



The Secret Sharer and other stories

Joseph Conrad

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This is a collection of gripping tales of crime, crisis or disaster, in which ordinary people find themselves tested in extraordinary circumstances.

The Secret Sharer and other stories Details

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From Reader Review The Secret Sharer and other stories for online ebook

Stephan says

This old edition contained the stories, "Youth", "The Secret Sharer", and "The Shadow Line". The stories all deal with the same themes of youth, being in first in command and tests against values and experience. They're all written from a first-person narrator, in a very conversational tone (especially for the time period) and often the story unfolds between dialog.

I guess "The Secret Sharer", about a captain who hides a murderer in his cabin and finds his own likeness in him, is the more popular. But my favorite was "The Shadow Line". The narrator, another youth about to give up sea life, finds himself in command of a crew. He's haunted by a sickly second mate who knew the previous captain. The entire ship's crew eventually falls ill after twenty-something days just drifting at sea waiting for wind. The whole thing seems to be some test of endurance and against the haunting reputation of the previous captain. Simply really spooky and eerie. It's almost as if you can hear the narrator questioning himself, growing and understanding as we do too.

Lyle says

This is another one of those books I read for class that I was most likely only one who felt an affinity towards. Another short read and not too action-packed. It's hard to review this without giving too much away, but there's a lot of dual personality references in here.

Julie Bozza says

Warning: This review feels a little spoilerish, but then I think Conrad's style is to be quite upfront about his themes and meanings, which is also what I'm doing here.

I chose this to read because BBC 'Merlin' had an episode called 'The Secret Sharer', and I was interested by the unusual title. (I suppose there are more random reasons to read a book!) It was intriguing to consider the parallels while I was reading that story! :-)

These three substantially-sized stories are all worth reading, and offer a window into a life that Conrad has obviously lived.

In 'Youth: A Narrative', a man recounts the tale of a voyage - 'to Bangkok!' - in which everything that could possibly go wrong does go wrong. His younger self approaches all this direness as an adventure, and an opportunity to test himself and come up trumps. His older self, and the silent men to whom he's telling the story, mourn the loss of those blithely confident days.

'Typhoon' tells of exactly what it's like to sail through a typhoon - under the infuriatingly calmest of captains

- and be subject to the unbelievable forces of such massive weather.

'The Secret Sharer' tells of a newly appointed young captain, a stranger on his own ship, who invites aboard a stowaway and hides him in his cabin. The stowaway was mate on another ship, and has murdered a man, but the captain sees him as his other self.

Well worth reading if you like tales of ships and the men who captain and crew them.

James says

In his essay, "The Condition of Art", Joseph Conrad says of the artist:

He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation--to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity"

His own art of storytelling though his novels and short stories demonstrates this artistic vision repeatedly; nowhere better than in his tale of The Secret Sharer. This is a short episode early in the career of an anonymous Captain of an anonymous ship in Southeast Asia near Siam. Only in his twenties on his first command, the Captain thought he was "somewhat of a stranger to myself", and he "wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly". It is with these thoughts in mind that in the midst of a mysterious black night he is surprised by a naked man climbing aboard the ship. It turns out to be a Mr. Leggatt, mate from the ship Sephora, who has escaped from that ship and his past actions which had culminated in his being responsible for the death of a ship-mate. The remainder of the story builds suspensefully to a climax in which the anonymous Captain finds out if he is capable of command and perhaps living up to some of the "ideal conception" that he has in mind. Leggatt functions as a "double" for the Captain, being explicitly referred to as such even as he lives the life of a shadowy, even ghostly, double hidden in the Captain's quarters. The tale suggests the internal struggle that comes with the first assumption of leadership and the need to create your own being through the experience of crisis. All this is draped in a story both mysterious and thought-provoking. The captain, in his anonymity, becomes every captain and everyman who has experienced the struggle toward an "ideal conception" of being.

Kate Sanders says

The Secret Sharer is very mysterious because some would argue whether there is an actual person that the captain is hiding or if it's just a figment of his imagination because he's lonely. This is a great story filled with details.

Idiosyncratic says

I'm surprised at how provocative (and evocative) I found this story to be - especially when I realized, upon

re-reading it after many years - that "the secret sharer" was a murderer. (So much for my cozy, romantic preconception.)

Nick Barth says

I enjoy dread and the sea.

GM says

Subtle and elegant short story. It is yet another spin to one of Conrad's favourite themes: the hardship that one sometimes faces in the process of doing the "right" thing, of taking the right stand, surrounded by an environment where so many people are blinded by their greed, material interest, lack of understanding of the world. Top notch, as almost everything from Conrad.

William Stobb says

"The Secret Sharer" is one of my favorite stories. It takes place on a ship on the ocean, but it's also as if it takes place in the subconscious mind. It's dreamy. I loved it.

Charlie Shafer says

The "Secret Sharer" and "Youth: A Narrative" were both great, captivating reads. You can finish reading both stories within an hour. His writing has always been so poetic and he showcases this writing style in both Youth and the Secret Sharer. Youth contained some of the most existential and beautiful writing I've ever encountered. The second story in the collection didn't grip me and I never finished it.

Steve says

I don't usually read short stories, but then again, this is three in the space of 270 pages, so they're long enough to fit my allowed reading spans. Conrad is somebody I was taught to admire in college, but it's only been the last couple years that I was old enough to really appreciate his mastery of the English language, and his ability to dig deep into the humanity of his main characters, while keeping the others at a nicely symbolic level. The Secret Sharer is a nifty morality tale about a ship's captain protecting a murderer; Youth: A Narrative is a spectacular tale of horrors aboard a ship and the ways this could seem more exciting to a young man. But my fave is The Shadow Line, a brilliantly constructed story about a man making that leap into the next level of life and facing every possible obstruction in his path. Aboard a ship, of course - Conrad loved seamen. The racism is kept to a minimum in these stories, though of course the white men consider themselves superior to the Asians their predecessors have conquered. It only adds a level of moral terror

beyond that intended by Conrad in the first place.

John says

YOUTH: A NARRATIVE — Normally, a title like that would be indicative of an absolute snoozefest, but this ended up being my favorite Conrad piece EVER. The story is that of a doomed ocean voyage, with Conrad taking a certain masochistic delight in inflicting as much damage upon the poor seagoing vessel as his fevered mind can dream up. It's like torture porn for ships. Apart from that, Conrad also explores the relationship between courage and foolhardiness. Wonderfully written, with such on-the-nose descriptions as could only be penned by an author with firsthand experience. Five stars.

TYPHOON: Flat-out the best descriptions I've ever read of a ship caught up in a violent storm. Unfortunately, though, despite Conrad's best efforts to convey excitement, this story reads like a dull slog. Three stars.

THE SECRET SHARER: A young captain on his first commanding voyage winds up harboring a fugitive, then goes to extraordinary lengths to conceal him from the crew. A gripping story, dripping with paranoia and psychological subtext. Four stars.

John says

Joseph Conrad is my favorite "high school book" author and "The Secret Sharer" is one of my favorites. Also a big fan of "An Outpost of Progress."

Henrietta Fudakowski says

Joseph Conrad is not a particularly easy author to read. He wrote in his third language English, but you can still feel the traces of his native Polish and his first learnt language French. So the sentences are dense, but they are also rich. If however you want somewhere to start reading Joseph Conrad's works Secret Sharer is a good place to start. Heart of Darkness is better known, and is the basis for the film Apocalypse Now

Secret Sharer was first published a century ago, but the issues that it deals with are basically a young man's coming of age in a very difficult situation. The hero is a captain for the first time on a ship where the crew know each other well, he feels like a stranger on board until his 'secret sharer' comes on board and tells him that he is a murderer. The pressure of keeping another man secret on board and wondering what he would have done in the same situation is most of the plot.

A new film adaptation of the book is going to be released in June 2014, so it would be a good idea to read the book before seeing the film. Members of the Conrad society have suggested that although the film is updated to the present, it remains faithful to the spirit of Conrad's original novella

Manoel Elpidio says

If there's a trait I have come to truly admire in Conrad is his sheer talent for drawing intense narratives from personal experiences or from stories he had heard in his days as a sailor. By the time I had finished "*The Duel*", which closes this collection, I realised what precisely amuses me about 19th-century literature that modern works will never be able to strike: simplicity, along with that personal touch.

There might be a small preconceived bias towards it when we tend to think of the depiction of the past as something as exotic and unimaginable as the discovery of new and unknown (opposite to the dull and boring present), but truth be told, modern authors tend to write about topics they only *relate to* or *pity*, and not necessarily what they *know* from experience. That leads to a massive and overwhelmingly unnecessary research to later present a work that poses either as propaganda or simply as something devoid of content. That is why I have been inclined to believe that empiricism in literature is essential for **good** literature, or, as Henry James advocated, that a text should first be realistic and contain a representation of life that is recognisable to its readers. What better way to successfully accomplish that if not by empirical findings on life and society?

There is also a second problem: either by the passage of time and its records, the consequences of the first problem or a combination of both, I see in modern writers a terrible trend of turning plots and themes more intricate and complex, which, in my opinion, deviates the reader from what the pivotal discussion should be about. And again, perhaps to make something "that is recognisable to its readers", simplifying is the key, not the opposite. That is what I see in Conrad, as much difficult and confusing his language may be, tough.

And then we get to this collection of short stories. In it, there is indeed empiricism and simplicity. Naval stories such as "*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*", "*Typhoon*" and "*Youth*" all have the personal touch from Conrad, they arise directly from his own experiences at the sea.(view spoiler) Others are ingenious precisely because they are simple: it is about betrayal in "*The Lagoon*", about secrecy in "*The Secret Sharer*" or plain and irrational animosity in "*The Duel*". They all become grand and magnificent not by complexity or esotericism, but by pure and unexpected frugality in their composition.

"*The Duel*" and "*An Outpost for Progress*" are easily the most interesting of this collection, while "*The Idiots*" and "*The Informer*" are placed on the opposite side. The latter feels morbid, drifting, just as *The Secret Agent* novel, most likely because both take a picture of a late 19th-century specific theme such as anarchism, but fails to transmit to us in modern times intentions behind their representatives.

Humphrey says

"*Youth*" is distinctly the best story here - very good stuff. I thought "*The Secret Sharer*" was about as well executed as it could have been, but wasn't all that impressive. "*Typhoon*" is a bit problematic: the length that allows Conrad to make it a great descriptive story, but cuts against the epiphany aspect of the form.

Scott Cox says

I found this to be one of the more haunting Joseph Conrad stories; one that I can remember decades after my first reading. The story involves a sea captain who discovers a mysterious swimmer clinging to the side of

the boat. Later we learn more about the swimmer's secret: the "brand of Cain" that he must bear. The swimmer becomes, in some way, the captain's double. A captivating story!

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

I love the short story form--fell in love with a lot listed here have been favorites since they were assigned in high school: Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner," O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Cather's "Paul's Case," Chekhov's "The Bet," Benét's "By the Waters of Babylon" (a science fiction story no less), Crane's "The Open Boat," Welty's "The Worn Path," Broun's "The Fifty-First Dragon," Saki's "The Interlopers," and the work that forms part of the title, Conrad's novella, "The Secret Sharer." Anyone with an American high school education will recognize several other authors and titles. Sure, there's a lot of the great short story writers missing--Poe, Hawthorne, Hemingway among others. And many of these are in the public domain and can now be found online. I'd recommend other short story anthologies over this one, particularly Moffett's *Point of View* or *Best American Short Stories of the Century*, but this isn't a bad choice when looking for a collection of 23 of the best.

Deb says

I enjoyed "Youth: A Narrative" the best. This is a story of a young sailor at sea, and the ship he is sailing on continues to be haunted by misfortune. I liked this story the best. Conrad's writing style is a mix of quirky antiquity mixed with a bit of humor. I mean, this ship was doomed, but I got the impression that the writer is always finding the up side, and looking at it all with a bit of humor.

"Typhoon" was a drag. The story is about the perfect storm... The barometer drops to unbelievable depths--could it be right? The suggestion is to steer out of it, but the captain says they would be wasting coal. He then goes into his library, and reads about a storm in a book. This becomes his manual. The storm is described in detail...blah, blah, blah... I would rather watch it on "Deadliest Catch". The story ends quickly, and I am glad it is over.

"The Secret Sharer" is probably the worst story for me. I never could understand why the captain is willing to take the fugitive. Okay, so when he dresses in his pj's, he notices the resemblance. He is then in a conspiracy to ensure that no one gets wind that this man is on ship. Why was he complicit in this act in the first place? I think I missed the meaning of the story.

Sasha (whispersofthesilentwind) says

2.5

Note:#1 required reading

Note:#2 I only read The Secret Sharer

I'm not a fan of Joseph Conrad, having read Heart of Darkness by him. I found The Secret Sharer to be better

than Heart of Darkness but still lacking something. The Secret Sharer was pretty bland & dry with a hint of something to keep me interested until the end.
