La influencia de la filosofía de Arthur Schopenhauer en la obra de Joseph Conrad

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ABSTRACT

The influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on Conrad’s works has long been recognized by literary scholars, and there are several articles and monographs dealing with this subject from different critical perspectives. However, the extent and significance of this relationship of literary influence has not been fully appreciated, and there are still many areas of disagreement on crucial aspects of such relationship. This thesis differs from previous approaches to the subject in its systematic and exhaustive analysis of the different areas of influence of Schopenhauerman philosophical ideas on Conrad’s entire oeuvre. The corpus selected for study thus includes Conrad’s literary output from his first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) to *Victory* (1915), the last novel in which the influence of Schopenhauer is manifest. The novels, stories and essays in four different phases are systematically analyzed, as well as the early letters of the 1890s, in which the decisive influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on Conrad’s developing thought as a philosophical novelist is recognizable.

The general aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that Schopenhauer’s philosophy constitutes a decisive influence shaping Conrad’s thought and thematic concerns from the outset of his literary career up to the period of decline. Conrad’s engagement with Schopenhauerman ideas, however, undergoes a process of dynamic evolution along different phases, which reflects an increasingly critical attitude towards the philosophy of the German thinker. In particular, the analysis of *The Secret Agent* and other works belonging to Conrad’s phase of maturity seeks to fill a gap in critical studies on the subject of Schopenhauer and Conrad.

The methodological basis of this thesis is comparative and interdisciplinary. Assuming that the influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophical ideas on Conrad’s works was both indirect and direct, through the reading of Schopenhauer’s main works in
English translations, a close comparative analysis of Conrad’s and Schopenhauer’s works is systematically developed. On the other hand, the analysis carried out in the thesis shows that Conrad had a deep knowledge of and interest in different areas of Schopenhauer’s philosophical thought, such as the epistemology, the metaphysics, the aesthetics and the ethics. In this study, Conrad is thoroughly understood as a philosophical novelist, whose works explore in fictional form the problems of modern philosophy, from a standpoint very close to Schopenhauer’s philosophical framework.

The thesis includes a critical overview of the studies which have previously dealt with the relationship between Schopenhauer and Conrad, as well as an analysis of the available evidences which prove Conrad’s knowledge of Schopenhauer’s works, used as a starting point for the ensuing comparative study. Also, the introductory exposition of Schopenhauer’s philosophical system is meant to suggest that Conrad engaged in his works with virtually every area of Schopenhauerian thought.

The lasting influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on Conrad’s works is studied from different critical perspectives in chapters devoted to the analysis of every work by Conrad in which such influence is considered to be significant, grouped in four major phases. The comprehensive study developed in this thesis necessarily draws on previous findings, but it includes entirely new readings of such works as *The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, “The End of the Tether”, “Typhoon” and “To-morrow”,* and it provides many other new textual evidences and interpretive keys. The wide range of topics discussed includes Conrad’s recurrent engagement with Schopenhauer’s theory of tragedy, his explorations of Schopenhauerian fatalism, the relationship between Conrad’s and Schopenhauer’s metaphysical pessimism and Conrad’s increasingly critical attitude towards Schopenhauerian ethics.
The comprehensive approach to the relationship between Schopenhauer’s philosophy and Conrad’s fiction in this thesis seeks to enhance our understanding of the ways in which the ideas of the German thinker considerably shaped Conrad’s thought, energizing the thematic tensions in Conrad’s works throughout the four major phases of his literary career.

**Keywords:** Conrad; Schopenhauer; Literary influence; Literature and Philosophy; Comparative Literature
CONCLUSIONS

The influence of Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophical thought on Conrad’s works is manifestly visible throughout Conrad’s literary career up to the period of decline. The first indisputable traces of influence are found in the letters written in the early years of the 1890s, before the publication of Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895). Schopenhauer’s influence on Conrad’s own thought as a philosophical novelist not only concerned the early stages of Conrad’s career, but also Conrad’s development as a writer throughout more than twenty years, as the literary career from *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) to *Victory* (1915) demonstrates. However, the analysis carried out in this study shows that Schopenhauer’s influence on Conradian thought is not static, but subject to a dynamic evolution throughout different stages.

Schopenhauer’s influence on Conrad’s works was direct as well as indirect. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Schopenhauer’s philosophy held a privileged place in European intellectual life. Thus Conrad could have met Schopenhauerian ideas through multiple sources and, in fact, it is virtually impossible that he did not have any knowledge of them. However, according to the analysis carried out in this thesis, Conrad’s works reflect a close knowledge of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Such wide knowledge of Schopenhauer’s thought, confirmed by Galsworthy’s external evidence, points to the source of direct influence as the most significant one.

The most important thing for a comparative approach to the relationship between Conrad and Schopenhauer’s philosophy is the study of the ways in which such sustained influence is reflected in Conrad’s works, as well as to determine the extent of its impact for an interpretation of the characteristics of Conradian thought. In this regard, the present comparative study shows that the influence of Schopenhauer on the successive stages of Conrad’s development as a writer includes several areas of his worldview: the
epistemology, the metaphysics, the ontology of nature, the ethics and even the aesthetics. Schopenhauer’s thought shaped Conrad’s own vision in his most intensely literary letters in the 1890s, in the phase of apprenticeship, in the phase of recognition and in the phase of maturity, as well as in the phase immediately following Conrad’s major achievement but previous to manifest decline. In all these phases, the influence of Schopenhauer’s thought energized the thematic tensions of Conrad’s narratives, gave philosophical resonance to his fictional universe, and shaped the pessimism which is the guiding thread of the meaning of Conrad’s work, but the authorial attitude towards this philosophical source changed throughout different phases.

The phase of apprenticeship

The study of Conrad’s first two phases is considerably enriched by the letters of the period, which are in general terms both the most philosophical and the most literary of all the extant letters until Conrad’s death in 1924. Throughout the decade of 1890, when Conrad’s literary career started, his letters reflect an astonishing degree of contamination from Schopenhauer’s philosophical thought. With the passage of time, Conrad’s letters paint an increasingly sober and less vehement portrait; the intellectual and creative tensions find their place in the literary works, and the letters begin to center on practical affairs. However, in the early years of Conrad’s literary career, the letters share a creative space with the writing of narrative prose fiction. The study of these letters is important because they reveal the characteristics of Conrad’s early thought and shed light on the philosophical background of the works written in the first two phases, including such landmarks as Almayer’s Folly, The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’, “Heart of Darkness” and Lord Jim.

In the early letters, philosophical concerns with the unmistakable imprint of Schopenhauer’s thought recur. In particular, the themes of metaphysical pessimism,
determinism and fatalism, as well as the emphasis on the evenascence and insubstantiality of the phenomenal world and human life, are given special prominence. Many of these ideas are explored in the fictional universe of the works belonging to the phase of apprenticeship. Analyzed together, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) show the influence of Schopenhauer’s thought in Conrad’s training as a novelist, at the outset of his literary career. They are to a large extent twin novels, even though the second one is more openly Schopenhauerian in its style and its handling of themes. The epigraph of the novel was probably taken from Schopenhauer’s main work, and it explicitly refers to the metaphysical pessimism which permeates the novel. At the end of *An Outcast of the Islands*, Schopenhauerian pessimism and fatalism converge when Almayer declares that “The world’s a swindle”, and examines the links in the chain of causes and effects which have provoked his downfall.

The deep impact of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on the early Conradian works is reflected in the exploration of the Schopenhauerian ontology of nature as well. Conrad’s exotic novels and short stories often dramatize the blind impulse of plants in their struggle with death. These descriptions of tropical nature underscore the agonizing predicament of the characters and the metaphysical pessimism prevalent in the early works. Above all, Conrad’s emphasis lies on the alienation of humankind from their natural surroundings, which figure as impenetrable to reason. This ontology of nature is highly relevant for the Schopenhauerian atmosphere in such works as *Almayer’s Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and “Heart of Darkness”. Stylistic features typical of the early Conrad, whereby nature is characterized as having a hostile will of its own, and the recurrent rhetoric of the inscrutable or enigmatic, are closely related to this conception of nature. These descriptions of nature and their related stylistic features constitute a distinctive trait of the first stages of Conrad’s development as a writer.
On the other hand, Conrad expresses forcefully and explicitly the idea of the illusory character of all phenomena in the tales “The Lagoon” and “Karain: A Memory”. The ending of “The Lagoon” is representative of the influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy in this regard: “he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the hopeless darkness of a world of illusions” (*TU*, 167). This is also a good sample of the ways in which Conrad gives narrative form to the thoughts frequently communicated in his letters. Conrad defines as illusory the visible world he pays tribute to in his works.

The phase of recognition

In this phase, Conrad is still very close to Schopenhauer’s philosophical thought, as the letters of the period confirm. At the end of the year 1897 Conrad showed his interest in metaphysical questions with the engaging metaphor of the “knitting machine”, in a letter to Cunninghame Graham in which the strong influence of Schopenhauer’s thought is apparent. This letter shows several significant points of contact between Conrad’s thought and Schopenhauerian metaphysics: the blind and irrational origin of the universe, determinism, the alienation of human reason in the cosmos and the indestructibility of the metaphysical reality whose manifestation is the visible world. This metaphysical pessimism had already been the background of Almayer’s and Willems’s downfalls in the first two novels, and dominates again the dark universe of “Heart of Darkness”: “Droll thing life is – that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose” (*Y*, 117).

Shortly after the letter of the “knitting machine”, early in the year 1898, Conrad wrote in a letter to Cunninghame Graham: “There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; 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 fleeting
appearance” (Watts ed., 1969: 71). This meditation takes Schopenhauer’s nihilistic philosophy as its starting point and reflects several points of his doctrine, which are also explored in the fictional universe of Conrad’s works. Thus, the sentence reflects Schopenhauer’s doctrine, according to which the world exists as a mental representation of the knowing subject. The solipsistic fear in this Conradian meditation is particularly prominent in such works as “Heart of Darkness” and *Lord Jim*, both written in the period immediately following the date of composition of this letter. On the other hand, the sentence in the letter to Graham also refers to the Schopenhauerian conception of the illusory nature of all phenomena as reflections of an unknowable metaphysical reality.

In “Heart of Darkness”, the exploration of a Schopenhauerian atmosphere is highly sophisticated, and includes several closely linked levels, such as the metaphysics of nature, the theories on genius and madness, or the superficial value of civilization, among many others. In particular, “Heart of Darkness” dramatizes more deeply than any other Conradian work Schopenhauer’s distinction between the “external” aspect of phenomena and their “inner” essence. Much of the philosophical resonance of the novella derives from the pervasive sense of despair at the unknowability of the hidden metaphysical reality.

The vast influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is reflected in Conrad’s own pessimistic worldview. In Conrad’s works, the world appears largely as a succession of fleeting phenomena filtered through the insurmountable subjectivity of the narrators, being Marlow the best representative of these narrators. According to Schopenhauer, the objective metaphysical reality whose manifestation are the phenomena of the world, is the blind impulse of will, a concept explored in depth in the tale “Falk: A Reminiscence”, in which there are also traces of influence of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of sexual love. Undoubtedly, *darkness* is the central metaphorical image in
Conrad’s works, which captures his own pessimistic worldview, at least partially derived from Schopenhauer’s negative metaphysics. The influence of Schopenhauer’s thought, decisive in the early stages of Conrad’s development as a creative writer, also explains in part the interest in spectral imagery and the evocation of characters as “shadows”, the recurrent motif of life as a dream, and the rhetorical emphasis on the inscrutable and enigmatic nature of all phenomena. These characteristics are present in every phase studied. For Marlow, the most celebrated of Conrad’s narrators and his alter ego in his fictional world, life is an indecipherable riddle: “If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be” (Y, 118).

On the other hand, Lord Jim, one of the most important works of this phase, incorporates a reflection on diverse aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. It is worth highlighting that Lord Jim is Conrad’s most complex and engaging dramatization of Schopenhauerian fatalism. The immutability of character, the self-knowledge which arises after watching one’s own acts and the fatal chain of external events converge in the pivotal scene in the novel: Jim’s jump and his desertion of the ship. There are also in Lord Jim multiple other references to Schopenhauer’s thought, such as Marlow’s fatalistic ruminations, his pessimistic generalizations about human life, or his comments on the character of Gentleman Brown.

Independent and sceptical about literary dogmas and schools, Conrad displays, however, a deep affinity with Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory. Significantly, Conrad found inspiration in Schopenhauerian aesthetics for at least some of the points so eloquently expressed in the Preface to The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’. In general terms, there are striking similarities between Conrad’s and Schopenhauer’s idealism in art. Conrad’s theoretical rejection of realism or impressionism arises from his belief that the goal of art is to illuminate the “ideal”, that is, the essential aspects underlying the varied
and specific manifestations. But perhaps the most remarkable thing in this regard is Conrad’s recurrent exploration of Schopenhauer’s theory of tragedy. Many of Conrad’s novels are conceived as tragedies, whose development bears a striking resemblance to Schopenhauer’s model of tragedy. The tragic endings of *Lord Jim*, “The End of the Tether”, *Under Western Eyes* and *Victory* show the discovery of the evil inherent to the world. Renunciation and the denial of the will to live reveal themselves as the only way out, and the self-knowledge achieved in the revelatory crises often results in self-sacrifice or suicide.

To the period immediately following *Lord Jim* belong the tales “Typhoon”, “Falk” and “To-morrow”, in which the influence of Schopenhauer’s thought is decisive again in the philosophical treatment of the main themes and in the metaphysical atmosphere which envelops them. The conspicuous influence of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of will in the tale “Falk” has attracted some critical attention, and proves Conrad’s knowledge of and interest in Schopenhauer’s philosophy towards the end of the phase of recognition. However, no less significant is Schopenhauer’s metaphysical pessimism to understand the short story “To-morrow”, whose main theme is the delusions of hope and the impossibility of happiness. The analysis of the main philosophical context for this story (the starting point for Conrad’s first attempt at writing a play) is one of the original contributions of the present study.

Furthermore, a purely epistemological aspect of Schopenhauer’s thought is also of great interest to read Conrad: the distinction between intuitive and abstract knowledge, as well as the preference for the former. In Conrad’s works and letters, a remarkable distrust of reason and the relative comfort of intuitive and practical knowledge are salient. Undoubtedly, Schopenhauer’s conception of the subordinate role of reason in respect to the blind instincts of the will, as well as his ideas about the
essentially irrational nature of the universe, were influential in Conrad’s own thought. Conrad sees human reason as a kind of accident dissociated from the natural surroundings, which can only bring unhappiness: “What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it” \( (CL, \text{ vol. 2, p. 30}) \).

Hence the nostalgia for characters like Singleton in *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* and Captain MacWhirr in “Typhoon”, experiments in characterization whose defining feature is that they lack the ability for abstract reflection, and because of that they are more able to cope with the exigencies of life. This is an important aspect of the philosophical dimension in both works, and the analysis of its relation to Schopenhauer’s thought is another contribution of this thesis.

**The phase of maturity**

In the novels belonging to the phase of maturity, the influence of Schopenhauer is not felt with the same intensity and immediacy as in the previous phases, but it is present in various aspects of the political novels. *Nostromo* (1904) derives from multiple sources and influences, but the global meaning of the novel is closely related to Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy, which so deeply influenced Conrad’s thought from the beginnings of his literary career. For *Nostromo* offers an impressive view of the futility of every human action, and it is a penetrating critique of the Hegelian conception of history.

In *The Secret Agent* (1907), the Schopenhauerian atmosphere which envelops different levels of the story is made explicit in this allusion to Schopenhauer’s philosophy: “As to Mr Verloc, his intense meditation, like a sort of Chinese wall, isolated him completely from the phenomena of this world of vain effort and illusory appearances” \( (SA, \text{ 120}) \). Though in a different way than *Victory*, the novel explores Schopenhauerian nihilism, captured in the thought that “things do not stand much
looking into” (SA, 136), but it develops a forceful critique of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of compassion. It is in this novel where a definite change in Conrad’s attitude towards Schopenhauer’s thought can be located. In the political novels of the phase of maturity we find a greater critical distance with respect to Schopenhauer’s philosophy than in the previous phases. *The Secret Agent* is thus a key work in the analysis carried out in this thesis, marking a turning point in Conrad’s thought as a philosophical novelist.

In the chapter devoted to this novel, which for the first time deals with its relation to Schopenhauer’s worldview, I hope to have shown the relevance and presence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy both in general concerns and textual details of the work. Moreover, the influence of Schopenhauer’s thought on Conrad’s novels of the phase of maturity confirms my contention that such influence is a constant presence throughout Conrad’s literary career from *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) to *Victory* (1915).

**The phase of transition to decline**

The process of critical distance initiated in *The Secret Agent* reaches its highest point in the central novel of the following phase, *Victory*. This novel, the last in which a significant influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is manifest, entails a change with respect to the way in which such influence was reflected in the works of the phase of maturity. The power of contamination is felt more intensely than ever before, but the critical attitude reaches its highest point as well. Suffused with Schopenhauer’s ideas, *Victory* is both a tribute to the legacy of his influence and a final rejection of his philosophy on moral grounds. *Victory* thus marks the end of the way from the deep immersion in Schopenhauer’s philosophy in the early letters and the first two phases, through the control over this influence and the critical change in the phase of maturity,
to the profound ambivalences which Schopenhauerian thought elicits in the phase before manifest decline.

Schopenhauer’s ontology permeates Victory, but the novel examines Schopenhauerian nihilism and rejects his philosophy for ethical reasons, in so far as nihilistic pessimism generates hostility to life and debilitates the natural impulses of human character. Axel Heyst, influenced by his father’s pessimistic philosophy, does not follow the salvationist ethics which Schopenhauer offered in the fourth book of his magnum opus, and which he himself never practiced. Rather, Heyst follows the model of behaviour favoured by the German thinker in different essays and writings, characterized by contempt for worldly affairs, misanthropy, solitude, renunciation to action and avoidance of suffering. The attitude of the implied author in Victory is ambiguous. On the one hand, the unfolding events in the novel prove that the nihilistic philosophy of Heyst’s father is right. On the other hand, the moral message of the novel is that seeking to avoid the troubles and suffering inherent to life at all costs is the worst wrong: “woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love – and to put its trust in life!” (V, 308), Heyst says before committing suicide.

This paradoxical and ambiguous character of Conrad’s last canonical novel shows the deep ambivalences with respect to Schopenhauer’s philosophy, for the multiple ironic ambiguities in the text preclude the critical interpretation of an outright rejection of this philosophy. But insofar as Victory constitutes Conrad’s final rejection of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on moral grounds, it must be pointed out that Schopenhauerian ethics had fostered a process of critical distancing noticeable in the previous phase. Even in the early letters there are some signs of criticism, as Conrad makes clear that he rejects any ethical conduct based on metaphysical or mystic beliefs. Such is the case of the ethics of compassion in the fourth book of Schopenhauer’s
masterwork, whose aim is to get beyond the illusion of the *principium individuationis* to reach the salvation from universal suffering.

From the outset of Conrad’s literary career, Conrad is sceptical about ascetic renunciation and absolute denial of egoism. Conrad thus rejects the ethics of compassion, advocating instead the ethics of cooperative solidarity. Conrad shares with Schopenhauer the conviction of the boundless power of egoism in human will, but for that very reason he thinks that altruism should not be developed at the expense of a total extinction of egoism. Conrad’s ethics of solidarity matches a purely sceptical outlook, insofar as the impossibility to transcend the visible world advises against basing ethics on metaphysical postulates.

The dramatic ending of the story “An Outpost of Progress” included a parody of the piercing through the Schopenhauerian *principium individuationis*, which prefigured the critique of the metaphysics of compassion carried out in subsequent works, especially in *The Secret Agent*. Moreover, regarding the differences in ethical thought between Schopenhauer and Conrad, it is remarkable that on many occasions in which Conrad is critical of the ethics of compassion, his thought is close to that of Nietzsche. The fact that in such novels as *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* (1897) and *The Secret Agent* (1907) Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean ideas compete as an important part of the philosophical atmosphere of these works indicate Conrad’s awareness of the close relationship between both philosophers. This close relationship includes Nietzsche’s desire to surpass his master, as well as their opposed views on the conflict between the assertion and denial of the will to live.

Therefore, Schopenhauerian ethics is the key aspect of a process of evolution which goes from the deep immersion in Schopenhauer’s philosophy in the first two phases, through the critical distancing in the phase of maturity to the final rejection in
*Victory*. However, this rejection is highly ambiguous, and this ambiguity in *Victory* reflects the great power of contamination of Schopenhauer’s philosophy in Conrad’s *oeuvre*. The “anxiety of influence” is manifest in a master-disciple and paternal-filial conflict of contamination, evasion and rejection. In *Victory*, as was also the case, though in a different way, in *The Secret Agent*, Schopenhauer’s ontology is accepted and explored but his ethics is rejected. The key conflict developed in *Victory*, however, is summed up in the opposition between the title and the last word of the novel. The latter makes reference to the ending of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*, which expresses the radical nihilism his philosophical analysis leads to. It is probably inexact to suggest that the title of the novel is wholly ironic, but metaphysical pessimism and nihilism prevail.

Concluding remarks

Conrad’s works engage in an unrelenting exploration of nihilism until the allusion to Schopenhauer’s philosophy in the last line of *Victory*. Though certainly Conrad does not take pleasure in nihilism, his works present a nihilistic vision in which the influence of Schopenhauer, as *Victory* amply confirms, is decisive from beginning to end. The position of critics who tend to minimize the pessimism in *Victory* and Conrad’s work in general does not seem to be right in the light of an impartial and objective approach. When substantiating such claims with textual evidences, critics who minimize the extent of Conrad’s pessimism often quote public manifestations such as the essay “Books” (1904), in which Conrad condemns “declared pessimism”. However, they do not mention, for instance, Conrad’s letters to Cunninghame Graham at the closing years of the nineteenth century, which make such public declarations lose credibility.
Similarly, the Conradian ethics of solidarity, fidelity and work, as well as the “simple ideas” of his unreliable autobiography, are often mentioned in this regard. However, Conrad’s works amply show that the ethics of cooperative work and solidarity is at best an effective illusion, since it is no more than a temporal shelter in a hostile and incomprehensible universe. As representative examples, it is clear in “Heart of Darkness” that the work ethics is not a defence against the prevailing evil of the world. In *The Secret Agent* there is not a glimpse of hope, and only making great interpretative efforts could the far-reaching pessimism of *Nostromo*, *Under Western Eyes* and even *Lord Jim* be lessened. D. H. Lawrence understood the nature of Conradian pessimism when he told Edward Garnett: “I can’t forgive Conrad for being so sad and for giving in” (Boulton ed., 1979: 465).

Lastly, it is frequent to put the emphasis on individual freedom and the moral responsibility of every choice as a fundamental part of Conrad’s thought, something which would make him a proto-existentialist. However, Conrad’s works repeatedly show characters who are prisoners within a chain of fatal and inevitable events. Likewise, his early letters often endorse an unmistakably fatalist worldview, and in key moments in his fiction even individual freedom itself is questioned within a Schopenhauerian psychological framework. Thus Jim’s jump in *Lord Jim* suggests that, rather than taking decisions, we sometimes watch our own actions as if they were the result of an unknown and alien will. All this matches a wider philosophical worldview, brilliantly sketched in the early letters, whereby humankind is an anomaly, alienated by reason from nature, where everything is necessarily determined: “Our captivity within the incomprehensible logic of accident is the only fact of the universe” (*CL*, vol. 1, 303); “To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well –
but as soon as you know of your slavery the pain, the anger, the strife – the tragedy begins” (CL, vol. 2, p. 30).

Conrad’s thought as a philosophical novelist is defined from the outset of his career under the tutelage of Schopenhauer, but this influence is a constant presence in Conrad’s works, reflected in an ongoing process of understanding, revision and criticism throughout four major phases. Though Victory is the culminating point in this process of critical revision, it also confirms that Schopenhauer’s philosophy permeates Conrad’s thought and works as a central and decisive influence. This influence is entirely beneficial, as it gives creative impulse and philosophical resonance to Conrad’s best work.

To conclude, recurrent themes explored in Conrad’s fiction, such as the irrationality of the universe, the primacy of instinct and intuitive knowledge, determinism and the problematic status of free will, the opposition of the evanescence of phenomenal reality and the unknowable metaphysical reality, metaphysical pessimism and nihilism, constitute key problems and concerns which are given force and prominence by the productive dialogue with Schopenhauerian thought. I hope that this comprehensive study helps us better understand the true impact of Schopenhauer’s philosophy on Conrad’s works.