


## CONRAD ADAPTED

**Review of *Adaptacje biografii i twórczości Josepha Conrada w kulturze współczesnej* [Adaptations of Biography and Works of Joseph Conrad in Contemporary Culture] by Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2022, 361 pp.**

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Most Conrad scholars would agree that the writer's biography could lend itself easily to dramatisation in the form of an attractive screenplay. In her 2022 study, rather than focus solely on adaptations of Joseph Conrad's texts, Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech proposes that his biography has become a text of culture which may also be subject to adaptation and which sheds light on both Conrad's writing and the culture(s) from which it stems. Among adaptations analysed in this volume are graphic novels, comics, literary adaptations, theatrical and radio plays, and a film script. The author draws on a diversity of scholarly sources, beginning with Zdzisław Najder's work on Conrad's life, cultural background and heritage, both Western and Polish Adaptation and Translation studies (Roman Jakobson, Linda Hutcheon, John Ellis, Julie Sanders, Kamila Elliot, Marek Hendrykowski, Urszula Dąbska-Prokop, Wojciech Birek to name just a few), Conrad criticism and theoretical studies on graphic novels and comics. Rather than evaluate the issue of fidelity of the discussed adaptations, she underlines the importance of the cultural memory of a given literary (or cultural) text and pinpoints cases when authors of adaptations, instead of drawing on the original text, refer to its existing cultural memory in another text of culture (e.g. Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*). In order to highlight how the reworking of the original creates new meanings, Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech applies Marek Hendrykowski's nuanced terminology, including operations such as substitution, reduction, addition, amplification, inversion, transaccentuation (a shift in what is being highlighted) and compression. The volume consists of four chapters enriched by illustrations, an exhaustive bibliography and an index of names and subjects, and is supplemented by an appendix – an analysis of four most recent Polish translations of

*Heart of Darkness* (by Jędrzej Polak, Barbara Koc, Magda Heydel and Patrycja Jabłońska) with reference to theoretical and ideological aspects.

Part One includes analyses of visual adaptations: the graphic novels *Heart of Darkness* by Catherine Anyango and David Z. Mairowitz and *Kongo* by Tom Tirabosco and Christian Perrissin which use Conrad's biography in order to interpret the literary text; Peter Kuper's adaptation *Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* and *Au coeur des ténèbres* by Stephane Miquel and Loic Godart which focus mainly on the novella; and the Polish comic book *Niesamowite opowieści Josepha Conrada (The Amazing Tales of Joseph Conrad)* by Łukasz Godlewski and Maciej Jasiński which interweaves Conrad's biography with both his fiction and essays in a way that is designed to attract the young reader. Literary critics and readers alike will be interested to follow the author's convincing, insightful and exceptionally meticulous (occasionally to the point of overwhelming the reader) analyses of whether the figures of Conrad and Marlow are identified, which themes are highlighted, how the authors achieve and render the effect of epistemological uncertainty and general mistiness of human experience, the inconclusiveness, cyclicity and cognitive chaos that define the novella (including attempts to render instances of "delayed decoding" visually), or how colour symbolism is employed. Of great importance are also those parts of the analysis that demonstrate the ideological and historical perspective underlying the adaptations, for example the emphasis put on the hard work, suffering and death of the Congolese people, the historical and political context of the Free State of Congo, criticism of colonialism, the role of the natives in the plot of the story exhibited. In this aspect, Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech rightly places her discussion in the context of the work of Julie Sanders who claims that adaptations often offer an ideological commentary on the source text by adding hypothetical motivation or voicing silent and marginalized groups (*Adaptation and Appropriation*, London New York: Routledge, 2006). The question of Marlow's (and Conrad's) involvement in and responsibility for the atrocities in the Congo remains a bone of contention, which is demonstrated by the comparison of the diverse attitudes of the authors of the adaptations to this issue. The overview of the visual adaptations presented in this study demonstrates the continued presence of the figure and the works of Joseph Conrad in cultural memory and reflects the ideological developments that mark contemporary criticism and reception. An analysis of the Polish artist Tomasz Bohajedyn's poetic graphic book *Kongo* (2007) and his comics based on *Heart of Darkness* (a bonus in a 2016 edition of Conrad's novella by the Cztery Strony publishing house) would certainly complement this section.

Part Two deals with three diverse contemporary Polish literary adaptations of Conrad's texts by Jacek Dukaj, Jakub Małecki and Eustachy Ryłski. The Polish writer Jacek Dukaj has published two rewritings of *Heart of Darkness*, an alternative history science fiction novella set on another planet (*Serce mroku*, 1998) and a 2017 "transmutation" of Conrad's text which is meant to match the horizon of expectations of Polish readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the post-literary era – and whose aim is, according to the author, to allow the readers to "live into" Marlow's yarn (Dukaj claims his version is not a translation but a "transfusion" or "polonisation"). The figure of Joseph

Conrad and a reworking of his texts is employed in order to shape the world presented in Jakub Małecki's 2011 novel *Dżozef*. A box narrative demonstrating how reading and identifying with literary characters allows us to gain self-cognizance and consciously shape our future (possibly in an echo of Marlow's yarns), the novel manifests the motive power of literature. The last rewriting discussed in this chapter is Eustachy Rylski's 2005 novel *Warunek (Condition)* set in the Napoleonic era. Inspired by hauntology, Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech demonstrates how Conrad's short story "The Duel" may be treated as a "phantom text," or "revenant" that is echoed in Rylski's work. This analysis is particularly engaging for two reasons: firstly, only rarely has hauntology been applied in Conrad studies (cf. Roger Bowen, "Journey's End: Conrad as Revenant in Alex Garland's 'The Beach,' *Conradiana* 2007); and secondly, neither Rylski himself nor the Polish critics who have up to date analysed the novel have noted Conrad's influence. Interestingly enough, only a link with Ridley Scott's film *The Duellists*, a 1977 loose adaptation of the short story, has been pinpointed, and it is only among readers on book blogs that the charge of plagiarism has appeared, which, as Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech rightly observes, sheds light on the workings of popular culture, cultural memory and the reading market. In order to supplement this discussion of the diversity of ways in which Conrad provides inspiration for writers, it would also be illuminating to broaden the scope of the discussed literary adaptations by including texts which fictionalise Conrad's biography, like Ewa Kuryluk's *Century 21*, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Dream of the Celt*, W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, J. G. Vásquez's *The Secret History of Costa-guana*, to name just a few.

Part Three is devoted to theatrical and film adaptations of Conrad's life and oeuvre. Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech observes that while there have been numerous theatrical adaptations of Conrad's works (some of them prepared by the writer himself), a new trend has emerged recently, that is perceiving Conrad's biography as a text of culture and therefore a possible basis for a play script or screenplay, which demonstrates the marketability of Conrad's name in culture. Ingmar Villqist's play *Conrad* (first staged in 2017 in Katowice, Poland, to mark the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the writer's death) is set during Conrad's 1914 visit in Poland and emphasises the Polish dimension of his biography, as well as the continued relevance of his vision. The second play analysed is Tomasz Man's *Wyspiański/Conrad*. More poetic and oneiric than Villqist's, this play dramatises an imaginary meeting between the Polish modernist artist Stanisław Wyspiański and Joseph Conrad on board of a ship on its way to America and, according to Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, reveals the unrealised potential of Polish cultural heritage. The last adaptation discussed in this section is Harold Pinter's (never realised) film screenplay of *Victory* and its BBC Radio 4 version (prepared by Richard Eyre and broadcast twice: in 2015 and 2017). Topics characteristic for Pinter, such as anxiety, a sense of menace and cognitive uncertainty, as well as the dramatic potential of the novel are foregrounded. This section provides some in-depth analyses of the adaptation operations employed, but in general is intended to provide the reader with an overview of the diverse approaches to dramatising Conrad's life and oeuvre. Though most of the numerous film and theatre adap-

tations of Conrad's works have already been discussed by other scholars, this section would be more comprehensive if a wider variety of productions, especially the most contemporary ones, such as Peter Fudakowski's 2014 *Secret Sharer*, Julien Samani's 2016 *The Young One* (based on *Youth*) and Krystian Nehrebecki's 2007 theatre adaptation of *Lord Jim*, were juxtaposed.

The conclusion provides a new perspective on the presence of the figure of Conrad in contemporary Polish culture in the context of branding. While the idea of building a writer's personal and recognizable "brand" has already been introduced by C.C. Lury, it is typically applied to living authors. Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech's discussion of the Conrad "brand" in the context of cultural processes, advertising, the activity of official institutions (even issuing stamps and coins with the image of Conrad), events, festivals, exhibitions constitutes a novelty. She observes that while in Western Europe Conrad's biography and oeuvre remain popular due to its colonial past, in Poland it is *Lord Jim* (rather than *Heart of Darkness*) that has been dubbed a milestone in Polish consciousness. However, while Conrad used to be perceived as master and mentor, due to social changes, it is now the broader international, rather than moral, aspect of Conrad's writing that is being highlighted in contemporary Poland (hence an increasing interest in *Heart of Darkness*). Conrad's name has now come to stand as a symbol of international literary communication (as is the case in the annual Conrad Festival in Kraków, a literary event that only rarely features any allusions to the writer's oeuvre or life). Now that both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* have been removed from set book lists in Polish schools, it is clear that Conrad is recognizable but not widely read. Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech claims that only by basing on the moral heritage of Conrad's vision, that is the values of fidelity, loyalty and responsibility, may creating a long-lasting Conrad "brand" be feasible. Her new study will undeniably contribute to highlighting this dimension of Joseph Conrad's presence in contemporary Polish culture.