Conrads Early Sea Fiction: The Novelist As Navigator

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JOSEPH CONRAD was a phenomenon. Born to Polish parents in 1857 in a part of the Russian empire that is now Ukraine, he was christened Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. The novelist was orphaned at 11, his parents having succumbed to illness after being exiled for revolutionary activity to the gates of Siberia. At 16 he ran away to sea. For nearly 20 years he worked as an ordinary seaman from Marseille where, suffering from debt and despair, he appears to have attempted suicide. Then, in 1894, with no command in view, Conrad abandoned the sea and published his first novel, Almayer’s Folly. The journey from native-born Pole to sailor to writer was complete.