

## **TADEUSZ BOBROWSKI AS CONRAD KNEW HIM: THE UNCLE'S LETTERS TO THE NEPHEW**

**Joanna Skolik**

The University of Opole

**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to trace and determine the true relations that existed between Tadeusz Bobrowski and his nephew Joseph Conrad (then known by his Christian name Konrad or the diminutive form Konradek). Conrad's parents died when he was only eleven years old and from that moment onwards the most important person in his life was his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski – his guardian, mentor and later his closest friend and confidant. Bobrowski's role in Conrad's life cannot be overestimated, for without his financial support Conrad quite simply could not have become a writer. Opinions differ widely, however, as to the extent to which he shaped Conrad's personality or influenced his character and outlook. Conflicting theories, interpretations and speculations abound. Very often Bobrowski is presented as a cold man who was devoid of sympathy and understanding for his ward. This article argues that – deep down – Tadeusz Bobrowski was in fact and had always been a very emotional man. The shell of indifference in which he shut himself up was merely a shield that allowed him to survive in his social circle. By degrees, however, Bobrowski changed from being the reprimanding, grumpy and censorious guardian into a friend and spiritual guide. There were several reasons for this: Conrad's increasing maturity, his professional achievements and the two men's growing mutual attachment – if not mutual idealisation. They shared the same sense of humour, a predilection for sarcasm and a feeling of distance towards the world around them. What is more, a baggage of personal disasters brought them even closer together. They were very much alike. It would seem that only in his letters to Conrad could Bobrowski freely write about family matters and express his opinion about neighbours, knowing that his nephew would not only understand him, but would also appreciate his sarcasm, his sense of humour, his wit and his irony. Bobrowski treated Conrad as if he were his own son and only Conrad knew such an emotional, loving and warm-hearted Bobrowski.

**Keywords:** Joseph Conrad, Tadeusz Bobrowski, family letters, family relations, Polish heritage, emigration, sea travels

It is impossible to understand Joseph Conrad's works in isolation from his cultural background. From the very beginning of his literary career, Conrad's Polish heritage and his connections with Polish culture and tradition (to say nothing of the question of his national allegiance) have been widely discussed. Numerous biographers have analysed Conrad's life and letters, taking into consideration the influence of the people who were responsible for his upbringing and who, in his early child-

hood, shaped his character and personality.<sup>1</sup> Those who were closely involved in bringing up the young Konrad were of course his parents – and especially his father, Apollo Korzeniowski. His mother – Ewelina Bobrowska – died when he was only eight years old. When Conrad lost his father at the age of eleven, his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski became his guardian, mentor and – in later years – his closest friend and confidant. We can see how important these issues have been for Conrad studies by following the discussions in which, over the years, Conrad scholars have presented various, often contradictory opinions on the question of Conrad's attitude towards his native land, the question of betrayal and fidelity and the question of his attachment to the Polish Romantic legacy – to name but a few areas of disagreement.

Tadeusz Bobrowski's role in Conrad's life cannot be overestimated, for without his financial support Conrad quite simply could not have become a writer. On this point all Conrad's biographers seem to concur. Opinions differ widely, however, as to the extent to which he shaped Conrad's personality or influenced his character and outlook. Conflicting theories, interpretations and speculations abound.

Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech has made a chronological outline of the different tendencies that have come to the fore in discussions of the role of Conrad's uncle.<sup>2</sup> At first, Tadeusz Bobrowski was perceived as the ideal guardian and was looked on with admiration and esteem. Such are the opinions of Jean Aubry and Leo Gurko, both of whom were probably influenced by the way in which Conrad himself talked and wrote about his uncle. Later there were Conrad scholars who, like Jerry Allen, criticised Bobrowski's austerity and his lack of understanding for his nephew. Yet another group of scholars – Jocelyn Baines, Ian Watt, Frederic Karl and Zdzisław Najder – stressed Bobrowski's critical approach towards his nephew's outlook and opinions, pointing to his own conciliatory approach towards the Russian oppressor, which contrasted with Apollo Korzeniowski's active participation in the struggle for Polish independence. These same scholars, however, do not dispute Bobrowski's erudition, tolerance and sense of responsibility. Adamowicz-Pośpiech is of the opinion that Zdzisław Najder's own attitude towards Bobrowski has evolved from being very critical to being more balanced. The last group of scholars comprises Addison Bross and Keith Carabine, who "try to rehabilitate Bobrowski as a loving and tolerant guardian who was a wise and eminently realistic politician."<sup>3</sup>

Although – as Zdzisław Najder writes – Bobrowski "is often described as a progressive, enlightened liberal [,] [n]ineteenth-century liberals, and their Polish equivalents commonly called the 'Positivists' were activists [...] If Bobrowski sympathized with them, he did it with full discretion." Najder goes on to point out that Bobrowski was in fact "a cautious, sober-minded man – [who] did not share many of the lofty

<sup>1</sup> Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech reviews the various interpretations of the respective roles which Conrad's parents and his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski played in the writer's upbringing in her book *Joseph Conrad – spory o biografie*. Katowice: Deni-Press Usługi Wydawnicze i Reklamowe, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-55, a chapter entitled "Wuj Conrada: Tadeusz Bobrowski."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

illusions of his more idealistic or more impatient contemporaries.”<sup>4</sup> Recalling the words of Włodzimierz Sapsowicz,<sup>5</sup> Jan Perłowski claims that Bobrowski was described ...

... as a typical product of French eighteenth-century *esprit*. [...] Bobrowski possessed all the characteristics of a man of the Enlightenment. Lively by temperament, with a brilliant rationalistic intellect, he was absorbed solely in worldly affairs; even in the face of the greatest adversity he showed unabashed optimism, which was admirable but sometimes seemed like indifference. His sense of humour was sharp and laconic, typical of that sarcastic epoch. [...] He was ambitious but endowed with a great civic sense and perfect integrity.<sup>6</sup>

Czesław Miłosz – who said he belonged to the generation who knew Conrad's contemporaries – recalled that the conservative type of Polish nobleman (*szlachcic*) had survived in the Polish eastern borderlands because there the tradition of the Enlightenment had lasted longer than in other parts of partitioned Poland. Because of their conservatism, noblemen like these had preserved a nineteenth-century way of thinking.<sup>7</sup> This would seem to confirm Perłowski's opinion that Bobrowski was a figure from the past. Bobrowski should therefore be seen not as a Positivist, but rather as a man of the Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup>

What kind of person was the Tadeusz Bobrowski who wrote letters to Conrad? Over the twenty-odd years during which they corresponded, Bobrowski changed from being a reprimanding, grumpy and censorious guardian into a friend and spiritual guide. There were several reasons for this: Conrad's increasing maturity, his professional achievements and the two men's growing mutual attachment – if not mutual idealisation. They shared a sense of loneliness, a feeling of distance towards the world around them and a feeling of condescending superiority towards it. The people around them could not match their erudition or intelligence. The two men also shared the same sense of humour, as well as a predilection for sarcasm. What is more, a baggage of personal disasters brought them even closer together. They were very much alike.<sup>9</sup> It would appear that only in his letters to Conrad could Bobrowski

<sup>4</sup> Z. Najder. *Joseph Conrad and Tadeusz Bobrowski*. [In:] *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 52-3. Henceforth quoted as: Najder. *JC and TB*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W. Spasowicz. *Wiadomość o Tadeuszu Bobrowskim*. [In:] *Tadeusz Bobrowski. Pamiętnik mojego życia*. Ed. S. Kieniewicz. Warszawa: PIW, 1979, Vol. I, pp. 33-4.

<sup>6</sup> J. Perłowski, *On Conrad and Kipling*. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*. Ed. Z. Najder. Trans. H. Carroll-Najder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Cz. Miłosz. *Stereotyp u Conrada*. [In:] *Conrad żywy*. Ed. W. Tarnawski. London: B. Świdorski, 1957, pp. 92-3. Stefan Zabierowski discusses the ideological views of the Polish *szlachta* and also refers to Miłosz's observation: cf. "Conrad's Noble Heritage". *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)*, 2008-2009, Vol. IV, pp. 106-7.

<sup>8</sup> Addison Bross also traces Bobrowski's relation to the Enlightenment and Positivism while presenting "The Political Climate in Captive Poland, 1830-1863" and the person of Tadeusz Bobrowski, pointing to some positivist features of Bobrowski's character: A. Bross, *Introductory Essay*. [In:] T. Bobrowski. *a Memoir of My Life*. Transl. and Ed. with an Introduction by A. Bross. *Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives*. Vol. 17. Ed. W. Krajka. East European Monographs. Boulder and Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, New York: Columbia University, 2008, pp. 3-90.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Najder, *ed. cit.*, pp. 54-9.

freely write about family matters and express his opinion about neighbours, knowing that his nephew would not only understand him, but would also appreciate his sarcasm, his sense of humour, his wit and his irony.<sup>10</sup> It was a space in which Tadeusz Bobrowski could feel free, knowing that he was not perceived as a Justice of the Peace in the district (*powiat*) of Lipowiec or as a guardian of orphans and widows (although, of course, he was also a guardian to Conrad). As his letters were meant only for the eyes of his nephew (unlike the *Memoir*, which was meticulously prepared), he could commit his thoughts and feelings to paper, freely expressing his opinions in the knowledge that the letters would almost certainly never be published. Knowing his nephew's disregard for "material interests", Bobrowski probably assumed that the letters would be disposed of almost as soon as they had been read. We have Conrad the author to thank for the fact that excerpts from some of Bobrowski's letters and his *Memoir* have been immortalised in print – to mention but Stein's (or rather Bobrowski's) famous *usque ad finem* ...<sup>11</sup>

The influence that Bobrowski exerted on Conrad was, as Najder has observed, "undeniable".<sup>12</sup> The letters he wrote to his nephew are an invaluable source of information on Conrad's life in the years 1869-1893, while Conrad used the *Memoir* "[...] as a source both in his reminiscences, a *Personal Record*, and in his tale 'Prince Roman'."<sup>13</sup> What is more, Conrad adopted and presented his uncle's memoirs as his own. Writing about himself, Tadeusz Bobrowski claimed to be:

[...] a convinced doctrinaire, deeply confident in the inflexible and unchanging laws and duties of reason, critical judgement and free will which make man a master of his own fate and history, and rejecting all external influences of feeling, passions, and one's environment, possessing for every problem of life a ready formula obtained by abstract reasoning [...] I would bring [...] my sister [Ewa] to tears. Once, in the heat of discussion, she told me that if I were brought by the strength of my reasoning to the conclusion that she ought to be killed, I would be capable of grasping a knife and slaughtering her!<sup>14</sup>

Ten years after Bobrowski's death Conrad wrote:

I cannot write about Tadeusz Bobrowski, my Uncle, guardian and benefactor without emotion. Even now, after ten years, I still feel his loss. He was a man of great character and unusual qualities of mind. Although he did not understand my desire to join the mercantile marine, on principle, he never objected to it. I saw him four times during the thirty [sic] years of my wanderings (from 1874-1893) but even so I attribute to his devotion, care, and influence, whatever good qualities I may possess. The last two occasions on which I visited him were in the Ukraine (as a British subject) in 1890 and 1893.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See: Z. Najder. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Gaudium, 2006, Vol. I, p. 282.

<sup>11</sup> Najder. *JC and TB*, pp. 58-64.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in: Najder. *JC and TB*, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Conrad to Kazimierz Waliszewski, 5 December, 1903. [In:] *Conrad's Polish Background. Letters to and from Polish Friends*. Ed. Z. Najder. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 239-40. Henceforth quoted as: *CPB*.

However, when one reads the first letter written by Bobrowski to his eleven-year-old nephew, one must wonder how true ties of friendship could ever have developed between them:

It has pleased God to strike you with the greatest misfortune that can assail a child – the loss of its Parents. But in His goodness God has so graciously allowed your very good Grandmother and myself to look after you, your health, your studies and your future destiny. You know that the whole affection we felt for your Parents we now bestow upon you. You know too that your Parents were worthy of that affection – so you as their son should be doubly worthy of being their son and become worthy of our love.<sup>16</sup>

In no part of this letter is it possible to find the slightest trace of sympathy or any warm feelings that could have been expressed in order to comfort an orphaned child. On the contrary, the letter contains admonitions that – given the circumstances – seem heartless and cruel:

Without a thorough education you will be worth nothing in this world, you will never be self-sufficient, and a thorough education is gained only by thoroughly mastering the beginnings of every subject which is necessary for every cultivated man – which we hope you wish to become and we hope to see you become; therefore, my dear boy, apply yourself to mastering thoroughly their first principles. I know that all beginnings seem tiresome to a boy, but every effort must be made to master them by work and determination. If you want to become an engineer or a technician you must start with arithmetic and geometry – if you want to become a doctor or a lawyer you must start with languages, geography, etc. In a word, one thing follows from another, one thing is built upon another. Therefore, not that which is easy and attractive must be the object of your studies but that which is useful, although sometimes difficult, for a man who knows nothing fundamentally, who has no strength of character and no endurance, who does not know how to work on his own and guide himself, ceases to be a man and becomes a useless puppet.<sup>17</sup>

And Bobrowski continues in a similar tone:

Try therefore, my child, not to be or to become such a puppet, but to be useful, hard-working, capable and therefore a worthy human being – and thereby reward us for the cares and worries devoted to your upbringing.

Your education has been thought out by us, your needs supplied; it remains for you to learn and to be healthy and even in that matter (although it chiefly depends on God) if you take heed of the advice of your elders you may become completely well – not giving way to feelings and thoughts which are not proper to your age.<sup>18</sup>

As Najder points out, “Although in later years Konrad deserved more than once to be thus admonished, it seems highly unlikely that his instability or lack of dili-

---

<sup>16</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 8/20 September 1869. [In:] *CPB*, p. 35. Najder explains that “Bobrowski usually gave his letters two dates: one according to the Julian calendar and the other according to the Gregorian calendar. The Julian calendar was used officially in Russia, but the Gregorian calendar used in the West has also been in use in ethnic Poland since the late sixteenth century.” (*CPB*, p. 35.)

<sup>17</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 8/20 September 1869. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

gence could already have incurred his uncle's displeasure. Bobrowski's reference to his nephew's oversensitivity is quite significant."<sup>19</sup>

The cold tone of Bobrowski's letter is surprising, especially in view of the fact that it was meant to be read by a child who had undergone a really traumatic experience – a child who lacked sympathy and love and who needed warmth and understanding, not reprimands. Another surprising thing is that Bobrowski wrote the letter on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1869, i.e. four whole months after the death of Apollo on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

What is even more surprising is that Bobrowski himself (albeit at a much greater age than Konrad)<sup>20</sup> had been treated just as coldly on the death of his own father. Tadeusz was then twenty-one years old and before him lay a career at the university or in diplomacy. However, his paternal uncle – acting against his late brother's will – refused to take care of the orphaned family and burdened the young Tadeusz with responsibilities that seemed to be beyond his strength. In his *Memoir* Bobrowski reminds Konrad that when he came back home he was greeted with emptiness and his uncle's admonitions:

Such cold reasoning showed he had no notion that feelings warmer than his own could exist. Though he was my uncle, this behaviour could do nothing toward building trust between us – all the more because I knew the position he planned to take toward the family his brother had left behind and toward the duties his brother had assigned to him. By my late father's will he was designated unconditionally our guardian, with the expressed stipulation that until his death neither of us older sons should be given the guardianship.<sup>21</sup>

One would have thought that after such an experience Bobrowski should have been much friendlier and understanding towards his nephew, but he was not. Be that as it may, he never ever refused to act as a guardian to the numerous orphans and widows who asked him for assistance. It must be remembered, however, that when Bobrowski was appointed Conrad's guardian he was a man who had had bitter experiences in his life. He was then forty years old and for the previous nineteen years had been the head of the family – a role that had been imposed on him. Bobrowski's life could be an illustration of the saying "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans." As he himself wrote:

My father would not hear of me entering the service somewhere in the provinces; he dreamed I would enter the diplomatic service or the Imperial Chancellery. The career of Minister [Ignacy] Turkuł, [a Pole serving as Russian Secretary of State for the Kingdom of Poland] who started in his profession without connections and achieved his goal, was the beloved hobby-horse on which my dear father would gallop away, not only to rouse my ambition but for his own enjoyment.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Z. Najder. *Joseph Conrad. a Chronicle*. Transl. H. Carroll-Najder. Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Writing about the correspondence between the uncle and the nephew, I use the name Konrad. For Bobrowski, his nephew was always Konrad or Konradek (little Konrad); Bobrowski began his letters with: "Kochany Chłopcze," or "My Dear Boy" and in the text of the letters frequently used the expression "Panie Bracie" (My dear fellow).

<sup>21</sup> T. Bobrowski. *a Memoir of My Life*, ed. cit., p. 270. Henceforth quoted as: *a Memoir...*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

With such prospects in mind, in December 1849 in St. Petersburg Bobrowski “submitted [his] request for admission to the examination for the master’s degree in international (officially ‘foreign’) law.” Bobrowski “[...] before almost all the professors of the division [...] undertook the oral examination in international law and European public law, which took some three hours. It went quite well, for I heard many compliments [...]”<sup>23</sup>

It seemed that a great career lay before him, but this was not to be. When Bobrowski’s father died, all his hopes and dreams faded away. Notwithstanding his father’s will and his status within the family (he was not the eldest son), it was he who had to accept the role of head of the family. His elder brother Stanisław was an officer in the tsarist guards and it was Tadeusz who had to sacrifice his future career for the sake of the family. In those days, however, this was seen not as a sacrifice, but as a self-evident duty: it was quite obvious that Tadeusz was the person who had to carry the burden. He had to give up all his plans and go back to Oratów to run the family estate. All the effort he had put into his studies could no longer help him fulfil his dreams, but – fortunately – not everything was wasted, for “his interest in social affairs ranged from current social events [...] to the public affairs of those provinces, analysed by him with the thoroughness of a professional lawyer. He was a jurist not only by education but also thanks to his characteristic cool-headedness.”<sup>24</sup> Bobrowski “[...] earned the reputation of an excellent legal adviser, honest, scrupulously fair and independent. He served as executor of many testaments, arbitrator of conflicting estate claims, and the legal guardian of numerous wards – widows and orphans.”<sup>25</sup>

Nor was Bobrowski’s personal life a success. At the age of twenty-eight he “married Józefa Lubowidzka, the well-endowed daughter of a landowning family,” but his happiness did not last long, as the next year “his wife died giving birth to a girl.”<sup>26</sup> The following years brought him even more suffering and family disasters. Unlike the rest of his family – including his brother-in-law Apollo – Bobrowski had never been an advocate of armed struggle in the quest for Poland’s independence. He had always wanted to stay clear of politics and illegal doings because he believed that although Poland had no chance of regaining her independence, somehow the nation could live and even develop under Russian rule. He thought that armed resistance was pointless. The events preceding the January Uprising of 1863 and the uprising itself put a great strain on the Bobrowski family. It is enough to mention Apollo’s arrest and imprisonment in the Warsaw Citadel, the Korzeniowskis’ subsequent exile to Vologda and the involvement of Bobrowski’s brother Stefan in political activities that resulted in his murder (in a set-up duel).<sup>27</sup> Then came his beloved sister’s illness and the vain attempts to save her life, Konradek’s health problems, Apollo’s illness and death and – not long after he had become Conrad’s guardian – the death of his only daughter in 1871. Despite all these blows, however, Bobrowski managed to

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Perłowski. *On Conrad and Kipling*, p. 151.

<sup>25</sup> Najder. *JC and TB*, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Bobrowski. *a Memoir...*, pp. 408-14.

keep his mental balance, taking on various obligations and duties which no doubt helped him to survive those hard times.<sup>28</sup>

Although he enjoyed high esteem and wide recognition in his social circle, Bobrowski was also seen as being very conceited and haughty:

Whenever legal or social problems arose he was ready to advise, persuade or arbitrate. His judgements were valued by public opinion. He was surrounded by general respect. In the marketing rooms at the Kiev agricultural fair, contentions would break off, loungers would sit up as soon as he appeared: short, with a bald head, Roman features, clean-shaven face, always with an apt remark and a ready wit. In view of this general feeling it was not surprising that our leader had a high opinion of himself. This only further enhanced his authority among the gentry.<sup>29</sup>

Bobrowski's attitude and behaviour were not as conceited as they may have seemed to be, however. He certainly had a high opinion of himself and perhaps wanted to boost his ego by looking down on the people around him. He knew that he was ahead of his neighbours in terms of education, erudition and reading. On the other hand, he could not meet any of the challenges connected with physical fitness that were so valued by the Polish nobility (*szlachta*): he did not know how to ride, swim or hunt. In a word, he was excluded from so-called manly activities. As he himself admitted: "My equestrian misfortunes discouraged me entirely from all manly activities, and to no moderate loss of self-love, I have never in later years managed to compensate for this lack, never having learned to ride horseback, to drive horses, to shoot or to swim."<sup>30</sup> From early childhood Tadeusz was quite different from other boys of his age. He was born a weak and sickly child. His family worried over his health and were even afraid for his life. Bobrowski's childhood memories are quite frightening:

I had a very weak constitution and it was at this time that my spinal column began to bend. I was regularly awakened early from sleep and ordered to hang by my hands to straighten myself. I was given artificial feedings, and were it not for the directives of the honest Dr. Stankiewicz and the care of my mother, I may not have survived and would certainly have become a cripple. I did not become hunch-backed, but the slant in my spine has remained with me always. Physically weak, I was unable to engage in boys' games. I preferred sitting quietly at a table-corner, listening to adults' conversations, and in that way I absorbed many things my age-mates could never hear and would often comment on matters they could have no notion of.<sup>31</sup>

It was not only his physical condition, but also his religious beliefs that set him apart from the people around him. Being an agnostic, he did not fit in with his neighbours, who exemplified the stereotype of the Catholic Pole. As Najder observes: "His tolerant parish priest gave him [...] a good testimony" as a man, although he "never came to church, never confessed, did not observe fasts."<sup>32</sup> In short, Bobrowski did not

<sup>28</sup> See S. Kieniewicz. *Przedmowa wydawcy*. [In:] T. Bobrowski. *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, Vol. I, pp. 20-1; T. Bobrowski. *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, Vol. II, p. 96-8.

<sup>29</sup> Perłowski. *On Conrad and Kipling*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>30</sup> Bobrowski. *a Memoir...*, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Najder. *JC and TB*, p. 56.

fit in with his neighbours. His “conceit” was therefore largely the result of his “otherness”. When he gave up his hopes of pursuing an academic or public career and came back home he had to assume a new role and find his place among people who did not understand him. He may well have followed the sort of advice meted out by Sienkewicz’s protagonist Michał Wołodyjowski, who said: “God gave you a puny body – if you don’t inspire fear, people will laugh at you.” To a certain extent Bobrowski’s “conceit” may have been a kind of self-defence against the outside world – a veneer of superiority that allowed him to keep those who were different from him at a distance. He used this tactic not only when he began his studies and found himself in a completely new environment in Kiev at the age of fifteen and later in Petersburg, but also when, at the age of twenty-one, he came back home after his father’s death. Bobrowski played up his abilities, education and skills in such a way as to make others forget about his infirmities or other shortcomings. Although he was not “one of the boys”, he became an authority and guide for them. Bobrowski explained his attitude in his *Memoir*, saying that he had always been perceived as being conceited because of his inborn shyness, which caused him to become stiff in his manner whenever he met somebody for the first time.<sup>33</sup>

These feelings accompanied Bobrowski from his early childhood: on the one hand he had a personal conviction of his own superiority, while on the other hand he was shy and apprehensive of a social circle with which he did not entirely fit in. This explains the defensive posture which he adopted throughout his life – a posture which might well have been a family trait, as Conrad himself was also accused of being conceited or haughty towards others (this being caused by embarrassment or uncertainty). It is unfair, I think, to accuse Bobrowski of lacking tender feelings. The shell of indifference in which he habitually shut himself up was merely a shield that allowed him to survive in his social circle. Deep down, however, he was in fact and had always been a very emotional man. He could reveal his true feelings only to his nephew Konrad, who did not pose a threat to his position.

Let us now come back to the very first letter that Bobrowski wrote to Konrad. Reading Perłowski’s memoirs, which try to “reveal” Bobrowski’s true intentions, the reader learns that the words which appeared to be directed only to him – the orphan Perłowski – are to be found in the letter written by Bobrowski to Konrad. Perłowski concludes with regret that:

I, too, used to get letters from Bobrowski. Having come of age, I sent him a sincere appreciation of his wise and kind protection. To this he replied extensively, recalling my father’s memory: ‘I am now transferring that old and long-lasting friendship to his son.’ a phrase both simple and sympathetic. However, years later, when his letters to Conrad appeared in print, I found a similar sentence in a letter written at the time when, following his father’s death, the twelve-year-old boy found himself bereft of both parents. ‘The whole affection we felt for your parents we now bestow upon you,’ wrote Bobrowski. This kind of stereotype in matters of sentiment was quite in keeping with Bobrowski’s disposition. [...] Bobrowski was one of the worthiest men born in the Ukraine, but he was not a man of tender heart and feelings.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Bobrowski. *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, Vol. I, p. 432.

<sup>34</sup> Perłowski. *On Conrad and Kipling*, p. 153.

Having gone through several family tragedies, Bobrowski had to develop some kind of defence mechanism. Also, as someone who was a guardian to widows and orphans, giving them help and advice as well as managing their financial affairs, he had to be careful not to become personally or emotionally involved. As a Justice of the Peace he had to take an impartial view of events and keep a cool head, which necessarily entailed keeping other people at a distance. Conrad was the only person with whom he could be honest and frank, though his attitude towards his nephew changed only gradually. The first letter was written according to a well-tried template which he had employed earlier in similar situations. Bobrowski habitually expressed his “deep affection” by keeping at a safe emotional distance, drawing on the same phraseology that he employed when he had to communicate with the people around him. Hence his apparent coolness at the very beginning of his relationship with the young Conrad. With each successive letter, however, the distance between them grew smaller, though Zdzisław Najder claims that a cordial tone and mutual understanding in their correspondence appeared only ten years after Bobrowski had become Conrad’s guardian and especially after their meeting in Marienbad in 1883.<sup>35</sup> While it is true that after the Marienbad meeting (which could be seen as a turning point in their correspondence) Bobrowski’s letters became very warm and cordial, this was probably due to the fact that over the years Conrad had matured, and so they could now be on equal terms, whereas the relationship between a guardian and a ward required a different ‘code of communication’.

Perhaps after his use of a certain “emotional stereotype” in writing the first letter to his nephew Bobrowski began to recognize the similarities between Konrad’s plight and his own experiences as a child and adolescent. It was as if Conrad was following in his uncle’s footsteps. He too was a sickly child whose health had caused the family serious concern and he too had had bitter experiences, spending his early childhood mostly in the company of adults.

In my opinion, the fact that Bobrowski allowed Konrad to travel to Marseilles proves that for him Konrad was much more than yet another ward. Conrad’s biographers have presented various reasons for the boy’s departure from Poland at the age of seventeen (with the agreement of his guardian), citing his poor health, unrequited love, an urge to travel inspired by the *Wędrowiec* (The Wanderer) magazine, adolescent problems, the need to learn a profession and the wish to escape the then depressing atmosphere of Cracow. Like many of his peers, Konrad certainly dreamt of travelling and having adventures. Bobrowski may also have had problems with his upbringing. As Najder points out, “Konrad’s own head was probably full of various projects, but the sober-minded Bobrowski saw him as a sailor-cum-businessman who would combine his maritime skills with commercial activities – better still as a middleman in the huge agricultural products trade.”<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, “it was difficult to know what to do with the boy, since Syroczyński refused to keep him and his grandmother, nearing the end of her life, could no longer bear the responsibility. To leave the boy to his own devices without any specific duties would increase the risks

---

<sup>35</sup> Najder. *JC and TB*, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad. a Chronicle*, p. 37.

of his going astray. He could not return to the Ukraine.” Moreover, being a Russian subject and – worse still – the son of convicts, he risked being conscripted into the Russian army. “His application for Austrian citizenship had been refused.”<sup>37</sup> Bobrowski could, of course, have found another way to civilize his unruly nephew. He could have sent him on an educational tour or to a spa for another course of treatment. My own view, however, is that when Konrad began to dream of serving in the navy (in 1872), Bobrowski probably recalled his own youthful dreams of a career in public service – dreams that had been dashed by the death of his father. If he had been cold-hearted, embittered or insensitive to his nephew's feelings, he would hardly have agreed to the seventeen-year-old boy's departure for Marseilles – something which at that time certainly did not seem to be the most appropriate decision. Bobrowski not only agreed to Konrad's departure, but also approved of his decision to become a sailor and – in his letters – actually encouraged him to persevere in achieving what he had planned. This shows that he was a very consistent and thoughtful person who wanted to spare his nephew the experience of one day having to regret the fact that he had abandoned the dreams of his youth. Bobrowski steadfastly maintained that hard work and perseverance in pursuing his goals would help Konrad to fulfil his dreams. *Usque ad finem ...*

But I would not be myself and your uncle if I did not discourage you from changing professions and did not warn you that such changes make people become ‘déclassé’, who never having warned a place for themselves nor having built anything for themselves (I don't even mention the good of society although it is only fair to think of it), bear a grudge against the whole world for not having succeeded. [...] Work and perseverance are the only values that never fail. In the life of every man a momentary success may occur, but a sensible and moderate man will not misuse it but use it, while a thoughtless and stupid man will either miss it or misuse it. [...] You chose for yourself the profession of seaman, – you can expand on it further by trading – well and good – pursue this as far as you can and you will get somewhere. By changing from one career fortuitously to another you may encounter on your way nothing but deception and pain!<sup>38</sup>

It is not surprising that Bobrowski's letters were initially full of critical remarks and admonitions. Even a cursory knowledge of Konrad's doings at the beginning of his maritime career is sufficient for anyone to understand his uncle's irritation and indignation. Bobrowski writes in a very emotional way, knowing that his reader is not only a fledgling traveller, but also an incorrigible dreamer. Hence the nagging and carping. As a very organized and conscientious person who was prudent in the management of his financial affairs, Bobrowski could hardly have condoned Konrad's extravagant lifestyle. He tried to guide his nephew either by warning him or by pleading with him – as guardians and loving parents have done since time immemorial. One thing that cannot be said, however, is that his letters are cold or soulless – though to some extent I would agree with Zdzisław Najder when he says that ...

[...] with age, [Bobrowski] grew more embittered and doctrinaire, frustrated by remaining in the margin, cut off from public life. Conscious of having wasted his life, of having lived below

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 18/30 May 1880. [In:] *CPB*, p. 63.

his abilities and ambitions of becoming a diplomat or international lawyer, he put the blame not on the objective circumstances of a foreign oppression, but on the alleged sins of his own compatriots.<sup>39</sup>

This depicts Bobrowski as the author of the *Memoir*, but it is not the Bobrowski whom we find in the letters to Konrad – sometimes angry and irritated, but also a loving uncle, guide and friend. In his *Memoir*, Bobrowski scoffed at people, describing in detail all the scandals in which they were involved, as well as divulging all manner of family secrets, personal information and gossip. In a word, Bobrowski named names. It is worth asking whether he ever realized the consequences of its publication, which took place six years after his death and which itself caused a scandal: there were calls by relatives of those people whom the book showed in an unfavourable light to have the entire edition destroyed. To be fair, it must be said that Bobrowski did not confine himself to criticizing others, but also meted out praise to those who in his opinion deserved it.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, in the letters to Konrad it is impossible to detect any bitterness, frustration or despair. The person that emerges from these letters is completely different and it may well be that the real Tadeusz Bobrowski was at that time known only to Joseph Conrad (or rather Konrad Korzeniowski).

Apart from the very first letter, which was a routine affair for the benefit of yet another orphan, there is no distance or coldness in the rest of Bobrowski's correspondence with Konrad. In the early letters there is merely irritation and annoyance. The meeting in Marienbad was, I think, a turning point in their relations. From that moment onwards it was not only the tone of the letters that changed, but also the relative proportions of the subjects discussed: uncle and nephew were now on equal terms.

In the first period, Bobrowski mostly criticises Konrad's recklessness. He metes out reprimands, threats and instructions, hoping all the time that the boy's behaviour will improve. As in his *Memoir*, Bobrowski is scrupulous in dealing with his nephew's financial affairs. His meticulous calculations mercilessly expose Konrad's cavalier attitude towards spending "filthy lucre".<sup>41</sup> The clearest illustration of this is given in the "Document" written by Bobrowski "for the information of my beloved Nephew Konrad Korzeniowski,"<sup>42</sup> which is a register of the expenses incurred in connection with Konrad's upbringing and education – in Bobrowski's words: "the making of a man out of Master Konrad."<sup>43</sup> Bobrowski began writing his "Document" on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1869 and finished it in February 1890. In the same month, Konrad was presented with it while he was visiting his uncle at the family estate in Kazimierówka. "Thus the making of a man out of Mr. Konrad has cost – apart from the 3,600 given [him] as capital" 17,454 roubles. In total, it was 21,054 roubles. It must be remembered that in the year 1856 (when the family estate was divided) the Kazimierówka

<sup>39</sup> Najder. *JC and TB*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> See Kieniewicz. *Przedmowa wydawcy*, pp. 6-9.

<sup>41</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 14/26 May 1882. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 84-6.

<sup>42</sup> T. Bobrowski. *The Document. For the information of my Beloved Nephew Konrad Korzeniowski*. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 183-202.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 201.

estate was worth 28,000 roubles, as noted by Bobrowski in his *Memoir*.<sup>44</sup> The amount of money that was spent on Konrad's education was therefore quite a considerable sum.

Reading through Bobrowski's early letters, we find that the subject of "filthy lucre"<sup>45</sup> crops up quite frequently. On Konrad's departure from Poland his uncle decided that he would receive a high allowance. According to Najder, it was almost the same as the amount spent on good living and education in Lwów/Lviv.<sup>46</sup> When Konrad asked for more, Bobrowski must have been quite irritated. Konrad's allowance amounted to 2,000 francs a year, which was comparable with the pay of a lieutenant in the French navy.<sup>47</sup> Giving his nephew advice in the matter of "filthy lucre", Bobrowski invariably speaks of perseverance, common sense and duty – i.e. those things that meant so much to him.<sup>48</sup> In the years 1876-1878 we find admonitions and comments on financial matters in every letter written to Konrad. Notwithstanding the urgent tone of these letters, they are not devoid of warmth. Bobrowski never turns his back on Konrad, but indefatigably shows him the proper way of doing things. Even in those griping letters where he has to lecture his ward, Bobrowski always finds time for family and local news, discussions of other topics of mutual interest (e.g. Konrad's naturalisation) and enquiries about Konrad's health, plans and present activities.<sup>49</sup> Only occasionally are there letters which contain nothing but reproaches and reprimands, the best example being the letter of 26<sup>th</sup> June / 8<sup>th</sup> July 1878, where Bobrowski quite simply loses his patience:

You were idling for nearly a whole year – you fell into debt, you deliberately shot yourself – and as a result of it all, at the worst time of the year, tired out and in spite of the most terrible rate of exchange – I hasten to you, pay, spend about 2,000 roubles, I increase your allowance to meet your needs! All this is apparently not enough for you. And when I make a fresh sacrifice to save you from idleness and to ensure that you could stay on the English ship that you fancied, you leave the ship, giving me to understand that you did so because of the impossibility of paying the premium (for which they would certainly have waited, having in hand your 400 fr.) – you travel to London, God knows why, being fully aware that you could not manage by yourself, having nothing and knowing nobody – you then lose half the money you have left and you write to me as if to some school-chum 'send me 500 fr. which you can deduct from the allowance'; – from which allowance, pray? – from the one you give yourself? And 'advise me what to do

<sup>44</sup> Bobrowski. *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, Vol. II, pp. 80-1.

<sup>45</sup> Bobrowski explains in the letter of 14/26 May 1882 why he calls money "filthy lucre". He writes: "You have now lived for some years in England and have been taking part in the life there and you will have learned to respect money, and it therefore probably surprises you to hear me calling it 'filthy.' This expression is a survival from the 'romantic period' in which I was born and grew up, and to some extent it reflects our national character, a trait of which was supposed to be disinterestedness in money matters. I presume the latter to be an apparent rather than a real quality, for it arises rather from a carelessness than from a tempt for money. This is because we did not work to get it but worked rather to squander it!" [In:] *CPB*, p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> Najder. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 14/26 October 1876, 16/28 May 1878. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 39-45, 52-3.

<sup>49</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 10/22 June 1877, 28 July/8 August 1877. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 45-9.

in these circumstances'. In other words, you treat me like your banker: asking for advice so as to get money – assuming that if I give you advice – which you will or will not follow – I shall also give money for putting my advice into practice! Really, you have exceeded the limits of stupidity permitted to your age! and you pass beyond the limits of my patience!<sup>50</sup>

All Bobrowski's letters abound in exclamation marks, dashes, quotation marks, underlines and words which have been capitalized. The style of the letters is very emotional: Konrad's uncle not only roars from time to time, but also speaks emphatically, underlying certain phrases. Such letters can hardly have been written by a person who was cold-hearted or who was "not a man of tender heart and feelings."<sup>51</sup> Bobrowski merely tries to discipline his nephew. Whenever he mentions Konrad's extravagance, dreaminess or lack of perseverance he makes reference to "the Nałęcz spirit". The fact that Bobrowski blames Konrad's parental heritage whenever he criticises the boy's negative qualities (while at the same time praising the 'Bobroszczak' heritage whenever he finds any positive qualities) can, of course, be seen to be reprehensible, especially in view of the fact that Konrad had had problems understanding his father.<sup>52</sup> However, looking at it from Bobrowski's point of view, it was a very convenient and effective way of bringing the boy up: he made Konrad aware of certain inherited traits of character that could not be eliminated completely, but could at least be curbed. The "Nałęcz" in Konrad was a watchword that Bobrowski used with relish:

I see with pleasure that the Nałęcz in you has been modified under the influence of the Bobroszczaki, as your incomparable Mother used to call her own family after she flew away to the Nałęcz nest. This time I rejoice over the influence of my family, although I don't in the least deny that the Nałęczes have a spirit of initiative and enterprise greater than that which is in my blood. From the blending of these two excellent families in your worthy person there should spring a race which by its endurance and wise enterprise will astound the whole world! Pray God that may happen. Amen!<sup>53</sup>

Since you are a Nałęcz, beware of risky speculations based only on hope; for your grandfather squandered all his property speculating, and your Uncle, speculating always with other people's money and on credit, got into debt, – caused many people disappointments, and died heavily in debt.<sup>54</sup>

You lack endurance, Panie Bracie, in the face of facts – and, I suppose, in the face of people too? This is a trait of character inherited from your Grandfather – your parental Uncle – and even your father: in short the Nałęczes.<sup>55</sup>

Even when Bobrowski censures Konrad's misdoings in the most vehement way at the very beginning of a letter, he later goes on to ask about his health, describing his

<sup>50</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 26 June/8 July 1878 [In:] *CPB*, p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Perłowski. *On Conrad and Kipling*, p. 153.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Najder. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, pp. 283-284. *Idem. Introduction*. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 17-20.

<sup>53</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad 28 June (old style) 1880. [In:] *CPB*, p. 66.

<sup>54</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 3 June/15 August 1881. [In:] *CPB*, p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 18/30 July 1891. [In:] *CPB*, p. 147.

own physical and mental condition. Then come the “regular columns” devoted to local and family news, in which he keeps Konrad informed about the current situation at home. Bobrowski does not write to a stranger or foreigner, but to somebody who is “one of us”.

Apart from the matter of Konrad's and Bobrowski's health, another subject that continually crops up is the question of Konrad's professional career and the exams that he has to take and work for. The initial concern, care and interest that emanate from Bobrowski's letters later give way to pride and joy. Just as often, Bobrowski writes about the matter of Konrad's naturalisation, usually in the context of their future meeting. Konrad's career and his naturalisation are the two things that most preoccupy his uncle's mind:

It's all the same to me what you eventually do as long as you do it and find it satisfying. Everyone approaching the age of thirty knows or should know what he wants and what he is aiming at – provided that he is self-supporting. According to my point of view, no one, not even the most loving Uncle, has any right to interfere with that. To close our accounts for the past I permit myself to demand from you only two things – a master's certificate and your naturalization; and I ask this in the hope that you will shortly be informing me that both matters have been successfully settled.<sup>56</sup>

On closer inspection, the family news was initially intended to remind Konrad of his friends and relatives, whom Bobrowski did not want his nephew to forget. With the passage of time, however, he readily made Konrad privy to his thoughts and reflections about the people around him. Writing about things closer to home, Bobrowski often describes the weather, but only with regard to its bearing on the size of the harvest or his own physical condition.

Sometimes he indulges in a little fantasy, making future commercial plans connected with Konrad's stay abroad. Thus, just after giving Konrad a very sharp reprimand, Bobrowski wonders: “Maybe we could do some small business in these two articles [...]” (thinking about cigars and liqueurs).<sup>57</sup>

Bobrowski's correspondence with Konrad allowed him to escape from the dull reality of his own everyday problems. By sending letters to exotic places, he could follow the routes taken by his nephew and thus be his travelling companion – if only in his imagination. In encouraging Konrad to write for “The Wanderer”, on the one hand he wanted him to practise writing in his mother tongue (having noticed his talent – of this there is no doubt: as Najder observes, “Bobrowski was in fact the true discoverer of Conrad's literary talent”),<sup>58</sup> while on the other hand he wanted to vicariously take part in Konrad's travels. The request – made on behalf of Dr Kopernicki and concerning the collection and delivery of “skulls of natives” – also made a change from Bobrowski's everyday cares.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 24 June/6 July 1886. [In:] *CPB*, p. 105.

<sup>57</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 14 October/26 October 1876. [In:] *CPB*, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> Najder. *JC and TB*, p. 58.

<sup>59</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, of 16/28 June 1881, 3/15 August 1881. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 71-5.

Over the years, Bobrowski writes more frequently about their planned meeting. After 1883, while asking about Konrad's naturalisation, he constantly has their future meeting in Kazimierówka at the back of his mind. Whenever such a proposition comes up, however, Bobrowski makes a point of insisting that Konrad must take his own interests and career into consideration before making any decision. Whenever he is forced yet again to give up the idea of meeting Konrad, the reason he gives is that there are family problems. The most important thing for Bobrowski is his family, even when he criticises its members (including his brother Kazimierz) in a very witty and sarcastic way. He is always ready to help his relatives with money or advice. For Bobrowski, this is an obvious duty and he tries to teach Konrad to think likewise. Writing about his brother's family, Bobrowski says:

It seems to be enough anyway and you will admit that your Uncle worked successfully in this field. I don't even know when he had time to achieve all that as at nights he always had to be on the look-out for trains. Probably between one train and another he devoted himself to 'social work' to keep himself from falling asleep! [...] And so, all the things in the world and in life are connected with each other. We are responsible for each other and the family spirit is based on that. One thing only in this whole problem is not quite clear: why should only I be responsible for all the 'family prolificity'? But, in time, the answer to that question may be found: perhaps these children will grow up to be good people!?!<sup>60</sup>

When Bobrowski notices that his nephew's emotional life is heading in the wrong direction, being a very candid and direct person, he expresses his anxiety, warning him with great clarity, irony and humour against a flirtation with "Tante Margot":

Why do you say that you are one-eyed: do you suffer with your eye – or is it only a metaphor inspired by your being Tante Margot's 'support'? Well, it seems to me that you both fail to see that you are only flirting with each other since the death of poor Oleś – as an old sparrow friendly to you both I advise you to give up this game, which will end in nothing sensible. [...] It would be a stone round your neck for you – and for her as well.<sup>61</sup>

Bobrowski mellowed with age. Konrad for his part became more mature and sensible (though not entirely, as at times he resorted to fabrications – for instance the story of his accident and his stay in hospital – as a means of getting his uncle to send him more money).<sup>62</sup> No longer were they guardian and ward – their relationship had changed into friendship. However, it was the uncle who – always being wiser and more knowledgeable – could assess Konrad's character, pointing out its positive and negative traits. Although in time Konrad became Bobrowski's intellectual equal and was able to understand and appreciate his wit, irony and sarcasm, it was Bobrowski who was always in a position to give advice from the perspective of a more experienced person. This boosted Bobrowski's self-esteem and afforded him the pleasure of knowing that someone who had gone out into the world and had succeeded in achieving his goals was listening carefully to the advice of an uncle, who

<sup>60</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 14/26 May 1882. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>61</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 18/30 May 1891. [In:] *CPB*, p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 3/15 August 1881. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 72-3.

– despite the hopes and ambitions of his youth – had had to stay put in the provinces. Thus Bobrowski could leave Kazimierówka (if only in his imagination) and set off together with his “Dear Boy”. At the same time, Kazimierówka, being the point of reference for Konrad’s travels, became the hub of the universe – a compass, as it were, that showed uncle and nephew which route they were taking.<sup>63</sup>

Understandably, more and more space in Bobrowski’s letters was devoted to health problems, with descriptions of various illnesses and treatments gradually taking the place of financial reprimands. His accounts of haemorrhoidal disease,<sup>64</sup> the taking of waters, grape cures and mud-baths are admirable examples of his literary talent:<sup>65</sup>

I am experiencing a certain relief, and the dizziness that troubled me for over a year is much less frequent and acute, although it returns from time to time [...] I am patiently waiting; meanwhile I eat as little as a young maiden looking for a husband, and I run around my house and yard like a pointer, indifferent to the cold and frost. None the less my sixty-year-old mechanism is constantly falling down on me [...] I have reached the conclusion that there is nothing as silly as the sixty years themselves! And my advice to you is to put off reaching this age as long as possible.<sup>66</sup>

When he observes that Konrad has become depressed, Bobrowski – being his nephew’s confidant – falls into pessimism himself. He tries to cure Konrad of his depression by saying that the world may not be the best of places, but it is the only place where we can live and we just have to accept it. Bobrowski has been accused of being fatalistic and of preaching passive resignation or “a gospel of resignation”.<sup>67</sup> My own opinion is that the traumatic experiences which he had been through had left a distinctive stamp on his view of the world. As a result, the optimism with which he attempts to infect Konrad is of a very peculiar brand. Bobrowski hopes that everything will turn out well, providing one remains persistent in achieving one’s goals. One must stick to one’s resolutions and fulfil one’s duties. *Usque ad finem...* Considering his accumulated life experience, his determinism is perfectly understandable. He does his very best to cheer his nephew up. Bobrowski’s famous creed illustrates his supportive attitude towards Konrad:

Thus my assertion is: that although this world is not the best that one could imagine, it is nevertheless the only one we know and it is tolerable to the extent that we neither know any other nor are we able to create one; that society is not quite as bad as some seem to think and that it can’t be different from the people who constitute it; and that it is open to improvement provided that individuals try to improve themselves, – which in turn is bound to take place provided that with the idea of duty (already recognized as the guiding star in human ethics) they will combine, not the idea of compulsion and necessity [...] One must be able to look closely in order to see the good or at least the tolerable side of life and of people, in the light of the worldly order, the fate

<sup>63</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 10/22 May 1893, 1/13 July 1893. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 169-72.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 18/30 May 1881. [In:] *CPB*, p. 70.

<sup>65</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 16/28 June 1881, 30 VIII/10IX 1881. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 71, 77.

<sup>66</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 22 December 1888/3 January 1889. [In:] *CPB*, p. 127.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Najder. *Introduction*. [In:] *CPB*, p. 19; *idem*. *JC and TB*, p. 66; Adamowicz-Pośpiech. *Joseph Conrad...*, p. 48.

of which is not entirely in our hands – but one thing is certain and that is that if one must judge with one’s intellect one must appraise with one’s heart, obeying the order of nature in so far as it is necessary, with an understanding of shortcomings of the order of society in so far as they can be and should be rectified; with sympathetic understanding for the clumsy creatures which men are, provided that they act in good faith [...] On this soil pessimism, which is the aridity of soul and action, will not grow [...] Perhaps you will tell me that what I have said is but the words of a man who has always been comfortable in the world [...] but this is not so – you know this well. I have gone through a lot, I have suffered over my own fate and the fate of my family and my Nation, and perhaps just because of these sufferings and disappointments I have developed in myself this calm outlook on the problem of life, whose motto, I venture to say, was, is, and will be ‘*usque ad finem*’. The devotion to duty interpreted more widely or narrowly, according to circumstances and time – this constitutes my practical creed which – supported as it is by the experience of my sixty years – may be of some use to you?<sup>68</sup>

Another letter shows us just how important it was for Bobrowski to cheer Konrad up:

You say that my letters give you encouragement; well, here you have the key to my philosophy of life: one has to wait patiently till fortune shows the bright part of her face and then grab it with grace – meantime doing one’s duty. All the better for you and myself if you can find encouragement in this theory.<sup>69</sup>

Konrad must have seen Bobrowski as a grumpy guardian who often nagged him, but who was at the same time a loving, warm-hearted and very emotional man. By reading only certain passages taken out of context (especially in the case of the very first letters), we may indeed come away with the impression that Konrad’s uncle was cold and indifferent. When we go through all the letters, however, we usually see that just one paragraph later the irate guardian has changed into a caring uncle. If we wish to see Bobrowski as he really was, we must read his letters to Konrad from beginning to end. We may then notice, for example, that the elderly man who is trying to convince Konrad (or rather himself) that they cannot meet for Konrad’s sake, is actually trying to hide his own disappointment:

Who knows – it may be that in Australia you will find what you were waiting for in vain in London? ... indeed, should it in fact happen, I ask you most emphatically: forget all about our idea of meeting and take whatever is worth while that comes your way in the other hemisphere [...] I have no intention of dying so soon – during your absence and without at least once again seeing and embracing you.<sup>70</sup>

Bobrowski almost always addressed Konrad as “My Dear Boy”. He wrote: “And so you may tell me: it’s a fine ‘boy’ indeed who is already 34 years old! However, I shall apparently call you this till my dying day for I have grown to like this expression and to me you will always be a ‘dear boy’! ...”<sup>71</sup> Towards the end of his life, the subject of loneliness came up more and more frequently. His loneliness seemed eas-

<sup>68</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 28 October/9 November 1891. [In:] *CPB*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>69</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 6/18 September 1892. [In:] *CPB*, p. 165.

<sup>70</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 20 November/2 December 1891. [In:] *CPB*, p. 157.

<sup>71</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 15/27 June 1891. [In:] *CPB*, p. 143.

ier for him to bear when he was talking to Konrad through their letters. Their “chats” became the centre of his life. Bobrowski treated Konrad as if he were his own son and only Konrad knew the real Bobrowski, who was an emotional, loving and warm-hearted person:

I can't think of a better and more pleasant way of spending the lonely moments of Christmas than by thinking of and talking to you. For although it will be some time before you read this letter – you will see for yourself then how in these moments that remind me agreeably of the past, of my childhood and my parents' home, of youth, of my own home and of those who were its consolation – my thoughts, orphaned and battered by trials of life, are directed towards you and your destiny, seeking in them a vital centre for my own life which is gradually drawing towards its end.<sup>72</sup>

## WORKS CITED

- Adamowicz-Pośpiech, Agnieszka. *Joseph Conrad – spory o biografie*. Katowice: Deni-Press Usługi Wydawnicze i Reklamowe, 2003.
- Bobrowski, Tadeusz. *Pamiętnik mojego życia*. Vol. I-II. Ed. Stefan Kieniewicz. Warszawa: PIW, 1979.
- Bobrowski, Tadeusz. *a Memoir of My Life*. Transl. and Ed. with an Introduction by Addison Bross. Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. Vol. 17. Ed. Wiesław Krajka. East European Monographs, Boulder and Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, New York: Columbia University, 2008.
- Conrad's Polish Background. Letters to and from Polish Friends*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder. Transl. Halina Carroll-Najder. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Najder, Zdzisław. *Joseph Conrad. a Chronicle*. Trans. Halina Carroll-Najder. Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Najder, Zdzisław. *Joseph Conrad and Tadeusz Bobrowski*. [In:] *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Najder, Zdzisław. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*. Vol. I. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Gaudium, 2006.
- Perłowski, Jan. *On Conrad and Kipling*. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder. Trans. Halina Carroll-Najder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Zabierowski, Stefan. *Conrad's Noble Heritage. Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland) 2008-2009*, Vol. IV.

<sup>72</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad, 26 December 1891/7 January 1892. [In:] *CPB*, p. 159.