


## JOSEPH CONRAD IN THE EYES OF KAZIMIERZ WIERZYŃSKI: *FEARLESS OF THE BOUNDLESS AND FAMILIAR WITH THE INFINITE*

**Jolanta Dudek**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7009-5135>

(Jagiellonian University, Poland)

**Abstract:** Kazimierz Wierzyński (1894-1969) is now considered to be one of the greatest modern Polish poets. He was born in Drohobycz (which is now in western Ukraine) and studied literature and philosophy in Cracow and Vienna. During the interwar years he lived in Warsaw, after which for several years (1939-1941) he lived as a wartime refugee before spending more than twenty years in the United States. An émigré for the rest of his life, he finally settled in London, where he died in 1969. Wierzyński's poetry – like the works of Joseph Conrad – exhibits a particular sensibility to nature (perceived as a living organism) and the outside world, which is full of extraordinary places, objects, people and phenomena that invite us to reflect on the deeper meaning of our existence as human beings. Both writers share a stoic response to adversity and a fidelity to conscience and to the heritage of European culture.

In his 1924 sketch entitled “Conrad’s Great Silence,” Wierzyński saw Conrad above all as a writer who yearns for the infinite, whose “maritime reflection is reproduced in his work.” Twelve years later, in a narrative poem entitled *Lord Jim* (forming part of his 1936 collection entitled *Kurhany*), Wierzyński brought the eponymous character of Conrad’s novel into the pantheon of the Polish collective imagination. The fate of Lord Jim, who is tormented by nostalgia for his native England (to which he cannot return) would seem to foreshadow that of the émigré poet whom Wierzyński himself was soon to become.

In the titular poem of Wierzyński’s wartime collection *Róża wiatrów* (*The Wind Rose* – 1942), Conrad appears as a “role model” for all Polish wartime refugees and émigrés, who, like castaways, search for their own guiding light “in the Conradian sky” – a light that could help them find a safe haven where they could live and work in their own artistic realm without the need to care about literary fashions. This poem has been translated into English (under the title *The Compass Rose*) by Mary Phelps (Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, New York: Voyages Press, 1959). In the opinion of the author of the present article, this translation fails to correctly convey certain key images and allusions which enrich the meaning of the poem and which connect it with the poet’s own personal situation as an émigré writer.

**Keywords:** Joseph Conrad, Kazimierz Wierzyński, Adam Mickiewicz, *Sonety krymskie*, *Crimean Sonnets*, *Lord Jim*, *Róża wiatrów*, *Compa Ros*

## 1

Kazimierz Wierzyński was born on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1894 in Drohobycz in the western Ukraine, i.e. in lands which used to form part of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> After “the crime of partition,”<sup>3</sup> that part of the Ukraine where Wierzyński was born was incorporated into Austro-Hungary, while the central and northern regions – including the town of Berdyczów, where Joseph Conrad was born – was incorporated into Russia. Wierzyński’s father worked as a station master (successively at several railway stations) in the western Ukraine<sup>4</sup> and came from a family of German-speaking Austrian settlers, while his mother came from a Polish noble family. The future poet took his school-leaving exams in 1912 at the ‘classics’ grammar school in Stryj and spent the following two years studying literature and philosophy – first in Cracow and then in Vienna. One of his schoolmates in Stryj was Wilam Horzyca, who later became a literary (and theatre) critic. It was he who translated Conrad’s *The Duel* into Polish. During the First World War, Wierzyński – then an officer in the Austrian army – was taken prisoner by the Russians, but after two years managed to escape and eventually found his way to Warsaw, which was then the capital of the newly restored Republic of Poland. Having settled in Warsaw, in 1919 he published his first collection of poems entitled *Wiosna i wino* [Spring and Wine], which made his reputation as being one of Poland’s best-known and most highly regarded young poets. In 1920 he took part in the Polish-Soviet War, working as a news editor behind Polish lines. On the occasion of the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam he was awarded a gold medal for his collection of poems entitled *Laur olimpijski* (1927),<sup>5</sup> which was devoted to sports victories won by dint of an effort of will and imagination that surmounted physical limitations. During the interwar years, Wierzyński did a lot of travelling in Europe and the United States, crossing the Atlantic several times. In 1938 he became a member of the Polish Academy of Literature. After the Soviet Russian invasion of Poland on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1939, he and his wife Halina crossed the Polish-Romanian border and made their way to Paris

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stefan Zabierowski, *Dziedzictwo Conrada w literaturze polskiej XX wieku* (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Although it was known as the Commonwealth of Two Nations (*Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*), in effect it was – from today’s perspective – a union of four nations: Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia and the Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Joseph Conrad, ‘Zbrodnia rozbiorów’ [*The Crime of Partition*, 1919], in Joseph Conrad, *Szkice polityczne, Dzieła*, vol. 28, ed. Zdzisław Najder (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1996), pp. 45-63.

<sup>4</sup> Then known as (Austrian) Galicia.

<sup>5</sup> *Laur olimpijski* was translated into many languages, including English. Cf. Kazimierz Wierzyński, *The Olympic Laurel*, in Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, eds. Clark Mills and Ludwik Krżyżanowski (New York: Voyages Press 1959), pp. 28-38.

via Yugoslavia and Italy. After the fall of France in 1940 they eventually reached New York (via Portugal and Brazil) in June 1941. Wierzyński's wartime poems accompanied the soldiers of the Polish Army who fought alongside their western allies on the fronts of the Second World War. After the war, Wierzyński and his wife Halina chose to remain in the West as émigrés rather than live under Soviet-occupied Poland. They lived in the United States for over twenty years before moving first to Rome and then to London, where Wierzyński died on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1969 while he was preparing what was to be his last collection of poems (entitled *Sen mara*) for publication. Throughout his life as an émigré he took an active part in the cultural and political life of his native land through correspondence with friends, articles and programmes broadcast by Radio Free Europe. Kazimierz Wierzyński is now considered to be one of Poland's greatest poets.

The recognizable characteristics of Wierzyński's poetry – and those which have made it stand the test of time – are its rich lyrical range, its sensibility to the outside world (which abounds in extraordinary places, people, objects and phenomena), a Stoic attitude tinged with humour and irony (which Wierzyński shares with Joseph Conrad) and its fidelity to the moral heritage of European civilization.

In his article entitled "Wielka cisza Conrada" ("Conrad's Great Silence") published in the 33<sup>rd</sup> issue of the *Wiadomości Literackie* magazine of 17<sup>th</sup> August 1924 (which was devoted to the memory of Joseph Conrad, who had died a fortnight earlier) Wierzyński sketched a concise intuitive portrait of Conrad that would seem to have been based on the novelist's family and seafaring reminiscences.<sup>6</sup> It begins with a characteristic statement:

Jeżeli jest jakaś najcięższa samotność na tym globie, to nie jest nią opuszczenie ani klęska, lecz wielka samotność własnej prawdy, z którą zostaje się zawsze samemu, chociaż przeznacza się ją zawsze dla wszystkich.<sup>7</sup>

(If there is something on this earth that could be called the worst kind of loneliness, it is neither solitude nor disaster, but rather that great loneliness stemming from one's own awareness of the truth, with which one is always left to contend quite alone, even though it is always intended to be shared by everybody.)

Wierzyński equates the truth that pervades Conrad's inner world with wisdom, the source of which is one's conscience,<sup>8</sup> while its "most perfect expression" is "that purest language of conscience which is an astounding calmness."<sup>9</sup> It constitutes the essence of that particular metaphysical (aesthetic) quality<sup>10</sup> which Wierzyński meta-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Joseph Conrad, "A Familiar Preface," in Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, eds. Zdzisław Najder and J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 18, lines 16-20.

<sup>7</sup> Kazimierz Wierzyński, "Wielka cisza Conrada," *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 33 (17 August 1924), p. 3. Cf. Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Szkice i portrety literackie*, zebrał i posłowiem opatrzył Paweł Kądziela (Warszawa: Biblioteka „Więzi,” 1990), p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 16, lines 15-20.

<sup>9</sup> Wierzyński, *Szkice i portrety literackie*, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> "There are simple or 'derived' qualities (essences) as, for example, the sublime, the tragic, the dreadful, the shocking, the inexplicable, the demonic, the holy, the sinful, the sorrowful, the indescribable

phorically calls “Conrad’s sweet, eternal silence” (*słodka, wieczna cisza Conradowska*) and which is understood as being the equivalent of the experience of vast expanses and eternal peace that pervades Conrad’s world and entire literary output:

Świat był dlań egzotyczny, gdy dzieckiem kładł palec w środek Afryki i tęsknił, by tam być – gdy jednak po latach odpływał na swym statku handlowym z Cieśniny Torresa, uwoził w sercu niezwykle i bezcenny ładunek: ciszę słodką świata, wieczną ciszę Conradowską. Teraz odpłynął w ostatnią podróż, po ostatnią nieodgadłą prawdę, z którą znów zostanie sam, chociaż przeznaczona jest dla wszystkich. Spojrzy w nią przyjaźnie i po koleżeńsku, nieulekły wobec bezmiaru i obyty z nieskończonością, której morskie odbicie powtórzył w swym dziele i po wieki w nim na spoczynek ułożył.

(When, as a little boy, he put his finger in the middle of Africa and yearned to be there, he saw the world as something exotic. However, when – years later – he sailed through the Torres Strait on his merchant ship, he carried in his heart a cargo that was as priceless as it was unusual: the sweet silence of the world – Conrad’s eternal silence. Now he has sailed off on his last voyage, in search of the last unfathomable truth, with which – although it is destined for all – he will again be quite alone. He will contemplate it as a good friend who is fearless of the boundless and who is familiar with the infinite, the maritime reflexion of which he has reproduced in his works, where it has been laid to rest for centuries to come.)

The title of Wierzyński’s sketch – “Wielka cisza Conrada” (“Conrad’s Great Silence”) – would seem to allude to Adam Mickiewicz’s sonnet entitled “Cisza morska”<sup>11</sup> (“The Calm of the Sea”), the second sonnet of the *Sonetny krymskie* (*The Crimean Sonnets*)<sup>12</sup> and the first in a sequence of four maritime sonnets,<sup>13</sup> the last of which contains a moving description of a storm at sea. This sequence is preceded by the first sonnet of the cycle – “Stepy akermzańskie” (“The Ackerman Steppe”) – in which the sight of the endless Black Sea steppe covered with “a flood of flowers and meadows” rippling in the wind remind a lone wayfarer (the poet’s mouthpiece) of a vast ocean. Wierzyński also alludes to the symbolic motif of the calm that precedes a storm on land and sea. This is a recurring motif in Conrad’s works, starting with the scene in the opening chapter of *Almayer’s Folly*, in which Nina Almayer – standing in the porch of her parents’ home “in the oppressive calm of the tropical night”<sup>14</sup> – hears the ominous rumbling of an approaching storm – a storm which mirrors the one which is

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brightness of good fortune, as well as the grotesque, the charming, the light, the peaceful, etc. These qualities are not ‘properties’ of *objects* in the usual sense of the term, nor are they, in general, ‘features’ of some psychic state, but instead they are usually revealed, in complex and often very disparate *situations* or *events*, as an atmosphere which, hovering over the men and the things contained in these situations, penetrates and illumines everything with its light.” Cf. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation of the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and Theory of Language*, trans. and Introduction by George Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1973), § 48, pp. 290-291.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, “Cisza morska (“The Calm of the Sea”), in Adam Mickiewicz, *Wiersze* (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1976) p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mickiewicz, “Cisza morska,” pp. 239-258. *Sonetny krymskie* (*The Crimean Sonnets*) are a series of 18 poems published in 1826. They tell about the young (exiled) Mickiewicz’s journey through the Crimea.

<sup>13</sup> The maritime sequence comprises four poems: “Stepy akermzańskie (“The Ackermann Steppe”), “Cisza morska (“The Calm of the Sea”), “Żegluga (“Sailing”) and “Burza (“The Storm”).

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), p. 12.

gathering in her own heart and which will soon ruin her father's life. In *The Mirror of the Sea* we find a symbolic ring of sailing ships which have been immobilized by a calm at sea:

[...] a hundred sail becalmed, as if within a magic ring, not very far from the Azores – ships more or less tall. There were hardly two of them heading exactly the same way, as if each had meditated breaking out of the enchanted circle at the different point of the compass. But the spell of the calm is a strong magic.<sup>15</sup>

This magic ring of calm can be broken by a friendly breeze (“the spell of the fair wind”)<sup>16</sup> which will help the sailors achieve their goal. The ships can also be dispersed in a disorderly manner by a violent gale, this being the “wild and exulting voice of the world's soul.”<sup>17</sup> The concept of the soul of the world (*anima mundi*) to which Conrad here refers is to be found in Plato's dialogue entitled *Timaios* and is present in both ancient and Romantic philosophy. It is part of an organic view of the physical world, which Greek philosophers imagined to be a living whole that was endowed with an emotional as well as a rational soul. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, the emotional soul of the world speaks the language of the winds which rule the seas, whereas it is the rational soul of the world – the calm voice of the author's conscience – that speaks in the preface to *A Personal Record*, where Conrad tells us that his “[...] young days [...] have been rather familiar with long silences.”<sup>18</sup> In August 1924, in the eyes of the future creator of a vision of eternity presented as “Piąta pora roku” (“The Fifth Season”),<sup>19</sup> Conrad is therefore an artist whose works emanate “a great silence” – an inner calmness which accompanies his lonely and fearless quest for the truth of existence: a quest that can be equated with a yearning for the infinite, whose “maritime reflection is reproduced in his work.” In Wierzyński's postwar poetry, however, it is not the vast expanses of the oceans that are the image of the infinite, but the “earth of living things” (*roślinna ziemia*) – the “tissue of our existence” (*tkanka naszego istnienia*)<sup>20</sup> which renews itself in accordance with the rhythm of the seasons of the year, while the act of creation is comparable to the act of creating the world, as in the poem entitled *Michael Angelo*:

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, in Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea & A Personal Record*, ed. and Introduction by Zdzisław Najder, ch. X: “Cobwebs and Grossamer” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 17, lines 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> Kazimierz Wierzyński, “The Fifth Season,” trans. Clark Mills, in Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, pp. 42-45. Cf. Kazimierz Wierzyński, “The Fifth Season,” trans. Andrzej Busza and Bogdan Czajkowski, in *Gathering Time. Five Modern Polish Elegies: Iwaszkiewicz, Wierzyński, Jastrun, Miłosz, Białoszewski*, trans. and Introduction by Andrzej Busza and Bogdan Czajkowski Mission, B.C.: Barbarian Press, 1983), pp. 23-27. In “Piąta pora roku” (“The Fifth Season”) Wierzyński presents a comprehensive, organic vision of the physical and spiritual world (eternity). Cf. Jolanta Dudek, “Wierzyński's ‘Piąta pora roku’: An Analysis,” *Antemurale XXVI* (1982-1983), pp. 69-146.

<sup>20</sup> Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Tissue of Earth*, trans. Kenneth Pitchford, in Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, pp. 25-26.

When Europe shuddered in her soul,  
 Michael Angelo, under the dome  
 Painted chapel, fresco and wall,  
 On a mason's cradle swung  
 Nearer to God in Rome.

He gazed down at the brawling crowd  
 And at the bloody wars unfurled,  
 And from above spoke loud:  
 "Peace, men!  
 Or I'll throw down my brush, and then  
 Halt the Creation of the World."<sup>21</sup>

Wierzyński's wartime poetry is a touching chronicle of collective misfortunes and the will to fight to the death for the common values of European civilization, given that "we can only live with what we die for" (*tym się tylko żyje za co się umiera*). In these poems, Wierzyński defends the individual and collective human right to freedom, dignity, truth and justice, while he condemns genocide, falsehood, hatred, bestial violence towards the vanquished and betrayal of one's allies. These poems clearly exhibit the "stereotype of Polish political sensibility"<sup>22</sup> that was popularized by Mickiewicz and that is also present in Conrad's works. This stereotype had its roots in the centuries-old collective historical experience of having to repeatedly take up arms against inhuman barbarity in order to defend the fundamental values and achievements of European civilization. It is referred to in a poem entitled "The Polish Bible" ("Biblia polska") in the collection *Krzyże i miecze* (*Crosses and Swords* – 1946 – dedicated to Józef Czapski) and earlier in the hymn "Święty Boże" and the choral poem "Via Appia" in the collection *Ziemia-wilczyca* (*Earth-She wolf*, 1941).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Michael Angelo*, 1951, trans. George Reavey, in Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Czesław Miłosz, „Stereotyp u Conrada,” in: *Conrad żywy*, ed. Wit Tarnawski (London: B. Świdorski, 1957), pp. 92-99. Cf. Jolanta Dudek, "Czesław Miłosz on Conrads's Polish Stereotypes," *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)* 9 (2014), pp. 109-117.

<sup>23</sup> Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Poezje zebrane*, vol. 1 (Białystok: Łuk, 1994), pp. 352-353:

VIA APPIA  
 Zapalił się świat  
 Bijemy się o cały świat,  
 Biją się polskie pułki,  
 O Nike Samotracką,  
 O stare ateńskie zaułki,  
 O tysiące minionych lat.  
 [...]  
 Ateny Peryklesa zbiegły się na rynku  
 I przecierają oczy,  
 Ze snu i legend zbudzone:  
 Idzie piechota w ordynku,  
 Bateria się toczy,  
 Dudnią furgony.

Just before the outbreak of World War II, Wierzyński's poetry exhibited a myth-making trend, as had that of W. B. Yeats.<sup>24</sup> This helped him take a critical look at the present state of the country and put some order in the nation's collective imagination in the face of impending doom. This myth-making trend is to be found in two collections of poems written in the modern Romantic style: *Wolność tragiczna* (*Tragic Freedom* – 1936), devoted to the person and historic role of Józef Piłsudski and *Kurhany* (*Burial Mounds*, 1938).<sup>25</sup> The latter collection can now be seen as being a farewell to the Polish Second Republic, which was never to return. The symbolic opening scenery of *Kurhany* is Warsaw (The Łazienki Palace, together with its theatre and gardens, the Belweder Palace and the Krakowskie Przedmieście high street). As new characters make their appearance, the action gradually moves to other places in Poland, Europe and the world. Apart from Mickiewicz, Chopin and Prince Józef Poniatowski, the characters invoked by the poet from the burial mounds of collective memory include Gustaw from the fourth part of Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) and the fairy-tale deities and elves (Titania, Oberon, Puck and Ariel) from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>26</sup> The presence of Wyspiański, Żeromski and Piłsudski is also clearly felt. In a separate work – the burial mound entitled *Lord Jim* – the lonely eponymous character of Conrad's novel is also brought into the pantheon of the nation's collective imagination. Wierzyński describes him as a "tortuous wanderer" (*wędrowiec zawiały*), who – being unable to return to Britain with a clear conscience and hounded by feelings of guilt and inadequacy as well as nostalgia for the English countryside – travels by boat through a tropical jungle in order to start a new life on one of the islands of the Malay Archipelago, where he eventually dies a hero's death. Wierzyński's<sup>27</sup> *Lord Jim* posthumously returns to his native land

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To my!  
 Żołnierze nowych tysięcy lat!  
 To nasza krew się przetapia.  
 To nasz obrończy marsz  
 Na Via Appia.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. W. B. Yeats, "The Tower," "Meditations in Time of Civil War," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 218-232.

<sup>25</sup> Kurhan (arch.) = burial mound (cf. Latin *tumulus*).

<sup>26</sup> During this period all these characters were immortalized in the Polish collective memory by Leon Schiller, who created legendary stage productions of Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Teatr Polski in Warsaw in 1934. Cf. Kazimierz Wierzyński, *W garderobie duchów. Wrażenia teatralne* (Lwów: Książnica Atlas, 1938).

<sup>27</sup> Kazimierz Wierzyński, "Lord Jim," in Wierzyński, *Poezje zebrane*, vol. 1, 1994, p. 320:

Przeszły mgły, przeszły wiatry, świt powstał nadranny,  
 Szumi puszca gra upał pustynnej sawanny,  
 Szumi pamięć, gra morze, ocean pogromu,  
 Płynię żagiel po wolność, dmie w śmierć po kryjomu.  
 W masztach sosny rozkwitły i szumią okrutnie,  
 Cała flota ruszyła i wiezie go w płótnie,  
 Przez wody tropikalne, przez obce południe  
 Daleko, do ojczyzny, do bratniej mogiły.  
 Tu spocznij, między nami, wędrowcze zawiały.



as a Romantic tragic hero, just like his creator Joseph Conrad,<sup>28</sup> who during the inter-war period was immortalized in the nation's collective memory by Stefan Żeromski, Aniela Zagórska,<sup>29</sup> Maria Dąbrowska<sup>30</sup> and Józef Ujejski<sup>31</sup> (to whom Wierzyński dedicated his poem).

Another reference to Conrad<sup>32</sup> is to be found in the titular poem – written before the outbreak of World War II – of Wierzyński's 1942 émigré collection entitled *Róża wiatrów* (*The Wind Rose / The Compass Rose*).<sup>33</sup> The poem had originally been intended to express the poet's existential anxiety and confusion when confronted with contemporary literary (and other) trends, none of which he wholeheartedly approved<sup>34</sup> – an experience that reminded him of Joseph Conrad,<sup>35</sup> who – during his voyages on the Southern seas – found creative inspiration on the distant islands of the Malay Archipelago, despite the fact that “in the course of his sea voyages around the globe his heart and mind never left his native land.”<sup>36</sup> Thus in 1942 Wierzyński made Conrad the “role model” for all Polish wartime refugees and émigrés, who – seeking a safe haven in foreign lands – retained the memory of their native Ithaca in their hearts. The poem's protagonist (the poet's mouthpiece) sees an analogy between the plight of seafarers stranded at sea with that of his own concern for his future as a poet, whose life is “a journey guided by his own star amidst the turmoil of the world and the loneliness of the poet” (*wędrowka za własną gwiazdą wśród tumultu świata i samotności poety*).<sup>37</sup> In the first stanza, he comes across an old map of Java and Sumatra, dating perhaps to Conrad's times. In one corner of the map he notices an artless drawing of a wind rose which awakens his hope of returning home and reaching his desired destination. In the second stanza he alludes to the portrait of Conrad already sketched out in “Conrad's Great Silence” and – paraphrasing the words of Kant,<sup>38</sup> which

<sup>28</sup> Stefan Zabierowski, “Conrad Skamandrytów,” in *Skamander*, vol. 2 (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1982), pp. 112-116.

<sup>29</sup> See Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, trans. Aniela Zagórska, in *Pisma zbiorowe Josepha Conrada (Konrada Korzeniowskiego) z przedmową Stefana Żeromskiego*, vols 5 and 5a (Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej Spółka Akcyjna, 1933).

<sup>30</sup> Maria Dąbrowska, *Szkice o Conradzie*, Warszawa 1959. See Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Pamiętnik poety*, ed. Paweł Kądziała (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2018), pp. 250-252.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Józef Ujejski, *O Konradzie Korzeniowskim* (Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1936).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Kazimierz Wierzyński, “Wielka cisza Conrada,” 1924, in Wierzyński, *Szkice i portrety literackie*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>33</sup> See Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Róża wiatrów*, 1942, in Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Poezje zebrane* (London–New York: Wydawnictwo “Wiadomości” i Polskiego Instytutu Naukowego, 1959), p. 311. Cf. Kazimierz Wierzyński, *Compass Rose*, trans. Mary Phelps, in Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Wierzyński, *Pamiętnik poety*, p. 474.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Joseph Conrad, *Conrad's Preface*, in Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* ed., Introduction and Notes by Cedric Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. L.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from a letter written by Conrad to Kazimierz Waliszewski on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1908 and which was mentioned by Ujejski, *O Konradzie Korzeniowskim*, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Wierzyński, *Pamiętnik poety*, pp. 474-475.

<sup>38</sup> “Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).



concur with Conrad's own ethical stance – he takes note of the movements of the elements and the stars indicated on the map, looking for his very own guiding light “in the Conradian sky.” Before taking the risk of sailing off alone into unknown seas, he ought first to decipher the intricate drawing in order to ascertain the direction of a favourable wind (stanza 2). He lacks patience, however, and so his vessel sails more and more chaotically – so much so, that the seafarers sense impending death, with no sign on the horizon of the Ithaca that they all yearn to reach (stanza 3). The indications of the compass – which are “blurred by the compass of the beyond” – cannot show them the correct route to the shores of Ithaca, which they imagine to be a tiny island (*garść wyspy – a mere handful of an island*) – the counterpart of the poet's home and his own artistic realm (stanza 4). As the representative of all those seafarers who – sailing somewhat chaotically on the symbolic ocean of life – are concerned about what the future will bring, in the depths of the night the poem's poet-protagonist makes a final appeal to the wind rose on the old sea chart, asking it to help him find his way to that long yearned-for scrap of mainland (stanza 5):

Róża wiatrów

Znalazłem starą mapę Jawy i Sumatry:  
Leśne puszcze i rzeki, łodzie, stada słoni,  
Garść wyspy i ogromny ocean koło niej.  
W dole, w rogu śpi róża, gwiazdny bukiet: wiatry.

Z mimicznych znaków świata, z naiwnej legendy,  
Jakże blisko do serca i jak często każdy  
**Pod niebem Conradowskim** własnej szuka gwiazdy  
I płynąc chciałby z wiatrów odgadnąć – którądy.

Podróźni po bezmiarach, w łodzi byle jakiej,  
Pod żaglem podniesionym albo i bez żagla  
Błądzimy niecierpliwie, śmierć wciąż nas ponagla,  
A wybrzeża ojczystej nie widać **Itaki**.

Cóż nam z tych dróg i trudów, z upartej wędrówki,  
Po której tylko w oczach natężonych boli?  
Na mapie leży przestrzeń i strzała busoli,  
Magnesem **zaświatowym** zmacone wskazówki.

Sprzyjaj nam, różo wiatrów, twój znak niech nas chroni,  
Odnotuj wschód i zachód i wszystkie podmuchy:  
Pomóż mi znaleźć w nocy bezludnej i głuchej  
Garść mej wyspy i wielki ocean koło niej.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See Wierzyński, *Pamiętnik poety*, pp. 234-235 (My emphases – J.D.).

The following English translation by Mary Phelps, though well done with regard to versification,<sup>40</sup> is unfortunately somewhat deficient with regard to semantics and imagery, as it omits motifs which serve as transtextual references to the works of Kant, Conrad and Homer, i.e. to myths and beliefs which enrich the content and meaning of the poem by revealing its cultural contexts. In stanza 2, instead of “Under the Conradian sky” (*Pod niebem Conradowskim*), we have “our own star” and “the sky” – and so the allusion to Kant’s famous remark about *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me* is lost. In stanza 3 there is no mention of Ithaca, which was the symbolic end of Odysseus’s travels, while in stanza 4 “the beyond / the next world / the afterlife” (*zaświaty*) is incorrectly rendered as “an iron, unknown soil.”

#### The Compass Rose

I came upon an ancient map, new world,  
Java, Sumatra: deep jungle, and strange beasts;  
a hand-breadth island set in ocean vast.  
Below, the star of winds, the rose unfurled.

From the flat trace of a world, from child-kept tales,  
how quick the heart is touched, how often we  
launch toward our own star, wrestling the sky,  
asking the winds to tell us where to sail.

Far, without bound, in whatever flimsy hold,  
under what sail, what storm, or trial of calm,  
we yearn on, death urges us, we roam –  
still failing of our shore, our mark, our fold.

Of what avail these launchings and our toil,  
The search that only stares our eyes to pain?  
The map yawns space; the compass arrow strains  
And verges toward an iron, unknown soil.

Yet bless our wandering, compass rose; sign deep.  
Tell sunrise, sunset, and all winds’ wide flight.  
Give me to find, through plane and lone of night,  
My handful island in the ocean’s keep.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Iambic pentameter is here the equivalent of the Polish thirteen-syllable line with a feminine caesura after the seventh syllable and five or six stressed syllables in each line. Each of the five stanzas of the poem consists of four lines with the rhyme pattern abba.

<sup>41</sup> Wierzyński, *Selected Poems*, pp. 24-25.

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