

REVIEW OF
ZWISCHEN OST UND WEST: JOSEPH CONRAD IM
EUROPÄISCHEN GESPRÄCH (BETWEEN EAST AND WEST:
JOSEPH CONRAD IN EUROPEAN CONVERSATION). EDITED
BY ELMAR SCHENKEL AND HANS-CHRISTIAN TREPTE.
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Zwischen Ost und West is a stimulatingly unusual polyglot of articles by an international coterie of established scholars, the hardback volume's handsome cover arresting the eye with an oriental port scene of square riggers and sampans photographed at low tide and a photo portrait of Joseph Conrad in the monocled *gravitas* of his latter years.

Co-editor Elmar Schenkel, Chair of the Department of English Studies at the University of Leipzig and author of a recent life of Conrad written in German, *Fahrt ins Geheimnis: Joseph Conrad, Eine Biographie* (see review, *Conradiana* 41.1), is a Renaissance-style polymath who writes as easily about archery and bicycles as he does about Conrad. He is ideally complemented by his co-editor Hans-Christian Treppe of the University of Leipzig's Department of Slavic Studies, who has written extensively on northeast European literature and the literature of east European authors in exile.

The inclusion of short biographies reveals many of the contributors to be luminaries eminent in their own European domains; e.g., Christiane Bimberg (Dortmund University), author of *Reise nach Moskau* [Journey to Moscow] and Frank Förster (Christian Albrechts University, Kiel), author of *Die literarische Rezeption Joseph Conrads in Deutschland* [Conrad's Literary Reception in Germany] (2005). Lamentably, only a couple are commonly known beyond continental Europe; e.g., Wiesław Krajka, (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin), general editor of the multi-volume hardback series *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives*, and Mario Curreli, director of the Joseph Conrad Research Centre at the University of Pisa. Ludmilla Voitkovska is in her very person paradigmatic of the editors' cultural ideal of global unity in diversity. A Ukrainian educated at the University of Odessa, she teaches and writes in English at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

In the trilingual volume's foreword in German the editors point to the burgeoning of Conrad conferences and publications in the 150th anniversary year of Conrad's birth — 2007 and since — in Poland, France, Germany and throughout the English-speaking world. Capitalizing on this transoceanic spring tide of critical zeal, the editors' unifying theme characterizes *homo duplex* Conrad as the east-west *coincidentia oppositorum*, locating him at the unrestful fulcrum of a hemispheric cultural balance.

A further nine articles in German, two in Polish (with editorial summaries in German) and seven in English — all with themes related to aspects of the eastern and western cultural contexts of Conrad's life and *oeuvre*, gathered under one cover — comprise an eclectic multicultural critique unique in Conrad scholarship. In essays ranging in cultural foci from Anglophone nations to France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Russia and Indonesia, the authors not only confront the biographical and psychological dimensions of the divided cultural consciousness, but also tackle the historical and political challenges bedeviling receptions of Conrad's canon:

Elmar Schenkel and Hans Trepte (volume co-editors), "*Diesseits und jenseits von Polen: Ein Gespräch über Joseph Conrads Peripetien zwischen den Kulturen*" [This Side and That [lit. the Other] Side of Poland: A Conversation about Joseph Conrad's Shifts between Cultures]; Maria Janion, "*Conrad wobec dylematu polskiego romantyzmu*" [Conrad and the Romantic Dilemma], with summary and comments in German by Hans-Christian Trepte: "*Conrad und das Dilemma polnischen Romantik: Deutsche kommentierte Zusammenfassung...*"; Wiesław Krajka, "Conrad and Poland. Under the Eyes of My Generation"; Agnieszka Zawadowska, "*Wschodnie błoto na polach angielskiego płaszcza*" [Eastern mud on English Coattails], with summary and comments in German by Hans-Christian Trepte: "*Der östliche Schmutz auf dem englischen Mantelsaum: Deutsche kommentierte Zusammenfassung...*"; Monika Majewska, "On Conrad and Russia / Dostoevsky"; Ludmilla Voitkovska, "What is Polish Ukraine?"; and Elmar Schenkel, "Footprints [*Fusspuren*]" (transl. & commentary by G.W. Stephen Brodsky, the present reviewer).

Several essays address Conrad's reception and problems of cultural dissonance in both east and west Europe, airing also the political dangers of the Soviet years: Zdeněk Beran, "*Die tschechische Rezeption Joseph Conrads*" [The Czech Reception of Joseph Conrad]; Christiane Bimberg, "*Dialog mit Hindernissen: Verständnisschwierigkeiten zwischen West- und Osteuropa in Joseph Conrads Under Western Eyes*" [Dialogue with Obstacles: On the Difficulties of Understanding between West and East Europe]; Hans-Christian Trepte, "Ein barbar im garten des Westens" [A Barbarian in the Garden of the West]; Carsten Otte (moderator), Nadine Jänicke (transcription), "*Schmerz der Finsternis — Joseph Conrad zum 150. Geburtstag* [Pain of Darkness¹ – Joseph Conrad at (his) 150th Birthday]: *Ein Gespräch mit* [A conversation with] *Brigitte Kronauer, Elmar Schenkel, John von Düffel*"

¹ *Schmerz* [pain]: A play on *Herz* [heart] in the German title of Conrad's novella.

(Radio discussion session, *SW2 Forum*, 30 November, 2007); and Mario Curreli, “Conrad’s Reception in Italy”.

The final essays treat of Conrad as sailor, author, fictional memoirist and enigma: G.W. Stephen Brodsky (the present reviewer), “Darkness Visible: Occidental Orientalism and the Exotic in the Malay Tales”; Elmar Schenkel, “*Die Bibliothek des Seefahrers. Josef Conrad als Leser*” [The Seafarer’s Library. Joseph Conrad as Reader]; Frank Förster, “*Joseph Conrad als transnationaler Erinnerungsraum*” [Joseph Conrad as Transnational locus of memory];² and finally Marie-Luise Egbert, “Elusiveness Translated: Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and its German Translations”.

The collection concludes with epigrammatic verses by the late celebrated Lublin poet Józef Czechowicz (1903–1939), “*Pamięci zniknionego*” [Thoughts on the missing], with German translation by Hans-Christian Trepte: “*Im gedenken an einen verschollenen*”;³ and verses by Berlin lyric poet Johannes Bobrowski (1917–1965)⁴ — “Joseph Conrad” — as *envoi*. *Zwischen Ost und West* adds elegantly to a literary conversation just now beginning to span both hemispheres. Even for the occasional monolingual reader, the volume offers enough light to be worth the candle.



² “*Erinnerungsraum*” evokes specifically Pierre Nora’s Introduction [*Ouvrage*] to his *Les Lieux de Mémoire [Loci Memoriae]*, 7 vols. (1984–1992), in which is described his concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, a site or realm of collective memory, concrete or abstract, e.g. a monument, architecture, ritual or literature, symbolizing a community’s historical heritage.

³ For ensuring the accuracy of title translations, *Gratia* Elmar Schenkel and Monika Majewska.

⁴ Born at Tilsit, East Prussia, the poet Johannes Bobrowski bore no known relationship to Conrad’s distaff Bobrowski lineage, but “came to believe [he was Conrad’s] biological relative.” (Elmar Schenkel, *Eastern and Western Perspectives XIX*, 2010, 455, cites Eberhard Haufe, 1998.)