Zwischen Ost und West is a stimulatingly unusual polyglot of articles by an international coterie of established scholars, the hardback volume’s handsome cover arresting the eye with an oriental port scene of square riggers and sampans photographed at low tide and a photo portrait of Joseph Conrad in the monocled gravitas of his latter years.

Co-editor Elmar Schenkel, Chair of the Department of English Studies at the University of Leipzig and author of a recent life of Conrad written in German, Fahrt ins Geheimnis: Joseph Conrad, Eine Biographie (see review, Conradiana 41.1), is a Renaissance-style polymath who writes as easily about archery and bicycles as he does about Conrad. He is ideally complemented by his co-editor Hans-Christian Trepte of the University of Leipzig’s Department of Slavic Studies, who has written extensively on northeast European literature and the literature of east European authors in exile.

The inclusion of short biographies reveals many of the contributors to be luminaries eminent in their own European domains; e.g., Christiane Bimberg (Dortmund University), author of Reise nach Moskowien [Journey to Moscow] and Frank Förster (Christian Albrechts University, Kiel), author of Die literarische Rezeption Joseph Conrads in Deutschland [Conrad’s Literary Reception in Germany] (2005). Lamentably, only a couple are commonly known beyond continental Europe; e.g., Wiesław Krajka, (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin), general editor of the multi-volume hardback series Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives, and Mario Curreli, director of the Joseph Conrad Research Centre at the University of Pisa. Ludmilla Voitkovska is in her very person paradigmatic of the editors’ cultural ideal of global unity in diversity. A Ukrainian educated at the University of Odessa, she teaches and writes in English at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.
In the trilingual volume’s foreword in German the editors point to the burgeoning of Conrad conferences and publications in the 150th anniversary year of Conrad’s birth — 2007 and since — in Poland, France, Germany and throughout the English-speaking world. Capitalizing on this transoceanic spring tide of critical zeal, the editors’ unifying theme characterizes homo duplex Conrad as the east-west coincidentia oppositorum, locating him at the unrestful fulcrum of a hemispheric cultural balance.

A further nine articles in German, two in Polish (with editorial summaries in German) and seven in English — all with themes related to aspects of the eastern and western cultural contexts of Conrad’s life and oeuvre, gathered under one cover — comprise an eclectic multicultural critique unique in Conrad scholarship. In essays ranging in cultural foci from Anglophone nations to France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Russia and Indonesia, the authors not only confront the biographical and psychological dimensions of the divided cultural consciousness, but also tackle the historical and political challenges bedevilling receptions of Conrad’s canon:


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1 Schmerz [pain]: A play on Herz [heart] in the German title of Conrad’s novella.
Review of Zwischen Ost und West: Joseph Conrad im europäischen Gespräch...

(Radio discussion session, *SW2 Forum*, 30 November, 2007); and Mario Curreli, “Conrad’s Reception in Italy”.


The collection concludes with epigrammatic verses by the late celebrated Lublin poet Józef Czechowicz (1903–1939), “Pamięci znikionego” [Thoughts on the missing], with German translation by Hans-Christian Trepte: “Im gedenken an einen verschollenen”;³ and verses by Berlin lyric poet Johannes Bobrowski (1917–1965)⁴ — “Joseph Conrad” — as envoi. Zwischen Ost und West adds elegantly to a literary conversation just now beginning to span both hemispheres. Even for the occasional monolingual reader, the volume offers enough light to be worth the candle.

² “Erinnerungsraum” evokes specifically Pierre Nora’s Introduction [Ouvrage] to his *Les Lieux de Mémoire* [Loci Memoriae], 7 vols. (1984–1992), in which is described his concept of the lieu de mémoire, a site or realm of collective memory, concrete or abstract, e.g. a monument, architecture, ritual or literature, symbolizing a community’s historical heritage.

³ For ensuring the accuracy of title translations, Gratia Elmar Schenkel and Monika Majewska.

⁴ Born at Tilsit, East Prussia, the poet Johannes Bobrowski bore no known relationship to Conrad’s distaff Bobrowski lineage, but “came to believe [he was Conrad’s] biological relative.” (Elmar Schenkel, *Eastern and Western Perspectives* XIX, 2010, 455, cites Eberhard Haufe, 1998.)