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All topical manuscripts should be directed to the Editor via online submission forms available at *RIAS* website ([www.iasa-rias.org](http://www.iasa-rias.org)). General correspondence and matters concerning the functioning of *RIAS* should be addressed to *RIAS* Editor-in-Chief:

**Michael Boyden**  
K.U.Leuven  
Faculteit Letteren  
Departement Literatuurwetenschap  
Blijde-Inkomststraat 21  
B-3000 Leuven  
Belgium

**e-mail:** [michael.boyden@iasa-rias.org](mailto:michael.boyden@iasa-rias.org)

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## HEARTS OF DARKNESS?

**Paweł Jędrzejko**

University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland

Hearts of Darkness: Melville and Conrad in the Space of World Culture 4–7 August 2007 Szczecin, Poland The Melville Society's Sixth International Conference.

Co-hosted by The Melville Society, The Joseph Conrad Society (UK, US), The Tall Ships' Race Szczecin 2007. Institutional Organizers: The Institute of British and American Culture and Literature of the University of Silesia in Katowice—Poland, Centre College—Danville, Kentucky, USA, The City of Szczecin—Organizers' Office of the Tall Ships' Races Szczecin 2007.

### THE IDEA OF THE CONFERENCE

Both Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski assumed that the existential human condition necessitates a 'universal squeeze of the hand.' Beautifully conceptualized by Melville, it is this idea of friendship as the sine-qua-non of existence that provided the obvious connection between the Organizers of the Conference and the Organizing Office of the Tall Ships' Races Szczecin 2007. All sailors know that at sea, all men and women are part of a commonwealth. At sea, friendship beyond prejudice is a sine qua non of survival: the liquid reality of the human condition, tangible to those sailing the oceans, unconditionally affects everyone.

In June of 2005 the Organizers of both events met in Szczecin and decided to cooperate. The Conference, concentrating on the oeuvre of the two greatest mariners in literary history, provided an intellectual backdrop for the joyful meeting of international sailors and fans of maritime culture. The result: a gam of rare scale and a memorable cultural event. The complementary character of the theory and practice of friendship proved unquestionable: with its 80 papers and presentations, the Conference, attended by almost 150 persons representing nearly 20 countries made a serious contribution to the understanding multilayered, complex, and deeply humane message of Melville's and Conrad's.

Organizing the Conference in the year 2007—the Conrad Year—the Co-Chairs of the Conference, Paweł Jędrzejko and Milton M. Reigelman, strove to create an opportunity for Melville and Conrad scholarship to go beyond the boundaries of national literature and to enter a serious humanist debate on the cultural heritage



of both excellent writers, whose contribution to the world culture has rarely been considered jointly. Such a unique meeting of international literary scholars focusing on common themes will help to promote individual and institutional cooperation among Conradian and Melvillean scholars world-wide.

The publication of two books inspired by the debate in the academic year 2008/2009—a tangible results of such a gam—will certainly be one of many of its desired outcomes. The exchange of e-mail addresses and telephone numbers, which inevitably ensued, will result in individual growth and, at a more general level, in the international promotion of Conradian and Melvillean Studies. It is hoped that the organization of the event in Poland will prove to have exerted an energizing effect upon Polish, German, and Scandinavian Melville and Conrad scholarship, but also de-center the traditionally 'national' discourses. To non-Americans, Melville often seems to be monopolized by American scholarship; Conrad, traditionally, is claimed by the British and the Poles. Conference Participants and those following the conference in the Polish media certainly had an unrepeatable opportunity of gaining a greater understanding of connectedness of Melville and Conrad and of the interconnectivity of all peoples.

The conference program and detailed information concerning the event are available at the conference website: [www.melville.us.edu.pl](http://www.melville.us.edu.pl).

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