



Claude MAISONNAT (1945-2019)

« A voice ! A voice ! It rang deep to the very last » (*Heart of Darkness*)

Josiane Paccaud-Huguet

An eminent Conradian has left us. Our dear colleague and friend, Claude Maisonnat, Emeritus professor of Université Lumière-Lyon 2, died on August 18. Claude liked to say that he came from a modest family. If he retained one feature from this background, it is the simplicity which every one of us could appreciate in the human being, the great scholar and teacher he has become. Nothing, he would also say, predestined him to higher education. And yet, like his favourite author, one day he would make a jump and never stop on the path of his desire. Very early he fell under the spell of the musicality of the English language, which made of him the exceptional reader whose voice rang in our ears in conferences. In 1967, he spent a decisive year in Great Britain as a school assistant: it was not only the language, but the living culture irrigated by that language, that attracted him. He then made the decision to become a teacher. After the necessary step of the Agrégation in 1973, he taught in secondary schools where his guitar and beautiful voice were his best allies. He was devoted to his profession, even in its less glorious aspects like pedagogical tasks and examination boards. And this commitment will also remain a prominent feature in him later, at the highest levels in the academic profession.

Claude participated in an impressive number of thesis juries. Many of our young colleagues remember his immense culture, the generosity with which he would listen to those who, like him, took the uncertain path of a literary career. For he had something in common with them: the desire to listen to those written voices that make of us secret sharers of the deepest layers of our humanity. Another important encounter took place in 1995: he attended a seminar in contemporary literature in Cambridge, where he became friends with living

novelists like Antonia Byatt. This made of him a great reader and specialist of the contemporary short story and novel. But his favourite research field was of course the works of Joseph Conrad which he illuminated for us in many ways, never hesitating to call other voices to his rescue, like the voice of Jacques Lacan: another risk he took, but always at the service of the text. Many students remember his inspired readings, and some of them, because he crossed their paths, have become literary scholars themselves. This means that Claude's voice had a power of transmission. And it remains, alive, in his countless articles, and book chapters. The title of one of his latest monographs speaks for itself: *The voicing of textuality in the works of Joseph Conrad* (Columbia University Press, 2014).

Claude's academic life cannot be separated from his outstanding human qualities: his brisk intelligence, his generosity, his respect for others, his musical talents which made of him such a precious ally in the social life of conferences. Needless to say, he was also a gifted human being in his private life: he was very proud of his two children, H el ene and Florent, of his grand-children for whom he would compose memorable songs; and of course of Betty, his wife, whose musical talent he admired so much. The harmony of their life could be felt in their lovely home in Fontaines Saint-Martin near Lyon, full of Claude's books and of Betty's musical instruments. Claude now sleeps in the graveyard of his village, but his silenced voice is not asleep for those who have read him and will continue to read him.