



THE RESONANCE OF JOSEPH CONRAD
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

2nd Conrad Symposium, Paris, 28.09.2023-29.09.2023



Académie Polonaise des Sciences Centre Scientifique à Paris
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ABSTRACTS



edited by
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ORGANIZERS

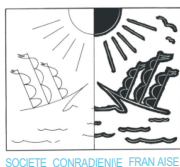


Paris
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PARTNERS



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Introduction



Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski was a writer shaped by various cultures – first of all Polish, French and English but also German and Russian. His life and fiction have been influencing cultures all over the world for almost a hundred years. The purpose of the symposium is to investigate the resonance of the figure of Joseph Conrad in the 21st century. Many critics (for example Chinua Achebe, Terry Eagleton, Hillis Miller, Edward Said), philosophers and thinkers (for example Jacques Rancière, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe), film producers (for example Francis Ford Coppola, Rogerio Nunes, Gerald Conn, Ingmar Villqist, Tomasz Man), musicians (for example Tarik O’Regan, Philip Glass, Tadeusz Baird, Krzesimir Dębski) and writers (for example Robert Silverberg, Caryl Phillips, John Maxwell Coetzee, Mario Vargas Llosa, Ewa Kuryluk, Jacek Dukaj, Patrick Deville) responded to his works. Thus one of the symposium objectives is to disseminate the responses to Conrad’s fiction on an international scale and, last but not least, propagate the understanding of his Polish heritage. To enhance the effects of the symposium and consolidate the knowledge of the influence of Conrad on contemporary world culture, it is planned to publish a volume of essays that the participants have prepared for the conference.

Visual Transformations of Conrad's Prose in 21st Century



Many visual representations of Joseph Conrad's life and works worldwide are produced by multinational artists. Just to mention the 21st-century ones: there is Katherine Anyango (Kenyan-Swedish) and David Mairowitz's (American) *Heart of Darkness. A Graphic Novel* (2010), Jean-François Chanson (French-Moroccan) and Yannick Deubou Sikoué's (Cameroonian) *Un avant poste du progress* (2010), Peter Kuper's (American) *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness* (2020), Tom Tirabosco (Italian-Swiss) and Christian Perrissin's (French) *Kongo. Le ténébreux voyage de Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski* (2013), Stephane Miquel and Loic Godart's (both French) *Au Au Coeur des ténèbres. Librement adapté du roman de J. Conrad* (2014), and Łukasz Godlewski and Maciej Jasiński's (both Polish) *Niesamowite opowieści J. Conrada* [The Amazing Tales of J. Conrad] (2015).

In particular, artists adapt *Heart of Darkness* to various media: the novella appears in a theatrical form on the Bulgarian and British stages (a performance by Museum Theatre directed by Valeriya Valcheva in Sofia and the production by the *Imitating the dog* theatre company in London), in the form of a sand animated film directed by Gerald Conn, or the anime-influenced Brazilian/French animated feature *Heart of Darkness* by Rogério Nunes. Additionally, there are video games (*Spec Ops, Far Cry 2*) based on its plot and the latest Instagram videos by Sascha Ciezata. We may say that Conrad became an icon of popular culture, one of fictional characters whom Umberto Eco dubbed "fluctuating characters". In the paper, I wish to explore the French graphic adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* by Stephane Miquel and Loic Godart entitled *Au Coeur des ténèbres. Librement adapté du roman de Joseph Conrad* (2014) and to demonstrate how it resonates with contemporary French visual artists.

After my intellectual biography of Joseph Conrad: Further lines of research



In my paper I will describe the perspective on Conrad which resulted from the two main lines of research that went into my book *Le storie di Conrad. Biografia intellettuale di un romanziere* (2019), and will suggest new developments.

I will start by describing the two-pronged approach to Conrad's texts I have adopted. While uncovering in his texts the presence of a master orchestrator of points of view and temporal shifts, a maneuverer of ironic narrators intent on demolishing every ideology encountered in their path, I have also outlined a poetics of the novel dispersed in a plurality of paratextual elements by assessing and linking together the ideas that structure those texts.

While reconstructing the story of Conrad's stories I realized how much his formal experiments revolved around the female figures in his fiction. His novels started mostly as sketches, often titled after a male figure – "Tuan Jim: A Sketch," "Nostromo," "Verloc," "Razumov" – or two, as in the case of "Two Vagabonds" (later, *An Outcast of the Islands*) – which then grew into plots revolving around the male protagonist's actions. But by the end, the story transcends these flawed men's individual destinies, and the reader is left with the sense of having read a tragic story, which has nothing to do with Verloc's or Jim's violent deaths, let alone Nostromo's, but, rather, with the figures who embody the human condition – or, as he calls it, "our common fate," which "fastens upon the women with a peculiar cruelty" (*Lord Jim*).

The first to recognize the resonance of their silent presence was George Gissing, who in a letter to Conrad wrote: "Wonderful, I say, your mute, or all but mute, women. How in Satan's name do you make their souls speak through their silence?" My answer to this question is: he made their souls speak through a number of increasingly complex narrative strategies. Through the only tools available, that is, for an author who was himself silenced by editors and publishers whenever he tried to write about women.

Michel Arouimi
Université du Littoral, France

From Conrad to horror films



In *The Secret Agent*, Winnie, the murderer of her husband, embodies a nameless drama which reveals to my eyes the failure of today's contemporary world. A revolt against the Father (figure), especially by women, is a rebellion whose importance and self-destructive meaning have been revealed by dozens of horror films since the beginning of the 21st century. In one of these films (*Raze*), a character named Kurtz (!) suggests the influence of *Heart of Darkness* in the movie. Conrad seems to be a “seer” if we consider some of his novels, like the anticipation of social problems, reflected by these recent films (for example *The Aviary*, directed by Chris Cullari and Jennifer Raite (2022); *Clown*, directed by Josh C. Waller (2014)).

Laurence Davies
King's College London, Great Britain

Descendants of 'The Secret Sharer'



This paper investigates two works rooted in Conrad's short story. Despite their common ancestry in a captain new to his command who shelters a stowaway and risks the safety and stability of crew and vessel, their narratives differ quite drastically in genre, setting, time, and space. What they do have in common is that the stowaway is a woman.

The son of Polish emigrants, Piotr Fudakowski was born in London. He has written and directed several much admired films, among them *Secret Sharer* (released in 2014 and shown in Poland a year later). The setting is the South China Sea in the present day, with a notable emphasis on global commerce. The cast is multilingual: a combination of Polish, English, Korean, and Mandarin Chinese.

One of the American author Robert Silverberg's contributions to science fiction is the novel *Downward to the Earth* (1970), which has strong affinities with *Heart of Darkness*. His novella *The Secret Sharer* appeared first in 1987 and is currently in print in a volume of his *Collected Stories*. The setting is a colossal spaceship on a voyage to a remote sector of the galaxy. The stowaway is a teenage woman who, like the legitimate passengers, is present in the form of an electronic matrix. She has hidden herself on board to escape the drab life of her birth planet. Communication with the captain is possible, brain to brain, and she is able to see and feel the glory of the skies outside the ship, a sublimity opposite to the shabbiness of Fudakowski's seascapes.

Julie Gay
Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale, France

**Conrad's Resonance in Chantal Akerman's *La Folie Almayer*:
a 'camera' of echoes.**



The concept of resonance, in its literal sense, implies the idea of prolonging the duration of a sound, as through its reflection on the walls of a hollow space. In the interest of sounding out the resonance of Joseph Conrad in the 21st century, this paper proposes to analyse Belgian film-maker Chantal Akerman's "camera", which in its etymological sense means "room" or "chamber", as both a literal and metaphorical chamber of echoes for Conrad's text, allowing it to resonate all the way into the 21st century. We shall analyse how Akerman's 2011 film *La Folie Almayer*, which she herself describes as a loose adaptation of Conrad's early novel *Almayer's Folly*, offers a both visually and phonically striking (though perhaps slightly deforming) echo of Conrad's text, through the intermedial process of adaptation. It is indeed by wilfully taking some distance with the novel that she paradoxically manages to create a filmic aesthetics that is perhaps closest to Conrad's narrative poetics, as though the echo required space to best reverberate the original. Within the framework of adaptation theory, this paper will examine in particular the similarities in the two artists' aesthetic sensibilities, as shaped by their very personal experiences of exile or displacement, and by their relatively marginal position in relation to their host country's canon.

Robert Hampson
FEA, FRSA, University of London, Great Britain

Colonialism, anti-colonialism and decolonisation



This paper will focus on Rob Lemkin's recent film, *African Apocalypse* and its use of *Heart of Darkness*. It will consider how it uses *Heart of Darkness* as an initial prompt and as a way of structuring and commenting on its own quest. The film follows in the footsteps of the Voulet-Chanoine Mission through modern Niger to Captain Voulet's grave. It sets up Captain Voulet as a real-life equivalent of Kurtz and, in doing so, foregrounds the anti-colonial aspects of *Heart of Darkness*. In the journey towards Voulet's grave, the film visits the sites of many of Voulet's massacres. It shows how the memory of the massacres is still alive by giving voice to the local peoples. The film has been translated into Hausa and has reached large Hausa-speaking audiences. The title *African Apocalypse* obviously makes reference to *Apocalypse Now*. The paper will conclude with a brief comparison of the two films and their handling of *Heart of Darkness* as an intertext. This comparison will be used to discuss Conrad's relation to the agenda of decolonisation.

Karol Samsel
University of Warsaw, Poland

Jacek Dukaj's *Heart of Darkness* from the Stylometric Point of View



The purpose of my study is a comparative stylometric analysis of Jacek Dukaj's *Heart of Darkness* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The initial point for consideration in this case – resolving many fundamental questions – is Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech's chapter exploring this issue in her book *Adaptations of Joseph Conrad's Biography and Works in Contemporary Culture*. It is worth considering to what extent determinants that Dukaj declares (Adamowicz-Pośpiech recapitulates them in great detail) have been transferred into what influences the final shape of his rewriting of Conrad's story. I am particularly interested in what happens to the specific achievements of the Conrad's narrative technique in the process of contemporary „transfusion” of his text so that it can become accessible to the so-called post-readers, the recipients of the post-writing era, as the addressees of his works are defined by Jacek Dukaj. Discussing over the classical achievements of Conrad's workshop, I refer here first of all to the classic, erudite recognitions of Ian Watt in his significant volume *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*: it was Watt who first exhaustively described such peculiar Conrad's techniques of writing as „analepsis”, „chronological looping” and „delayed decoding”.

The resonance of Conrad in African literature and film

“In the desert, in prison or out at sea, Conrad can be a good companion” says one of the protagonists of Arianna Dagnino’s book *The Afrikaner*. In Conrad’s works we, contemporary readers, can find the answers for many questions connected with modern African reality asked by the artists who observe the African protagonists from various perspectives (as belonging to Africa or being only visitors, guests; “one of them” or “others”, or even being “in between”).

Protagonists of *Tsootsie* (both: a book and a film) and *The Afrikaner* face Conradian, borderline situations, they must make decisions and then bear their consequences. They must find enough courage to face their own demon, to find the meaning of life despite what they have experienced, to find within themselves a sense of humanity in spite of everything.

Daniel Vogel

University of Applied Sciences in Raciborz, Poland

Meeting the Other in Selected Works by Conrad and Lem.



Despite the fact that we can find numerous traces of Conrad in the fiction by Stanisław Lem, the famous Polish philosopher and science fiction writer makes very few direct references to the author of *Heart of Darkness* and his works. In fact, Lem elaborates on Conrad only once, in an extended interview with Stanisław Bereś, in which he calls him “an outstanding, world-class novelist, whom he owes a lot”. He adds that his favourite works by Conrad are the less known ones, i.e. *The Shadow Line*, *The Mirror of the Sea* and *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. Indeed, reading Lem’s *Tales of Pirx the Pilot* or *Solaris*, we can easily find motifs which are explicit in the aforementioned Conrad’s masterpieces, such as loneliness and responsibility of a commander, crossing the “shadow-line”, or facing unpredictable weather conditions or circumstances beyond control.

Two years ago, during our first symposium at Polish Academy of Sciences in Paris I discussed the topic of migration in selected works by Joseph Conrad and Stanisław Lem. This paper to some extent develops the issue of migration, for the main idea I am going to concentrate on is the frequently problematic and multidimensional contact with the Other. Conrad presents it not only in his African tales, i.e. *An Outpost of Progress* or *Heart of Darkness*, but also in some of his short stories, including *Karain*. Stanisław Lem, in turn, makes numerous references to this motif in *Solaris* and *Fiasco*. The question, which somehow links both artists here, and which I am going to elaborate on, is in what circumstances contact with the Other turns out to be impossible, and what consequences may arise from such impossibility.

Rob Lemkin
Film Director, Great Britain

Conrad Transformed in Niger: the making of 'African Apocalypse'



I went to Niger in 2015 laden with Comad and French colonial accounts from the Scramble for Africa only to find something very different among the communities that live along the route of the notorious 1899 French invasion. This brief talk will highlight this transformation. It will be an introduction to a showing of the Hausa version of the film, first released in 2022 to an audience of 8 million in West Africa. It includes the first-ever readings of *Heart of Darkness* in Hausa.

I will also touch on the Hausa poet Umaru who wrote at the same time as *Heart of Darkness* a poem called *Arriving at the Water Gorge of History by One who comes to it with Insight*. A fierce condemnation of colonial violence and intrusion. Interestingly, the scholar who has done most work on Umaru's texts is Polish at Warsaw University (now in his 90s). When they showed our film in Niger and Nigeria they put excerpts from Umaru's poems at the start and end of the broadcast. I will also play those poems.

Reviews of African Apocalypse

"Startling" **** - *The Guardian*

"Necessary & well-timed" ***** - *The British BlackList*

"Harrowing but hugely important" ***** - *Daily Express*

"Intimate and immersive" ***** - *Reviews Hub*

"A chilling yet stunning confrontation of Europe' s colonial amnesia"

David Lammy MP

Kaoru Yamamoto
University of Shiga Prefecture, Japan

**Conrad's Echo in Anne Carson's *Nay Rather*:
Translation and a 'Third Place to Be'**



The aim of this paper is to find an echo of a self-translating author Joseph Conrad in contemporary Canadian poet and classicist Anne Carson's essay on translation *Nay Rather* (2013) and to show that untranslatable foreignness of Conrad's texts partly comes from 'a third place to be' that he apparently takes in translating his own experiences. Conrad does appear in Carson's short story 'An evening with Joseph Conrad' (2019) and her poem '1 x 30' (2020). In *Nay Rather*, on the other hand, the Polish-British author is absent, yet the essay strongly invokes him in its emphasis on the importance of silence in the practice of translation.

Moreover, her remarks that translation is a practice that gives us 'a third place to be' can be regarded as a description of Conrad's works which tend to be fraught with translation at every level. The unique position 'a third place to be' allows Conrad to makes us see something we don't yet have eyes for, and hear something that was never sounded but still peculiarly resonates with our contemporary concerns.

Programme

Day 1: 28 September 2023

09:30

Introduction

Welcoming Address by Magdalena Sajdak, Director of Polish Academy of Sciences Scientific Centre in Paris

Opening of the Symposium

Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, Vice President of the Polish Joseph Conrad Society

Conrad and Contemporary Literature

Chair: Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech

09:40 – 09:50

Joanna Skolik

The resonance of Conrad in African Literature and Film

09:50 – 10:10

Roundtable

10:10 – 10:20

Daniel Vogel

Meeting the Other in Selected Works by Conrad and Lem

10:20 – 10:40

Roundtable

10:40 – 11:00

Coffee break

Conrad, Literature and Bandes Dessinees

Chair: Joanna Skolik

11:00 – 11:10

Laurence Davies

Descendants of “The Secret Sharer”

11:10 – 11:30

Roundtable

11:30 – 11:40

Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech

Visual Transformations of Conrad’s Prose in 21st Century

11:40 – 12:00

Roundtable

12:00 – 14:30

Lunch break

Conrad and Film

Chair: Daniel Vogel

14:30 – 14:40

Michel Arouimi

Prom Conrad to Horror Films

14:40 – 15:00

Discussion

15:00 – 15:15

Coffee break

15:15 – 15:25

Julie Gay

Conrad Resonance in Chantal Akerman’s *La Folie Almayer*: a ‘camera’ of echoes

15:25 – 15:45

Discussion

Programme

Day 2: 29 September 2023

Conrad: Biography and Translation

Chair: Michel Arouimi

- Richard Ambrosini
- 9:40 – 09:50 After My Intellectual Biography of Joseph Conrad:
Further lines of research
- 09:50 – 10:10 Roundtable
- 10:10 – 10:20 Karol Samsel
Jacek Dukaj's *Heart of Darkness* from the Stylometric Point
of View
- 10:20 – 10:40 Roundtable
- 10:40 – 10:50 Kaoru Yamamoto
Conrad's Echo in Anne Carson's *Nay Rather*: Translation
and a 'Third Place to Be'
- 10:50 – 11:00 Roundtable
- 11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

Conrad and the Visual Arts

Chair: Julie Gay

- 11:30 – 11:40 Robert Hampson
Colonialism, Anti-colonialism and Decolonisation
- 11:40 – 12:00 Roundtable
- 12:00 – 14:30 Lunch break

Conrad and Film II

Chair: Robert Hampson

- 14:30 – 15:00 Rob Lemkin
On African Apocalypse
- 15:00 – 15:10 Coffee break
- 15:10 – 17:00 Screening of *African Apocalypse in Hausa*
(dir. Rob Lemkin)
Discussion
Closing of the symposium

