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Teaching Conrad: the challenge and the satisfaction

SUMMARY

Teaching Joseph Conrad is not an easy task, but some of the difficulties can be avoided by careful planning of lectures and practical classes. This involves students' familiarisation with major facts of Conrad's life and involvement in group projects. The knowledge of Conrad's difficult childhood and adolescence in the partitioned Poland after the failure of the January Uprising helps students comprehend Conrad's complex personality and his inner conflicts, which, in turn, influenced his creative writing. Keeping this in mind, students can adequately interpret Conradian themes, such as disillusionment, a sense of guilt and isolation, on the one hand, and repentance, (universal) solidarity and belief in mankind, on the other. In addition, viewing Conrad as a writer of Polish origin can be beneficial for due appreciation of his literary style.

Key words: teaching British literature, Joseph Conrad, Conrad's Polishness.

Teaching literature is a challenge in itself, and teaching Joseph Conrad is a challenge in particular. First, in order to understand the profound meaning of his works, the students have to be familiar with the writer's outlook, his life philosophy and principal values. These, in turn, cannot be fully understood without the knowledge of the basic facts of the author's life and the circumstances in which his moral position was shaped, and it is not easy to grasp Conrad's biography and the shaping of his values. Second, there is the question of Conrad's affiliation to a specific ethnic group and, even more importantly, the way in which his self-identification influenced his literary oeuvre. Last but not least, Conrad's works are not recognized as easy and pleasant fiction, and this can be discouraging to modern students. In this article, I wish to share my experience of trying to solve these problems and to ensure a fruitful and satisfying learning process.

Before reading and analyzing Conrad's works, students need at least a brief introduction encompassing the concise description of the relevant social and historical situation and the most important facts of the author's biography. As was rightly stated by Oliver Warner, The facts of a writer's personal life are sometimes an unimportant element in the understanding of his work. With Conrad it is otherwise. His life and his books are so closely integrated that what passes for a story, as instanced by "Youth", is sometimes autobiography, while who shall say that passages in "A Personal Record" lack the flavor of fiction? He was capable

of creation in the large sense, but he draw upon and returned again and again to the store of direct experience he had acquired in his dealings with fellow men of almost every race and creed¹.

For both scholars and students of Conrad, two factors of the writer's biography are of importance: the patriotic stance of his parents, relations and friends of the family who influenced young Conrad's upbringing, and the fact that the boy was born, spent most of his childhood and adolescence in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment. While teaching Conrad in British Literature lectures, I usually start with contextualizing the problem by asking my Polish students to recall the political and social situation in the partitioned Poland, especially in the years preceding the January Rising 1863–64. This exercise is helpful for the Polish students, who constitute the majority of the group and whose knowledge of the Polish history is – or is supposed to be – quite extensive. The introduction is also essential for Erasmus+ students, whose high school curriculum covered the history of Europe in general, but not Poland in particular. After that, at my request the Polish students describe the persona of Conrad's father Apollo Korzeniowski, a poet, translator, playwright and political activist. I usually modify and finalize students' deduction, repeating the main ideas. This staging helps arouse students' interest in the personality of Joseph Conrad and prepares them for the lecture properly. With the introduction completed, I start the theoretical part of the lecture, in which I read and interpret these facts.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) achieved significant success in two careers: as a mariner (in which he reached the degree of a captain) and as an English writer. His works, which can be classified between realism and early modernism, influenced writers belonging to a comparatively modern school: post-colonialism². His first-hand experience in maritime career certainly helped his literary mastery. As stated by Stephen Brodsky, “only his [Conrad's] sea life in British vessels could produce the *Narcissus's* Captain Alistoun and Donkin, *Nan-Shan's* Captain MacWhirr, *Sofala's* chief officer Sterne, and *Patna's* Lord Jim”³. Remarkably, Conrad is considered to be one of the best authors who wrote in the English language, and is admired for his fine, exquisite style of writing, notwithstanding the fact that he was not a native speaker and did not learn the language until his early twenties.

Joseph Conrad (real name: Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, coat of arms: Nałęcz) was born in or near Berdyczów (now: Berdychiv) on the territory of Ukraine which, after the loss of the country's independence, in the 18th–19th century was regarded by the Polish *szlachta* (nobility) as an essential part of Poland. Many Polish romantic writers (including Antoni Malczewski, Seweryn Goszczyński, Józef Bohdan Zaleski, Juliusz Słowacki, Henryk Rzewuski and, finally, Józef Teodor Korzeniowski's father Apollo and his namesake, Józef Korzeniowski)

¹ O. Warner, *Joseph Conrad*, London and Tonbridge: Longman Group UK Limited for the British Council, 1976.

² N. Martinière, “Like a Damaged Kaleidoscope: Multiple Contemporary Images of Joseph Conrad”, *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. Joseph Conrad's Authorial Self: Polish and Other*, Edited with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: M. Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 2018, s. 21.

³ S. G. W. Brodsky, “Anchors and Mirrors: Joseph Conrad's Polonism Encoded”. *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. Joseph Conrad's Authorial Self: Polish and Other*, Edited with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 2018, s. 71.

viewed Ukraine, its history, nature and people through rose-tinted glasses⁴. For them, “Ukraine was native land, the Edenic land of childhood and youth”⁵. The Poles referred to Ukraine as *Kresy* (the Borderlands). According to Joanna Skolik, the term *Borderlands* (written with a capital letter) was in a way representative of Poland’s historical past and its destiny. Importantly, “The Borderland[s] became a mythical being ideal of Polish national life when the Republic lost its independence and disappeared from the map”⁶. Moreover, Skolik believes that “Ukraine (the Borderland[s]) was a magical land, a special territory not only for Poles of all sorts but also for Conrad himself [...]”⁷. This can be illustrated by Conrad’s descriptions of the Ukrainian landscapes in his novels *The Sisters* and *A Personal Record*, which are filled with warmth and nostalgia. As Conrad himself later mentioned in *A Personal Record*, his childhood days near Berdyczów (now Berdychiv in Ukraine) were the happiest time of his life.

Besides Poles and Ukrainians, the land of Conrad’s birth and childhood was inhabited by other ethnic groups, such as Jews and Russians. These groups belonged to different denominations: Roman Catholic, Jewish, Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox, and Ukrainian Unitarian (Greek Catholic). Interestingly, Conrad’s maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski was baptized by a Uniate priest “in dire emergency”, because Tadeusz was born a weak child and his parents wanted him to be baptized in case he died soon after birth⁸. Hence, since his earliest childhood Józef Teodor lived in a multi-national, multi-religious and multi-cultured environment, which must have been a significant factor in forming his moral stance of open-mindedness and cultural and religious tolerance, thus preparing him “for the variety of cultures and religions which he encountered as an adult”⁹.

Importantly, during his childhood and early adolescence Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was to a certain degree influenced by his father Apollo, a poet, translator, playwright and political activist. Apollo Korzeniowski, “a radical romantic Messianic Polish patriot, even an impractical dreamer”, was a prominent member of the clandestine Polish patriotic organization¹⁰. He was the leader of the “Reds” faction, a radical wing of the Poles engaged

⁴ A. Brzozowska-Krajka, “Yanko Goorall: A Waxwork from the Wax Museum of Polish Romanticism”, *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. Joseph Conrad: East European, Polish and Worldwide*. Edited and with an Introduction by W. Krajka, 1999, s. 165; L. Omelan, “Conrad and Ukraine – Ukraine and Conrad”, *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. From Szlachta Culture to the 21st Century, Between East and West. New Essays on Joseph Conrad’s Polishness*, Edited and with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: M. Curie-Skłodowska UP, New York: Columbia UP 2013, s. 379–380.

⁵ A. Brzozowska-Krajka, op. cit., s. 165.

⁶ J. Skolik, “Conrad’s Mythical World of the Borderland”, *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. From Szlachta Culture to the 21st Century, Between East and West. New Essays on Joseph Conrad’s Polishness*, Edited and with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: M. Curie-Skłodowska UP, New York: Columbia UP, 2013, s. 147.

⁷ Ibidem, s. 151.

⁸ T. Bobrowski, *A Memoir of My Life*, Translated and edited with an Introduction by Addison Bross, *Conrad: Eastern and western Perspectives*, Edited by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs; Lublin: M. Curie-Skłodowska UP, New York: Columbia UP, 2008, s. 114.

⁹ M. Majewska, „Konrad u Pol’shchi: Narys Problematyky”. *Velyka Volyn*, trans. L. Omelan, 2 vols., Zhytomyr 37, 1, 2007, s. 86.

¹⁰ W. Krajka, “Joseph Conrad 1861–1869: A Polish Romantic-Martyrological Patriot?”, *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. A Return to the Roots: Conrad, Poland and East-Central Europe*, Edited and with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska UP, New York: Columbia UP, 2004, s. 25–26.

in the national-liberating movement whose plans foresaw the restoration of the country's independence. In particular, the Polish patriots were preparing an armed insurrection against the Tsarist Russia, who had refused to recognize Poland's autonomy.

For Apollo Korzeniowski, there was no divisive mark between his public activities and private life. Even the birth of his only son was viewed in nation-wide categories: his third given name, Konrad, bore a definitely patriotic connotation, echoing the name of the character of the Romantic poetic drama *Dziady* (*Forefather's Eve*) and the Romantic narrative tale in verse *Konrad Wallenrod* by Adam Mickiewicz. Conrad was subjected to a patriotic upbringing literally from his birth. In the same line, Apollo Korzeniowski's poem "To My son Born in the 85th Year of Muscovite Oppression, A Song for the Day of His Christening" describes the difficult times in which Józef Teodor Konrad was born¹¹. In the face of these difficulties, Korzeniowski Senior instructs his son about the guidelines that he should follow throughout his life: "to abide by Polishness and to live an honourable life of persistence and poverty rather than to accept prosperity resulting from collaboration with Poland's partitioners [...]" and never cease being a true Christian¹². Józef Teodor's mother, Ewelina Korzeniowska, fully shared her husband's views regarding Konrad's upbringing. In particular, in 1861, little Konradek, like many other Polish patriots, was wearing black mourning clothes which symbolized mourning for the Polish patriots who died in a peaceful manifestation (dispersed by the Tsarist government) and for Poland's lost independence¹³.

Apollo's impact on the future writer can be summarized in these words: "The father's crucial influence upon the child consisted principally in imprinting upon his mind the attitudes of uncompromising faithfulness to cherished moral principles, patriotism, belief in democracy, hatred of Russia, loneliness, pessimism, and in instilling in him a love of belle-lettres (especially of Polish Romantic literature) and making his first contact with English, French and marine literature"¹⁴. In particular, the young Józef Teodor Konrad was familiar with the works of Adam Mickiewicz, especially with his poems *Pan Tadeusz*, *Konrad Wallenrod* and *Grażyna*, Juliusz Słowacki, Victor Hugo and William Shakespeare¹⁵. Later on, the young Conrad cherished the love of classical literature which had been instilled by his father. As a teenager, he enjoyed the works of James Fenimore Cooper and Frederick Maryatt¹⁶.

In all probability, the love of belle-lettres was one of the factors which helped Józef Teodor Konrad deal with the traumas of his childhood and early adolescence, a time filled with tragic events: the arrest and imprisonment of his father Apollo in 1861, the Korzeniowskis exile to the Russian city of Vologda, the failure of the 1863–64 Insurrection, the arrest of his uncles Hilary Korzeniowski and Kazimierz Bobrowski, the death of his uncle – and the leader of the "Reds" faction – Stefan Bobrowski and, most importantly, the untimely death of his parents. While in exile, both Ewelina and Apollo contracted tuberculosis; Ewelina died in Chernigov in 1865, and Apollo – in Cracow in 1869. His father's funeral, which

¹¹ Ibidem, s. 27; Z. Najder, *Joseph Conrad. A Chronicle*, Rutgers UP, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1983, s. 32–33.

¹² W. Krajka, "Joseph Conrad 1861–1869. A Polish Romantic-Martyrological Patriot?"..., s. 27–28.

¹³ Z. Najder, (Edited and with an Introduction), *Conrad Wśród swoich. Listy. Dokumenty. Wspomnienia*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1996, s. 65–66; idem, *Joseph Conrad. A Chronicle*, Rutgers UP, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1983.

¹⁴ Ibidem, s. 29.

¹⁵ Idem, *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, vol. 1, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1980.

¹⁶ Ibidem, s. 53.

turned into a mass patriotic manifestation, must have left the young Józef Teodor devastated, as there had been a strong emotional connection between Apollo Korzeniowski and his son. Cedric Watts comes to the conclusion that the traumatic experiences made a strong imprint on Conrad's mind and, eventually, were important for his literary works:

So already, as a child, Conrad would have learned that to be loyal to one principle may entail treachery of another: service of nation may entail subversion of state. [...]

Already, stamped on the boy's imagination, was an image of the lethal cost exacted from domestic, familial life by national political concerns; and already he knew personally the isolation which was to be rendered with such intensity in the novels of his mature years¹⁷.

After Apollo's death Józef Teodor Conrad was cared for by several family guardians in turn. In particular, he spent the academic year 1873/74 in a boarding house for boys orphaned by the January Insurrection. The boarding house was run by Conrad's uncle, Antoni Syroczyński, an ardent Polish patriot for whom the education of young Poles was a matter of primary importance. He also spent some time in Cracow – both before and after his studying at Uncle Antoni's institution.

One of the most important people in Conrad's life was his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski – his mentor, advisor, and even in a way a fatherly figure. In contrast with Conrad's father, a Romantic-messianic poet and an outstanding member of the "Reds" faction, Bobrowski was a positivist who believed in "work at foundations". In particular, Wiesław Krajka observes that Conrad, influenced by his uncle after the death of Apollo Korzeniowski, must have been disappointed with the sublime and romantic national Polish ideals. Here is a fragment of Krajka's "The Past Moribund Legacy of Polishness? The Case of Joseph Conrad" explaining the changes which took place in Józef Teodor's outlook by 1874:

Was Conrad's Polish legacy moribund? It definitely was. Biographers and critics have proved that his nightmarish childhood and early youth experiences left a very strong imprint on his personality and works. One theory explaining Conrad's youthful "jump" from Cracow to Marseille holds that he was discontented with the mournful atmosphere of lost independence and failed insurrections, of contemplating of the glorious national past and the hopeless present, that was prevailing in Cracow. Young Conrad could have possibly sensed acutely the bankruptcy of his father's ideology, which brought about both his personal and national failure and tragedy. In 1874, 17-year-old Conrad, dreaming of a sea career, saw Cracow as oppressive and finally decided to escape this "prison" and leave Poland for good¹⁸.

In the above extract, the word "jump" is used with reference to two events: a physical one, i.e. Conrad's departure to Marseille where he was going to pursue a maritime career, and a fictional one. The second is the unfortunate jump of Jim – the eponymous protagonist of Conrad's novel *Lord Jim*, a young first mate on a British ship who often daydreams of becoming a hero and rescuing the ship's passengers and the crew from some potential threat. Unexpectedly, in the face of real danger, Jim obeys the call of a few other crew members and leaps into a lifeboat, abandoning the damaged ship with its passengers before the imminent storm. Ironically, the passengers survive: they are rescued by another ship, and Jim, with

¹⁷ C. Watts, *A Preface to Conrad*, Second Edition, Longman Group UK Limited, London 1993, s. 8.

¹⁸ W. Krajka, "The Past Moribund Legacy of Polishness? The Case of Joseph Conrad", *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. East-Central European Traumas and a Millennial Condition*, Edited by Z. Białas and W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: M. Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 1999, s. 33.

several other crew members, including the captain, has to face an official inquiry. Eventually, Jim is the only one to answer the questions because his fellow mariners do not appear in the court... Having familiarized the students with these facts, I start lecturing on *Lord Jim*.

***Lord Jim*: analysis**

While designing the curriculum for first year students, I had to choose Conrad's works which would be in the obligatory reading list. I selected *Lord Jim* for a number of reasons. First, it is considered the best – or at least one of the best – Conrad's novels by many critics. Second, scholars believe that in this work of fiction Conrad turn to the Polish theme, although he does not do it explicitly. Third, the protagonist, a marine officer in his twenties, has to make difficult choices, which make students put themselves questions like "What would I do/have done if I were/had been in a similar situation?" These stimulated questions can be discussed later, during classes, after the students read the full, unabridged text of *Lord Jim*.

The novel was published in 1900, when its Conrad, who started his literary career rather late in life, was 43 years old and had abandoned his maritime career in favour of writing. As mentioned earlier, in *Lord Jim* scholars are able to distinguish the suggestion of the Polish theme. It is true that Conrad refrained from mentioning Poland openly in his fiction, with exception to the later short story "Prince Roman" (1911), his only work in Polish, and *A Personal Record* (1912). Critics agree that this was caused by his tragic childhood and adolescence, by the fact of losing both parents in the unequal fight for Poland's independence. As was already stated, Conrad's vision of Poland was restricted to its heroic past and to the idealized image of the *Borderlands* (*Kresy*)¹⁹. This is probably due to the fact that "Although Conrad lived in many different places, his first experience of safety, joy and comfort – in a word – of home, was connected with the Borderland[s]. It always remained there, in the shape of the house of his uncle, guardian, mentor and friend, Tadeusz Bobrowski"²⁰.

However, the writer's Polishness was manifested in the way he wrote, evident from his "telling posture characterized by elusiveness and a habit of reticence an evasion which reveals his attitude toward his Polish background and heritage"²¹. Conrad's interview with the Polish journalist Marian Dąbrowski shows that, in fact, Poland was very dear to the author of *The Heart of Darkness* and could be found "everywhere in the narrative"²². This can be demonstrated by the example of *Lord Jim*, particularly in the lengthy monologue by Marlow, who combines the roles of a character and the narrator. Marlow examines the role of a native land in a person's life and, metaphorically speaking, of the Motherland's expectations towards those who left their homeland. In this connection, Robert Hodges observes:

National loyalty is discussed in *Lord Jim* in a strange and beautiful passage of about three pages in which Marlow meditates on the meaning of the homeland and what it expects from those who wander from it. Marlow takes up several ideas familiar from romantic nationalism:

¹⁹ A. Acheraïou, "The Shadow of Poland", *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. A Return to the Roots: Conrad, Poland and East-Central Europe*, Edited and with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs; Lublin: M. Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP 2004, s. 47–70; Skolik, J., op. cit. s. 150–152.

²⁰ Ibidem, s. 151.

²¹ A. Acheraïou, op. cit., s. 49.

²² Marian Dąbrowski w: ibidem, s. 55.

a man although far from home must render an account of his doings to his native land; a nation has an eternal, unchangeable spirit which strengthens its people; a man draws his faith from his native land just a grass draws its life from the earth. [...] Not at all a digression, the passage is related directly to the heart of the book, because in it Marlow uses national sentiment as a means of exploring his relationship with Jim, and national loyalty as an introduction to the idea of the solidarity of mankind²³ (158: 1967).

Further on, Hodges continues: “Marlow [...] seeks in the homeland a refuge or source of identification [...]”²⁴. After the discreet shift of emphasis from himself to Jim, Marlow applies these universal rules to the former chief mate, sadly noticing that the Motherland is not interested in those who wander away: “Their native land is not interested in stragglers”²⁵. Nevertheless, Marlow finishes his monologue in an optimistic way, expressing his hope in the solidarity of all people²⁶.

This statement of Hodges is consistent with the ideas of Amar Acheraiou and Stephen Brodsky. In particular, Acheraiou observes: “Together with the recurrent themes of honour, betrayal and guilt that can be easily traced back to the Polish literary tradition, Conrad resorts to subtle structural and symbolic devices to represent implicitly his native country. Among these devices we find the aesthetics of resonance which pervades his texts, symbol, metaphor, analogy, allusion, gaps, and silences”²⁷. In a similar manner, Brodsky asserts that “Conrad’s oeuvre [...] contains postfigurations, code mirroring his Polish life. Even the language of his thought remained Polish [...]”²⁸. Importantly, the influence of the Polish Language (including vocabulary and syntax) on Conrad’s writing style has attracted considerable attention of scholars, including both Conradians and applied linguists. Among researches devoted to the subject are Mary Morzinski’s *Linguistic Influence of Polish on Conrad’s Style* and Michael Lucas’s *Aspects of Conrad’s Literary Language*, as well as many academic articles, such as Tanya Gokulsing’s “Polishness, Modernism, and the Manipulation of Time: Conrad’s Use of ‘Now’ in Almayer’s Folly”.

Projects

Lord Jim

When the students learn of these facts, they are ready to be involved in group projects, which can be done as homework and presented in practical class. During the preparatory stage, I remind students of the definitions of epithets, similes and metaphors (this is usually done during the lecture). Then, the undergraduates read *Lord Jim* at home and discuss the novel in class (for better understanding and analysis of characters, themes, motifs and symbols, using materials from SparkNotes.com). After that, they identify the descriptions of nature in the book (especially of the ocean, the sea, and the sky) and write out the examples of the aforementioned stylistic devices. In class, the students present their findings after reading out appropriate excerpts describing nature (before reading aloud, it is important

²³ R. R. Hodges, *The Dual Heritage of Joseph Conrad*. Studies in English Literature, Volume XXIX. The Hague, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967, s. 158.

²⁴ Ibidem, s. 161.

²⁵ Ibidem, s. 163.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ A. Acheraiou, op. cit. s. 49.

²⁸ S. G. W. Brodsky, , op. cit., s. 70.

to advise the students to read these excerpts in a distinct but unaffected voice, with natural intonation). With this part of assignment completed, the students try to explain why, in their opinion, Conrad opted for that particular wording.

Below are examples of Conrad's use of figures of speech in descriptions of nature, especially of sea – and ocean-scapes.

The sea and the ocean:

Epithets:

“the smiling peace of the Eastern seas” (8) (an epithet and a metaphor),

“the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice” (11)

“And under the sinister splendor of that sky the sea, blue and profound, remained still, without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle – viscous, stagnant, dead” (11). (Here, epithets are used to note the foreshadowing of the disaster)

“the darkened surface of the waters” (14)

“an opaque sea” (14)

“the undisturbed level of the sea” (17),

“the smooth level of the sea” (18),

“vibrating water” (18) (after the accident”),

“the still ocean” (78),

“the placid sea” (150),

“a misty ocean” (152),

“the purple sea” (209),

“the darkened sea”

Metaphors and epithets:

“the plain of the sea, of a serene and intense blue” (207),

‘a sheet of a pale glassy water’ (207)

The sun, the moon, the sky, and the stars:

Epithets:

“The eternal serenity of the Eastern sky” (8)

“festal sunshine” (8),

“the [...] watchful stars” (13),

“the inaccessible “The thin gold shaving of the moon” (14),

“the augmented glitter of the stars’ (14),

“a pitchy blackness” (71 – the description of the squall),

“the everlasting sunlit haze” (152),

“the colourless sunshine” (207),

“the low sun, glowing, darkened and crimson” (209)

“the sky was pearly grey” (219)

Similes and epithets:

“The young moon, recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving

thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of the dark horizon “ (11).

“the vivid stars” (18),

“the pellucid emptiness of the sky” (78),

“we had watched the moon float away above the chasm between the hills like an ascending spirit out of a grave; its sheen descended, cool and pale, like the ghost of dead sunlight” (154).

“Here and there a red gleam twinkled within the bamboo walls, warm, like a living spark, significant of human affections, of shelter, of repose” (155).

“Great waves of glitter blew lightly along the pitted dark surface, as swift as feathers chased by the breeze” (207).

Metaphor:

“The sun was eating up the mist” (252)

The horizon:

Epithets:

“a dark horizon” (11),

“the unattainable horizon” (13)

“the thread-like horizon” (107) (what figure of speech is it?)

Metaphors and epithets:

“the western horizon was one great blaze of gold and crimson” (210)

Questions for discussion and assignments

How is the Polish theme presented in *Lord Jim*?

In which way Conrad’s past and upbringing influenced his works?

Give examples of descriptions of nature foreshadowing adversity in the novel.

Find the descriptions of sea- and ocean-scapes in *Lord Jim* depicting the nature before and after the disaster at the passenger ship *Patna*. What is the function of these depictions? In which way can the protagonist’s state of mind explained through them?

Why, in your opinion, does Marlow want to strike friendship with Jim?

Why did the Malay people call the protagonist “Tuan” (“Lord”)? What connotation did they put in the word?

Why do people regard Jim as “inscrutable at heart” and ‘excessively romantic’ (261)?

In which way does Jim endeavour to overcome his ethical isolation? Does he ever succeed?²⁹

How do you understand the words “He was one of us”? Do you think these words are still up-to-date? If yes, in which way is a modern person in their twenties similar to Lord Jim?

²⁹ For more on different types of isolation in Conrad’s works and the characters’ ways of overcoming it, see: W. Krajka, *Izolacja i etos. Studium o twórczości Josepha Conrada*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1988.

Why, in your opinion, does Jim refuse to escape the trial (as suggested by Captain Brierly) and decides to face the unpleasant questioning till the end?

Write a diary entry choosing one of the topics:

Jim's reflections at the beginning of the *Patna*'s journey;

Jim's torments after the first day of the trial;

Marlow's first meeting with Jim;

the last day of Captain Brierly's life;

a day of Jim's life in Patusan;

a day of Jewel's life when she was in a happy, fulfilled relationship with Jim.

“Heart of Darkness”

This is an optional activity for those students who read *Heart of Darkness*. On the basis of the novel's text, students, in groups of three or four, have to identify the sounds made by corresponding animals and humans and write them down. Next, the undergraduates attempt to draw conclusions (both these parts of assignment are done at home). In class, students present their homework and discuss the results. Usually, they find that human voices – and sounds made by people – are presented rather scarcely as compared to those made by animals. This shows that a human, especially a white, civilized man, can be regarded as an intruder into the pristine, self-regulating world of the African Congo. The teacher serves as a moderator to help students reach proper conclusions, particularly about the true nature of imperialism.

This activity was inspired by Professor Adriana Cavarero's fascinating and thought-provoking paper “Soundscapes of Darkness” read at the international conference *Conradian Crosscurrents: Creativity and Critique* 1-3 June 2017 in New York City.

Feedback

After finishing the project, students admitted that the understanding of Conrad's background helped them comprehend both his complex personality and works, as well as discern the implicit Polish ideas in *Lord Jim*. Besides, they really enjoyed the proposed activities, especially those connected with Conrad's descriptions of nature. A few undergraduates acknowledged that they did extra research on Joseph Conrad, studying the available academic articles and drawing their own conclusions which they presented in class. Last but not least, two students admitted that the novel *Lord Jim*, which they first read and analyzed as undergraduates, was their favourite book. This experience shows that reading Conrad to students should involve a pre-teaching stage, with that emphasizes important facts of the writer's life, and demonstrates that Conrad belonged to – and was a product of – many cultures. It is vital to understand that Conrad used his traumatic Polish legacy to the best advantage, while “His feelings of alienation and displacement, his internal dilemmas and his indistinct identity formed the foundation for the complex psychology of his characters”³⁰. Also, stu-

³⁰ W. Krajka, “Was Conrad's Polishness a Curse or a Blessing?”, *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. From Szlachta Culture to the 21st Century, Between East and West. New Essays on Joseph Conrad's Polishness*, Edited and with an Introduction by W. Krajka, Boulder: East European Monographs, Lublin: M. Curie-Sklodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 2013, s. 202.

dents' comprehension of the author's sophisticated style can benefit from the recognition that Conrad's writing was influenced by his native tongue. In this respect, group projects examining Conrad's literary style appear to be helpful in the teaching/learning process, making it enjoyable both for the students and the teacher and thus encouraging further interest in Conrad and his works.

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STRESZCZENIE

Lilia Omelan

Nauczanie Conrada: wyzwanie i satysfakcja

Nauczanie Josepha Conrada nie jest łatwym zadaniem, niemniej jednak niektórych trudności można uniknąć, starannie planując wykłady i zajęcia praktyczne. Obejmuje to zapoznanie studentów z głównymi faktami z życia Conrada i zaangażowanie ich w projekty grupowe. Znajomość trudnego dzieciństwa i wczesnej młodości Conrada w Polsce po klęsce powstania styczniowego pomaga studentom zrozumieć złożoną osobowość Conrada i jego wewnętrzne konflikty, które z kolei wpłynęły na jego literacką twórczość. Mając to na uwadze, studenci mogą odpowiednio interpretować conradowskie tematy, takie jak rozczarowanie, poczucie winy i izolacja z jednej strony oraz pokuta, (uniwersalna) solidarność i wiara w ludzkość z drugiej strony. Ponadto postrzeganie Conrada jako pisarza polskiego pochodzenia może być korzystne dla właściwej oceny jego stylu literackiego.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczanie literatury brytyjskiej, Joseph Conrad, polskość Conrada.

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