

**REVIEW OF *POLSKIE ZAPLECZE*
JOSEPHA CONRADA-KORZENIOWSKIEGO.
DOKUMENTY RODZINNE, LISTY, WSPOMNIENIA
(THE POLISH BACKGROUND
OF JOSEPH CONRAD-KORZENIOWSKI.
FAMILY DOCUMENTS, LETTERS, MEMORIES), VOLS. I–II.
EDITED BY ZDZISŁAW NAJDER AND JOANNA SKOLIK.
LUBLIN: GAUDIUM PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2006**

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In 2006 the Lublin Publishing House Gaudium issued a two-volume work edited by distinguished Conrad scholars, Zdzisław Najder and Joanna Skolik. The work constitutes a highly valuable source of texts which characterise and further determine Joseph Conrad's Polish cultural and family background.

The first volume contains, among others, the writer's family documents, and in particular *Synowi urodzonemu w 85. roku niewoli moskiewskiej piosenka w dzień chrztu św.* (A Song for my Son born in the 85th year of Captivity under Moscow's Rule written on the Day of his Christening) composed by his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, in 1857 in Berdyczów (Berdichev – Conrad's birthplace where he was also baptised). This group of texts also includes very important sources, such as documents concerning the investigation and subsequent trial of Apollo Korzeniowski, who in 1861 was accused of conspiracy by the tsarist authorities in Warsaw, shortly before the outbreak of the January Uprising, his obituary of 1869, or the 1914 Political Memorandum concerning Poland penned by Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski.

The first volume also contains correspondence connected with Conrad's family, especially a large number of letters by Apollo Korzeniowski to the writers and literary connoisseurs of his time, including Kazimierz Kaszewski, Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki and Stefan Buszczyński. On the basis of these sources Apollo emerges as an outstanding man of letters who was extremely well acquainted with literature past and present – and not only Polish literature at that. The 1861 letters from Ewa Korzeniowska to her husband, who at that time was in Warsaw, organising the Komitet Ruchu (the Movement Committee), the foundation for the later Powstańczy Rząd Narodowy (the Insurrectionary National Government), are particularly interesting. This is because they illustrate the most intimate relations between the couple, their everyday problems and Ewa's justified fears for her husband *qua* conspirator. Thanks to these letters we can learn

about many details concerning the private life and the social work of the Korzeniowski family, and in particular about Apollo's conspiratorial and literary work, which was spoken about in a veiled manner, as well as about his literary plans. In the light of this correspondence, Conrad's father can be seen to have been a very remarkable figure – he turns out to have been a gifted writer and a social-political activist with a talent for organisation and leadership.

The third section of the first volume contains numerous letters from Joseph Conrad's uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski (Ewa Korzeniowska's brother) to his nephew, written between 1869 and 1893. These letters demonstrate both concern for young Conrad, who had chosen the life of an emigrant-sailor, and pride in his lesser or greater successes.

The second volume is in turn devoted entirely to Conrad and his relationships with compatriots. It comprises all Conrad's known letters to Polish addressees written between 1861 and 1924. To some extent they help to explain the writer's complicated biography. They illustrate his political views, but above all portray his close and intimate contacts with Poles, especially with the Zagórski family.

This volume also contains memoirs and comments about Conrad written by Polish authors, mainly in the first half of the 20th century. Two of them are especially worth mentioning: the controversial comment made by Eliza Orzeszkowa in her 1899 text entitled *Emigracja zdolności* (Emigration of Talent) and Stefan Żeromski's enthusiastic introduction entitled *Joseph Conrad – przedmowa* (Joseph Conrad – an Introduction) to the 1923 Polish edition of Conrad's *Pisma wybrane* (Selected Works). Luckily, the authors of this book have succeeded in collecting in one volume all the various texts that have hitherto been scattered in other collections such as *Wspomnienia i studia o Conradzie* (Memoirs and Studies on Conrad, edited by Barbara Kocówna, Warsaw 1963); Joseph Conrad, *Listy* (Letters. Selected and edited by Zdzisław Najder, Warsaw 1968); *Listy do Conrada* (Letters to Conrad. Edited by Róża Jabłkowska, Warsaw 1981); *Conrad wśród swoich. Listy – Dokumenty – Wspomnienia* (Conrad among His Own People. Letters – Documents – Memoirs. Edited by Zdzisław Najder, Warsaw 1996). The present edition greatly facilitates access to sources connected with the Korzeniowski family and Conrad himself.

The whole content has been illuminated by an introduction written by Zdzisław Najder, who portrays Apollo Korzeniowski as a politician and writer, and briefly recounts the series of events that led to Conrad's emigration from Poland, as well as explaining Conrad's complicated attitude to the problem of Poland's independence and his own Polish roots.

The book is also of great value because in a very clear way – thanks to numerous and very accurate footnotes and a list of sources and first editions of individual texts – it facilitates access to valid information concerning the vast and rather complex Polish context of the life and works of Joseph Conrad, which is still not well known to the wider reading public. This work will certainly be of use to experts on Conrad and also to those who simply love the books of this English writer with Polish roots.

Translated by Ewa Kowal