

CONRAD

IN THE MAKING

JJ Sandras




Yvelinedition

This simplified partial biography of a South African pensioner in his late sixties living in Paris begins with his childhood in Johannesburg and ends when he is twenty-three years old in the Punjab. It describes the events in his life which converted him from a typical South African Protestant to a follower of the Buddhist philosophy corresponding to Christ's message.

His youth in Johannesburg describes a world that no longer exists, his encounter with a Bushman in the Kalahari is as amusing as it is instructive. As a lad of nineteen in swinging London in the late sixties he meets people who enlighten him on human values. Back in Johannesburg a year later he undergoes an existential crisis under favourable conditions enabling him to pursue his quest for the meaning of life pleasantly.

Three years later he embarks upon another voyage allowing him to enjoy a happy sojourn as a volunteer on a kibbutz in Israel before meeting the Master who opens the Path of the Buddha for him in the Punjab.

The author's description of his search for the meaning of life is a happy one. It can be read with pleasure by old and young alike.

Jean-Jacques Sandras was born in 1947. He grew up in South Africa. He began to travel widely at the age of 19 and has lived on several continents. He draws upon his experiences in foreign lands when describing the why and wherefore of our passage on this earth.

CONRAD IN THE MAKING

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

BOOKS IN ENGLISH:

The Lord Magicians, Solkeo publisher, 2015, is a philosophical trilogy on mysticism written as a fantasy tale with the background of France in the Middle Ages.

volume 1: *The Knight of the Flower*,

volume 2: *The Lady of Noble Love*,

volume 3: *The Knight of the Boar*,

Conrad & Alice

Conrad, an elderly South African pensioner, and Alice, a young French psychologist, work together as crime investigators.

1 *The mad murder*, Yvelinédition, 2017.

2 *The anti-speciesism murder*, Yvelinédition, 2017.

The Magic Flute, Yvelinédition, 2017, is a fairy tale written in 1985 for my daughter, Fleur, when she was 9 years old and can be considered as a preliminary exercise a year before the fantasy tale, 'The Knight of the Flower' written in 1986 and published in French under the title 'le Chevalier à la Fleur' in 2001.

BOOKS IN FRENCH:

Le Chevalier à la Fleur, éditions Déjà, 2001.

Roman philosophique et mystique écrit à la manière d'un conte fantastique sur fond de Moyen-Âge en France.

Les Seigneurs Magiciens, éditions Clair de terre, 2005.

Bande dessinée inspirée du roman *Le Chevalier à la Fleur*.

Guy Marais, détective privé

Les mésaventures comiques d'un détective privé sud-africain à Paris.

1 *Les clients mortels*, Yvelinédition, 2010.

2 *L'or de la mort*, Yvelinédition, 2010.

3 *Association mortelle de malfaiteurs*, Yvelinédition, 2011.

4 *Crime fatal en bande désorganisée*, Yvelinédition, 2011.

5 *Homicide volontaire en flagrant délire*, Yvelinédition, 2012.

6 *Non-assistance à personne enragée*, Yvelinédition, 2012.

7 *Entrave stupéfiante à la justice*, Yvelinédition, 2013.

8 *Erreur fatale sur la personne*, Yvelinédition, 2014.

9 *Mystère et cupidité au musée du Louvre*, Yvelinédition, 2015.

10 *La fin du 36, quai des Orfèvres*, Yvelinédition, 2016.

Bandes dessinées tirées des romans du même titre:

1 *L'Or de la mort*, Yvelinédition, 2015.

2 *Mystère et cupidité au musée du Louvre*, Yvelinédition, 2016.

NOTICE

This is a simplified biography of my earlier life.

To my parents.

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

The thing with biographies is that they must remain chronological. Otherwise they become difficult to follow. So let it be known that Conrad was born in 1947. His souvenirs of life began when he was a child in Johannesburg in the early 1950's. Born eighteen months after his parents' first child, a daughter, and eighteen months before their third one, a second son, our hero grew up in a typical white family of that time. His mother's origins went back as far as the early Dutch settlers of the seventeenth century while his father was of a more recent Continental European descent.

Conrad was sent to English schools and could therefore be considered as a product of the British Empire. As a diligent colonial he learnt how to make a shilling of 12 pennies, and a pound from 20 shillings. There were 8 pints to a gallon, 16 ounces to a pound, 2000 or 2240 pounds to a ton depending on whether it was short or long, 12 inches to a foot, 3 feet to a yard and 1760

yards to a mile. The word « pounds » is used twice on purpose as it denotes either money or weight according to circumstances. These measurements might sound preposterous to the metric maniac, yet they didn't prevent the valiant English from defeating such worthy enemies as the Spanish and the French, on different occasions it is true as it's better to divide in order to conquer, resulting in the creation of the greatest empire in modern history. In all fairness to Lord Nelson it must be said that he beat the combined fleets of France and Spain at Trafalgar. He got himself killed in the affair; but then that's war!

Getting back to Conrad it can be said that he was fortunate from birth. He was white (which was preferable in that lovely land of sunshine at the time) and had inherited enough intelligence, in spite of what one of his teachers once told him, to get through school with more than enough ease. He often competed for first place in his class. The aforementioned teacher was more annoyed than serious when he told Conrad that the school motto "thorough" suited him very well, for he was a thorough idiot. Sometimes Conrad did insist even when he was wrong. This stubbornness, his grandmother would say, he got from his father. His father knew how to handle his children. For example, when the two boys were playing soccer in the street and their big sister came to tell them that it was time to come home to eat they would often reply "in a minute" and would have to be reminded several minutes later. But when she said "if you don't come now, Dad will come to fetch you," they invariably went home immediately.

Once, when Conrad was about ten years old his father upon returning from work called him to repeat what his

mother had said about his being disobedient to her earlier on in the day. “Yes, but...,” began Conrad wishing to justify his bad behaviour, but was cut short by his father who exploded: “and what’s more, you call your mother a liar!” That meant double punishment. After that experience Conrad’s mother could have told her husband that their first son had shot the moon out of the sky and the young lad would not have dared to protest. This lesson served him well on many occasions later on in life: especially during his military service. Whether you are right or wrong, Conrad had learnt, there are times when it is wiser to accept accusations with resignation. Of course, his mother had been perfectly right in her accusations. Seldom did she report her sons to their father, but being too kind-hearted she lacked authority and used her husband as her trump card.

Another important lesson in life that Conrad learnt as a youngster was when he insulted the maid by making derogatory references to her ethnic origins. She reported the matter to the Madam who relayed it to the Master for the matter was grave. Conrad’s father gave him one of the soundest hidings he had ever had and then made him apologise to the maid. Since then Conrad had always been careful not to insult people even though they may insult him. Now he knew, whether you are young or old, rich or poor, man or woman, black or white, as a human being you are worthy of respect.

Theirs was a typical white South African city household. The mother was a housewife and the father the only breadwinner. Like that Conrad had clear models of what a father and a mother should be. These models have since greatly altered in the Western World. When

the children got up at seven in the morning their father had already left for work. He was a sound engineer in a record manufacturing factory. Thus, in the days when most people didn't have many records Conrad's family had more than a hundred; mostly of classical music. The father was only seen in the evenings and on week-ends, whereas the mother was always present. No matter what time of night or day it was, the children could always run to mother. The boys didn't make a habit of it, but it was reassuring. Then there was the black maid who lived on the grounds. She would only go to her house in the black area on week-ends which she would spend with her husband who worked elsewhere during the week. It was illegal for the black couple to spend the night together in Jo'burg as only the maid had a pass allowing her to sleep in a white area.

The summer holidays took place from mid December to mid January and Conrad's parents would send the two boys off to Cape Town to their mother's parents. These long holidays are amongst Conrad's happiest memories. How he loved to read the sign from the milk train (it was called such because it stopped everywhere on its route) telling them that Cape Town was 999 miles away as the train pulled out of Park Station in Johannesburg. The 36 hour rail ride was a holiday treat in itself. Then there was Oupa, mother's father, who would spoil the kids so much. Ouma, the grandmother, was more severe. They had cousins in the Cape and so summer holidays were a great family get together, save that more often than not Conrad's parents remained in Jo'burg. "Nice to get a rest from the kids," his father would say.

The family in the Cape spoke Afrikaans but conversed in English fluently and it was always they who made the effort to speak to Conrad and his brother in English. Had it not been for the Transvaal Education Department teaching Afrikaans in school Conrad might have never learnt his mother's language.

His mother made sure that the three children went to Sunday school. There Conrad discovered exciting tales of treachery and heroism. Especially in the Old Testament. And Cecil B de Mill's film "The Ten Commandments" came to the cinema at a time when Conrad was eager to take everything at face value and admire, as well as fear, the God who took sides when His creation was in fratricidal conflict. This was quite natural for him because his father was like God with a major difference. His father always punished whereas with God you still stood a chance if you were sincerely sorry.

It was common for the Afrikaners of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal to compare themselves with the Jews of the Old Testament. God's chosen people. When the French invaded Holland and captured its fleet trapped in the ice, the British had cause for alarm. The French naval victories, like Surcouf's capture of the HMS Kent in the Indian Ocean in 1800, made things worse, and in order to protect its maritime route to the Far East the British occupied the Cape. They returned it to the Dutch two years later in accordance with the treaty of Amiens, but re-occupied it definitely in 1805. It was impossible to live in peace with the French.

The people living in the Dutch colony refusing British domination set off northwards in a series of mass movements in the 1830's that was to be called the Great Trek.

Hence the word 'trek' in international English. Trek is Dutch and it literally means to pull. The Great Trek was a modern version of the Hebrews leaving Egypt for the Promised Land. It was a bit like going west in North America several decades later. And Joshua's winning the battle of Jericho was compared to a battle when several hundred Afrikaners defeated a Zulu army of several thousand. In order to be objective it should be known that the Afrikaners had prepared a laager protected by a wall of wagons linked to a donga (a ditch), on one side and a river on the other. Beneath the wagons thorn bushes were stacked in order to prevent the Zulus from creeping into the laager. The Whites had guns whereas the Zulus only had short stabbing spears. Each man had about six guns and while he fired his wife reloaded thereby allowing him to shoot rapidly. The Zulus were massacred at short range, never being able to get into close combat. Their blood flowing in the river as they were massacred trying to cross it gave the name of Blood River to this famous battle. Thousands of Zulus were killed whereas only three Afrikaners were injured. The Zulu power had been crushed and the Afrikaners were able to settle in their Promised Land. With such an outstanding and decisive victory the 16th of December 1838 became a national holy holiday.

In the months previous to this battle the Zulus had attacked white farmsteads and murdered men, women and children in an attempt to eradicate the White threat. Just before the battle Andries Pretorius, the pioneer leader, led a prayer meeting in which he asked God to let them know if this land was for them or not. Now the Afrikaners knew that this was their God given land

and that they had absolute authority over the defeated people. Other peoples, before and after, have drawn the same conclusion under similar circumstances. History is full of it.

Johannesburg is a strange city, as everybody knows. It had unusual beginnings and as to this day, while your devoted servant is putting fingers to the keyboard, the city has always lived up to its reputation of being wild and dangerous. It became the biggest city in the world not to be built on water. There is no sea, no lake and no river. "Only mad men could conceive such an abnormality," you might say, and if you did say so you would be perfectly right. The discovery of the yellow metal, that according to the black man, makes the white man go crazy, in that part of the desolate bushveld created such a gold rush that a city was established in 1886. Johannesburg has always had a high proportion of weird and wonderful inhabitants. In the late 1950's there still was a dairyman who had two shops next to each other. In the one there were only bottles of milk and the customers would go there first to deposit their empty bottles and take full ones before going into the next shop where they would order butter, cheese and eggs and tell the dairyman how many empty bottles they had deposited and how many full ones they had taken. Technical detail: there were two kinds of bottles, one pint and two pints. You could have gone into the first shop and help yourself and the owner would have been none the wiser. Nothing forced you to go into the second shop. And yet that's just what the customers did! From this you can see what a strange city Johannesburg was!

The closest thing that Conrad found to that was in Paris where people would order coffee at a table outside the café and leave money on the table when leaving. The customers pay without compunction and passersby don't steal the coins shining in the Parisian sun.

From an early age Conrad had shown a vivid interest in life. His personal reading began with stories for boys which the English are so good at writing. The adventures of Biggles as well as those of Worrels enthralled Conrad. Capt. W.E. Johns' descriptions of England were so clear, and some of them had so much in common with South Africa, like the school buildings, pupils' uniforms and teaching habits, that Conrad could easily identify himself with the heroes. And when the author took his English heroes about the world Conrad travelled with them with enthusiasm. Mark Twain opened the Far West with Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. His favourite story was "Jock of the Bushveld". It had taken place only a couple hundred miles east of Jo'burg and on his first trip to the Kruger National Park he was thrilled to visit places like Pilgrim's Rest where he could just imagine the legendary dog lying in the shade in one of the drowsy streets. Of course, the wild animals enchanted him tremendously and he chose the lion as his favourite animal all the while making large allowances for elephants. He discovered a strong attraction for African wildlife which never left him and almost each time he went back to the Transvaal from Western Europe where he had taken residence from 1974, he would go off into the Bushveld. Often alone, sometimes with friends and sometimes with family. He remained like a child who can never have too much dessert.

CHAPTER 1 CHILDHOOD

Besides being a profuse reader Conrad was an active athlete. He played soccer for the local club and rugby for his school. He also tried swimming for his school which he gave up after only a couple of competitions. Coming last regularly was discouraging. He was better at cross country running and best at chess. He became his school's chess captain. The weather was conducive to outdoor living and Conrad was a typical South African boy.

Conrad would sometimes spend time on farms belonging to friends. It was during these short stays that he learnt to love the wide open spaces. It was comforting to lay awake in the open bushveld with Nature enveloping you with the warm blanket that was the evening air. Camping was common. The cowboy films from America were readily imbibed, and Zane Grey was another one of Conrad's favourite authors.

When the Beatles hit the world scene Conrad was fifteen years of age. Being too young for Elvis Presley's time his youth was marked by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The South African youth of the time were of a mixed culture with North America and England slowly but surely eradicating the early Dutch influence.