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“Intelligent Volition” – Conrad’s Vision of Free Will in *Lord Jim* and *The Rescue* in the Light of Karol Wojtyła’s Anthropology

1. The Moment of Will

Included in the cycle *Profiles of Cyrenean* (1957), Wojtyła’s poem “Man of Will” scrutinizes in a fascinating way the inner ripening of free will:

Colourless moment of will yet heavy as piston’s drive
or sharp as a whip,
a moment that, on the whole,
encroaches on nobody –
or only on me.
It doesn’t ripen like fruit, out of feeling,
or emerge from thought,
it just shortens the road.
When it comes I must lift it up
and this I do, on the whole.
No place for heart and thought,
only the moment exploding
in me, the cross.¹

To the readers of Conrad’s fiction this metaphor of the silent explosion of a decision strikes a familiar note. It brings associations with Jim’s silent coming to the decision to face the verdict of the court, humiliation and suffering, as

¹ K. Wojtyła, *Poems*, transl. J. Peterkiewicz, Kraków, 1998, pp. 129-130.

a consequence of his escape from the “Patna”. His decision is altogether surprising for others but not irrational; it is, in fact, logically inscribed in his conscience of “the knight errant of the sea”, formed by the ideal of honour, justice and sacrifice. Jim’s later decision to start his life anew in Patusan seems to be a similar silent unexpected flash of will. Lingard’s deeds in *The Rescue* make him altogether a very different character from the Lingard in *Almayer’s Folly* or *An Outcast of the Islands*, more mysterious, more heroic and more unpredictable. As in the case of Jim, his lack of eloquence makes him keep the secret of his “explosive” resolutions to himself. Conrad wants us to see his characters not only think² but also explode unnoticeably with decisions against all odds. The “colourless moment of will yet heavy” gives Jim and Lingard the sense of integrity and certainty, especially in the moments of their defeat and humiliation. Marlow’s first perception of Jim shows him “staring into the sunshine”, “unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young man can look”, “as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on”. “He had no business looking so sound”³. Marlow’s remark is to induce an impression that Jim finds a peculiar point of absolute support in his dramatic decision. In *The Rescue*, the narrator reads in Lingard’s face the “remarkable expression”; his “eyes, as if glowing with the light of a hidden fire, had a red glint in the greyness that gave a scrutinizing ardour to the steadiness of their gaze”⁴. His “long, lingering look round the horizon”, in the first scene, is the look of a warrior before a battle; of “the man ready for the obvious, no matter how startling, how terrible or menacing”⁵. “The light of a hidden fire” in his eyes is his passionate willingness to carry out the plan of restoration of Hassim as the rightful successor in Wajo.

2. The Inheritance

This affinity of images and meanings in Conrad’s and Wojtyła’s texts is not accidental. Both drew from the rich tradition of Polish Romanticism. In a significant way both distilled from its messianic idealism such universal values as the value of free will illuminated by moral intelligence. The tensions and ambiguities of Conrad’s approach to the Romantic messianism of his father, Apollo, caused that beside his ironic treatment of his heroes, and almost neurotic repulsion to the idea of redemptive power of nation’s or individual’s

² P. Wiley, *Conrad’s Measure of Man*, Madison, 1954, p. 25.

³ J. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, Peterborough, 2001, p. 68.

⁴ Idem, *The Rescue*, London, 1969, pp. 9-10.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 11.

suffering, there were in him the devotion to the “lost (Polish) cause” and the attraction to the idea of sacrifice as an act giving special meaning to one’s life⁶. If it is true that early in his life Conrad was acquainted with Kamil Cyprian Norwid’s short story “Civilization”⁷, written after his apprenticeship on the sea, the first marine story in Polish literature praising seamanship as the moral school of human character, and with Norwid’s long digressive poem *Promethidion*⁸, it is probable that these texts instilled in him the essential message of this Polish Post-Romantic poet, namely the idea of “freedom of progress in the human person”⁹, which radically transformed Cieszkowski’s messianic idea – of Heavenly Kingdom to be established by the Polish nation – into the “gospel of the heart”, of the creativity of individual will manifest in work, art and acts of conscience. Even if Norwid did not fascinate him, Conrad was involved in a similar pursuit. The cruel vicissitudes of his heroes’ fate and the ironic stripping them of romantic delusions did serve the purpose of the extraction of the value of morally illuminated free will, of the “intelligent volition”.

What found expression in Conrad’s intuitive literary visions, was manifest in Wojtyła’s philosophical analysis. Similar concerns motivated Conrad’s creation of his heroes and Wojtyła’s philosophical analysis of “the experience of being a man”. Obviously their attitudes were not the same. Wojtyła eagerly accepted the Catholic identity very early in his life, which differentiated him much from Conrad the sceptic who developed an informal religiosity only as an elderly man. However, what they shared in common was the background of the Polish history and culture, and the inspiration with Norwid’s vision of human freedom, confirmed in the case of Wojtyła, suspected in the case of Conrad. What is more, there is all probability that, as a young student of Polish literature at the beginning of WWII, the future Pope John Paul II read *Lord Jim*, which for

⁶ K. Carabine, *The Life and the Art. A Study of Conrad’s “Under Western Eyes”*, Amsterdam, 1996, pp. 64-76.

⁷ S. Zabierowski, *Conrad w Polsce*, Gdańsk, 1971, s. 151-152. Zabierowski reminds in his book *Conrad w Polsce (Conrad in Poland)* about receptions of Conrad among Polish literary critics such as Tadeusz Filip (1958), who put forward the thesis that Conrad might come across Norwid’s “Civilization”, or Józef Ujejski (1936), who saw analogy between Norwid’s style of the so-called “resonance box” based on digressions and descriptions enveloping the main message and complications of chronology of Conrad’s stories. Zabierowski also writes about Marian Piechal’s (1935) claim about the similarity between the approaches of these two authors to work and art as possessing ethical and metaphysical meaning, and about Roman Pollak’s (1947) discovery of parallel between Norwid’s and Conrad’s visions of the moral pedagogical function of seamanship.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ J. Krasicki, *Eschatologia i Mesjanizm*, Wrocław, 1994, p. 77.

obvious reasons gained tremendous popularity in the fighting Poland as it struck the heart of the drama.

2. The Acting Man

Thus it is no coincidence that Conrad's intention – confessed in one of his letters to Blackwood – to show deeds of living men, “who bleed when pricked and move in visible world”¹⁰, coincides with the purpose of Wojtyła's philosophy of “the acting person” developing one characteristic discovery that: “Every action is an external manifestation of the person, even when it is wholly performed internally”¹¹. In fact, the core of human freedom makes every conscious action an internal act which can be expressed externally; “the person fulfills himself/herself in action and through action”¹². The paradox of free will, synthesising “I will” with “I may but I need not”, is that it emerges from the person's self-determination¹³. i.e. from the inner inter-relationship of one's self-governance and self-possession, which means that “the person is, on the one hand, the one who governs himself/herself, and, on the other, the one who is governed” by himself/herself¹⁴. “Being in possession of himself/herself man can determine himself/herself”¹⁵, which means that no one, apart from the very person involved, can intervene into one's conscience and decisions – without violating one's freedom. Self-determination is not naturalistic determinism. “Freedom in its fundamental sense is equivalent to self-reliance”¹⁶.

Self-governance and self-possession are expressed in Conrad's compact images e. g. of Jim's identification with and “imprisonment in” Patusan, as the external plane of his internal recovery of the “confidence in himself”¹⁷. so important to him after its loss in the escape from the “Patna”. It is also expressed in the image of Lingard's identification with his ship, his being “proud of his brig, of the speed of his craft, the swiftest vessel in those seas, and proud of what she represented”¹⁸. “His will was its will, his thought was its

¹⁰ Z. Najder, *Życie Conrada Korzeniowskiego*, Warszawa, 1996, p. 24.

¹¹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, London, 1979, p. 114.

¹² Ibidem, p. 154.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 115.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 107.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 106.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 138.

¹⁷ J. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, Peterborough, 2001, p. 303.

¹⁸ Idem, *The Rescue*, p. 10.

impulse, his breath was the breath of its existence”¹⁹. An accidental idiom used by d’Alcacer to describe Edith Traverse, the heroine of free will in *The Rescue*, indicates Conrad’s intuitive awareness of self-possession as the root of freedom: “... the woman of whom we speak is and will always remain in the fullest possession of herself”²⁰.

“Control of emotions by consciousness”, Wojtyła writes, “has a tremendous role for the inner integration of man. Feelings may outgrow their current understanding of man, which is tantamount to a breakdown of self-knowledge”²¹. Conditioned by immature idealism, vividly suggested by the narrator, Jim’s defection from the “Patna” may be viewed as the breakdown of self-knowledge and as his relative disintegration. Marlow speaks of Jim’s “confounded imagination” that “had evoked for him all the horrors of panic”, of the “extreme weariness of emotions, the vanity of effort, the yearning for rest”²². Despite Conrad’s anti-psychological declarations, these images look deep into the emotional confusion and helplessness of man facing an imminent disaster. At the same it makes one wonder whether these are not indirect reflections of his dramatic struggle with neurosis, the first signals of which apparently appeared in his escape from his first ship, the French “Mont Blanc”, and which was probably caused, as Najder suggests, by the storm which had torn the ship’s sails or by other dramatic circumstances²³. Similarly in *The Rescue*, Lingard’s experience of the conflict between his love for Edith Traverse and loyalty to Hassim seems to cause his emotional and moral confusion. Although difficult to judge, the failures of both heroes evoke in them the sense of guilt. Wojtyła writes: “Human actions when performed do not vanish without trace: they leave their moral value, which constitutes an objective reality intrinsically cohesive

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 11.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 68. Another explanation of the image of the vessel as the compact symbol of virtue, i.e. of man’s spiritual governance of himself/herself, is found in the text partly inspired by Conrad’s fiction, namely in Eliot’s “What the Thunder Said”, part 5 of *The Waste Land*, in the passage which reinterprets the mythical *Upanishad*’s commandment “*damyata*”, meaning “control”:

Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited beating obedient
To controlling hands
(T. S. Eliot, *Wybór poezji*, Wrocław, 1990, p. 93).

²¹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, p. 53.

²² J. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, pp. 106-107.

²³ Z. Najder, op. cit., p. 68.

with the person, and thus a reality also profoundly subjective”²⁴. What is more, “moral evil leads or amounts to, so to speak, non-fulfilment”²⁵. Even if Jim’s and Lingard’s decisions cannot be judged as morally evil, their consequences are tragic and harmful, also in the moral sense. If fulfilment means achievement of *eudaimonia*, i.e. felicity in emotional, existential and moral sense, non-fulfilment means lapsing into frustration and inner suffering. Jim’s and Lingard’s trespasses flow from their inability to cope with the tension between their heroic dreams and ruthless surrounding, which prevents them from self-fulfilment.

“It is the reality of guilt,” according to Wojtyła, “known from the moral experience that brings to light the fact that the reference to truth and the inner dependence on truth is rooted in the human will”²⁶. Jim’s obsessive “talking for truth’s sake”²⁷. after his failure, “as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind’s conception of itself ...”²⁸. seems to reflect Conrad’s own concern with moral truth of the situations he created. Conrad equips his heroes with “intelligent volition”, which can be related to Wojtyła’s notion of conscience’s “surrender to truth”²⁹. “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (J 8:32) – Christ’s augury is most crucial for Wojtyła’s *The Acting Person*. Although for a long time Conrad was far from accepting the authority of the New Testament, the echoes of these words indirectly reverberated in the literature his father had put before him, in the chivalric tradition which inspired him and in the atmosphere of his social class. In fact, the very search for truth leads his heroes, such as Jim, or Razumov, or even Kurtz, to the release of their inner potential of free acts of will. In *The Rescue*, the problem of Lingard’s liberation is much more complicated. However, as I intend to show further, his tragic failure brings growth in realistic approach to surrounding and, for all its dramatic character, the inward enhancement of his will.

The threat of disintegration, according to Wojtyła, gives a “better insight into the fundamental significance of integration”³⁰. Jim’s and Lingard’s relative disintegration, or even Kurtz’s radical one, makes them seek the way to reconciliation with themselves and with human community, from which their excess of dreams cut them off. Jim’s path to reintegration leads him to the

²⁴ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, p. 151.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

²⁷ J. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 60.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

²⁹ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, p. 138.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

recovery of “confidence in himself”, i. e. of self-reliance and self-possession symbolically expressed in his sense of responsibility for the community of Patusan. The acting person never exists in vacuum but is always involved in the so-called “participation” that manifests itself in the personal intertwinings of the coexistence and collaboration with other people³¹. In this way Conrad makes his hero discover the reality of the so-called virtue, which he absorbed from his culture as restraint of passions. Restraint for Jim means departure from his youthful romanticism and descent into reality of complex human interrelations within the primitive community of Malays. As Wojtyła explains, it lies in the nature of virtue “to aim at subordinating the spontaneous emotivity of the subjective ego to its self-determination”³². However, this does not exhaust the role of virtue, for, if it is authentic, virtue does not suppress emotive energy but makes the best use of it and “allows the will to secure the spontaneity of emotions”³³.

The integrating process of developing the psyche gradually produces the result that the will – guided by the light of reason (and conscience) – learns how by spontaneous reference to emotion, by a spontaneous move of attraction or repulsion, to choose and adopt the real good; ... how to reject the real bad.³⁴

Jim’s moral proficiency expresses itself in his spontaneous self-fulfilment through the love for Jewel and marriage with her. His tragic final decision should be viewed as the dilemma of Conrad the writer. Even if it came naturally, this solution could be dictated by an intention to bring out the power of Jim’s heroic “intelligent volition.”

In the case of Lingard, his self-fulfilment, through the involvement into the affairs of Wajo, seems premature and thus inauthentic. His noble intentions are shattered; on the one hand by his discovery of love and on the other by the dark side of Malays’ Muslim psyche. His failure is radical and irrevocable. However, Conrad seems not to intend to make his breakdown absolute.

In the last meeting with Edith Traverse at the grave of Jaffir, Hassim’s messenger, in the atmosphere of solemn immensity of the nocturnal ocean, Lingard confesses that he is looking at her for the first time³⁵. However, the metaphor of Lingard’s silhouette as a giant perceived by Edith against the background of a starry night suggests that it is also she who sees him in the new

³¹ Ibidem, p. 163.

³² Ibidem, p. 253.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ J. Conrad, *The Rescue*, p. 463.

light. For her he is now “the most magnanimous of men”³⁶. Earlier in the story he is described by Edith’s husband and d’Alcacer as the “Man of Fate”, which now starts to mean the “Man of Will”. His final decision to “steer North” in the opposite direction to Traverse’s yacht is dramatic. At the same time it carries the entire power of his resolution. Conrad seems to want readers to see Lingard as still alive, as living through the power of his will, in which his entire understanding of the situation is reflected. For it is not only his sense of guilt that casts him away from his first love. It is not only the fear of social convention that prevents him from breaking up the marriage that seems to be mere pretence. He is “one of us” too. Despite his low birth Conrad gives him the sense of honour and compassion. Thus he seems to suggest that a part of Lingard’s motivation is an intention to save the lady of his heart from scandal and infamy. In this way the power of Lingard’s “intelligent volition” makes him, in the author’s eyes, real and alive.

4. Reality

About Jim Marlow says in the end:

There are days when reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself to claim of his own world of shades.³⁷

It is Jim’s “pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct”, his self-inflicted death and departure from his love, his inability to consume his self-fulfilment, that make him submerge in the “world of shadows”. In fact it is the author who makes him do it. What makes him strikingly real, in Marlow’s eyes, is his fulfilment in the act of free will.

Wojtyła writes that “to perform the action brings fulfilment” and fulfilment means actualisation of one’s potential, i.e. the act of becoming characteristic for man “because of his/her personality and also because of his/her being somebody and not merely something”³⁸. The act of will motivated by the sense of moral reality is properly human act of being. Thus it makes the human person authentic and spiritually alive. At the same time, moral reality “has no existence apart from man’s performance of actions and fulfilment through actions”³⁹.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ J. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 372.

³⁸ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, p. 152.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 153.

Although morality is the axiological division between good and evil, in the act of free will “it shows also an ontological status, namely, an existential reality, *the reality of fulfilment in an action*”⁴⁰. The generous or dramatic act of human volition makes moral reality itself more vivid. That is why at times Jim looks so real to Marlow. That is why Lingard’s final decision has such tremendous power of expression of the crucial mystery of his life, or even of human life in general.

„INTELIGENTA WOLA” – CONRADA WIZJA WOLNEJ WOLI W *LORDZIE JIMIE*
I *RATUNKU* W ŚWIETLE ANTROPOLOGII BŁ. KAROL WOJTYŁY

Streszczenie

Koncepcja wolnej woli sformułowana przez bł. Karola Wojtyłę w *Osobie i czynie* znajduje swoją analogię w prozie Józefa Conrada Korzeniowskiego. Zwłaszcza jego dwie powieści *Lord Jim* i *Ratunek* są doskonałymi portretami paradoksów ludzkiej wolności. Bohaterowie tych powieści w decydujących momentach fabuły podejmują decyzje heroiczne, przeciwstawiające się presji zarówno otoczenia, jak i własnych emocji. Wspólnym punktem odniesienia dla Conrada i Wojtyły jest myśl i twórczość Norwida. Rzeczywistość wolnej woli jako aktu osobowego, przerastającego ograniczenia natury, w doskonały sposób opisuje bł. Karol Wojtyła w swoim dziele łączącym zagadnienia antropologiczne z etycznymi.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

