

JOSEPH CONRAD WORLD WIDE
AND HIS POLISH FOOTPRINTS

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From 8-10 September, 1991 there was a conference in Baranów Sandomierski on Conrad's Polish Footprints. The conference organized by the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, and sponsored by the Tarnobrzeg Province Administration and the Tarnobrzeg Public Library was a notable and major event in the world of Conrad scholarship. The chief organizer of the conference, Profesor Wiesław Krajka succeeded in making it really international. The list of those present and delivering papers may illustrate it very well. Apart from 29 scholars from Poland there were 22 from Britain, 21 from the U.S.A., 4 from Sweden, 3 from Canada, 3 from Norway, 2 from Italy, 2 from The Republic of South Africa, 2 from Ukraine and 1 from each of the following countries: France, Croatia, Korea and Taiwan. Also present were Joseph Conrad's grandson, Philip Conrad, President of the Joseph Conrad Society United Kingdom; Juliet McLauchlan, Chairman, Joseph Conrad Society United Kingdom; Adam Gillon, President, Joseph Conrad Society of America; Stig Nystrand, President, Scandinavian Joseph Conrad Society and many other distinguished scholars.

Juliet McLauchlan, Oxford University, held the opening plenary lecture on *Conrad's "few very simple ideas"* in which she stressed that, in spite of the fact that Conrad is the greatest English novelist, it is impossible for the English to understand him completely, because the very core of his writing is Polish. She gave a very interesting new dimension to Conrad's concepts of honour and fidelity extending them into the sphere of emotion.

Adam Gillon presented the methods of *Adapting Conrad to film: Dark Country*. Stig Nystrand from the Institute of Philosophy, University of Lund in his paper entitled *Joseph Conrad and the Central European tradition in fiction and philosophy* among other things found parallels between Conrad's attitude to philosophy and aesthetics and the ideas of Wittgenstein. In general his thesis that Conrad was widely responsive to Central European thought as represented by the above men-

tioned philosopher whom, as Nystrand suggests, Conrad could have met personally in London and such writers as Musil is tenable also because as a Polish scholar Karol Kosek has proved in his paper entitled *J.T Korzeniowski's education and the influence of Polish school in Galicia [1868-1874] on mentality and literary culture of Conrad* in which he presented the results of thorough investigation of school archives, Conrad was exposed in his secondary school education very strongly to Austrian and German literature and philosophy. Nystrand also discussed the German notion of *Kitsch* and especially its ethical emptiness to argue that Conrad in his artistic ethics was deliberately *anti-Kitsch*. Conrad's fiction naturally attracts scholars whose interest lies in the field of narratology. Among papers dealing with such subjects the present writer found most interesting that by Claude Maisonnat from English Department, Université Lumière Lyon II, entitled *Discursive deception and the quest for meaning in 'Almayer's Folly'*. Maisonnat opposed the views of other critics claiming that the inconsistencies of the novel could be attributed to the author's lack of skill. The author of the paper pointed out that Conrad "...was far more conscious of the importance of technique in the writing of fiction than he claimed to be" and that generally Conrad possessed "...an amazingly modern awareness of the problematic of fiction." In discussing *Almayer's Folly* the author of the paper went as far as stating that "a process of deconstruction is somehow at work in the narrative set up of the novel." As a characteristic feature of Conrad's art of fiction present in the discussed novel Maisonnat pointed out that "...not only are the characters deceived and manipulated in the story but the reader is too" and that all the characters are involved in a constant tampering with meaning and truth, "...that they alternately find themselves in the position of encoding or decoding trumped up messages". That the problems of Conrad's narratology are not yet exhausted was also shown by Richard Ambrosini in his paper entitled *Conrad's 'Paper Boats'* in which many new insights into the subject were present. Marta Wiszniowska from the Department of English Studies, Nicolas Copernicus University, Toruń, compared the stage versions of Conrad's works with the narrative ones and noted the changes in character drawing in the former. She concluded that "For all the shortcomings Conrad mastered enough of playwrighting skill to produce actable versions of his fictions". Her paper entitled *Conrad a playwright manqué* covered a rather neglected area. Another such seemingly marginal field, the comic aspect of Conrad's writings, was presented in a very lively way by G.W. Stephen Brodsky from the Department of Literature and Philosophy, Royal Roads Military College (Canada) in a paper entitled *The Conrad Harlequinade, Bakhtin, Rabelais and Conrad's Szlachcic Comic Spirit*. The author of the paper found many unsuspected comic elements in Conrad's fiction.

Among the modern methodologies one could also expect feminism and it was actually represented by at least three papers, that of Paul B. Armstrong from The Department of English, University of Oregon, entitled *Misogyny and the ethics of reading: the problem of Conrad's 'Chance'*; Padmini Mongia, *Empire, narrative, and the feminine in 'Lord Jim' and 'Heart of Darkness'*; Heliéna Krenn from Fu Jen University, Taiwan, *The 'beautiful' world of women — women as a reflection of colonial issues in Conrad's Malay novels*. Biography always occupies a number of

Conrad scholars at any conference for the obvious reason: his life, according to the formulation of one of the scholars, remains one of the greatest mysteries. This is well illustrated by a paper by Ernest W. Sullivan from English Department, Texas Tech University entitled *Joseph Conrad tries to prove who he is: Life insurance form as autobiography* and by several other papers both by Polish and foreign scholars. Last but not least, comparative studies must be mentioned. By his "double nationality" Conrad naturally invites comparisons above all with Polish writers, both those writing before him and after him, and the present writer is convinced that in spite of much work being done in this particular field, there is still much untapped material in it. Just two papers must be mentioned here: Alex Kurchaba's from The University of Illinois at Chicago, entitled *Gombrowicz and Conrad: The question of autobiography* and Eugenia Łoch's from UMCS *Conradian inspiration in Iwaszkiewicz's short stories*. There were many other papers on many other subjects. The author of this brief report is not free from subjectivism in his selection and is fully aware that for various reasons he is unable to do justice to all equally deserving scholars. One can only wish further good luck to professor Krajka in publishing the proceedings of the really remarkable conference, taking place in the splendid historic surroundings of the Baranów castle and followed by a trip to places in Poland associated with Conrad. This great event taking place from September 8-10, 1991 augurs well for future such conferences planned in the same place and elsewhere.