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said Miss Gibbon, who was a stickler for etymology, "and I don't know which word you mean either," riposted the blurbie. "And does Miss Felicity," he laughingly added, "inherit the family talent for 'appreciation'?" "Don't talk cocker," laughed Fellow—and she smiled secretly to herself at the idea of *Her* writing blurbs. For she was going to do something creative. A biography of her father, perhaps, with all the family jokes in it. Not that she wanted—she looked across at him, handsome, healthy, shaggy, smiling—still, you never knew, these athletes cracked up sooner than you expected, and blurb-writing carried with it, she had heard, a high mortality. First the dedication—to the memory of the dearest of Dads—then the preface, "I have not hesitated to set down the other side of the picture. Gilbert Arquebus was, in many ways, a very tiresome man. . . ." Good Heavens, what was she thinking! She smiled away at him and he smiled reassuringly back. "Absent thee from Felicity," he reflected, "awhile." Yes. But why not for ever? More money all round. Conceited little bore. Expensive, too. Trying that grin on me now. All right! This evening she should have her first glass of port. More money all round! And then, maybe, he could get at that actress, the one who played the governess, a big fat bouncing creature who looked as if she had a temper, all right. He began to hum "Singing in the Rain" to himself. Macking in my whack, I'm whacking in my mac, 'cos I'm glad to be back. . . . "Elia," he cried suddenly. "My adorable Elia! Who reads him now?" "O Dads!" and Mums beamed loyally down the table. Special Person indeed! If they knew what a drag a writer's wife can be. The woman who shares your early struggles is very different from the one you would choose to share your later success. And why should she share it? Port for her too. "I saw the first caterpillar to-day," she said, "it was a looper." "You might really be in the depths of the country," said Mr. Goulash. The poet was telling a story, "and what do you do," I asked her. "Paint." "And what do you paint?" "Fans." "What fun, like Conder, I suppose, do you get a lot of fan-mail?" "Not fans, you idiot, vans. I don't paint silly fans, I paint useful vans." She's a girl from the Tottenham cell. Tiresome young cub, thought Dads—and that dreary thinker, with his Scotch face hanging over the savoury. A glass of port all round. "A very special bin," he said, when the time came. "Not a has-bin, I hope," said Mr. Goulash. Dads scowled. "I want you all to drink a health," he said, "It's my birthday, don't forget!" The Blurbs were still whispering. "Who wrote the last Charles Morgan?" said one—"I don't know who did the front, as a matter of fact, I did the back." "I did the front," said Dads, "if you still want to know." They didn't, for the cyanide was doing its work. "You were quite right not to like the laurustinus, Felicity," laughed Dads—"but my biography will have to wait." The way they fell they reminded him of a skittle alley, only quieter; each seemed to knock against the next one, there would be a wobble, and over they'd go. The thinker was last and Dads drummed impatiently on the mahogany with his cigar-cutter, while he was "passing." Soon all, with varying grace, had made the fatal exit, and five minutes later it was a very lonely man indeed who sped in a taxi on his way to the stage door.

CYRIL CONNOLLY

JOSEPH CONRAD

Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel.

By EDWARD CRANKSHAW. Lane. 8s. 6d.

Conrad is out of fashion. His was the art of evoking magical horizons, of creating verbose glamour, of interpreting moral conflicts. All are a little out of fashion with him. The influx, from America, of the fashionable cult for sociological reporting, a cult which Conrad would no doubt have despised, has put what might be called distinguished writing into a back seat. The history of plain guys, recorded in a style composed of the colloquial idiom of the characters, was not for Conrad. He was cosmopolitan, aristocratic and, in spite of many but forgivable faults, he wore, and still wears, an air of greatness.

It is my own opinion that the great rarely need biographies; that they write or paint or in some way record their own. Conrad wrote his life in his novels and stories, in *Lord Jim* and *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness* and the rest, underlined it in such books as *A Personal Record*, and further underlined it in his letters. Some such belief as this has no doubt prompted Mr. Edward Crankshaw to label his book on Conrad not "a biography" or "a revaluation" or even "a study," but "some aspects of the art of the novel," which means "some aspects of Conrad's art of the novel," which really

means, as the book itself confirms, "in praise of Conrad's genius." His book is not a biography of Conrad and is not, except secondarily, an exploration into the vast labyrinth of the novel in general. It puts Conrad on the operating table, in a nice way, of course, and also perhaps on the off-chance that there may be, after all, something wrong with this Polish English-speaking patient who outdid the English on their own pet playground, namely the sea. And Conrad having been put on the operating table, we are invited to see Mr. Crankshaw perform the investigation and dissection of that remarkably nervous body.

It is not, as explorations into the art of things go, a very long operation. But it manages somehow to be itself extremely nervous, a little complex and by starts didactic. And though not long, it manages to give the effect of being long and, here and there, rather like Conrad himself, a little windy and a little tedious. This is not to detract from it. It is a minute, exact, painstaking dissection done with extreme skill and under a powerful lens. Unlike well-meaning politicians, Mr. Crankshaw does explore all avenues: the complex baffling avenues that run down and split off and lose themselves finally in the profound recesses of Conrad's own heart of darkness. Such an exploration could never hope to be complete; I question if there will ever be a definitive reckoning of the man. And that, incidentally, may further explain Mr. Crankshaw's sub-title, as though he felt the impossible magnitude of this task of, as it were, opening up Conrad in the cold light of the literary laboratory. There are things in Conrad that defy any opening up. Mr. Crankshaw knows this. He is aware, better than I can tell him, of Conrad's most illimitable and elusive nature.

That said, it remains only to recommend this book to all who still see in Conrad, with all his faults, a great ironist, a prose writer who could show any living American novelist, with possibly one exception, where he got off, and who remains, as Mr. Crankshaw prudently and correctly observes, "a great novelist unclassified."

H. E. BATES

PITY THE POOR TRAVELLER

Sweden on Ten Pounds. By SYDNEY A. CLARK. *Nicholson and Watson.* 5s.

Norway on Ten Pounds. By SYDNEY A. CLARK. *Nicholson and Watson.* 5s.

These are cruel little books. They cannot be called a take-in; they contain, as far as I could judge from *Sweden*, nothing strictly inaccurate, except the spelling; but the poor man who listens to their siren voice will get some heartbreaking disappointments. In the first place, their basic assumption is that one starts from the capital of the country visited. Then, once abroad—I have not pursued Mr. Clark sedulously through all his budgets, but it is plain that the guide in him has no sympathy, and only intermittent contact, with the financier—you can get along on the sums he suggests, but you cannot possibly do the things he keeps suggesting. For instance, to live and sightsee at ease in Stockholm, you should, in my judgment, allow yourself £1 a day—and then you will be in clover; for Stockholm's peculiarity is that in it the excellent, the luxurious, costs only a shade more than the mediocre. An excellent reason for not going there to pinch.

As for Sweden at large, Mr. Clark, though he travels, I think, too much, does not try to cover it. "Sweden," he says in plaintive tones, "is an unconscionably long country" (most thoughtlessly failing to adapt itself to the £10 series). And he cannot, with the best will in the world, get half-way up. Still, if you really want to include Jämtland and the midnight sun, like Mr. Wegg he meets you at once, free and fair, with "Done, for double the money!" How his arrangements would work out in Norway I cannot say; but will merely observe that Norway is also a long way off, and more expensive than Sweden. I have heard it suggested that the idea may be to travel with a rich friend, upon whom you can sponge; but Mr. Clark drops no hint of this solution.

Mr. Clark has, as the poor man's guide, one hopeless disability—he admires everything. Reading *Norway* (with some idea of going there), I felt how shattering it would be to have to choose among all these equally dazzling possibilities; reading *Sweden*, I thought that most of us could have made the task much easier. And that is what the poor man wants. "Do not go to so-and-so"—"You may just as well ignore such-and-such"—that is the news for him. He should never be tantalised (as here) with "forbidden" chapters and suggestions; nothing which he