Abstract – “Anywhere out of the World”: this quotation from Hood’s poem (The Bridge of Sighs) via Baudelaire (and Poe) opens a winding hermeneutic itinerary questioning Conrad’s choice of English as his literary language. The clearly French echoes of literary debts and influences in Conrad’s writing fully involve the Décadence: Baudelaire’s Voyage in Les Fleurs du Mal, the so called Roman Célibataire (Gide, Dujardin, Poictevin, Paul Adam, Jean Lorraine, Barrès, all of them somehow under the spell of Tristan Corbière’s Le Poète Contumace), not to mention Flaubert, Maupassant, and De L’isle Adam’s Wagnerite Tragedy Axel clearly influencing Conrad’s Victory. Conrad’s French influences are the subject of important studies by Maisonnat, Leighton Pratt, Katharine Haynes Gatch, Kirschner, Hervouet, Disanto. The present essay is an attempt to cast new light on what we may define Conrad’s French influences, especially focusing on Victory as a sort of terminal masterpiece bringing into play, through Schopenhauer and negative thought, the very essence of the fin de siècle sensibility.

Keywords: France, Décadence, exoticism, escapism, nihilism