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**Book Review: George Z. Gasyna. Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise:
Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz.
London: Continuum, 2011. Bibliography. Index, xii + 276 pp.
\$130.00 (cloth); \$44.95 (paper)**

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George Z. Gasyna. *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz*. London: Continuum, 2011. Bibliography. Index. xii + 276 pp. \$130.00 (cloth); \$44.95 (paper).

George Gasyna's study of the exilic discourse of Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz represents an innovative analysis of two remarkable Polish writers who have rarely been considered together in the same critical study. With the help of a complex theoretical framework, Gasyna makes a connection between Conrad and Gombrowicz as writers on either ends of the modernist project through the fundamentally decisive experience of exile. While the nature of exile differed radically for both, Gasyna argues that shared experiences of responding personally and artistically as an "other" in a foreign culture or cultures allowed them to create an in-between space in which they were able "to domesticate" their surroundings and maintain a clear sense of creative and personal autonomy as writers (250). By employing Foucault's notion of heterotopia as the working frame for this "non-place of language," Gasyna succeeds in producing a thread that links together these two extremely different writers as participants in the modernist project's evolution from Modernism to post-Modernism and as *Polish* writers (144–78). Both achievements are significant, for they link Polish writers to the global spread of literature, exilic or otherwise, and they help bring together the work of these two men, whose personal and artistic experiences of and responses to exile have complicated their connection to Polish letters.

It is difficult to think of two more diametrically opposed modern Polish writers as Conrad and Gombrowicz, whether it be in terms of artistic sensibility or in personal self-expression. Gasyna's study, therefore, represents a valuable contribution to the field of Polish literary studies for bringing together two writers who previously occupied distinctly separate zones of literary existence. In doing so, Gasyna takes the tricky yet essential relationship between exile and literature, which so often worked to separate Conrad and Gombrowicz, and turns it into a useful critical tool for understanding the hybridization of literature, a phenomenon which Gasyna identifies as the byproduct of the profound and widespread experience of exile, emigration, and displacement in the twentieth century. The critical language necessary to make sense of the unique strains of the exilic experience, of being in between one's home culture and one's host culture, makes Gasyna's study valuable as a means of understanding not only literary outliers such as Conrad and Gombrowicz, but also of realizing the value or "potentiality" of the "other" as a distinct voice both within our own culture and world literature as a whole.

As useful as Gasyna's theoretical framework may be, his heavy use of the terminology and conceptualizations of Modernist and post-Modernist literary theory, while part and parcel of the book's focus, may not appeal to all readers. Although Gasyna makes valuable use of the quasi-literary memoirs of both writers, Conrad's *A Personal Record* and Gombrowicz's *Diary* and *A Kind of Testament*, which helps to bring them together as exilic writers, it would have been interesting to have had a better sense of how Gombrowicz was writing in response not only to Polish traditions but also against Conrad himself. It is, of course, extremely telling to read Gombrowicz against the backdrop of the Polish literary canon, but given the delightful commentary Gombrowicz maintains in his *Diary* on fellow Polish writers such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, it would seem quite natural to include his critical response to a much more immediate predecessor, and fellow exile, Joseph Conrad.

The connection or disconnection, as it were, between Conrad and Gombrowicz along the lines of the Modernist project, or shift from Modernism to post-Modernism, also begs for further examination in respect to the distinctly different position Gombrowicz occupied as a post-war émigré writer. Leaving aside the question of whether one can distinguish between prewar and postwar Gombrowicz, there is a world of difference between Conrad and Gombrowicz in terms of experience. Gasyna does touch on the fundamentally different nature of the exilic experience of each writer, with Conrad representing a kind of reluctant orphan of the non-entity of partitioned Poland and Gombrowicz a surprise victim of the *blitzkrieg* onset of WWII, but

the question of the essential dividing line between the prewar and postwar reality that separated the two writers remains somewhat under-examined. It is interesting to consider the South American sojourn of Gombrowicz both for the critical distance it gave him with which to write against Polish literary tradition as well as for the possibility to remain apart, as a Polish and European writer, from the devastating experience of the war and its aftermath. With this separation in mind, the importance of the establishment of a journal such as *Kultura* as a kind of life-line or outlet for Gombrowicz is also critical, for it offered writers like Gombrowicz, Miłosz, and Herling-Grudziński, among others, a *Polish* and an international intellectual community that was not really available to Conrad in England. Of course, as Gasyna points out, Conrad was happy enough to create a comfortable distance between himself and the literary worlds of both his adopted England and his native Poland. These kinds of critical experiential differences between Conrad and Gombrowicz, however, remain valuable for what they might reveal about both men as *exilic* writers.

As it draws together a broad range of Polish writers across a rather wide period and establishes an interesting series of tools with which to examine them, Gasyna's book naturally appeals to specialists in modern Polish literature who are interested in considering Polish literature in a wider, more global context. The dynamic and theoretical nature of Gasyna's approach to Conrad and Gombrowicz, who have rarely if ever been examined in such an extensive comparative study, also represents a useful bridge between Polish scholars and specialists, comparatists, and students of other fields such as Diaspora Studies, Post-colonialism, Anglophone studies, and the Modernist Project. In a way, this is the real value of a study such as this, for it is precisely the otherness, or being in "non-place," of both Conrad and Gombrowicz as writers that has kept them from their full critical appreciation, both together and separately, in the fields of Polish and Comparative Literature. In this respect, then, Gasyna's study of these two writers presents a comparativist project that is impressive in scope, valuable for its ability to speak to a wide range of disciplines, and original in conception.

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Michael G. Smith. *Rockets and Revolution: A Cultural History of Early Spaceflight*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2014. Illustrations. Selected bibliography. Index. 448 pp. \$34.95 (cloth).

Michael Smith has produced a remarkably rich study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fascination with the notion of space flight in literature, culture, and—ultimately—as reflected in technological innovation. In the 1860s, long before the advent of powered flight some fifty years later, French science fiction whetted the appetite of European readers, including many in Russia, for information regarding the prospects of space travel. Best known in the United States through the translation of Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, other such works were written by Henri de Graffigny, Camille Flammarion, and Georges Le Faure. As it turns out, even in the nineteenth century a remarkable number of publications were translated into Russian almost immediately after they appeared in the West.

Smith discusses in great detail the socio-cultural impact rocketry had on people's imagination during that period. This was only heightened, after the turn of the century, by the studies of the true space pioneers—Hermann Oberth in Germany, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky in Russia, and Robert Goddard in the U.S.—and by advances in the design and construction of balloons, which only in the 1930s were capable of carrying intrepid space pioneers on highly publicized, quasi-scientific flights into the stratosphere.

Professor Smith completed a prodigious amount of research in preparing this book. He con-