Interwar Itineraries

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CHAPTER ONE

Apprenticeship: French Writers Read Conrad

The one statement that can safely be advanced about traveling at sea is that it is not what it used to be. It is different now elementally. It is not so much a matter of changed propelling power; it is something more.¹

—Joseph Conrad, “Ocean Travel”

Part One: The Traveling Text

Each generation, informed by the predilections of its particular Zeitgeist, selects its own favorites from a writer’s body of work. It was the early period of Conrad’s work that most attracted the coterie who established his reception in France, guaranteeing his early, albeit limited, popularity in that country. It was, in particular, the writers associated with the highly influential literary journal La Nouvelle Revue française (henceforth NRF) who made extraordinary attempts to acquaint Francophone audiences with Conrad’s writing during the interwar period.

Conrad’s virile image in France was a group product on the part of Conrad, his translators, and the writers and critics who introduced him to the French public. Along with the assistance of several fellow intellectuals and literary critics, the contributors and the directors of the NRF worked together to shape the period’s particular obsession with Conrad. French writers as diverse in style as André Gide, Joseph Kessel, Pierre Mac Orlan, and Michel Leiris participated in this process of creating a French Conrad, one tied up with notions of authenticity. It is not important here to speculate if the English and Americans of the interwar period had a similar reading of Conrad; what is important is rather to understand the way in which a writer can be made to stand as an emblem for his literary successors, in this case, the literary coterie that consecrated Conrad during the
First World War through the middle of the interwar period. Conrad, read by French writers during these periods, was a formidable, intimidating, and inspiring precursor, ushering in ideals for what they cast as authenticity, ideals that are also articulated in many of the first publications to explicitly address the fashioning of masculinity in Conrad’s early work.2

It is unfortunate that there is less material by French women to consult when turning to the early reception of Conrad. It is certainly to be hoped that anyone who finds such material would share it with scholars more widely. It would be fascinating and instructive to know, for instance, what French women of the interwar period thought of the model of masculinity on display in Conrad’s early writing, a model that Conrad’s male consecrators were so quick to celebrate. More generally, Conrad offered an unusual literary balm for male writers during this era of relative, albeit precarious, peace. He allowed them, as apparent in early literary responses to his work, to vicariously undertake adventures no longer possible in the postwar world, while, as noted above, also offering them a model of masculinity to engage with. Additionally, they culled a set of ideals from Conrad’s writing, which they would, in turn, make use of to paint the present unfavorably and establish a clear sense of disappointing belatedness with respect to the prewar period. Overall, he offered them what might be described as a vocabulary to express, by means of comparisons, the perceived limitations of their own era, one that they deemed inauthentic. In many ways, the role of transportation in setting ideals is paramount; Conrad’s French consecrators claimed both implicitly and explicitly that true adventures at sea were undertaken with sails, not powered by steam. After all, anyone who could afford the fare could take an eight-day ship transfer from Europe to the United States (the conceit of numerous contemporaneous Hollywood productions and romance novels). Indeed, the retraction of prolonged periods of travel at sea—periods seen as generative and geared toward both contemplation and action—due to naval innovations, is one of the principal lamentations of both Leiris and Gide.

The following account of Conrad’s reception in France asks why his early writing in particular—writing perceived as partially, if not entirely, autobiographical—attracted the coterie associated with the NRF, many of whom identified a marked decline in his later work. This selective appreciation of Conrad means that these writers celebrated, almost exclusively, his novellas and novels narrating seafaring, writing that they did not hesitate to tie to his own years at sea, and whose basis in real events they of-
ten assumed. Their appreciation is discernable in French translations and critical commentary from 1910 onwards, as well as the commemorative issue of the *NRF* that appeared in December 1924, barely four months after Conrad’s death. It is also discernable in interwar-evocations of Conrad found in personal diaries and ethnographic journals (I nod here to the claim, articulated most widely by James Clifford, that all ethnography is, in its essence, at least partially autobiographical).

Conrad’s positive reception in France often outshone that of Anglophone writers living as expatriates in France. Niels Buch Leander addresses this in his scholarship:

> Why did the leading French literary review persist in a belated interest in Conrad’s early modernism at a time when its editorial board probably should have moved on to the emerging generation of high modernist authors such as Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and James Joyce, who all even resided in the French capital?

Perhaps a response to Susan Bassnett’s earlier call for scholars to study how and why some writing grows as cultural capital across cultural boundaries while other writing does not, Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* (English edition: 2004) offers useful conceptual tools to help us understand Conrad’s consecration and reception in France during an era of expatriate writers in Paris. Casanova revisits Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of consecration to illustrate the ways in which literature is produced, circulated, and evaluated. Particularly germane to a study of Conrad’s French reception, she details the way in which metropolitan literary centers controlled the translation and critical evaluation of writing from what she terms the “periphery.” In the history Casanova outlines, acceptance by Paris—which she argues is the principle center of consecration from the fifteenth through the first half of the twentieth century—was primarily limited to books that met the aesthetic criteria dominant at the time. In her view, consecrated books have to reflect enough of their diverse origins to make them interesting and even fascinating, but they also, if only in part, must display adherence to current trends at the center.

Casanova does not, however, attend to the role of translation in the circulation of world letters; a robust discussion of translation is notably absent from her account. I thus build on part of her thesis as I undertake a fresh exploration of Conrad’s literary appearance in France. Indeed, this
chapter takes off from where Casanova left off, in the belief that the role of translation in Conrad’s consecration has not been addressed. In this chapter, I demonstrate that we can gain important new perspectives if we do address it, insofar as so many elements, especially a particular modality of authenticity at this time, are tied up in it. Ever a site of contention, a look at translation can reveal much about the ways in which Conrad’s work is negotiated by his French consecrators. I combine this with a fresh study of both his contemporaneous critical reception and his literary afterlife in France, overall identifying a crucial construction of masculine heroism, one that, as seen in the forthcoming chapters, haunts later writers.

Casanova lists Conrad as one of many writers from the “periphery” who adopted English to find a wider audience. Casanova, however, overlooks Conrad’s claim in his autobiographical A Personal Record that he was “adopted by the genius of the language” when he first heard English, and would not have written at all if he “had not written in English.” Furthermore, Yves Hervouet, while suggesting that Conrad “thought in French” and was influenced by nineteenth-century French literature, also claimed that, by the time Conrad started writing fiction, his Polish had deteriorated to the point that writing in his mother tongue was no longer an option. In addition to that, Conrad once protested to Spiridion Kliszczewski that he “would lose [his] public” if he wrote about Poland, let alone in Polish.

What did Conrad’s critical reception mean to him and what did it mean for his French consecrators? Conrad had long desired that his writing be translated into French. Until the publication of the English edition of Chance in January 1913, Conrad’s English book sales had lagged. During an unproductive period in his sixties, he turned his sights towards France. He sensed that translation would afford him greater recognition on the continent where he had spent his first twenty years, four of them in the coastal city of Marseilles (1874–78). Indeed, he had been looking for French translators since the beginning of his literary career. In 1894, a year before its publication in English, he unsuccessfully invited Marguerite Poradowska, his French-speaking cousin by marriage, to undertake a collaborative translation of Almayer’s Folly (1895). In 1900, Poradowska translated “An Outpost of Progress,” but it was never published. Conrad did indeed offer a welcome challenge to his French counterparts, who, in their writing, express a complex admiration for his inimitable life and letters, both models of authenticity. He appeared to anticipate
Jacques Rivière’s 1913 call in the *NRF* for an infusion of English adventure novels capable of renewing French literature by example. In his seminal essay, “Le roman d’aventure” [*“The Adventure Novel”*], Rivière emphatically insists that French literature will profit from the translation of English literature: “It seems to me that the moment has come when French literature, which has already and so often been able to rejuvenate itself through its borrowing, is going to seize upon the foreign novel and melt it into its blood.”¹¹ He hopes that French writers will find a new orientation, one far removed from the static products so often, in his view, characteristic of Symbolism. He submits that French writers’ new tendencies should better represent the era’s new concerns; whereas, in his view, Symbolist writers privilege the mind, writers should now turn to the wider range of subjects offered by life and action. He argues that the Symbolists deem life a vulgar topic. But contemporary French writers, he maintains, should turn to life for subject matter: “We are people for whom the novelty of living has been reborn.”¹² Rivière’s account of this rediscovered life is replete with images of youthful adventure. For Rivière, a kind of miraculous rejuvenation awaits French writers, whose subsequent writing will, in his view, restore something that was thought forever lost:

> Once more it is morning. Everything is beginning again; we have been mysteriously reborn; we no longer touch the world through our habits; our hands no longer slide along that smooth, worn surface of things about us without our even noticing them. A sharp, living, lively spirit has begun to burn in the midst of our being once more; in its light we approach objects; our new spirit encounters them, receives them, experiences them.¹³

A new relationship with objects, events, and people is proposed in Rivière’s essay; he encourages contemporary writers to forge a new relationship with the world of real things that he argues is abandoned and disdained by Symbolist writers.

Rivière’s encomia for this new literature supplements his rejection of what he sees as Symbolism’s elitism, the elitism of writers who do not care for common men or popular pursuits: “[T]he slightest adventure seemed a dishonor to them; they thought they had been compromised if they happened to be involved in a street incident.”¹⁴ In his view, the novel that corresponds to the new mentality will privilege action over dreams and celebration; it will include all kinds of materials, enlarging the scope of the
genre and freeing it up stylistically. The new manner of novel proposed by Rivière is characterized by diversity and miscellany:

Its atmosphere is multiplication, exaggeration, excess; it is obsessed by hugeness. Finally, it is a monster; it seems to be covered with excrescences—interminable tales interrupting the main story, confessions, pages from diaries, a statement of principles professed by one of the characters. It forms a kind of natural agglomerate, a mud pie whose elements stick together in some unknown fashion.\(^{15}\)

Such novels, he maintains, make use of the variety of human experiences and are directed toward the future, not the past. He specifies that the designation “adventure” [“aventure”] refers to both form and content, and indicates that the novels will share an element of unexpectedness with regard to both plot and character. In his depiction of the future novel’s heterogeneous style, he also anticipates English travel narratives of the interwar period and their debt to Conrad.

Anticipating Sartre’s *What is Literature?* (1948) by over thirty years, Rivière’s essay pits the adventure novel against Symbolist poetry more specifically, identifying the latter with stasis and opposing it to the progression that, he argues, will characterize the new adventure novel. The adventure novel, he maintains, is about existence itself; its narrative mode is more oriented toward experience than other kinds of novels:

The emotion we must ask of the adventure novel is, contrary to that awakened by poetry, the emotion of awaiting something, of not yet knowing everything, of being led as close as possible to the edge of what does not yet exist. […] When we read a novel of adventure, we give ourselves unreservedly to the movement of time and life; we agree to experience, in the very depths of our marrow, this obscure, indefatigable question which moves and torments all living beings.”\(^{16}\)

Rivière anticipates that foreign novels will cause a literary awakening that will, in turn, change French letters, rejuvenating them from without. A foreign writer who could renew the forms and subjects of the French novel, Conrad appears as a solution to what Rivière perceives as its state of crisis. Significantly, Rivière linked his call for a renewal of French literature to the overall project of the *NRF*. Putnam has documented André Gide’s
overwhelmingly positive response to Rivière’s essay, an essay that meshed well with Gide’s own robust interest in English literature.\textsuperscript{17}

Conrad’s early French translators, reviewers, and champions, including writers as diverse as Gide, Henri Ghéon, Jean Schlumberger, Joseph Kessel, Pierre Mac Orlan, Paul Valéry and Valéry Larbaud, favor works that they can connect with his first career as a seaman. Their preference for Conrad’s early writing, I will demonstrate, in large part, reflects their attraction to seemingly obsolete trials of manhood, particularly those associated with the sea. As seen above, for writers of these eras, Conrad’s depictions of dangerous and life-defining experiences provided literary models of honor, masculinity, and authenticity. For many among the coterie, Conrad’s first career justified and authenticated his writing. As André Chevrillon, scholar, traveling writer, and immortel of the Académie française noted after Conrad’s death: “His paintings of the sea are those of an artistic genius but it is the experience of a professional seaman that he interprets.”\textsuperscript{18} In this view, Conrad’s writing would not have been possible without his first vocation.

Conrad was consecrated in France prior to and after the First World War, yet his consecrators celebrated a heroism anchored in the nineteenth century, in merchant ships. Commenting on the phenomenon of literary reception writ large, André Lefevere posits that this kind of selective appreciation is an essential part of literary history, which “often projects the ‘fray’ of its own times back into the past, enlisting the support of those writers it canonizes for a certain ideology, a certain poetics or both.”\textsuperscript{19} Through their praise, commentaries, and translations, these French writers of the period encourage a reading of Conrad that conforms to their nostalgia for risky prewar-era adventures. This is nostalgia for something that none of the urban writers had themselves even experienced directly; it is a synthetic yet highly convincing nostalgia.

Relevantly for this project, Georges May has observed that the “most effective way of attracting the French public to a foreign writer has always proven to be the translation of his writing by an established French writer.”\textsuperscript{20} Conrad’s success in France during the interwar period, however narrow its circumference, owes a great deal to the prestige of Gide and the other writers and critics associated with the NRF. Thomas Cazentre reports that Gide, after meeting Conrad, articulated a rather quixotic plan to have a literary informant in every country: “To this desire for discovery we can partially attribute the pains Gide took to find in each country a
native literary correspondent who could advise and inform him.”\textsuperscript{21} Conrad’s champions at the \textit{NRF} function as what Pascale Casanova terms “foreign exchange brokers,” that is, eminent writers and translators whose work involves “exporting from one territory to another texts whose literary value they determine by virtue of this very activity.”\textsuperscript{22} The French word \textit{passeur}—often used to describe writers and literary critics who introduce and help foreign writers seeking recognition in the \textit{passeur}’s own country—is relevant here, particularly with respect to Gide and Larbaud, and I explore this further in what follows. Casanova also explores other relevant forms of literary consecration, including the introduction of peripheral writers through “the canonizing effect of prefaces and introductions” contributed by writers at the center.\textsuperscript{23} She also notes that when a peripheral writer benefits from the attention of “great translators,” those translators themselves are often also beneficiaries of this success.\textsuperscript{24} Instances of both are analyzed in what follows.

Indeed, this chapter takes it as a given that the tradition of invisibility and neglect for translators in the Anglo-American tradition, so thoroughly explored by Lawrence Venuti, did not hold for French letters. As this analysis of Conrad’s reception will show, Casanova’s thesis reiterates Lefevere’s contention that a foreign writer’s success in translation is never exclusively due to the intrinsic value of his writing. Drawing particular attention to the politics of rewriting writ large, he contends that the literary study of a text should include a study of its appearance, reception, and, wherever relevant, its adaptations and translations.\textsuperscript{25} Conrad’s early recognition in France must be attributed to the translators, reviewers, and scholars who translated, reviewed, and promoted his writing. In what follows, I identify these Conrad champions and demonstrate how they, as a group, fashion a stereotyped Conrad out of his early writing as well as his later works that also featured material that they believed was gathered from his life as a seaman. As I show, this French version of Conrad is, in their terms, authentic. He embodies and narrates the seemingly unrepeatable masculine adventures undertaken during the prewar period and, for this group of readers, he invokes a feeling of belatedness and a related sense of awe.

André Gide played a pioneering role in introducing Conrad to French readers, first by translating \textit{Typhoon} in 1916, and then by overseeing the translation of his complete works for the Gallimard \textit{NRF} publishing house. Conrad and Gide’s relationship originated in Gide’s visit to Conrad at Capel House in Kent in the company of Larbaud, among others. Their discus-
sions on that occasion marked the beginning of a long personal and professional connection. In Kent, Gide became interested in aiding Conrad in his perennial attempts to have his work appear in French translation. In the years during and following the First World War, Conrad’s work was then translated and presented to French readers with the mark of both writers’ styles and temperaments.

Gide was not the first Frenchman to express interest in translating Conrad, and the details of his early translation are, for the most part, already known. Prior to Gide’s visit, H. D. Davray, an accomplished translator of Kipling, Meredith, and Wells, and a committed advocate of English letters, had already promised Conrad that he would translate several of his novels. Davray, who contributed a “Lettres anglaises” column to the literary journal Mercure de France, had begun corresponding with Conrad in 1898. In 1902, Davray initially proposed translating two of Conrad’s works, Tales of Unrest and Typhoon, and in 1908, Conrad signed a formal contract with him that would give him permission to translate all of his writing, with the exception of the “Narcissus,” which the French poet and translator Robert d’Humières had already begun translating.

Like Gide, Davray was interested in translating and promoting the work of foreign writers in France, and his translations appeared regularly in the Mercure de France. But Davray only completed translations of “Karain: A Memory” in 1906 and The Secret Agent in 1910 before apparently losing interest in what Conrad describes in a letter to D’Humières as the project of “creating me a readership.” Davray’s heavily bowdlerized translation of the “Narcissus” was serialized in the Catholic literary journal Le correspondant in 1909 and published as a book by Mercure de France in 1910. A botched translation of Typhoon by Joseph de Smet appeared in 1911. At the time of Gide’s visit, Conrad was tired of disappointments and pyrrhic victories.

Gide initially attempted to help Conrad by pressuring Davray to complete the promised translations. When this approach failed, Gide assumed responsibility for Conrad’s translation into English, thereby continuing his role of, as Lefevere has put it more generally, “the twentieth-century translator trying to ‘bring the original across’ cultures.” In 1914, Gide proposed that Conrad break with Davray and offered to oversee both translations of his works and their eventual publication by the Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue française (known, since 1961, as Les Éditions Gallimard). Gide had long hoped to enlarge the scope of the NRF and its affiliated
publications by introducing foreign authors in translation. Conrad would be the first foreign writer to have his collected works translated for the edition, a choice that testifies to Gide’s exceptional interest as well as that of his fellow literary influencers. Gide initially hoped to contribute at least two translations of his own every year and was particularly interested in *Heart of Darkness*. However, his initial ambition quickly waned, and he began assembling other translators in 1915. In 1916, he finished his one and only translation of Conrad’s work, the early novella *Typhoon*. In part, Gide wanted to lend prestige to the translation enterprise by translating *Typhoon* himself.

Gide charged himself with Conrad’s reception in France. Yet the alliance between Gide and Conrad, which lasted until the latter’s death in 1924, was often fraught. Gide had aligned himself with an author conversant in French and apprehensive about the foreign reception of his work. But his French consecrators were ready to continue the task of bringing him into French letters. In 1917, Gide writes cheerfully in his journal of “new translators who are offering themselves for Conrad.”

Gide had begun English lessons around the time he met Conrad. His journals document how he studied Conrad’s novels with his English tutor. As he notes in his journal on November 12, 1912: “This morning at work at six o’clock. Spenser and Skeat, then Conrad. I write to my teacher to resume my lessons.” In a 1910 letter to Edmund Gosse, he confesses, with apparently no little chagrin, that his knowledge of the language is poor. Gide’s interest in Conrad and the English language, in addition to his trip to England, was part of a broader interest in the English language and in English writers, an interest that, during these years in particular, assumes the nature of a vocation.

It is fruitful to consider why Gide immersed himself in Conrad’s writing and intervened so energetically on his behalf. If Gide was learning English at least in part in order to read authors such as Conrad, he was also using Conrad to learn English. Like Rivière, Gide hoped that the lessons offered by the contemporary English adventure novel could revitalize both his writing and French literature in general. Even before his trip to England, Gide hoped to enlarge the scope of the *Nouvelle Revue française* by introducing foreign writers in translation, English ones in particular. Conrad fit neatly into the scheme of Gide’s wider interests at the time. In 1911, the same year that he visited Conrad, Gide had begun *The Vatican Cellars*, which he conceived of as an adventure novel along English lines.
We should certainly contemplate the significance of Gide’s imperfect command of English when exploring his translation of *Typhoon*, as well as his revisions of translations by other translators. For instance, in his study of Gide’s reworking of Isabelle Rivière’s translation of *Victory*, J. H. Stape argues that Conrad’s style posed particular problems for Gide: “Often highly idiosyncratic and rhetorical, and even at times unidiomatic, it poses formidable difficulties even for the experienced translator, let alone for the neophyte.” It is clear from Gide’s journal that the work is slow and exhausting; while translating *Typhoon*, he ponders the task: “Translation. However backbreaking it may be, this work amuses me. But how much time it takes! I count, on average, and when all is going well, an hour to half a page (of the Heinemann edition—I am speaking of *Typhoon*). I think the result will be very good; but who will be aware of it?... No matter.” Is Gide’s loose theory of translation the result of his linguistic shortcomings? To what extent does it exacerbate the appropriative elements of his translation? In a 1928 letter to the writer André Thérive about the “thorny question of translation” [“épineuse question des traductions”], he notes that it is “a question upon which I have reflected much and for a long time.” Gide argues that translation is but one of many kinds of authorship. In his view, writers should translate works with which they feel a particular kinship, works that share the translating writer’s dominant spirit. Relevantly, West has argued that Gide felt a particular affinity with *Typhoon*, one informed by his “desire to escape the anguish and heartbreak caused by the war.” Others, however, including Conrad translator and scholar Sylvère Monod, maintain that Gide’s translation of *Typhoon* is a loose translation that bears neither thematic nor stylistic resemblance to Gide’s own work: “[N]othing resembled less than *Typhoon* the kind of narrative that Gide had written or could even conceive of producing.” I fall in the middle, accepting West’s assessment of the influence of the war as well as Gide’s own explicit claims of affinity, while also agreeing with Monod, and others, that the stylistic gulf between Conrad and Gide appears insurmountable.

In his defense of translation in his letter to Thérive, Gide joins affinity and recognition; for him, the work of translation involves an affinity that is, in this case, the awakening of something already latent in the writer; further, literary influence, in this view, is not the result of utterly new ideas but rather the activation of dormant impulses. Accordingly, in Gide’s view, instead of offering a word-for-word translation, a translator should attempt to capture the essence of a book:
I think that it’s absurd to cling to the text too tightly; I repeat, it’s not only
the sense that needs to be rendered. It’s crucial to translate phrases not
words, to express—without losing anything—thought and emotion, just
as if the author, without cost to his writing, had written directly in French,
which can only be done by perpetual cheating, by incessant detours and
often by straying far from simple literalness.35

Ultimately, he maintained, the translator should capture the flow of
thought in the original. It is worth considering an example of translational
choices that Gide made while translating Typhoon into French. Close to
the end of the novella, he translates the following passage: “You couldn’t
tell one man’s dollar from another’s [. . .]36 into “[p]eu importe que ce
soit précisément son dollar à lui ou celui de l’autre; tous les dollars sont
pareils.”37 Translated into English, Gide’s added words would be, in my
translation, “[i]t’s not important if it is exactly his dollar or another’s; all
dollars are alike,” additional commentary on dollars that has no basis in
the source text.38

For Gide, who also translated Goethe, among many other notable writ-
ers, translation often served as a substitute for original writing during un-
productive periods (here I put to the side the question of translation as,
in itself, an original, and accept the traditional sense of “one’s own writing”).
In his journal, Gide reflects on the task of revising Isabelle Rivière’s “mé-
diocre” translation of Conrad’s Victory, contrasting performing that task
with the practice of translating Typhoon: [I]n that case, it is my own work,
freely chosen, and I shall gladly sign it.”39 He also begrudges Rivière what
he sees as her wearisome literal approach to translation, an approach that
contrasts ill with his paraphrastic approach. Following an evening spent
revising her translation, he complains of her work in his journal noting,
in particular, her “childish theories about how faithful a translation must
be.”40 For him, Rivière’s theories led to a translational approach that en-
gendered a product that was: “studded with errors, awkward expressions,
cacophonies, ugly passages.”41 He laments the arduous process of revision
which “ages me a fortnight.”42

Although Gide admired both Victory and Typhoon, they were not
among his favorite works by Conrad. He preferred Heart of Darkness, Lord
Jim, and “Youth,” all of which he had considered translating. However, fol-
lowing the publication of his translation of Typhoon, he parceled them off
to other translators, ultimately participating in none of the translations
that he had envisioned. Translating *Typhoon* was a difficult task for Gide with his limited English. With a deeper understanding of the difficulty involved in translating Conrad, Gide gave *Heart of Darkness* to fellow NRF translator André Ruyters. Gide’s first experience translating Conrad was his last; his translation of *Typhoon* was his only contribution to the collection.

Ruyters gently criticized the version of *Typhoon* that appeared in the *Revue de Paris* in March 1918. Gide graciously accepted Ruyters’s criticism, and reworked the novella for its volume publication, ultimately dedicating the translation to Ruyters himself. No doubt his decision to stop translating after this was at least partly motivated by a much harsher critique of his translation by René Rapin, a young Conrad scholar. Rapin studied the definitive edition of Gide’s translation that appeared in 1923, making an exhaustive study of its errors and perceived infidelities, before doing his own translation. Conrad, however, approved of Gide’s translation, which he felt remained true to the original, despite Gide’s numerous mistakes.

As I have demonstrated, Gide took translation very seriously; he hoped to elevate its status, in Putnam’s words, “to the rank of a noble art.”43 However, his preference for a paraphrastic approach over a literal or “word-for-word” approach led to conflicts with translators, as Putnam has also reported: “It was precisely this question of literal translation that pitted Gide against other translators of Conrad, Isabelle Rivière and André Ruyters in particular.”44 Again, Gide’s criteria for translation were highly subjective, as he submits that the translator could meet them by satisfying the “sensibility” [“sensibilité”] of both writer and translator.45

Accepting Lefevere’s argument that translation is one among many forms of rewriting, Gide’s view of translation is both true and false; Gide is right to argue that the work is his own, but he avoids a larger question when he casts his ownership primarily in terms of aesthetic affinity. As Venuti has repeatedly demonstrated, translation targets the translator’s mother language and culture, resulting in a translated traveling text inscribed with “domestic intelligibilities and interests.”46 Although Conrad offered a breath of fresh and doubly foreign literary air perfectly suited to renewing French literature, the theories that guided his translation by Gide and by others were appropriative and “densely motivated,” to the extent that they allowed translators to claim partial authorship through claims of identification.47
Lefevere demonstrates the extent to which the ideological concerns of patrons and publishers influence the character of translations as well as the presentation of a translated writer. Gide, as a translator, clearly occupied a high position within many notable literary institutions. Nevertheless, Gide’s position in the world republic of letters, and his adoption of Conrad’s cause, did not sustain Conrad’s declaration in a 1916 letter to Gide that his “friendship” [“amitié”] was “[q]uite the greatest treasure I have won at the point of my pen.”

Conrad’s unmitigated gratitude did not outlive the following three years, due, principally, to the question of female translators. Gide initially gave *Victory* and *Typhoon* to women, the former to Isabelle Rivière, the latter to Marie-Thérèse Müller. Frederick R. Karl gives a detailed account of the “trying period of the translation of *Victory*.”

In a 1924 letter to Gide, who had just assigned the translation of Conrad’s “Youth” to Marthe Duproix, fellow Conrad translator G. Jean-Aubry writes that any woman, “whoever she is, is incapable, by nature, of understanding Conrad [. . .] Conrad is a fundamentally male author: when a woman translates him, she emasculates him.” In the same letter, Jean-Aubry maintains that this was Conrad’s view as well: “Moreover, this was Conrad’s feeling as well.”

Jean-Aubry reproduces Conrad’s own anxiety about masculinity; he does not want to lose in translation the very qualities he admired when reading him.

This concern about emasculating Conrad had its origins in a significant 1919 dispute between Gide and Conrad, the latter enraged by the former’s choice of a woman translator for the novel *The Arrow of Gold*. With the NRF translation well underway, Conrad sent Gide a copy of *The Arrow of Gold* shortly upon its publication, suggesting that Jean-Aubry, his friend and future biographer, translate it. Gide, however, had already given the task of translating the novel to Madeleine Octavie Maus. In a now lost letter, Conrad insists again that Gide take his novel away from Maus, arguing that the essential “virility” [“virilité”] of his writing could not be sacrificed without damaging the whole:

If my writings have a pronounced character, it is their virility—of spirit, inclination, style. No one has denied me that. And you throw me to the women! In your letter, you say yourself that in the final reckoning, a translation is an interpretation. Very well, I want to be interpreted by masculine intelligences. It’s perfectly natural.
Conrad cleverly makes use of Gide’s own philosophy of translation in his letter. Despite his declaration in a 1911 letter that “[w]omen as far as I have been able to judge have a grasp of and are interested in all the facts of life,” Conrad here suggests that women are incapable of correctly interpreting and therefore translating *The Arrow of Gold*.55

Conrad’s assertive response surprisingly anticipates contemporary theories of translation, most notably those of Venuti, who casts it as an interpretive act. However, if appropriation and disfigurement are inevitable in a translation, the choice of a translator is not. As seen above, Conrad’s preference for a male translator appears to him “perfectly natural” [“tout naturel”], and he perceives Gide’s decision as a personal betrayal. Conrad’s letter invokes an implied code of masculine conduct, and ends with a plea for Gide to respond to his request with a yes or no—“as is proper between men.”56

Conrad’s incensed letter to Gide dates from November 1919. One month earlier he wrote another letter to Jean-Aubry, explaining the disagreement from his perspective: “I have just now had a letter from Gide in which he says that a woman has just got hold of *The Arrow* for translation. I am going to protest with all my might. He throws me as bait to a gaggle of women who have made a fuss (he says it himself). All this annoys me.”57 Jean-Aubry supported Conrad in the dispute; perhaps Gide’s response to Conrad’s letters—“Are you really so certain that a masculine translation would necessarily be superior to a female one?”—was interpreted by either Conrad or his preferred translator as a slight.58 Surprisingly, earlier women translators performed their task without attendant commotion. For example, an earlier letter to Gide suggests that Conrad was satisfied with Gabrielle d’Harcourt’s 1919 translation of his novella *The End of the Tether* (1902). Conrad also expressed admiration for Geneviève Seligman-Lui’s 1919 translation of *Almayer’s Folly*. But these specific instances of harmony run counter to the bumpy nature of Conrad’s wartime and interwar-era translation into French, as overseen by Gide. Part of this logic, negotiated early in Conrad and Gide’s relationship, characterized the relationship between Conrad, the writer, and Gide, the translator and overseer of other translations. Conrad’s writings could not, in his own view, be detached from Conrad himself; fidelity to his work required fidelity to Conrad the man. Gide knew that Conrad was an unusual case in that he was alive, at least semi-fluent in French, and particularly concerned with the cali-
ber and fate of translations of his work, reviews of which he could read in the French press. In like fashion, Gide’s early intervention into Conrad’s French reception was merely the first step in what would result in a complex negotiation between Conrad and his patrons and translators as he entered into French letters as both writer and embodiment of an ethos.

Jean-Aubry’s translation of *The Arrow of Gold* was published in 1928, four years after Conrad’s death, by which time Jean-Aubry had long before taken Gide’s place as overseer of the Conrad translation project. It is unclear whether Gide’s conflict with Conrad might have influenced his decision to hand over supervision of the entire Conrad project to Jean-Aubry in 1920. After their disagreement, Gide limited his own participation in the *NRF* Conrad edition to reviewing translation manuscripts. The project was successful nonetheless. Under the combined direction of Gide and Jean-Aubry, the *NRF* published twenty-two translations of Conrad’s works between 1919 and 1946, approximately half of them translated by Jean-Aubry.

Conrad knew the difficulties his work posed for translators and was often generous with his support. He approved of several translations that differed significantly from the original, including Gide’s translation of *Typhoon*, and, not surprisingly, given the drama over *The Arrow of Gold*, all of Jean-Aubry’s translations. Gide’s 1916 translation won Conrad’s approval, although it included numerous vocabulary errors and inaccuracies. As Conrad wrote to his literary agent, J. B. Pinker, upon first reading it, Gide’s errors seemed inevitable and, therefore, acceptable:

> It’s wonderfully done, in parts. In others utterly wrong. And the worst is that with all my knowledge of the two languages I can’t do much either in the way of suggestion. I was not fully aware how thoroughly English the Typhoon is. I am immensely proud of this, of course. There are passages that simply cannot be rendered into French—they depend so much for their meaning upon the very genius of the language in which they are written. Don’t think I am getting a “swelled head.” It’s a fact. 59

Here and elsewhere, Conrad insists that his writing works exclusively in English; in a letter from 1916, he counsels Gide to translate his idiomatic style “faithfully by seeking the equivalent idioms.”60 Describing himself as “an English writer who lends himself so little to translation,” he encourages translators to match him in spirit—as with the idioms—if not in exact sense.61 The latitude Conrad conferred Gide in his translation of *Typhoon*
underscores his preference for paraphrastic translation over literal translation. *Typhoon* was the first publication of the *NRF* Conrad edition and, true to the formula May outlined above, Gide’s name gave Conrad’s writing a boost in literary circles as well as with the general public. In his meditation on translation, *Sous l’invocation de Saint Jérôme* (1946) [An Homage to Jerome: Patron Saint of Translators], Larbaud remarks the value of translations by writers “highly placed in the judgment of literary people.”62 *Typhoon* indelibly connected Gide with Conrad and contributed to both writers’ prestige in France.

Conrad was in dialogue with and befriended many of his translators, critics, and biographers, such as Richard Curle, Larbaud, Paul Valéry, Hugh Walpole, and, as seen above, Jean-Aubry. In addition to correcting translations, he sought to rectify misconceptions about himself. In particular, he wanted to see details about his seafaring past relegated to his biography rather than the stuff of literary criticism; he made this clear to Gide numerous times. A telling moment is when the latter commented favorably on an engraving of the sea at Conrad’s home: “Don’t bother yourself with that, he said, while leading me into the salon [. . .] Let’s talk about literature.”63 This interest in Conrad’s life was prevalent in England as well. He wrote as much to his friend, biographer, and critic Richard Curle on July 14, 1923, one year before his death:

I was in hopes that on a general survey it could also be made an opportunity for me to get freed from that infernal tale of ships, and that obsession of my sea life which has about as much bearing on my literary existence, on my quality as a writer, as the enumeration of drawing-rooms which Thackeray frequented could have had on his gift as a great novelist.64

Conrad chides Curle in response to an article he had written earlier that year for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Curle’s article emphasizes the role in Conrad’s writing of his years at sea. Conrad did not want critics to understand his vision and style as the direct outcome of the seafaring life of his early adulthood. He was particularly concerned with his posthumous reputation; he wanted to be cast as a literary man of opinions, rather than as a writer who had sailed on ships. In this sense, the group-created French Conrad was at odds with the intentions and desires of the writer himself.

Conrad’s initial limited appeal, in England as well as France, enhanced his allure for his more elite contemporaries. Curle, like many of Conrad’s
avid readers, saw Conrad’s limited popularity as a mark of distinction. He appears to articulate a more general sentiment when he opines that this limited popularity is linked to recognition of his genius among the happy few. In his 1914 study of Conrad, he writes: “I do not mean, of course, that he will ever be popular. His work is not cast in that mold. But I mean that he will be genuinely revered.” Curle did not foresee widespread interest in Conrad. The same is true in France, where Conrad appeared during and between the wars as a writer’s writer.

Conrad reluctantly but cannily published his only explicitly autobiographical work, A Personal Record, in 1912. By his own account, he published the book version of a serialized set of reminiscences—originally published in Ford Madox Ford’s English Review between 1908 and 1909—in order to indulge his English readers and sell more books, as he wrote to Thomas Fisher Unwin a year before its publication: “I know that there are people who’ll want to read it. My public. I also think that if published at a proper time as, for instance, in the months following the issue of a novel of mine it may secure a larger sale.” Earlier in that same letter, however, he also made it clear that—although he would revisit his seafaring years—his book would be “the work of an author, who, whatever his exact merit, has his place in English literature.” Conrad did not hesitate to make use of his renowned past, particularly in his self-professed capacity as a natural writer born into literature after eighteen years at sea. However, he always suggested that this past was of secondary or even tertiary interest.

Although he had always been an avid reader, of nineteenth-century French literature in particular, Conrad resisted the notion of influence. He also claimed that he had a near total lack of ambition during the two decades he spent at sea. Early in A Personal Record (1912), he describes a whimsical relationship with the written word:

And I too had a pen rolling about somewhere—the seldom-used, the reluctantly-taken-up pen of a sailor ashore, the pen rugged with the dried ink of abandoned attempts, of answers delayed longer than decency permitted, of letters begun with infinite reluctance and put off suddenly till next day—till next week as likely as not!

This presentation of self is quite at odds with the extensive correspondence that survives Conrad’s years at sea. It is echoed by those of his admirers who seek to emphasize his distance from other writers by noting that his
powerful vocation resulted from a maritime past and what they saw as a related—and self-professed, as I argued above—lack of literary ambition.

In the half dozen years during which Gide worked on *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* [*The Counterfeiters*], his only lengthy novel, he oversaw the translation and publication of four Conrad works: *Under Western Eyes* (1920), *Victory* (1923), *Lord Jim* (1924), and *Heart of Darkness* (1924). *Heart of Darkness* was serialized in the NRF, starting with the commemorative edition in 1924 and continuing through 1925. Following Conrad’s death and the publication of *The Counterfeiters* in 1925, Gide made an extended journey to French Equatorial Africa. This trip resulted in two published journals: *Travels in the Congo* (1927) and *Back from Chad* (1928). He dedicated these journals to the memory of Conrad, who had been in Africa in 1890, approximately thirty-five years before. Gide appeared to be on the trail of Conrad as he searched for the extreme experiences that might authenticate the account of his travels. *Travels in the Congo* and *Back from Chad* mark Gide’s transition from novelist to engaged activist and fellow traveler. Indeed, Gide was instrumental in raising a debate about the egregious abuses of the concessionary companies; excerpts from his *Travels in the Congo* were read aloud at a session of the Chambres Députés on November 23, 1927, creating considerable controversy and marking a break between the aging writer’s fiction writing and his activism. Gide cites *Heart of Darkness* numerous times in his journal, making use of Conrad’s novella to lend historical context to his observations and reporting. For instance, he has recourse to *Heart of Darkness* when speculating on the very real problems of navigating Congo by boat: “[A]nd as for the boats themselves, since the Congo becomes navigable again only at a great distance from its mouth, it is necessary—it was long necessary at least (see *Heart of Darkness*)—to transport through the jungle, on human backs, the heavy dismantled parts of any boat whatever.”69 However much Conrad became a source of information to Gide during his activist years, Gide also still held Conrad in high literary esteem, and, while in Africa, champions him with much approbation, reflecting on *Typhoon*, the novella he had translated:

Conrad has been blamed in *Typhoon* for having shirked the climax of the storm. He seems to me, on the contrary, to have done admirably in cutting short his story just on the threshold of the horrible and in giving the reader’s imagination full play, after having led him to a degree of dreadfulness that seemed unsurpassable.”70
Despite this generous reflection, Gide’s late-life writing about Conrad nevertheless mixes reservation with admiration. Reading *Under Western Eyes*, he notes his ambivalence: “One does not know which deserves more admiration: the amazing subject, the fitting together, the boldness of so difficult an undertaking, the patience in the development of the story, the reader would like to say to the author. And now let us rest a little bit.” Gide envisioned, but never began, a four-part study of Conrad that would no doubt have helped elucidate the influence that the latter had on his own work, as well as his diminishing appreciation of Conrad’s postwar-era writing. His journals indicate that he read this later work in a desultory fashion, often years after it was initially published. He openly preferred the earlier works which recounted the moral dilemmas and challenges experienced by young men at sea, particularly *Lord Jim*, which he mentions at length twice in his journal. He was particularly interested in Jim’s struggle to regain honor after his, widely perceived as, cowardly jump from the *Patna* and her imperiled passengers. In February of 1930, he compares *Lord Jim* favorably with *Under Western Eyes*, noting that the notion of redemption after disgrace is at the core of both books:

Much interested by the relationship I discover between *Under Western Eyes* and *Lord Jim*. (I regret not having spoken of this with Conrad.) That *irresponsible act* of the hero, to redeem which his whole life is subsequently engaged. For the thing that leads to the heaviest responsibility is just the *irresponsibilities* in a life. How can one efface that act? There is no more pathetic subject for a novel, nor one that has been more stifled in our literature by belief in Boileau’s rule: that the hero must remain, from one end to the other of a drama or a novel, ‘such as he was first seen to be.’

By August 2nd of 1930, Gide had reflected further on this issue and came to the conclusion that such irresponsible acts were not necessarily redeemable:

Noteworthy that the fatal *irresponsible acts* of Conrad’s heroes (I am thinking particularly of *Lord Jim* and of *Under Western Eyes*) are involuntary and immediately stand seriously in the way of the one who commits them. A whole lifetime, afterward, is not enough to give them the lie and to efface their mark.
For Gide, however, this does not take away from the books’ value. Nor did it take away from the principal characters’ heroism. Indeed, it was precisely this lasting mark of shame that permitted heroism by making it truly human. If Conrad’s early writings were indeed works of apprenticeship, for Gide this was an existential apprenticeship. More was at stake in Gide’s view than the mastery of a craft; for him, the significance of Conrad’s early work was crystallized in his characters’ search for a life code that would ease the confrontation between youthful aspiration and the challenges of adulthood.

Gide was critical of Falk (1903), The Secret Agent (1907), and The Rescue (1920). Gide read The Secret Agent before his trip to Africa in 1926 but was not able to finish it: “[U]nable to finish The Secret Agent.” He was disparaging of Romance (1903), Nostromo (1904), and Chance (1913), all three of which he read before the Second World War. Although he read the more realistic novels that were anchored more explicitly into socio-historical contexts, he continued to favor the works about seafaring that transformed human adventures into existential quests. Through the penumbra of a language that he never fully mastered, Gide found what he saw as formidable but inconsistent writing.

In some respects, Conrad exhausted the aging Gide; the accounts of various forms of extreme experience that Gide admired in Conrad’s early work came to overwhelm him in his later years. Yet, as I will explore at length in the fourth and fifth chapters, Conrad’s imprint is highly visible in both Travels in the Congo and Back from Chad, and not merely insofar as Gide sees his work as providing some kind of historical record. And, despite his later reservations, Gide succeeded in introducing Conrad to French readers by associating their names together. He was a central factor in determining how Conrad was read and received in France. His interventions into Conrad’s translation into French and his open preference for his early work colored Conrad’s reputation in France. His preferences are echoed in other writers’ assessments of Conrad during the interwar period.

Overall, I argue that French writers of the interwar period situate Conrad between nineteenth-century aspirations and twentieth-century paradoxes. Although a unique and fresh writer, Conrad was also a writer of disjunction, of spoiled dreams, and seemingly noble but outmoded aspirations. They saw him as an authentic writer, his authenticity gained by
the life he lived before he began writing. The majority of these writers discovered Conrad during or after the First World War, but his writing was rooted in the illusions and aspirations of the prewar period. Would it be possible to emulate Conrad in life or in letters? This is a question that Conrad’s French readers confronted at that time, tainting, I argue, their reading with anxiety.

Coupled with anxiety about belatedness, French writers of the interwar period often also expressed a complimentary awareness of what they saw as Conrad’s limitations as a writer, particularly with respect to the novels that did not deal with young men and the sea. Admiration and disillusion were, as I demonstrated with Gide, important elements of interwar-era French writers’ encounter with Conrad’s work; their writing mixes disenchantment and awe in a manner both unusual and provocative. As I will argue when turning to the NRF commemorative edition, critical responses to Conrad quite often mix praise with muted criticism and characterize his writing as endowed with a kind of flawed perfection. Such mixed praise is first articulated by Valery Larbaud and Pierre Mac Orlan, as I demonstrate in what follows. Both French writers identify flaws while also suggesting that such flaws, minor for the most part, contribute to Conrad’s sublimity by providing a humble background for his talents. Flaws and failures serve the function of fashioning Conrad into a writer who will be appreciated by a select interpretive circle. Casanova distinguishes between literary centers, Paris, in this case, and literary peripheries. But the case of Conrad clearly demonstrates that there were equally important hierarchies and power struggles at work within the center itself. Several of Conrad’s French admirers and translators make the case for Conrad as a writer’s writer; the gains for general French readers are rarely mentioned. One could of course argue that such views offered consolation to Conrad’s early champions and translators, who had only a modest initial response to their efforts.

Although conspicuously absent from the commemorative edition—likely due to an argument with editor Jacques Rivière about publishing James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the NRF—Larbaud mixes criticism and praise in a review of Conrad’s 1914 novel *Chance*, which predates the commemorative edition by ten years. In the first review of Conrad’s work in France, Larbaud dismisses Conrad’s plots as perfunctory nods to the demands of a large reading public. Larbaud, himself arguably a writer’s writer, laments that there is not “in England, as there is here, a clear division between the
larger public and the happy few." He maintains that English writers—he also names H. G. Wells and Charles Dickens—must write in two different registers, one for "the discreet elite" ["la discrète élite"], and the other for the "general reader". In this view, because Conrad has to write for the general reader, he tarnishes his work by means of a stylistic compromise. Larbaud explicitly rejects any equation between widespread popularity and greatness; for Larbaud, Conrad’s limited appeal is due to the fact that, to put it simply, the chord he strikes is audible, in his account, only to those with a highly developed literary sensibility. If Conrad is a writer’s writer, Larbaud is an elitist’s elitist.

Larbaud sets Conrad apart from his contemporaries not by the complexity of his plots, for which he had won particular praise from early English reviewers, but by his use of an indirect narrator. Larbaud points to the indirect narrator as both the conscience of the novel and its distinctly modern element, arguing that the reader must read Conrad’s writing through the optic of this conscience, and in spite of the “old rusty car-cass of the plot.” What distinguishes Conrad from his contemporaries, in Larbaud’s view, is the tragic element that governs his writing. Larbaud offers NRF readers the portrait of a writer whose work he sees as characterized by inconsistent genius, conjoining a frank assessment of Conrad’s limitations with an unequivocal affirmation of talent: “Joseph Conrad and his ouv trained a thorough and detailed study that will introduce novels like Nostromo and Chance to numerous readers in France. We hope that such a study will be offered first to the readers of this journal.” For Larbaud, at least, the greatness of Conrad’s writing outshines his stylistic shortcomings.

In part, we can see Larbaud’s misgivings as rooted in Conrad’s perceived failure to echo the more experimental style of writing popular among the literary elite at that time. In Larbaud’s view, Conrad is an extraordinary writer but stylistically retrograde; I turn to Casanova’s notion of literary temporality here, but with the understanding that Conrad, writing in English in England, was—contra Casanova—both a peripheral and a central writer. Despite his misgivings, Larbaud, informal agent and passeur of English, American, and Irish literature, is nevertheless quick to emphasize the role that the NRF might play in encouraging translations and publishing future studies of Conrad.

Pierre Mac Orlan reviewed Conrad’s first published novel, Almayer’s Folly (1895), for the NRF upon the work’s translation into French in 1919.
In his review, he maintains that Conrad is one of just a few writers who had had extraordinary adventures and writes convincingly about them. In his initial invocation of Conrad as the author of *Almayer’s Folly*, he telegraphs the doxa of his early French Conrad criticism: “Joseph Conrad, Englishman of Polish heritage and long-haul sailor, is at the top of this set of writers who were molded by a harsh and wild existence and whose literary genius was able to retain images of this past in order to create a harsh and wild book.”

Conrad’s work is singled out for the way in which it marshals the writer’s past into writing capable of conveying “harsh” [“dure”] experiences. In Mac Orlan’s view, adventure is glimpsed at in *Almayer’s Folly* but never realized; indeed, he suggests that an atmosphere of “anxiety” [“inquiétude”] dominates Conrad’s first novel. But this is as it should be, Mac Orlan opines; such novels are successful when they are disturbing.

Unlike Larbaud’s review, Mac Orlan’s mixed review of *Almayer’s Folly* was published directly after the war and considers the implications of the war for reading Conrad. In Mac Orlan’s view, Conrad’s work is characterized by an appropriate tone for the generation rising in the postwar period, who will be able to appreciate novels whose scope has been radically enlarged, novels in which accounts of adventure have been reworked in heretofore-unseen ways, “offering characters an unlimited field of action.” Conrad offers a new way to write about modern experience, even if most of his work had been published before the war. Further, it is this interwar-era generation that is primed to appreciate and understand this work. Mac Orlan—who will further elaborate on Conrad’s shortcomings in the commemorative edition that I turn to next—specifies that the work will be particularly relevant for those who have lived through the war and are thirsty for new forms of literature that will be adequate in scope for their experiences.

The group response of members of the *NRF* to Conrad’s death in 1924 illustrates the influence and effects of the Gide/Conrad collaboration. The 1924 *NRF* commemorative issue “*Hommage à Joseph Conrad,*” published four months after Conrad’s death, offers the testimony of a large number of notable writers and critics (and those who were both). All of these were men, associated with the *NRF*, including both those who knew him, and those only familiar with his work. There are also translated contributions from the English writers John Galsworthy and Cunninghame Graham.
photographs, letters written in French by Conrad, and the initial installment of André Ruyter’s serialized translation of *Heart of Darkness*.

The commemorative essays in the volume are divided into two sections: “souvenirs,” or remembrances, of Conrad the man, and “l’œuvre,” essays that address Conrad’s body of work. They are remarkably consonant, again evoking the connections they perceive between Conrad’s personal history and his fiction. Nearly every contributor addresses Conrad’s national heritage, questioning how it informs his writing, and alternately identifying English, French, and Slavic elements. Contributors ponder his cultural and linguistic background and consider why he chose to write in English, his third language. Many contributors to the commemorative issue argue that Conrad’s connection with France is aesthetic as well as linguistic, and situate him in the French literary tradition.Relatedly, contributors often comment on Conrad’s mastery of French. “[N]ever a faulty article, never a grammatical error,” declares Jean-Aubry, who would later correct Conrad’s French writing while editing his French-language letters for the 1929 *Les lettres françaises* compilation. Contributors to the commemorative edition also suggest that Conrad did indeed have an eye on Paris and its literary trends. “How well he knew our writers!” Gide enthuses.

The prevailing tendency to demonstrate Conrad’s connection to the French language is most pronounced in Valéry’s account of Conrad. He recalls the shock he suffered when he first heard what he assessed as Conrad’s “horrible accent” [“accent horrible”] while speaking English; contrasting Conrad’s English with what he saw as his fluent French and his “good Provençal accent” [“bon accent provençal”], Valéry concludes: “To be such a great writer in a language that one speaks so poorly is truly a rare and novel thing.” Valéry suggests that verbal-linguistic capacity indicates a larger cultural affinity; going further, he identifies Conrad’s thick accent as a sign of implicit resistance to the English language and English literature. In Valéry’s view, by dint of his foreign language skills, Conrad is ultimately more a French writer than an English one; his rightful place is in the lineage of French literature. He recalls contentiously grilling Conrad on the putative superiority of the British Navy during the Napoleonic era.

Like Valéry, Jean-Aubry emphasizes Conrad’s enviable command of French. Unlike Valéry, however, he nowhere criticizes Conrad’s English. A great friend of Conrad and his first biographer, Jean-Aubry notes the active
role Conrad played in his own translations, often translating portions of his novels and stories himself. Although Jean-Aubry connects Conrad’s nobility and chivalrous nature with his Polish heritage, he ends his essay with a polemical statement that echoes Marlow’s oft-repeated “one of us” in Lord Jim: “[H]owever great an English writer that he was, he was one of us.”90 Indeed, Jean-Aubry’s commemorative essay underscores Conrad’s sympathy with French values and aesthetics as well as his “feeling for the French language and its resources, vocabulary, and style.”91 His decision to include several of Conrad’s French-language letters in the memorial edition appears polemical and perhaps intended to cast doubt on Conrad’s own claims about the relationship between his writing and the English language. “You can take it from me,” Conrad famously wrote to British novelist and critic Hugh Walpole, “if I had not known English I wouldn’t have written a line for print, in my life.”92 In Conrad’s own view, he was not a writer who accidentally wrote in English when he could have written in another language; it was the English language that made a writer of him.

Much as they address Conrad’s national identity and linguistic skills, contributors draw attention to his astonishing life and strength of character, using adjectives such as “bitter” [“âpre”] to invoke both Conrad’s person and the characters that people his novels and stories. Gide’s commemorative essay is exemplary in this respect: “And I think what I loved the most in him was a kind of native nobility, bitter, scornful, and somewhat hopeless, the very nobility that he lends to Lord Jim and which makes that book one of the most beautiful that I know but also one of the saddest and the most exhilarating.”93 In his essay, Gide directly connects Conrad the writer with Jim the character, once again emphasizing the relationship between his work and his life.

Nearly all of the contributors dwell on the importance of Conrad’s path to literature via an exacting and virile métier; they commemorate a writer whose literary vocation they saw as the outcome of a younger adulthood characterized by hardship and generative loneliness. For many contributors, Conrad’s years at sea spared him the superficiality and pretentiousness they find abundant in contemporary literature. As André Chevrillon declares: “He didn’t emerge from a school of writing or a literary coterie; he wasn’t searching for a new way to write.”94 In his contribution to the commemorative edition, Robert Francillon further addresses the generative element of Conrad’s seafaring: “The unity of the life of Conrad the navigator and Conrad the novelist resides in an act of abandonment al-
ways renewed by the power of imagination.” For Francillon, it is in part Conrad’s solitary nature that made him both an artist and a sailor; loneliness fed his singular vision. Likewise, in the view of the *immortel* Edmond Jaloux, Conrad’s formidable life led him to reflect on the ways in which human nature is tested when “faced with unusual circumstances.”

In his memorial essay, André Gide writes: “No one lived more savagely than Conrad; no one then patiently, consciously, and wisely submitted life to such a transmutation into art.” In his parallel declaration of genius, Gide praises Conrad’s talent for molding his life into his writing. With its emphasis on the connection between Conrad’s writing and his seafaring years, Gide’s essay summarizes the guiding spirit of all of the contributions. Fittingly, *Typhoon* is the most frequently invoked work in the volume.

Like Larbaud and Mac Orlan before them, for many contributors to the *NRF* commemorative edition, appreciation for Conrad requires a refined taste and the capacity to perceive hidden and rugged beauty beneath discernable surface flaws. Chevrillon’s commemorative essay articulates this view and reiterates the widespread preference for his works about the sea:

We could debate some of Conrad’s books, reproach them for their length and sometimes disconcerting and complicated composition. But when he limits himself to sailors and the sea—what certainty of conception, what direct and easy narrative flow, what increasing grandeur of expression!

Even more critical of Conrad’s literary techniques, André Maurois considers his later works as failures. He cites the example of *Victory*, which he later contrasts with earlier sea-oriented works such as the “*Narcissus, Lord Jim*, and *Typhoon*: “The Conrad of *Victory* could not have believed in his monstrous and romantic characters in the way that the Conrad of the *Typhoon* believed in his friends, the sailors.” In this view, Conrad’s later works failed because he did not believe in them.

Written in English, Jean-Aubry’s *Life and Letters* (1927) was published three years after Conrad’s death; it was the first Conrad biography to appear. Its ten chapters of biography, supplemented by photographs and a collection of Conrad’s letters, remains faithful to key notions expressed in the book reviews and in the commemorative edition essays. Jean-Aubry published Conrad’s French letters separately in *Lettres françaises*, a controversial editorial choice, but omitted much of Conrad’s later correspondence, including the letters that he wrote to Gide. In 1947, twenty years
after Life and Letters, Jean-Aubry published in French a second, revised biography of Conrad entitled Vie de Conrad [Life of Conrad]. This book had no letters and was dedicated to Gide, although Gide is rarely mentioned in this revised biography either. In Life and Letters, Jean-Aubry echoes his commemorative essay by emphasizing Conrad’s mastery of French, claiming in a footnote that: “Conrad’s knowledge of French was perfect. He not only spoke correctly, with a good accent and with great fluency, but he showed later, as a literary man, a nice feeling for French style and a knowledge of the precise meanings of words which many Frenchmen might have envied.” Jean-Aubry’s impulse to make much of Conrad’s French and his four years in Marseilles hints at a longing, one shared by the contributors to the commemorative edition, to enjoy some kind of connection, or share something essential, with Conrad.

In Life and Letters, Jean-Aubry notes the significance of Conrad’s years at sea and highlights the writing that draws from that period. In the absence of other historical documents, Life and Letters joins biographical analysis with selections from Conrad’s fiction. For instance, he suggests that the “Narcissus” provides an accurate account of Conrad’s life at sea: From this beautiful book [the “Narcissus”] and The Mirror of the Sea we know what Conrad’s life was like, not only during the voyage of the Narcissus but during the twenty years he spent aboard sailing ships. The atmosphere, the dangers, the fatigues of that life become real to us; also its arduous beauty, which appealed intimately to Conrad, brought up from childhood, as he was, to be familiar with the sentiment of the sublime and with struggle against all odds.

Jean-Aubry underscores the connection between Conrad’s life and his writing, despite Conrad’s insistence, most notably in A Personal Record, that his novels bear only a tangential relationship to real events; he explains that they were often fabricated out of a fragment of a story he had heard although, relevantly, in his view, this did not take away from his work’s authenticity. In an author’s note for an edition of Typhoon, he writes of the protagonist Captain MacWhirr as the product of his own “twenty years” of seafaring life albeit fictional: “If it is true that Captain MacWhirr never walked and breathed on this earth [. . .] I can also assure my readers that he is perfectly authentic. I may venture to assert the same of every
aspect of the story, while I confess that the particular typhoon of the tale was not a typhoon of my actual experience.”

In Life and Letters, Jean-Aubry stresses Conrad’s temperamental and yet unaffected nature, arguing that this nature led Conrad to write without pretense in the same devoted fashion with which he had sailed ships. His vocation is “unconscious,” the result of “circumstances and the still secret impulse of his nature” and a continuation of his work at sea. As in his commemorative essay, Jean-Aubry, in a footnote, emphasizes Conrad’s fluent French.

Despite many differences, Jean-Aubry, like his NRF contemporaries, situates Conrad between nineteenth-century aspirations and twentieth-century paradoxes, casting him as a chronicler of noble, but typically outmoded, masculine feats, and fashioning him as a model of authenticity. The majority of Jean-Aubry’s contemporaries discovered Conrad during or after the First World War, whereas his life and writing were rooted, they suggest, in the illusions and aspirations of the prewar period. Nevertheless, they contend that Conrad’s early works, in particular those that detailed emotional and physical strength in the face of adversity, could function as a literary salve for readers still recovering from the war.

Venuti describes the process of forcing, through translation, foreign writing into familiar norms as a violent one that runs the risk of “whole-sale domestication.” Conrad’s French consecrators were drawn to the foreign elements of his writing. However, it was their domestic criteria for foreignness in the interest of which his consecrators evaluated Conrad’s writing and privileged his early work. Yet if I speak of slanted or tendentious readings, I also suggest that correct and permanent readings are possible and that literary merit is easily decided. Conrad’s case foregrounds the inevitably variable nature of literary consecration.

Part Two: “Unknown and Prestigious Shores”

Charles Forsdick has demonstrated that the interwar period was a period of complete renewal for French travel literature. He argues that this was particularly true in the 1930s, a decade that “witnessed rapidly multiplied contact between Europe and elsewhere before the postwar collapse of colonial dependency.” A number of interwar-era writers place themselves
in dialogue with Conrad’s work. Several literary readings and rewritings of Conrad at the time also express notable anguish and related sentiments of belatedness in the face of his seemingly inimitable life and work. Two of the most canonical interwar-era French novels, André Malraux’s The Royal Way (1930) and Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s Journey to the End of the Night (1932), both question whether a certain kind of authenticity-granting experience is still possible. Isabelle Guillaume argues that both novels, in which the search for new territory cedes to the search for otherness (“altérité”), are rewritings of Heart of Darkness. In the fourth and fifth chapters, I explore Journey to the End of the Night in depth; for now, I note that Céline’s novel takes place, in part, in Africa, just as Heart of Darkness transpires, in part, in an unnamed place that is understood to be in sub-Saharan Africa. Both Conrad’s and Céline’s novels are, as is also widely understood in both cases, informed by their own experiences in Africa.

Conrad’s early writing provided a standard for interwar-era French writers of both fiction and nonfiction. He was often invoked in narratives that detail searches for endangered experiences such as those sought by Gide in sub-Saharan Africa. The novelist and reporter Joseph Kessel offers an exemplary reading of Conrad in Marchés d’esclaves (1933), a cri de coeur that he wrote while investigating the slave trade in the Arabian Peninsula and in the East African region known at the time as Abyssinia. He invokes Conrad—dead for nine years at the time of publication—at a moment in the book when he crosses the Red Sea to Hodeidah, a port city on the Arabian Peninsula. He recalls reading Conrad and desiring experiences of the sort that Conrad described. He draws particular attention to Conrad’s story “Youth,” and its drama of a young seaman who survives a tempest and then glimpses the horizon through disappearing clouds. He laments that, although he is on a ship on a benighted coast, he will never feel the excitement felt by the protagonist of “Youth,” an excitement which he presumes Conrad once felt himself: “I remember that when I finished reading the story, a profound melancholy mingled with my admiration. I thought that I would never know the beautiful and pure joy experienced by Conrad, sailor of the last century.” Kessel’s assessment of “Youth” involves a complicated mixture of admiration, melancholy, and anxiety.

But Kessel’s despair is short-lived. Although modern travel first seemed to him to have robbed European men of the world’s mysteries, Kessel manages to stumble upon what he deemed was real adventure in Hodeidah. He employs a rhetoric of discovery, combined with a nod to older modes of
Kessel suggests that he has experienced something like the sailor in Conrad’s “Youth” and dramatizes his account accordingly. In his account, his experience is particularly exciting because he did not believe that such adventures were still possible; if the protagonist of “Youth” must confront a tempest in order to see the Orient, then Kessel must confront Conrad—functioning here as a metonym for authentic and antiquated experiences—and keep writing. Kessel exhibits himself succeeding at finding such experiences, despite the unfavorable era. In this way, by experiencing the previously unattainable, he defeats Conrad and then deflates him, just as the protagonist in “Youth” combats and conquers the storm: “As the coast slipped away, Conrad’s novella “Youth” came back to me.” Spatializing history, Kessel travels to what he paints as the past, to have experiences like Conrad.

Kessel’s tribute to “Youth” casts it as the account of a supremely transformational experience; he identifies in the novella the prestige of difficult experience and the ways in which hardship can be understood to confer authority and guarantee authenticity. He suggests the anxiety Conrad inspires as a literary precursor insofar as he writes about experiences that appear to be out of the reader’s reach. However, Kessel’s challenge is less to prove that life-changing experiences of the kind Conrad fictionalized are still possible than to substitute himself for Conrad as the final representative of an imperiled world of adventure. Kessel extends no welcome when he invokes “Youth”; rather, he inserts himself into another bygone and imperiled world. In this view, the old world of adventure is indeed still disappearing, but he was offered the last chance to experience it before it vanishes forever. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate that this logic of belatedness and exclusivity is shared in other writing about travel from the interwar period.

French writers in the thirties were overall much kinder towards Conrad’s later work than the gatekeepers at the NRF. Michel Leiris’s adaptation of Conrad’s 1915 novel Victory appears in the travel journal he kept while acting as a secretary and archivist for the Dakar-Djibouti ethnographic mission from 1931–1933. The Dakar-Djibouti mission lasted nearly two years and was the first mission of its kind to cross the continent of Africa;
it was funded by the French state in the interest of advancing ethnographic studies in a variety of regions in Africa from the West Coast to the East Coast. The mission was led by the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule, and included, among others, ethnographers, linguists, a musicologist, a painter, and a naturalist.

Leiris’s “transgressively reflective journal,” which he quickly transformed from a public document to a private journal, was published in 1934 in France as *L’Afrique fantôme* (published in English as *Phantom Africa* in 2017). His command of English rather limited, Leiris had most likely read Isabelle Rivière and Philippe Neel’s translation, which Gallimard had published in 1923. In 1933, stationed in Abyssinia towards the end of the twenty-one-month mission, Leiris rewrote the plot of Conrad’s novel *Victory*, transforming Axel Heyst—the Swedish-English protagonist who lives in imposed isolation on the fictitious island Samburan—into a miserable colonist whose story involves a mental foundering, seemingly like that of Kurtz. In this and elsewhere, Leiris’ adaptation of *Victory* is also redolent of *Heart of Darkness*. He registers his own fragile mental state: “Terrible depression. The real thing: colonial depression.” Indeed, although Leiris’s lengthy adaptation retains the name Axel Heyst, he transposes him from the Dutch East Indies to colonial East Africa, consciously incorporating elements of the “present reality” (“présente réalité”) into the plot.

Michel Leiris, the Surrealist-turned-ethnographer-turned-autobiographer, contributed frequently to the *NRF* in the 1930s. His lifelong obsession with masculinity colors his semi-autobiographical rewriting of *Victory*, a novel whose plot concerns, to a great extent, Heyst’s extraordinary feats on his remote island. Leiris’s adaptation is also informed by his interest in *l’art nègre*, which he championed as a contributor to Georges Bataille’s Surrealist magazine *Documents* (1929–1930). As in Conrad’s *Victory*, the prominent themes of Leiris’s adaptation are failure and cynicism. In vivid detail, he narrates the humiliation of a man who seeks to retain his fragile and much valued dignity in the colony by avoiding sporting functions and social encounters. Both Conrad’s isolated Swedish Baron and Leiris’s colonial island dweller are “gentlemen” (the word is in English in Leiris’s journal) and both characters’ situations contest the implicit triumph suggested by the novel’s title. Indeed, Leiris’s sketch of Axel Heyst documents Leiris’s growing disappointment at the end of the Mission when he contemplates: “[A] review of all my failures; acts, adventures, copulations gone wrong.”
Leiris’s Heyst navigates the masculine behavior for which Conrad’s protagonists won praise from NRF contributors. His adaptation intermingles his own experiences on the Dakar-Djibouti Mission with the misadventures of Conrad’s Heyst in the Dutch East Indies. Like Conrad’s Swedish Heyst, Leiris’s English Heyst is a self-controlled man who breaks the rules of behavior demanded of him by his countrymen. He runs afoul with the bulk of his fellow colonials because he does not adhere to custom; he is friendly with the “natives” [“indigènes”] and mainly keeps to himself. The other colonists take him to task for his heterodox behavior: “Some say he’s not ‘a man’; he doesn’t go out, he doesn’t hunt, he is very lax with the natives, he gets flustered easily.” Although he has had opportunities for sexual relations, he has apparently not had any since his arrival in the colony. Like Conrad’s Heyst, Leiris’s Heyst is aloof, but also jocular and playful when he does socialize, prone to ill-advised jokes concerning such topics as masturbation. His unusual demeanor and inappropriate joking leads the community to suspect that he is either homosexual or impotent. Heyst bucks the colonial community’s guidelines for correct behavior and grows even more isolated because of it: “Most people saw him as a poseur: the better educated called him an aesthete. It was considered odd that he didn’t ride and disliked hunting.” Leiris experienced similar alienation in his own community as he testifies in his journal only a few days before composing his adaptation of Victory: “Soon I will have been chaste for two whole years. Some people will call me impotent or say that I have no balls.”

In this passage, Leiris is particularly concerned with how the other members of the Mission perceive his deeply undesired chastity and his attendant feelings of shame. His concern with group reflection is mirrored in another journal entry, in which he envisions a possible misreading of his adaptation and offers a defensive apostrophe to the reader: “Let no one call Axel Heyst an aesthete, a madman, or an eccentric. He is just a semi-lucid man in a world of the blind.” Although both Conrad’s Heyst and Leiris’s Heyst are capable of robust self-mockery, neither can bear calumny; in Phantom Africa overall, a notion of honor evolves that is pinned both to self-esteem and other peoples’ esteem; for Leiris’s Heyst, the community functions as an evaluative group whom he must convince that he is a norm-obeying man and, thereby, redeem himself. Ultimately, Leiris’s Heyst must die in order to be understood.
Edward Said has relevantly noted Conrad’s affinity with Nietzsche, particularly with respect to *Victory* and Heyst’s flawed “code of philosophic disengagement from life.” I argue that, with respect to such a code of disengagement, we can see just how much Leiris has rewritten; whereas in Conrad’s *Victory*, the native East Indians remain in the background while a drama plays out among Europeans, Leiris’s version brings indigenous people into the foreground. Conrad’s British Lena is transformed into an indigenous woman with whom Heyst is enamored.

The rumors about Heyst that circulate among both the colonials and the indigenous people suggest that Heyst’s impotence far exceeds the sexual sphere. However, a sudden flurry of events and discoveries in the colony ultimately confirm that he is indeed capable of convincingly conforming to normative masculinity despite the scornful judgment of his fellow colonizers. Unlike Conrad’s Heyst, who is maligned for his Nietzschean independence and contempt, Leiris’s Heyst faces ridicule and humiliation for general ineptitude. In Leiris’s adaptation, a rumor starts that Heyst is having an affair with an indigenous sex worker. With the avowed hope of curing himself of his fear of coitus, Heyst invites the indigenous woman to his home; she leaves quickly, terrified by his sexual aggression as well as his spare room with its “overwhelming cleanliness and bareness.” Shortly thereafter, Heyst attempts suicide and fails because, forever bumbling, he cannot manage to shoot himself effectively; once again, even during a suicide attempt, he proves himself an incompetent colonist, as a familiarity with guns is one of the attributes of the “gentleman” he unsuccessfully tries to become. This episode echoes the episode in Conrad’s *Victory* in which Heyst’s gun is stolen due to his carelessness. Shortly after his suicide attempt, Leiris’s Heyst dies in a massive epidemic. In line with Conrad’s penchant for second-hand narration, Heyst’s story is then seen through the eyes of an interested doctor. Here, Leiris introduces an avatar of Davidson, the second-hand narrator who tells Heyst’s story in *Victory*. In an episode reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness*, the doctor searches Heyst’s room, uncovering a photograph of a solemn young woman and a messy personal diary. The “fairly thick pile of separate pages, forming a sort of diary, rather confused and mostly undated,” mirrors the piles of ethnographic notes which Leiris transcribes for the Mission. Heyst’s mostly undated papers include a variety of different kinds of writing. There are reflections on suicide as well as accounts of affairs that suggest that Heyst was not, after all, impotent. There are also optimistic notes about his plantation work,
work that could have elevated Heyst’s reputation in the colonial community, work that will allow Heyst to “show that he, too, is a ‘man.’” The diary also includes reflections on various intimate topics such as love and sex and relations with indigenous women. Yet when the doctor interviews Heyst’s domestic servant, he counters that Heyst’s only attempt at a sexual encounter in the colony was with the aforementioned indigenous sex worker, who fled his house, terrified by his strange manners as much as his barren and antiseptic living quarters. The doctor speculates that Heyst’s suicide attempt was precipitated by this failed encounter.

Leiris, like so many of his interwar-era contemporaries, believed that sub-Saharan Africa was a place where authentic and character-building experiences could be had and that, therefore, travel would cure him of sexual neurosis and what he saw as cowardice. He hoped that the Mission would permit him to escape from what he saw as a stifling and degrading European life, a hope that had at its foundation the quite firm conviction that living for nearly two years among sub-Saharan Africans from a broad variety of regions would prove both curative and restorative. He anticipated returning from the Mission a more virile and sexually confident person. Emawayish, the Abyssinian woman whom Leiris encounters and falls in love with on his trip, is given (and rightly refuses) the absurd task of emancipating him from what his journal describes as “the education I was given [. . .] all the rules that merely ended up enchaining me, making me the kind of sentimental pariah that I am, incapable of living a healthy life and copulating in a healthy way.” In his semi-autobiographical rewriting of the plot of Victory, as well as elements from Heart of Darkness, Leiris, like his contemporaries, interprets Conrad’s characters as lonely individuals who confront themselves in extreme situations, just as his own “colonial depression” prompts him to confront his false expectations and personal failures.

In a 1951 preface to Phantom Africa, Leiris, now “[ceasing to aspire to the romantic role of the White Man [. . .] like Lord Jim],” underscores the dangerous solipsism of his younger self, impelled to travel to such distant lands, because it “signified to him, not only a test, but also a lived poetry and a change of scenery.” The 1951 edition, with its new preface and notes, published almost twenty years after the initial publication of Phantom Africa, offers a rereading of both his adaptation and his earlier understanding of Conrad’s work. If Leiris were to rewrite Victory at that later date, he remarks in a lengthy marginal note, he would change the doctor’s account to reflect quite different insights:
If the doctor had reflected a bit further, he would surely have had more to say about the blow given to the “native” laborer renowned throughout the area for the enormous size of his virile member. He would have noticed how much Axel Heyst’s reaction—this gesture of puritanical fury toward a man of color—showed him to be vaguely contaminated, despite the open mind that one might suppose he possessed, by one of the worst racist prejudices: the one that transforms black men, in the eyes of many white men, into dangerous sexual rivals who must be kept at a distance. And perhaps he would have suspected that, if Heyst succumbed to suicide, it is because this fear of turning out to be inferior—a sign of the elevated value he attached to his prestige, as well as his exaggerated self-concern—could not be dispelled without a radical conversion, in a way that would have, for example, let him see a woman only as herself, instead of reducing her to an instrument for him to experiment with or to prove something to himself with; a radical conversion, in sum, so that in the most general manner he would have been less anxious about virility and instead show himself to be more generous with pure and simple humanity.126

As I have illustrated, Lefevere uses the term “rewriting” to refer to translation as well as many other forms of adaptation, including critical work. The study of rewritings can help establish the factors influencing cultural production and reception; Leiris’s belated analysis of his own youthful adaptation of Victory does indeed point at a specific mode of cultural production. In Leiris’s adaptation, Heyst’s interactions with indigenous people serve primarily to instigate self-encounter. He is particularly concerned with the opinions of fellow Europeans. According to Leiris’s 1951 preface and marginal notes, a new Axel Heyst would concern himself far less with group perception, would not dwell on the sexual prowess of an indigenous laborer, and would not look to indigenous women to cure him of sexual neuroses. Overall, he would guard himself from looking at indigenous people in an instrumental fashion.

Edward Said has notably argued that Conrad’s Victory served as a kind of “re-invasion of his past by Conrad.”127 Leiris’s 1951 rereading of his earlier adaptation of a writer whose work nourished his childhood also discloses an autocritique. Indeed, Leiris’s rewriting of Victory adapts Axel Heyst in order to reflect the unusual way in which Leiris stages his own masculinity. Relatedly, his 1951 preface is an implicit critique of his earlier reading of Conrad, a reading that echoes the obsessions and personal con-
cerns of Conrad’s early French consecrators. In his adaptation of *Victory*, Leiris highlights the dominant early French interpretation of Conradian heroes: men made noble and authoritative through rugged experience abroad, drawn by a writer who was authenticated by his maritime past, by his first métier.

Lefevere challenges readers to ask “who rewrites, why, under which circumstances, for which audience.” Interwar-era French writers, critics, and translators, many of them associated with the circle of appreciation constituted by the contributors and editors of the *NRF*, describe Conrad’s characters as antiquated heroes who stand for a bygone world and now fading possibilities for heroism and adventure, the very stuff of authenticity in their view. Yet Leiris, in his 1951 preface and marginal notes, identifies this reading as flawed because it ignores both the indigenous people who are an ineluctable part of these rugged experiences, as well as the colonial contexts that permitted them. Here he offers another reading of *Victory*, positing the dangers that Heyst and Lena face precisely because they do not recognize indigenous people as people. It is therefore important to note that Leiris’s adaptation, as well as his later preface and marginal notes, suggest that Leiris, in 1951, was not criticizing Conrad, but rather the readings of Conrad that ignore the human element of his fiction. It is only fair to note that current French- and English-language Conrad scholarship does not necessarily echo his interwar-era French consecrators. For instance, as Padimi Mongia notes with respect to Conrad’s colonial fiction: “Conrad’s interest in the white men who go soft in the heat and dust of colonial outposts is always attentive to the possibilities the colonial context makes available to these men.” She suggests, like so many of her counterparts, that Conrad was aware of his own position and, in the main, effectively captured some of the abuses of power that the colonial project entailed. However, debates about Conrad’s view of colonialism are ongoing.

The younger Leiris, like his *NRF* counterparts, neglected this human aspect of Conrad’s work, as well as his criticism of colonialism. However, in 1951, Leiris moved to center stage the indigenous people who stood in the margins of his adaptation. As I will show in the fourth and fifth chapters, Gide began an earlier parallel project later in the late twenties when he traveled to Africa in the footsteps of Conrad, but with more concern for the plight of indigenous Africans than the personal transformation of white men among them. Neither reading is a self-righteous critique of Conrad, but both offer the possibility of a reinterpretation, and both
suggest that the interwar-era French reading of Conrad was due for revision, rejection, or reaffirmation. These works also anticipate the work of contemporary Conrad scholars who seek to further illuminate his writing through the lens of our own cultural moment. As Said has reminded us with regard to a number of writers, such investigations offer a confirmation of merit, not a dismissal: “I see them contrapuntally, that is, as figures whose writing travels across temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways to emerge as part of a new ensemble *along with* later history and subsequent art.”130 He asserts the value of reading Conrad “in all sorts of unforeseen proleptic ways,” giving particular preference to later reworkings and “echoing answers.”131

Casanova asks readers to “continually shift perspectives” by situating literary works within a literary temporality that is both historically and aesthetically defined but not reducible to either.132 In his adaptation of a remembered translation, Leiris offers us a personal glimpse into how Conrad was read in France during the interwar period. It is no accident that Leiris chose a Conrad character to dramatize the unusual way in which his protagonist stages his masculinity. Considering the reception of Conrad in France, a new literary hero emerges, one perpetually transformed by rugged experiences, one whose life justifies and authenticates his work. Yet this hero is also an antiquated hero; the war years effectively complicated many of the things that once counted as heroism. If the First World War sounded the death knell for the heroic individual, Conrad served as both example and counterexample to this death. He became a hero in France after the war, but the possibility for such perceived heroism was anchored firmly in the prewar world.

Conrad’s interwar-era readership made use of his writing in order to ask themselves if the kind of experiences he narrated were still possible and if one could still unproblematically transmute art into life as they believed he had. Conrad’s early works in particular inspired a unique combination of yearning and nostalgia. The travel literature that followed this fascination with Conrad is replete with ambition for lived knowledge coupled with nostalgia for endangered experiences, for authenticity, for Kessel’s “unknown and prestigious shores.” For his French readers of the war and interwar period, Conrad inspired a generative blend of optimism and anxiety.

During the interwar period in France, Conrad was read, translated, and consecrated by members of the *NRF*, and others in proximate critical
constellations, in a manner that reflected domestic aesthetic criteria. However, as Venuti argues, much is to be gained from identifying and decoding strategies of interpretation and translation. Said argues that adaptations and rewritings of Conrad honor the originals, leaving Conrad’s writing “further actualized and animated by emphases and inflections that he was obviously unaware of, but that his writing permits.”133 He also makes a case for Conrad’s undiminished relevance and likewise for the usefulness of returning to and drawing meaning from writers who “brush up unstintingly against historical constraints.”134 Later writers like Leiris can, as Said argues, “dramatize the latencies in a prior figure or form that suddenly illuminate the present.”135 Jean-Yves Tadié also notes that Conrad’s narrative style is particularly well suited for a productive afterlife: “His movement is that of interrogation, not of realism, nor of certitude.”136 Conrad has much to tell readers about themselves. In the case of his interwar-era French readers, critics, and translators, there is clear evidence of Conrad’s elasticity in the way in which he contributed to their self-definition as they read, translated, commented on, and otherwise adapted his work.

I have demonstrated how Conrad became a model for a group of interwar-era French writers who emphasized his work’s origin in unusually exclusive and unrepeatable experiences.137 I have explored the way in which an interest in authenticity and authority-granting hardship informs the imaginary of the writers among Conrad’s early French readership. I will now explore how these two desiderata, authenticity and authority, are inscribed in Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway’s 1932 treatise on the Spanish bullfight. Our look at Hemingway’s opus thus begins where I leave off in this chapter, as if the young American writer had taken the French Conrad as a blueprint for traveling, and writing about travel. I will demonstrate, however, that Hemingway, albeit problematically, pushed local cultures, so absent from the accounts of Conrad’s French consecrators, into the foreground.

We will also see the same interwar-era anxieties about a changing world play out in bad faith through Hemingway’s insistence on a nostalgia whose object is ultimately coterminous with the present. Such nostalgia, which I introduced in the introduction as “anticipatory nostalgia,” is radically different from the backwards looking nostalgia of Conrad’s consecrators, and serves as a way for Hemingway to distinguish his writing and put heavy and strategic pressure on the gap between the time of writing and the time of reading. Hemingway will make much out of this inevitable
time lag in the publication process; indeed, he will make it one of the chief motifs in his treatise and pair it with a marked hostility to his anticipated readership. The following chapters will further explore the ways in which ambition for authenticity, tethered to nostalgia, became the defining template in interwar-era literature about travel. It did so by means of distinct and widely shared conventions among traveling writers, for traveling, for writing about travel, and for writing about the people they meet while traveling.