


Review of *Tajemni współnicy: czytelnik, widz i tłumacz. Opowiadania Josepha Conrada w nowych interpretacjach* [Secret Sharers: a Reader, a Viewer and a Translator. Joseph Conrad's Short Stories in New Interpretations]. Edited by Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech and Jacek Mydla. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2018, 255 pp.

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The volume *Tajemni współnicy: czytelnik, widz i tłumacz. Opowiadania Josepha Conrada w nowych interpretacjach* [Secret Sharers: a Reader, a Viewer and a Translator. Joseph Conrad's Short Stories in New Interpretations], edited by Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech and Jacek Mydla and published in Katowice by Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego in 2018 is a collection of 14 essays and 1 record of a conversation devoted to Joseph Conrad's short fiction.

As the volume's editors write in the introduction, it was only in the 90-ies of the 20 century that this part of Conrad's oeuvre, earlier rather neglected in comparison with his longer works, came under close critical scrutiny. This can be confirmed by the number of critical comments, including monographs, that were published at that time. The interest in Conrad's short fiction has continued to the present day. *Tajemni współnicy: czytelnik, widz i tłumacz*, which offers new interpretative possibilities of Conrad's shorter works, might be perceived as one of its manifestations.

The collection opens with Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech's analysis of what she terms the "spectral presence" of Joseph Conrad's short story *The Duel* in the novel *Warunek* [The Condition] written by Eustachy Rylski. Her point of departure is the methodology of hauntology. She begins with elucidating the concept of hauntology as proposed by Jacques Derrida. Next she points to its being highly relevant for the discussion of literary texts. Only then does she consider Rylski's *Warunek* as "tacitly revisited" by Conrad's *The Duel*. In her analysis Adamowicz-Pośpiech focuses on three aspects of these works: their setting, plot and protagonists.

Ewa Borkowska devotes her essay to Conrad's *Il Conde*. She discusses the text, which the author himself termed "pathetic," as a prose elegy written on the occasion of the titular Count's possibly last visit to Naples. From Borkowska's perspective, his journey home may be perceived as a metaphor for his bidding farewell to life. The motto that Conrad chose for the story – *Vedi Napoli e poi muori* – serves to rein-

force this idea. So does the impression of a funeral procession that the narrator gets while looking at the train on which the Count leaves Naples. Borkowska in her study draws attention to the Count's cultural background – that of an elderly member of Polish nobility (*szlachta*) – as opposed to that of a young member of the *Camorra* who attacks him.

Grażyna Maria Teresa Branny juxtaposes Conrad's short story *Freya of the Seven Isles* and Leszek Prorok's play *Freya – zimna bogini miłości* [Freya – the Cold Goddess of Love]. Evoking the mythological motif of the Nordic goddess of love, fertility, death, war and revenge, both texts point to Freya being a highly ambiguous deity. As Branny argues, Prorok in his play about the Nazi *Lebensborn* programme deliberately uses other Conradian motifs, such as that of elopement, Wagnerian music and the colonial Seven Isles. While doing so, he “exposes the full implications” of Conrad's short story, which she considers to be “hitherto underrated.” On the whole, the juxtaposition of the two texts enables the reader to arrive at “novel conclusions” as to, on the one hand, the character of the “illness” of Freya in the play by Prorok, and on the other, the role of colonial ideology in the story by Conrad. In her essay, Branny also enters into a polemic with Sylvère Monod's critique of *Freya of the Seven Isles* and evoking William Faulkner's denegative style, she proposes that Conrad, not Faulkner, is the “the real precursor” of “denegative stylistics.”

Justyna Jajszczok discusses Conrad's *The Inn of the Two Witches* as a detective story of a locked-room variety. In her opinion, “the actual crime story is obscured by gothic clichés.” She shows how, due to Conrad employing the unreliable narrator and his introducing fantastic and grotesque characters, as well as the atmosphere of horror into his story, the reader's attention is “diverted away from the mystery itself and [gets] focused on the supernatural and the inexplicable.” Therefore her reading of *The Inn* is not that of “just a story within a story” – she views it primarily as “a locked-room mystery hidden inside a gothic story.”

Anne Keithline presents in her essay critical opinions concerning the character of Felicia Moorsom in *The Planter of Malata*. In her view, it is Joel R. Kehler who comes closest to identifying the main “fascination” of Conrad's text, which is the impossibility of acquiring reliable information about its characters, Felicia Moorsom included. Keithline notes that Kehler's comments are of a philosophical nature, whereas an insight into the sheer “textual mechanics” alone suffices to state that the characterizations throughout *The Planter* are not to be trusted. She thoroughly examines the means by which they operate, thus rendering the information about Felicia Moorsom unreliable.

Sławomir Konkol, on the other hand, juxtaposes Conrad's *Youth* and Graham Swift's *Mothering Sunday*. In Konkol's opinion, the Swift novel might, in many aspects, be viewed as “a continuation of sorts and, at the same time, a counterpoint to the themes and writing methods employed by Conrad in *Youth*.” This can also be said of the ideas that Conrad communicates by these means. Konkol compares the narration in the two works and observes that the character of Jane in Swift's novel, who also acts as the narrator of her own story and seems to be, at the same, “the author and the material” is “as elusive as Marlow.” Jane, Konkol writes, is “inspired by the ex-

ample of Conrad,” whom she perceives to be, in Paul Wake’s wording, “a kind of a secret agent sneaking between worlds.”

Jacek Mydla focuses on Conrad’s *The Tale*. He analyses in depth the narrative structure of Conrad’s text posing the question as to whether *The Tale* may indeed be viewed as but “a radical expression” of skepticism, which, according to Mark A. Wollager, permeates Conrad’s oeuvre, or whether there are any suggestions to be found in the text which would “allow the characters and the readers alike to abandon skepticism, an attitude which seems to be the conclusion of the story.”

Maciej Nowak is one of the two authors of essays collected in the volume who devote their articles to *Karain: A Memory*. He considers Conrad’s work in the context of modernist and romantic aesthetics. Nowak observes that it was not Conrad’s intention “to preach [in his fiction] values or morals.” Rather he constructed his fictional worlds in such a way, so as to cater for the needs and expectations of his potential readership, English readers in particular. At the same time, the modernist aesthetics of his work makes it possible for him to attract a highly diversified groups of readers, some of whom may almost effortlessly attribute to *Karain* “various moral senses.” Among Conrad’s reading public there are also those, who “might just as well enjoy the sheer mysteriousness of the thing.”

Like Jacek Mydla, Marek Pacukiewicz chose for his analysis Conrad’s *The Tale*. In Pacukiewicz’s view, this text is far from being “just a closed system of ‘a story-within-a story.’” *The Tale* shows, argues Pacukiewicz, that behind every story there is a man and the context surrounding him, which forms the basis for the reader’s understanding. Through recourse to a mythical formula and highlighting the opposition night – fog, Conrad crosses the boundaries of simple literary convention and makes his readers see *The Tale* in a wider context. According to Pacukiewicz, the actual theme of the story is “silence in the face of the overwhelming tragedy of World War I.” Pacukiewicz also draws the reader’s attention to other writings of Conrad, in which, even if indirectly, he reacts to the war.

Karol Samsel discusses Conrad’s unfinished text *The Sisters* in the context of Henry James’s oeuvre. Unlike Zdzisław Najder, who interprets *The Sisters* primarily in relation to the French school of realistic fiction, Gustave Flaubert in particular, Samsel attempts to show the influence of James’s *Roderick Hudson*. In Samsel’s view, *The Sisters* has been underrated. He considers it to be “a fragment of a fresco which contains suggestions of an ambitious yet never-realised project of a greater narrative.” This narrative was very likely to show national and cultural, as well as sexual and artistic “clashes of worlds and experiences” of three kinds: Slavic, Ukrainian and Spanish.

Joanna Skolik compares Conrad’s *The Secret Sharer* and its 2014 film adaptation directed by Peter Fudakowski. The release of the film coincided with the 40th Annual International Conference of The Joseph Society (UK) held the same year in Canterbury – there was a special screening of the film version of *The Secret Sharer* organized for its participants, which was followed by a discussion with the director. Skolik shows that what unites Fudakowski and Conrad is their hybrid Polish/English identity. In her analysis of the film, she focuses on Fudakowski’s departures from the

original text of the story. And there are many of them, perhaps the most noticeable being that of Fudakowski's changing the time when the action takes place, and the sex of the sharer in question. Skolik concludes that these and other differences notwithstanding, Fudakowski's film is "truly Conradian" for it grows out of Conrad's spirit, his sensitivity.

Reflecting on complex relations between the characters of Conrad's story *Because of the Dollars*, Anna Szczepan-Wojnarska focuses on two issues: firstly, the problem of wealth and the role of money, and secondly, the social/cultural standing of women. As to the issue of wealth, money is not so much good in its own way; in the context of the story it is rather a certain task, it opens up the possibility of having a choice, of controlling one's life in human relations. In the final result, "money is but money, what is of more importance is agreements between people." As for the women, Szczepan-Wojnarska defends Conrad against accusations of misogyny and emphasizes his realism in presenting women characters as victims of the patriarchal order.

Daniel Vogel considers the presence of the Other in Conrad's stories *Karain: A Memory* and *An Outpost of Progress*. The article opens with a brief discussion of the concept of the Other. Vogel next analyses what he terms the "relocation" of the Other in *Karain: A Memory*. Vogel shows how the eponymous hero "occupies both the position of I and the Other, depending on a situation and the place where he currently is." In *An Outpost of Progress*, Vogel writes, Conrad highlights a sharp contrast between representatives of Western civilization and the indigenous inhabitants of the African continent. In Vogel's view, in this story Conrad does little to make his readers understand the natives. Nevertheless, he shows how complex the relations between the white colonizers and the natives are. He also has recourse to irony to point to the absurdity of the preconceptions some Europeans have about the civilizing mission of the white man.

Stefan Zabierowski analyses Conrad's *Youth*. The story used to be interpreted primarily as a work of an autobiographical character. Later biographers, such as Zdzisław Najder, were rather more cautious as to viewing *Youth* as a reflection of a real life situation. Zabierowski next reminds readers this is the first time that Marlow appears in Conrad's fiction. Zabierowski focuses on this narrative construct noting that whereas Western critics attributed its appearance to the influence of Laurence Stern and his *Sentimental Journey*, as well as Henry James's narrative techniques (point of view), Polish Conradians pointed to its descending from the genre of the Polish oral tale *gawęda* (yarn). In Zabierowski's view, the young Marlow's perilous journey on the *Judea*, which might be regarded as unnecessarily exposing himself to danger, is actually a victory. After all, even if in material terms there can be no question of success, Marlow has managed to realize the dream of his youth.

The volume *Tajemni współnicy: czytelnik, widz i tłumacz* closes, in its critical material section, with a record of a conversation between Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech and Magda Heydel concerning the latest translations into Polish of Conrad's short stories. Despite his status as a "classic," Heydel finds Conrad to be "so much alive and surprising." Heydel then refers to her experience of translating Conrad, disclosing some of the challenges that Conrad's prose poses in translation.

Asked by Adamowicz-Pośpiech about her plans for the future, Heydel hints at one of Conrad's longer works.

The final part of the volume gives readers rapid access to its critical content via 4 indexes: that of names, of literary works, of fictional characters and, eventually, that of collections of Conrad's short stories. The indexes are followed by notes on the authors.