

GUSTAW HERLING-GRUDZIŃSKI AS A READER OF CONRAD

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Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (1919–2000) was one of those writers who chose Conrad as a guiding literary figure throughout his peripatetic years as an émigré. In one of his interviews Herling-Grudziński elaborated on that choice:

Why Conrad is close to me as a writer?

Because I share his principles: to be faithful to yourself, to be loyal to the cause you have taken up. This is not my latest literary infatuation. I have appreciated the author of *Lord Jim* since I was a youth and I have remained faithful to him. When I read Conrad, I breathe a different kind of air.¹

Conrad became a primary author not only for Herling-Grudziński but also for an entire group of Polish men of letters.² They treated him not only as a source of inspiration, but also as a moral authority, especially during the extremely difficult times of the Nazi occupation, when he also became an unquestioned authority for the young soldiers of the Home Army (the military organisation of the Polish Underground).³ Young people who took part in the Warsaw Uprising (1944) looked to Conrad's writings as a source of moral inspiration.⁴ They valued Conrad's ethos, which for them subsumed such qualities as being faithful to oneself, the belief in human dignity and the struggle to preserve one's identity in the face of hostile forces.⁵ There were heated

¹ E. Sawicka. *Widok z wieży* [A View from a Tower]. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza MOST, 1997, 120. All the translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author of this article.

² For a thorough presentation of Conrad's influence upon Polish writers see S. Zabierowski. *Dziedzictwo Conrada w literaturze polskiej* [Conrad's Heritage in Polish Literature]. Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1992.

³ N. Davies, *Rising '44*. London: Macmillan Publishers, 2003, 688.

⁴ The historical and political context of the debates about Conrad during the German occupation and in post-war Poland is presented by R. Szczerbakiewicz. "Jan Kott's Joseph Conrad." Ed. Krajka, Wiesław, *A Return to the Roots: Conrad, Poland and East-Central Europe*. Boulder-Lublin-New York: Columbia UP, 2004, 107–126.

⁵ Davies, 688.

debates prior to the outbreak of the uprising on the question of defending or condemning the idea of being true to oneself even in defeat.⁶ The followers of Conrad believed in loyalty and remaining true to one's principles whatever the cost, while their opponents rejected the idea of serving in the ranks and fighting when the failure of the uprising was well nigh inevitable.⁷

In post-war Poland, Conrad could only be admired in private, since he was officially banned from publishing houses and school reading-lists after the publication of deprecating articles, mainly by the Polish Marxist critic Jan Kott, whose essay accusing Conrad of promoting blind slavery to western capitalists initiated an officially inspired literary debate about Conrad.⁸

The aim of my paper is to analyze some aspects of Joseph Conrad's profound influence on Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's views and writing. Among the manifold points of convergence there are biographical analogies – both of them were emigrants, struggling to earn their living (at least partly) by writing, and, more importantly, Herling-Grudziński discussed Conrad's works (like "Typhoon," *Lord Jim*, *Under Western Eyes*). These discussions include critical analyses of Conrad's characters and polemics with his artistic methods. Another common area comprises analogous methods of narration (using a fictitious distanced narrator, frequent shifts in the narrative perspective, laconic dialogues, fashioning the narration as if based on authentic sources). Last but not least, one should mention the domain of Conradian themes in which Herling-Grudziński's short stories abound. Since the scope of the essay does not allow for a complete presentation of each of the aforementioned parallels, I would like to focus on the biographical analogies and two instances of overt discussions of Conrad's works.

Herling-Grudziński belonged to a group of political émigrés who could not return to their home country after the World War II.⁹ As a member of General Władysław Anders Army, formed in the former Soviet Union, he made his way through Abyssinia, Iraq, Egypt to Italy where he took part in the battle of Monte Cassino. During those war years he was offered twice the opportunity to withdraw from the front and work

⁶ Szczerbakiewicz, 109. The causes of the Home Army soldiers' determination and the will to fight in the face of defeat are discussed by J. Kasznica, *Victory in the Face of Defeat: The Psychology of the AK-Home Army During the Warsaw Uprising of 1944*. Warszawa: Adiutor, 2005, 20–46. Cf. also G. Gibson, *63 Days. The Story of the Warsaw Rising*. London: Democratic Press, 1963, 18, 22, 39–46.

⁷ A comprehensive presentation of the political and ideological pros and cons of the can be found on www.polishresistance-ak.org

⁸ J. Kott. "O laickim tragizmie. Conrad and Malraux" [Secular Despondency. Conrad and Malraux]. *Twórczość* 1.2 (1945), 137–160.

⁹ Cf. G. Herling-Grudziński's essay "Emigracja polityczna" [Political Emigration] (1946). Reprinted in *Pisma zebrane* [Collected Works]. Vol. 9: *Wychścia z milczenia*. Warszawa: Czytelnik 1998, 74–77 and G. Herling-Grudziński. *Wstęp* [Introduction] A. Mickiewicz. *Księgi Narodu i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* (1946). Reprinted in *Pisma zebrane*. Vol. 9: *Wychścia z milczenia*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1998, 6.

for the Information and Press Agency, which he declined.¹⁰ Only after the end of the war did he decide to live on writing. He penned many reviews, political articles but his first major success was a novel describing his sojourn in a Soviet gulag *A World Apart*.¹¹

On the basis of this short biographical introduction we can trace several parallels to Conrad's vicissitudes. Similar to the author of *Typhoon*, Herling-Grudziński did not start his literary career immediately, although Conrad's nautical profession lasted much longer than Herling-Grudziński's martial ups and downs. Yet, both careers were connected with extreme danger and demanded courage, perseverance and dutifulness on the part of their followers. Another parallel is the writers' isolation from their compatriots: Conrad's in England and Herling-Grudziński's in England, Germany and Italy.¹² One more similarity but at the same time a difference as well, refers to language(s). Conrad spoke French (and Polish) fluently, commenced learning English when he was twenty, mastered it superbly (at least in writing) during his seafaring years and finally chose it to be the medium of his artistic creation. Gustaw Herling-Grudziński knew Russian well, started to learn Italian when he was twenty, later on acquired English and German, but as his literary tool he chose Polish. As an experienced writer he confessed: "When I write occasionally, for money, in Italian, I have the feeling as if I were touching that language through a thick glove."¹³ Herling-Grudziński wrote the bulk of his essays and short stories in Polish, rarely did he publish in Italian. Apart from that he translated from English, Italian and Russian into Polish.

Furthermore, one can trace some correspondences as far as the two writers' literary fame is concerned. Conrad's success came late in life after the publication of *Chance*.¹⁴ His works were translated into Polish (which was his first foreign translation) but appealed mainly to the avant-garde. Herling-Grudziński, on the other hand, achieved some success abroad with *The World Apart* (1951) but in Poland his name and works were consistently crossed out by the censors. His presence in motherland could be noticed only as late as in the 90s. There are also some similarities as far as their posthumous renown is concerned. Conrad's work went into decline just after his death (in the late 20s and 30s). Herling-Grudziński, likewise, after the boom of the 90s, is now frequently criticised and considered to be overestimated.¹⁵

¹⁰ Cf. Z. Kudelski. *Studia o Herlingu-Grudzińskim. Twórczość – recepcja – biografia* [Studies about Herling-Grudziński. Writings – Reception – Biography]. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1998, 298, 300.

¹¹ *A World Apart*. Transl. Joseph Marek with preface by B. Russell (1951). On the basis of the English translation a lot of other renditions were made into French, German, Italian, Swedish, Chinese and Japanese.

¹² G. Herling-Grudziński. "Zagadnienia językowe literatury emigracyjnej" [Linguistic aspects of émigré literature]. Reprinted in *Pisma zebrane*. Vol. 9, 321.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 322.

¹⁴ M. Ray. Introduction to J. Conrad, *Chance*. Oxford: OUP 2002, x.

¹⁵ Cf. the discussions held in the daily *Dziennik* about books and authors which have been overpraised VII–VIII 2007.

I would call that “unintentional” biographical affinity. However, there is also a different, even more important layer of biographical convergence constituted by Herling-Grudziński’s deliberate allusions to Conrad’s biography and his following, sometimes literally, in the eminent predecessor’s footsteps.

Discussing daily routines, Herling-Grudziński mentioned his promenading down Villa Comunale in Naples and commented that this is the venue of “Il Conde.”¹⁶ The remark about those morning strolls was intertwined, as if haphazardly, with Grudziński’s views about Naples. He continued the motif of his deliberate discovering Conrad’s traces in the southern city by pointing to the municipal gardens where the story of the Count takes place. Another instance of reference to Conrad can be found in Herling-Grudziński’s assessment of contemporary events in Naples: commenting on the high crime rate he refers again to the novella “Il Conde” in which one of Neapolitan crimes was depicted – *scippo* (street mugging).¹⁷ Moreover, he enlarged on the case of the fictional Count who apparently came to Naples because of good climatic conditions, whereas Herling-Grudziński believed that he chose the city since young boys were easy to find there.¹⁸

While Herling-Grudziński recapitulated his ups and downs with the Italian publishers, he mentioned a journal edited by G. Fofi (which published several of his articles), entitled “Linea d’ombra,” immediately adding that the title was borrowed from Conrad’s *The Shadow Line*. On the basis of those personal reminiscences, it seems evident that Herling-Grudziński deliberately interwove Conradian threads into his autobiographic recollections to emphasize the significant role that the author of *Nostramo* played not only in his literary output but also in his émigré life.

A different type of dialogue with Conrad underlies Herling-Grudziński’s explicit discussion of his works (“Typhoon,” *Lord Jim* and *Under Western Eyes*). He tries to interpret “Typhoon,” questions Conrad’s artistic methods in *Under Western Eyes* and uses *Lord Jim* in a political debate. In this paper I would like to concentrate on two of them: “Typhoon” and *Lord Jim*. “Wywiad imaginacyjny z bohaterem ‘Tajfunu’” [An Imaginary Interview with “Typhoon’s” Main Protagonist] (1945) is an early response of not-yet-fully-fledged writer to Conrad’s multi-layered text.¹⁹ At the beginning he creates a fictitious situation of himself as a journalist conducting a face to face interview with MacWhirr. Boarding the steam-ship, he meets Jukes and Solomon Rout who comment upon MacWhirr’s encounter with other captains in London during which he stressed that the *Nan-Shan* weathered conditions that “you find nothing about in books,” adding that one always had to keep the ship at her course which infuriated the competent mariners. The young journalist is not interested in that, though.

¹⁶ G. Herling-Grudziński and T. Marrone. *Pod światło* [Against the Light]. Transl. S. Kasprzysiak. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszczyński, 1998, 11.

¹⁷ Sawicka, 64.

¹⁸ Herling-Grudziński, Marrone, 13.

¹⁹ *Orzel Biały* 1945: 19 (154) 6–7. Reprinted in *Żywi i umarli* [The Living and the Dead]. Lublin: Wydawnictwo FIS 1991, 60–65.

He wants to have a word with MacWhirr. Appropriately, he finds him writing a letter. Similarly to the steward, now Herling-cum-journalist looks over his shoulder and reads some lines: "My darling wife, ... It's very hot here. The West-Indian Company wants us to leave for Singapore. Yesterday, I came across some Chinamen from that memorable voyage I'd written about... Remember me to the children. Your loving husband." When MacWhirr marks his presence, he takes the interviewer for the Cripp brothers' errand boy. He confesses sadly that the *Nan-Shan* can no longer carry passengers, only cargo. Upon that the journalist reveals the purpose of his visit, which is to compare MacWhirr's testimony of the voyage with Conrad's account. Throughout that interview, the narrator unwittingly slips into the pose of yet another Yukes, being very talkative, putting in elaborate sentences with metaphorical expressions and incorporating longish evaluations of Conrad's books. After each tirade, MacWhirr either accurately sums up the reporter's verbosity, exactly pinpointing the ideas only vaguely outlined by his interlocutor or consistently refers to the substantial example of the *Nan-Shan* voyage. In every riposte MacWhirr alludes to books as unreliable sources of information, whereas the inexperienced journalist keeps quoting and building up complicated similes. The whole conference ends with a quasi-typhoon situation, when the narrator feels a gust of wind, just catching some unfinished sentences of MacWhirr's: "Nonetheless, nonetheless... my dear friend, nonetheless..." which is capped with the composed and tranquil final judgement: "there are things you find nothing about in books."

Within the frame of the interview, we can distinguish several levels of imitating Conrad's work. One of them is creating the two opposite characters MacWhirr and journalist-Yukes through the language they use. The captain's simple-mindedness and literariness is mirrored in the brevity of his answers, constant repetition of the same phrases, lack of figurative language and limited vocabulary. MacWhirr's matter-of-fact standpoint is highlighted by the confrontation with the journalist's loquaciousness, but also, by the captain's deliberate rejection of Mr Rout's speech. (He calls him a sentimental fool because of one of his comparison in which he likened losing one's ship by fire to seeing your newly-wed wife in the arms of another man.)

Another aspect of Herling-Grudziński's interpretation is his specifically Polish reading of that novella. The essay begins by portraying the narrator on the point of finishing Conrad's tale and ruminating about its meaning:

So again Conrad, again the same circle of courageous conscience and human independence, of invariable moral principles as well as taciturn and tenacious fight to implement them fully.²⁰

Herling-Grudziński imposes on the story the frame of traditional Polish readings of Conrad which emphasise courage, perseverance and faithfulness. As a member of the war generation, he regarded Conrad's works as a compass to manoeuvre the young people expertly through the difficult choices they faced. To him MacWhirr is

²⁰ Herling-Grudziński 1991, 65.

first and foremost a paragon of unflinching bravery, a man who in a *Grenzsituation* passes the test of humanity. The captain is depicted as an ancient hero, who with calm dignity wrestles with destiny according to the dictates of his simple conscience. Such readings were typical of A. Gołubiew and J.J. Szczepański.²¹ In Herling-Grudziński's eyes Conrad's protagonists who recognized the significance of duty are placed on a pedestal and they are beyond criticism.

In "Typhoon" [the journalist tells MacWhirr], Conrad portrayed people who perceived the momentousness of their own simple duty. Whether you agree with me or not, this is an undisputable fact that his story of your ship is a hymn commemorating unavoidable human loneliness. But that's not all. There's also, so to speak self-conceived tragedy.²²

Herling-Grudziński classifies all sailors depicted in the novella as belonging to one type: brave men. He overlooks the nuanced portrayal of such extremely different characters as captain Tom MacWhirr, the first mate Mr. Jukes or the chief engineer Mr. Solomon Rout along with their varied reactions to the fatal threat of the typhoon.²³

Another conspicuous motif, for Herling-Grudziński, is the entanglement of human loneliness with man's solidarity. Although the mariners are portrayed as autonomous monads, still they survive only because of their cooperation. According to Herling-Grudziński "Typhoon" is a eulogy of that beautiful solidarity, which, struggling with the sea, overpowers the melancholy of lonely human existence.²⁴

In his imaginary interview he exhibits one-sidedness and cultural bias, neglecting the comic aspect of this short story as well as the varied shades of irony. However, this type of interpretation cannot be labelled as "Polish-made" since even some eminent Conradians also shoved "Typhoon" away as an uncomplicated and straightforward piece of writing.²⁵ After several decades Herling-Grudziński openly acknowledged this lopsidedness of his essay calling it a piece of "clumsy juvenilla."²⁶

²¹ Cf. A. Chomiuk. "Gołubiew: Conrad under Catholic Eyes." *Krajka*, 2004, 131–155. B. Gontarz, *Pisarz i historia. O twórczości J.J. Szczepańskiego* [A Writer and History. On the Writings of J.J. Szczepański]. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2001, 48.

²² Herling-Grudziński 1991, 66.

²³ I have discussed the differences between those protagonists as well as their behaviour on the basis of their private correspondence in "Listy i książki, czyli o pisaniu i (nie)czytaniu w 'Tajfunie' Conrada" [Letters and Books or on Writing and (Mis-)Reading in Conrad's "Typhoon"]. *Zeszyty Naukowe NKJO: Zabrze* (forthcoming).

²⁴ Herling-Grudziński 1991, 65.

²⁵ As A. Guerard believed: "it stands al most alone among Conrad's better books as a work whose preoccupations are nearly all on the surface [...]. Its matter is rather that of character and conscience facing more outward challenges. Thus 'Typhoon' requires no elaborate interpreting." (A. Guerard. *Conrad the Novelist*. New York: Atheneum 1967, 294.

²⁶ G. Herling-Grudziński. *Dziennik pisany nocą. 1973–1979* [Diary Written at Night. 1973–1979]. Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990, 180.

Last but not least, the émigré writer peppers his imaginary dialogue with Mac Whirr with quotations from various Conrad's works. The pivotal one initiating the whole conversation comes from *A Personal Record*:

But it seems to me that their [my judges] unfailingly interested sympathy has ascribed to social and historical influences much, of what, I believe, appertains simply to the individual. Nothing is more foreign than what in the literary world is called Slavonism, to the Polish temperament with its tradition of self-government, its chivalrous view of moral restraints and an exaggerated respect for individual rights: not to mention the important fact that the whole Polish mentality, Western in complexion, had received its training from Italy and France and, historically, had always remained, even in religious matters, in sympathy with the most liberal currents of European thoughts. An impartial view of humanity in all its degrees of splendour and misery together with a special regard for the rights of the unprivileged of this earth, not on any mystic ground but on the ground of simple fellowship and honourable reciprocity of services, was the dominant characteristic of the mental and moral atmosphere of the houses which sheltered my hazardous childhood: – matters of calm and deep conviction both lasting and consistent [...].²⁷

Herling-Grudziński uses that fragment as a motto by means of which Conrad (and, in the fictitious interview, Mac Whirr) defines his cultural roots but also the origins of his beliefs. The closing phrases “matters of calm and deep conviction both lasting and consistent” are especially relevant to Herling-Grudziński, who many a time underlined his staunch adherence to the once-chosen principles. That it was a treasured *passus* for the political émigré is revealed by the qualifying expression introducing it: “a long kept note,”²⁸ and also, by Mac Whirr's reaction who finds it, in spite of its digressive nature, sensible.

A different type of citation is a line from “Typhoon:” “there are things you find nothing about in books.”²⁹ It is an elaborate “multi-quotation” since in Herling-Grudziński it is a paraphrase of Jukes' utterance which, in Conrad's text was the chief mate's restatement of the skipper's words and finally, which, at least to my mind, seems to be Conrad's travesty of Shakespeare's well-known vociferation:

There are more things in heaven and earth, [...]
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy [...].³⁰

This quotation recurs in Herling-Grudziński's story several times: it is used by Jukes who reports Mac Whirr's meeting with other captains in London, by Mac Whirr

²⁷ J. Conrad. *A Personal Record*. Oxford: OUP 1996, vi.

²⁸ Herling-Grudziński 1991, 62.

²⁹ J. Conrad. “*Typhoon*” and *Other Tales*. Oxford: OUP, 1998, 102; a different version of the same conviction: “you don't find everything in books,” 34.

³⁰ W. Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Ed. S. Wells et al. *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Complete Works*. Oxford: OUP, 1998, I, 5, 662. The Shakespearean affiliations of Conradian prose were thoroughly discussed by A. Gillon. “Joseph Conrad and Shakespeare.” *Conradiana* 8:1 (1976), 61–76, “Shakespearean and Polish Tonalities in Conrad's ‘The Lagoon’.” *Conradiana* 8:2 (1976), 127–136, “Joseph Conrad and Shakespeare.” *Conradiana* 8:3 (1976), 263–281. Gillon, however, did not mention this allusion in “Typhoon.”

himself, and by the journalist. Indeed, the story's denouement is precisely that line: "Nonetheless, my dear friend, there are things you find nothing about in the wisest books." The whole interview reverberates with that utterance, similarly to Conrad's tale in which MacWhirr repeats that conviction several times not only to Jukes but also to his wife³¹ and the chief mate reiterates the captain's words in a letter to his friend in the Western Ocean trade. Characteristically, the novella's closure consists in that dictum as well.

The other direct discussion of Conrad's work which I would like to focus on in this paper, is Herling-Grudziński's article entitled "Lord Jim i towarzyszy Jan"³² (Lord Jim and Comrade John) provoked by Jan Kott's text "O laickim tragizmie. Conrad i Malraux."³³ (Secular Despondency. Conrad and Malraux). The Polish Marxist critic, Jan Kott, just after the II World War launched a veiled attack on the ethos of the Home Army. Since Conrad represented the highest moral authority for the majority of the Home Army soldiers (who were called "Conrad's children"³⁴), Kott by depreciating Conrad's fiction, had been implicitly negating the values of the Home Army and the significance of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Once again Conrad served as a mere cover, a "prop" in a political dispute.³⁵ This time, however, a lot of defenders arose to fight openly for their literary master and covertly to vindicate the honour of the Home Army soldiers. Their situation was extremely difficult since the communist censorship made it virtually impossible to exchange opinions overtly. Hence a specific kind of encoded cultural-political discussion arose, called "a crypto-discourse."³⁶

Herling-Grudziński's position was different, though. As an exile, publishing in London, he could express his opposing views without any obstacles. He responded promptly and emotionally in 1947. After three decades, he belittles this juvenile polemic as "written quite clumsily, too hectic and chaotic".³⁷ Nevertheless, it seems to me, that it is worth analysing since it discloses the main tenets of Conrad's moral philosophy which Herling-Grudziński stood up for and admired throughout his life and literary career.

First of all, Herling-Grudziński laid bare his opponent's factual motivation for writing the tendentious essay: namely, it was Kott's attempt at disparaging the Home

³¹ "Typhoon," 93.

³² *Światło* [Light] 3.2 [1947], 37–43 and *Światło* 3.3 [1947], 30–36.

³³ *Twórczość* [Creativity] 194:2. Reprinted in *Mitologia i realizm* [Mythology and Realism] Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1946. For an extensive discussion of the evolution of Kott's views see Szczerbakiewicz, 107–130. He does not analyse the Kott – Herling-Grudziński polemics.

³⁴ Davies, 688.

³⁵ The first being that of W. Lutosławski and E. Orzeszkowa in 1899. Cf. Z. Najder, "Introduction" to *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*. Transl. H. Halina Carroll. London: OUP 1964 and Z. Najder, *Conrad's Polish Background, or, from Biography to a Study of Culture*. *Conradiana* 18:1 (1986), 3–8.

³⁶ Qtd. in Szczerbakiewicz, 126.

³⁷ Herling-Grudziński. *Dziennik pisany nocą. 1973–1979*, 181.

Army ideals.³⁸ That he had been right was confirmed some time later when Kott changed his political option and also became an expatriate. Withdrawing from his former convictions, the critic admitted openly that Conrad served as a pendant for an ideological discourse:

It was a political dispute. I had always been fascinated with Conrad in a way, and it was not about him. It was a dispute about the Home Army. Conrad advocated fidelity against all odds, till the very end, and he eulogised honour. These values were recognised by the soldiers of the army, who were still hiding in the forests, though by that time it was clear they were political losers.³⁹

Secondly, Herling-Grudziński rightly observed that Kott's arguments against the author of *Lord Jim* were not original; on the contrary, he only paraphrased the accusations put forward by Upton Sinclair in his book *Mammonart*. The American novelist accused Conrad of engaging his talents in the ship owners' employ. Herling-Grudziński pinpoints the fact that Kott tailored this argument in order to match the then-current-political habitat. Thus the Marxist critic adroitly restated Sinclair's ideas:

It [Conradian fidelity] is blind obedience to the great ship-owners of this world that is even more dangerous to society than self-importance and affection for solitude of Conrad's protagonists.⁴⁰

Herling-Grudziński laid bare the reasons why Kott modified Sinclair's idea of Conrad's *being paid for his services by capitalists* to the captain's *blind obedience*. Namely, his conjecture was that the fervent Marxist critic must have thought of the morally dubious situation of many writers in post-war Poland who were well-paid by the regime and enjoyed a lot of prerogatives on condition that they supported the new government.⁴¹

Furthermore, Herling-Grudziński believed that Kott devised his 'revisionist' reading of Conrad's ethics on the basis of one short story – "Typhoon" and then over-generalised it to apply to much more complicated novels like *Lord Jim* or *Victory*.⁴² "Typhoon" can, on the face of it, be interpreted as a eulogy of unreasonable fidelity of an unreflective man. Herling-Grudziński admitted that even he in his short sketch on that novella overlooked its ironic edge.

The next weak point of Kott's attack that the political émigré elaborated on was his dilettantism. Herling-Grudziński maintained that the Marxist critic undertook to

³⁸ Herling-Grudziński 1947, 37.

³⁹ J. Kott. "Polityki się nie wybiera..." [You don't choose politics...]. *Nagłos*, maj (May) 1991, 88. Transl. W. Kozak.

⁴⁰ J. Kott. *O laickim tragizmie*. 156. Transl. W. Kozak in *Szczerbakiewicz*, 112.

⁴¹ The privileges of such writers are well described in A. Bikont, J. Szczęsny. *Lawina i kamienie. Pisarze polscy wobec komunizmu* [An Avalanche and Stones. Polish Writers and Communism]. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2006.

⁴² Herling-Grudziński 1947, 39.

examine too much and thus he slid only on the surface with brilliant pirouettes of aphoristic shortcuts, yet never aimed at creative synthesis.⁴³ Kott's scope was too broad and that is why he analysed *Lord Jim* only superficially. His argument that "*Lord Jim* is only apparently a story about a man who lost his place in the ranks, since he did not fulfil the ethical requirements of a given social group" is, according to Herling-Grudziński ridiculous, since in fact no attentive and intelligent reader would narrow the interpretative perspective to such a one-sided and straightforward analysis.⁴⁴ Thus it is a groundless interpretative "windmill" which Kott tilts at.

Another wrong assumption of the critic was that Conrad never appropriated himself of the right to examine the character's soul, to overhear his/her interior monologue.⁴⁵ What is left is only narration. Herling-Grudziński, on the other hand, claims that the author of *Lord Jim* while narrating facts, records in a "second-hand" mode the protagonist's inner emotions. When psychological writers describe the thoughts of their characters they: "paralyse acting thus misrepresenting people's behaviour,"⁴⁶ whereas observing facts is to portray human beings in a concise, true and humanistic close-up. Herling-Grudziński believes that it was only Conrad who managed to create not only a psychological analysis in the novel but psychological narration for the novel: "Everything that happens in Conrad's works happens and is narrated so as to throw wider and wider stream of light on man's soul."⁴⁷ The author of *A World Apart* exemplified that claim by referring to *Lord Jim* which for him is an "interior monologue of thoughts" perceived and narrated by another man in its rich variety, not of introspection, but observation. On the basis of his faulty assumption, Kott concluded that "Conrad heroes act in order to live and die in order to excuse their lives."⁴⁸ In his polemist eyes it is almost the other way round: "Conrad's protagonists live in order to act and die when they are defeated."⁴⁹

One more assumption which the Polish émigré writer tried to disprove was Kott's statement that Conrad's heroism is a "heroism of death." His characters pay too much attention to their greatness. Kott claimed that heroism is too costly a method of secular salvation of their souls. If there are any cases for which it is worth to sacrifice one's life they certainly do not include fidelity, dignity or honour but first and foremost "ideas and the laws of history." Kott postulated:

We have to finish with the individual's dignity, honour and fidelity. The interior moral drama takes place in a real world, in a social world and boils down to the choice of one of standpoints which have been imposed by the communal life, the choice of one of the forms of

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 38.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 40.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 40.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 40.

action. Courage, fidelity to oneself is in fact obedience to the laws of the world which is covertly despised, this is the rejection of the right to rebel.⁵⁰

Herling-Grudziński refuses to acknowledge the Marxist's *Weltanschauung*. Having dismantled Kott's generalisations, he proceeds to conscientious and unbiased interpretation of Conrad's novels. Commencing with Kott-like scornful questions he endeavours to prove that Conrad's heroes fight for values which constitute in fact the sole foundations of human relations. Hence he asks: "What made that oversensitive Jim act like that?"⁵¹ Such a query should be posed at the onset of the novel, but then towards the end the readers have to reply: "the thought of his dignity and of people's trust."⁵² One more question asked by Herling-Grudziński: "why does that quiet Heyst entangle in a suspicious erotic affair?" – one could have shrugged one's shoulders plodding through the first chapters of *Victory* – and the reply is "he fought for the faith in man and the belief in love."⁵³ Therefore Herling-Grudziński concludes that Conrad's heroism is not "too precious a method of secular salvation of the soul since such emotions, convictions and values form the basis of each truly humane relationship and ensuing social interactions."⁵⁴

On the basis of this polemic of a political exile with a then fervent supporter of the new regime we can see how Conrad came to symbolise the old traditional values of fidelity and honour represented by the Home Army on one side of the ideological barricade and on the other, his philosophy was regarded as anachronistic and he was looked upon as "the last moralist of the middle class."⁵⁵

To recapitulate, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's readings of Conrad refer both to the writer's biography and works. The writer deliberately looked for parallels between his own existence and the life of the author of *A Personal Record*. He endeavoured to trace some of the venues in Italy where Conrad's stories took place; he frequently compared the events from his life with Conrad's decisions and choices. Moreover, Herling-Grudziński analysed several of Conrad's novels and short stories. His literary discussions began with an imaginary talk with one of Conrad's protagonist in which he praised the ethical views of the author of "Typhoon." Then he progressed to a very emotional defence of his favourite author against Marxist attacks. In that debate he accentuated the artistic values of *Lord Jim* but first and foremost upheld the noble ideals to which thousands of Poles who fought in the Resistance movement during World War II were committed – those ideals which Herling-Grudziński himself was to implement during his lifetime and in his writing in exile.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 32–33.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 32.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 32.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 32.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 33.

⁵⁵ Kot 1946, 122.

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