

УДК 821.111 Дж.Конрад

Lilia OMELAN

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

“A NOBLEMAN FROM UKRAINE”: JOSEPH CONRAD’S ATTITUDE TO HIS HOMELAND

Joseph Conrad was born and spent his childhood and a significant part of his youth in Ukraine – a country, which alongside Poland had lost its independence due to historical reasons. In 18th-19th centuries the Polish szlachta regarded Ukraine as a part of Poland, and the Polish romantic poets and writers idealized the Ukrainian history, people and land. Conrad deals with Ukraine in his several works (“Amy Foster”, “Sisters”, “Prince Roman”, „A Personal Record”). These works expose Conrad’s fondness of the Ukrainian land and people. The time spent at the multiethnic and multicultural Ukraine belongs to a very important period of the life of Conrad – the English writer who never abandoned his Polishness and till the end of his life considered himself “a gentleman from Ukraine”.

Key words: Joseph Conrad, Ukraine, Poland, writer, Polishness.

Джозеф Конрад народився і провів своє дитинство, а також частину молодості в Україні – країні, що, як і Польща, в силу історичних обставин втратила незалежність. У XVIII-XIX ст. польська шляхта вважала Україну частиною Польщі, а поети та письменники польського романтизму ідеалізували українську історію, народ і землю. Конрад звертається до української тематики у кількох своїх творах („Гуцул”, „Сестри”, „Князь Роман”, „Зі спогадів”). У них проявляється любов письменника до української землі й людей. Час, проведений Конрадом на багатоетнічній і багатокультурній Україні, належить до важливого періоду життя Конрада – англійського письменника, який ніколи не зрікся своєї приналежності до польського народу і до кінця своїх днів вважав себе „шляхтичем з України”.

Ключові слова: Джозеф Конрад, Україна, Польща, письменник, польськість.

Joseph Conrad urodził się i spędził swoje dzieciństwo oraz część młodości na Ukrainie – kraju, który, podobnie jak Polska, na skutek uwarunkowań historycznych utracił swoją niepodległość. W XVIII-XIX wieku szlachta polska uważała Ukrainę za część Polski, a poeci i pisarze polskiego romantyzmu idealizowali ukraińską historię, naród i ziemię. Conrad pisze o Ukrainie w kilku swoich utworach („Janko Góral”, „Siostry”, „Książę Roman”, „Ze Wspomnień”). Dzieła te pokazują zamiłowanie pisarza do ukraińskiej ziemi i ludzi. Czas, spędzony na wieloetnicznej i wielokulturowej Ukrainie, należy do bardzo ważnego okresu życia Conrada – angielskiego pisarza, który nigdy nie wyrzekł się swojej polskości i do końca życia uważał siebie za „szlachcica z Ukrainy”.

Słowa kluczowe: Joseph Conrad, Ukraina, Polska, pisarz, polskość.

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, which is the real name of the famous English writer Joseph Conrad, descended from the social layer of the Polish nobility (in the original: “szlachta”). The territory of the present Ukraine was the place of residence for several generations of Conrad’s predecessors of both branches of his genealogical tree, the Korzeniowskis and the Bobrowskis. Józef Teodor Konrad was born on 3rd December 1857 on the territory of Volhynia. The specific location of Conrad’s birth has been a matter of dispute among biographers. As a possible birthplace, they regarded Berdychiv, Ivankivtsi, Terekhove and Derebchynka. Unfortunately, the documents which could either confirm or reject any of these theories have never been found. This paper is an attempt to analyse the attitude of Joseph Conrad and his close relatives to the Ukrainian land and people.

Conrad’s feelings towards Ukraine and its people have been a matter of interest for biographers

and literary critics. However, the articles on the subject are not numerous. Among the first literary pieces fully devoted to the analysis of Conrad’s connection with Ukraine and/or the writer’s attitude to the Ukrainian people and land is Viktoria Tsybul’ska’s article “The steppes like the sea and the sea like the steppes”. The author emphasizes Conrad’s warm attitude to the Ukrainian people. Turning to Conrad’s unfinished novel “The Sisters”, Tsybul’ska advances the hypothesis that Conrad endowed his literary hero Stefan, who has Ukrainian roots and studies abroad to become a professional painter, with his own features [14, 109-110].

In the popular scholarly article “The Ukrainian Reminiscences of Joseph Conrad” Mark Sokolyan’sky and Victoria Tsybul’ska endeavour to explain the meaning of the Ukrainian period of Conrad’s biography for his life and literary work. The critics analyse Conrad’s attitude to his homeland on the basis of “A Personal Record”, “Amy Foster”, “Prince

Roman" and "The Sisters". They use excerpts from these works in the Ukrainian translation. Most probably, the translation was made by Sokolyans'ky and Tsybul's'ka themselves, because none of the above-mentioned Conrad's works was ever published in Ukrainian. The reviewers conclude that Conrad retained warm feelings to the land of his birth and childhood throughout all his life [11, 139-141].

Interestingly, Tsybul's'ka and Sokolyans'ky believe that Yanko Goorall was a Ukrainian by origin. Their conjecture is based on Conrad's words that Yanko came from the Eastern Carpathian mountain range. In my opinion, this theory should be regarded as a plausible hypothesis (rather than a confirmed fact) and confronted with Wiesław Krajka's article "The Multiple Identities of Yanko Goorall" [7, 131-164].

It should be observed that Conrad's choice of an East Carpathian hero was not accidental. To quote Anna Brzozowska-Krajka, "East Carpathians were a part of Ukraine whose romantic image and cultural identity permanently existed in Polish spiritual culture. In idealistic imagination of Polish romantics this was a region of dialogue and friendship, of reciprocal responsibility and union" [2, 166].

Other articles devoted to Conrad's links with Ukraine are "Conrad and Ukraine: A Note" by Zdzisław Najder and "Conrad and Ukraine: Mutual Erasure" – a paper presented by Ludmilla Voitkovska at the International Conrad Conference in Amsterdam in 2005. Najder shows the connection of Conrad's family with the Ukrainian land and exposes some blank spaces in the biographies of Conrad and his close relatives. On the other hand, Voitkovska believes that Conrad did not pay much attention to Ukraine in his works. The author also concludes that the critical response to Conrad's literary heritage was not enthusiastic. The basis for this conclusion is the fact that scholarly articles devoted to Conrad were not numerous. Sadly, Ludmilla Voitkovska does not analyse the reasons for this phenomenon. One of them is Stalinist repression beginning in 1930 and lasting till the end of Stalin personality cult. This can explain why the Ukrainian Conradiana, which had been in steady progress, was abruptly stopped and restarted only several decades later. Another aspect of Voitkovska's statement, Conrad's attitude to the land of his birth, also calls for clarification.

"Joseph Conrad's Ukrainian links are obvious: he was born there, and, for nearly two centuries, his ancestors had lived in what today is Ukraine" – Zdzisław Najder observes [9, 45]. Whereas the time of residence of Conrad's antecedents can be a matter open to discussion, Conrad's connection with

Ukraine cannot be denied. The present Ukrainian territory was the place of numerous important events for Conrad's relatives. Many of them were born, spent their lives in either mundane occupations or patriotic activities (or both), died there and were buried in the Ukrainian land. Moreover, Ukraine was the place where Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski spent his early years, which are considered very important for shaping a person's individuality. Conrad's Ukrainian reminiscences found their reflection in his literary works "Amy Foster", "Sisters", *A Personal Record* and "Prince Roman". In particular, in "A Personal Record" the time of Konrad Korzeniowski and his mother's stay in Novofastiv (before their return to Chernihiv) is described as a delightful episode of the writer's life.

In the 18th-19th century the Polish "szlachta" considered Ukraine, which had lost its independence, not as a separate country but as an integral part of Poland. Many Polish romantic writers tended to idealise Ukraine, its people, history and nature. As noted by Anna Brzozowska-Krajka, "for many eminent Polish romantic writers (e.g. S. Goszczyński, J.B. Zaleski, H. Rzewuski, A. Malczewski, J. Słowacki) and also for Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, and for the Korzeniowski and Bobrowski families – Ukraine was native land, the Edenic land of childhood and youth" [2, 166].

Being a representative of the 19th-century Polish nobility, Conrad regarded Ukraine as a part of Poland. Besides, as has already been stated, he considered it his homeland and the land of his childhood. Conrad's kind attitude to Ukraine and its people was in all probability influenced by the open-minded approach of his father. Apollo Korzeniowski, who thought of himself as "a Pole from Ruthenia", had a warm attitude towards the Ukrainian people [6, 29]. (The word "Ruthenia" then stood for "Ukraine"). In Korzeniowski's time, after a great part of the ancient Ruthenian "szlachta" had long ago become polonized, peasantry constituted the majority of the Ukrainian nation.

Apollo Korzeniowski was a tolerant landowner, whose farming business often made a loss because of his excessive lenience towards the "lesser and simpler folk" – that is, the Ukrainian peasants [1, 238]. However, Korzeniowski's attitude to the Ukrainian common people was not restricted to mere sympathy. Apollo, like other romantic-messianistic patriots, believed that the Ukrainian peasantry would support the Polish "szlachta" during the anti-Tsarist insurrection [1, 32]. On the one hand, Korzeniowski idealized the relationship between the Ukrainian serfdom peasants and their Polish lan-

downing masters [1, 30-31]. On the other hand, he “evidently felt uneasy about his own social position as a user of peasant labour” [9: 50]. As remarked by Najder, Apollo Korzeniowski and his fellows from the radical Red faction intended to impart equal rights and privileges to all nations and social strata: “When they advocated this principle also with regard to Ruthenians, their programme amounted to making the latter legally and politically equal to Poles” [9, 51]. During his exile Korzeniowski commanded respect with the Polish and Ukrainian deportees; the exiles of both nationalities met regularly at the Korzeniowski’s modest lodging.

Another person who exerted considerable influence on Conrad, his uncle and guardian Tadeusz Bobrowski, was not consistent regarding his attitude towards the Ukrainians. Bobrowski asserted that he disliked the Ukrainians because of his negative school experience.

Leon Syroczyński, Conrad’s relative on his father’s side, took a lively interest in the life of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Influenced by Ukrainian and Polish democrats including Zygmunt Miłkowski, Leon Syroczyński and his colleagues read the works of the Ukrainian writer Marko Vovchok, distributed the Ukrainian first reader by Panteleimon Kulish, and attended the church service for the soul of the renown Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. Leon Syroczyński maintained friendly relations and corresponded with the Ukrainian historian and ethnographer Mykhailo Drahomanov. Moreover, Syroczyński (together with Mikołaj Michał Zagórski) was engaged in the study of the relations between Polish and Ukrainian intelligentsia. Syroczyński and Zagórski made plans for the co-operation between the Polish and Ukrainian intelligentsia circles. However, they changed their intentions after the outbreak of the 1863 Insurrection: Leon Syroczyński took part in the Rising and later settled in Galicia, and Mikołaj Zagórski emigrated. Interestingly, Leon Syroczyński admits his command and active usage of the Ukrainian language: “With each other we spoke Polish, with common people and our servants we spoke Ruthenian [...]” [13, 27].

Stefan Bobrowski, Conrad’s maternal uncle and a prominent member of the Reds faction, rightly considered the Ukrainian people a separate nation (in contrast with the reactionary tsarist theory of Ukraine being a part of Russia and the Ukrainian language being only a dialect of the Russian language). He believed that a successful rising against the tsarist government would result in forming a union of free nations. Bobrowski envisaged Ruthenia (Ukraine) and Lithuania as members of the union. All the uni-

ted nations would have equal rights. However, Bobrowski declared that the membership in the union would be voluntary. In this way, the Ukrainian and the Lithuanian nation could make independent decisions concerning their future [5, 36].

Conrad’s political commitment was far less significant than that of his relatives: Apollo Korzeniowski, Stefan Bobrowski and Leon Syroczyński. Jósef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was fond of his homeland which he, like other “szlachta” members, regarded as a part of Poland: “And it so happened that I very nearly lost the M.S. [of “Almayer’s Folly”], advanced now to the first words of the ninth chapter, in the Friedrichstrasse railway station (that’s in Berlin, you know) *on my way to Poland, or more precisely Ukraine*” [4: 19, my italics].

It seems that, unlike Leon Syroczyński, Conrad did not know any representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Perhaps this is the reason for the lack of learned Ukrainians among Conrad’s literary heroes. His knowledge of the Ukrainian nation was limited to peasants. In general, Conrad depicts the Ukrainian peasants in a kind way, with the exception of the unruly crowd which robbed his maternal great uncle Mikołaj Bobrowski of his martial honours, having mistaken them for money.

In contrast to Apollo Korzeniowski, Conrad never regarded the Ruthenian/Ukrainian peasants as a political power. His memories of the Ukrainian people and the land of his birth are warm and reflective. Here are a few illustrative fragments from “A Personal Record”:

“I remembered perfectly the trusty Joseph [the coachman] who used to drive my grandmother. Why! he it was who let me hold the reins for the first time in my life and allowed me to play with the great four-in-hand whip outside the doors of the coach-house” [4, 21].

“I saw again the sun setting on the plains as I saw it in the travels of my childhood. It set, clear and red, dipping onto the snow in full view as if it were setting on the sea. It was twenty-three years since I had seen the sun set over that land; and we drove on in the darkness which fell swiftly upon the livid expanse of snows till, out of the waste of a white earth joining a bestarred sky, surged up black shapes, the clumps of trees about a village of the Ukrainian plain” [4, 22].

“Within five hundred yards of the chair on which I sat stood the first peasant hut of the village – part of my maternal grandfather’s estate, the only part remaining in the possession of a member of the family; and beyond the village in the limitless blackness of a winter’s night there lay the great

unfenced fields – *not a flat and severe plain, but a kindly, bread-giving land* of low, rounded ridges, all white now, with the black patches of timber nestling in the hollows" [4, 26, my italics].

"I discovered before long that all the faces about the house and all the faces in the village: the grave faces with long moustaches of the heads of families, the downy faces of the young men, the faces of the little fair-haired children, the handsome, tanned, wide-browed faces of the mothers seen at the doors of the huts, *were as familiar to me as though I had known them all from childhood, and my childhood were a matter of the day before yesterday*" [4, 27, my italics].

Interestingly, Conrad's first published work "Almayer's Folly" comprises a geographical name which is literally taken from Ukrainian. This is Sambir, the name of a small and quiet Galician town in which Conrad's former tutor, older friend and guardian Adam Marek Pulman had his medical practice. Pulman one of the most memorable figures of Józef Teodor's adolescent years. The relationship between Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski and his tutor were characterized by mutual trust and understanding. The pupil and the teacher's emotional attachment lasted even after the loss of contact between them.

It was thanks to Pulman that Conrad used the toponym of Sambir in his literary work. This fact was revealed by J.D.Gordan who was examining Conrad's manuscript of "Almayer's Folly". While Chapter Four included the words "That year, towards the breaking of the south-west monsoon, disquieting rumours reached Sambir"; on the reverse side of the same sheet there was found a fragment of Conrad's letter written in Polish. It was the letter to Tadeusz Bobrowski's friend Gustaw Sobotkiewicz (29th March 1890), in which Conrad mentioned that Pulman probably lived in Sambir (using the

Ukrainian spelling of the town's name), but Conrad did not know how things were with him [10, 140].

It is very probable that Józef Teodor Konrad and his father earlier visited the town of Sambir on their way to Topil'nytsya (Topolnica), where Apollo Korzeniowski was taking a cure for tuberculosis in the summer and autumn of 1868.

To recapitulate, Conrad spent early years in a multicultural and multireligious environment, surrounded by the picturesque landscapes of the Ukrainian land. The years spent in Ukraine must have been meaningful not only for forming Conrad's personality, but also for shaping his literary principles. As observed by Monika Majewska, "[...] perhaps Conrad's early acquaintance with such cultural context prepared him for the variety of cultures and religions which he encountered as an adult" [8, 86]. This idea is concordant with the statement by Jerzy Buzek, the former Prime Minister of the Government of Poland who calls Conrad "the first conscious modern European Pole" [3, 22]. To the former Polish Prime Minister's mind, Conrad's closest relatives abode by the European moral principles. One of the central values for Conrad's family, who lived in the area inhabited by people of different nationalities, was tolerance. As evident from his literary works, Conrad – the writer also adhered to this moral principle: "His characters of different nationalities are evaluated equally, without any prejudice, in terms of ethical principles. Therefore the fictional world of his literary works is colourful and pluralistic, but it is also far from relativistic" [3, 23-24]. The Ukrainian pages of Conrad's biography contributed to creating Conrad's complex personality of a "homo multiplex" [12, XII], of an English writer who never abandoned his Polishness and considered himself "a nobleman from Ukraine" [2, 165].

LITERATURE

1. Bobrowski T. A Memoir of My Life, translated and edited with an Introduction by Addison Bross. Volume XVII, Boulder: East European Monographs. – Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 2008.
2. Brzozowska-Krajka A. Yanko Goorall: A Waxwork from the Wax Museum of Polish Romanticism // Joseph Conrad: East European, Polish and Worldwide, volume VIII. Edited with an Introduction by Wiesław Krajka. Boulder: East European Monographs. – Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
3. Buzek J., the former Prime Minister of Poland. Opening Address to the Participants of the Third International Conrad Conference at the Maria Curie-

Skłodowska University, Lublin // Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives. A Return to the Roots: Conrad, Poland and East-Central Europe, volume XIII. Edited by Wiesław Krajka. Boulder: East European Monographs. – Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 2004.

4. Conrad J. A Personal Record (in The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record). Edited with an Introduction by Zdzisław Najder. – Oxford, New York, 1988.

5. Dunin-Wąsowicz K. Mózg i serce "czerwonych". – Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo „Iskry”, 1963.

6. Koc B. Conrad. – Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1977.

7. Krajka W. The Multiple Identities of Yanko Goorall // *Joseph Conrad: East European, Polish and Worldwide*, volume VIII. Edited with an Introduction by Wiesław Krajka. Boulder: East European Monographs. – Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska UP; New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
8. Majewska M. Konrad u Pol'shchi: Narays Problematyky // *Materialy Mizhnarodnoi Naukovo-Kraeznavchoi Konferentsii, prysvyachenoï 150-littyu vid dnia narodzhennya klasyka anhlijs'koi literatury Dzhozefa Konrada (27-29 veresnya 2007, m. Berdychiv)*. – Zhytomyr: M. Kosenko, 2007.
9. Najder Z. Conrad and Ukraine: a Note // *The Conradian*. – Volume 23. – Autumn 1998. – number 2.
10. Omelan L. "How short his years and how clear his vision!": Adam Pulman, Conrad's unforgettable tutor // *"Conradiana, A Journal of Joseph Conrad Studies"*, Texas Tech University. – Volume 36. – Numbers 1-2. – Spring-summer 2004.
11. Sokolyans'ky M. and Tsybul's'ka V. The Ukrainian Reminiscences of Joseph Conrad // *"Vsesvit"*, Kyiv. – 1996. – Numbers 8-9.
12. Stape J. *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad*. – London, 2008.
13. Syroczyński L. *From Fifty Years Ago: the Reminiscences of the Former Student of Kiev University Leon Syroczyński, a Professor of the Polytechnic School in Lwów*. – Lwów: Drukarnia Polska, 1914.
14. Tsybul's'ka V. The steppes like the sea and the sea like the steppes // *"Prapor"*, Kharkiv. – 1974. – Number 8.