

A book review by Aleister Crowley from the October 1917 edition of The International.

The Shadow Line by Joseph Conrad. Doubleday, Page & Co.

The plot of this novel is identical with that of Lord Dunsany's "Poor Old Bill." The difference is that between the realist and the fantastic. It is very instructive to read them side by side. Joseph Conrad is the greatest master of atmosphere now living, so far at least as the East is concerned. In fact, I do not know even an immortal shade who can compare with him.

Rudyard Kipling gives the violence, the coarseness and the horror, which are very effective from the literary point of view, but which do not exist in the East, so far as I know.

Stevenson, on the other hand, has everything toned down. He throws a Scotch mist over the proceedings. Conrad describes the East, both subjective and objective, in precisely the same terms as I should do if I had his power of expression. There is no need to tell the story of the book; any story or no story would have done just as well. He takes me back ten years to my long lonely walk across China, to the explosive casualty of Hai-Phong, to the Fata Morgana which I saw off Hoi-How, to the Akashic obsession of silence and darkness and stillness which closed in upon us in those very waters which he describes in "The Shadow Line." Even the captain's woman is a living portrait of one whom I knew in those ensorcelled days, a tuberculous hag of paint and rottenness and vice, who yet possessed the power to awaken the very fountain of calf-love from its frozen sleep. It is very interesting to compare Conrad with Stevenson. Stevenson is never happy unless he has the decks awash with blood and slime. Mr. Conrad is one of those rarest and most supreme of artists who does not need incident in order to be interesting. He does not

fear to use it, but he does not depend upon it. It is rather significant that England should have had to go to Hungary for her supreme prose artist.