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Joseph Conrad, Ewa Kuryluk and "The Places of Transition": Transnational Modernism in Contemporary Polish Women's Writing

Abstract: This article aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on revitalizing modernist sensibilities in contemporary literature and art. Through an analysis of the prose of Ewa Kuryluk, a Polish and Anglophone writer, I examine how her intertextual engagement with Joseph Conrad allows her to navigate her dual national and artistic identity. Kuryluk's reinterpretation of Conrad's literary imagery, such as his use of the sunset motif, exemplifies a modernist symmetrical subjectivity, which aligns with Richard Sheppard's broader theoretical insights. This form of subjectivity, stretched between complementary yet contradictory poles, offers a transnational perspective on intertextual connections with modernism, taking into account the tension between center and periphery – both in terms of national literary traditions and the positioning of women's writing within the literary canon.

Keywords: Modernism; Intertextuality; Transnationalism; Subjectivity; Ewa Kuryluk; Joseph Conrad.

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Trans-/national Modernism(s)

The afterlife of modernism[1] is palpable to any reader visiting a bookstore in Poland, glancing at new Polish translations of some of the canonical modernist works: Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Franz Kafka's *The Diaries*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Katherine Mansfield's *Collected Stories*, Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*[2]. But what "the common reader" might not even be aware of is that what he/she encounters is just a small part of the broader, international phenomenon which has already been problematized in humanities and variously named as "new" or "contemporary" modernism, neomodernism, metamodernism[3] and which manifests itself not only explicitly in retranslations, but also implicitly in contemporary literary practices based on both intertextual references to texts of the past and the continuation of "the aura, that is to say the recognizable narrative tools and stylistic devices, of modernist literature"[4]. In a multitude of different perspectives, relatively little

attention has been devoted to a particular connection and concrete artistic imagination through which the woman-author dialogues with the legacy of modernism[5]. The legacy that, after all, oscillates between a strong male voice (Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Mann etc.) and the beginning of an emancipatory voice for women (Woolf, Nin, Mansfield etc.) and delineates one of the tensions constituting the internal structure of this period[6]. Additionally, the major part of the discussion around revitalizing modernism in contemporary female writing has been devoted to Western and English-language authors, like Jeanette Winterson, Zadie Smith, Dorris Lessing[7]. Eastern European women writers, and the Polish authors among them, are still being cast away to the margins, although their writings create a particular set of connections with the past, especially when seen against the background of socio-political changes and increasing reception of English-language literature in the post-communist literary environment[8].

What should be acknowledged before starting any specific analysis, is that framing contemporary women's writing in Poland within the Anglophone modernist legacy, raises the question of not (only) the "male" and "female" canon, the binary division which has already been contested in feminist literary criticism, but also about the relationship between national and global literatures, including the place of modernism as such. In contemporary research, the question of what we mean by modernism – what quality, value, set of characteristics – has been replaced by the question of whose modernism, to paraphrase the title of one of the chapters of *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, published in 2012, we have in mind. For even if we limit the field of study to literature, the tension between modernism and national literatures that depend on diverse political situations and socio-cultural traditions, still becomes problematic[9]. And yet, in Douglas Mao's and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's acclaimed text *New Modernist Studies* (2008), it is the "transnational turn" that is considered the most important determinant of the contemporary modernist studies. Modernism, as the authors stated, is a period of intense intercultural and international exchange[10]. However, the concern of the scholars raised by the tendency for modernism to be globalized refers to the situation where "the national" is absorbed to the universal, dominant Anglo-American model. A similar attentiveness is presumed by Polish scholar, Włodzimierz Bolecki:

> Indeed, almost all authors of Polish publications avoid as much as possible the qualification of the "nationality" of modernism and treat this formation (modernism) exclusively as a name for universal or at least pan-European phenomena. This perspective is, of course, justified and even necessary when speaking of general and metahistorical or comparative issues – key to the multilingualism of Central European culture – but in practice it most often serves to mechanically shift from general issues to interpretations of the Polish literature, which function as simple illustrations of modernism as a universal phenomenon[11].

But what happens when the oeuvre of a particular author, as well as his/her biography and experiences, refuses to

clearly qualify to one literary tradition? Ewa Kuryluk had emigrated from Poland to the United States in the 1980s, where she started her international artistic career. Now known as an autobiographical writer, she expressed her literary connection to the avant-garde primarily in the prose fiction of the 90s, and especially in her experimental novel *Century 21,* published in English, in 1992 by Dalkey Archive Press. In this afabular, intertextual and linguistically opaque prose, Kuryluk creates a string of references to authors such as Malcom Lowry, Djuna Barnes, Marcel Proust, and most of all to Joseph Conrad, who emerges, as a protagonist of the novel, as the leading authorial alter ego. Her dialogue with Conrad, an English author of Polish descent, cannot be delineated without considering the contradictory discourse surrounding his work: in his time, he was considered a traitor to the Polish cause (Eliza Orzeszkowa), a writer "who ceases to see the world colored by his own language" (Robert Lynd), only later to be "rehabilitated" as an ambassador of Polish culture to the West, whose work became an exemplary representation of national romantic and patriotic values (Wiesław Krajka)[12]. These rather radical discursive approaches are leveled by Zdzisław Najder, who points to the fact that Conrad's work can be seen as "at the same time national (or multinational) and not alien; as written in English, suffused with Polish and French elements, and essentially European"[13].

The aim of this article is to see how through Conrad's literary imagination, Kuryluk understands and combines her own double national and artistic identity. The image of an "in-between" subject, who simultaneously seeks completion and intelligibility, can be reflected in a broader modernist intellectual thought that was marked by Richard Sheppard as "the sense of crisis" and involved two poles: "at one there is a sense of extreme constriction and at the other there is a sense of being swept along or assailed by raw, unleashed energy"[14]. The idea of the subjectivity that is stretched onto symmetrical places, resurrected by Kuryluk herself, turns out to outline not so much the universal, as Bolecki feared, but the transnational field of reflection on oneself and one's personal past, which can only be fulfilled in transition.

Between Conrad and Konrad in Kuryluk's *Century 21*

The protagonist of *Century 21*, Joseph Conrad, is the most interesting of Ewa Kuryluk's artistic alter egos. For already an intuitive comparison of these two creative personalities, the poetics of their texts, but also the place they occupy in the literary field builds a number of tensions. Kuryluk is definitely a non-mainstream author: appreciated, but little known in Poland, especially due to the emigration and unfavorable political and social atmosphere – because of her Jewish heritage and her parents' difficult wartime experiences, she had to face the post-memorial trauma against the Polish anti-Semitism of the 1960s. Conrad is a canonical writer, and his *Heart of Darkness* is read as a compulsory school reading. Kuryluk in her work reaches for the tools of experimentation, Conrad, from an aesthetic perspective, is a predominantly realistic writer; Kuryluk is close to feminism, Conrad – definitely not[15]. However, the works of both are set against the backdrop of important historical events: for

Kuryluk, it is World War II, the Cold War, the War in Afghanistan, communism in Poland, including March '68; for Conrad: partitions, World War I and the restoration of Poland's independence, and, of course, the 19th-century colonial expansion. If one were to compare their biographies, they are bound together by their Polish origins and emigration, building an English-language literary career, growing up in the orbit of key political changes in Poland and later measuring themselves against the consequences of aggressive Western policies. In her meta-critical work, Kuryluk calls her own career – "Conradian career" (*kariera Conrada*). In one of her interviews, asked why she had been writing in English, she answered:

> I finished *Century 21* in 1988. I had been living in America for seven years and, I had just received the news that my passport would no longer be renewed. At the time, I predicted that the Polish People's Republic would fall no sooner than around 2010. I had no chance to publish in Poland, and I didn't want to be stuck in the emigration circuit, because I'm not suited to it. Since childhood, I have been a cosmopolitan, a person unaccustomed to sitting in any small ghetto. Therefore, I decided to write in English[16].

However, in her prose, in the words of her characters, she strips the question about national identity of balance and shows that, in fact, these are personal matters. The distance with which she surrounds herself in the interview, talking about the practicality of choice, in the space of fiction rests on intertextuality; when the author is secured by it, she can, in a different tone, intensely, even aggressively, describe the foreignness of Conrad. In the words of the protagonist of *Century 21*, Malcolm Lowry, she addresses Conrad, as if addressing herself:

> Your English, a Pole-made eng, is so slow, so *eng*. Really, it feels less comfortable than a marsupial bag […]. *Pan Józef*, take my arm and let's *polak* together to the tune of a polka, wash down the *polnische Wirtschaft* with a splash of vodka, toast the Lumumba heart of a Congo night, save a couple of savages – since we cannot rescue even a single Pole – and get killed in a preposterous protest staged by one of your patriots. Sweet Joe, you picture yourself a cosmopolitan, but you belong to Bydgoszcz city. And so it is. Malcolm alone understood the difficulty of entering the heart of anything if you're from the provinces[17].

This fragment is an excellent example of Kuryluk's poetics focused on the sound layer due to alliterations, consonances, paronomasies. The accumulation of the *p* sound (*splash*, *Pole*, *preposterous protest*), the use of Polish lexis and the themes raised in the semantic layer draw a reference to concept of Polishness, which is primarily associated with the uprising history – the important part of Polish national identity. Conrad, an inheritor to this powerful tradition, emigrates both geographically and personally, distancing himself from the values that literary discourse so strongly associated with his father, Apollon Korzeniowski. He was an acclaimed writer and patriot, who played a part in preparations for the January Uprising (1963), the

longest-lasting insurgency in partitioned Poland, that was aimed at regaining independence but principally organized against the Russian occupation[18]. For his pro-liberation activities, Korzeniowski was arrested and sentenced to exile. According to Wieslaw Krajka, the Polish name given to Conrad at birth – Konrad – was meant to refer to the national Romantic tradition, embodied in the actions of his father, but in literary history mostly associated with the works of Adam Mickiewicz: "Giving the boy this name may have been a conscious attempt on the part of his parents to raise him according to a Romantic-patriotic-martyrical axiological pattern"[19].

In the fragment from *Century 21*, Conrad is being inculpated on the basis of these romantic values – but in an ironic way distancing him from the traditionally understood national identity. And yet, the clear complex of the emigrant who tries unsuccessfully to break away from the national tradition invites considering of Kuryluk's "Polishness". The enigmatic "marsupial bag" is an autobiographical signal, for this was the childhood nickname that was used by Kuryluk's brother, Piotr[20]. The authorial indication is significant, allowing us to believe that Conrad is a figure representing the author's experiences, similarly torn between two linguistic and cultural systems. The end of the excerpt, in which Conrad's cosmopolitanism is ridiculed, is particularly self-ironic – as seen earlier in Kuryluk's interview, she considered herself a "cosmopolitan". The poetic nature of the passage would not so much be a symptom of Kuryluk's entrenchment in the English language, but of her need for constant linguistic experimentation, and therefore the appropriate distance to both Anglophone and Polish culture. Kuryluk admits that she feels like a foreign stranger in English; as the author writes in the introduction to the Polish edition of the *Century 21*: "The English of foreign writers is always a bit strange. On the surface it is breakneckly bold, on the inside it is lined with panic, like a traveler on false papers in a transit zone"[21]. Significantly, Conrad was too conscious of his foreignness and spoke with a Polish accent until the end of his life; this was not to be without influence on his work – in some critical circles it was even said that reading Conrad was like reading a great translation from a foreign language[22].

Modernist Artistic Imagination. A Sunset as the Place of Transition

The matter of national identity is presented both explicitly and implicitly through literary language of intertextual dialogue. The reference to the poetics of the *Heart of Darkness* is, however, best visible in different passages of *Century 21*, where Kuryluk reveals her artistic imagination. As she admits in another interview: "I am concerned with capturing the shadow and I go back to Plato's cave, I assume that the 'true image' is the inner image, I use the metaphor of the membrane or inner membrane on which everything is imprinted. I would like to take it, something completely immaterial, out of myself and show it"[23] .

It seems that Kuryluk's comment can be echoed by Conrad himself. In the preface to the novella *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, also known as *The Children of the Sea* – Conrad changed the title of the first American edition because of the racist overtones of the word "Nigger"[24] – the author represents, in his opening words, the definition of art as

"the highest kind of justice to the visible universe [...]. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence"[25]. In response to Conrad's call to pay attention to shapes and colours, light and shadows, let us pause for a moment at the descriptions in which these very elements come to the fore; these are at once seemingly the most sentimental and impressionistic landscapes in the history of literature, namely sunsets. Kuryluk's novel *Century 21* begins with an introduction to this special moment of transition from day to night:

> SUNSET IN THE PERSIAN GULF. The red sea of my mind. Sailors sleep, their heads dropped between their fists. In empty coffeehouses marble-topped tables doze away. An oriental flower fades in a male hand. […] A woman pretends to resist her lover. A woman resents his measured caresses. Ideals of love, old-fashioned blossoms of sentiment. A collage of carnal decay. Prostitutes count their money and their years. Surprises await readers who reject surprises, pristine images, tints of many books, anthologies of fiction with poetry, shrines dedicated to Lowry and Conrad, and the name Simone Weil knotted into Anna Karenina's black riband. In the Persian Gulf literature is born out of insufficiency and longing. (p. 3)

The twilight is for Kuryluk, as she admits in a conversation with Agnieszka Drotkiewicz, a primordial source of metaphors, the basis of Western metaphysics; it is not without reason that she points to its "foreignness", when "in English" she is captivated by "the sound of the short word *sunset*, heralding the night of nature: the season of sleep and darkness, love and death, sex and conception, but also, figuratively, the 'night of the mind', that is, time of superstition and obscurantism, violence, lawlessness, war"[26]. The author's words reveal her love of mutually related phenomena that occur in tandem: "the red sea of the mind" refers to both "ideals of love" and "a collage of carnal decay"; the nightfall is the moment when the old twins, Eros and Thanatos, awaken, and the oneiric atmosphere of sleeping sailors only emphasizes their modernist origins[27]. This opening paragraph of the novel is where Conrad is mentioned for the first time, seemingly – just nominally, but the very type of outlined image prompts the reader to return to another prelude, a memorable sunset over the Thames, in which the interference of phenomena, simultaneously paired and antagonistic, foreshadows the path of meaning of *Heart of Darkness*:

> In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. […] And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men[28].

The oxymoronic juxtapositions of "glowing white" and "a dull red", the contrasting impression of the light and darkness, calmness that is being interrupted, emphasize the importance of the boundary between day and night and create a distinct symmetry. It is the symmetry that marks the trajectory of so many readings of *Heart of Darkness*, especially the symbolic and postcolonial ones, juxtaposing civilization vs. barbarism, culture vs. nature, white people vs. black people; the symmetrical structure can be found in the narration: for example, in the symmetry of the two rivers, over which the reader observes two sunsets. As dusk falls over the Congo in the Conrad's story, we read that:

> The current ran smooth and swift, but a dumb immobility sat on the banks. […] It was not sleep – it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance. Not the faintest sound of any kind could be heard. You looked on amazed, and began to suspect yourself of being deaf—then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well (p. 46).

It is easier to find connections in this passage with Kuryluk's initial image of sleeping sailors, but what is also significant is that, in *Century 21*, we find a second sunset, observed, as in Conrad's, from the deck of a ship sailing on a river:

> A band of violet, tinted with rusty spots, occupies the lower portion of the sky and meets above zones of azure and shades of blue into which a clear lilac is infused. Tints of pearl and gray mottle through it, and where the red ball casts its reflection, the darker colors give way to pale yellow hues and sparkles of turquoise. Under the beam of light, water ripples obliquely, and shines with the dullness of an old quicksilvered mirror or a new razor blade. Against the lemon-colored glow, the sinuosities of the bank and all objects along the shore are brought out in black relief. In the crepuscular light, eyes are misled and perceive things where there is nothing (p. 67-68).

It is noteworthy that here the writer's diction changes: extended sentences, participle phrases, visuality based on the play of colours are elements that indicate a style of the 19th-century description, Conrad's poetics. The perspective that forms the intersection is that of an outsider, an emigrant who moves on the ship and who at the same time observes the threshold moment; the sailors sleep and the tables "doze away" (Kuryluk), enhancing the experience of "trance" (Conrad); "not the faintest sound" reigns (Conrad), because everything is based on "images" and "tints" (Kuryluk); the absence of sound and dynamics makes the depicted phenomena to seem as photographs evoked in words; at the same time, however, the imminent arrival of night disqualifies even observation, for night "struck you blind" (Conrad), dusk "deceives the eye" (Kuryluk). The annihilation of the senses positions artists in a different tradition than the impressionist one. Polish scholar, Przemysław Czaplinski, recognizes Conrad's description of the moment between day and night in existential terms:

> The narrator notes an ordinary phenomenon, that is, the coexistence of

> light and darkness. But this coexistence, mutual interfusion, struggle of the two elements is too much for us not to understand that it is the writer himself who draws our attention to a certain quality of being. Generally speaking, it is based on the fact that in human reality no place is exclusively light or exclusively dark. The meeting of the two qualities has the nature of a dramatic struggle, happening constantly and everywhere[29].

Czapliński's remarks lead to reconsideration of the coexistence of two contradictory predicates, like light and darkness, that are essentially complementing each other, like the pair of Eros and Thanatos. Not surprisingly, it is Conrad for Kuryluk who becomes the medium for this symmetrical imagination: at the end of *Century 21*, Conrad-protagonist admits that: "I took Malcolm's advice and went further than any other Pole – but not far enough. I should have dwelt a little less on the mysterious symmetry of love and death" (p. 210). However, "the meeting of the two qualities", to apply Czaplinski's comment to Kuryluk, is not just a "quality of being" for the contemporary author, but rather an essential moment for the creation of the subjectivity. In the first pages of her novel, one can read: "The same metaphors recur, […]. Ships leave traces on the surface of the water. Roads and railroad tracks meet and cross. Like all emigrants, I'm fascinated with places of transition […]" (p. 8). Crossing the border – literally referring to Kuryluk's (and Conrad's) "dual" national identity – here outlines a reference to the modernist philosophy of the subjectivity, which oscillates on the edge and ultimately creates itself in its crossing (transgression). As Richard Sheppard points out the dominant image of modernist subjectivity was precisely the "balance amid conflicting opposites"[30]. The conflict definitely had a psychological aspect – an oscillation between consciousness and what remains in its shadow – but it also overlapped with social and cultural conflicts. A similar sensibility can be found in Conrad's, who writes in one of his early letters: "Events are casting shadows, more or less distorted, shadows deep enough to suggest the lurid light of battlefields somewhere in the near future, but all those portents of great and decisive doings leave me in a state of despairing indifference"[31]. In these words, one discovers a vision of war, which is foreshadowed by the political scene of the time, but what is particularly noticeable is that in the face of various conflicts, Conrad is unable to take a clear position. According to Najder, the writer "saw it as a world in a state of multifaceted crisis; of change which did not translate into progress, as many of his contemporaries tended to believe; of overt and violent clashes between forces and tendencies none of which deserved full support"[32]. Perhaps it is only in the lack of clear identification, that Conrad calls "indifference", one is able to preserve a "balance" in terms of Sheppard – the balance in the symmetrical struggle of opposing forces.

Modernism and Symmetrical Subjectivity

The axis of symmetry is a landmark for the modernist subjectivity. What comes to mind here are the famous words from Joyce's *Ulysses*, when at the end of the

novel Leopold Bloom finds himself in an ambiguous sphere between the "The irreparability of the past" and "The imprevisibility of the future"[33] or from Kafka, who in one of his parables of the collection *He* states that: "His dream, however, is to take advantage of an unsupervised moment [...] to find himself outside the line of battle and rise, through experience in combat gained, to the role of judge of his opponents fighting each other"[34]. The symmetrical field of subjectivity is also temporal: it is defined by the past and the future. But what outlines the boundaries of I? "The self is the skin", writes Kuryluk in her later novel *Grand Hotel Oriental* (1997), in which the Parisian hotel serves as a place bringing order to the chaos of the inner world of the main character, who is lost in his own past traumatic experiences. In this fictional story, time and space, past and future overlap: "What's inside and what's outside are one and the same. The self is the skin. Time forges space. Space feeds on time. Memory and expectation meld together. Consciousness is a compass, a clock, a living map, time and space. The mind knows where it is and what time it is"[35]. Different times and spheres converge in the consciousness, and it seems that in this contemporary novel Kuryluk also echoes the modernist subjectivity, whose characteristics are determined by the experience, as Sheppard stated, of a rupture between the self and the world, and whose questions of cognition are overlaid by the uncertainty of physical world (including Einstein's subatomic theory). This acknowledged multiplicity of worlds reflected in the consciousness of the individual is also realized by Conrad when, in an excerpt from a letter dated September 29, 1898, he writes in a quasi-scientific manner:

> But, don't you see, there is nothing in the world to prevent the simultaneous existence of vertical waves, of waves at any angles; in fact there are mathematical reasons for believing that such waves do exist. Therefore it follows that two universes may exist in the same place and in the same time — and not only two universes but an infinity of different universes — if by universe we mean a set of states of consciousness[36].

It is the delineation of a certain event horizon that becomes the common element of Conrad's and Kuryluk's artistic expression. What is important, above all, is embedding this moment of subject-creation in the visual boundary (*the place of transition*) over which this transformation takes place. The artistic image, which Kuryluk described as "capturing the shadow" and reflected, following Conrad's path, in description of sunsets, could be compared to Eliot's famous concept of "objective correlative". He defines it as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of the *particular* emotion"[37]. The sunset which, in Eliot's understanding, is the "sensory experience", evokes a certain emotion, however the significant difference in the concept of Kuryluk is that it is in fact an intimate, not objective, "correlate", which reveals its personal charge in the intertextual dialogue. Capturing the shadow means capturing one's own shadow – one's twin: it creates a subject-forming model in which becoming oneself, especially when it comes to the emigration experience, can take place only in duality, in dialogue; not so much with oneself, but with the Other. What is especially visible in modernist

poetics, is the balancing on the edge, the sharpening of the axis within which transgression takes place, sometimes violently and traumatically – this axis is nothing but a "Kampfline" as Kafka calls it but also, especially for the emigrant, the "place of transition", to use Kuryluk's term.

Kuryluk and Conrad emigrate from Poland at the time of important political events. However, their motivations for leaving the country are not political, but primarily personal. In the lack of unequivocal identification with Polish culture, there is a chance to transcend the limits of self-knowledge and an affirmative approach to dialogue with the modernist tradition – the tradition that is equally, as Walkowitz and Mao pointed out, trans-national. Modernism reflected through trans-national perspective, that artistically rests on inter-textual dialogue, presents opportunities for intergenerational and intercultural colligations. In Kuryluk's case, what is both transnational and modernist, linking Poland to the broader West, concerns the model of identity placed in-between two poles. The emigrant subject stands for Kuryluk "in transition" even linguistically: both in the sense of lexical interference of different languages and intertextual connections that appeared in the text. In this case then, transnational modernism would be connected mostly to the artistic representation of modernist subjectivity that, as Richard Sheppard pointed out, emerges as the response to the times of epistemological, esthetical and ethical crisis that marked the turn of the 20th century.

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Notes

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2. All translations, with the exception of *Nightwood* (which appeared in Poland for the first time), have been published by the Officyna publishing house in Łódz: Marcel Proust, *W poszukiwaniu utraconego czasu*, Krystyna Rodowska, Jacek Giszczak, Tomasz Swoboda (trans.), V. I-III, Łódź 2018-2022; Franz Kafka, *Dzienniki*, Łukasz Musiał (trans.), Łódź 2022; James Joyce, *Ulisses*, Maciej Świerkocki (trans.), Łódź 2021; Katherine Mansfield, *Opowiadania*, Magda Heydel (trans.), Łódź 2020; Djuna Barnes, *Ostępy nocy*, Marcin Szuster (trans.), Wrocław, Ossolineum, 2018; Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, Maciej Świerkocki (trans.), Łódź 2023; Virginia Woolf, *Pani Dalloway*, Magda Heydel (trans.), Łódź 2023.

3. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz explain "new modernism" as critical project which seems "to have arisen from diverse quarters; to have found a stimulus in a new journal (Modernism/Modernity); to have come into focus as the title of a conference (the inaugural meeting of the Modernist Studies Association); and thereafter to have been certified as a coherent trend by a prominent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education. It is clear, nonetheless, that the rubric encompasses at least two significant enterprises: one that reconsiders the definitions, locations, and producers of "modernism" and another that applies new approaches and methodologies to "modernist" works". See. Douglas Mao, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New,* in Douglas Mao, Rebecca L. Walkowitz (eds.), *Bad Modernisms*, Durham&London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 1. See also: *The Contemporaneity of Modernism. Literature, Media, Culture*, Michael D'Arcy, Mathias Nilges (eds.), London, Routledge, 2016. Metamodernism is the term coined by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin Van den Akker in their article "Notes on Metamodernism", *Journal of Aesthetics& Culture* 2010, V. 2, p. 1-14. "Neomodernism" or "retromodernism" is used by Monica Latham in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism. Rewriting Mrs. Dalloway*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

4. Monica Latham, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

5. I can point to one scholarly work devoted to women writers' relation to modernism: Paige Reynolds's *Modernism in Irish Women's Contemporary Writing*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2023. A special issue of *Feminist Modernist Studies* on the topic of "Modernist Legacies/ Contemporary Women" is going to be published in the summer of 2025.

6. See f.e. Peter Childs, *Modernism*, sec. ed., London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 3-14. The new modernist studies offered a perspective that confronted the misogyny of the period with its emancipatory potential as the source of conversations about gender in literature. Modernism was highlighted as a moment that sought to disrupt taken for granted assumptions, transforming the idea of modernity from an uncritical teleology of Western progress and the ideal of reason to a signal of the ambivalent, the crisis, the contradictory. See R. Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, London, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 14; and also: S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, *No Man's Land. The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 1, 2, New Haven, London, Yale University Press 1987, 1988; *The Gender of Modernism. A Critical Anthology*, ed. by B. Kime Scott, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press 1990, p. 1-18.

7. See f.e. Laura Marcus, *The legacies of modernism*, in Morag Shiach (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007.

8. In Poland, the last decade of the 20th century – the time of debuts of many female writers – is marked by a large number of books translated, mainly from English. See Zob. Przemysław Czapliński, Piotr Śliwiński, "Bogactwo i chaos. O tłumaczach i tłumaczeniach", *Megaron* 1996, no. 10, p. 16-18.

9. See. Mark Wollaeger, Matt Eatough (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of global modernisms*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012.

10. Douglas Mao, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies", *PMLA* 2008, Vol. 123, no. 3, p. 737-748.

11. Włodzimierz Bolecki, *Modalności modernizmu. Studia, analizy, interpretacje*, Warszawa, IBL PAN 2012, p. 9. Original text: „Niemal wszyscy autorzy polskich publikacji unikają bowiem jak ognia kwalifikacji „narodowości" modernizmu i traktują tę formację (modernizm) wyłącznie jako nazwę zjawisk uniwersalnych lub co najmniej paneuropejskich. Ta perspektywa jest oczywiście uzasadniona, a nawet konieczna, gdy mowa jest o zagadnieniach ogólnych i metahistorycznych albo komparatystycznych – kluczowych dla wielojęzyczności kultury Europy Środkowej – ale w praktyce najczęściej służy do mechanicznego przechodzenia od zagadnień ogólnych do interpretacji zjawisk literatury polskiej, które pełnią funkcję prostych ilustracji modernizmu jako zjawiska powszechnego" (translation mine).

12. Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Emigracja zdolności (1899*), in Zdzisław Najder (ed.), *Conrad wśród swoich. Listy, dokumenty, wspomnienia,* Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1996, p. 271-272; Wiesław

Krajka (ed.), *Conrad a Polska*, Lublin, Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2011. Robert Lynd in the "Daily News" (1908) stated about Conrad that: "A writer who ceases to see the world coloured by his own language—for language gives colour to thoughts and things in a way that few people understand—is apt to lose the concentration and intensity of vision without which the greatest literature cannot be made. It was a sort of nationalism of language and outlook that kept wanderers like Turgenieff and Browning from ever becoming cosmopolitan and second rate". Norman Sherry (ed.), *Conrad. The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Books 1973, p. 210-212.

13. Zdzisław Najder, *Conrad in perspective: essays on art and fidelity*, New York, Cambridge University Press 1995, p. 175.

14. Richard Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2000, p. 13.

15. Female protagonists in Conrad's works fit the stereotypical representations of female protagonists of the modernist time: they are either angelic or *femme fatale*. Polish researcher Monika Malessa-Drohomirecka looks at the relationship between men and women in Conrad in a slightly different way. In this sense, see: *Konwencje. Stereotypy. Złudzenia. Relacje kobiet i mężczyzn w prozie Josepha Conrada*, Kraków, Universitas 2017.

16. Lidia Wójcik, Ewa Kuryluk, "Jestem niezależna od mody i ideologii. Z Ewą Kuryluk rozmawia Lidia Wójcik", in *Nowe Książki*, no. 3, 1996, p. 3. Original text: „*Wiek 21* ukończyłam w 1988. Siedziałam w Ameryce od siedmiu lat, dostałam właśnie wiadomość, że mój paszport, nie będzie więcej przedłużany. Przewidywałam wówczas, że PRL upadnie nie wcześniej niż około 2010. Nie miałam szans na publikowanie w Polsce, a nie chciałam tkwić w obiegu emigracyjnym, bo się do tego nie nadaję. Od dzieciństwa jestem kosmopolitką, osobą nieprzyzwyczajoną do siedzenia w jakimkolwiek małym getcie. Stąd decyzja, by pisać po angielsku" (translation mine).

17. All the citations from Ewa Kuryluk, *Century 21*, Fairchild Hall, Dalkey Archive Press, 1992, p. 209.

18. See Wiesław Krajka, *Joseph Conrad w latach 1861-1869. Czy był polskim romantyczno-martyrologicznym patriotą?*, in Wiesław Krajka (ed.), *Conrad a Polska*, op. cit., p. 92.

19. *Ibidem*. Original text: "„Nadanie chłopcu tego imienia mogło być ze strony rodziców świadomą próbą ukształtowania go według romantyczno-patriotyczno-martyrologicznego wzorca aksjologicznego" (translation mine).

20. Ewa Kuryluk, *Frascati. Apoteoza topografii*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009, p. 42.

21. Ewa Kuryluk, *Wiek 21*, trans. [from English to Polish] Michał Kłobukowski, Warszawa, Twój Styl, 2005, p. 5.

22. Jeffrey Meyers, *Joseph Conrad. A Biography*, New York, Cooper Square Press, 2001, p. 209.

23. Ewa Kuryluk, Anna Nasiłowska, Ryszard Nycz, "Inna awangarda. Z Ewą Kuryluk rozmawiają Anna Nasiłowska i Ryszard Nycz", *Teksty Drugie,* 1994, no. 5–6, p. 244.

24. See D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, "Racism and *The Nigger of the »Narcissus«*", *Conradiana* 2011, no. 2/3, p. 54.

25. Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, New York, doubleday page & company, 1926, p. XI.

26. Ewa Kuryluk, Agnieszka Drotkiewicz, *Manhattan i Mała Wenecja*, Warszawa, Fundacja Zeszytów Literackich 2016, p. 12. Original text: „brzmienie krótkiego słowa *sunset*, zwiastującego noc przyrody: porę snu i ciemności, miłości i śmierci, seksu i koncepcji, ale też, w przenośni, »noc umysłu«, czyli czasy zabobonu i obskurantyzmu, przemocy, bezprawia, wojny" (translation mine).

27. The co-existence of love and death is an artistic concept that has been recurring since, one would like to say, the dawn of time, and I am thinking of the mythological origins of the two gods personifying these phenomena, such as the myth of Orpheus. Modernism, however, fundamentally changes the perspective on the coexistence of the these forces, leaning towards the psychic condition of the individual: the desire to preserve life (Eros) and the simultaneous impulse towards death (Thanatos) are the immanent aspirations creating each subject in Sigmund Freud's work, and this subject-oriented interpretation is here the most adequate. See Simgund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C. J. M. Hubback, London, The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922.

28. All of the citations from Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness*, Cedric Watts (ed.), London, Everyman, 1995, p. 3, 4.
29. Przemysław Czapliński, *Niebezpieczne arcydzieło*, in: Joseph Conrad, *Jądro ciemności*, Jędrzej Polak, Poznań, Vesper 2009, s. 126. Original text: „Narrator zauważa więc zjawisko zwykłe, czyli współistnienie światła i ciemności. Ale tego współistnienia, wzajemnego przenikania się, walki obu żywiołów jest za dużo, abyśmy nie mieli zrozumieć, że to sam pisarz zwraca naszą uwagę na pewną właściwość bytu. Mówiąc najogólniej, polega ona na tym, że w ludzkiej rzeczywistości żadne miejsce nie jest wyłącznie jasne ani też wyłącznie ciemne. Spotkanie obu jakości ma charakter dramatycznej walki, dzieje się ciągle i wszędzie" (translation mine).
30. Richard Sheppard, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
31. Jean-Aubry Georges, *Joseph Conrad. Life and Letters*, Vol. 1, London, William Heinemann, 1927, p. 80-81.
32. Z. Najder, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
33. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, New York, Milestones Editions, 1946, p. 642.
34. See Franz Kafka, "Er. Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1920" in Franz Kafka, *Beschreibung eines Kampfes*, New York, BoD 1946, p. 300. Original text: "Immerhin ist es sein Traum, daß er einmal in einem unbewachten Augenblick […] aus der Kampflinie ausspringt und wegen seiner Kampfeserfahrung zum Richter über seine miteinander kämpfenden Gegner erhoben wird" (translation mine).
35. Ewa Kuryluk, *Grand Hotel Oriental*, Warszawa, W.A.B., 1997, p. 63.
36. Edward Garnett (ed.), *Letters from Conrad 1895-1924*, Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1928, p. 143.
37. T.S.Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems", in T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood Essays On Poetry And Criticism*, 3rd ed., London, Methuen & Co., 1932, p. 100.