

## **“HE WAS ONE OF US.” THE POLISH RECEPTION OF THE WORK OF JOSEPH CONRAD KORZENIOWSKI**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to present the Polish critical reception of Conrad’s biography and work in the years 1897-2014, with particular emphasis being laid on the political, social, cultural and aesthetic factors that have conditioned this process. The reception began when Poland was still partitioned between Prussia, Russia and Austria. During this ‘Young Poland’ period, Conrad’s work was admired by a small artistic and intellectual elite which included Maria Komornicka, Stanisław Brzozowski and Wincenty Lutosławski. Things changed considerably when Poland regained her independence after World War I. Translations of Conrad’s collected works were published (with the active encouragement of the novelist Stefan Żeromski). The “Skamander” group of poets and the intellectuals grouped around the “Wiadomości Literackie” magazine became fascinated by Conrad, whose work was appreciated by the entire Polish political spectrum, with the sole exception of the communists.

Towards the end of the interwar period, Conrad was seen as a kind of intellectual and moral ideal by leading critics of the younger generation. It was then that Conrad’s image in Poland was codified by Józef Ujejski’s monumental study entitled *O Konradzie Korzeniowskim (On Conrad Korzeniowski – 1937)*.

During the Second World War, Conrad became a moral landmark for those Poles – especially members of the Home Army – who were actively engaged in the struggle against Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

After the war, Conrad was strongly attacked by Marxists (and by Jan Kott in particular). During the period of relative liberalization which followed the political ‘thaw’ of 1956, Conrad’s books were widely read in independent intellectual circles and also began to be the subject of scholarly research. The period of the 1970s was particularly favourable for Conrad in Poland, as it was then that Zdzisław Najder played a leading role in the process of publishing, interpreting and popularizing his works.

The restoration of democracy in 1989 removed all the remaining political obstacles to the popularization and study of Conrad’s work in Poland and a new generation of young and able scholars began to offer new approaches to the interpretation of his work. Unfortunately, however, in recent years Poland has not seen any significant growth in interest in Conrad on the part of the general reading public. We may note that in the past this interest would seem to have been occasioned in large measure by discussions on key issues of Polish culture, as Conrad – on account of his Polish heritage and his own considerable influence on Polish culture – was always considered to have been “one of us”.

**Keywords:** Conrad, critical reception, Poland

## 1

Any discussion of the Polish reception of Conrad must begin by recalling the fact that when the young Konrad Korzeniowski left Poland in 1874 – and also when Poles began to read his works – Poland had disappeared from the map of Europe, as it was still partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia. His works – in Polish translation and in the original – aroused the interest of many members of the Polish intellectual elite who were then involved in what was called the ‘Young Poland’ (Młoda Polska) avant-garde cultural movement, whose two characteristic currents Kazimierz Wyka summed up as follows:

If we boil down our analysis of the ideological and literary models which the Young Poland movement sought to impose, it transpires that in essence there were two great models of national culture and literature – two models which at that time co-existed and competed with each other. One was a model of art and culture that were subordinated to the ideological tasks associated with the life of a nation which had been deprived of its independence. This model found a powerful justification in the Romantic tradition, which explains why the entire period has often been nominated to the status of Neoromanticism – even by scholars such as Julian Krzyżanowski. [...] The other model of art took its inspiration from European culture as a whole, in which there was no special role for literature to play in the life of a Society that had been deprived of its political independence. Towards the end of the century, the impact of this model was considerably enhanced by the fact that at that time the same rebellious ideas and the same innovative artistic trends had found their way into all the national literatures of Europe. The other principal names for this period are symbolism or modernism, neither of which is rooted in a tradition or experience that is exclusively Polish.<sup>1</sup>

Here we may add that Conrad’s writing fell into both categories. In the realm of Western literature, he was a great reformer of the novel, while there were intertextual allusions to Polish Romantic literature in his fiction and his essays, to name but his autobiographical volume entitled *Some Reminiscences*, his story entitled *Prince Roman* and his political pamphlets.<sup>2</sup> In a brilliant essay, Tymon Terlecki goes even further in an attempt to establish the links between Conrad and the Young Poland authors who were more or less his contemporaries:

Having instinctively chosen to follow in the footsteps of his contemporaries, Conrad could not have done better, finding immense fulfilment in the universalisation of Polish Romanticism together with its vision of the world, its attitude towards various phenomena and its moral ‘habitus’. And he universalised it in the very genre that was its weak point and was one of the reasons for its lack of appeal outside the Polish-speaking world: the genre of narrative prose – what

<sup>1</sup> K. Wyka. “O jedności i różności literatury polskiej XX wieku”. In: K. Wyka. *Nowe i dawne wędrówki po tematach*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978, pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Krzyżanowski. “U źródeł publicystyki Józefa Conrada”. *Ruch Literacki* 1932, № 8; A. Busza. “Conrad’s Polish Literary background and some illustrations of the influence of Polish literature on his work”. *Antemurale* (Rome–London) 1966, Vol. X; A. Busza. “The Rhetoric of Conrad’s Non-Fictional Political Discourse”. *Annales de la Faculte des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice* 1978, Vol. 34; K. Wyka. “Wyśpa na polskiej zatoce”. In: K. Wyka. *Wędrując po tematach*. Vol. 2: Puścizna. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1971.

Conrad called “human history” – endowing it with all manner of poetic qualities, contemplative depth, psychological originality and masculine emotional detachment.<sup>3</sup>

It is small wonder, then, that Conrad’s name was on the lips of the Polish luminaries of his day: Stanisław Brzozowski, Wincenty Lutosławski, Maria Komornicka, Józef Hieronim Retinger, Maria Rakowska and Kazimierz Waliszewski. On the whole, the reception was positive, the only fly in the ointment being the debate over the “emigration of talent” – a debate which was largely the result of misunderstandings and which took place towards the end of the nineteenth century between Wincenty Lutosławski, Tadeusz Żuk-Skarszewski and Eliza Orzeszkowa in the columns of the St. Petersburg “Kraj” journal.<sup>4</sup>

The first of Conrad’s books to be translated into Polish was his second novel – *An Outcast of the Islands*. It appeared in 1897 – under the title *Wyrzutek* – in the Warsaw “Tygodnik Romansów i Powieści” weekly and had been translated by Maria Gąsiorowska.<sup>5</sup> It was *Lord Jim*, however, that aroused the greatest interest when it was published in Emilia Węśławska’s translation in 1904. A review by Maria Komornicka in the elite “Chimera” magazine marvelled at the novelist’s artistry:

The author is a man of culture to a degree that is practically unheard of in our part of the world. His artistry is refined, discriminating and consummately masterful. Wise, alert and intellectual, he is on a par with the greatest English masters of the novel (e.g. Meredith). He hunts down the truth in a subtle interplay of light and shade that is perceptible only to those who are “eternally observant” and vigilantly noble in individuation – abhorring crude truisms – in twinkles and flashes, in “mental impressions” that are instantly decoded by the brain, which bypasses, as it were, their vocal form [...].<sup>6</sup>

In his *Memoirs*, Stanisław Brzozowski reflected on the ethical questions posed by the novel:

The meaning of “Lord Jim”. What kills him is his loss of self-respect – his loss of personal dignity. From that moment onwards, the immense material world which surrounds him and in which he plays his part is as good as gone. Here the problem takes on a form that is more complex and modern as a result of the fact that this material world in tropical Asia is incommensurable with our ethics, which together with our consciences and our absolute imperatives constitute the very essence of our personalities. In that world, however, they are no more than mere propositions – something relative and fortuitous that has only just begun to fight for its existence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> T. Terlecki. “Conrad w kulturze polskiej”. In: *Conrad żywy*. Ed. W. Tarnawski. London: B. Świdorski, 1957, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. Lutosławski. “Emigracja zdolności”. *Kraj* 1899, № 12; T. Żuk-Skarszewski. “Amicus Plato...”. In: *ibid.*; W. Lutosławski. “Emigracja zdolności”. *Kraj* 1899, № 14; E. Orzeszkowa. “Emigracja zdolności”. *Kraj* 1899, № 16.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Adamowicz-Pośpiech. *Seria w przekładzie. Polskie warianty prozy Josepha Conrada*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2013, pp. 50-55.

<sup>6</sup> [M. Komornicka]. “Powieści. *Lord Jim* przez Conrada (K. Korzeniowskiego)”. *Chimera* 1905, Vol. IX, pp. 333-334.

<sup>7</sup> St. Brzozowski. “O Józefie Conradzie”. In: St. Brzozowski. *Głosy wśród nocy*. Lwów: B. Połoniecki, 1912, pp. 374-377.

Wiktor Gomulicki for his part proposed a symbolic and thus extremely original reading of *Lord Jim*:

I had just closed Conrad's book with a feeling of total despondency and was saying to myself: "No! This writer did not *break away* from Poland – he never *belonged* to it in the first place ...", when suddenly something inside me shouted: "Perhaps it's all just a symbol?"

That doomed ship ... those passengers who succumb to sleep after the nervous exhaustion of religious ecstasy ... those selfish people whose craving for life tells them to flee the ship whose care they have been entrusted with ... and above all that basically noble young man who is thrown together with despicable characters and who for the rest of his life has his heart eaten out by the Promethean vulture of his pangs of conscience ... that 'nobleman' who finds prosperity, love and trust in a foreign land, but who seeks ultimate relief in voluntary death – at bottom, is all this merely what the *English* reader thinks it is?<sup>8</sup>

Quite naturally, Polish critics of the time also wrote about Conrad's autobiographical volume entitled *Some Reminiscences*. Tadeusz Nalepiński, for instance, wrote:

Today I would like to dwell for a moment on a personage who is all the more interesting because of the fact that, although he is well known and highly esteemed in all those vast countries where the English tongue is spoken, he has not lost the soul and the heart with which he came into the world. A small number of those of our educated citizens who take an interest in more recent English literature have no doubt not only heard of Joseph Conrad, but also know him from one or more of his now numerous novels.<sup>9</sup>

Polish interest in Conrad was considerably heightened by his sojourn in Cracow and Zakopane – inspired by Józef Hieronim Retinger and preceded by an important newspaper interview accorded to Marian Dąbrowski<sup>10</sup> – in the summer of 1914. In Zakopane, Conrad had the opportunity to meet leading representatives of the world of Polish culture: Jerzy Żuławski, Tadeusz Nalepiński, Jan Rembowski, Teodor Kosch and – above all – Stefan Żeromski.

## 2

The next phase in the reception of Conrad's work began with the restoration of the State of Poland after the First World War. Stefan Żeromski, who became one of the great advocates of Conrad's fiction, wrote:

[...] it is our duty to acquaint ourselves with his works in excellent translations – to bring his spirit into the country. [...] Our theatres, which unceasingly complain about the dearth of interesting plays, ought to stage his work entitled *Tomorrow* right away. [...] Publishers who have already published Conrad's works ought to continue to do so without delay, as this is not only worth their while, but also makes it possible to run second editions. Our literary critics ought to

<sup>8</sup> W. Gomulicki. "Polak czy Anglik?". *Życie i Sztuka* 1905, № 1 (supplement to the St. Petersburg *Kraj* magazine).

<sup>9</sup> T. Nalepiński. "'Wspomnienia' Conrada". *Kurier Warszawski* 1912, № 84.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Dąbrowski. "Rozmowa z J. Conradem". *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1914, № 16.

take up the study of Conrad. [...] At a time when our State has been reborn and is developing, having made contact with the waves of the sea, a tremendous current of air – the atmosphere of the entire globe – is now blowing onto our literature from the works of Joseph Conrad.<sup>11</sup>

Żeromski's appeals did not fall on deaf ears. Translations of Conrad's minor works appeared in the columns of literary magazines almost as soon as Poland regained her independence. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (*Murzyn z załogi „Narcyza”*) was serialized in the “Nowy Przegląd Literatury i Sztuki” magazine.<sup>12</sup> In 1922 the “Ignis” publishing house decided to publish Conrad's “Selected Works” and began with Conrad's first novel *Almayer's Folly* (*Fantazja Almayera*), which was translated by Aniela Zagórska and preceded by a foreword written by Stefan Żeromski.

At that time it was the intellectuals grouped around the “Wiadomości Literackie” weekly magazine who played a leading role in promoting Conrad's fiction. Three weeks after his death, an entire issue of the magazine was devoted to his memory,<sup>13</sup> with contributions from (among others) Stefan Żeromski, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Emil Breiter. There were also poems specially written for the occasion by Jan Lechoń and Antoni Słonimski, as well as reminiscences penned by Conrad's cousin and translator Aniela Zagórska. In their prose, poems and literary criticism, members of the “Skamander” group of poets (who were associated with the “Wiadomości Literackie” magazine) continued to promote interest in Conrad between the wars. The chief “Skamander” literary critic Karol Wiktor Zawodziński distinguished himself by leading a campaign to explain the reasons for Conrad's departure from Poland in 1874.<sup>14</sup> The magazine carried articles on Conrad written by representatives of various political and aesthetic options: Maria Dąbrowska, Adolf Nowaczyński, Waław Borowy, Ferdynand Goetel, Stefan Kołaczkowski and Stefan Napierski.

Whatever their political affiliations, Polish authors spoke and wrote favourably about Conrad, while Poland's political representatives in Britain – the envoy Konstanty Skirmunt and the embassy official Edward Raczyński – maintained contact with him. His works aroused the interest of various political camps. They were discussed in the “Sanacja” press which supported Marshal Piłsudski (“Gazeta Polska”, “Czas” and “Droga”) and by such representatives of the “Belvedere camp” as Adam Skwarczyński and Janusz Jędrzejewicz. They received equally favourable treatment in periodicals which supported the right-wing National Democrats (“Rzeczpospolita”, “Myśl Narodowa”, “Gazeta Warszawska” and “Kurier Poznański”), whose contributors included Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, Adolf Nowaczyński and Witold Chwalewik. Approval also came from the left wing of Polish politics, with comprehensive notes and favourable reviews coming from the

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<sup>11</sup> S. Żeromski. “Autor-rodak”. In: S. Żeromski. *Pisma literackie i krytyczne*. Ed. St. Pigoń. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1963, pp. 166-167.

<sup>12</sup> J. Conrad. “Murzyn z załogi ‘Narcyza’”. *Nowy Przegląd Literatury i Sztuki* 1920, Vols. I-II; 1921 Vol. I.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Wiadomości Literackie* 1924, № 33.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. K.W. Zawodziński. “Nieuwzględnione motywy decyzji życiowej Conrada”. *Wiadomości Literackie* 1927, № 39.

pen of Zygmunt Kisielewski in the columns of the socialist “Robotnik” newspaper. The communist “Nowa Kultura” magazine for its part took a critical view of Conrad’s work. Its chief columnist Jan Hempel conceded that the novels contained “very beautiful descriptions of life at sea” and portrayed “Man’s battle with the elements”, but was of the opinion that their author could be considered to be a “model bourgeois writer” on account of his approach to social matters.<sup>15</sup> This criticism subsequently became even harsher. In its final judgement, the magazine informed its readers that “As regards the attitude towards social issues that emerges from Conrad’s works, it is that of a Western European hooligan.”<sup>16</sup>

In the 1920s, Polish literary critics were split in their assessment of Conrad’s personality. Some highlighted his connections with (and perhaps his betrayal of) Polish tradition, while others highlighted his universal or “cosmopolitan” outlook. Such was the elite’s perception of Conrad. The general reader for his part saw him first and foremost as a seafaring novelist.

A fundamental change – resulting from several factors – took place in the 1930s. In 1929 the “Dom Książki Polskiej” publishing house began to publish Conrad’s *Collected Works* in Polish translations. Books on Conrad published abroad at this time – in particular Jean-Aubry’s *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* (1927) and Gustav Morf’s *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad* (1930) – aroused great interest among Polish critics. Another and perhaps much more important factor was that around the year 1932 a new generation arrived on the Polish cultural scene. These were people who had been born in or around the year 1910 and who had grown up in an independent Poland. The scholar and literary critic Kazimierz Wyka – one of the leading representatives of this generation – wrote that it had been “brought up on Conrad.”<sup>17</sup> This new generation saw Conrad as a great artist and – above all – as the creator of significant moral stances, i.e. A moral ethos. As Bolesław Miciński wrote:

Conrad was a writer of the sea and a writer of adventures. In adventures he saw a concentrated image of life. In the sea he saw the reflected face of Man as he wanted to see him: the face of a man of morality.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of the role played by Conrad’s books in moulding the ethos of this generation was best conveyed by Ludwik Fryde:

Today we know – though not every reformer and literary revolutionary knows – that questions of values lay at the heart of the crisis of psychologism and the defeat of this spiritual trend. The point at issue is how to salvage what is of value from the turmoil of determinism and ethical relativism. And the answer is to be found in Conrad’s writing. In our transitional age, the overcoming of psychological causality for the sake of ethics has a significance that is both educational and liberating.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> J. Hempel. “Józef Conrad (Korzeniowski)”. *Nowa Kultura* 1923, № 7.

<sup>16</sup> “Odpowiedź redakcji”. *Nowa Kultura* 1924, № 12.

<sup>17</sup> K. Wyka. “Wyspa na polskiej zatoce”. [In:] K. Wyka. *Wędrując po tematach*, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup> B. Miciński. “O przygodzie i o morzu”. *Pion* 1939, № 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> L. Fryde. “Conrad i kryzys powieści psychologicznej”. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1935, № 30.

Konstanty Troczyński was of a similar opinion,<sup>20</sup> while Stefan Kisielewski spoke of the existence of a

[...] loose and perhaps not too numerous, though undoubtedly extensive clan of Conrad fans for whom the work of this author is not only a wonderful work of art, but also a profound source of truth and wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1930s, the biography and work of Joseph Conrad also began to be the subject of serious academic research in Poland. Here mention must first and foremost be made of Józef Ujejski's study entitled *O Konradzie Korzeniowskim (On Conrad Korzeniowski)*, which was published in 1936 and which aroused great interest among critics and the general reading public alike, having been preceded by an extremely popular series of lectures given by the author at the University of Warsaw. Being the work of an eminent scholar specializing in Polish Romanticism, Ujejski's monumentalising study presented Conrad as yet another 'national bard' – a perfect moral and intellectual model for his readers and a continuator, as it were, of the Polish Romantics. Years later, Zdzisław Libera made the following assessment of this study:

His book on Conrad is an attempt to give an overall picture by discussing a number of generally framed questions: “Conrad and Poland”, “Conrad and the world”, “Conrad and art”, “Conrad and the world of his novels” and “Conrad in general”. It is a very personal book which at the same time is the result of years of painstaking research on Conrad's life and work. It would be no easy task to express the main ideas of this book in a few words, as it is rich in content and abounds in detailed observations, but one thing (among many) that seems to stand out in my mind is the originality and depth of the descriptive analysis of Conrad's Romanticism.<sup>22</sup>

Another distinguished scholar of the time who published several important studies on Conrad was Rafał Marcei Blüth, who had connections with Catholic circles (Laski) and whose main field of study was Russian literature. He wrote studies on Conrad and Dostoevsky, the transformations undergone by Conrad's main characters and the reasons for Conrad's emigration from Poland. His greatest achievement was a biographical study entitled *Dwie rodziny kresowe (Two Borderland Families)*, whose subject were Conrad's relatives – the Bobrowski and Korzeniowski families – and which was published just before the outbreak of World War II.<sup>23</sup>

During the 1930s, Conrad was also the subject of attacks. The arguments levelled against him were either of a nationalistic or a sociological nature. Two Polish periodicals on opposite sides of the political spectrum – the extreme right-wing

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<sup>20</sup> K. Troczyński. “Romantyzm etyki honoru. Z powodu ‘Lorda Jima’ Josepha Conrada”. *Dziennik Poznański* 1933, № 264.

<sup>21</sup> S. Kisielewski. “‘Tajny agent’ Conrada”. *Czas* 1939, № 215. On S. Kisielewski's connections with Conrad see: M. Szyszka. *Droga klerka. Filozofia sztuki Stefana Kisielewskiego*. Kraków: Universitas, 2010, *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> Z. Libera. “Józef Ujejski”. In: Z. Libera. *Uczeni i nauczyciele*. Warszawa: PWN, 1995, p. 34; J.Z. Jakubowski. “...Czytałem tylko Conrada [Józef Ujejski]”. *Kultura* 1972, № 15.

<sup>23</sup> R.M. Blüth. “Conrad et Dostoevsky”. *La Vie Intellectuelle* (Paris) 1931, № 2; R.M. Blüth. “Ewolucja heroizmu u Conrada”. *Ruch Literacki* 1932, № 8; R.M. Blüth. “O tragicznej decyzji krakowskiej Konrada Korzeniowskiego”. *Verbum* 1936, № 2; R.M. Blüth. “Dwie rodziny kresowe”. *Ateneum* 1939, № 1.

“Merkuriusz Polski Ordynaryjny” magazine (which had shadowy connections with the secret services) and the left-wing “Sygnały” magazine – reprinted the chapter on Conrad in Upton Sinclair’s book entitled *Mammonart. An Essay in Economic Interpretation* (1925).<sup>24</sup> This American author had accused Conrad of using his talent to serve the interests of the big shipowners, arguing that by propagating the cult of heroism at sea, Conrad encouraged seamen to work on inadequately equipped ships, thus enabling shipowners to claim higher insurance payouts:

Analyzing the stories in the light of economic science, we find the stealthy Nemesis revealed as organized greed exploiting unorganized ignorance.<sup>25</sup>

Sinclair’s claims were disputed on several occasions by Maria Dąbrowska in the columns of the “Głos Prawdy” and “Wiadomości Literackie” magazines.<sup>26</sup>

### 3

Moving on to the next phase in the reception of Conrad’s work – i.e. the period of German and Russian occupation following the outbreak of war in 1939 – we must first note the tragic losses for Conrad studies in Poland. Well-known Conrad scholars such as Rafał Marcei Bluth, Ludwik Fryde, Konstanty Troczyński and Prof. Andrzej Tretiak were murdered by the Germans. Bolesław Miciński died in difficult circumstances abroad, while Conrad’s best-known translator Aniela Zagórska died in occupied Poland.

It was during these years of war and occupation that Conrad became a source of moral inspiration for the generation of Poles who were born in or around the year 1920 (known later as the “Kolumbowie” generation) and who were in the forefront of the underground armed struggle against Nazi and Soviet totalitarian rule. In the words of Leszek Prorok, who was a member of this generation:

One could venture to say – and find ample evidence to support such a claim – that apart from the Romantics, who were the mainstay of the secondary-school literature syllabus, it was Conrad, with his ideal of fidelity to one’s word, even in totally hopeless situations – and with his ideal of honour, doing one’s duty and the absolutely binding force of voluntarily accepted moral rigours, who exerted the greatest influence on the personal development of members of the Polish Resistance generation – or at least a considerable and significant number of them.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf. “Podstępny los”. *Merkuriusz Polski Ordynaryjny* 1933, № 1; U. Sinclair. “Nieubłagana Nemezis”. *Sygnały* 1936, № 22.

<sup>25</sup> U. Sinclair. *Mammonart. An Essay in Economic Interpretation*. Pasadena: published by the author, 1925, p. 375.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. M. Dąbrowska. “Kula w plot”. *Głos Prawdy* 1926, № 161; M. Dąbrowska. “W sprawie ‘demaskowania’ Conrada”. *Wiadomości Literackie* 1934, № 3.

<sup>27</sup> L. Prorok. “Wachty z Conradem”. In: L. Prorok. *Inicjacje Conradowskie*. Kraków: Znak, 1987, pp. 7-8.

In everyday life, Conrad – or, to be more exact, Conradian characters – became models with whom members of the underground Resistance movement often identified themselves. As Jan Józef Szczepański recalled:

I knew a young lad whose death was the direct result of his having read *Lord Jim* (or rather the first volume of *Lord Jim*). The motif of that bulkhead which was about to give way – but which in the event held out longer than the nerves and courage of the wretched first mate of the “Patna” – became a veritable obsession with him. He was a highly strung and extremely sensitive person. [...] He would repeat Jim’s famous sentence – “It is all in being ready.” – as if it were a magic spell or a lesson that had to be learnt by heart. And it was that very fear of his own moment of weakness that led this acquaintance of mine to commit an act of totally needless daring which cost him his life.<sup>28</sup>

A similar experience of identification with the title character of *Lord Jim* was recalled by one of the people who took part in the Warsaw Uprising – a lady who was working as an orderly in a hospital that was being bombed and who decided to leave her post. As she was about to desert, ...

[...] just at that moment Jim came. When it seemed I just wasn’t capable of coming to grips with my own fear any more, Jim suddenly stood at my side and simply asked if I’d be able to endure what would inevitably be my fate after running away. He reminded me of his own misery and the price he paid for a momentary lapse.<sup>29</sup>

During the Second World War, the power of Conrad’s prose was quite exceptional in occupied Poland as far as its influence on readers’ attitudes was concerned. Polish scholars for their part continued their research on Conrad’s work even in those tragic years. During the academic year 1941/1942 the underground University of Warsaw (which, like all other Polish universities, had been closed down by the German occupying power) offered lectures by Waław Borowy on “Conrad and the art of writing novels”,<sup>30</sup> while near Cracow, in the little town of Krzeszowice (whose new German name was Kressendorf), the young scholar Kazimierz Wyka was writing a study on the subject of time as an indicator of literary genres, a significant part of which was devoted to the construction of time in the work of Conrad and his imitators.<sup>31</sup> In Cracow itself, Roman Dyboski devoted an extensive chapter of his textbook entitled *Sto lat literatury angielskiej (A Hundred Years of English Literature)* to Conrad.<sup>32</sup>

There was also interest in Conrad among Poles who had fled Poland after the outbreak of World War II, becoming émigrés in Romania, Cyprus, Palestine and Italy.

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<sup>28</sup> J.J. Szczepański. “Conrad mojego pokolenia”. *Życie Literackie* 1957, № 49.

<sup>29</sup> M. Młynarska [M. Tarnawska]. “Lord Jim w powstaniu warszawskim”. In: *Conrad żywy*, p. 263.

<sup>30</sup> “Z kronik uniwersyteckich”. In: *Z dziejów polonistyki warszawskiej*. Ed. J. Kulczycka-Saloni *et al.* Warszawa: PWN, 1964, p. 98. The original Polish title was: “Sztuka powieściopisarska. Jej przykłady z twórczości J. Conrada”.

<sup>31</sup> K. Wyka. “Czas powieściowy”. In: K. Wyka. *O potrzebie historii literatury. Szkice polonistyczne z lat 1944-1967*. Warszawa: PIW, 1969, pp. 5-98.

<sup>32</sup> “Samotny geniusz (The Lone Genius)”. In: R. Dyboski. *Sto lat literatury angielskiej*. Warszawa: PAX, 1957.

A particularly active Conrad enthusiast during those years was Dr Wit Tarnawski, who was of the opinion that Conrad's books – *Lord Jim* in particular – related perfectly to the situation of Polish émigrés at that time. In the preface to a Polish edition of *Lord Jim* which was published in Jerusalem, Tarnawski argued:

Jim developed into one of the most accurate literary portrayals of the Polish character and an amazingly penetrating vision of Polish capabilities – both positive and negative – which for us Poles gives the novel a particular significance.<sup>33</sup>

In all, eleven books by Conrad had been published by the time the Polish army (commanded by General Anders) reached Italy. What the Polish readers of these books were looking for, however, was something different. In the words of Tarnawski:

As one might easily guess, it was another Conrad who struck a chord with these Polish soldiers who were fighting without any guarantees and who had been rewarded with the conclusion of an alliance with one of their deadly foes: not the subtle analyser of cases of conscience or the judge of character, but the ship's captain whose duty it was to successfully complete the voyage, the poet of fighting against hope, if only to preserve one's honesty and self respect.<sup>34</sup>

It was just such a Conrad that Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (who took part in the battle of Monte Cassino) presented in his "Imaginary interview with the main character of *Typhoon*":

So it was Conrad once again – and yet again that closed circle of a courageous conscience and human autonomy, unchanging moral principles and a dogged struggle for their full implementation. Oh, what a lot of anxiety and delight!<sup>35</sup>

The fact that a Royal Navy cruiser which was transferred to the Polish Navy in the October of 1944 was renamed as the "Conrad" became a symbolic event, as this was done "not only to honour the great English writer Joseph Conrad, who was Polish to the core [...], but also to stress Polish-British naval cooperation."<sup>36</sup>

#### 4

After the Second World War, Conrad was highly esteemed by independently-minded intellectuals and by members of the younger generation in post-Yalta Poland, where there was now an awareness of the extent to which Conrad's writing was relevant to the tragic experiences of the war and the prospects of the post-war world. In his *Treatise on Morality*, Czesław Miłosz wrote:

<sup>33</sup> W. Tarnawski. "Wprowadzenie do *Lorda Jima*". In: W. Tarnawski. *Conrad. Człowiek – pisarz – Polak*. London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1972, p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> W. Turno [W. Tarnawski]. "Conrad na obczyźnie". In: *Conrad żywy*, p. 269.

<sup>35</sup> G. Herling-Grudziński. "Wywiad imaginacyjny z bohaterem 'Tajfunu'". In: G. Herling-Grudziński. *Żywi i umarli*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo FIS, [no date], p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> J. Pertek. *Krążowniki "Dragon" i "Conrad"*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1969, p. 46.

Na dziś nie daję ci nadziei,  
Nie czekaj darmo treuga Dei,  
Bo z życia, które tobie dano,  
Magiczną nie uciekniesz bramą.  
Idźmy w pokój, ludzie prości,  
Przed nami

– „Jądro ciemności”.<sup>37</sup>

I can't give you any hope for the present,  
Don't wait in vain for a Truce of God,  
Because there's no magic escape route  
From the life that you've been given.  
Let us go in peace, we the simple-hearted,  
For before us lies ... the “Heart of Darkness”.<sup>38</sup>

In 1955 Jan Kott observed:

We may now find Conrad somewhat surprising, but then and for a couple of years more after the liberation, Conrad was the living writer of members of the Home Army – and the best and most decent of them at that. What they found in him was a defence of honour that told them to stay at their posts to the bitter end, a predilection for inner drama and a justification for spiritual solitude that had nothing but scorn for all social values.<sup>39</sup>

It was for these very reasons that Conrad was attacked by Marxist intellectuals grouped around the “Kuznica” weekly published in Łódź. The leading role in these attacks fell to Jan Kott, who during the occupation had written a highly stimulating essay entitled *O laickim tragizmie* (*On the secular tragic*), in which he argued that there were no absolute, timeless moral precepts, but that morality was a socially relative concept, right being on the side of the advocates of “Great History”:

In the concept of that blind, merciless and victorious Fate against which Conrad's characters are told to put up a vain struggle it is difficult not to see the conviction – carried over into the domain of ethical concepts – that the world is fundamentally irrational. If this is so, then every act of choice is tragic. The battle in defence of moral values is fought not only in full awareness of the inevitability of defeat, but also with the profound conviction that these values have no real basis in the laws of social development. This attitude must necessarily lead – as it does in Conrad's works – to the acknowledgment that life's greatest value is a heroic death. [...] Conrad's characters act in order to live and die in order to justify their lives.<sup>40</sup>

Kott's conclusion was fairly unequivocal:

In reality – in concrete social reality – Conrad's fidelity to oneself is obedience to those very laws of the world which inwardly are held in contempt. It is a rejection of the right to rebel.

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<sup>37</sup> Cz. Miłosz. “Traktat moralny”. In: Cz. Miłosz. *Poezje*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1981, p. 172. Cf. J. Dudek. *Miłosz wobec Conrada 1948-1959*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Transl. R.E. Pyplacz.

<sup>39</sup> J. Kott. “Odpowiedź na ankietę ‘Nowej Kultury’: ‘Pisarze wobec dziesięciolecia’”. In: J. Kott. *Postęp i głupstwo*. Warszawa: PIW, 1956, Vol. II, p. 336.

<sup>40</sup> J. Kott. “O laickim tragizmie”. *Twórczość* 1945, № 2, p. 142.

Conrad's fidelity to oneself is the fidelity of slaves, for he who obeys his master and is concerned only with his inner integrity is a slave.<sup>41</sup>

This critical assessment gave rise to numerous polemics and was hotly disputed by Józef Chałasiński, Antoni Gołubiew and Hanna Malewska.<sup>42</sup> The most strident voice in this context was that of Maria Dąbrowska, who in an essay entitled "Conradowskie pojęcie wierności" (The Conradian Concept of Fidelity) drew attention to the topical significance of Kott's condemnation:

As Kott takes to task Conrad's "fidelity" and in doing so takes to task the heroic "fidelity" of the Polish Resistance, which fought the Germans for five and a half years, I shall take the liberty of giving a few words of explanation in its defence. The soldiers of the Home Army and all those Poles who, with unparalleled courage, risked their lives and were killed, eventually going as far as to imperil the fate of their beloved capital city, were not fools who showed blind obedience to orders of one sort or another. Those many thousands of soldiers and civilians fought for a Poland that would be really free and really democratic.<sup>43</sup>

Kott's arguments also received a robust rebuttal in an article entitled *Lord Jim i towarzysz Jan* (*Lord Jim and Comrade Jan*), which was published by the Polish émigré author Gustaw Herling-Grudziński.<sup>44</sup>

Jan Kott's voice was not alone, however. In the columns of the "Odrodzenie" magazine one could read the following statement by Stefan Żółkiewski:

Norwid, Conrad and their literary commentators – Przesmycki, Kołaczkowski or Ujejski – not only physically, but also spiritually belong to an irrevocably bygone age.<sup>45</sup>

Such opinions were by no means confined to prominent left-wing literary critics. Their views were adopted by the State authorities. As Stefan Kisielewski somewhat maliciously said of Kott:

He's always in the right, whatever he does. And he's done some strange things. For example, it was through him that they didn't publish Conrad, because he wrote that Conrad used to defend the shipowners and the bourgeois. Just like him, that was. I must say I'm not too fond of the man. He's a good writer, though.<sup>46</sup>

The outcome of these attacks was the administrative suppression of interest in Conrad. The planned publication of Conrad's collected works – which had been be-

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. Chałasiński. "Mitologia i realizm (rec.)". *Myśl Współczesna* 1946, Vol. 2; A. Gołubiew. "Poprawiam Kotta". *Dziś i Jutro* 1945, № 3; H. Malewska. "Jeszcze o heroizmie". *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1945, № 15.

<sup>43</sup> M. Dąbrowska. "Conradowskie pojęcie wierności". *Warszawa* 1946, № 1.

<sup>44</sup> G. Herling-Grudziński. "Lord Jim i towarzysz Jan". *Światło* 1947, № 2 and № 3. On the relations between Kott and Herling-Grudziński see: A. Adamowicz-Pośpiech. "Conradowskie echa w twórczości Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego: biografia, historia i ideologia". In: *Opowiedzieć historię*. Eds. B. Gontarz, M. Krakowiak. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> S. Żółkiewski. "O pozytywny program kulturalny". *Odrodzenie* 1945, № 37. Cf. Żółkiewski's commentary on this article in: S. Żółkiewski. *Cetno i lichy*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1983, pp. 49-50.

<sup>46</sup> S. Kisielewski. "Jan Kott". In: S. Kisielewski. *Abecadło Kisielewa*. Warszawa: Iskry, 1997, p. 66.

gun by a private publishing house – ended in 1948 with the publication of Aniela Zagórska’s wartime translation of *The Golden Arrow*.<sup>47</sup> Translations of *Lord Jim* and *The Mirror of the Sea* appeared a year later, after which there was nothing but silence.

During the years which immediately followed the war, Conrad’s work received a lot of attention from the whole spectrum of Catholic magazines – from the “Tygodnik Warszawski” weekly to “Dziś i Jutro”. Here the leading role fell to the “Tygodnik Powszechny” magazine, in whose columns literary critics often stressed the connections and analogies between the Conradian vision of the world and the axiology and values of Christianity. In this context, particular mention ought to be made of Antoni Gołubiew’s article entitled “Katolickość Conrada” (“Conrad’s Catholicism”) – which was published in the “Znak” magazine<sup>48</sup> – and also of an article by Wit Tarnawski on how Conrad’s work relates to existentialist philosophy, which was particularly popular in the years that followed the Second World War.<sup>49</sup>

During the years when the reading of Conrad’s books was actively discouraged by the communist authorities in Poland, they were avidly read by Poles living abroad. The first Conrad Lovers’ Club (Klub Miłośników Conrada) in Britain was started by Poles in 1948 and it was on the initiative of its members that in 1949 a whole issue of the London “Wiadomości” magazine was devoted to Conrad on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death.<sup>50</sup> This issue included a poem – written by Wit Tarnawski – which best conveys what Conrad then meant to Polish émigrés:

Poeto wędrowców, patronie bezdomnych,  
towarzyszu tych wszystkich, których wygnał z kraju  
wróg lub własna niespokojna dusza.  
Przewodniku surowy, wierny, niezawodny.  
Jakoś za życia stawał u steru, prowadząc statki przez odmęt,  
Tak stoisz dzisiaj pośród dzieł swoich:  
Na pokładzie „Nan Shanu”, na pomoście dowódczym  
„Błyskawicy”, na wraku płonącej „Judei”  
i wołasz ku nam przez burze mórz, przez burze wieków:  
„Spełń swą powinność lub zgiń”  
„Do or die.”<sup>51</sup>

Poet of voyagers, inspiration for the homeless,  
companion of all those who have been exiled  
by the enemy or by their own restless souls.  
Stern, faithful and unfailing guide.  
Just as you used to stand at the helm,  
steering ships through troubled waters,  
So you stand today amidst your books:  
On board the *Nan-Shan*, on the bridge of the

<sup>47</sup> Cf. J. Conrad. *Złota strzala*. Transl. A. Zagórska, K. Zagórska and J. Kornilowiczowa with an introduction by J. Parandowski. Kraków: Instytut Wydawniczy Poziom, 1948.

<sup>48</sup> A. Gołubiew. “Katolickość Conrada”. *Znak* 1948, № 6.

<sup>49</sup> W. Tarwid [W. Tarnawski]. “Conrad przeciwko Sartre’owi”. *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1947, № 45.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Wiadomości* (London) 1949, № 33/34.

<sup>51</sup> W. Tarnawski. “Do Conrada”. *Wiadomości* (London) 1949, № 33/34.

*Lightning* and on the wreck of the burning *Judea*,  
calling to us through the storms of seas and centuries:  
“Do your duty or die in the attempt.”  
“Do or die.”<sup>52</sup>

Important articles on Conrad’s writing appeared in the columns of the émigré “Kultura” journal which was published in Paris. Among the authors were Wit Tarnawski, Stanisław Vincenz and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński.<sup>53</sup> The greatest Conradian achievement of Polish émigré writers came in 1957 with the publication of a volume of essays entitled *Conrad żywy* (*Living Conrad*) under the editorship of Tarnawski. The contributors included leading Polish émigré writers such as Andrzej Bobkowski, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Jerzy Stempowski, Czesław Miłosz, Tymon Terlecki, Stanisław Vincenz and Wit Tarnawski himself.

Another important event was the publication of a new translation of *Under Western Eyes* by Wit Tarnawski in 1955. In émigré circles this gave rise to extensive discussions on the subject of Conrad’s attitude towards Russia and Russian culture – discussions which at that time could not have taken place in Poland because of the existence of communist censorship.<sup>54</sup> By broadcasting several programmes on Conrad, the Polish section of Radio Free Europe (based in Munich) also did its bit to foster interest in the author.<sup>55</sup> Mention must also be made of Andrzej Busza’s then pioneering and invaluable dissertation entitled *Conrad’s Polish literary background and some illustrations of the influence of Polish Literature on his work*.<sup>56</sup>

## 5

A fundamental change in the communist government’s attitude towards Conrad took place in and around 1956, with the advent of ‘de-Stalinization’ and the abandonment of the policy of imposing socialist realism. A harbinger of this shift in policy was the publication of Teresa Tatarkiewiczowa’s translation of *Chance* in 1955, while in the following year the State-run Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy publishing house began to publish a series of selected works by Conrad (*Z pism Josepha Conrada*). Interest in Conrad culminated in 1957, which was the anniversary year

<sup>52</sup> Translated by R.E. Pyłacz. The Polish destroyer *Błyskawica* (in English: *Lightning*) fought alongside the Royal Navy during World War II.

<sup>53</sup> W. Tarnawski. “Uwagi o formie artystycznej Conrada”. *Kultura* (Paris) 1949, № 9; W. Tarnawski. “Conrad a...”. *Kultura* (Paris) 1957, № 1-2; W. Tarnawski, St. Vincenz and W. Dołęga. “Czy Conrad był antyrosyjski?”. *Kultura* (Paris) 1957, № 4; G. Herling-Grudziński. “W oczach Conrada”. *Kultura* (Paris) 1957, № 10.

<sup>54</sup> G. Herling-Grudziński. “W oczach Conrada”; W. Tarnawski. “W sprawie pięciu Conradów”. In: W. Tarnawski. *Conrad. Człowiek – pisarz – Polak*, pp. 172-180.

<sup>55</sup> K.W. Tatarowski. *Literatura i pisarze w programie Rozgłośni Polskiej Radio Wolna Europa*. Kraków: Universitas, 2005, pp. 243-244, 248.

<sup>56</sup> A. Busza. “Conrad’s Polish literary background and some illustrations of the influence of Polish literature on his work”. *Antemurale* (Rome–London) 1966, Vol. X.

of his birth. In that year, almost every Polish cultural and literary magazine had a special issue largely devoted to Conrad, with contributions from leading writers and literary critics. The "Nowa Kultura" magazine, for instance, carried articles by Maria Dąbrowska, Antoni Słonimski, Zdzisław Najder and Arnold Kettle, while the "Przegląd Kulturalny" had contributions from M.C. Bradbrook and Zdzisław Najder. The "Życie Literackie" magazine featured articles by Jan Józef Szczepański, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Róża Jabłkowska. The "Tygodnik Powszechny" for its part carried articles by Antoni Gołubiew, Zdzisław Najder and Zbigniew Grabowski. In the December of 1957 a symposium on Conrad was held in Warsaw and later a special issue of the "Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny" featured articles by, among others, Richarda Curle, Jocelyn Baines, Ivo Vidan, Witold Chwałewik, Stanisław Helsztyński and Róża Jabłkowska.<sup>57</sup>

The fruits of this anniversary year were not long in coming. 1958 saw the publication of a somewhat belated Polish translation of Jean-Aubry's *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (Życie Conrada)*, which was then the most significant biography of Conrad. Over the next few years, competent and highly favourable texts on Conrad appeared in the press and later in book form. This phase of the Polish reception of Conrad began with the publication (in 1963) of an invaluable volume of reminiscences and studies (*Wspomnienia i studia o Conradzie*) edited by Barbara Kocówna. A collection of Conrad's letters edited by Zdzisław Najder came out in 1968. Here mention must also be made of the collected essays of Maria Dąbrowska (*Szkice o Conradzie* – 1959), Róża Jabłkowska's study entitled *Conrad 1857-1924* (1960), a collection of studies by Zdzisław Najder entitled *Nad Conradem (Reading Conrad* – 1965) and also Barbara Kocówna's study on Conrad's Polishness entitled *Polskość Conrada* (1967). Jocelyn Baines's new biography entitled *Joseph Conrad. A Critical Biography* (1960) aroused interest in the Polish émigré press, but received scant attention in newspapers and magazines published in Poland. In this context, the deprecatory comments made by Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz in 1962 were completely anachronistic:

I fail to understand the Polish attitude towards this writer. I wholeheartedly share the opinion of Eliza Orzeszkowa, who condemned Conrad. If someone has turned his back on us, then can we take pride in him? He was the son of a great patriot. So much the worse for him – his conduct is all the less justifiable.<sup>58</sup>

The 1970s could be called the golden age of Conrad studies in Poland. A factor that worked in favour of this was a certain degree of political liberalization that marked the decade when Edward Gierek was in power as first secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party. It was also at this time that Zdzisław Najder played a major role in furthering the Conradian cause in Poland. In the years 1972-1974, a twenty-seven-volume edition of Conrad's collected works – then the most extensive in the world – was published under his editorship. A supplementary twenty-eighth volume containing Conrad's political writings – which had been suppressed

<sup>57</sup> Cf. "Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski. Essays and Studies". *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny* 1958, № 1/2.

<sup>58</sup> St. Mackiewicz. "Temat dla L.H. Morstina". *Słowo Powszechne* 1962, № 25.

by the communist censors – was published anonymously in London.<sup>59</sup> Zdzisław Najder was also the editor of two volumes of Conrad's writing that were published in the prestigious "Biblioteka Narodowa" series: *Wybór opowiadań* (*Selected Stories* – 1972) and *Lord Jim* (1978).

In 1972 an international Conrad conference was held in Warsaw, Cracow and Gdańsk. The participants included not only Conrad scholars such as Ian Watt, Eloise Knapp Hay, Norman Sherry, Thomas Moser, Cedric Watts, Mario Curreli, Hans van Marle, Gustav Morf, Przemysław Mroczkowski, Witold Chwałewik, Aniela Kowalska, Róża Jabłkowska, Barbara Koc and Zdzisław Najder, but also the Polish authors Andrzej Braun and Leszek Prorok (who were members of the generation of 1920) and the Polish émigré writers Aleksander Janta and Andrzej Busza. The guest of honour was Conrad's elder son Borys. The proceedings of the conference were later published in two volumes edited by Róża Jabłkowska: *Joseph Conrad Colloquy in Poland, 5-12 September 1972. Contributions* (1975) and *Joseph Conrad Conference in Poland 5-12 September 1972. Contributions. Second series* (1979). In the anniversary year of 1974 the Polish press carried many articles on Conrad, while commemorative events and conferences devoted to the author took place in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Kazimierz nad Wisłą and Sosnowiec.<sup>60</sup>

Books on Conrad written by Polish authors living in Poland during this period included Przemysław Mroczkowski's *Conradian Commentaries* (1970), Stefan Zabierowski's *Conrad w Polsce* (1971), Andrzej Braun's *Conrad – dotknięcie Wschodu* (1970) and *Śladami Conrada* (1972), Aniela Kowalska's *Conrad 1896-1900* (1972), a collection of articles on maritime subjects entitled *Conrad w żeglarskiej kurcie* edited by Józef Miłobędzki (1972), Najder's invaluable anthology entitled *Conrad w oczach krytyki światowej* (1974), an expanded version of Maria Dąbrowska's *Szkice o Conradzie* (1974), a collection of articles entitled *Studia conradowskie* edited by Stefan Zabierowski, two collections of articles – *Nad tekstami Conrada* (1976) and *O kompozycji tekstu conradowskiego* (1978) – edited by Andrzej Zgorzelski, Michał Komar's *Piekło Conrada* (1978) and Tadeusz Skutnik's anthology entitled *W imię Conrada. Joseph Conrad w poezji polskiej* (1977).

Translations of books on Conrad written by foreign authors included Jerry Allen's *The Sea years of Joseph Conrad* (*Morskie lata Conrada* – 1971), Norman Sherry's *Conrad's Eastern World* (*Wschodni świat Conrada* – 1972) and *Conrad's Western World* (*Zachodni świat Conrada* – 1974). A translation of Ian Watt's ground-breaking study entitled *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (*Conrad w wieku dziewiętnastym*) was published in 1984.

Books on Conrad written by Polish authors living abroad during this period included Wit Tarnawski's *Conrad. Człowiek – pisarz – Polak* (1972) Barbara Koc's biography entitled *Conrad* (1978), Tadeusz Bobrowski's letters to Conrad (*Listy do Conrada*) edited by Róża Jabłkowska (1981) and Zdzisław Najder's impressive biog-

<sup>59</sup> Cf. M. Wąsik. "Conrad and communist censorship: the story of the 28<sup>th</sup> volume of the Polish edition of Conrad's collected works (1974-75)". *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)* 2014, Vol. IX, pp. 89-94.

<sup>60</sup> L. Prorok. "Po roku Conrada". *Odra* 1975, № 3.

raphy entitled *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego* (1980), an English translation of which was published in 1983 under the title *Joseph Conrad: a Chronicle*.

In the 1970s there were Polish adaptations of Conrad's works for the theatre, the cinema and television. Worthy of mention are, among others, the Polish Television Theatre's adaptation of *Lord Jim* (directed by Lidia Zamkow) in 1972, an adaptation entitled *Patna*, which was directed by Kazimierz Dejmek and staged at the Teatr Nowy theatre in Łódź in 1973, Romuald Twardowski's opera entitled *Lord Jim* (directed by Maria Fołtyn) – performed in 1974 at the Opera Bałtycka opera house in Gdańsk – and Andrzej Wajda's 1976 film adaptation of *The Shadow Line* (*Smuga cienia*). Another event worthy of mention was the unveiling of an impressive monument to Conrad – sculpted by Zdzisław Koseda and Wawrzyniec Samp – in Gdynia in 1976.

Interest in Conrad waned somewhat in the 1980s, especially after the declaration of martial law in 1981. However, the trend towards the adoption of a more scholarly approach in publications on Conrad – which had begun in the 1960s and had gained ground in the 1970s – continued unabated. In 1984 Andrzej Zgorzelski published a study on Conrad's short stories entitled *O nowelach Conrada*, while in 1988 Wiesław Krajka published an extensive thesis entitled *Izolacja i etos. Studium o twórczości Josepha Conrada*. 1988 also saw the publication of Stefan Zabierowski's "*Autor-rodak*". *Pisarze polscy wobec Conrada*, an expanded version of which was published in 1992 under the title *Dziedzictwo Conrada w literaturze polskiej XX wieku*. Andrzej Braun's *Kreacja Costaguany* came out in 1989. Mention must also be made of Leszek Prorok's essays on Conrad, which were published posthumously in 1987 under the title *Inicjacje conradowskie*.

An important event in 1993 was the publication of Wanda Perczak's Polish Conradian bibliography entitled *Polska bibliografia conradowska. 1896-1992*.

The activity of Polish Conrad scholars and translators was boosted by the end of communist rule in 1989. New translations of Conrad's works were published, as were those Conradiana which had hitherto been unavailable in Poland because of the objections of communist censors. Unburdened by the past, young scholars began to study Conrad in a new spirit. During these years, Poland witnessed a rapid growth in the number of methodological approaches to Conrad research, which included those based on biography, the history of ideas, comparative literature, cultural science, the theory of literary genres, the theory of translation, the theory of literary reception, intertextual relations and postcolonial theory. In this context, mention ought to be made of Stanisław Modrzewski's study entitled *Conrad a konwencje* (1994), Wiesław Krajka's *Joseph Conrad. Konteksty kulturowe* (1995), a collection of Polish letters, documents and reminiscences entitled *Conrad wśród swoich. Listy – dokumenty – wspomnienia* edited by Zdzisław Najder and Joanna Skolik (1996), a revised and corrected edition of Zdzisław Najder's biography of Conrad entitled *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego* (1996), Zdzisław Najder's excellent collection of studies entitled *Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada* (2000), Marta Skwara's *Motywy szaleństwa w twórczości Witkacego i Conrada* (1999), Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech's studies entitled *Joseph Conrad – spory o biografię* (2003) and "*Lord Jim*"

*Conrada. Interpretacje* (2007), Grażyna Branny's *a Conflict of Values: Alienation and Commitment in the Novels of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner* (1997), Stefan Zabierowski's two studies entitled *W kręgu Conrada* (2008) and "Lord Jim" *w krytyce i w mediach* (2008), Paweł Dzianisz's collection of essays entitled *Wokół Conrada* (2008), Joanna Skolik's *The Ideal of Fidelity in Conrad's Works* (2009), Marek Pacukiewicz's *Dyskurs antropologiczny w pisarstwie Josepha Conrada* (2009), Wiesław Ratajczak's *Conrad i koniec epoki żaglowców* (2010), Jolanta Dudek's *Miłosz wobec Conrada. 1948-1959* (2014) and Rafał Kopkowski's *Polskie dziedzictwo Conrada* (2014). A translation of John Stape's *The several lives of Joseph Conrad* was published under the title *Joseph Conrad* in 2009.

Here mention must also be made of several Polish works which are based on Conrad's biography: Leszek Prorok's *Smuga blasku* (1982), Waclaw Biliński's *Sprawa w Marsylii* (1983), Jan Parandowski's story *Godzina śródziemnomorska* (1949) – in a collection bearing the same title – and Andrzej Braun's story *Morze Północne* (2003) – included in his volume entitled *Apogeum*.

A new phenomenon has been the appearance of new Polish translations of Conrad's works. *Lord Jim* was translated by Michał Kłobukowski in 2001 and by Michał Filipczuk in 2004. *The Shadow Line (Smuga cienia)* was translated by Ewa Chruściel in 2001, while *Heart of Darkness (Jądro ciemności)* was translated by Jędrzej Polak in 1994, Barbara Koc in 2000, Ireneusz Socha in 2004 and Magda Heydel in 2011.

Lately two important studies on the art of translating Conrad have been published in Poland: Ewa Kujawska-Lis's *Marlow pod polską banderą. Tetralogia Josepha Conrada w przekładach z lat 1904-2004* (2011) and Agnieszki Adamowicz-Pośpiech's *Seria w przekładzie. Polskie warianty prozy Josepha Conrada* (2013).

Recent years have also seen a rapid growth in the number Conrad conferences in Poland. The Polish Conrad Society – whose president until recently has been Zdzisław Najder – has to date organized five international conferences: "Various National Perspectives on Conrad" (Gdańsk 1997 – in cooperation with the Voivodeship and Municipal Public Library in Gdańsk), "Conrad and History" (Cracow 1999 – in cooperation with the International Cultural Centre in Cracow), "Conrad's Europe" (Opole and Cracow, 2004 – in cooperation with the University of Opole), "The reception of the work of Joseph Conrad – readers real and implied" (Cracow 2007 – in cooperation with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute and the Jagiellonian University and under the patronage of President Lech Kaczyński) and "Poland and the Conrad Problem: Conrad's reception in his home country and abroad" (Cracow 2014 – in cooperation with the Jagiellonian University). Other Conrad conferences have taken place in Gdańsk, Lublin, Warsaw and Zielona Góra.

6

There is a curious paradox in present-day Poland. All of Conrad's works – including his political writings – are now easily accessible. Many articles and books – often of a high standard – are being written about his life and work. And yet in Society at large interest in him is relatively low. It is now predominantly professionals and – to a much lesser extent – faithful enthusiasts who are interested in Conrad. How are we to explain this phenomenon?

Several reasons come to mind. In Poland, it is members of the intellectual elite who have always shown a great interest in Conrad. Despite appearances to the contrary, he has never been a writer with a mass following at historical and cultural turning points, i.e. during times of national crisis. Intellectual interest and moral reflection generated by Conrad's books was greatest in the 1930s, when a new generation of Poles had grown up in an independent country (unlike their parents and grandparents) and were now looking for a set of new ideals. Conrad's impact on Polish readers reached its peak during the Second World War, when he was a source of moral support for those who – often in tragic situations – fought desperate battles against German and Russian totalitarianism. After the war, Conrad's writing was a source of inspiration for democratic forces opposing communist dictatorship. With the advent of democracy, which was accompanied by the introduction of a market economy and the expansion of mass culture, Conrad's influence waned significantly, as he was now valued above all not so much for his ideas on morality, historiosophy or politics as for the fact that he was a great artist, being one of the twentieth century's great writers of prose. As happens with classics, Conrad's work became the subject of all manner of interpretations, though these were often of an abstruse nature and were largely inaccessible to the general reader. Conrad is no ordinary classic, however. His links with Poland are quite exceptional. Although he himself was born into Polish culture, his own writing continues to exert a strong influence on that culture. He was not just a great English writer, but was very much "one of us" – and that is the secret of his undying presence in the Polish cultural world.

Translated by R. E. Pyplacz

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