

An Unknown Episode of Conrad's Life*

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Sir, All the recent biographers of Joseph Conrad have overlooked the fact that he was employed for about two months as a translator of Slavonic languages during the early 'nineties¹ by a Translating Agency, a few doors away from Mudie's Library, New Oxford Street, WC. I remember Conrad calling one day at the office of the long since defunct *St Stephen's Review*,² in the Adelphi, and informing the assistant editor, the late Mr Edgar Lee,³ that he had ceased calling for work at the Agency. Sometimes, Conrad said, his remuneration did not exceed ninepence per week. This was owing to the fact that most of the Slavonic firms doing business with English customers wrote in French or German. Conrad brought with him at the same time some translations of Polish short stories, which Mr Lee promised he would read. Mr Lee, however, afterwards told me that he was compelled to return the Polish tales to Conrad, because all of them were much too revolutionary for a Conservative weekly journal like the *St Stephen's Review*.⁴

NOTES

1. The exact date is not known, although Zdzisław Najder suggests 1891 (see *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p. 149).

2. This journal ceased publication in 1892.

3. Edgar Lee (1851–1908) was, according to *Who's Who*, acting editor of *St Stephen's Review* between 1883 and 1890. If this is correct, then Conrad possibly undertook his translating work in 1889 (despite de Ternant's reference to the early 1890s). Conrad was not in London for two complete months in 1890.

4. Possibly these 'revolutionary' stories were early works by Stefan Żeromski (1864–1925), one of the foremost writers of the period.

* *New Statesman*, vol. xxxi (28 July 1928) p. 511.