

TRACING CONRAD'S DUELISTS
REVIEW OF: JOHN H. STAPE AND JOHN G. PETERS.
***CONRAD'S "THE DUEL": SOURCES/TEXT.* LEIDEN,**
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J.H. Stape and John G. Peters give the reader a unique opportunity to investigate and trace the sources and genealogy of "The Duel." In the Preface to their book the authors remind us about Conrad's fascination with the Napoleonic era and point to his "Author's Note" to *A Set of Six* (1908) where the writer explains the origins of the tale, which is collected in the volume: "It springs from a ten-line paragraph in a small provincial paper published in the South of France [...]" (86). Stape and Peters invite the reader on a fascinating quest for the tale's sources. Not only does the reader learn that "The Duel" is based on "an *Ur*-story that lay ready to hand" (vi), but is also given "the raw materials to engage with Conrad's imaginative transformation of a story that circulated in several forms and languages in Europe and [...] in the United States" (vi).

The main body of the book is divided into two parts: "Sources" and "Text." The former consists of two chapters: "'The Duel': *Ur*-Versions, 1858-1903" by J.H. Stape and Karen Zouaoui, and "A 1907 Source for 'The Duel'" by J.H. Stape. The first chapter is written in memory of Hans van Marle, whose work on the genealogy of the tale can hardly be overestimated. Stape and Zouaoui present an account of the search for the sources of Conrad's tale, namely a discovery of the earlier versions of a story of two officers whose duel lasted from the outset of the French Revolution to the close of the Napoleonic era. The authors begin with the findings of J. DeLancey Ferguson (1935) and Donald Cross (1968), to later remind us about van Marle's own discovery of four versions of the story. In addition, Stape and Zouaoui include twelve other versions, with a reservation that further ones "may well come to light in due course" (3). Moreover, the researchers discuss the stories that Conrad might have read while in Montpellier, by referring to van Marle's deliberations on the subject. The authors come to a conclusion that "[t]he version of the story that came into Conrad's hands cannot be identified with precision, but d'Alembert, whose phrasing is at times echoed in his text, seems to be the most likely" (4). This introductory section of the chapter ends with the Appendix presenting the authors of the "fourteen

versions of the story of the Napoleonic duel in print in French and English when Conrad began to draft his short story in January 1907" (4). The final section of the first chapter comprises all fourteen versions arranged chronologically and supplied "with full publication data" (4).

In the second chapter "A 1907 Source for 'The Duel'" J.H. Stape conducts a thorough investigation into the immediate source of Conrad's tale, namely the "ten-line paragraph [...] published in the South of France [...]" (86). The author mentions the papers where the news appeared during Conrad's stay in Montpellier in 1907. He refers to the duel having been "widely reported" (86) in Paris, where it became a great sensation not only because of the mysterious reasons for the quarrel but also because of "the unusual choice of weapon, [which] gave the affair further spice" (87). The researcher also introduces the duelists: their names, family backgrounds and all other details found in the articles. Stape concludes: "If nothing else, the focus on the oath of silence taken by the two principals and their seconds, repeatedly mentioned in the press, influenced Conrad's treatment of a story whose main outlines he had borrowed from another source" (89).

The second part of the book, titled "Text," is a unique version of Conrad's tale for it is "the preprint state of 'The Duel,'" i.e., a "typescript/manuscript [...] in a tightly bound volume" (90) in the Special Collections Department of The Free Library of Philadelphia. Although the lineation of the text is missing, its pagination is preserved. While the punctuation irregularities lack editorial comment, the square brackets mark editorial interpolations "to adjust spelling or to draw attention to an anomaly or to supply an obviously missing word. Asterisks indicate matter that is not legible" (90). Thus the reader takes part in the process of creation by following all the changes to the text.

As the blurb says, the book "will interest several readerships": from scholars working on historical, textual and genealogical problems, to teachers of short fiction and creative writing. It will not only attract scholars who might want to verify Northrop Frye's proposition that "literature derives not from life but from other literature" (vi) but also the inquisitive reader attempting to trace the links between literature and life.