



**TRANSCULTURAL BIOGRAPHY AND OEUVRE OF JOSEPH
CONRAD-KORZENIOWSKI AND ITS REVERBERATIONS
WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS**

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ABSTRACTS



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Introduction



Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski was a man of three cultures: Polish, French and English. His biography and works have inspired various artists representing different media: (visual) literature (comics, graphic novels), film, music, art installations, murals and computer games. The purpose of the seminar is to discuss and make known the achievements of national artists inspired by Conrad on an international scale, exchange the knowledge of multifarious cultural events connected with this writer in particular countries (film and literature festivals, theatre performances, graphic installations, etc.) and last but not least, enhance the understanding of his Polish background.

In times of severe social turmoils and hostile nationalistic discourses, the transcultural dimension of Conrad's life and writing provides a platform for the exchange of different visions of cultures and societies. Discussing the achievements of modern artists who draw inspiration from his oeuvre will build bridges of collaboration between international scholars representing different cultural backgrounds. The seminar will popularize diverse artistic performances, resulting in a better understanding of various discourses, ways of life and religious practices. We believe that by organizing an international debate on the works of artists inspired by Conrad, we can enhance divergent cultures' appreciation. Finally, we wish to prove that Conrad, 'a Pole and a gentleman from the Ukraine', a borderland author, can provide a relevant perspective on political conflicts, migration and economic inequalities today.

**Representations of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in French
and English Graphic Novels**



In the contemporary visual culture, we may observe the rise (and development) of a new myth - the myth of *Heart of Darkness*. Artists reimagine the well-known story in various media: the most obvious example being F.F. Coppola's cinematic adaptation *Apocalypse Now*. However, there are also the lesser-known ones, with Conrad's novella appearing 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, not to be left behind, there are several graphic novels and comics depicting the story, starting with the famous version by Catherine Anyango and David Mairowitz and ending on the Instagram videos/comics volume by Sascha Ciezata. In the paper, I wish to explore visual adaptations of Conrad's biography and the novella in two graphic novels: *Kongo* by Tom Tirabosco and Christian Perrissin (2013) and *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness* adapted by Peter Kuper (2019). The paper's focus is twofold: first, to discuss how the contemporary artists interweave Conrad's biography into their visions of *Heart of Darkness* and second, how they introduce a revised point of view into the visual story by voicing the silenced native population.

Conrad in Antonioni Film Projects



Michelangelo Antonioni is well-known for his films. Some of them were never shoot, for mysterious reasons. Antonioni just wrote some short stories, vainly waiting the opportunity to make films. In one of these texts, Antonioni speaks of his passion for Conrad. Antonioni clearly evokes his “passion for Conrad” around 1969 in “Four Men at Sea”, a film project inspired by a piece of news involving three men drifting on a boat without anything to eat or drink while a fourth, the boat owner, has mysteriously disappeared. Antonioni declared that “this Conradian impression of an open sea” appealed to him – and it gave him the idea of an “homage to Conrad”.

The name of one of the characters in this fiction, Towers (“James Towers”), is an obvious reminiscence of “Tower”, the name of the former owner of the mysterious volume of nautical lore discovered by Marlow right in the middle of *Heart of Darkness*. The boat involved in the film project, “The Irene”, evokes other boats in other narratives by Conrad.

In another film project, a woman, with her B.A. in chemistry, is an echo from the “Professor” in *The Secret Agent*, that inventor in explosives who himself owes his nickname to his former job in a chemistry lab. And one may also be reminded of Mr. Ossipon, a deceptive sheet anchor for Winnie, when the woman in “Two Telegrams” (title of this film-project) catches sight of “the shadow of a man . . . within the rectangle of a window in the neighboring skyscraper.” These details can evoke key motifs in Conrad’s narrative...

Contexts, Genres, and Transformations: Conradesque Novels by Robert Silverberg and Henri Bosco and Their Second Lives as *Bandes Dessinées*



As often as not, thinking about novels that acknowledge Conrad's influence is a dialogue with the present as much as with the past. Edward Said's distinction in critical practice between filiation and affiliation adapts well to the creative texts themselves: filiation as respect for inheritance, grounded identity, and truth to literary type; affiliation as voluntary divergence and association, multiple subjectivities, and revisionary questioning. In an ideal literary world, neither stance calls for disparagement or rejection. This paper, however, concentrates on milieu and transformation.

Very little has been written on Henri Bosco's reading of Conrad's works, but he told an academic interviewer that 'C'est une oeuvre qui m'a bouleversé' (John Prince, *French Review*, March 1974). Bosco was particularly affected by the stories in *Youth*. In this paper I discuss the challenging study of isolation *Malicroix* (1948) and what is often regarded as a children's book, *L'enfant et la rivière* (1945). Both of them are set in the Rhône Delta, Bosco's substitute for the sea. Robert Silverberg's *Downward to the Earth* (serial 1969, book 1970) is better known but still bears the stigma in some quarters of being science fiction. It is a rereading of "Heart of Darkness" of considerable power and originality, clearly a response to the war in Viet Nam and the attendant reappraisal of American politics, history and culture. In contrast, Bosco's oeuvre has often been considered apolitical to the point of mysticism, but his intense engagement with land, air, wind, and water aligns him with other ecologically aware writers from Provence such as Marcel Pagnol and Jean Giono.

In a further metamorphosis, both *L'enfant et la rivière* and *Downward to the Earth* have been made into graphic novels: the former drawn and written by Xavier Coste in 2018, and the latter in two volumes written by Philippe Thirault and drawn by Laura Zuccheri in the same year.

**Parallax and Impossible Return in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"
and Caryl Phillips's *Higher Ground***



Caryl Phillips' 1989 novel, *Higher Ground*, is a triptych, the title of whose first part, "Heartland", openly acknowledges its parentage with Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness", all the more so as it is set on the West coast of Africa at the time of the slave trade. The anonymous first-person narrator who acts as an interpreter for the white traders and is therefore placed in a morally dubious position, betraying his own people, somehow offers a crude picture of what was only suggested by Marlow's narrative, as though Phillips wished to tear open the veil of Conrad's fiction. Concurrently, he sheds light on Marlow's own uncomfortable position as the latter is somehow also caught in a colonial enterprise he at once works for and denounces, interpreting the reality of colonialism for his imperialist fellows at home. For Marlow, just as for the narrator of "Heartland", no return is possible, no place can ever be home again. Thus Caryl Phillips does not aim to adjust and correct the parallax effect of Conrad's text, the white man's point of view, by writing the Black man's, but rather to provide different angles on the white man's presence in Africa, and mostly to show that parallax is inherent to the process of interpretation in all time and places. It is probably no coincidence if the last part of the triptych tells the story of a Jewish girl from Poland who escaped the Holocaust and was sent as a child to England where suffering from trauma, she feels isolated. Displacement, trauma, being between different languages and different cultures is a familiar – if not explicitly expounded on – experience for Conrad. Phillips somehow makes us see, read between the lines of Conrad's text and offers readers a parallax experience whereby both object and viewer are changed. Reading Conrad, and reading Phillips reading Conrad, forever changes our perspective and places us in a challenging, if uncomfortable, dynamic of adjustment and readjustment.

Robert Hampson

Conrad and Transcultural Belonging



This paper takes off from three texts by Conrad from different stages of his career: “An Outpost of Progress”, *The Secret Agent* and *The Rover*. We are familiar with Marlow’s statement that “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz”. I want to begin this paper by turning that lens on Henry Price in “An Outpost of Progress” and Verloc in *The Secret Agent* in order to consider the transnational and transcultural makings of each character. I will then consider the complex transcultural belonging of Peyrol in *The Rover* and compare that with Conrad’s exploration of a similar transcultural complexity in his own character in “Poland Revisited”. This latter text will be used to generate the terms exile and haunting, which will then be explored through a discussion of Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow* (2004) and Agnieszka Studzinska’s third collection of poems, *Branches of a House* (2021). It will consider how Pamuk draws on *Under Western Eyes* for his own novel of exile and how Studzinska takes off from Conrad for an exploration of her own transcultural belonging through the figure of haunting.

The Shadow/Presence of Joseph Conrad in Contemporary Fiction



Joseph Conrad's influence on contemporary fiction (novels, films, comics, painting, etc.) is well known. It seems that his own works are a prism through which artists can re-examine our own age: they have been used to deal with race, gender, terrorism, international questions, or even globalisation. Some, however, are fascinated as much by Conrad-the-author as by his stories, pointing out that, as Spanish novelist Javier Marias has it, "it is almost as if writers' features were part of their work/oeuvre." Consequently, Joseph Conrad, the man and author, is regularly transformed into a character and his personal life is the object of fictionalisation. This is the case with Argentinian novelist Eduardo Berti in his latest novel, *Un Padre Extranjero/Un père étranger*, a novel haunted by Conrad's figure. Drawing parallels between his own father and Conrad, Berti tackles personal matters and mingles biography and fiction, exploring the questions of exile, identity and language, especially the relation between native and adopted tongue. Relying heavily on Jessie's books, Berti also forces us to (re-)consider our approach to Conrad as a source of inspiration for contemporary fiction, the *author* becoming apparently as important as his books.

If Berti's choices make it clear that every reader re-creates the "author" of the works they have read in order to suit their own preoccupations and come to terms with their own ghosts, underlining the creation of an emotional bond between author and reader, his approach reveals unexpected aspects of Conrad's influence on world literature. It also confirms that, beyond cultural and temporal differences, his figure is still very much alive and that he is still our contemporary.

Conrad's Presence in Contemporary French Literature



In the 1920s, Paul Claudel advised André Gide to read “the whole of Conrad”. Soon afterwards, Gide decided to arrange the translation of Conrad’s major works, a process which has not ceased ever since: Conrad has become somehow a classic in French literature. This essay will consider some modalities of his presence among French contemporary writers, among which Christian Bobin, Marie Darrieuseq, Patrick Deville and Jacques Rancière. What seems to be still fascinating in his work is the way in which it revolves around “l’inimaginable” (Rancière) – literally, what there is no image for: paradoxically, it is only through the oblique lighting of fiction, through “the concoction of artistic lies” (Conrad), that Conrad introduces the sense of the human mystery which continues to appeal to these writers.

Kurtz and the Gift from God: The end of St Paul's 'Charism' and the Rise of Secular Charismatic Leadership in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.



Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) has traditionally been received in terms of its criticism of the administration of western colonialism and the artificial binary of the civilized and the savage. However, I argue for a more nuanced approach to the text by identifying Conrad's ability to foresee the dangers not just of the colonial project but of the rise of the 'charismatic' leader. As part of a larger investigation into the influence of Conrad's Catholic heritage on his fiction, I want to explore how Conrad portrays the transformation of St Paul's 'charism' into the modern and secular 'charisma' of the twentieth – and indeed the twenty first – century. My argument is that Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* becomes an embodiment of the secular or 'third world' culture of revolt (Gardner, 2009: 181) displacing 'charism' as the gift of God and aligning it instead with the non-religious and aesthetic. As Stephen L. Gardner argues, charisma's 'religion' is 'the divinity of the image itself, idolatry of culture as a realm of "signs" and "representations" referring only to themselves as though culture were merely a field for emancipatory "freedom" to play in. The image of the divine is supplanted by the divinity of the image. Third culture feeds by cannibalizing traditional culture, in endless revolt against the sacred order in the name of personal liberation' (Gardner, 2009: 181). My paper will begin with a brief overview of Conrad's Catholic heritage and the theological etymology of the word 'charism'. I will then use Weber's theories of 'charisma' to show how this holy 'gift' has become little more than a secular commodity, before making a comparison between Kurtz and western contemporary leaders such as Winston Churchill and Boris Johnson.

Olga Tokarczuk – Joseph Conrad. A Close-up Attempt



There is no question that Olga Tokarczuk's heroes and heroines – whatever the writer recognizes their condition in that way or doesn't – face the strict Conradian, ultimate situations. Kunicki from *Flights* is being put to the typically Conradian test, from the same novel, Conradian can also be precised the experience of Eric, a boatman from the Vis Island who one morning decides to 'abduct' on impulse one of passenger ships to the high seas. However, we say 'typically Conradian test' of Kunicki or 'Conradian experience' of Eric, what exactly do we have in minds then? On what have been based those (likewise, characteristic) 'conradisms' of Tokarczuk, what understanding of Conrad by Tokarczuk do they convey? If we above all conclude from the short Tokarczuk's note written for 'Gazeta Wyborcza', the writer desires to see in Conrad the depth of 'the tender onlook'. Also, she wishes to see in Conrad the ideas of community and commonwealth responsibility – instead of the issues of honour or the honour's responsibility strictly associated for Tokarczuk with the entanglements in missions. That is the responsibility, indeed, not the fidelity or the honour, what is called by the author of *House of Day, House of Night* 'Conrad's sense'. 'Are we still having it, that Conrad's sense, which – in so-called normality – lets us perceive the violence and the disdain, the striving for domination, the imposing own world vision, eventually the splitting people on the better and worse ones' the writer asks rhetorically.

A great deal of difficulties has always been connected with that mode of simplified Conrad's reading. It is possible to consider them even as the *salto mortale* of the Conradian aspect of depicting the literary reality in general. Conrad had never expressed any clear and legible outlines for the interpersonal proceedings, he had spoken out the desperate solidarity, capturing it poetically, the brotherhood of those who are walking and will be walking in darkneses. In spite of all, reading Conrad by Tokarczuk can be also rehabilitated: it's plausible to see in it the Copernican revolution in thinking about ethics of particular Conradian heroes. It ought to be mentioned that in the quite similar spirit few years ago in the essay entitled *An understanding heart* Alan Finkelkraut, the appreciated French philosopher in equally surprising manner had interpreted *Lord Jim*. The book was awarded with the Prize of French Academy in the section of essays.

Conrad, Fudakowski and *Their Secret Sharer*



Although Peter Fudakowski's film is distinctly different from its literary original, and is not a faithful adaptation, it is very faithful to Conrad's message. Fudakowski succeeded in capturing the gist of Conrad's story, despite (or perhaps due to) departing from the original piece quite substantially by "modernizing" the text, adding a few motives and also changing the sex of one of the characters . It tells the story of the young captain; his increasing responsibility for his new crew and his ship. Similarity of their (the writer and the filmmaker) memories and experience made Fudakowski understand and express Conrad's message and interpret his prose in his own artistic way.

Loneliness of a Migrant: Intercultural Experience of Joseph Conrad and Stanisław Lem and Its Presence in Their Selected Works.



When Konrad Korzeniowski decided to leave his relatives and pursue the maritime career, he was only 17. Though he had been dreaming of voyages to distant parts of the world and discovering regions then unknown to the white men, living abroad far away from a known social group certainly gave rise to profound internal tensions, particularly if we take into consideration his childhood background: following his parents in exile and their premature deaths. Hence, when young Korzeniowski found himself in France, the emotions he experienced were sometimes extreme - moments of intensive and ecstatic social life, extravagance and profligacy interweaved with loneliness, melancholy and depression. These mixed feelings accompanied Conrad for many years, not only those he spent in the sea, but also when he finally settled down in England. We can also notice them in the characters of many of his works, including *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outpost of Progress*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Amy Foster* or *The Shadow Line*.

Like Konrad Korzeniowski, Stanisław Lem, one of the most known Polish modern science fiction writers, also experienced the consequences of migration resulting from complicated political situation. The first time was when after the period of German and Russian occupation, the whole Lem family decided to leave Lviv in 1945 and go to Cracow (Stanisław Lem was in his early twenties then), the second time was after the introduction of the martial law in Poland in 1980 (Lem left Poland in 1983 and spent 6 years abroad, mostly in Vienna). The intercultural experience of this artist and the consequences of a long time spent away from one's home is, like in the case of Conrad, a frequent motif in his fiction, particularly in the works such as *Tales of Pirx the Pilot*, *Return from the Stars*, *Solaris*, *Eden* and *Fiasco*.

As we can find many traces of Conrad in the fiction of Stanisław Lem, the paper aims at examining how individual experience of migration and loneliness influenced the writings of the two artists. Particular attention will be given to the comparison of some of the characters appearing in Conrad's and Lem's fiction which develop intercultural contacts (or at least make an attempt to do so) and are confronted with the consequences of long periods of being away from their familiar environment.

**Affiliations in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*
and J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*.**



Although Coetzee very rarely mentions Conrad, both authors have much in common. As external and internal exiles, both were expected in their fiction to spell out their cultural and/or political affiliations. The two novels on which this paper focuses, *Under Western Eyes* (1911) and *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), show, however, that this is not an expectation that either Conrad or Coetzee were to fulfil straightforwardly.

Under Western Eyes and *The Master of Petersburg* are both political novels dealing with Russia, revolutionary and anarchist movements, with social, political, cultural and historical affiliations, as well as problematic affiliations. Their respective publications revived arguments about their authors' cultural and political affiliations. The publication of *Under Western Eyes* generated a new spate of reminders of Conrad's foreign, or so-called 'Slav' origins, which Conrad rejected vehemently, later stressing in his author's note the "scrupulous impartiality" and "detachment" with which he attempted to approach his subject. Coetzee's novel centres on the figure of Dostoevsky – whom, as we know, Conrad detested – and on events leading to the writing of *The Possessed*. With this novel, his first since the end of Apartheid, Coetzee appeared to be turning his back on South Africa precisely when some kind of response to South Africa's fresh beginnings was expected of him.

These two novels are also metafictional novels foregrounding the creative process, the writing and reading of fiction. The point of this paper, therefore, is not to argue that Conrad was a source of inspiration that Coetzee, for whatever reason, seems to be willing to hide. It is rather to analyse how, by displacing the representation of political debates onto creative issues, both Conrad and Coetzee defend fiction against superficial links between representations and affiliations.

Programme
Day 1: 16 September 2021



- 9.30** Opening of the Seminar
Veronique Pauly – President the French Conradian Society
Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech Vice President of the Polish Joseph Conrad Society
- 9.40 – 10.40** **Conrad in Contemporary Literature**
Chair: **Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech**
- Nathalie Martinière**
The Shadow/Presence of Joseph Conrad in Contemporary Fiction
- Catherine Delesalle-Nancey**
Parallax and Impossible Return in Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness”
and Caryl Phillips’s *Higher Ground*
- 10.40 – 10.50** Discussion
- 10.50 – 11.10** Coffee break
- 11.10 – 12.10** **Conrad in *Bandes Dessinées*.**
Chair: **Nathalie Martinière**
- Laurence Davies**
Contexts, Genres, and Transformations: Conradesque Novels by Robert Silverberg and Henri Bosco and Their Second Lives as *Bandes Dessinées*.
- Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech**
Representations of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in French and English Graphic Novels
- 12.10 – 12.20** Discussion
- 12.20 – 14.20** Lunch break
- 14.30 – 15.45** **Conrad and Film**
Chair: **Laurence Davies**
- Michel Arouimi**
Conrad in Antonioni Film Projects
- 14.55 – 15.00** Discussion
- 15.00 – 15.45** **Joanna Skolik**
Conrad, Fudakowski and their *Secret Sharer* (screening of some fragments of Peter Fudakowski’s *Secret Sharer*)
- 15.45 – 15.55** Discussion

Programme
Day 2: 17 September 2021



9.40 – 10.40 Conrad and Polish Literature

Chair: **Joanna Skolik**

Karol Samsel

Olga Tokarczuk – Joseph Conrad. A Close-up Attempt

Daniel Vogel

Loneliness of a Migrant: Intercultural Experience of Joseph Conrad and Stanisław Lem and Its Presence in Their Selected Works.

10.40 – 10.50 Discussion

10.50 – 11.10 Coffee break

11.10 – 12.10 Transnational Conrad and His Protagonists

Chair: **Daniel Vogel**

Robert Hampson

Conrad and Transcultural Belonging

Kim Salmons

Kurtz and the Gift from God: The end of St Paul's 'Charism' and the Rise of Secular Charismatic Leadership in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness".

12.10 – 12.20 Discussion

12.20 – 14.20 Lunch break

14.30 – 15.30 Conrad and Contemporary Literature

Chair: **Robert Hampson**

Josiane Paccaud

Conrad's Presence in Contemporary Fiction

Veronique Pauly

Affiliations in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* and J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*.

15.30 – 15.40 Closing of the seminar

Graphic design by Sylwia Vogel