

Camille R. La Bossière

Pop Conrad and Child's Play: A Context for *The Rover*

We are the creatures of our light literature more than generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories.

— Conrad, *Chance*

Behold the boy.

— Conrad, "A Preface to Thomas Beer's *Stephen Crane*"

I made play in this world of dust, with the sons of Adam for my play-fellows.

— Proverbs 8:31, as translated by David Jones in *Epoch & Artist*

I

In February 1921, the diplomat Alexis Saint-Leger Leger (who would come to sign his poems Saint-John Perse) wrote to Conrad from Beijing: "Je vous écoute encore me réciter les premières laisses des *Jumblies* d'Edward Lear, où vous m'assuriez trouver 'l'esprit des grandes aventures' plus que dans les meilleurs auteurs de mer, comme Melville" (*Oeuvres complètes* 886; hereafter cited as *O*).¹ That encounter, remembered from their long nightly conversations at the novelist's home in Kent

some nine years before, had made a deep impression on a Perse then in his mid twenties. His letter to André Gide dated 7 December 1912 registers the force of the effect: "Si je pouvais me permettre jamais de citer mon plaisir ou mon goût, je ne recommanderais qu' [Edward] Lear, seul poète d'une race qui me semble la race même poétique" (*O* 781).² The impression was to be a lasting one. In September 1947, shortly after the publication of his prose-poem *Vents*, with its reprise of the spirit animating Lear's crew of a sieve bound for the Western Sea and the Hills of the Chankly Bore,³ Perse recalled—for G. Jean-Aubry—Conrad's sallying into the "nonsense lyrics ('The Jumblies'!) brought down from the children's room" in the summer of 1912 (Little, "Letter" 264). As to how perdurantly alive the memory and effect of that reading remained for Perse, his letter of 9 September 1958 to the American writer Mina Curtiss leaves little doubt: especially remarked among the genial spectres haunting the seventy-one-year-old poet's new home on the Giens Peninsula are "Stevenson, et Conrad, et le cher Edward Lear" (*O* 1062).

Given the constancy of Perse's commitment to "la pleine liberté d'esprit" epitomized by *The Jumblies* (*O* 889, 1005), Lear's exclusion from Perse criticism is remarkable, even mystifying. Given the leaning of Perse's commentators to high gravity, on the other hand, that absence is understandable. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, for one, in his 1929 preface to *Anabase*, places its author at the head of "les saints nouveaux" to be born out of France (*O*, "Notices et notes" 1108). Avers another follower, "Saint-John Perse est bien le poète qui satisfait en nous l'incoercible et redoutable *besoin d'absolu*" (*Honneur* 236). The complete book of Perse is a palimpsest bible, according to a recent monograph, "un texte sacré qu'on vénère" (Favre 110-11). Recognition of the funny Lear in a poet so solemnified would seem out of place, as Roger Little implies in his one-sentence response to Perse's venturing into *The Jumblies* with Conrad: Lear is a "surprising point of reference for two essentially serious-minded writers" ("Letter" 263).⁴ Even in Erika Ostrovsky's *Under the Sign of Ambiguity*, where the design is to upend Perse's "idolizers" in the name of the comic unreason that animates his oeuvre, Lear's place is outside the margins. The merriment of *The Jumblies* is displaced by Nietzsche's (Ostrovsky 52), and this in spite of "le mécanisme d'esprit" Perse found and rejected in the autobiographer of *Ecce Homo*: "Ce n'est pas la contradiction en elle-même qui me déçoit chez lui," as he explains in a letter of February 1909 to Gabriel Frizeau, "mais son impuissance à

en poursuivre le train jusqu'à sa libre exploitation" (O 742-43).⁵ Having cut itself off from "cette vraie source de la jeunesse qu'est . . . [la] pleine liberté d'esprit," Nietzschean unreason is a dead end, for adults only (O 927). It should come as no surprise that in the early twenties some of the youngest students at the Lycée de Marseille shared with Guillaume Apollinaire and Rainer Maria Rilke an enthusiasm for Perse's *Eloges* and its "Images à Crusoé."⁶

On the face of it, the main record of Conrad's reception among sober adult students has a very different story to tell. Unlike Perse's commentators, Conrad's have tended (and with good reason) to be anything but silent on their author's reading of popular "juvenile" literature. And yet, the manner Conrad criticism has generally found suitable for the treatment of that literature suggests a substantial accord with the solemnizing readers of Perse. In compliance with the invitation extended by those of Conrad's fictions that have come to be especially prized for their riddling of the conventional, the narratives of adventure popular with Victorian and Edwardian readers enter modern Conrad studies but to have their value and conventions undermined, contrasted with high art's. Reference to Stevenson and other "boyish" questers after "a pure dispassionate adventure" (Stevenson, *Travels* 148) serves to gauge the maturity of Conrad's achievement: he better understood "the temptations which beset the romantic dreamer" (Kiely 103). For those readers who, like Gary Geddes, would raise the stock of the often devalued "later novels," Conrad never relinquished the art of "the ironic romance" (6). As Geddes intimates, the refiguring of Conrad in Lowry's *Under the Volcano* affords a model for a properly bifocal reading of the Conradian corpus as a whole.⁷ Having "stopped growing when seventeen," Lowry's greying protagonist continues to take inspiration from Edward Lear and *Peter Rabbit*, now bottled with mescal (*Under the Volcano* 22, 39, 44, 138, 213).⁸ "A kind of more lachrymose pseudo 'Lord Jim'" unable to distinguish his life from "a quixotic oral fiction" (39), Consul Geoffrey Firmin has his quest for love and light and honor ended at the bottom of a hell-pit with a dead dog for a compañero.⁹ What role juvenile literature finds itself assigned in comparably discerning critical responses to Conrad at his darkling best is to install the superior realism and value of an art mirroring the peripeties of (dis)enchantment in a world of unremitting ambiguity. The high seriousness served by the silence of Perseans on Lear, Conrad criticism achieves by ironic contrast. In each case, the

greater the writer's distancing from popular light reading, the weightier or more adult his achievement.

By the same token, of course, any apparent reduction in that distancing invites devaluation, affords a measure of artistic decline. According to the now institutionalized charting of achievement-and-decline, Conrad's irregular slide downward after *Under Western Eyes* hit bottom in the last completed romances. In *The Rescue*, finds one critic, Conrad created a hero like Fenimore Cooper's and Captain Frederick Marryat's, "long on pragmatic energy, short on both brains and moral intention." Captain Tom Lingard of the LIGHTNING is a juvenile hero in a book for boys (Turko 13, 230). Old Conrad's reach in his tale of master-gunner Peyrol suffers a similar abbreviation. "At its best a true adventure story for boys," pronounces Albert Guerard, *The Rover* "is at its worst a coarse-grained study of feeble-minded and inarticulate people"; to consider it otherwise would be "to take simple matters very seriously" (284, 285).¹⁰ Far from inviting comparison with Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, as the "major" Conrad does (Said 65-76, Bonney 3-11, Land 192-94), the Conrad in full swan song brings light Stevenson and company to mind (Schwarz 140-43), which comparative declining recalls, in its turn, the history of reader-reception built into Timothy Findley's novel *The Wars*, set in the period 1915-1922: Conrad's association is with the *Boys' Own Annual*, *Chums*, and Charles Kingsley's *Water-Babies* (65, 95, 107).¹¹ Modern comparative readings unfriendly to *The Rescue* and *The Rover* prolong the history of that association, though to sheerly reductive effect: Conrad's last completed romances are to be taken not much more seriously than the juvenile works they are seen to resemble. Lear's exclusion from Perse criticism effectively spares the poet-priest-metaphysician of *Anabase*, *Vents*, and *Amers* from any potential lowering or indignity of the kind.

II

"I was never one of those wonderful fellows that would go afloat in a wash-tub for the sake of the fun," Conrad confesses in *A Personal Record* (18-19). And no sage, it goes without saying, would go to sea in a bowl. His literary craftsmanship has been no less sober. The verity Conrad would share with his readers, in the words of his essay "Books," extends beyond "the truth of a childish theatrical ardor in the game of life" such as one finds in fiction "the least worthy of the name"; his

chronicling of "the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdom of the earth" has a more "serious intention" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 6-7). In private correspondence Conrad's reaction to readers suspected of taking him for an improvident lover of adventure could be less composed, altogether direct. He protests in a letter of January 1902 to the literary agent, James Brand Pinker: "Am I a confounded boy? I have had to look death in the eye once or twice. It was nothing. I had not then a wife and child. It was nothing to what I have to go through now pen in hand before what to *me* spells failure. I am no sort of airy R. L. Stevenson . . ." (Karl 491).¹² The intensity of that more personal response lends authority to Frederick R. Karl's assessment of the comparisons often made by Conrad's reviewers, with writers of popular romance: they were "superficial," "inept" (546).

Conrad, though, did not entirely lack for discriminating readers adept in the literature of adventure and able to understand, like Perse, that the Conradian craft of fiction was no mere "jeu littéraire" for the entertainment of bored tourists or pure aesthetes (O 888).¹³ In Pierre Mac Orlan's *Petit Manuel du parfait Aventurier* (completed 1920), for instance, the distinguishing of "l'aventurier passif" ("un sportsman documenté" in fairyland, exemplified by Stevenson) from "l'aventurier actif" (a responsible professional, disciplined in confronting unimaginary hazards) prepares a reading of Conrad as ironist, "un écrivain à ce genre infiniment rare et précieux qui comprend les aventuriers à la fois passifs et actifs" (193, 195, 200).¹⁴ No less studied than Mac Orlan in the ways of paradox and adventure, G. K. Chesterton locates the Polish romancer, with "his record of hard or violent adventure at sea," in the company of those "who introduced a sort of irony into [the Stevensonian] fairyland": Conrad's fiction connects the "fantastic element" with "the more realistic" in a brilliantly individual way (*Common Man* 89-90). The comparative readings by Mac Orlan and Chesterton certainly accord with Conrad's own sense of his relation to "airy R. L. Stevenson," even as the disjunction they describe is weak rather than strong. Just as certainly, those readings do nothing to infirm the thinking comparatist's perennial rule, *simile non est idem*. As their example shows, similarity and sameness are not quite the same thing: no comparison without difference, and without difference no irony.

Nor do those readings gainsay the recent observation from John Coates, that the division between "high-brow" and "low-brow," "juvenile"

and "adult" in Edwardian writing was "in some ways less marked than it has subsequently become" (279, 281).¹⁵ That division could be ambiguous, as in the Conrad recognized by Mac Orlan and Chesterton. For Mac Orlan, Conrad's is a rare comprehension, encompassing as it does the boyish Stevensonian adventurer and the adult active adventurer in such a way as to make impossible a clear separating out of the boy from the man. The Chestertonian reading concurs, but with a difference suggestive of a closer attention to the collocation of past and present, the juvenile and the adult, in Stevenson's own romancing as well. To Chesterton's way of reading, the Conradian vision of (dis)enchantment represents a development in "what may be called the Stevensonian stereoscopic view; the looking at the same object in a double fashion, with the eye of the adult and of the child" (*Common Man* 89-90).¹⁶ Chesterton need adduce no narrative by name in the presence of a public *au fait*. The grown-up Jim Hawkins, as readers of Stevenson's first and least complex romance will recall, can reflect on the impercipience of the fanciful lad who (among other follies) once went to sea in a bowl of hides—"But I was only a boy, and I had made up my mind" (*Treasure Island* 148)—even as his storytelling testifies that he has not altogether changed his mind. And so it is for the not quite sober(ed) Captain Marlow of *Youth*, for example, sadder but not much wiser than the second mate who sailed for the East, romantically, in the do-or-die old JUDEA. The old salt has seen a thing or two since those days, but he still prefers the soldier Burnaby to the philosopher Carlyle (*Youth* 7). If "stereoscopy" is not the *mot juste* for the Conradian seeing of past and present, it does not miss by much.

Criticism that would sharply distinguish the highbrow and the adult from the lowbrow and the juvenile in Conrad has a lesson to take, then, from Mac Orlan and Chesterton. Attuned to the writing of the epoch out of which Conrad fashioned his chronicles of humanity's adventures amongst the dangers of the earth, they were in an ideal position to appreciate that the line separating "child's play" (*Youth* 11) from "man's play" (*Rescue* 121) can be devilishly hard to draw in a storied universe where all enterprise, however grave, recalls as it partakes of "a child's game in a nursery" (*Victory* 213).¹⁷ There is, in addition, room enough in Mac Orlan and Chesterton to accommodate the grimly democratic conviction that "every age is fed on illusions" (*Victory* 94), a principle set aside by a grown-up Conrad criticism secure in its scaling of value

according to time of life. The child is father to the Conradian man of (dis)enchantment, for better or for worse. Conrad, it is worth remembering, did come to figure the serious professional undertakings of his own "literary childhood" as "but paper boats, freighted with a grown-up child's dreams and launched innocently upon that terrible sea [of human life]" (*Last Essays* 143).

III

"The simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things . . . is the basis of spirituality as it is of nonsense," so Chesterton gives the riposte to the nineteenth-century solemnities of utility and positive science in his "A Defence of Nonsense" (1901). Against that orthodoxy well designed for the drabbing or unmarrowing of things, he sets the comic paradox of Lear and "the huge and undecipherable unreason" of the Book of Job (*Stories, Essays & Poems* 127). For Perse, too, the topsy-turvydom, joking, and jumbling of "le cher Edward Lear" keep faith with the substantial reality of the Creation, a vast nonsense syllabary enigmatic "comme une Bible," rife with wonders and terrors "qui passent l'entendement" (*O* 199, 306). "[L']absurde," by Perse's reckoning in a letter of September 1917 to Paul Valéry, "[est] . . . une incitation légitime de l'esprit," a justified flying in the face of those killing restrictions imposed on the spirit by "[le] lamentable positivisme" of the prolonged Victorian Age (*O* 823-24). Early in that age, the often grotesquely funny fictions of Captain Marryat, prankster and punster extraordinaire, had evinced a similar commitment to the spirit of great adventures sapped by the solemn among the savants of his time.¹⁸ The Creation, Marryat has the hero of his *Masterman Ready* consider, is "odd" in the sense that it is "fearfully and wonderfully fashioned" (193).¹⁹ Partaking as it does of "this strange world" big with jest, "a riddle," as the text of his *Japhet in Search of a Father* repeatedly signs, humankind is no less an abode of mystery: "we are odd mixtures" (234, 82, 68).²⁰ What is life but a "wandering in mystery, and awe, and doubt," do-or-die Philip Vanderdecken is given cause to ponder in *The Phantom Ship* (200), a tale of "the agony of suspense" suffered by a humanity in the midst of endless contradictions (8, 127, 142, 206, 329). Fenimore Cooper, one of Stevenson's (and Conrad's) masters,²¹ is of a mind with his contemporary Marryat on that score. In *The Sea Lions*, for example, where all things

"are to be taken by their opposites," Cooper provides this gloss on the moral universe of the Antarctic wanderers Daggett and Roswell: "It is all a mystery . . . as is the creation itself" (231, 56). To "unbelievers in the marvelous" the 1849 preface of *The Pilot* recommends that they look again and see: "It is probable a true history of human events would show that a large proportion of our acts are more the result of sudden impulses and accident than of that reason of which we so much boast" (3). The field of unreason that is the physical and moral universe (typically configured as "the deep" in Cooper) constitutes "a marvel, or a downright mystification," in the words of his tragi-comic romance *Homeward Bound; or, The Chase: 'c'est une équivoque*" (509, 482). The "funny cosmogony" spelled by Lear, who saw himself as a wanderer in "the dusty twilight of the incomprehensible" (Holbrook x, xxiii), bespeaks just that kind of awe.²²

Conrad's response to the dogmatics of a practical and scientific reason taken with its own gravity is likewise "spiritual." "Life and the arts follow dark courses, and will not turn aside to the brilliant arc-lights of science," he gives the twitting reply to the argument of an author who would marry the latest scientific learning with poetics (*Notes on Life and Letters* 74). In another review from 1910, of a book of religious belief based on and assured by reason, Conrad's conviction is as clear as his irony is telling: "Science, having in its infinite wanderings run up against various wonders and mysteries, is apparently willing now to allow a spiritual quality to man and, I conclude, to all his works as well" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 67). Composed early in his literary childhood, within a year of his tribute to Marryat and Cooper, the preface to Conrad's first deep sea novel had claimed just such a spiritual quality or intention for his own work: unlike "the thinker or the scientist," the artist speaks to what is "more permanently enduring" in humanity, "to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives . . ." (Preface to *Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*). That conviction remained fixed in Conrad. "The aim of creation," he would propose in *A Personal Record*, ". . . is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view—and in this view alone—never for despair!" The task that falls to humanity is "to bear true testimony to the visible wonder, the haunting terror, the infinite passion and illimitable serenity; to the supreme law and the abiding mystery of the sublime spectacle," which sight "may move us to laughter" or (as in the case of the Walrus and the

Carpenter before "such quantities of sand") to "tears" (92-93).²³ Guided by his sympathetic imagination, the Conradian artist strives to render the least possible injustice to "the mystic nature of material things" (130), "the mystic ordering of common events" (141). It is this sense of mystery that "professors of intense gravity" would deny or rule out of court and that the "solemnly mystifying" prose of their unwittingly funny science would work to deaden (*Last Essays* 86, 40). Their "lamentable essays in seriousness" (86) are of a piece with those of the no-nonsense Captain H. C. Jörgenson of *The Rescue*, that wreck of an old adventurer whose experiments in the timing of fuses are undertaken so very seriously—"He was playing very gravely indeed with those bits of string" (368)—and whose very presence robs life "of all heat and mystery" (369): "really nothing in the world could astonish or startle old Jörgenson" (334). "No child's play" for this walking cadaver (100, 366).

IV

The mystic ordering-of-things indicated in Conrad's prose of statement coordinates nicely with the way of enlightenment plotted by his narratives. Conrad's fiction introduces a host of characters sure of themselves in their ignorance of life and its dark courses—from Jim, son of a parson possessed of "certain knowledge of the Unknowable"; (*Lord Jim* 5) and Harry Whalley, blind master of the SOFALA and erstwhile daredevil purveyor of knowledge, like Kurtz, to dark places; (*End of the Tether* 176-77, 285-86), to M. George, tyro gentleman-sailor ignorant, like Razumov, of the "dreadful order" in "the darkest shadows of life"; (*Arrow of Gold* 283) and Captain Tom Lingard of the LIGHTNING, "a man ready for the obvious" but "blind to the mysterious aspects of the world"; (*Rescue* 11). The tale of this last's enlightenment traces in bold the way to such science as Conrad's art is empowered to reveal (La Bossière, *Joseph Conrad* 33, 63-66). Like the many protagonists of Conrad's earlier finished creations, "Red-Eyed" Tom has his eyes opened by way of immersion in a bedlam element, a nonsense world featuring, in this instance, a march hare, a white rabbit, a ticking watch without hands, a watch with hands that have stopped, an animated mushroom, and at least one earnest and proper dodo.²⁴ Plunged into a universe "so painful with all sorts of wonders" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 11), Lingard and his

antecedents in blindness come to see, more or less acutely, something of the enigma at the heart of things and themselves.

The protagonist of *The Rover* is joined to their company, the last full figure in the Conradian fellowship of impaired vision and ignorant hearts. Led down the Giens Peninsula by an intelligent mule, master-gunner Peyrol in his fifty-eighth year is introduced as a man of "gravity" (16), "serious as a judge" (17), calm in his indifference, "having learned from childhood to suppress any sign of wonder before all extraordinary sights and events, all strange people, all strange customs, and the most alarming phenomena of nature" (24).²⁵ No child or "man to lose time in idle wonder," as he is quick to remind anyone who would even suggest otherwise (46, 48, 114, 117), the rover who would retire to a quietly ordered life in the vicinity of his childhood after knocking about the Eastern seas for some forty-five years appears the very image of sound and sober adulthood: "All Peyrol had ever done was to behave rationally" (34). The homecomer ripe for enlightenment is in for a few surprises. In a dreamy, fabulous world,²⁶ of "bizarre sights" (50), "the veriest nonsense" (218), the "perfectly absurd" (257), of "incomprehensible signs" (164) or facts of "no visible, conceivable or probable reason" (204), where all happens "as if by enchantment" (119), Peyrol comes to feel increasingly "funny" (9, 252), to experience "mingled curiosity and awe" (88) before the enigma he inhabits and finds in himself. "Dream left astern. Dream straight ahead" (223), he is brought to "wonder" before a mirror and the contradictory impulses, to indifference and engagement, that he glimpses there.²⁷ Peyrol's gradually intensified tuition in perplexity concludes in the recognition that "strange things do happen" (249), not the least surprising of which is the act of love and deception, from impulse and cunning, that is his last. "A look of ironic gaiety" (239) responds to manifold wonders as the seeker after repose and rational order sees himself drawn in from the sidelines of "the field of nonsense . . . a playground for games of so high and mysterious a nature, as well as being so normal and commonplace," in the words of Elizabeth Sewell on Carroll and Lear, there to put his "lovely skills" fully to work (183-84).²⁸

If the plotting of enlightenment to mystery in *The Rover* runs true to the nonsense logic normal to the Conradian imagination, however, it does so with a difference. In a way peculiar to *The Rover* among Conrad's fictions, the ordering of crucial events here—from Peyrol's surprising of

his old shipmate "Testa Dura" Symons to his last tricky move in decoying the English—seems to have been worked out with at least two specific games in mind.²⁹ The first, favored in Renaissance and Victorian times, by adults and children alike, and still played by Mediterranean seamen, is Blind Man's Buff (Fr.: "La Main chaude"), or "the sport of giving a person a clout and having him guess who did it" (Opie 293-94).³⁰ "Who are you?" (*Rover* 128, 137), Symons gropes after the identity of the agile white-haired trickster who, "stealthily like an Indian" (122), had knocked him on the head from behind. Peyrol's immediate response to the improbable discovery of his secreted tartane and the subsequent failure of "Testa Dura" to discover in his assailant his old friend "Poigne-de-Fer" lead to the improvising of the "inspired fib" (135) that prepares a complex series of moves in the "game" (127, e.g.) the French will play with the English. And the plotting of those moves suggests, in turn, a scaled-up and witty reworking of the most popular and baroque of catching or capturing games, Prisoners' Base (Fr.: "Le Jeu de barres"):

Two captains pick up sides . . . and each side takes possession of a base, but the prison in which they hope to place their captives is the one diagonally opposite, not the one nearest them. . . . When one captain sends a player to rescue a captive, his opponent sends a player to intercept the rescuer. One after another, players are sent to rescue rescuers and intercept interceptors. . . . Each player . . . will be both chasing and being chased. . . . (Opie 143)³¹

The patterning of manoeuvres in the contest between Peyrol and the AMELIA's master simulates the design of that game, but with an added twist for increased baroque effect. For the fib of the tartane as a courier boat to come into play, the captive Symons must be allowed to report it to Captain Vincent. Having taken precautions to prevent any interference in his plan—"having, so to speak, guarded his base" (190)—Peyrol oversees the *escape* of his prisoner and old friend: "No nurse could have watched with more anxiety the adventure of a little boy than Peyrol the progress of his former prisoner" (199).³² The deceiving rescue so lovingly and playfully engineered readies the deceiving capture of Peyrol and his "plaything" tartane (268) as couriers of authentic intelligence.³³ "It isn't going to be child's play" (207), the old rover had warned of the landlubberly Gallic officialdom's airy game plan. Events bear his words out, and in more ways than one. Like the playing of Blind Man's Buff

and Prisoners' Base by spirited children of all ages in a world of quotidian nonsense and wonder—so the Conradian ordering of things here leaves it understood—the expert working of a craft in an element of unreason is no *jeu d'enfant*. In *The Rover* Conrad produced a popular book. He did not produce an easy one.

NOTES

1. Conrad read this letter shortly after his return from Corsica in April of that year (Najder 460).
2. Perse had just returned to Paris after a six-month stay in England, during which time he had also visited with Chesterton.
3. Compare, for example, the first stanza of *The Jumblies*—

They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
 In a Sieve they went to sea:
 In spite of all their friends could say,
 On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
 In a Sieve they went to sea!
 And when the Sieve turned round and round,
 And every one cried, "You'll all be drowned!"
 They called aloud, "Our Sieve ain't big,
 But we don't care a button! we don't care a fig!
 In a Sieve we'll go to sea!"
 Far and few, far and few,
 Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
 Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
 And they went to sea in a Sieve.

—with this passage from *Vents*:

Ces vols d'insectes par nuées qui s'en allaient se perdre au large. . . . On leur a dit, on leur a dit—ah! que ne leur disait-on pas?—qu'ils s'allaient perdre sur les mers, et qu'il fallait virer de bord; on leur criait, on leur criait—ah! que ne leur criait-on pas?—qu'ils s'en revinssent, ah! s'en revinssent parmi nous. . . . Mais non! ils s'en allaient plutôt par là, où c'est se perdre avec le vent! (O 208).

4. Little observes elsewhere: "La beauté sonore de 'Saint-John Perse', poésie affranchie de toute signification, invite le lecteur à l'aventure. . ." (*Etudes* 203). Again, though, Perse's reading of Lear is given but a passing mention (148).
5. Later in that letter, Perse includes Blake and Novalis as poets similarly ensnared by their "automatisme et servitude dans la contradiction" (744). For a reading of Perse's responses to Lear, R. L. Stevenson, Melville, and Nietzsche, see La Bossière, "Monumental Nonsense."
6. For an example of Apollinaire's treatment of "children's" literature, see his "Cendrillon," in *A la Perrault: Les Contes de Perrault racontés par des humoristes*, No. 185 of *La Baïonnette* (16 Jan 1919). Rilke's translation of "Images à Crusoé" appeared in 1925. Perse's reception at the Lycée de Marseille in the twenties is recalled from Pierre Guerre's *Le Carnet de moleskine*.
7. Malcolm Lowry's poem, "Joseph Conrad," provides the epigraph of Geddes's *Conrad's Later Novels*.
8. Geoffrey Firmin even composes his own nonsense alphabet (305-306). Ironically enough, Beatrix Potter's tales, like Lear's nonsense creations, do not make altogether light of the hazards of adventure. For all their daring, the Jumblies at sea in a sieve know enough to keep their feet dry (st. 3); and the very prudent Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-Tail of *Peter Rabbit* have bread and milk and blackberries for supper, while the venturesome hero of the tale, having barely escaped empty-handed from the garden of Mr. McGregor, must content himself with the fruits of his audacity and sup on one tablespoonful of camomile tea.
9. Cf. Conrad, "The Nursery of the Craft," in *The Mirror of the Sea*: "No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great among heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha" (155).
10. There is perhaps irony as well in Guerard's reading of "the husband Scevola" (285). Cf. Gillon: "Like Lingard [in *The Rescue*], the hero of *The Rover* is "a simplistic character, more suited to teenage tastes than to those of the seasoned readers of Conrad" (168). Gillon, though, immediately goes to suggest that it is also possible to see in Peyrol "the elements of a fabular figure."
11. "In a sense," Schwarz comments on *The Rover*, "Conrad is trying to write an adventure story in the Kipling and Stevenson tradition"; it is "a fairy-tale that Conrad tells to himself" (141, 143). Najder's account of Conrad's intention differs: he may have written "an easy and popular book," but not "on purpose" (485). Cf. Karl's account of the critical reception that immediately greeted Conrad's last completed romance: Raymond Mortimer, reviewing *The Rover* for *The New Statesman* in 1923, stressed that "'a twelve-year-old could enjoy it'" (902).
12. Conrad, though, could at times be direct enough in his public response to play for play's sake: "I have noticed that the mere lovers of adventure are mightily careful of their skins. . . . There is nothing more futile under the sun than a mere adventurer. [. . .] A man is a worker. If he is not that he is nothing. Just nothing—like a mere adventurer" (*Notes on Life and Letters* 189-91).

13. In the period of his first contacts with Conrad, Perse wrote to Jacques Rivière: "Il ne doit y avoir de plus açaçant que de jouer du piano sur un pont de paquebot" (O 676).
14. Cf. Mac Orlan's *La clique du Café Brebis*: the character Nicolas Read is like Stevenson the passive adventurer, with "son visage de capitaine au long cours, bruni par des voyages imaginaires" (95). For another example of Mac Orlan's humoristic treatment of imaginary and actual venturing, see his version of "Barbe Bleue," in *A la Perrault*, No. 185 of *La Baïonnette* (16 Jan 1919). Sir Leslie Stephen's earlier defence of Stevenson's "invincible boyishness" qualifies rather than contradicts Mac Orlan's sense of the passive adventurer:

[Stevenson] was no "aesthete" in the sense which conveys a reproach. He did not sympathise with the doctrine that an artist should wrap himself up in luxurious hedonism and cultivate indifference to active life. He was too much of a boy. A true boy cannot be "aesthetic". He had "day dreams", but they were of piracy; tacit aspirations toward stirring adventure and active heroism. (3, 6-7)

15. G. S. Fraser's reckoning in *The Modern Writer and His World*, that "Edwardian readers who were looking for an adult view of their world turn probably neither to Kipling nor to Conrad," Coates finds expressive less of historical actuality than of a modern prescriptive criticism that defines "some sorts of fictional concerns as 'adult' and some as 'child-ish'" (281).
16. It is ironic that the comparisons by Mac Orlan and Chesterton should attend, each in its own way, to that feature of Conrad's art which, to Karl's mind, makes all such readings nugatory. "Conrad should not be compared with the romancers popular" in the 1890s, warns Karl, since from the very beginning his "manipulation of narrative alone, so as to create simultaneity of past and present, was an attempt to impose on the novel form an idea about life and mind alien to the romancers" (350). "Simultaneity of past and present" is surely apt for Conrad; and it is the very thing that his readers Mac Orlan and Chesterton have at heart.
17. Attentive as they are to irony in development, the comparative readings by Mac Orlan and Chesterton have the added virtue of fidelity to two aspects of human and literary history tacitly curtailed or even suppressed in modern Conrad criticism disposed to read in the way of achievement-and-decline. The first is so obvious as perhaps not to need mentioning: children's books are not normally written by children. Childhood and childhood remembered are not quite the same thing. The second is only slightly less evident: books change in time with their readers. As Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* speculates, to return to the stories of one's childhood is to find a world still vital with wonder, but strangely different: the eyes of the oldster who rereads *Treasure Island*, Homer, and the Alice books are not what they once were (28-29, 80, 303, 405, 501). The old reader needs a magnifying glass. Certainly, the Alice books are wondrously altered in the process of their translation to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (Eckley 220-24) and the *In Parenthesis* of David Jones (Dilworth 76-80). Even the relatively uncomplex *Treasure Island* can undergo significant sea-changes. For Graham Greene at age thirty-two, this "adventure-story

- for a boys' magazine" has become a "Scottish Presbyterian's *Mansoul*" (44). A recent history of Lear's reception, from Ruskin through Aldous Huxley to Donald Barthelme, suggests a similar potential for development in *The Jumblies* (Hark 135-50). Reading Lear in, say, one's mid fifties, as Conrad did with Perse, differs from reading Lear as a child. And the same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Conrad's experience of Marryat and Cooper. Oliver Warner observes of the subject of his *Captain Marryat: A Rediscovery*: "It is . . . with a certain sense of shock that a contemporary reader realises just how adult in fact he often is" (146). The rediscovery of Fenimore Cooper by Howard Mumford Jones produces a similar effect: "It may shock the modern reader into attention to list some of Cooper's unique achievements" (136-37). Marryat and Cooper are not what they once were.
18. For a reading on Marryat's position relative to earnest Victorian learning, see Charles Kingsley's narrative of science and education for children and adults, *The Water-Babies*: following his visit to a latter-day "Laputa," the hero Tom is referred to *Peter Simple* for the meaning of "flapdoodle," one of Marryat's contributions to the English lexicon (185).
 19. The Psalms and the Book of Job are Ready's ruling texts.
 20. Marryat's reading of the human comedy is far from uniformly or simply lightsome. "We certainly are of a perverse nature," the hero of *Masterman Ready* generalizes from his own experience of saving a man's life and thereby putting that enemy under obligation: "The heart is deceitful" (162-65). In *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, the protagonist's triumphs in love and war are enabled by his pact of friendship with Mesty, short for "Mephistopheles Faust" (41). Jack Easy comes into his inheritance as a result of his father's grotesquely funny death by the machine designed by that mad philosopher to make all men equal. As Virginia Woolf remarks, there is "a kind of bright hardness" in Marryat's humor (44). For a developed account of humor, "noir" as well as "rose," in Marryat's fiction, see Gauthier (411-14).
 21. In the verse preface to *Treasure Island*, Stevenson memorializes his fellowship with "Cooper of the wood and wave."
 22. "Funny" here as in Iris Murdoch's definition: "there is so much that is funny in life; especially if we extend our definition of 'funny' a little to include strange, incongruous, bizarre, ironic. . ." ("Speaking of Writing"). "Mystery is a kind of joke," as Thomas Byrom observes in his *Nonsense and Wonder: The Poems and Cartoons of Edward Lear* (120). "[I feel] I am taking a leap in the dark.—Is not all life more or less so necessarily?" Byrom cites from Lear's diary entry for 9 Jan 1874 (38). Evidence that Pascal's *Pensées* was Lear's favorite bedside book (30, 47) helps make the case that funny Lear was "more than a tourist" (193).
 23. Near the end of his letter of 26 Feb 1921 to Conrad, which opens with a recollection of their reading of *The Jumblies* in 1912, Perse writes: "J'ai eu avec moi en Chine, avec le beau portrait que je tiens de vous, le dernier de vos livres dédicacés, *Some Reminiscences*, qui livre de vous le plus humain." Perse's encouragement to Conrad is that he continue to safeguard his "pleine liberté d'esprit" (O 889).
 24. Frequently referring to "child's play," *The Rescue* is peppered with allusions to books of wonder and adventure, *Through the Looking-Glass* in particular (e.g.: 6, 95, 268, 337, 351-53, 361).

25. Conrad's reading here of "the affectation common to seamen of never being surprised at anything that sea or land can produce" (*Rover* 24) accords closely with Cooper's. For example:

This *sang froid* of seamen is always a matter of surprise to landmen; but adventurers who have been rocked in the tempests for years, whose utmost security is a great hazard and whose safety constantly depends on the command of the faculties, come in time to experience an apathy on the subject of all the minor terrors and excitements of life that none can acquire unless by habit and similar risks. (*Homeward Bound* 499)

And again, in *Afloat and Ashore*: "Sailors, as a class, are very philosophical, so far as the peculiarities and habits of strangers are concerned, appearing to think it beneath the dignity of those who visit all lands, to betray wonder at the novelties of any . . ." (262). In his 1848 preface to *The Sea Lions*, Cooper spells out his response to such a philosophical turn of mind: "If anything connected with the hardness of the human heart could surprise us, it surely would be the indifference with which men live on, engrossed by their worldly objects, amid the sublime natural phenomena that so eloquently and increasingly speak to their imaginations, affections, and judgements" (3). For Cooper as for Conrad, "this is a life of mysteries . . . though its incidents seem so vulgar and of everyday occurrence. There is mystery in its beginning and its end; in its impulses, its sympathies, and all its discordant passions" (*Water-Witch* 548).

26. Several commentators have remarked Conrad's use of a number of classical myths in *The Rover*. Higdon refers to the stories of Acis, Polyphemus, and Galatea; and Geddes (177-78) to the myths of the Gorgon's Head and Pygmalion. "Admirable nonsense" characterizes these myths in Hawthorne's *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (133).
27. The punning on "strange," "curious," and "wonder" is virtually continuous in *The Rover*. Interestingly, *The Rover* shows more puns per page than any other Conrad fiction (on "frank," "mind," "slippery," "phenomenon," "start," "incensed," "blessed," and so on). See Wright (272-73) for a reading of the "humorous realism" intoned by that semantic playing.
28. Cf. Coe: "Play is the most supremely serious of all human activities, because it alone either constructs (Freud), reveals (Huizinga), or refers back to (Callois) a system of values which transcends the drab and stultifying restrictiveness of deterministic utilitarianism" (252). In Karel Čapek's *War with the Newts*, it is the greying businessman G. H. Bondy who dismisses Conrad as a writer of "juvenile epics" (144-45). Playing in *The Rover* bears little resemblance to the games in the nineteenth-century realist novels described by Morrow: they retain "the *form* but not the *essence* of play," which resides in supple, dynamic movement (4-5).
29. Najder suggestively recalls of Conrad in the 1920s that he would wake up his son John in the middle of the night to play chess; then, after a few moves, he would return to his writing (462). Evidently, Conrad also enjoyed sailing toy boats with the lad in the privacy of his garden (492).

30. "Probably more often mentioned in English literature than any other informal game," Blind Man's Bluff figures in a letter from Emily Tennyson to Lear: Tennyson, Palgrave, and Jowett are playing it (Opie 118-19). In Blind Man's Buff (also known as the Hoodwink Play) the questioned player is either blindfolded or struck from behind. Chesterton's essay "Christmas and the First Games" offers this illustration of the wonder of quotidian things: the handkerchief came to be used to blow the nose, but only after "it had been used for centuries to blind the eyes, as in the hierarchic mystery of Blind-Man's-Buff" (*Coloured Lands* 221).
31. This favorite among games in Renaissance England gets a significant mention in *The Faerie Queene* (5.8.5). It also figures in Mac Orlan's *La clique* (79), as one of "ces jeux dont l'innocence n'existe pas véritablement que dans l'âme des parents, puisque les enfants sont toujours un peu moins naïfs que ceux qui leur ont donné le jour" (85).
32. "The absence of humor in some form may be a touchstone for a falling off" from Conrad's "best work," Lippincott suggests in the concluding paragraph of his "Sense of Place in Conrad's *The Rover*" (111). By that standard, certainly, old Conrad had not quite lost his touch or his clout.
33. Blind Man's Buff and Prisoners' Base are not the only games suggested by the scheme of events in *The Rover*. The long-lived Red Rover, in which one player is challenged to break through a chain formed by the enemy side, is another that may come to mind, though more distantly. The structure of that game is likewise perceptible in Fenimore Cooper's *The Red Rover*, in which the mysterious "lawless" protagonist—he goes under a number of assumed names—is drawn into the service of his country: he outwits a blockading English fleet, dies in the process, and thereby helps unite two lovers. Red Rover continues to be played in British and North-American schoolyards (cf. Opie chap. 6). Conrad's long-standing devotion to Cooper seems not to have diminished in his last years (cf. Mackenzie). Though broad, *The Rover's* allusions to Cooper's *The Trapper*, the kinless old wanderer who combines judgment with skill in *The Prairie*, seems clear enough: "He could still creep stealthily like an Indian. [. . .] Peyrol could not have done the job better at the age of twenty. No. Not so well. There was swiftness, mature judgment . . ." (122-23).

WORKS CITED

- Apollinaire, Guillaume. "Cendrillon." *La Baïonnette* 185 (1919): 12-14.
- Bonney, William W. *Thorns & Arabesques: Contexts for Conrad's Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980.
- Byrom, Thomas. *Nonsense and Wonder: The Poems and Cartoons of Edward Lear*. New York: Dutton, 1977.
- Čapek, Karel. *War with the Newts*. 1936. Trans. M. and R. Weatherall. London: Allen 1937.
- Chesterton, G. K. *The Coloured Lands*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1938.
- _____. *The Common Man*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950.

- _____. *Stories, Essays & Poems*. London: Dent, 1935.
- Coates, John. "Chesterton and the Meaning of Adventure." *The Chesterton Review* 5 (1979): 278-99.
- Coe, Richard N. *When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1984.
- Conrad, Joseph. *The Works of Joseph Conrad*. 21 vols. London: Dent, 1946-54.
- Cooper, J. Fenimore. *Afloat and Ashore*. 1844. Vol. 4 of *The Works*. New York: Collier, 1892.
- _____. *Homeward Bound; or, The Chase*. 1838. Vol. 5 of *The Works*. New York: Collier, 1892.
- _____. *The Pilot*. 1823. Vol. 3 of *The Works*. New York: Collier, 1892.
- _____. *The Red Rover*. 1827. Vol. 3 of *The Works*. New York: Collier, 1892.
- _____. *The Sea Lions*. 1848. Vol. 4 of *The Works*. New York: Collier, 1892.
- _____. *The Water-Witch*. 1830. Vol. 4 of *The Works*. New York: Collier, 1892.
- Dilworth, Thomas. *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988.
- Eckley, Grace. *Children's Lore in 'Finnegans Wake'*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1985.
- Favre, Yves-Alain. *Saint-John Perse: Le langage et le sacré*. Paris: Corti, 1977.
- Findley, Timothy. *The Wars*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1977.
- Geddes, Gary. *Conrad's Later Novels*. Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's UP, 1980.
- Gillon, Adam. *Joseph Conrad*. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- Greene, Graham. *Graham Greene on Film: Collected Film Criticism 1935-1940*. Ed. John Russell Taylor. New York: Simon, 1972.
- Guerard, Albert J. *Conrad the Novelist*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966.
- Guerre, Pierre. *Le Carnet de moleskine*. Cahiers du Sud, 1954.
- Gurko, Leo. *Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- Hark, Ina Rae. *Edward Lear*. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*. 1852. New York: Rand McNally, 1913.
- Higdon, David Leon. "Conrad's *The Rover*: The Grammar of a Myth." *Studies in the Novel* 1 (1969): 17-26.
- Honneur à Saint-John Perse*. Comp. Jean Paulhan. Paris: Gallimard, 1965.
- Jackson, Holbrook. "Introduction." *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*. London: Faber, 1947. i-xxiii.
- Jones, Howard Mumford. "Prose and Pictures: James Fenimore Cooper." *Tulane Studies in English* 3 (1952): 136-37.
- Karl, Frederick. *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*. New York: Farrar, 1979.
- Kiely, Robert. *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure*. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1964.
- Kingsley, Charles. *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*. New York: Mershom, 1863.
- La Bossière, Camille R. *Joseph Conrad and the Science of Unknowing*. Fredericton NB: York Press, 1979.
- _____. "The Monumental Nonsense of Saint-John Perse." *Folio* 18 (1990): 25-37.

- Land, Stephen K. *Paradox and Polarity in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*. New York: St. Martin's, 1984.
- Lear, Edward. *The Jumblies. Anthology of Children's Literature*. Ed. Edna Johnson, Evelyn R. Sickels, and Francis Clarke Sayers. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton, 1959. 55-56.
- Lippincott, H. F. "Sense of Place in Conrad's *The Rover*." *Conradiana* 6 (1974): 104-12.
- Little, Roger. *Etudes sur Saint-John Perse*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1984.
- _____. "A Letter about Conrad by Saint-John Perse." *Conradiana* 8 (1976): 263-64.
- Lowry, Malcolm. *Under the Volcano*. 1947. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.
- Mackenzie, Manfred. "Fenimore Cooper and Conrad's *Suspense*." *Notes & Queries* N.S. 10 (1963): 373-75.
- Mac Orlan, Pierre. "Barbe Bleue." *La Baïonnette* 185 (1919): 6-8.
- _____. *'La clique du Café Brebis', suivi de 'Petit Manuel du parfait Aventurier.'* 5th ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.
- Marryat, Frederick. *Japhet in Search of a Father*. 1836. Boston: Colonial, 1898.
- _____. *Masterman Ready*. 1841. London: Nelson, n.d.
- _____. *Mr. Midshipman Easy*. 1836. London: Foulsham, n.d.
- _____. *The Phantom Ship*. 1839. London: Routledge, 1874.
- Morrow, Nancy. *Dreadful Games*. Kent OH: Kent State UP, 1988.
- Murdoch, Iris. *The Sea, The Sea*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1978.
- _____. "Speaking of Writing." *Times* 13 Feb 1964: 15.
- Najder, Z. *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1984.
- Opie, Iona and Peter. *Children's Games in Street and Playground*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969.
- Ostrovsky, Erika. *Under the Sign of Ambiguity: Saint-John Perse/Alexis Leger*. Washington Square: New York UP, 1985.
- Perse, Saint-John. *Oeuvres complètes*. Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.
- Potter, Beatrix. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. 1903. *Anthology of Children's Literature*. Ed. Edna Johnson, Evelyn R. Sickels, and Francis Clarke Sayers. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton, 1959. 79-81.
- Said, Edward. "Conrad and Nietzsche." *Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration*. Ed. Norman Sherry. London: Macmillan, 1976. 65-76.
- Schwarz, Daniel R. *Joseph Conrad: The Later Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Sewell, Elizabeth. *The Field of Nonsense*. London: Chatto, 1952.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Complete Poetical Works*. Ed. R. E. Neil Dodge. Boston: Houghton, 1908.
- Stephen, Leslie. "A Critical Essay on Robert Louis Stevenson." *Essays and Reviews*. Vol. 9 of *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Ed. Charles Curtis Bigelow and Temple Scott. New York: National Library, 1906. 1-23.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*. 1879. Vol. 5 of *The Works*. Ed. Bigelow and Scott. New York: National Library, 1906.
- _____. *Treasure Island*. 1881. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.
- Warner, Oliver. *Captain Marryat: A Rediscovery*. London: Constable, 1953.
- Woolf, Virginia. "The Captain's Death Bed." *The Captain's Death Bed & Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1950. 41-44.

Wright, Elizabeth Cox. "The Defining Function of Vocabulary in Conrad's *The Rover*." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 59 (1960): 265-77.