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Anthropology of Otherness, Anthropology of Polishness: Witkiewicz, Malinowski, and Conrad in the Tropics

In this paper I consider the modes in which Bronisław Malinowski and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz conceived of their Polishness against the background of British colonial enterprise, through their reading of Joseph Conrad's works, especially *Lord Jim*. In 1914, Malinowski, the founder of British social anthropology, and Witkiewicz, a Polish philosopher, playwright, and painter, sailed together to British Ceylon and Australia. During their journey, they read and discussed Conrad's *Lord Jim*. As a result of that journey, and with great debt to Conrad's writings, Malinowski published his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, and Witkiewicz wrote his three "tropical plays". While the events that inspired Malinowski's and Witkiewicz's respective works took place when Poland was absent from the maps of Europe (since 1795), the works themselves were not written and published until after the country regained its independence in 1918, thus spanning a key period in the country's modern history. Malinowski's and Witkiewicz's explicit interests as writers-intellectuals were, first and foremost, in understanding and recounting their experience of non-European otherness, of the tropics, and of British colonialism. However, as I will argue, a negotiation of their sense of Polishness forms an implicit subtext to these writings, pointing to a crucial question at the time, namely that of (new) Poland's place in the modern world.

My paper engages directly with the theme of the Congress in exploring the complex relationship between cultural centres and (semi-)peripheries. It examines how "minor literature" writers felt, simultaneously, the need to situate their national tradition within the prevailing socio-political paradigms, whilst realising the "otherness" of their experience. It also emphasises the mediatory role of Western European literature in first encounters between the European "Other" and the non-European "Other".

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