

**Abstract**

‘Translation … isn’t everything’: Joseph Conrad’s translation of Bruno Winawer’s *The Book of Job*

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In 1921 Joseph Conrad reluctantly undertook the translation of a play by the Polish playwright, Bruno Winawer. This was Conrad’s first and only known translation of a work from Polish and it remained unpublished until after his death in 1924. The translation was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a success. Winawer’s witty play becomes leaden in Conrad’s rendition and he failed to find a theatre to stage it. Nonetheless, the translation has much to tell us.

In this presentation I want to explore why Conrad was reluctant to take on the project, his failed attempts to place it with a theatre producer, and the process of translation itself. By this time in his career, Conrad was acutely afflicted by gout. Consequently, he composed primarily by dictation through his amanuensis, Lilian Hallowes. This has an impact on the process of translation and at times allows us to ‘hear’ Conrad through Hallowes’ mis-transcription of Conrad’s words. At the same time, Conrad’s corrections to the typescript produced by Hallowes, show his attempts to move from a relatively literal to a more idiomatic rendering of Winawer’s script. As I hope to demonstrate, despite its failings, Conrad’s translation of *The Book of Job* provides a fascinating insight into his compositional methods and, more broadly, challenges the common assumption that Conrad was uninterested in artistic experimentation in the latter years of his career. In particular, I want to show how attending to the textual versions, rather than the printed work, can help us to rethink the value of this translation.

This presentation draws on my current work editing Conrad’s plays with Richard Hand for Cambridge University Press’s Works of Conrad series.

**Profile**

Katherine Baxter is Deputy Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor in the Department of Humanities at Northumbria University. She was awarded Ph.D. from the University of Glasgow in July 2003. She then worked for several years in London both as a lecturer and as a cataloguer and curator at the British Library. In 2007 She was appointed as Research Assistant Professor in Cross-Cultural Studies in English at the University of Hong Kong. She then moved, in 2010, to the United States where she was a lecturer at Stanford University before joining Northumbria University in 2011. Her work is characterized by her longstanding interest in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scholarship. Colonial and postcolonial literatures form the main focus of her research alongside an interest in literary multilingualism, and law and literature studies.