

Conradian inspirations in Zygmunt Haupt's prose

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In his letter to Jerzy Stempowski, who wrote a well-known essay on young Konrad Korzeniowski's baggage¹ from the fatherland, Zygmunt Haupt discusses a particularly interesting feature he noticed in the works of the author of *Lord Jim*:

I would like to return to the issue you mentioned, namely the importance of the writer's fatherland, especially when it is also a country of their youth. I find it peculiar that this hardly features in Conrad-Korzeniowski; how few (if any at all) traces of his (first 17 years of) life in Ukraine or Cracow one can discern in his works. What has always interested me in Conrad-Korzeniowski is

¹ Paweł Hostowiec (actually, Jerzy Stempowski), *Bagaż z Kalinówki* [Baggage from Kalinówka], in: *Conrad żywy* [The living Conrad], ed. by Wit Tarnawski (Londyn: B. Świderski, 1957), 87–91. See also Paweł Dzianisz, *Ukraina Conrada* [Conrad's Ukraine] (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 1999).

the consistency with which he distanced himself from his former life, which he achieved not only by resorting to the language of a different nation, but also by turning to the themes of sea and ships, with all of the accompanying exoticity and remoteness of this way of life, including shipping techniques, issues of navigation or the folklore of life on deck. Polish translators, especially Aniela Zagórska, must have struggled with the technicalities of sea-related terminology, resulting in Polish *bukszpryty* (for 'bowsprits'), *bezanmaszty* (for 'mizzenmasts'), *foki* (for 'foresails;'), *logi* (for 'logbooks'), etc., all of which exoticise his novels even further. Contrariwise, one will not find in his works any mention of horse-drawn vehicles, whips or britzkas, in which he had been driven around in his childhood in Ukraine, and during his later exile with his family, or later still in Cracow. None of that remained. (Incidentally, I was amused by Gombrowicz's description of his travel by boat, in which this native of Sandomierz compared the rudder to britzka wheels and the masts – to drawbars!).

When I think about Conrad's writing, I am struck by one more paradox. In an anecdote brought up by his biographers the young Conrad points to blank spots on the then map of Africa and decides that one day he will visit these places. Nowadays those same spots from "the heart of darkness" in Africa are covered by tarmac and feature cinemas and TEXACO petrol stations. Paradoxically, we find blank spots in places where Conrad-Korzeniowski was born.²

It is not hard to see that Haupt indirectly characterizes his own writing method, its crucial element being a deliberate excess of "traces of life" from his native Ukraine. A reader of Joseph Conrad, Haupt tests the tightness of his own "distancing from his former life" in his works; he observes the poetics of concealment and revelation as well as the relationship between the "blank spot" and the "heart of darkness", present in his prose – the relationship between memory and denial.

The shadows

References to Conrad in Haupt's works are rarely explicit or obvious. One can only get a glimpse of these in a 1937³ short story, *Admirał Gaspar Hojeda* [*Admiral Gaspar Hojeda*], which concerns the death of the rebel Vivan, sailing to the Caribbean on a Portuguese ship. The nature and purpose of his rebellion are never revealed, but the more important aspect of the story is the relationship between martyrdom on the one hand and faithfulness and courage on the other, whereas the persecutors' cruelty, despite being lethal, does not affect spiritually the one who is persecuted. Even after his death he is permanently present in the captain's consciousness and still participates in the ship's mission. This motif is reminiscent of the presentation featured in numerous elegiac texts published after Conrad's death, especially starting with the well-known issue 33 of "Wiadomości Literackie" journal ["Literary News"] in 1924. Stanisław Młodożeniec, Antoni Słonimski, Marian Piechal, Roman Kołoniecki⁴ are

² Letter of 28th Oct, 1963, as quoted in Jerzy Giedroyc, Zygmunt Haupt, *Listy 1947–1975* [Letters 1947–1975], edited, with introduction and footnotes by Paweł Panas (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Więź, 2022), 266–267.

³ Haupt's short story might be an original example of anniversary literature, but it is probably a mere coincidence that the eightieth anniversary of Conrad's death occurred in 1937.

⁴ See also *W imię Conrada. Joseph Conrad w poezji polskiej* [In the name of Conrad. Joseph Conrad in Polish poetry], edited by Tadeusz Skutnik (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1977).

only a few authors whose poems in the interwar period mentioned the posthumous presence of the shadow of captain Korzeniowski onboard ships.

In the Polish reception the author of *Lord Jim* was strongly linked to the legend of freedom and rebellion. It was in this spirit that Stefan Żeromski explained young Conrad's decision to leave his country:

As a seventeen-year-old boy he ran away from his fatherland, from a city most deeply buried in the past, routine and fear of public thought. He threw himself onto foreign ships and all on his own went to foreign seas, he became a sailor, a deckhand, an officer and finally – the captain of a ship⁵.

What Żeromski characterizes as a jump into foreignness can be linked to “distancing oneself from one's former life”, mentioned by Haupt.

Initially, the death of a rebel in *Admirał Gaspar Hojeda* does not seem to impact the course of the cruise: “Nothing changed in the fleet. The waves kept spitting upon ship decks, mast tops still covered the sky with a convoluted text, blocks kept creaking and watches were still ringing the time in a deadpan manner”.⁶ However, the titular character is alarmed by the continuous presence of the man whose death he is guilty of. The fragmentary plot devised by Haupt is reminiscent of Conrad's *Shadow-Line*. In Conrad's short story the ghost of the former commander of the ship seems to be in a constant fight with his young successor, arresting his will, immobilizing the ship, and running the crew towards death. Both writers depict this misery of the captains and the active presence of the dead amongst the living against the backdrop of the solidarity of the crew, who comprise a community of people of the sea. Haupt writes:

The ship is family; the dispersed fleet is a house. Gunsmiths, riggers, carpenters, *arcabuceros*, and those to whom the horizon from the top of the stars on the mast top was entrusted, and coppersmiths, watchkeepers and officers with their seniority over regular sailors, and chaplains and monks saying their prayers, they all secretly repeated to themselves that at night Vivan boards the ship from the sea, followed by streams of water and seaweeds, and moves towards admiral's quarters. Watchkeepers huddle the shrouds and the sentry, guarding the admiral's cabin, covers his face with a halberd.

Vivan puts his seawater swollen hands on maps, cut across with compass roses, beautifully decorated with dolphins and griffins and grins at the admiral, obscuring the west from him... (ZR23)

In order to reach his destination, Admiral Hojeda, not unlike the young captain in *The Shadow-line*, must release himself from the overwhelming influence of the dead, who takes vengeance for his suffering. Just like in Conrad's story, Haupt's sailors must overcome the silence

⁵ Stefan Żeromski, Joseph Conrad, in: *Pisma raperswilskie. Wspomnienia i sylwetki* [The documents from Rapperswille. Memories and silhouettes], edited by Zdzisław Jerzy Adamczyk, *Pisma zebrane* [Collected works], vol. 24 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2015), 527.

⁶ Zygmunt Haupt, *Admirał Gaspar Hojeda* [Admiral Gaspar Hojeda], in: *Z Roksolanii. Opowiadania, eseje, reportaże, publicystyka, warianty, fragmenty (1935–1975)* [From Roxolania. Short stories, essays, reports, opinion journalism, variants, fragments (1935–1975)], prepared by Aleksander Madyda (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2018), 23. Henceforth quotations from this issue are indicated by “ZR”, followed by a page number).

of the sea because there is no riding it out. One more difficult experience of the community of sailors, mentioned by both authors, is infectious disease. The tough orders of the commanders in both stories help the crews overcome the curse and get moving. Of course, Haupt is not as direct as Conrad. If, contrary to the author's recommendations⁷, one classifies *The Shadow-line* as a ghost story, then the ghost of the suicidal captain represents all the dark, destructive forces which threaten both the community and individuals. The young captain, who combines elements of the author's biography, stands on the side of life, solidarity, responsibility, and faithfulness to professional and human obligations. In *Admirał Gaspar Hojeda*, however, the division of roles is not that clear: the ghost of the murdered rebel proves to be the antagonist of the crew who want to reach the ship's destination, whilst the determination and stringency of the cruel captain might well (the plot is interrupted before the end of the journey) take the fleet to its final port. If we take *The Shadow-line* to be the prototype of Haupt's short story, then the author creates a shorthand, a condensation and complication of the plot.

The cyclone and the typhoon

Haupt's short story-reportage (probably the best term for this 1948 literary hybrid) *Cyklon* [*The cyclone*] begins as a criticism of modernity, shockingly confident in its scientifically supported opinions, which create a semblance of mastery of the always complicated, chaotic matter of the world:

This modernity is drunk on the suddenly achieved ability of the human brain to arrange, systematize the observed phenomena, and striking the coin of words, which acquire unshaken and enchanting meanings, at the cost of reality. Along with the old art of generalization and abstraction and with the logic of deduction, we have created a separate world within the world, a fool's paradise, as the English say (Bd 714)⁸.

Such fool's paradise seems to be what Conrad's captain MacWhirr from the "Nan-Shan" steamship sees in a book on seamanship, with its learned chapter on storms. He is overwhelmed by his opposition to generalisations and certainty of the uselessness of theories the minute he wants to translate his readings into specific situations he and his ship experienced: "All these rules for dodging breezes and circumventing the winds of heaven, Mr. Jukes, seem to me the maddest thing, when you come to look at it sensibly"⁹.

On discovering this, shall we say, irrationality of rationality, the captain would rather rely on the detail, remember the small things, without necessarily combining them by means of generalisations. Haupt, in turn, notices in his *Cyklon*:

⁷ „I believe that if I attempted to put the strain of the Supernatural on it it would fail deplorably and exhibit an unlovely gap.” (Joseph Conrad, Author's note, in: *The Shadow-Line*, 1917). It is worth remembering, however, that Conrad is often purposely misleading in his notes. [Translator's note: all quotations from Conrad's works are from Project Gutenberg website, available at www.gutenberg.org]

⁸ Zygmunt Haupt, *Cyklon* [*The Cyclone*] in: *Baskijski diabeł. Opowiadania i komentarze* [*The Basque devil. Short stories and commentaries*], ed. by Aleksander Madyda (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2016). Henceforth quotes from this edition will be indicated by a bracketed „Bd”, followed by a page number.

⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon*, 1902.

We are impoverished by deduction. Deduction - a logical thread which determines our future and reduces it to boredom. We are the functions of various data, enclosing our lives from the first moment of awareness till the hour of agony. We have turned life into a machine for concluding; a nomographic circus; we are like a cipher on a slide rule (Bd 714).

Unwilling to accept the usefulness of such a method, the impatient MacWhirr interrupts his reading because – as Herling-Grudziński added in his 1945 imaginary interview with the protagonist of the *Typhoon* – “after all, my friend, there are things about which the wisest books have nothing to say”¹⁰.

Jokingly, Haupt questions the belief that relying on scientific data, theories and predictions “will help us survive” (Bd 714). Conrad writes about the same thing (also making fun of his protagonist) in the *Typhoon*. After all, the “Nan-Shan” survived the storm despite (or maybe because of?) renouncing theory.

By questioning the power of abstract concepts, without which it is supposedly impossible to describe the world, Haupt illustrates the phenomenon of “the bankruptcy of the most ingrained notions” (Bd 714) with the example of our treatment of time. He points out that there are peoples who do not have words to denote “something that «was» or something that «will be»”. Thus, unexpectedly, the author notices, this “simultaneity”, which is irrational and primitive, is discovered in the Western world by Bergson and Freud. This primary focus on the here and now is combined in Conrad’s captain MacWhirr with his reticence, dislike of metaphors and generalisations:

With a temperament neither loquacious nor taciturn he found very little occasion to talk. There were matters of duty, of course—directions, orders, and so on; but the past being to his mind done with, and the future not there yet, the more general actualities of the day required no comment—because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision¹¹.

According to Haupt, the imminent danger, whose name (“used for metaphors and parabolas”, Bd 715) and progress are known, still surprises us with its scale and extraordinariness. Conrad adds that even one’s life experience may prove futile:

Observing the steady fall of the barometer, Captain MacWhirr thought, “There’s some dirty weather knocking about.” This is precisely what he thought. He had had an experience of moderately dirty weather—the term dirty as applied to the weather implying only moderate discomfort to the seaman. Had he been informed by an indisputable authority that the end of the world was to be finally accomplished by a catastrophic disturbance of the atmosphere, he would have assimilated

¹⁰Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Wywiad imaginacyjny z bohaterem „Tajfunu” [An imaginary interview with the protagonist of „Typhoon”], in: *Żywi i umarli* [The living and the dead] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo FIS, 1991), 65. See also, among others, Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, *Conradowskie echa w twórczości Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego: biografia, historia i ideologia* [The echoes of Conrad in the works of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński: biography, history and ideology], in: *Opowiedzieć historię: prace dedykowane profesorowi Stefanowi Zabierowskiemu* [To tell a story: essays dedicated to professor Stefan Zabierowski], ed. by Beata Gontarz, Małgorzata Krakowiak (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009), 27–44.

¹¹Conrad, *Typhoon*.

the information under the simple idea of dirty weather, and no other, because he had no experience of cataclysms, and belief does not necessarily imply comprehension¹².

Both authors preface these reservations with descriptions of a catastrophe, which disrupts the orderly, bookish, “statistical, demographic, mapped, bulletined” (Bd 718) world. Any sense of security, as they both emphasise, is always false and dangerous. Haupt writes about “damn *security*”, characterizing it metonymically:

[...] a sense of security, a scheme, a drill, a small-town warmth or, if you will, urban bohemia, we have seen it all, we have yawned up to the cracking sound in our ears over the things we desired; we are already spent and polished, like a change penny, like a well-trodden step of stairs, like a disease-riddled mirror. The sky will not smile back at us anymore, the hot blood of shame or anger or happiness will not rise to our faces, the lark of surprise will not sing in our throats, we are in no danger of choking on the world, which we put in our mouth by mistake and by defiance (Bd 719).

The titular cyclone is a time of confrontation between a falsely lulling knowledge with the forever unexpected specificity of life. The floor of the house where the author of the reportage (or the narrator in the short story) and his son shelter (or, rather, where they put themselves in danger), becomes “the captain’s bridge” and – like in Conrad’s *Typhoon* – a place of confrontation between the contents of “books about elements, storms, ships, tempests. Let it come true for once and show us what it really is like” (Bd 721). Clearly, Haupt is piling up the senses: the literariness of the *Typhoon*, a story of the illusion of “storm theories”, also needs to be verified against an element. The more imminent the element is, the clearer allusions to Conrad’s works become:

[...] we remember that we owe to ourselves faithfulness and trust that when we are here, when we have rested our foot on the shaky floor, excuse me! board of the ship, the sweetness of “virtue” and the balsamic taste of victory over itself (Bd 721).

This phrase evokes faithfulness as a key issue in the Polish reception of Conrad, and the vision of the communal fate of the ship’s crew, whereas the word “victory”, may recall one of Conrad’s novels. Of course, Haupt does not present Conrad as a master of fighting against all odds. The above quoted remark is followed by the following conclusion: “We’re only fantasizing here” (Bd 721). But this fantasizing, as the writer implies, is preferable to trusting scientific theories because, even though it is just as fallible, it is definitely more beautiful.

The house

Haupt begins his 1959 short story *Z kroniki o latającym domu* [*Chronicle concerning a flying house*] from the relationship between exoticism and familiarity, which was the topic of his letter to Stempowski. In that letter he was emphasising the radical nature of the choice made by Korzeniowski in his youth, now he is reducing the distance between the two concepts: “So

¹²Conrad, *Typhoon*.

this is exoticism? So that's what it is? Seems like something far away and yet not too much, unsurprisingly" (Bd 415).¹³ When this formula of exoticism is applied to Conrad's works, its landscapes, typically distant and different from the European ones, will prove to be a scenery which does not scream difference or uniqueness; rather, one which is close and humane in its basic dimension. In Haupt's short story it is the seaside, considered from the perspective of the banal details: the sand, a shell, a stick, an old sneaker, which surprises with its ordinariness. "So that's what it is? Water, sand, trash on the sand, the sky. It's here already? It's so unsurprising, after all" (Bd 415) – the narrator concludes. One is tempted to add that Conrad's faraway places on different continents are not surprising either and they are not the locus of the reader's attention; rather they constitute background for human tragedies. Perhaps one of the aspects of "a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe"¹⁴ by Conrad is to present the exotic landscapes in such a manner that they do not captivate the reader with their novelty, otherness, but showcase some rudimentary elements, similar in every part of the world, yet capable of establishing new structures. Against this background, both new and domesticated, Haupt describes a house, which is "uprooted from its foundations by a hurricane, desolate" (Bd 415). The edifice is hardly reminiscent of its former glory, there is nothing durable or robust about it; it is deformed and looks as if it were viewed through a fun-house mirror: "The frames of the entire edifice are twisted and skewed to one side" (Bd 415). The novella then turns to a detailed description of the "life" and death of the house, a triumph of nature over man's work, his aspirations, dreams, in a sense – over human life. The living, changeable shapes of plants gradually become victorious: they stifle the shape envisaged by and for the man. Observing the effects of this process leads the narrator to acknowledge the irony inherent in the process of building a house; an act traditionally perceived as the central, elemental ingredient of culture:

This ruin at the seaside amongst the shadows of trees seems to be taunting human disappointment. As if the house was supposed to be a shelter, it was supposed to focus the thoughts and dreams of those who were far away, its so-called noble walls were supposed to host a sense of ultimate security, one's thought was supposed to return to it as a matter of course. And now? It is gritting its teeth and gums in a mockery of human trust. Where do we go now, what do we trust, when our own house, roof, hood, shadow, warmth and protection turn against ourselves." (Bd 416)

The ruin is not a memory of a life lived in the past, but a manifestation of death and a mockery of human strife for stability and security. Thus, this view does not trigger sentimental memories or dreams, but helps find an expression for and measure of one's own failures: "finally, I fixed my mobile, restless misery to its white walls" (Bd 416).

This reading of the literary image evokes connotations with a house, which is the protagonist of Conrad's first novel: *Almayer's Folly*. A dilapidated structure made its builder and only inhabitant experience with the greatest intensity the crash of his ambitions, investments, plans and dreams. The house, designed as incontrovertible proof of its owner's financial and

¹³Zygmunt Haupt, *Z kroniki o latającym domu* [The chronicle concerning a flying house], in: *Baskijski diabeł. Opowiadania i komentarze*, ed. by Aleksander Madyda (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2016), 415.

¹⁴Joseph Conrad, Foreword, in: *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, 1897.

personal luck, had become an abandoned ruin before anybody managed to really live in it. The old house, in turn (from which Almayer intended to move to the “Folly”) is the place of misery for its only tenant, because it is full of traces of Nina – the beloved daughter who abandoned her father, making him realise the futility of all the actions he undertook with her in mind:

All those things had cost a lot of money at the time. The desk, the paper, the torn books, and the broken shelves, all under a thick coat of dust. The very dust and bones of a dead and gone business. He looked at all these things, all that was left after so many years of work, of strife, of weariness, of discouragement, conquered so many times¹⁵.

Poetic ruin from Haupt’s short story, monstrous and depressing as it is, in a sense connects the ideas inscribed in images and histories of houses from Conrad’s novel. Both writers conclude their stories with the house’s destruction. In *Almayer’s Folly* after his daughter’s escape, the old father sets fire to the house in order to destroy “every vestige of Nina’s existence”¹⁶, hoping it will help him forget. After this attempt at destroying the past he moves to a new house; in other words – he attempts to destroy the past, at the same time moving into a ruin of the future:

He took possession of the new ruin, and in the undying folly of his heart set himself to wait in anxiety and pain for that forgetfulness which was so slow to come. [...] He wanted to live only long enough to be able to forget, and the tenacity of his memory filled him with dread and horror of death; for should it come before he could accomplish the purpose of his life he would have to remember for ever!¹⁷

The issue of memory is usually related to the image of a house but in Conrad and Haupt this relationship is characterized by a particular kind of pessimism. For Haupt the private is linked to the common because the dilapidated house evokes memories of the ravaged fatherland and images of a brutally interrupted, cheerful childhood. Conrad’s novel, of course lacks the context of personal and common tragedy caused by wartime historic processes. This view, however, can be challenged by a reading of *Z kroniki o latającym domu*. It is probably more certain that the writer “separating himself from his former life” concealed in the motif of folly his own memory of the house/ fatherland, a problematic and denied remembrance.

The conclusion of Haupt’s story is extremely dramatic. The author’s answer to the question of what to do with a ruin of a house (as well as with private memory and awareness of the fates of a community destroyed by history), is, first, the image of saving the crumbling structure, working on turning the house into “protection from the elements” again, as well as on “righting the wrongs, dismissing evil, defeating the accompanying abandonment and homelessness” (Bd 421). And if that is not accomplished, then the other solution is the annihilation of the house, a brutal destruction of everything “so as to leave no trace behind” (Bd 421). Both

¹⁵Joseph Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*, 1895.

¹⁶Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*.

¹⁷Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*.

Conrad, in the epic format, and Haupt, through his poetics of a fragment, present the same desperate (and ineffective?) gesture of rejecting memories.

On layers of memory and Sienkiewicz

The essay *Dzisiaj, przedwczoraj, wczoraj, jutro* [*Today, the day before yesterday, yesterday, tomorrow*], published in 1975 in the “Kultura” journal is a brief series of images of suffering and cruelty. The point of departure for the first, one-page long, fragment, is a short press note, which combines the pain of an animal, the ruthlessness inherent in the custom of disposing of unproductive creatures, the absurdity of formal regulations, an allusion - literary (to a fragment from *Crime and punishment*) and biographical (to the Turin episode from Nietzsche’s life, followed by the final bout of his illness). The geographic-historic detail seems equally important for what follows in the story: the car accident, reported on in a paper, happened in the “Podbeskidzie portion of the Wild Fields”, where “thirty years before abandoned weapons could be found everywhere, so that anybody was able to pick them up and with no problem whatsoever plant a bullet, no, not in a horse! a man!” (ZR 132). A banal column in a local newspaper invokes musings on a place whose history features a particular accumulation of evil, initiated “the day before the day before yesterday”, i.e., in 1648. It is that moment in time which features in the other text, mentioned by the author - a book by “Natan Hannover, son of Moses Hannover Ashkenazy of Niemirów” (ZR 132)¹⁸. Its depictions of cruelty from the Khmelnytsky Uprising period are combined by Haupt with the recently concluded Thirty Years’ War. Then he reminds the reader about the first instalment of Sienkiewicz’s historic cycle, and then a string of associations leads him to Conrad. The latter is not mentioned by name, but the reader who knows the author’s canon will have little trouble identifying him:

One wonders about the episode which seems to have been wholly transferred from Ukraine to the novel by the writer of Ukrainian origins, who went out into the world, fascinated by the pyramids of sails, distant mirages of islands, the mirrors of seas and oceans, and in his adulthood adopted foreign speech so as to engage in writing stories about that other world, clad in fogs, swung by typhoons and stopped dead in the immobility of sea silences; all that in order to show others the universal virtues of honour and faithfulness. But how did he manage, surprisingly, to bring to life in his *Nostramo*, the character of some Jewish martyr? It was señor Hirsch, a dealer in hides from Sulaco, suffering at the hands of the universal prototype of inhumanity. Is it possible that the author internalized memories and legends from his distant fatherland, which he had heard in cottages, fourplexes, at fairs, entrances to Orthodox churches, or stories told by a nanny? (ZR 133)

¹⁸The chronicle *Jawejn mecula* (Hebr. ‘deep bog’) was written in Hebrew by Natan Hannover contains the description of the massacre of Jews during the uprising of Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1648). It was translated and published many times, following its first Venice edition (1653). See entries for Zofia Borzymińska, Hannover Natan Nata ben Mosze Aszkenazy (Askenasy) and Zofia Borzymińska, Paweł Fijałkowski, *Jawejn mecula*, in: *Polski Słownik Judaistyczny* [Polish Dictionary of Jewish Terminology], ed. by Zofia Borzymińska, Rafał Żebrowski, <https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj?articleId=16782>, <https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj?articleId=19434>, accessed 17.06.2022.

It is worth noticing that by emphasizing the universality of “virtues of honour and faithfulness”, present in Conrad’s works, Haupt joins the most important movement in Polish reception of Conrad. Out of an impressive novelistic historical panorama, in which the English writer represented the turbulent history of a fictitious republic, the author of the essay chose an episode doubly exotic, in a manner of speaking, because the presence of a Jewish trader in the landscape of South America is nothing if not surprising, as he would be more fitting in Haupt’s and Sienkiewicz’s Podolia. One might repeat the formula “It seems far away, but not too much, surprisingly”. Haupt took from *Nostromo* a scene of Hirsch’s torture, partly reminiscent of the times of the Khmelnytzky Uprising. He achieved two effects thanks to this. First of all, he added plausibility to the issue raised on numerous occasions by Conrad specialists – the inspiring influence of *Ogniem i mieczem* [*With fire and sword*] on this novel, taking place in a distant reality¹⁹. Secondly, following Haupt’s poetics of the fragment, even taken out of the context of the entirety of the work, the recalled episode of *Nostromo* is extremely impactful. This is true regardless of the reader’s familiarity with the background of the multi-layered plot. Conrad does not shy away from any detail of torture, he does not curtail descriptions to spare the readers – he is making them accompany Hirsch in every minute of his suffering, also when “He screamed with uplifted eyebrows and a wide-open mouth—incredibly wide, black, enormous, full of teeth – comical”²⁰. In this suffering Haupt links the distant and fictitious Costaguana to a specific detail in Ukraine’s history.

Darkness and likeness

The connection between the essay *Z Roksolanii* [*From Roxolania*] (also published in 1975) and *Heart of Darkness* is remarkable. Haupt reviews a book by Colin M. Turnbull *The Mountain People*, focusing on those same processes, which Conrad introduced earlier in his most famous short story: degradation, hopelessness of life, the dying out of peoples suddenly removed from the traditional rules of life. Social life, subservient to a change this unstoppable and destructive, makes it easy to impose order of the kind enforced by Kurtz, where – to use a quote from Haupt’s essay – “cruelty replaced love...” (ZR 139). Both writers accept the possibility that examples of African peoples are equally upsetting and fascinating not so much because they are different from the “civilized” world, but – on the contrary – because they are so similar to it. Conrad’s Marlow sees it clearly, whereas Haupt encourages the reader to accept the assumption that ...

we have internalized some old, outdated views, inhibitions, superstitions, memories. So why not deceive ourselves and also say of others that one can ascribe meaning even to their apathy and silence. Then, listening to the quietness of the dying Ik people we would hear in their silence a message from their own psalmist: “If I forget you ... if I do not consider my highest joy...” (ZR 140)

¹⁹See, among others, Stefan Zabierowski, „O Conradzie i Sienkiewiczu” [„On Conrad and Sienkiewicz”], *Miesięcznik Literacki* 12 (1967): 65–69; Stefan Zabierowski, *Conrad w Polsce: wybrane problemy recepcji krytycznej w latach 1896–1969* [Conrad in Poland: selected problems of critical reception 1896–1969] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1971), 183 and others.; Andrzej Braun, *Kreacja Costaguany* [The creation of Costaguana] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1989), 221 and others.

²⁰Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo. A tale of the seaboard*, 1904.

This exercise, quite safe and, in a way, abstract, as one concerning a geographically and mentally distant people, is instantly changed by Haupt into a difficult, acute experience, because it now concerns the most proximate tradition. The writer wonders about the fate of the Ukrainian equivalent of “the Ik people”. From underneath a layer of written, official history and literary myth of this part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth one can infer the details of the lives of generations of simple Ruthenians, forcibly enrolled in the army and engaged in “forced labor on other people’s lands” (ZR 142). Instead of idyllic, fairy-tale images (like the one’s from Zimorowic’s *Roksolanki*) Haupt provides scenes illustrating crassness, brutality and cruelty. Sometimes, in order to read the past and its relationship to modernity, instead of a soft light one needs to let the darkness in – as Haupt seems to be indicating.

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Haupt helps the reader of Conrad see more clearly the poetics and symbolism of *Lord Jim*’s author’s prose, as well as find out about its deeply personal character, related to the “baggage of Kalinówka”, about which Stempowski wrote. As it turns out, that baggage could also contain dark and difficult imagery. When one describes the ways in which Haupt utilises Conrad’s plots and ideas, it is easier to understand the method of shorthand used by the author of *Pierścień z papieru* [*The paper ring*], his concentration of meanings, combining the personal with the universal and the deadly serious with the pathetically ridiculous.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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KEYWORDS

Zygmunt Haupt

ruin

memory

Joseph Conrad

ABSTRACT:

Although Conrad-inspired motifs are not frequent in Zygmunt Haupt's prose, they do play an important role. Thanks to discovering similarities and differences they serve the author of *Pierścień z papieru* to describe his own writing method. As a reader of Conrad he is interested in the poetics of concealment and revelation as well as the relationship between memory and denial. He discovers the poeticism and symbolism of this creation and its personal character, related to the experiences of childhood and dark memories of the fatherland. By recognizing the ways in which Haupt utilizes Conrad's plots and ideas, it is possible to understand better his principle of shorthand, concentration of meanings, combining the usual with the exotic, the lyrical with the tragic, the personal with the universal, the serious with the pathetic.

destruction

intertextuality

HOUSE

elements

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