

JOSEPH CONRAD IN BULGARIAN WATERS

Маргрета Григорова. Джоузеф Конрад Коженъовски. Творецът като мореплавател [*Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski. The Creator as a Seafarer*]. Veliko Tarnovo St. Cyril and St. Methodius University Press 2011, 440 pp.

This is the third monograph by Assoc. Prof. Margreta Grigорова, PhD, a scholar from the University of Veliko Tarnovo whose works have received wide recognition among Bulgarian slavists. A specialist in Polish literature, Prof. Grigорова's main fields of research include the Romantic, Positivist and Young Poland periods along with the fiction and essays of J. Conrad, G. Herling-Grudzinski, R. Kapuscinski and Cz. Milosz (she is also the first Bulgarian translator of Milosz's *Native Realm*, 2012). The most visible pattern of her studies is the examination of wide mythological, folkloric and symbolic contexts that strongly influence the reception of Slavic literary artifacts in different national cultures. Following this pattern, the sea and the exploits of seafaring turn out to be the key to revealing Conrad's biography and creative imagination to the Bulgarian public.

With her most recent book M. Grigорова opens a new branch of conradology – although translated and respected, Joseph Conrad has never received consistent attention from English or Polish literature scholars in this Balkan country (which, on its part, is a sea nation only in georgahic and tourism terms). Apart from the fact that this is the first monograph on the writer and sailor in Bulgaria, it offers a comprehensive approach towards his life, naval career and writings. The book release is evidently targeting both academic circles and the wider audience. This explains its complex structure: the study is divided into nine chapters, while the last 100 pages contain a number of appendices (fragments of *The Mirror of the Sea* and the letter *The Future of Constantinople*, translated by Petya Tsoneva and not previously published in Bulgaria; essays, reviews and memoirs by Virginia Woolf, Marian Dabrowski, Stefan Zeromski, Maria Dabrowska, G. Herling-Grudzinski and Chinua Achebe; a chronicle of Conrad's life; a map section with a list of his travels and a gallery of Conrad's personal photographs and documents).

Prof. Grigорова's approach has the natural advantage of being free from nationally biased interpretations of Conrad's legacy. This important aspect of the study is implied in the book title by contaminating the writer's English name and Polish surname: the complete Conrad is, according to this highly suggestive act, neither *Joseph Conrad*, nor *Józef Konrad Korzeniowski*; the insight into the Conrad phenomenon demands full awareness of the diversity of identities meeting in this extraordinary man's life and works – his Polish nationality and Russian Empire citizenship, the noble upbringing and the life of a British navy officer, the creative impulses and the exploits of a seafarer.

All these controversial aspects are introduced and expanded in the book's initial chapter which basic conclusions insist on the exclusiveness and discursive multiplicity marking Conrad's place in European literature; this diversity, however posing a "universe of questions" beyond answering, challenges the researcher with the constant responsibility of separating facts from the myths surrounding the writer's biography. Following the thesis of J. Stape, Grigorova accepts the *homo duplex* – *homo multiplex* paradigm as a reliable basis for her study.

The book's main themes deal with the questions of migration (chapters I–II), the sea as a potent stimulus to writing and to the masculine instinct for power, the process of taming the foreign language as an inner projection of the conquest of the sea (III–V, VIII). Chapters VI and VII offer a detailed, multi-level approach to the "heart of darkness" and lead to the conclusion that Conrad's Belgian Congo reveals the "black mirror" of European civilisation, Europe's own projections and denials due to the instinct for power and plunder (p. 197). The construction of a post-Conradian literary record of Belgian Congo (VII) discusses works by André Gide, Alberto Moravia, Kazimierz Nowak and Ryszard Kapuscinski; reaching "the geographical center of the Earth", the heart of Africa is predominantly viewed as a cruel yet romantic adventure (p. 274).

Chapter IX should presents a highly intriguing challenge to Polish scholars as it gives an outside view of Conrad's reception in his native culture. According to Grigorova, Conrad's literary fate in Poland has been subject of fierce discussions from the end of the XIX c. up until the 1960s (p. 320), while the last two decades have led to the stabilisation of critical opinions and the rediscovering of the author's significance in post-colonial context.

The reference list includes over 170 sources – a bibliographical anthology of English, Polish and Bulgarian language Conrad-related publications. From its front cover until the last pages *Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski. The Creator as a Seafarer* confronts the reader with the unresolvable paradox whether the author's uniqueness lies in balancing between different identities or his true identity lies in conquering the sea as the grand metaphor for all language, national and cultural barriers.