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Conrad and Turgenev's Delineations of Nature

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Abstract: *That Conrad regarded The Mirror of the Sea as a work in the spirit of Turgenev's Sportsman's Sketches and even contemplated titling it A Seaman's Sketches is obvious. Both fictional autobiographies, initially published in magazines, demonstrate realistic and faithful observation of life and highly sensory, anthropomorphised and based on impressions (especially visual) delineations of nature – the sea or the forest respectively. Turgenev's reader is struck by his extraordinary sensitivity to the landscape of Central Russia. Both the impenetrable, sombre forests and the vast solitude of waters become factors that affect or shape the destiny of his heroes. The mysterious nature intensifies the motifs of alienation and diminutiveness of man in the face of powerful nature. Nature in Turgenev's sketches is often strikingly indifferent, it is a mirror of human problems which occupy the foreground. Conrad shared Turgenev's view on nature. He presents the natural world as a blind struggle for survival, transformed, in human life, into an intelligent battle for supremacy. The nature being indifferent to men causes his isolation. His protagonists are separated by the sea's infinity, darkness, calm and stillness in nature as well as the immensity of the elements of nature.*

Much of Conrad's writing, covering an era obsessed by a sense of its own fragmentation, the break-up of old structures, old conventions of art, thought and politics can be seen to continue the nineteenth-century realist tradition. Morally, psychologically artistically and philosophically he can be a probing and challenging writer, who, like many great writers, was influenced by and responded to the ideas and ideals of his day as well as his literary predecessors. Since he began writing under the influence of the nineteenth-century realists, but at a period which is regarded as the first stage of Modernism, and possessed a multi-cultural literary heritage, realist and modernist elements are merged in his fiction.

Nevertheless, although Joseph Conrad (1857-1923) denied his knowledge of the Russian language and declared limited knowledge of Russian literature, the latter is the third, after English and French, most frequently mentioned in his letters. This was largely due to Conrad's friendship with Edward Garnett (1868–1937), an English critic and writer who had many Russian friends, and whose wife Constance (1862–1946) was famous for her translations from the Russian, including the great novels of Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

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The great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century aroused mixed feelings in Conrad. Lev Tolstoy was treated with reserved respect and suspicion as being too mystical for Conrad's taste, but his chief antipathy was reserved for Dostoevsky – a grim, graceless writer who lacked all that Turgenev possessed – in contrast to the civilized, liberal and humane Turgenev, who was one of Conrad's literary predecessors and masters, next to Flaubert, Maupassant and James.⁴¹ We may also agree that avoiding being accused of rejecting all “things Russian” and all Russian writers, Conrad found it easiest to praise Turgenev, who combined in himself and in his writing national and universal values in a satisfactory balance.

In a letter to George Harvey on 15th April 1904 Conrad announced that his intention had been to compose “a volume of sea sketches something in the spirit of Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*, but concerned with ships and the sea with a distinct autobiographical and anecdotal note running through is mainly meant for a record of remembered feelings” (Conrad 132). This declaration poses a question about the function of Conrad's message. Did he only want to create interest and inform about his plans, or, what seems also probable, take up Turgenev's artistic challenge?

A Sportsman's Sketches, the first of Turgenev's masterpieces, in which he modified the psychological sketch by transforming it into a dramatic scene, was written in several stages, mostly between 1846 and 1851. The title of Turgenev's collection of sketches is, perhaps deliberately, deceptive, for hunting is hardly the author's concern. It is first and foremost the Russian peasant and his lot. The stories contain nothing but accounts of what the narrator saw and heard during his wanderings with a gun and a dog in his native district of Bolkhov and in the surrounding country. Some of the sketches are purely descriptive, of scenery or characters, others consist of conversation, addressed to the narrator or overheard. The stories in the sketches seem to be bound by deliberate structural and stylistic devices which produce the effect of communication on the level of poetry more than of prose. One such device is the creation of unique spatial settings within the large context of the Orel province through which the narrator wanders – settings which in themselves convey special messages about the stories and thus become central, rather than background, elements of their communicative code.

Conrad, having spent the better part of his life on board ships, in the company of men affiliated to their common concern, the sea, has registered his indebtedness to the sea, its men and ships in *The Mirror of the Sea* which Ernst Bendz considers “the most penetrating, subtle and attractive book ever written on the subject by a man himself of the craft” (21).

The Mirror of the Sea as a whole is an uneven and fragmentary collection of “memories and impressions”, as its subtitle says. Some of the pieces are no more than impersonal essays. It is also variable in quality; some parts are sharp illustrations of maritime acquaintances and locations, others pretentious passages of rhetoric about the winds and oceans.

⁴¹ Conrad was twenty-six years old when Turgenev died in 1883. *Almayer's Folly* – his first novel was published twelve years later in 1895.

Conrad's treatment of nature suggests that he views it as a symbolic framework or a power. Both the impenetrable, sombre forests and the vast solitude of waters become factors that affect or shape the destiny of his heroes. From his seafaring experience Conrad developed the notion of man's contest with the elements, either as an individual or in a group such as a ship's crew. Many of his works deal with this contest. The measure of man is shown in his struggle against the elements. It is a test which often brings self-knowledge, but which can also prove to be the undoing of the person thus tested. The greatest skill of Conrad the artist is manifested in those works where he combines magnificent descriptions of nature with a convincing portrayal of men and women in their strengths and weaknesses.

For a reader who approaches *The Mirror of the Sea* expecting recollections of adventures at sea or descriptions of exotic lands, it may be puzzling to discover that the sea enters into the narrative mostly as a reflection of life aboard ships. For Conrad the sea is a mirror of nature and the universe. Water also symbolises the link between the man and the ship; it reflects both the shape of the ship and its passenger. Conrad says: "Love and regret go hand in hand in this world of changes swifter than the shifting of the clouds reflecting in the mirror of the sea" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 25) The mirror also "explains" the sea's constant inconstancy. If greedy or ambitious men have seen the sea as friendly to their interests, this is because the mirror faithfully reflects all gazes; but if the sea "has never adopted the cause of its masters", as Conrad says in "Initiation", this is because all causes are alien to its nature: the "vast dreams of dominion and power" that would-be masters to the sea have pursued on the sea's surface "have passed like images reflected from a mirror, leaving no record upon the mysterious face of the sea" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 135-136). Like a mirror, the sea is not a master of itself. Unmastered by its masters, the sea is also unmastered by itself. Conrad tries to define the sea as unique and absolutely self-identical, like nothing else on earth.

Although the writer in *A Sportsman's Sketches* praises the great outdoors of Russia, the setting in the "Forest and Steppe" might just as well be any vast wooded wilderness and steppe or prairie. The situation here is the same as with Conrad's sea which may be regarded as a mirror of the universe or nature in general. According to Richard Freeborn *A Sportsman's Sketches*, having the social purpose of exposing the injustice of serfdom, "mirrored the new mood of social awareness and responsibility" (28-29).

Turgenev's spatial settings represent an imprisonment of the human condition within discrete sets of relationships encompassing the beauty of nature, the misery of human life, and the ironic implications of a literary or cultural-historical subject. Thus in "Bezhin Meadow" the hunter-narrator's hunt and his encounter with the country boys mark the stages of an internal journey, in the course of which he discovers both the beauty and the tragedy of peasant Russia under serfdom. The ability to focus the lens of the writer's eye with such precision that the subject acquires a dramatic immediacy, is admirably illustrated in the sketch. The opening description of the July day is an example of Turgenev at his most brilliant. A special magic haunts the picture that Turgenev offers us and suggests that such beautiful July days are a part of innocence, of boyhood, clothed

in the magic of recollection. The reality, then, is the night in which Turgenev encounters the peasant boys around their fires, hears their stories of hauntings and darkening of the Sun. Serfdom here is not represented as a problem of social relationships; it is a presence, like the darkness, surrounding and enclosing the boys' lives. The drama of flickering firelight and darkness has a quality of sorcery that illuminates darkness and light in the boys' minds, dramatically holds them in the writer's eye, "photographs" them for the reader's gaze. Then, after the mystery of the night's experience, comes the splendour of the morning and Turgenev's always clear-minded insistence on the ephemerality of life with the announcement that Pavlusha had been killed in falling from a horse. The visual richness and the simplicity of the anecdote so magnificently recreated and the finely etched characterisations of the boys leave a residue of wonder.

In Turgenev's sketches we see, similarly to Conrad's technique, "life reflected as in the still waters of a lake, with every nuance of sky and cloud and pendant willow-tree reproduced with meticulous accuracy" (Cecil 148). It is visible in the description of a summer night in "Bezhin Meadow":

I quickly withdrew my foot in mid-air, and, through the hardly penetrable darkness of the night, I made out, far below me, an enormous plain. A broad river bounded it in a receding arc; steely gleams of water, flashing faintly here and there, marked its course. The hill on which I was standing dropped sharply in an almost perpendicular cliff; its massive outline showed up blackly against the bluishness of the airy void, and just below me, in the angle of the cliff and plain, beside the river, which at this point stood in a dark and motionless mirror, right at the foot of the hill, two fires close beside each other were blazing redly and smoking.⁴² (A Sportsman's Notebook 95).

The poetization of language is achieved here by a great variety of poetic devices: metaphors ("steely gleams of water"), adjectives functioning as epithets ("hardly penetrable darkness", "receding arc", "perpendicular cliff"), animation ("the river [...] stood in a dark and motionless mirror"), antitheses ("here and there"), the constant use of the contrasts of light and darkness, movement and immobility. The language is used here to express the attitudes, feelings and impressions of the narrator. The lyrical element which is introduced by the appropriate variation of these poetic devices serves to present the surrounding world

⁴² In Russian, see И. С. Тургенев, *Записки охотника*, in *Собрание сочинений*, Москва, Правда, 1949, vol. 1, p.73.

Я быстро отдернул занесенную ногу и, сквозь едва прозрачный сумрак ночи, увидел далеко под собою огромную равнину. Широкая река огибала ее уходящим от меня полукругом; стальные отблески воды, изредка и смутно мерцаая, обозначали ее течение. Холм, на котором я находился, спускался вдруг почти отвесным обрывом; его громадные очертанья отделялись, чернея, от синеватой воздушной пустоты, и прямо подо мною, в углу, образованном тем обрывом и равниной, возле реки, которая в этом месте стояла неподвижным, темным зеркалом, под самой кручью холма, красным пламенем горели и дымились друг подле дружки два огонька. (*Записки охотника*, p. 73)

of nature, which is powerful and indifferent to man. The mysterious nature intensifies the motifs of alienation and diminutiveness of man in the face of powerful nature.

A Sportsman's Sketches includes many purely lyrical pages of natural description. To this period also belongs *A Tour in the Forest* (1857), where for the first time Turgenev's conception of indifferent and eternal nature opposed to transient man found expression in his prose. In *A Sportsman's Sketches* the sky mirrors the sea, as in the fragment of sunset in the "Forest and Steppe": "The sun has set. A star lights up and trembles in the fiery sea of sunset. [...] Now the fiery sea turns pale; the sky takes on a deeper blue; separate shadows are extinguished and the air is saturated with mist"⁴³ (*A Sportsman's Notebook* 387). There is, of course, no proof that Conrad drew such parallels from Turgenev, but we can find many textual analogies in Turgenev's and Conrad's treatment of nature which is quite indifferent to man: in fact, these two have nothing in common.

In a review of S. T. Aksakov's⁴⁴ *Memoirs of a Sportsman* Turgenev included a digression on nature which was a central theme in much of the German philosophy and the work of Goethe. Turgenev wrote that

nature forms one great, harmonious whole, at the same time it is also the case that nature strives to ensure that each separate unit within should exist solely for itself, and should concentrate solely on its own aims and needs – the mosquito which sucks your blood is solely concerned with you as food; while the interest of the spider in the mosquito is in turn, the same. How it comes about that out of all this fragmentation, in the course of which each fragment seems to live only for itself, there arises that infinite harmony in which everything that exists, on the contrary exists for someone else and only achieves reconciliation or resolution through that someone else, is 'one of those "open" secrets which we both see and do not see' (qtd. in Schapiro 85-86).

Turgenev quotes Goethe in conclusion: "Nature [...] divides everything in order to unite everything ... it can only be approached through love [...] it seems only to be concerned to create individuals; and yet individuals mean nothing to it" (qtd. in Schapiro 86).

It is possible to detect in the fragment the "organic" view on progress. In respect to that progress which individual organisms display in the course of their evolution, Goethe and other Germans (Wolff, and Van Baer) established the truth that the series of changes during the development of a seed into a tree, or an ovum into an animal, constitute an advance from homogeneity of structure to heterogeneity of structure. This is the course of evolution followed by all

⁴³ Солнце село; звезда зажглась и дрожит в огнистом море заката [...] Вот оно бледнеет; синее небо; отдельные тени исчезают, воздух наливается мглой. (*Записки охотника*, p. 294)

⁴⁴ S. T. Aksakov – father of the leading Slavophile writers Konstantin and Ivan. Slavophiles believed in Russia's moral supremacy over the "decadent" West, identifying in her anxious imitation of Europe the source of all Russian problems.

organisms, and the organic progress consists in a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.

Nature in Turgenev's novels is often strikingly indifferent, it is a mirror of human problems which occupy the foreground. The natural scene both reflects and contrasts with human emotions, it reflects their moods, hopes, feelings and tragedies. The important thing is that nature is always the same, ever present, ever demanding its rights (Freebom 49-50). Victor Ripp underlines that Turgenev's attitude towards nature understandably wavers. "In evoking nature's bounty, he shows a realm that is complete and self-sufficient; the world seems to work perfectly well without man" (35). He concludes that instead of serving as a model, "nature seems to oppress man by leaving no role for him to play in the universe" (35). Turgenev's natural realm, which projects a feeling of harmony, stands distinctly apart from the social realm, which is marked by fractiousness and cruelty. Turgenev's encounters with peasants and noblemen and with nature always have an element of surprise, the wonder of discovering something new.

The smells and sounds, the changing colours painted with lyrical precision which illustrate nature's indifference to man's grief at death are visible in the description of the funeral in "Prince Hamlet of Shchigrovo":

Across the open windows the fresh young leaves of the weeping birch-trees murmured and stirred; from outside came the smell of grass; the red flame of the wax candles paled in the gay light of the spring day; the twittering of the sparrows filled the whole church; and now and then, from under the dome, came a cheerful exclamation from a swallow which had flown in. In the golden dust of the sunlit, the fair heads of a few peasants, zealously praying for the dead lady, rose and fell busily; in a fine, bluish wisp, smoke rose from the mouth of the censor⁴⁵ (*A Sportsman's Notebook* 293).

Conrad shared Turgenev's view on nature. Ian Watt writes that "the ties which most obviously 'bind' mankind to the visible universe are really the shackles which the laws of the cosmos impose upon human aspiration, the iron conditions within which men must attempt to live" (97). According to Watt Conrad's attitude to the visible world reflects the nineteenth-century's growing sense "of nature's unconsciousness but absolute tyranny over human affairs" (97). Paul Kirschner states that "Conrad presents the natural world as a blind struggle for survival, transformed, in human life, into an intelligent battle for supremacy" (34). The nature being indifferent to men causes his isolation. Wiesław Krajka distinguishes between two types of isolation in Conrad's work: geographical (imposed external

⁴⁵ Во всю ширину раскрытых окон шевелились и лепетали молодые, свежие листья плачущих берез, со двора несло травяным запахом, красное пламя восковых свечей бледнело в веселом свете весеннего дня, воробьи так и чиркали на всю церковь, и изредка раздавалось под куполом звонкое восклицание влетевшей ласточки. В золотой пыли солнечного луча проворно опускались и подымались русые головы многочисленных мужиков, усердно молившихся за покойницу. (*Записки охотника*, p. 223)

isolation) and physical separation of a character's microcosm, his social rootlessness and escapism. Conrad's sea stories comprise of many instances of geographical isolation at sea and on the land. His protagonists are separated by the sea's infinity, darkness, calm and stillness in nature as well as the immensity of the elements of nature. Being a testing ground, geographical isolation imposes man's destiny and impedes the personal test he must undergo (Krajka 108-109).

Such images of nature, indifferent to man, the magnitude of the world and the fragility of man, are present in Conrad's exposure of the sea's cynical indifference to man's courage and endurance in the essay "Initiation". The awakening to the sea's ability to cheat and defraud, the awareness of the extent of the sea's perfidy, comes eventually to all seamen. Conrad is echoing the wisdom that as enchanting, sight as it may be, the sea "has never been friendly to man" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 135). Conrad is sure that "He – man or people who, putting his trust in the friendship of the sea [...] is a fool!" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 135) because "[I]mpenetrable and heartless, the sea has given nothing of itself to the suitors for its precarious favours" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 136) and "it plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 148). It "has lured so many to a violent death" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 136) and nothing can touch "the brooding bitterness of its soul" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 148). The sea "has no generosity" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 137). It is indifferent to evil and good, it "would have betrayed the basest greed or the noblest heroism," (*The Mirror of the Sea* 148) but claims the veneration of every seaman:

Open to all and faithful to none, it exercises its fascination for the undoing of the best. To love it is not well. It knows no bond of plighted troth, no fidelity to misfortune, to long companionship, to long devotion. The promise it holds out perpetually is very great; but the only secret of its possession is strength, strength – the jealous, sleepless strength of a man guarding a coveted treasure within his gates (*The Mirror of the Sea* 148).

It is interesting that the sea, for all its immensity or indifference to man's fate, for all the hard knocks it deals the sailor, can still be the place of romance. The terror, perfidy, and violence of the sea are a test of man's solidarity. It has a charm and "a sort of unholy fascination" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 185); it is the moral symbol of our life. Thus Conrad's attitude towards the sea appears to be ambiguous, running from hate to love, but existing, at most times, as a mixture of the two emotions as illustrated in the sketches about "The Nursery of the Craft" and "The 'Tremolino'" which show the sea as enchanting and attractive despite its cruelty toward the seamen. In "The Weight of the Burden" Conrad writes that he loved the sea, saying: "I have loved, lived with, and left the sea" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 44). In "The 'Tremolino'" he asserts that he owes to the ship "the awakened love for the sea" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 157).

For in whatever guise the sea appears – occasionally kind and harmless, often deceitful, usually indifferent and unfair, it appears most frequently in its cruelty. Despite the sea being unfair, *The Mirror of the Sea* shows a vision of a man attracted to the sea, viewing it as a testing ground. In coping with the sea which is

incapable of faith and trust, the seaman must be committed to unremitting vigilance, because the sea is unforgiving in punishing. The unwary fascination of the cruel sea consists in the challenge it poses to man's courage, fidelity and integrity. Man and nature are tied together, but Conrad tries to contrast the sea to the land, the seamen, and the ship – which seems to be the main protagonist of the book. The refrain running through “Initiation” asserts, “ships are all right.” Against the cynical indifference of the sea, the ship “makes appeal to a seaman by the faithfulness of her life” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 130). The love that men give to ships is, Conrad asserts:

profoundly different from the love men feel for every other work of their hands – the love they bear to their houses, for instance – because it is untainted by the pride of possession. The pride of skill, the pride of responsibility, the pride of endurance there may be, but otherwise it is a disinterested sentiment (*Notes on Life and Letters* 136-137).

It appears that all sailors feel an affinity and affection for all ships, and it is an affinity of the highest order. But for Conrad, the appeal of the sailing ship goes far beyond her inner grace and beauty. The ship is the sailor's most intimate friend and partner. Hence the “sensitive creatures” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 29) remain in everlasting bondage with sailors, who “must treat with an understanding consideration the mysteries of her feminine nature” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 56) because “[S]he has her rights as though she could breathe or speak” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 56). Conrad asserts that faithful ships will do anything for the right man. It seems that nature is animate in *The Mirror of the Sea* and Conrad focuses attention on the psychological joining of man and objects. Hence the ship has a “pulsating heart of steel” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 65) “in her inner body” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 38). It can breathe “black smoke into the air” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 65). Similarly the cruel “black-browed and dark-eyed, grey-robed” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 92) East Wind has a “black and merciless heart [...] manners of villainy, and no more conscience than an Italian prince of the seventeenth century” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 98). The “diabolic ingenuity of the Easterly Weather” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 97) is opposed to “the kingly face of the Westerly Weather” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 81) and the West Wind, which is like a poet seated upon a throne – “magnificent, simple, barbarous, pensive, generous, impulsive, changeable, unfathomable – but when you understand him, always the same” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 82).

There is a persistent unity of ships and human beings in *The Mirror of the Sea*. Conrad says: “To deal with men is as fine an art as it is to deal with ships. Both men and ships live in an unstable element, are subject to subtle and powerful influences” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 27). Ships are approached with humanizing delicacy. Docked in London they seemed lost like “bewitched children in a forest of gaunt, hydraulic cranes” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 113). Hence a ship is an organic part of the sea and ocean, the vision of ships frozen in a row, appearing “vaguely like corpses of black vessels in a white world, so silent, so lifeless, so soulless” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 50) is appalling. At sea they demand from their masters great skills. Conrad asserts: “Of all the living creatures upon land and sea, it is ships

alone that cannot be taken in by barren pretences, that will not put up with bad art from their masters” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 35).

In a letter to Bettina von Arnim Turgenev asks: “What would nature be without us, what would we be without nature? Both are unthinkable!” (*Letters* 27) One thing is certain: like Conrad, the narrator in *A Sportsman’s Sketches* lives very close to nature and is capable of understanding it and communicating with it.

Turgenev’s reader is struck by his extraordinary sensitivity to the landscape of Central Russia. The smells and sounds of its woods and meadows, the changing colours of its vast and moody skies had never before in Russian prose been painted with such lyrical precision.

The extended visual experience in “Kasyan from Fair Springs” helps us to understand Kasyan’s simple philosophy of the sanctity of animal and bird life, which represents a mixture of the pantheistic and organic view on nature. As God is in everything in nature and the universe, the stars, the sun, the Earth, and every living thing are manifestations of nature’s creative energy. The origin of it all remains incomprehensible, the tremendous mystery. Although nature produced conditions amenable to life on Earth, that same energy brings death, disease, and natural disasters. From a human standpoint, nature is far from perfect – its generative powers show indifference to humanity.

Thus in “Kasyan from Fair Springs” we learn that it is “sinful” to cut down trees, because they are like human beings. They are able to express feelings, emotions and grief. Turgenev describes “lately-felled poplars [...] sadly on the ground [...] on some of them, dead but still green leaves drooped limply from the rigid branches” and adds: “from farther off, near the edge of the wood, came the dull thudding of axes, and from time to time, solemnly and serenely, as if bowing and opening its arms, down fell a leafy-headed tree” (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 123).

The same idea is also expressed by Turgenev in “Death”, where the narrator is sorry for his “old friends, the oaks and ashes; parched, stripped, just covered here and there with unhealthy verdure”⁴⁶ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 214) after a heavy winter in 1840. The contact between the narrator and nature is so intimate, that he calls the trees his friends. The narrator in “Death” feels a great sympathy for the dying trees which “lay rotting on the ground like corpses”⁴⁷ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 215). He expresses his grief saying that some of them “still overgrown with leafage at their base, raised dead shattered branches aloft, as if in protest or despair; on others, from foliage that was still fairly thick, though not so abundant or luxuriant as before, protruded stout, dried-up dead boughs”⁴⁸ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 215). The sight of the dying trees makes the narrator think: “it must be

⁴⁶ друзей – дубов и ясеней; засохшие, обнаженные, кой-где покрытые чахоточной зеленью, печально высились они над молодою рощей, которая «сменила их, не заменив». (*Записки охотника*, p. 163)

⁴⁷ повалились и гнили, словно трупы, на земле. (*Записки охотника*, p. 163)

⁴⁸ Иные, еще обросшие листьями внизу, словно с упреком и отчаяньем поднимали кверху свои безжизненные, обломанные ветви; у других из листвы, еще довольно густой, хотя не обильной, не избыточной попрежнему, торчали толстые, сухие, мертвые сучья; с них уже кора долой спадала. (*Записки охотника*, p. 163)

shameful for you and bitter?...”⁴⁹ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 215). This unusual awareness of nature acquired an almost new ecological dimension which defined the relationship between nature and man. As man is a part of it, he is able to communicate with it and nature is able to respond.

In “Bezhin Meadow” Turgenev evokes the magic of a summer night spent in the open, in the enchanting setting of the countryside which is also humanized and animated. Turgenev says that everything “was sunk in the heavy, immobile sleep that precedes the dawn”⁵⁰ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 112) As the day was breaking “over the sleeping fields,”⁵¹ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 107) “the damp breath of dawn was [...] hovering above the earth”⁵² (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 112). As the contact between nature and the narrator was so intimate, his “body answered it with faint thrill of exhilaration”⁵³ (*A Sportsman’s Notebook* 112). It is clearly visible that Turgenev animates nature by portraying it as a living and breathing element.

In the letter to Bettina von Arnim (end of 1840 or beginning of 1841) Turgenev included a digression about “nature as something animate and living” (*Letters* 26). He undertakes to show that “[T]his intimate link between the human spirit and nature is not by accident the most pleasant, most beautiful, and most profound phenomenon in our lives” and adds that “in order to have the opportunity to enter into this union, one must be as ingenuous as nature itself” (*Letters* 26). According to Turgenev, even a person who is alien to truth cannot avoid nature’s influence and the more intensely a person strives for the simplicity of truth, the richer and fuller “will be his relationship with nature – and how it could be otherwise, since truth is nothing other than the nature of man?” (*Letters* 26) These feelings of direct communion arise from the wonder and mystery of nature.

In the letter to Bettina von Arnim Turgenev writes that

as all of nature, including its most hidden palpitations, is open to you, so is your spirit open to nature, your thoughts grow like plants out of the earth’s soil – that is the same self-revelation of the spirit, which, like an organic image here, and the idea of that image there, like a sprout from the soul, reveals itself to the light (*Letters* 27).

Similar relation may be noticed in Conrad’s presentation of the intimate contact between the sea and the seamen for whom the sea is always a means of earning a livelihood, and the relationship of the sailor individually to the sea provided a test of character, skill and solidarity. This exercise led to harsh, even fatal consequences in the event of failure through loss of nerve or inefficiency. But,

⁴⁹ чай, стыдно и горько вам? (*Записки охотника*, р. 163)

⁵⁰ все совершенно затихло кругом, как обыкновенно затихает все только к утру: все спало крепким, неподвижным, передрагветным сном. (*Записки охотника*, р. 86)

⁵¹ над землею (*Записки охотника*, р. 86)

⁵² жидкий, ранний ветерок уже пошел бродить и порхать над землею. (*Записки охотника*, р. 86)

⁵³ Тело мое ответило ему легкой, веселой дрожью. (*Записки охотника*, р. 86)

unlike Turgenev's, Conrad's view is entirely secular, and he does not perceive nature's creative energy and the universe through a presence of divinity. Both writers, however, agree that nature reflects and enhances the mental and moral character of the heroes and is, moreover, a direct deteriorating agent. Conrad's fiction reveals a fascination with the individual, tested to the limits of his endurance, called upon to proclaim his moral toughness. For this, the sea offers the perfect antagonist, and, in the sailors' battle for existence against arbitrary natural forces, we find one of the definite images of the modern condition. Conrad repeatedly demonstrates that, however anthropomorphically presented, the sea is indifferent to the men who sail on her in a "close dependence upon the very forces that, friendly to-day, without changing their nature, by the mere putting forth of their might, become dangerous to-morrow" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 71-72). Their shared predicament encourages and demands the fellowship of the craft between sailors dependent upon each other, a fellowship that is tested through the obligations and responsibilities of the sea life.

Although Conrad asserts that "unlike the earth" the sea "cannot be subjugated at any cost of patience and toil" and "its immensity has never been loved as the mountains, the plains, the desert itself, have been loved" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 136), his love for the deceitful, changing and mysterious sea can be compared to Turgenev's love for the "interminable, frontier-less steppe"⁵⁴ (*A Sportsman's Notebook* 390) and still forest. Being a great lover of the natural world, it is fitting that Turgenev chose to end the collection with the "Forest and Steppe", a poetic evocation of the many moods of the Russian countryside, where "you can hear the discreet, confused murmuring of the night,"⁵⁵ (*A Sportsman's Notebook* 384) you can hear and admire how "stately poplars whisper high above your head; the long hanging birch-branches hardly stir; the powerful oak stands warrior-like beside the graceful lime"⁵⁶ (*A Sportsman's Notebook* 387).

Nature in Turgenev's stories affects the hero's soul, evokes definite thoughts, feelings and wishes; and inducing the hero to certain decisions and deeds, thus promotes the action of the story. Turgenev creates an inner harmony in which the landscape, forming one whole with the hero in basic tonality, also participates in and even directs the course of events in that life.

The above examples show that in their figurative language, in their treatment of nature being indifferent to man, in their depiction of the sympathetic relations of figures to landscape, visual impressions to fragmentary glimpses of objects, people, forms and movements both Conrad and Turgenev expressed their love for the natural world. From both collections of sketches emanate visions of their authors and their lives: not reconstructed, but re-imagined, re-created; lives emotionally and intellectually coherent and meaningful. There are many fragments

⁵⁴ безграничная, необозримая степь! (*Записки охотника*, p. 296)

⁵⁵ слышится сдержанный, неясный шопот ночи. (*Записки охотника*, p. 292)

⁵⁶ Статные осины высоко лепечут над вами; длинные, висячие ветки берез едва шевелятся; могучий дуб стоит, как боец, подле красивой липы. (*Записки охотника*, p. 294)

in both books which may serve as demonstrations of Turgenev and Conrad's finest stylistic abilities, expressions of their philosophies, ideas and typical motifs. Both writers in a clearly realistic and impressionistic manner constituted their universe – space, darkness, motion, atmosphere and mystery. As could be noted especially in its visual aspects which carry ontological as well as epistemological implications, many of the characteristics of modernism are explicitly impressionistic in form. In this respect Conrad, but above all Turgenev, can be regarded as modern writers. Although Conrad himself described *A Sportsman's Sketches*, in the preface he contributed to Edward Garnett's study on Turgenev, as "those marvellous landscapes peopled by unforgettable figures" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 46), he did not seem to look at them as of much importance when writing his *The Mirror of the Sea*. As Zdzisław Najder points out "only the final essays, written in 1905, testify to the author's greater artistic ambitions" (299). A close examination of the two books reveals that the analogies that may be found in them do not imply that *A Sportsman's Sketches* was a source for *The Mirror of the Sea*. Yet both books are probably better understood as one of the stages in Turgenev and Conrad's artistic development, revealing some of the themes and motifs which recur so frequently in their work and imbue it with significance that is as much philosophical as social or political.

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