Conrad and Anatole France

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IN MAKING a comparison between Conrad and Anatole France, Ernst Bendz wrote in 1923:

> . . . one cannot help noticing the remarkable affinity of intellect that betrays itself on so many points between Conrad and 'the most eloquent and just of French prose writers', whom he so frequently paraphrases or alludes to![1]

Bendz briefly illustrates this 'affinity' in a page which has apparently remained for nearly fifty years the only one on this subject. It is surprising that critics have not heeded Conrad's high regard for Anatole France and his obvious appreciation of France's work, shown in the frequent allusions he makes to the French master in his critical writing and correspondence.

In 1904 Conrad wrote an enthusiastic review of France's short story 'Crainquebille' in which he paid tribute to France's 'distinction of thought' and 'princely command of words'.[2] He declared it 'difficult to read M. Anatole France without admiring him'.[3] In a letter to H. G. Wells dated 20 October 1905, Conrad struck the same appreciative note: '. . . it cannot be denied that A.F., apart from being a great master of prose, is one of the finest minds of our time.'[4] The following day he expressed to Mrs Galsworthy both his delight at her approval of France's short story 'Abeille' and his 'admiration of *Thaïs*'.[5]

A letter he wrote to the Galsworthys from Montpellier on 31 December 1906, shows how well versed he was in Anatole France's works and the importance he attached to all of them: 'There is nothing new — except (an important exception) that

1 Ernst Bendz, *Joseph Conrad: an appreciation*, Gothenburg, 1923, p. 89.
2 *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 35. All references to Conrad's works are to the Dent Collected Edition, 1950.
3 Ibid., p. 39.
4 G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, 1927, II, 26.
5 Ibid., II, 27.

I have discovered a vol. of Anatole France unknown to us — a work of his younger days.'[1] In 1908 in a review of *L'Ile des Pingouins*, Conrad first expressed his admiration for France's critical essays, *La Vie Littéraire*; and echoing France's own definition of the critic's task, he said that this work described 'the adventures of a choice soul amongst masterpieces'.[2] He then praised *L'Ile des Pingouins* highly for its 'very admirable treatment' and congratulated its readers on the 'feast of wisdom'[3] in store for them. By 1912 Conrad's admiration obviously had not waned, for in *A Personal Record* he called Anatole France 'the most eloquent and just of French prose writers'.[4]

All these references clearly indicate that Conrad was very closely acquainted with Anatole France's work, and we may indeed wonder why no one has examined the possible implication that France's writings exercised a direct influence on his work. An investigation reveals numerous evident and probable borrowings that Conrad made from France, particularly from *La Vie Littéraire* (1888–92) and *Le Jardin d'Epicure* (1895).

Nostromo (1904) offers some interesting examples. In *L'Anneau d'Améthyste* (1899), France discussed the value of work thus:

Madame Bergeret tira de ce labeur quelque avantage moral. Le travail est bon à l'homme. Il le distrait de sa propre vie, il le détourne de la vue effrayante de lui-même; il l'empêche de regarder cet autre qui est lui et qui lui rend la solitude horrible. Il est un souverain remède à l'éthique et à l'esthétique. Le travail a ceci d'excellent encore qu'il amuse notre vanité, trompe notre impuissance et nous communique l'espoir d'un bon événement. *Nous nous flattons d'entreprendre par lui sur les destins*! Ne concevant pas les rapports nécessaires qui rattachent notre propre effort à la mécanique universelle, il nous semble que cet effort est dirigé en notre faveur contre le reste de la machine. *Le travail nous donne l'illusion* de la volonté, de la force et *de l'indépendance*![5]

[Madame Bergeret gained some moral advantage from this hard work. Work is good for man. It diverts his attention from his own life, it turns him away from the frightening sight of himself, it prevents him from looking at the other self which makes solitude horrible for him. It is a sovereign remedy for ethics and aesthetics. Work is also excellent

[1] Ibid., II, 39. Aubry suggests: 'Probably *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*.'
[2] *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 41.
[3] Ibid., p. 44.
[4] *A Personal Record*, p. 95.
[5] O.C., XII, 6. All references to Anatole France's works are to the Calmann-Lévy edition, 25 vols., Paris, 1925–35. The term 'O.C.' indicates the *Oeuvres Complètes* of France.

in that it amuses our vanity, deceives our helplessness and gives us the hope of good fortune. We flatter ourselves that through it we have a mastery over the Fates! Not perceiving the inevitable ties which link our own effort to the universal mechanism, it seems to us that this effort is directed in our favour against the rest of the machine. Work gives us the illusion of will-power, force and independence.]

Conrad seems to have split this passage into two parts and used them both in widely separated parts of *Nostromo*. After the death of his father, Charles Gould feels a 'mournful and angry desire for action' which leads Conrad to this general consideration:

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only *in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates.*[1]

Towards the end of the novel, Conrad seems to echo France's view on solitude when, explaining Decoud's fate, he says: '. . . he died from solitude, the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand.'[2] He then returns to the theme of the value of action, using this time the second part of the passage quoted above from *L'Anneau d'Améthyste*, after reversing its order and reshaping it, to fit perfectly into his account of Decoud's psychological state in the solitude of the Isabels:

In our activity alone do we find the sustaining *illusion of an independent existence* as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part.[3]

This 'borrowing' illustrates Conrad's sympathy with Anatole France's view on a point which lies at the core of his own view of life: his general attitude to work and to anyone's dedication to work, or to a particular craft. This affinity is confirmed by Conrad's praise of France for his knowledge that 'only in the continuity of effort there is a refuge from despair' and for his wish to see us 'preserving in our activity the consoling illusion of power and intelligent purpose'.[4]

In *Nostromo*, Conrad also borrowed from *L'Anneau d'Améthyste* for the characterization of Pedrito Montero. In the following passage, Anatole France describes the psychology of Maurice

1 *Nostromo*, p. 66.
2 Ibid., p. 496.
3 Ibid., p. 497.
4 *Notes on Life and Letters*, pp. 34–5.

Cheiral, a rather dull and shallow but ambitious young man who owes to his mother's influence the position he holds as principal secretary to his uncle, the minister of Justice:

Cheiral n'était pas très intelligent. Il ne considérait jamais qu'un petit nombre de choses et il se déterminait par des raisons que leur futilité rendait difficiles à démêler. Aussi croyait-on qu'il avait, dans un âge encore tendre, des idées personnelles. Pour l'instant, il venait de lire *un livre de M. Imbert de Saint-Amand* sur les Tuileries *pendant le second Empire*; *il avait été frappé,* à cette lecture, *de l'éclat d'une cour brillante et il en avait conçu l'idée d'un genre de vie où, comme le duc de Morny, il associerait les plaisirs à la politique et jouirait du pouvoir de toutes les manières.*[1]

[Cheiral was not very intelligent. He only ever considered a small number of things and his actions were determined by reasons which were difficult to unravel owing to their futility. Thus everyone believed that when he was still very young, he had ideas of his own. At this time, he had just read a book by M. Imbert de Saint-Amand about the Tuileries, during the Second Empire; he had been struck on reading it, by the splendour of a brilliant court and he had conceived the idea of a kind of life in which, like the Duc de Morny, he would combine pleasures with politics and would enjoy power in every way.]

Conrad saw the similarity between the character of Cheiral and that of Pedrito Montero. Like Cheiral, Montero is a hollow sham, yet ambitious and thirsting for power and pleasure. He is an incorrigible hanger-on and relies entirely on the success of his brother the General for his own advancement:

His actions were usually determined by motives so improbable in themselves as to escape the penetration of a rational person.

Thus at first sight the agent of the Gould Concession in Sta. Marta had credited him with the possession of sane views . . . It could never have entered his head that Pedrito Montero, lackey or inferior scribe, lodged in the garrets of the various Parisian hotels where the Costaguana legation used to shelter its diplomatic dignity, had been devouring the lighter sort of historical works in the French language, such, for instance, as *the books of Imbert de Saint Amand upon the Second Empire.* But Pedrito *had been struck by the splendour of a brilliant court, and had conceived the idea of an existence for himself where, like the Duc de Morny, he would associate* the command of every *pleasure with* the conduct of *political affairs and enjoy power* supremely *in every way.*[2]

Conrad has thus made use of the whole of the passage by Anatole France, adapting the first part, and then translating the

1 *O.C.*, XII, 221.
2 *Nostromo*, p. 387.

latter part almost word for word. This 'borrowing' suits the characterization of Pedrito Montero and, as in the previous case, fits admirably in the context.

Conrad also drew on Anatole France for his treatment of the love scene between Nostromo and Giselle. The following scene from 'Balthasar' takes place between the black King Balthasar and Balkis, the Queen of Sheba:

Il n'en dit pas davantage. L'ayant saisie dans ses bras, il tenait renversé sous ses lèvres le front de la reine. *Mais il vit qu'elle pleurait.* Alors, *il lui parla tout bas d'une voix caressante*, en chantant un peu comme font les nourrices. *Il l'appela sa petite fleur et sa petite étoile . . .*

Elle noua ses bras au cou du roi noir et dit de la voix d'un enfant qui supplie: — *Voici la nuit venue.*[1]

Ils tombèrent tous deux *embrassés.* Ils crurent *s'abîmer* sans fin dans un néant délicieux *et le monde des vivants cessa d'exister* pour eux.[2]

[He said no more. Having seized her in his arms, he was holding the brow of the queen upturned beneath his lips. But he saw that she was crying. Then, he spoke to her in a low caressing voice, crooning a little, as nurses do. He called her his little flower and his little star . . .

She clasped her arms around the neck of the black king and said in the voice of a suppliant child:

— The night has come.

They both fell down, in each other's embrace. They believed themselves lost endlessly in a delicious oblivion and for them the world of the living ceased to exist.]

Conrad's love scene clearly reflects that of France in its composition, psychological content and phrasing:

He could not restrain himself any longer. While she shrank from his approach, her arms went out to him, abandoned and *regal* in the dignity of her languid surrender. He held her head in his two hands, and showered rapid kisses upon the upturned face that gleamed in the purple dusk. Masterful and tender, he was entering slowly upon the fulness of his possession. *And he perceived that she was crying.* Then the incomparable Capataz, the man of careless loves, became gentle and caressing, like a woman to the grief of a child. *He murmured to her fondly.* He sat down by her and nursed her fair head on his breast. *He called her his star and his little flower.*

It had grown dark . . .

He was lost to the world in their *embraced* stillness.[3]

[1] *O.C.*, IV, 127.
[2] *O.C.*, IV, 133.
[3] *Nostromo*, pp. 537–8.

There is, however, a noticeable difference in this scene between what is taken from France, which is restrained, and Conrad's additions, which tend to be over-written, cloying and novelettish. For instance, they include clichés, such as 'He . . . showered rapid kisses upon the upturned face that gleamed in the purple dusk', and unusual paradoxes like 'abandoned and regal'. This word 'regal', probably inspired by the Queen of Sheba, is an unexpected adjective when applied to Giselle. All this further confirms Conrad's well-known inability to handle love themes and his reliance on his favourite authors like Maupassant[1] and Anatole France when dealing with affairs of the heart.

Anatole France and Conrad had in common a distrust of thought which they regarded as the acid that corrodes belief and from which it is desirable to be safe. They shared Mrs Verloc's belief that life does not 'stand much looking into',[2] and for both authors, those who probe too much into it are inevitably punished. There is a significant parallel here between the conclusion of France's essay on Mérimée in *La Vie Littéraire* and the description of Decoud's end in *Nostromo*. France described the sceptic Mérimée as sad and weary before the spectacle of an incomprehensible and meaningless universe and asks: '. . . n'éprouvait-il pas cette amertume de l'esprit et du cœur, châtiment inévitable de *l'audace intellectuelle*?'[3] [. . . did he not feel the bitterness of the mind and of the heart which is the inevitable punishment of intellectual audacity?] Decoud, a sceptic too, disappeared in the solitude and indifference of the Placid Gulf, 'A victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to *intellectual audacity*'.[4]

In the same year (1904) in which *Nostromo* was published Conrad also looked to Anatole France for inspiration when writing his essay on Maupassant. They both greatly admired Maupassant whom the one called 'le prince des conteurs'[5] and the other 'the most accomplished of narrators'.[6] In the opening

1 See Paul Kirschner on the influence of 'Les Sœurs Rondoli' on 'A Smile of Fortune', and *Fort comme la Mort* on *Victory*, in *A Review of English Literature*, VI, 4, October 1965, and VII, 3, July 1966.
2 *The Secret Agent*, p. 177.
3 *O.C.*, VI, 383.
4 *Nostromo*, p. 501.
5 *O.C.*, VI, 171.
6 *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 31.

of 'M. Guy de Maupassant critique et romancier' (one of the three essays on Maupassant in *La Vie Litteraire*) France wrote:

Quant à l'esthétique, elle est telle qu'on devait l'attendre d'un esprit pratique et résolu, enclin naturellement à trouver les choses de l'esprit plus simples qu'elles ne sont en réalité.[1]

[As for aesthetics, it is such as one would expect from a practical and resolute mind, naturally inclined to find the things of the mind more simple than they are in reality.]

Conrad split this passage into two, using the first part as his opening: '*Maupassant's conception of his art is such as one would expect from a practical and resolute mind.*'[2] He used the second part later, together with another of France's opinions ('Et puis, *il ne raisonne pas.*'):[3] 'It cannot be denied that *he thinks very little . . . His view of intellectual problems is perhaps more simple than their nature warrants.*'[4]

The rest of the essay further indicates that Conrad found a model in Anatole France's criticism. Both underline the 'impersonality' and the self-denial which are the outstanding features of Maupassant's writings, for he was concerned with facts, with giving life to characters and not with moralizing. Both were struck by his honesty and his frankness and by what might even appear to be a certain callousness. But they believed that, in spite of his apparently detached attitude, Maupassant felt what France calls '*une pitié profonde*' or in Conrad's words '*a profound pity*' for his characters. They also emphasize Maupassant's intense Frenchness.

In his eulogistic review of 'Crainquebille' Conrad described its opening chapters as 'a masterpiece of insight and simplicity'.[5] But his admiration probably found expression in a more significant way than mere praises, for a few years later, in 1908, he appears to have turned to this work for traits and episodes in the development of his short story 'An Anarchist', which Ernest A. Baker describes as 'A Conradian pendant to "Crainquebille" '.[6] But the parallel which would show some of the 'elements' Conrad

1 *O.C.*, VI, 359.
2 *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 25.
3 *O.C.*, VII, 407.
4 *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 30.
5 Ibid., p. 35.
6 Ernest A. Baker, *History of the English Novel*, 1939, X, 36.

probably found in 'Crainquebille', and about which he later said in his Author's note that he had 'forgotten for the most part' (VIII) how they came to be in his story, is too long to tell here.

The influence of Anatole France is strongly felt in 'A Familiar Preface' to *A Personal Record* (1912). Conrad's remark on the comic: 'The comic, when it is human, soon takes upon itself a face of pain' (XVI), comes from *Le Jardin d'Epicure* where France says: 'Le comique est vite douloureux quand il est humain.'[1] [The comic soon becomes painful when it is human.] The other identifiable references are from *La Vie Littéraire*. In France's essay on M. Edouard Rod, we read:

. . . s'il nous est impossible de découvrir un sens quelconque à ce qu'on nomme la vie, *il convient de vouloir ce que veulent les dieux, sans savoir ce qu'ils veulent, ni même s'ils veulent et que ce qu'il importe de connaître, puisque enfin il s'agit de vivre, ce n'est pas pourquoi, c'est comment.*[2]
[. . . if it is impossible for us to discover any sort of meaning in what is called life, it is proper to will what the gods will, without knowing what they will, nor even if they do will, and that what matters, since after all it is a question of living, is to know not why but how.]

Conrad borrowed this passage boldly:

I think that the proper wisdom is to will what the gods will without, perhaps being certain what their will is — or even if they have a will of their own. And in this matter of life and art, *it is not the Why that matters so much* to our happiness *as the How*. (XIX)

In a scathing attack on Zola, which was bound to attract Conrad's attention as he shared some of France's dislike for the leader of naturalism, France had said: '. . . les choses humaines n'inspirent que deux sentiments aux esprits bien faits: *l'admiration* ou *la pitié*.'[3] [. . . things human inspire only two sentiments in well-formed minds: admiration or pity.] Conrad seems to have echoed this passage when he wrote: 'The sight of human affairs deserves *admiration* and *pity*' (XIX).

In his essay on *Mensonges* by Paul Bourget, Anatole France said of the author of *The Imitation of Christ*: '*Il connaissait profondément la vie.*'[4] [He knew life profoundly.] He later used a quotation from this work to describe the hero, René Vinci:

[1] *O.C.*, IX, 412.
[2] *O.C.*, VII, 257–8.
[3] *O.C.*, VI, 213–14.
[4] *O.C.*, VI, 309.

Cette parole de l'ascète se vérifia pour lui: 'Il arrive que, sans la connaître, *on estime une personne sur sa* bonne *réputation, et, en se montrant, elle détruit l'opinion qu'on avait d'elle.*[1]
[The word of the ascetic was verified for him: 'It often happens that, without knowing a person, one esteems him on account of his good reputation, but by showing himself he destroys the opinion one had of him.']

Conrad also used the same quotation in 'A Familiar Preface':

And I cannot help thinking of a passage in the 'Imitation of Christ' where the ascetic author, who *knew life so profoundly*, says that 'there are *persons esteemed on their reputation who by showing themselves destroy the opinion one had of them*'. (XIII)

In this passage the words 'reputation', 'showing themselves', 'destroy the opinion' provide linguistic evidence that it was taken from the French and not from the English, as no English translation uses this phrasing.[2] And Conrad's appreciation of the author of *The Imitation*, being identical to that of France, seems to confirm that *La Vie Littéraire* was the source of this quotation.

The main theme of the introduction to *La Vie Littéraire* is that there is no 'objective' art. For France '. . . tout roman, à le bien prendre, est une autobiographie'. [Every novel, all things properly considered, is an autobiography.] France argued that 'ceux qui se flattent de mettre autre chose qu'eux-mêmes dans leur œuvre sont dupes de la plus fallacieuse illusion. La vérité est qu'on ne sort jamais de soi-même'.[3] [. . . those who flatter themselves that they put something other than themselves into their work are dupes of the most fallacious illusion. The truth is that we never escape from ourselves.]

This is the argument by which he tried to refute Flaubert's theory of 'l'art impersonnel'. He explained that Flaubert's pronouncement: 'L'artiste doit s'arranger de façon à faire croire à la postérité qu'il n'a pas vécu,' [The artist must contrive to make posterity believe that he has not lived,] stems from an aberration, because 'On a beau s'en défendre, on ne donne des nouvelles que de soi et chacune de nos œuvres ne dit que nous, parce qu'elle ne

1 *O.C.*, VI, 312.
2 For example, in a translation by John Payne, Glasgow, 1824, this passage reads: 'It often happens, that a stranger, whom the voice of fame has made illustrious, loses all the brightness of his character, the moment he is seen and known. (Book I, ch. VIII)
3 *O.C.*, VI, 5–6.

sait que nous'.[1] [Though we deny it, we only speak of ourselves and each of our works speaks only of us, because it is only us it knows.]

Still in 'A Familiar Preface', Conrad made an assertion very close to France's, when he wrote: 'I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself,' and proclaims a little further that 'every novel contains an element of autobiography — and this can hardly be denied since the creator can only express himself in his creation' (XIII). He may indeed be echoing France.

The latter suggestion seems even more likely in the light of his full agreement in *A Personal Record* with France's views on literary criticism as expressed also in *La Vie Littéraire*. France claimed that 'Il n'y a pas plus de critique objective qu'il n'y a d'art objectif'. [there is no more objective criticism than there is objective art.] He defined the good critic as 'celui qui raconte les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre.'[2] [. . . he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces.] Conrad quoted this 'memorable saying' with approval, and also viewed literary criticism as a 'well-told tale of personal experience'.[3] And just as France expressed his conviction that literary criticism 'survivra à toutes les autres formes de l'art',[4] [will outlive all the other forms of art] Conrad told of his 'inward certitude that literary criticism will never die'.[5]

The influence of Anatole France can also be detected in *Chance* (1913). Marlow remarks: 'For if we men try to put the spaciousness of all experiences into our reasoning and would fain *put the Infinite itself into our love,* it isn't, as some writer has remarked, *it isn't women's doing*'.[6] The writer in question, whom he is paraphrasing, is Anatole France who had written in *Le Jardin d'Epicure: 'Nous mettons l'infini dans l'amour. Ce n'est pas la faute des femmes.*'[7] [We put the infinite into love. It isn't women's fault.]

[1] *O.C.*, VII, 293. Anatole France levels the same criticism at Leconte de Lisle (*O.C.*, VI, 99).
[2] *O.C.*, VI, 5.
[3] *A Personal Record*, p. 96.
[4] *O.C.*, VI, 514.
[5] *A Personal Record*, p. 96.
[6] *Chance*, p. 93.
[7] *O.C.*, IX, 413.

The following passage in which Marlow detains Flora de Barral on the pavement while Mr Fyne remonstrates with Captain Anthony in the Eastern Hotel, gives an interesting example of the way Conrad wove phrases from Anatole France into his own writing. Marlow sees something comic in the situation of the girl and himself waiting together to know the outcome of Fyne's mission. Conrad made him generalize on the comic, using France's definition, the one already used in 'A Familiar Preface', but this time following France even more closely: '*But the comic when it is human becomes quickly painful.*'[1] Marlow realizes then that the girl is 'infinitely anxious', and he asks himself whether the 'tension of her suspense' depends 'on hunger or love'. This remark may have been inspired by France, who reiterated the view that hunger and love are the two main motives for human actions. In *La Vie Littéraire* we read: 'La faim et l'amour sont les deux axes du monde. L'humanité roule tout entière sur l'amour et la faim.'[2] [Hunger and love are the two axes of the world. All mankind revolves on love and hunger.] In *Le Jardin d'Epicure*, France also spoke of 'ce vieux fonds de faim et d'amour sur lequel . . . nous vivons tous'.[3] [. . . this old fund of hunger and love on which . . . we all live.] Marlow continues:

> The answer would have been of some interest to Captain Anthony. For my part, *in the presence of* a young girl *I always become convinced that the dreams of sentiment — like the* consoling *mysteries of Faith — are invincible; that it is never,* never *reason which governs men* and women.[4]

This passage leaves us in no doubt as to its provenance. In *Le Jardin d'Epicure*, writing on the subject of Woman, Anatole France claims:

> *. . . on se pénètre près d'elle de cette idée que les rêves du sentiment et les ombres de la foi sont invincibles, et que ce n'est pas la raison qui gouverne les hommes.*[5] [. . . in the presence of a woman one becomes penetrated by the idea that the dreams of sentiment and the shadows of faith are invincible, and that men are not governed by reason.]

In addition to the many borrowings Conrad made from Maupassant for *Victory*[6] he was also indebted to Anatole France

[1] *Chance*, p. 206.
[2] *O.C.*, VI, 307.
[3] *O.C.*, IX, 459.
[4] *Chance*, p. 206.
[5] *O.C.*, IX, 412.
[6] See Paul Kirschner, *A Review of English Literature*, VI, 4, October 1965.

when he wrote this novel. Again, philosophizing about women in *Le Jardin d'Epicure,* France referred to their '*faculté sublime d'aimer et de souffrir*'[1] [sublime faculty to love and to suffer]. This generalization found an echo when Lena's decision to take upon herself the perilous defence of Heyst was described as the consequence of 'the great exaltation of *love and self-sacrifice which is a woman's sublime faculty.*'[2]

In contrast with the views Anatole France expressed in *l'Anneau d'Améthyste*, where work is presented as a means of salvation, those expressed by Monsieur Bergeret on action in *Le Mannequin d'Osier* were very pessimistic:

Vivre, c'est détruire. Agir, c'est nuire.[3] 'Je suis méchant parce que j'agis. Je n'avais pas besoin de cette expérience pour savoir qu'il n'y a pas d'action innocente et qu'agir, c'est nuire ou détruire. Dès que j'ai commencé d'agir, je suis devenu malfaisant'.[4]
[To live is to destroy. To act is to be harmful.] ['I am evil because I act. I did not need this experience to know that there is no innocent action and that to act is to be harmful or destructive. As soon as I started acting, I became harmful.']

Conrad probably saw the aptness of these words for the character of Heyst, for he made him deplore, almost in Bergeret's own words, his having been drawn from the role of observer to act:

I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish.[5]

In 1915 Conrad also published a short story 'The Planter of Malata' which contains another identifiable 'borrowing' from Anatole France. In *Le Jardin d'Epicure,* France gave this analysis of jealousy:

Au vrai jaloux, tout porte ombrage, tout est sujet d'inquiétude. *Une femme le trahit déjà seulement parce qu'elle vit et qu'elle respire.* Il redoute ces travaux de la vie intérieure, *ces mouvements* divers *de la chair et de l'âme* qui font de cette femme une créature distincte de lui — même, indépendante, instinctive, douteuse et parfois inconcevable . . . Au fond, il ne lui reproche rien, sinon *qu'elle est* . . . Quel sujet *d'inquiétude mortelle*![6]
[To the really jealous man, everything gives umbrage, everything is a subject for anxiety. A woman betrays him simply because she lives and she breathes. He dreads those workings of the inner life, those diverse impulses of the flesh and soul which make of this woman a

1 *O.C.*, IX, 402.
2 *Victory*, p. 317.
3 *O.C.*, XI, 381.
4 *O.C.*, XI, 425.
5 *Victory*, p. 54.
6 *O.C.*, IX, 410.

creature distinct from himself, independent, instinctive, uncertain and at times inconceivable . . . After all, he reproaches her with nothing except that she exists . . . What a subject for mortal anxiety!]

Conrad condensed this passage when, commenting on the jealous Renouard in 'The Planter of Malata', he said that jealousy occurs 'when it seems that a *woman betrays us simply by this that she exists, that she breathes — and when the deep movements of her nerves* or *her soul* become a matter of distracting suspicion, of killing doubt, of *mortal anxiety*'.[1]

Writing about 'l'action romanesque' in *La Vie Littéraire*, France remarked: 'C'est peu que d'y montrer les hommes: les hommes ne sont rien; il faut y faire sentir *les puissances inconnues qui forgent et martèlent nos destinées*.'[2] [It is of little account to show men in it: men are nothing; one must stress the unknown powers which forge and hammer out our destinies.] Conrad seems to have had this passage in mind when he wrote in *The Shadow-Line* (1917) of '*the unknown powers that shape our destinies*'.[3]

Another item has been pointed out by M. Jacques Mouradian in a short article in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 30 October 1930, in which he showed the 'similitude presque parfaite' between a passage in *The Arrow of Gold* (1919) and the following one from Anatole France in *Le Lys Rouge* (1894). Jacques Dechartre confesses to his mistress Thérèse Martin that he feels jealous after discovering that she has loved someone before him. 'You are absurd,' says Thérèse. To which Dechartre replies:

Oui, je suis absurde, je le sens mieux que vous ne le sentez vous-même. *Vouloir une femme dans tout l'éclat de sa beauté et de son esprit, maîtresse d'elle-même, et qui sait, et qui ose*, plus belle en cela et plus désirable, *et dont le choix est libre*, volontaire, instruit; la désirer, *l'aimer pour ce qu'elle est et souffrir de ce qu'elle n'a ni la candeur* pudrile *ni la* pâle *innocence qui choqueraient en elle*, s'il était possible de les y rencontrer; lui demander à la fois qu'elle soit elle et ne soit pas elle, *l'adorer telle que la vie l'a faite* et *regretter amèrement que la vie, qui l'a tant embellie, l'ait seulement touchée, oh! c'est absurde*.[4]

[Yes, I am absurd, I feel it more than you do. To want a woman in all the splendour of her beauty and her mind, mistress of herself, and who knows, and who dares, more beautiful because of this and more desirable, and who in her choice is free, self-willed, experienced; to desire her, to love her, for what she is and suffer because she neither

[1] *Within the Tides*, p. 34.
[2] *O.C.*, VI, 606.
[3] *The Shadow-Line*, p. 62.
[4] *O.C.*, IX, 265.

has the youthful artlessness, nor the pale innocence which would shock in her, were it possible for them to be met in her; to ask her at the same time to be herself and not to be herself; to adore her as life has made her and regret bitterly that life, which has so embellished her, has touched her at all, oh! it is absurd.]

In *The Arrow of Gold*, Dona Rita tells Monsieur George of Blunt's jealousy and says she asked him 'whether he didn't think that it was absurd on his part . . .' She then continues:

I told him plainly that *to want a woman formed in mind and body, mistress of herself, free in her choice, independent in her thoughts*; to *love her* apparently *for what she is and at the same time to demand from her the candour and the innocence* that could be only a *shocking* pretence; to know her *such as life has made her and at the same time to despise her secretly for every touch with which her life has fashioned her* — that was neither generous nor high minded; *it was positively frantic*.[1]

The gallicism is to be noted: the word 'candour', which Conrad uses influenced by 'candeur', is out of place in the context. For, as Kœssler and Derocquigny explain in *Les Faux Amis*, whereas 'candeur, candide, supposent de l'innocence, de la naïveté' 'candid et candour expriment simplement la loyauté, l'honnêteté, . . . la franchise'.[2] Artlessness is what Conrad means here.

Both in *La Vie Littéraire* and in *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard*, Anatole France related the apologue of Zemire, the king of Persia, who was most anxious to learn the history of mankind. On his death-bed, he complains to his chief historian:

— Je mourrai donc sans savoir l'histoire des hommes!

— Sire, répondit le doyen, je vais vous la résumer en trois mots: *ils naquirent, ils souffrirent, ils moururent*.[3]

[Then I shall die without knowing the history of mankind.

Sire, answered the eldest, I am going to sum it up for you in three words: they were born, they suffered, they died.]

In his author's note to *Chance* (1920) Conrad used these very words: 'The history of men on this earth since the beginning of ages may be resumed in one phrase of infinite poignancy: *They were born, they suffered, they died.*' (VIII). (Again there is a gallicism: 'resumed' meaning 'summed up').

In concluding his article M. Mouradian said that when Conrad wrote the lines previously quoted from *The Arrow of Gold*, he

1 *The Arrow of Gold*, pp. 210–11.
2 Kœssler and Derocquigny, *Les Faux Amis*, Vuibert, Paris, 1961, p. 49.
3 *O.C.*, VI, 222 and *O.C.*, VIII, 465.

obviously had the text of Anatole France in mind but, he wondered, 's'agit-il, cependant, d'un plagiat délibérément fait ou simplement d'une de ces réminiscences littéraires qui s'imposent inconsciemment à la pensée d'un auteur?' [. . . is it however a plagiarism deliberately made or simply one of those literary reminiscences which impose themselves unconsciously on the thought of an author?] This query could apply to all the borrowings dealt with in this article, but, though it is impossible to tell for certain, they seem to be too numerous, too long and their verbal echoes too distinct to be unconscious. They are more likely to be the result of a method of working which included, on Conrad's part, a deliberate exploitation of some of his favourite French authors, like Maupassant,[1] and Anatole France.

On 18 August 1894, in a letter to his aunt Madame Poradowska, Conrad said of *Le Lys Rouge*: 'It means nothing at all to me.'[2] But some twenty odd years later, he borrowed from it for *The Arrow of Gold*, and Aubry was surprised to hear him quote whole sentences from *Le Lys Rouge* by heart.[3] Unlike Daudet whom Conrad himself called one of his 'youthful enthusiasms',[4] Anatole France seems to have been an enthusiasm of Conrad's maturer years.

France, however, certainly influenced Conrad's thought long before *Nostromo*, as two examples from his correspondence will illustrate. In his review of 'Crainquebille' Conrad called him 'a great analyst of illusions'.[5] Indeed, France believed that man is fated to live in a world of illusions and will never know more than the appearances. In *La Vie Littéraire* he narrated this fable: One day, a flat mirror meets a convex mirror and remonstrates with it for the way in which it reflects nature. As the quarrel waxes between the mirrors, d'Alembert who is walking by tells them that they are both right and wrong and that the forms they both project are perfect. And he continued:

[1] See Kirschner's articles previously cited, on this point.

[2] *Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska*, 1890–1920, translated from the French and edited . . . by John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm, New Haven, 1940, p. 76.

[3] 'Que de fois ne m'a-t-il pas surpris ainsi par des phrases du *Lys Rouge*, . . .', Joseph Conrad, *Lettres Françaises*, Paris, 1930, p. 12.

[4] The reference to Daudet is in a letter dated 23 February 1895, included in *Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska* 1890–1920, p. 91.

[5] *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 33.

Un miroir concave en produirait une troisième (figure) fort différente et tout aussi parfaite. Quant à la nature elle-même, nul ne connaît sa figure véritable, et il est même probable qu'elle n'a de figure que dans les miroirs qui la reflètent.[1]
[A concave mirror would project a third form, very different and just as perfect. As for nature itself, no one knows its true form, and it is even probable that it has only the forms which are reflected in the mirrors.]

Conrad also often emphasized the illusory nature of the world and of human life, but it may be that he had France in mind when he wrote to R. B. Cunninghame Graham on 31 January 1898: '. . . there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that, whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror, is always but a vain and floating appearance.'[2]

Moreover, Conrad's vision of the universe was strikingly similar to that of France. In 'Rêveries astronomiques' in *La Vie Littéraire*, we read: 'L'univers que la science nous révèle est d'une désespérante monotonie. Tous les soleils sont des gouttes de feu et toutes les planètes des gouttes de boue.'[3] [The universe that science reveals to us is of a despairing monotony. All the suns are drops of fire and all the planets drops of mud.] When on 14 January 1898, Conrad wrote to R. B. Cunninghame Graham of 'a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud',[4] he once more seemed to be echoing France. These examples afford at least two more illustrations of the closeness of Conrad's views with those of the French master.

Anatole France had a considerable intellectual influence on Conrad which contributed to the shaping of some of his ideas on life and human nature. In his review of 'Crainquebille' Conrad said that the 'proceedings of [France's] thought compel our intellectual admiration'.[5] The adjective is revealing. This influence stems no doubt from a profound accord between these two authors which is indeed conspicuous, as Bendz pointed out, in the 'remarkable affinity' of their views on many political, moral and philosophical issues.

[1] *O.C.*, VI, 170.
[2] G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, I, 226.
[3] *O.C.*, VII, 207.
[4] G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, I, 222.
[5] *Notes on Life and Letters*, pp. 39–40.