

**REVIEW OF: MARGRETA GRIGOROVA: JOSEPH CONRAD  
KORZENIOWSKI: THE CREATOR AS SEAFARER (МАРГРЕТА  
ГРИГОРОВА. ДЖОУЗЕФ КОНРАД КОЖЕНЬОВСКИ.  
ТВОРЕЦЪТ КАТО МОРЕПЛАВАТЕЛ. ВЕЛИКО ТЪРНОВО:  
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Margreta Grigorova's monograph is a timely piece of research that closes a long-standing gap in the critical reception of Conrad's work in Bulgaria, where the present state of academic interest in Conrad would seem to reflect a pressing need to study "migrant" writers, whose significance has increased as a result of the trends towards globalization in our modern world. This enhanced critical sensitivity to problems of migration is also signalled by the fact that two distinct works on Conrad (the other being Stefana Rusenova's comparative study entitled *Dialogues in Exile: Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, Eva Hoffman*) have been published in Bulgaria in recent years. Given that terms such as *migrant literature* and *literature of migration* open up exciting new perspectives from which Conrad's work can be read and explored, Grigorova's contribution to this field of study can be described as being significant.

In Grigorova's research, the perspective that regulates the "sea of discourses" (393) on the author's work is shaped by the literal and metaphoric presence of the sea in Conrad's life and writing. The strategic significance of this topos is activated in the problematic identification of Conrad's quest for his origins and his place in the world, as well as in the literary worlds of his works. Claiming that the sea is his home (*A Personal Record*), he also claims that any distinct location or quest for "home" will amount to the dissolution of the particular home-place (or homeland) into the constantly changing and uncertain sea-like expanse of migrant life. Aware of this multi-layered locus of Conrad's quests, Grigorova problematizes the concepts of *homo duplex* and *homo multiplex*, the question of migration and the cross-border dimensions of his position. The latter raises questions about Conrad's Polish origins, his adoption of Englishness and the French, Spanish, Russian and Australian routes in his life and work. The sea not only represents the dynamic principle of interchange between localities, but is the symbolic space of Conrad's writing that contains the turbulent interflux of different currents and discursive flows. As Grigorova observes in the summary of her book, one of its aims is to trace "the inevitable geopolitical and

geocultural discourses which are related to his journeys and which situate Conrad in the context of anthropological, colonial and postcolonial discourses ... As a representative of the transition between the Victorian period and modern times, Conrad is an elusive figure that stands between literary currents.”

The book’s major focus is the study of Conrad’s experience of migration and sailing as the (primary) source of his creative quests and his identity as a writer. Grigorova argues that Conrad’s maritime plots are central to the autocreative way in which the writer and seafarer imply each other in the writing. For Conrad, therefore, “writing” may well amount to “sailing” and vice versa – sailing enables the writer to experience the utmost fulfilment of his creative will. This complex relationship is most evident in *The Mirror of the Sea*, which Grigorova reads as a book that reveals Conrad’s identity as a seafarer. She further discusses select works by Conrad (fictional and non-fictional) which add new insights to this perspective.

The monograph consists of an Introduction, nine chapters and an appendix which includes the Bulgarian translations of excerpts from hitherto untranslated works by and on Conrad, summaries of the monograph in Bulgarian and Polish, a calendar of Conrad’s life and writing, a set of maps of Conrad’s sea routes and a gallery of pictures. There is also a drawing of Conrad the seafarer (on the back cover) made by Margreta Grigorova herself.

The first chapter of the book focuses on the multiple contexts and discourses that provide the various lenses through which Conrad’s works can be read. As has already been mentioned, Grigorova’s research makes use of a wide range of theoretical instruments, but its working tools are those of anthropological, colonial and postcolonial discourses. This chapter also explains how these critical perspectives operate in relation to the key idea of the research – that Conrad’s maritime experience and ‘philosophy of the sea’ are at the core of his creative principles.

Chapter two (entitled “Poland – the Book of Memories. Memory and Genealogy. 1914”) is a retrospective investigation of Conrad’s memories of his home country and discusses his problematic relationship with Poland – his simultaneous “insidedness” and “outsidedness” with regard to the land of his birth. A symptom of the former is the sacralized fictional version of Poland as the “book of memories” which he writes on all his journeys. Of particular interest to this section of the monograph is Conrad’s unconventional biography in *a Personal Record* (the first English edition was entitled *Some Reminiscences*), as well as *Prince Roman* (Conrad’s only novella that has a Polish plot) and his political articles: “The Crime of Partition” and “Autocracy and War”. The chapter explores how Conrad’s migration and “outsidedness” enabled him to enter into a more intense relationship with the country of his birth.

The next three chapters deal with Conrad and the sea. Grigorova sees the mariner’s sea routes and experiences in *The Mirror of the Sea*, *Youth*, *The Shadow-Line* and *Typhoon* as major itineraries of his creative self-assertion. While they prove to be heroic and epic in terms of their intensity, they are also external projections of the protagonists’ inward journeys and quests of self-discovery. Such forms of self-assertion frequently take place in instances of disconnection from any “firm” ground, as in *a Personal Record*, where Conrad confesses that “I may safely say that through the

blind force of circumstances the sea was to be all my world and the merchant service my only home for a long succession of years.” Life at sea conditions Conrad’s self-constructed legend of captainship – a legend that employs circumstances of uncertainty, instability and extreme danger, epitomized by the sea, to illustrate human leadership and the conquest of the elements.

Two of these chapters follow the storyline of the journey “into the heart of darkness” and discuss those works which are set in the Congo – *Heart of Darkness* (1899, 1902) and *An Outpost of Progress* (1897; 1900). Grigorova reads these through the lenses of mythological symbolism and hermeneutics. The role of ritual and fairy-tale codes is also taken into consideration. Special emphasis is placed on the creative and destructive potential of language – “the word” – as a source of power. This part of the book also reviews the discussion triggered by Chinua Achebe’s accusations of racism directed against Conrad.

The next chapter examines how Conrad’s accounts of the Belgian Congo have been continued by writers who have recorded their own impressions of that part of Africa – André Gide, Kazimierz Nowak, Alberto Moravia and Ryszard Kapuściński.

Chapter eight argues that Conrad’s writing is both a field of work and a battlefield – a version of the captain’s duel with the sea. These observations are based on Conrad’s personal correspondence and his autobiographical book.

The last chapter presents a detailed account of the Polish reception of Conrad, which has been marked by severe differences of opinion reflecting varying perceptions of the writer’s world-wide fame and his disconnection from Poland.

Margreta Grigorova’s monograph brings the following new insights to the study of Conrad:

- It explores how captainship forms part of the discourse of self-assertion and personal control over fate, epitomized by the captain’s duel with the storm and the shadow. The author focuses on a range of captain figures that provides a set of case studies.

- The monograph examines the political aspect of Conrad’s tale of the winds in *The Mirror of the Sea* and reads it as a political allegory, the discourse of navigation being studied in close relation to geopolitical models of the world.

- The chapters on *Heart of Darkness* present enticing new perspectives for a conventional reading of this work by taking as their focus the hermeneutic interpretation of language – the “word” – as an agent of creation and destruction, studying its metamorphoses into truth and falsehood, fetish and scream. The privacy of confession that characterizes the meeting between Kurtz and Marlow, together with the role of ritual and fairy-tale codes (Kurtz imagined as a “sleeping princess”) are some of the other exciting new vistas that we find in this study.

- A major feature of the monograph is the placing of Conrad’s Belgian Congo as an “open file” in a network of references to other writers and works that produce “black” myths about the Congo. This particular point of departure has developed into a separate route of exploration that goes beyond the scope of Grigorova’s research, taking the form of an examination of a sequence of texts by several prominent authors – Henry Stanley Morton, André Gide, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, Kazimierz

Nowak, Ryszard Kapuściński, Hugo Claus and Mario Vargas Llosa. The latter project was presented at the Fifth Congress of Polish Studies for Foreigners held in Opole in June 2012.

– Another creative aspect of the book is its concern with the role of memory in Conrad’s construction of Poland as a phantom land of memories. This complex retrospection conditions the creative impulse in Conrad’s writing as a “conversation with shadows”. The polemical aspect of the Polish reception of Conrad – “Conrad on Trial at Home” – adds further tension to the problem of placing the writer’s work.

