Abstract – At the beginning of his apprenticeship, just after finishing *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad seems to have tried his hand at a completely new narrative genre. The fragment of a long-forgotten and unfinished novel, “The Sisters”, published only after his death, shows evident traces of a dual influence which presided over the composition, the choice of theme and language of a very curious and revealing experiment. The shadow of Lord Byron and the traces of his *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* are very evident in the choice of his autobiographic, wandering hero, but it is especially the influence of the narrative and stylistic pattern of Walter Pater’s imaginary portraits which gives shape and substance to the figure of Stephen and his quest for artistic identity. While Byron’s presence was soon to disappear, Pater’s influence seems to surface time and again on the Conradian text, shaping, quite unexpectedly but forcefully, the figure of Doña Rita in his last novel *The Arrow of Gold*.

**Keywords:** Byron, Pater, imaginary portraits, style, intertextuality