

TO FOLLOW CONRAD'S STAGE ADVENTURE

Review of: *Conrad's Drama: Contemporary Reviews and Observations*. Edited by John G. Peters. Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill–Rodopi, 2019, 515 pp.

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The volume *Conrad's Drama: Contemporary Reviews and Observations*, edited by John G. Peters, gives the reader an opportunity to investigate and trace the unique sources for research on Conrad's dramatic forms. The General Editors of Cambridge University Press's *Joseph Conrad: The Contemporary Reviews* (2012) decided not to include reviews of Conrad's published dramas and John G. Peters' edition complements this gap successfully.

John G. Peters collected reviews of three of Conrad's plays: *One Day More*, *Laughing Anne*, *The Secret Agent* and of one that has been translated by Conrad from Polish: *The Book of Job* written by Bruno Winawer. The book starts with acknowledgments, explanation of editorial practices and an introduction, followed by reviews and observation. The reviews are organized according to publication or performance and, within these divisions, geographically: United Kingdom, United States, elsewhere. This arrangement enables researchers to navigate easily in all directions and, simultaneously, it frames the field of research clearly.

The nature of drama reviews themselves appears as very complicated and multi-layered as they refer not only to the dramatic work itself but to performances, to the actors, the scenography or other typically theatrical features. Moreover, the drama *One Day More* was published four times during Conrad's lifetime and several times shortly after his death, which means that reviews of the play appeared at various points during Conrad's career and after, therefore one has to explain the meaning of "contemporary."

The editorial principles for *Conrad's Drama* consider drama reviews valuable to anyone working not only on Conrad's plays, but on the drama of early twentieth-century Britain or on modernist studies in general, as an aid to future scholarship. Many reviews present general remarks about novelists who turned dramatists, many

reviews give insights into the state of the British theatre in the early twentieth century. There are also some discussions related to the role of the drama critic in the success or failure of a drama, touching upon economic factors as well as on cultural differences. A significant number of critics praise Conrad as a drama writer but in a very specific way: the authors point out that intensity of conflicts and problems turns out immediately to be a tragedy or a melodrama in Conrad's plays. There is also a number of reviewers who focus on Conrad's intentions in his dramatic works.

The volume operates with very broad meaning of contemporaneity. Generally, the reviews are limited to those appearing before the mid-1930s so that they remain, essentially, contemporary with the first performances. Nevertheless, the volume includes also later reviews and even the occasional notices where mere notices are the only available source of information about a particular performance. Furthermore, this volume provides information about the history of staging the dramas after Conrad's death.

On such basis the fate of a play can be observed, for example, after the 1933 staging of *One Day More* at the Provincetown Playhouse in New York, performances tend to be student, amateur, or only semi-professional, as opposed to earlier staging, which were almost exclusively professional. Reviews and notices of later performances are listed with their performances in an appendix that becomes a very good source of knowledge.

Finally, Peters included in this volume a number of the reviews discovered in producer scrapbooks for the 1922 London performance of *The Secret Agent* and the 1926 Broadway performance of *One Day More*. These scrapbooks included no page numbers for the reviews and notices, and occasionally supplied incorrect attributions or publication dates. Due to the editor's efforts some of them had been corrected and identified however not all of them—that has been humbly admitted by the editor.

The anthology of reviews prepared by John G. Peters will appeal to many readers. Conrad's drama will undoubtedly attract Polish scholars as the last part of the reviews refers to *The Book of Job* by Bruno Winawer, the only literary work that has been translated by Conrad from Polish into English. The Polish audience receives a great source documenting the reverberation of a drama written by a Polish writer, who was very popular at that time in his native country. To say that for Conradians Peterson's edition will be an essential source in their investigation of Conrad's oeuvre seems an obvious compliment, but it will also be an invaluable tool in the hands of theatre historians and theoreticians, a precious guide to the twentieth-century tensions and discussions on art, aesthetics and sense of humour, as well as on politics. This book makes its readers ponder why Conrad's plays were appreciated in the States and disregarded in Germany, why the context so vivid to the recalled critics disappears from the contemporality of twenty-first-century perspective, and why the interpretation of the female characters in Conrad's plays differs so drastically between reviews—ranging from omission and neglect to placing them at the heart of the drama.