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## CONRAD'S CRACOW

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**Abstract:** This article discusses Joseph Conrad's links with Cracow, the historic capital of Poland and a major centre of Polish culture. Conrad first came to Cracow in February 1869, accompanied by his father Apollo Korzeniowski, who — after several years of exile in northern Russia — had become gravely ill. Conrad visited the city a second time in the summer of 1914, having accepted an invitation from the young Polish politician Józef Hieronim Retinger, and (not without some difficulty) eventually managed to get himself and his family safely back to Britain after the outbreak of World War I. Both of these sojourns in Cracow played an important role in Conrad's life — and, one might say, in his creative work as a writer. One of the most vivid memories of his first stay in Cracow was the hero's funeral given to his father, who had been a victim of tsarist oppression. It was from Cracow that the young Conrad set out for France in order to take up a maritime career in Marseilles. During his second stay in Cracow (and Zakopane) Conrad made the acquaintance of many members of the Polish intellectual elite and took the decision to become actively involved in the cause of Polish independence.

**Keywords:** Cracow, Joseph Conrad, Józef Hieronim Retinger, the Polish Question during WWI

### 1

If we were to ask ourselves which of the Polish towns in which he had occasion to stay — Warsaw, Lwów or Cracow — exerted a particularly strong influence on the shaping of the personality and views of a certain Józef Teodor Konrad Nałęcz-Korzeniowski (known all over the world by his literary pseudonym “Joseph Conrad”), then Cracow would have to come first. In his volume entitled *Notes on Life and Letters*, Conrad writes about the role that Cracow played in his life:

It was in that old royal and academical city that I ceased to be a child, became a boy, had known the friendships, the admirations, the thoughts and the indignations of that age. It was within those historical walls that I began to understand things, form affections, lay up a store

of memories and a fund of sensations with which I was to break violently by throwing myself into an unrelated existence.<sup>1</sup>

For the moment, however, let us set aside this statement — made many years later, when Nałęcz-Korzeniowski had become an English writer — and let us look at the hard facts. Conrad first came to Cracow on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1869, together with his father Apollo Nałęcz-Korzeniowski, who was a poet, a translator and a political activist. Father and son lived at 6 (now 12)<sup>2</sup>, Poselska Street.<sup>3</sup>

Together with his parents, Conrad had been through extremely difficult times. As a young boy, he had had a very Polish, tragic childhood. His parents' ardent Polish patriotism had cost them dear. Apollo Korzeniowski, who had been one of the organizers of a Polish underground State, had been arrested in Warsaw on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> October 1861 — i.e. before the outbreak of the January Uprising of 1863 — and imprisoned in the Tenth Annexe (*Pawilon*) of the Warsaw Citadel.<sup>4</sup>

During his imprisonment, Apollo was visited by his wife Ewelina and their little son Konradek. A couple of years later, after being 'exiled' with his parents to Vologda (not all that far from the Arctic Circle), Konradek sent his grandmother Teofila Bobrowska a photograph of himself with the inscription: "To my dear Granny, who helped me take cakes to prison for my poor Daddy. Your little grandson — Pole, Catholic and nobleman — Konrad."<sup>5</sup> Years later, in a letter to the philosopher Wincenty Lutosławski, Conrad wrote:

My father was imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel and my childhood memories — a normal thing for our nation — begin in the courtyard of that Citadel.<sup>6</sup>

Having been sentenced to a term of exile by a Russian court, Apollo Korzeniowski and his wife Ewelina had no choice but to take their little son with them. The journey

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*. Ed. John H. Stape with the assistance of Andrew Busza. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> The house was later demolished to make room for an extension to the Town Hall (*ratusz*). There is a commemorative plaque on the walls of the back of the Town Hall (in Poselska Street) which is reproduced in Sherry's excellent book: Norman Sherry. *Conrad*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988 (1972), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Zdzisław Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*. Transl. Halina Carroll-Najder. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983, p. 27; Zdzisław Najder. *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*. Lublin: Gaudium, 2006, vol. 1, p. 62; Frederick R. Karl. *Joseph Conrad. The Three Lives*. London: Faber and Faber, 1979, p. 73; the question of the exact location of the house where the Korzeniowskis lived has been discussed by B. Bogunia and Andrzej Bogunia-Paczyński: "Apollo, Conrad i Kraków. Dwa przyczynki do biografii Korzeniowskich". *Kraków* 2011, № 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jerzy Zdrada. "Apollo Korzeniowski's *Poland and Muscovy*". *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2008–2009, vol. IV, pp. 38–39.

<sup>5</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., p. 18; Najder. *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., p. 46: "Kochanej Babuni, która mi pomogła biednemu tatkowi ciastka do więzienia posyłać, wnuczek, Polak-Katolik i szlachcic, Konrad".

<sup>6</sup> J. Conrad to W. Lutosławski, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1897. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder and Joanna Skolik. Lublin: Gaudium, 2006, vol. 2, pp. 40–41.

into exile was one long traumatic experience, as is shown by the following excerpt from a letter that Apollo wrote to his relatives Gabriela and Jan Zagórski in Lublin:

In the White-Stony [i.e. Moscow] the boy [i.e. Konradek] gets pneumonia; the doctor applies leeches and calomel. Better. Just then they start harnessing the horses. Naturally I protest against leaving, particularly as the doctor says openly that the child may die if we do so. My passive resistance postpones the departure, but causes my guard to refer to the local authorities. The civilized oracle, after hearing the report, pronounces that we have to go at once — as children are born to die (sic). And so we move on and all I gained with my passive resistance was about a dozen hours. Anyhow, God must have given me His blessing and consolation, for I was spared the need to be obliged to anyone here, even if only for mere humanity, and all my gratitude has gone to Him alone for having kept the boy alive during that hard journey. In Nizhni Novgorod Ewusia [i.e. Ewa / Ewelina] fell ill. When they started to telegraph there and back asking if she could stay to be treated, a few days passed and, although they refused the permission, we learned in the meantime about the change in our destination. Otherwise we would have gone to Perm and thence retraced our way for fifteen hundred versts. Anyhow, on 16 June we reached Vologda.<sup>7</sup>

Living conditions in Vologda — the family's eventual place of exile — were just as appalling, as Conrad's father explains:

What is Vologda? A Christian is not required to know. Vologda is a huge quagmire stretching over three versts, cut up with parallel and intersecting lines of wooden foot-bridges, all rotten and shaky under one's feet: this is the only means of communication for the local people. Interspaced along those foot-bridges are Italian-style villas on stilts, built by the provincial gentry who all live here. A year here has two seasons: white winter and green winter. The white winter lasts nine and a half months, the green winter two and a half. Now is the beginning of the green winter: it has been raining continually for twenty-one days and it will do so till the end. During the white winter the temperature falls to minus twenty-five or thirty degrees and the wind blows from the White Sea, bringing the latest news from polar bears.<sup>8</sup>

In January 1863 the terms of the couple's exile were considerably eased and they were transferred to Czernihów (Chernihov / Chernihiv) in the Ukraine. Their situation seemed to have greatly improved. However, this was not to be, as there was bad news from every quarter. The January Uprising had broken out and Conrad's mother, who had been seriously ill with tuberculosis, died on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1865, despite all the family's attempts to save her, leaving her little son to stay in Czernihów with his father. In the course of the Uprising, many members of the Bobrowski and Korzeniowski families had suffered or been killed. As Zdzisław Najder recounts:

"All life within us has come to an end, we are stunned by despair," wrote Apollo. His brother Hilary had been under arrest since 23 January; his father died toward the end of April; Robert was killed in May. Stefan Bobrowski was killed on 12 April in a duel provoked by his

<sup>7</sup> A. Korzeniowski to G. and J. Zagórski, 15<sup>th</sup> / 27<sup>th</sup> June 1862 (OS 15<sup>th</sup> June, going by the Old Style Julian calendar / NS 27<sup>th</sup> June, going by the New Style Gregorian calendar). [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder. Texts translated by Halina Carroll-Najder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 66; *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego, ed. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 137–138.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

right-wing opponents. His brother Kazimierz was put in prison. And while both families were suffering heavy losses, Korzeniowski felt helpless.<sup>9</sup>

All these tragic experiences took their toll on the little boy's health, as his father notes in a letter to his friend Kazimierz Kaszewski:

I am lonely. Konradek is with his granny; his first month away was at Kiev visiting the doctors, then, on their advice, he went to his uncle in the country. We both suffer equally: just imagine, the boy is so stupid that he misses his loneliness where all he saw was my clouded face and where the only diversions of his nine-year-old life were arduous lessons; he misses me in the clean country air, amidst amusements with his first cousin, his contemporary, under the caressing wings of his granny, with his indulgent uncle who has transferred all his love for his sister on to her son, upon whom he looks with tender respect as upon the child of an unforgettable and superior being.<sup>10</sup>

It was only in the February of 1868 that Apollo Korzeniowski — now a sick man — was released from his exile by the Russian authorities. With his son he went to Lwów (Lvov / Lviv), which was in the Austrian partition of Poland, then called Galicia. They spent some time in Topolnica (on the outskirts of Przemyśl) and also in Kruhel Wielki (in the Starosamborski district), as Apollo sought to improve his health, which had seriously deteriorated owing to tuberculosis and a heart condition. Neither Lwów, nor the rest of Galicia — which had been granted autonomy by the Austrians — found favour with Apollo. Being an old conspirator, he could not stomach the legalism of the Galicians or their loyalism towards the Austrian empire. In the words of the historian Jerzy Zdrada:

[Apollo Korzeniowski] tried to halt the decline in his health, but without much success. He renewed contacts and planned literary ventures. As he did not understand the situation in Galicia during the early days of autonomy, he was scathing in his judgements of people and political dealings.<sup>11</sup>

It was because he found the atmosphere of Lwów so intensely irritating that Apollo began to think that he and his son would be much better off living in Cracow. As he wrote to his friend Stefan Buszczyński:

Anyway, my second, if not my first object is to bring up Konradek not as a democrat, aristocrat, demagogue, republican, monarchist, or as a servant and flunkey of those parties — but only as a Pole: and I doubt whether that is the intention behind the present educational system in Lwów. One could write about it at great length — indeed there is much to say. It is very likely that I shall eventually move to Cracow: if I am to carry my life's heavy burden, it is certainly better to do it in the vicinity of that Holy Sepulchre which may become my child's cradle — his holy, royal cradle!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> A. Korzeniowski to K. Kaszewski, 10<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1866. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 105.

<sup>11</sup> Jerzy Zdrada. "Pomiędzy szyderstwem i rozpaczą". *Rzeczpospolita*. Warszawa, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2007 (supplement devoted to Joseph Conrad).

<sup>12</sup> A. Korzeniowski to S. Buszczyński, 5<sup>th</sup> / 17<sup>th</sup> March 1868. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 113.

A couple of months later Apollo informed Kazimierz Kaszewski of his plans:

Most probably I shall live in Cracow: at least there will be good schools and an atmosphere of tradition emanating from almost every building. If you have friends in Cracow, please mention me to them. Never before did I need so much to see at least a few kind faces; to clasp a few kind hands.<sup>13</sup>

Two days later he wrote to Stefan Buszczyński:

If God allows me to regain my health and my strength, then as soon as I leave here (during the last days of July) I'll be in Cracow in order to find a permanent place to live, as I've made up my mind to settle down there.<sup>14</sup>

Here we may note the special role that fell to Cracow — as compared with other important Polish cities — at that particular moment in history. In the words of Jacek Purchla:

This uniqueness of Cracow — compared with the Polish lands of the Russian partition (which were in mourning and suffering repression in the wake of the January Uprising) and those of the Prussian partition (whose population was being subjected to the ever-increasing pressures of germanization) — was then well understood. It was precisely why Cracow — which, despite the partitions, continued to be a shining symbol of Poland's past greatness — in the 1860s became the home of the 'Stańcycy' political movement. Deprived of its role as a regional capital — partly as a result of the activities of the Stańcycy themselves — Cracow at that time became "the spiritual capital of the nation". The conservative camp's choice of Cracow for this role was deliberate and was made for historical reasons, as well as being the outcome of political developments in the 1860s.<sup>15</sup>

In Cracow Apollo was to become a member of the editorial staff of the "Kraj" (The Country) newspaper, which had been founded by the "Red Prince" Adam Sapieha. In a letter to Stefan Buszczyński he writes about his future editorial duties:

Chłapowski was here yesterday; an understanding was reached to the extent that I promised to come to Cracow about the 20th; that I shall join the editorial staff; that I shall be *ex officio* responsible for Muscovy, the territories annexed by her, and for England; that if I deem it necessary I shall write one leading article per week for my section; that in case of need I shall not refuse to write literary articles, but shall only do so occasionally.<sup>16</sup>

Apollo Korzeniowski's first Cracow address was 6 (now 12), Poselska Street, which was not far from the offices of the "Kraj" newspaper (at 14, Kanonicza Street).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A. Korzeniowski to K. Kaszewski, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1868. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> A. Korzeniowski to S. Buszczyński, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1868. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., vol. 1, p. 214.

<sup>15</sup> Jacek Purchla. *Matecznik Polski. Pozaekonomiczne czynniki rozwoju Krakowa w okresie autonomii galicyjskiej*. Kraków: Znak, 1992, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> A. Korzeniowski to S. Buszczyński, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1869. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bogunia and Bogunia-Paczyński. "Apollo, Conrad i Kraków. Dwa przyczynki do biografii Korzeniowskich", ed. cit.

Unfortunately, when he and his son began to live in Cracow his health took a sudden turn for the worse. Years later, Conrad had the following recollections of those harrowing months:

Later in the evening, but not always, I would be permitted to tip-toe into the sick room to say good-night to the figure prone on the bed, which often could not acknowledge my presence but by a slow movement of the eyes, put my lips dutifully to the nerveless hand lying on the coverlet, and tip-toe out again. Then I would go to bed, in a room at the end of the corridor, and often, not always, cry myself into a good sound sleep.<sup>18</sup>

Apollo's last moments were recorded by his faithful friend Stefan Buszczyński:

[Apollo] was surrounded by his most precious mementos. His gaze was often fixed on his wedding ring and on the portrait of his wife. He had wished to see her mother. She was unable to visit her son-in-law, whom she loved like a son. She had not been given a passport. He prepared himself for death long and slowly, in complete spiritual tranquillity. Having made his confession and received the Last Rites from the hands of Fr. Walery Serwatowski, he sat up on the couch and, with a peaceful countenance that brightened into an unusually joyous smile when a friend entered the room, said, "I have finished everything. I have squared my accounts with this world. I do not belong to it any more."<sup>19</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

According to Aleksander Nowolecki, Apollo's last words to him and to Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki were:

It won't be long before I have to part company with you, my dear friends. It's easier for me to die because I can see you ... and because I'm dying on Polish soil, in Cracow ... among Poland's faithful sons ... close to the Wawel castle.<sup>20</sup>

Apollo Korzeniowski died on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1869. The funeral of this indefatigable fighter for the Polish national cause took place in Cracow three days later. It was, of course, reported by the "Kraj" newspaper that Apollo had hoped to work for:

Yesterday at six o'clock in the evening immense crowds gathered in Grodzka Street and Poselska Street in order to pay their last respects to the poet and worthy son of Poland, whose life has been tragically cut short. His coffin was escorted by members of the clergy, members of the guilds bearing their banners, professors of the University, schoolteachers, students, schoolchildren, members of the Society for the Advancement of Learning, the Friends of Education, the "Ants", the "Muses" and members of the Voluntary Fire Brigade. Several thousand members of the public followed, walking in silence. With the exception of a handful of its representatives, so-called high society was conspicuous by its absence.<sup>21</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

<sup>18</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 134.

<sup>19</sup> Stefan Buszczyński. *Mało znany poeta. Stanowisko jego przed ostatnim powstaniem, wygnanie i śmierć*. Kraków: Drukarnia „Czasu”, 1870, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Bogunia and Bogunia-Paczyński. "Apollo, Conrad i Kraków. Dwa przyczynki do biografii Korzeniowskich", ed. cit.

<sup>21</sup> "Pogrzeb śp. Apolla Korzeniowskiego" (The Funeral of the late Apollo Korzeniowski). *Kraj* 1869, № 70. [In:] *Conrad wśród swoich. Listy. Dokumenty. Wspomnienia*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1996, p. 185. See also: *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 129.

Almost half a century later, Conrad gave his own account of the funeral as seen through the eyes of a child:

In the moonlight-flooded silence of the old town of glorious tombs and tragic memories, I could see again the small boy of that day following a hearse; a space kept clear in which I walked alone, conscious of an enormous following, the clumsy swaying of the tall black machine, the chanting of the surpliced clergy at the head, the flames of tapers passing under the low archway of the gate, the rows of bared heads on the pavements with fixed, serious eyes. Half the population had turned out on that fine May afternoon. They had not come to honour a great achievement, or even some splendid failure. The dead and they were victims alike of an unrelenting destiny which cut them off from every path of merit and glory. They had come only to render homage to the ardent fidelity of the man whose life had been a fearless confession in word and deed of a creed which the simplest heart in that crowd could feel and understand.<sup>22</sup>

The subject of Apollo Korzeniowski's funeral has also found its way into Polish poetry. We see it in a poem entitled *Na śmierć Conrada* (*On the occasion of Conrad's Death*) written by Jan Lechoń — one of the "Skamander" poets — in a volume entitled *Lutnia po Bekwarku* (*Bekwark's Lute*):

Twój ojciec też miał pogrzeb wspaniały i chmurny,  
Szli za nim mrocznym miastem dostojni i prości,  
O bruk stukały buty jak greckie koturny,  
I wiedli go z niewoli do wiecznej wolności.

Mową prostą i twardą, chropowatą mową  
Mówili doń Polacy i cicho płakali.  
Nakryli go ojczyzną, jak czapką wojskową,  
A później się rozeszli i bili się dalej!<sup>23</sup>

Your father also had a funeral that was magnificent and sullen.  
Dignified in their simplicity, the townspeople walked behind at day's end,  
Their boots, like Greek buskins, clattering on the cobbled streets,  
And so they led him out of captivity into the freedom of eternity.

In their simple, forceful, rough-hewn sentences  
Poles addressed him and wept in silence.  
They covered him with Polish soil, as if with an army cap,  
And later, going their separate ways, they fought on! [Transl. R.E.P.]

Apollo Korzeniowski was buried at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow. The inscription on his tombstone reads:

Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski  
Ofiara moskiewskiego męczeństwa  
ur. 21 lutego 1820  
um. 23 maja 1869  
Mężowi, który ukochał Ojczyznę

<sup>22</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> Jan Lechoń. "Na śmierć Conrada". [In:] *idem. Poezje*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1979, p. 81.



Pracował dla niej i umarł za nią.  
Rodacy.<sup>24</sup>

Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski  
Victim of Muscovite oppression  
born 21<sup>st</sup> February 1820  
died 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1869  
To a man who loved, worked and died for his country.  
His compatriots.

In an essay written in the 1950s, Czesław Miłosz (who was later awarded the Nobel prize for literature) suggested that a monument to Apollo Korzeniowski ought to stand somewhere in Cracow:

Does Apollo Korzeniowski deserve to have a monument erected in his honour? Yes, he does. For his love. And, who knows, perhaps the best place for such a monument, showing the man with the boy, who owed so much to his father — above all his “inherited inclination” — is none other than Cracow itself. After his death, it was written of Apollo Korzeniowski that “he never wanted to be consoled”. The same could also have been written on the death of Conrad himself.<sup>25</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

Aged twelve and having lost both parents, Konrad Korzeniowski suddenly found himself in dire straits. Initially, he passed into the care of his grandmother Teofila Bobrowska, who informed Apollo’s friend Kazimierz Kaszewski of the arrangements that she had made:

My beloved orphan, in accordance with his father’s wishes, has been placed *en pension* with Mr. Georgeon in Cracow. The boy’s ignorance of the German and Latin languages prevent him from attending the second class; we hope he will go into the fourth class next year, since his headmaster and the teachers praise his industry, comprehension and application — providing God gives him health — to which end I shall devote myself in his free time. His guardian maintains that he does not know another child so easy to bring up and with a heart as noble as his [...]<sup>26</sup>

The boarding school run by Ludwik Georgeon — a veteran of the 1863 January Uprising — was located in the Fajl house at what was then 5, Floriańska Street. Conrad described his daily walk to this school in his volume entitled *Notes on Life and Letters*:

Into this coldly illuminated and dumb emptiness there issued out of my aroused memory a small boy of eleven, wending his way, not very fast, to a preparatory school for day-pupils on the second floor of the third house down from the Florian Gate. It was in the winter months of 1868 [sic!]. At eight o’clock of every morning that God made, sleet or shine, I walked up Florian Street. But of that, my first school, I remember very little. I believe that one of my co-sufferers there has become a much appreciated editor of historical documents. But I didn’t

<sup>24</sup> For a photograph of the inscription see: Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., or: Zdzisław Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Life*. Transl. Halina Najder. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007. See also: Sherry. *Conrad*, ed. cit., p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Czesław Miłosz. “Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski”. [In:] *idem. Prywatne obowiązki*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001, pp. 286–287.

<sup>26</sup> T. Bobrowska to K. Kaszewski, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1869. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 131.

suffer much from the various imperfections of my first school. I was rather indifferent to school troubles.<sup>27</sup>

During these sad months the young orphan received moral guidance from his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski, who lived in the Ukraine. The tone of his uncle's first letter — dated 8<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> September 1869, i.e. four whole months after Apollo's death — is dry and devoid of any warmth. Such a letter could hardly have kept up the distressed boy's spirits:

You know that the whole affection we felt for your Parents we now bestow upon you. You know too that your Parents were always worthy of that affection — so you as their son should be doubly worthy of being their son and become worthy of our love. Therefore you must try to take full advantage of all they taught you, and also of the instructions given to you by the friends chosen by your father and by us, such as Mr. Stefan B[uszczyński] and Mr. A. Georgeon, and in all things to follow their opinions and advice.<sup>28</sup>

In time, Ludwik Georgeon's boarding school moved to new premises at what was then (in all probability) 43, Franciszkańska Street,<sup>29</sup> where Conrad made friends with members of the large Taube family who lived in the same building. His other Cracow friends included Stefan Buszczyński's son Konstanty.

In the years 1870–1873 Konrad Korzeniowski lived at 9, Szpitalna Street with his grandmother Teofila Bobrowska, who on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1870 was made the boy's official guardian (together with Count Władysław Mniszek as co-guardian) by a decision of the Cracow City Court.<sup>30</sup> On 28<sup>th</sup> December 1872 Konrad was accorded the status of local citizen by the City Council — on condition that he first “be granted Austrian citizenship.”<sup>31</sup> However, all Tadeusz Bobrowski's efforts to secure Austrian citizenship for his nephew came to nothing.<sup>32</sup>

## 2

In the written accounts of Conrad's early years spent in Poland there are several questions which continue to be the subject of heated debate. These include the matter of the young Konrad Korzeniowski's health, the question of whether he attended a secondary school in Cracow (and, if so, which?) and his reasons for leaving the then

<sup>27</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., pp. 132–133.

<sup>28</sup> T. Bobrowski to K. Korzeniowski, 8<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> September 1869. [In:] *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder. Transl. Halina Carroll. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Zdzisław Najder. *Życie Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*. Lublin: Gaudium, 2006, vol. 1, p. 71; Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 133.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>32</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., p. 33; cf. *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*, ed. cit., pp. 192–193: “To the solicitor who, unsuccessfully, occupied himself with your naturalization in Austria — 80.50 gulden.”

Austrian partition of Poland in 1874 in order to take up a maritime career in France. Let us examine each of these questions in turn.

There can hardly be any doubt that, after living in very difficult conditions during his period of 'exile' in Russia and after the distressing experience of losing both of his parents, Konrad Korzeniowski must have suffered a decline in his physical and mental health. That this was so is shown by the family's correspondence. While still in exile in Czernihów, Apollo mentioned his son's bad health in a letter to Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki:

Poor Konradek is ill and receiving treatment at his uncle's country house; as to myself, without exaggeration, I doubt if I have spoken a thousand words in the last two years.<sup>33</sup>

In a letter written to Kazimierz Kaszewski at the end of the same month we read:

I'm lonely. My poor little Konrad's been ill for five months. Right now he's with his granny in Kiev, where he's being treated. Don't even try and put yourself in my place, because it's too upsetting: a father who isn't allowed to nurse his own sick child.<sup>34</sup>

Two years later, now writing to Kaszewski from the Austrian partition, Apollo reports:

My little one suffers from a new onset of his old illness typical of children: urinary sand forms in his bladder, causing constant cramps in the belly. In such a state of health it is difficult to make him do his lessons, and yet he is already eleven years old and for the last two years has hardly studied at all.<sup>35</sup>

Conrad's cousin Tekla (z Syroczyńskich) Wojakowska recalled that in 1873, during his second stay in Lwów, he suffered from:

[...] nervous attacks and very severe headaches caused by migraine. The doctors declared that a stay at the seaside might help him recover.<sup>36</sup>

It is, of course, difficult to come up with a firm medical diagnosis on the basis of such fragmentary second-hand information. All we can do is speculate. Zdzisław Najder is inclined to think that the young Konrad's symptoms might have been psychosomatic:

What was the cause of Konrad's persistent ill health? Apollo's mention of kidney trouble in one of his later letters is somewhat vague. And from several independent sources we learn that epileptic attacks were among the boy's symptoms. We do not know when the first one occurred and, not possessing detailed medical diagnosis, we may only assume that his epilepsy was psy-

<sup>33</sup> A. Korzeniowski to K.W. Wójcicki, 2<sup>nd</sup> / 14<sup>th</sup> December 1866. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> A. Korzeniowski to K. Kaszewski, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1866. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., vol. 1, p. 181.

<sup>35</sup> A. Korzeniowski to K. Kaszewski, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1868. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> Stefan Czosnowski. "Conradiana". [In:] *Wspomnienia i studia o Conradzie*. Ed. Barbara Kocówna. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1963, p. 88.

chosomatic, brought on by his painful experiences. The character of his illness explains, as we shall see, a number of puzzling aspects of Konrad Korzeniowski's young life.<sup>37</sup>

Moved by concern over the boy's health, the family did all it could to ensure that Konrad was given adequate medical treatment and got a good rest during the holidays. After his father's death, his grandmother Teofila took him for treatment to Wartenberg in Bohemia. In June 1870 Konrad was taken to Krynica (a Galician spa whose benefits were then being publicised by Józef Dietl) by his tutor and guardian Adam Marek Pulman, who was reading medicine at the Jagiellonian University. Similar recuperative journeys were undertaken in May 1871 and in May 1872. In the "Document" drawn up by his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski we read:

In May [1873] on doctor's orders it was decided to send you to Switzerland. Mr. Pulman accompanied you — you were to spend 6 weeks at the most — the estimated cost was to be 300 r. — for this purpose your Grandmother drew 200 r. out of the sum deposited with Mr. Buszczyński — moreover I sent her for the same purpose 100 r. — but, because of the cholera which was prevailing in Cracow, you remained away from home nearly twice as long as was intended and your Grandmother drew the remaining 150 r. of the sum deposited with Mr. Buszczyński. [...]<sup>38</sup>

This journey to Switzerland had a great bearing on Conrad's future life. We find a literary depiction of it in the autobiographical volume entitled *Some Reminiscences*, of which the following is a characteristic excerpt:

It was in the jolly year 1873, the very last year in which I have had a jolly holiday. There have been idle years afterwards, jolly enough in a way and not altogether without their lesson, but this year of which I speak was the year of my last schoolboy holiday. There are other reasons why I should remember that year, but they are too long to state formally in this place. Moreover, they have nothing to do with that holiday. What has to do with the holiday is that before the day on which the remark was made we had seen Vienna, the Upper Danube, Munich, the Falls of the Rhine, the Lake of Constance — in fact it was a memorable holiday of travel. Of late we had been tramping slowly up the Valley of the Reuss. It was a delightful time. It was much more like a stroll than a tramp.<sup>39</sup>

According to Conrad, it was during this holiday that the resolve to become a mariner began to take shape in his mind:

It was the year in which I had first spoken aloud of my desire to go to sea. At first, like those sounds that, ranging outside the scale to which men's ears are attuned, remain inaudible to our sense of hearing, this declaration passed unperceived. It was as if it had not been. Later on, by trying various tones I managed to arouse here and there a surprised momentary attention — the "What was that funny noise?" sort of inquiry. Later on it was — "Did you hear what that boy said? What an extraordinary outbreak!" Presently a wave of scandalised astonishment (it could not have been greater if I had announced the intention of entering a Carthusian monastery) ebbing out of the educational and academical town of Cracow spread

<sup>37</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*, ed. cit., pp. 191–192.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Conrad. *A Personal Record*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder and John H. Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 45.

itself over several provinces. It spread itself shallow but far-reaching. It stirred up a mass of remonstrance, indignation, pitying wonder, bitter irony and downright chaff. I could hardly breathe under its weight, and certainly had no words for an answer. People wondered what Mr. T.B. would do now with his worrying nephew and, I dare say, hoped kindly that he would make short work of my nonsense.<sup>40</sup>

Jan Perłowski, who was one of Tadeusz Bobrowski's charges, recalled that his guardian's ultimate failure to stand in the way of the young Conrad's maritime ambitions had initially been greeted with dismay and disbelief:

He was taken to task for allowing his fifteen-year-old [actually, seventeen-year-old] orphaned nephew to go to the ends of the earth — "to his certain death." Now the facts have proved the boy's uncle right. "I gave him permission to go," he said, "providing he took his maritime studies seriously."<sup>41</sup>

In the light of these facts we can safely say that one of the main reasons why Conrad's guardians agreed to let him travel to France and join the merchant navy was a well-founded concern for his health. According to the testimony of Tekla Wojakowska:

This overcame the objections of Bobrowski — his uncle and guardian — who until then had refused to countenance the idea of him becoming a sailor.<sup>42</sup>

### 3

Another contentious issue relating to the young Conrad's life in Cracow is that of his education. We know from letters that during the family's period of exile in Russia the boy was educated at home by his father, who was a poet and a playwright. In a letter written by Apollo from his exile in Czernihów in November 1866 we read:

You know, my dear, that I taught myself English following Robertson's method. So I know how much easier it makes learning. Konradek is another case in point: I taught him French by the same method and every day has brought new progress. The French governess is amazed by his knowledge of French after only one year of lessons. I myself worked out for Konradek a French method based on Robertson's, and adapted it to the Polish language; but it could also prove useful for other young people, particularly those who are already acquainted with Polish grammar, like Konradek.<sup>43</sup>

For as long as his own health permitted, Apollo taught his son not only French, but also several other subjects. While in Lwów, he did not send Konrad to any of the local

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> Jan Perłowski. "O Conradzie i Kiplingu". [In:] *Wspomnienia i studia o Conradzie*, ed. cit., p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> Czosnowski. "Conradiana", ed. cit., p. 88.

<sup>43</sup> A. Korzeniowski to K. Kaszewski, 10<sup>th</sup> / 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1866. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 107.

schools because of his concerns about their attitude to Polish patriotism. In a letter to Stefan Buszczyński he wrote:

Almost certainly I'll also settle down in Cracow, because the Lwów schools are pretty dim. It's a pity about Conrad's abilities, which are now going to horrendous waste, as I myself can't take care of his education any more.<sup>44</sup>

A question that has been much debated by scholars is whether the young Conrad attended a secondary school in Cracow — and, if so, which? St. Anne's or St. Hiacynth's? Conrad himself clouded the issue in an interview he gave to Marian Dąbrowski — a reporter for the Warsaw "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" weekly — in the spring of 1914:

I left Poland at the age of seventeen. My secret wish was to go to sea, to join the English merchant marine. Just like that: straight from the fifth form at St Anne's High School. When my father died I had lessons with a tutor. Finally my uncle-guardian yielded to my pleas and let me go. But only to France, to Marseilles.<sup>45</sup>

Here, however, Conrad makes a factual error, because in 1874 he could not possibly have left for France "straight from the fifth form at St. Anne's" in Cracow, for the simple reason that he had spent the whole of the previous year in Lwów — as is confirmed by an entry in the "Document" drawn up by his pedantic jurist uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski:

[In the summer of 1873] We decided that your Grandmother should take up her residence in Warsaw, and that you should be put in the care of your relation Mr. Antoni Syroczyński and that is what was done. Then I went to Cracow to establish you there and to see Mother off to Warsaw. In September, I sent you off to Lvov to Uncle Antoni. [...] For half a year's maintenance and education I sent through you to Uncle Antoni 350 r. [...] In February 1874 to cover your education and other needs I sent your Uncle Antoni 350 r. In September on my arrival in Cracow and Lvov in order to send you off to the Merchant Marine, which you had been continually badgering me about for two years, I repaid Mr. Antoni and Mr. Leon Syroczyński the 190 Austrian gulden for your maintenance during the vacation.<sup>46</sup>

On the basis of this evidence it would appear that — from September 1873 to September 1874 — Konrad Korzeniowski stayed in Lwów at a boarding school (for children orphaned during the 1863 January Uprising) which was run by his maternal uncle Antoni Syroczyński. His stay there was remembered by Syroczyński's daughter Tekla (z Syroczyńskich) Wojakowska:

He spent ten months at our house and finished the seventh form of secondary school. He was very well developed intellectually. He did not like the school way of learning, which he found boring and tiring. He used to say that he had great talent and that he would one day become a

<sup>44</sup> A. Korzeniowski to S. Buszczyński, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1868. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., vol. 1, p. 204.

<sup>45</sup> Marian Dąbrowski. "An Interview with Joseph Conrad". [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 196.

<sup>46</sup> *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*, ed. cit., pp. 192–193.

great writer. This, together with his sarcastic expression and his frequent critical remarks, was met with astonishment on the part of his teachers and ridicule on the part of his classmates.<sup>47</sup>

A more sympathetic reminiscence of the young Conrad's stay in Lwów comes from Jadwiga (z Tokarskich) Kałuska, who was then one of his acquaintances:

Conrad often came to our house and we had serious conversations. He read a lot, mostly about journeys. He wanted to see more of the world. There used to be a weekly called "Wędrowiec" (The Wanderer), which was Conrad's favourite magazine. At the town hall there used to be lectures given by professors from the University and we used to go to them. What interested Conrad most were lectures on natural science and literature. If he couldn't go to a lecture, he asked me to give him a summary of it. I don't know what he studied — I didn't ask. All I know is that he was a very diligent student.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, Konrad Korzeniowski was in Lwów for the duration of the 1873/1874 school year and could not have set off for France "straight from" secondary school in Cracow. Be that as it may, most of Conrad's scholarly biographers — beginning with Jean-Aubry — are of the opinion that the writer was a pupil at St. Anne's *gimnazjum* (grammar school) in Cracow. This hypothesis is supported by the testimony of Conrad's Polish friend Józef Hieronim Retinger (who himself went to this school) and also by Andrzej Busza, who adduces several arguments in its favour.<sup>49</sup> Zdzisław Najder for his part is inclined to think that Conrad may well have attended St. Hiacynth's Grammar School in Sienna Street, where Ludwik Georgeon taught French.<sup>50</sup> The whole of this discussion has been summed up by Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, who, citing the findings of Gustave Morf and Karol Kosek<sup>51</sup> — and adding arguments of her own — comes to the following conclusion:

Of all the positions that have been presented above, the most convincing would seem to be the view that Conrad did go to grammar school in Cracow and that this school was indeed St. Anne's. The arguments in favour of this 'educational hypothesis' are as follows: the statement which Conrad himself made to M. Dąbrowski, his successive reminiscences about the school (referring to the type of school it was and to its teachers and subjects) in conversations with friends and in his letters, the entry in the school's records stating that 'Joseph Korzeniowski' took the entrance exam and, finally, the sheer knowledge that comes across in his writing.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Czosnowski. "Conradiana", *ed. cit.*, pp. 87–88.

<sup>48</sup> Roman Dyboski. "Z młodości Józefa Conrada". [In:] *Wspomnienia i studia o Conradzie*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>49</sup> Andrzej Busza. "Conrad's Polish Literary Background and Some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on His Work". *Antemurale*. Romae–Londinii, 1966, № X, pp. 244–247.

<sup>50</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, *ed. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Gustav Morf. *The Polish Shades and Ghosts of Joseph Conrad*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976; Karol Kosek. "Wpływ polskiej szkoły galicyjskiej (1868–1974) na umysłowość i kulturę literacką Josepha Conrada". *Rocznik Komisji Historycznoliterackiej (Kraków)*. Kraków, 1988.

<sup>52</sup> Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech. *Joseph Conrad – spory o biografję*. Katowice: Deni-Press, 2003, p. 65.

It therefore seems quite likely that the Cracow heritage of which Joseph Conrad partook included the honour of being educated at the city's oldest grammar school, which was founded in 1588 and was also known as one of the Nowodworski schools. Its former pupils include many prominent members of Polish Society: Wojciech Bogusławski, Michał Bobrzyński, Karol Estreicher, Lucjan Rydel, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer and Stanisław Wyspiański — to mention but a few.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4

We now come to another contentious issue relating to Conrad's stay in Cracow: what were the reasons that lay behind his decision — at the age of seventeen — to leave his native (albeit partitioned) country for good?

One important reason that has already been mentioned was the family's serious concern over the state of the boy's health. Both of his parents had had tuberculosis (with complications) and had died premature deaths. Conrad himself was therefore a prime candidate for the same disease — and what the doctors of the day recommended in such cases was a prolonged stay in southern Europe.

There were also ideological and political considerations, however. Some Polish scholars in particular are of the opinion that a young man coming from such an ardently patriotic family might have felt ill at ease in the 'Stańczyk' Cracow of that time — which was prepared to cooperate with one of the partitioning powers — and might not have been able to stomach the then prevailing critical attitude towards Poland's past, which — strangely enough — was coupled with a fondness for public manifestations of patriotism.

Here it must be said that in drawing attention to the national oppression suffered by Poles during the nineteenth century, many Conrad scholars fail to make a distinction between the lot of Poles in the Russian partition (and in particular the so-called 'taken lands' of what used to be eastern Poland) and that of Poles in the Austrian partition (known as 'Galicia') — especially after the changes that began in Austria at the beginning of the 1870s and that gave Poles a large measure of autonomy. Speculating on Conrad's motives for leaving Poland, the novelist Stefan Żeromski laid particular emphasis on the matter of national oppression:

The impulse to look for something else, which cast him out of Poland for ever, may be measured by the intensity of the deeply tragic experiences undergone by the boy and his family. And he was by no means the only Pole who wanted to escape from that torture chamber. If Mieczysław Romanowski, that powerful and impassioned poet of the January Uprising, cried out in despair:

Orły, sokoły, dajcie mi skrzydła!  
Gruz i popioły — ziemia mi zbrzydła,

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Józef Bąk. *Semper in altum. Z dziejów Szkół Nowodworskich*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976.



Ja bym chciał w górze pohulać z wami  
 I tam na chmurze żyć piorunami ...  
 [...]
   
 A tu żałobą pokryte doły ...  
 Dajcie mi skrzydła, orły, sokoły!

Eagles and falcons, lend me your wings!  
 Rubble and ashes — the land repels me,  
 I would soar with you aloft  
 And there live among thunderbolts on a cloud ...  
 [...]
   
 Here below all is shrouded in mourning ...  
 Lend me your wings, eagles and falcons!

... then what are we to say of the feelings of this boy, who was surrounded on all sides by graves?<sup>54</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

Żeromski's hypothesis was taken up towards the end of the 1930s by Rafał Marcelli Blüth, who used the concepts of psychology to analyse Konrad Korzeniowski's motives for leaving Poland. His interpretation of what happened is as follows:

The plan to break his ties not only with his native land, but also with European culture in order to commune with the element of the sea and that of people untainted by civilisation, could manifest itself only after the trauma of orphanhood. However, it may have developed out of [...] a loneliness complex during childhood. Paradoxical though it may seem, here too a major role may well have been played by a certain instinctive psychological self-defence mechanism.<sup>55</sup>

The French biographer Jean-Aubry would seem to imply that the explanation for Conrad's escape to the sea was also to be found in the conditions that then prevailed in the Austrian partition of Poland:

It was natural that a Polish boy who had set his heart on going to sea should first turn his eyes toward France, for to take service even in the Mercantile Marine of Russia or Germany was out of the question. The national sentiments of a Pole toward those two countries precluded it. On the other hand, Conrad could easily have entered the Austrian Navy, and, at that time, Poles were actually rising to high posts in the dual monarchy. His family were thinking of sending him to the Naval School at Pula, where his career would not have suffered through his nationality, but Conrad himself had never entertained that idea. Indeed, up till now he had not thought about having a "career" at all. To him the important thing was to escape, at whatever cost, from a certain atmosphere, and to win liberty in life and action. This liberty was symbolized by the sea.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Stefan Żeromski. "Joseph Conrad". [In:] *idem. Pisma literackie i krytyczne*. Ed. Stanisław Pigoń. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1963, p. 155.

<sup>55</sup> Rafał Marcelli Blüth. "O tragicznej decyzji krakowskiej Konrada Korzeniowskiego". [In:] *idem. Pisma literackie*. Ed. Piotr Nowaczyński. Kraków: Znak, 1987, p. 257.

<sup>56</sup> Georges Jean-Aubry. *Joseph Conrad – Life & Letters*. London: William Heinemann, 1927, vol. 1, p. 28.

In the first substantial Polish study of Conrad — published in 1936 — Józef Ujejski had already drawn attention to the political aspect of Conrad's decision to leave Poland:

But then, who knows whether he would have wished to slip away if that reality had been a little less ... prosaic — if the time had been before 1863; or much later: for instance, if it had been the period during which the Union of Active Struggle came into existence? These, however, were the 1870s. It was not a time of heroics, but a time of national disarray.<sup>57</sup>

Fifty years ago, the hypothesis that Conrad's motive for leaving Poland was his desire to break with the Polish Romantic paradigm of national suffering found favour with Jerzy Andrzejewski, the author of the novel *Ashes and Diamonds*. Recalling a walk round Cracow that he had taken with his friends Czesław Miłosz and Kazimierz Wyka during the Nazi occupation, Andrzejewski writes:

And just then — in one of the little side streets near the Wawel castle — when our conversation turned to the subject of Conrad (not without some deeper reasons), I suddenly realized why the son of an exile — a young sixth-former at St. Anne's Grammar School, living almost next door to the then five-year-old future author of *Liberation* and *Acropolis* — had left his native land for good. He fled from the graves. From the coffins. From the Christian name 'Konrad'. From the 'Songs' that had been written over his cradle. From a certain ideal of doing one's duty in life. Was it that he wanted "the sun, a stiff wind and the thunder of hooves"? Of course he did! He was seventeen, for God's sake. He dreamt of long voyages. He wanted to be a sailor. All he did — and he didn't do it by halves — was what all of us want to do at some point in our lives.<sup>58</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

Recently yet another hypothesis has been put forward to explain Conrad's departure for the sea: the boy is said to have been encouraged to join the merchant marine by Julius F. von Ripper — a native of Cracow who was an officer of the Austro-Hungarian navy and who later became an admiral and commander of the Pula naval base.<sup>59</sup>

There would seem to be a need to put some order in all this speculation over the reasons that led Conrad to take leave of Stefan Buszczyński and his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1874 before setting out for Marseilles. Conrad's own statements, such as those to be found in the autobiographical volume entitled *Some Reminiscences*, must be treated with extreme caution, as they may have been coloured by hindsight. Indeed, they may be no more than literary images and may therefore not be a faithful record of the young man's real feelings.

The most likely (and most verifiable) immediate reason for Conrad's departure was the family's concern for his health. In all probability this was the only argument that could have swayed his uncle and guardian Tadeusz Bobrowski, who had the final say in the matter — and who, let us not forget, having been prematurely bereaved of

<sup>57</sup> Józef Ujejski. *O Konradzie Korzeniowskim*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Domu Książki Polskiej, 1936, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Jerzy Andrzejewski. "Trzykrotnie nad *Lordem Jimem*". *Twórczość* 1956, № 2.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Bogunia and Bogunia-Paczyński. "Apollo, Conrad i Kraków. Dwa przyczynki do biografii Korzeniowskich", *ed. cit.*

his wife and daughter, as well as his sister (Conrad's mother), would not have been easily swayed.

Another significant motive for leaving Cracow could have been Conrad's mental state — his feeling of loneliness, combined with a desire to travel and experience fascinating adventures. Given his age and his reading habits, such youthful yearnings seem perfectly plausible.

Much less convincing is the argument that Conrad's departure was prompted by the political climate which then prevailed in Galicia. There can be no doubt that for Poles, life in the Austrian partition was incomparably better than in the Russian partition. As a contemporary historian has observed:

The second half of the nineteenth century was a time when, of the three partitioning powers, only the Austrians provided adequate conditions for the existence of Polish nationhood.<sup>60</sup>

In any case, in Cracow Conrad moved in patriotic circles and may simply have been unaffected by the loyalist ideas of the Stańczyk camp. If anything, he may well have been affected by his memories of tragic experiences at the hands of the Romanov dynasty — and in particular his own years in exile and the fate of his parents and relatives. Here we may invoke the opinion of Jan Perłowski, who was familiar with that section of Polish Society from which Conrad came:

That world has now passed away, but what kind of world was it that Conrad, with his infant's eyes, began to observe when he became a fully conscious being? The memory of a child rarely goes back beyond his or her fifth year, but usually retains what happens later. Conrad therefore did not forget the year of the Uprising. Together with his parents, he was already in exile, and so his first impressions were not those of his native land. [...] Fear crept into the depths of his soul — the soul of a child. From then on, the feeling of fear never left him and sometimes turned into terror. And it was not just his imagination. He knew, and with each passing day became more and more convinced that some sinister, implacable power — the threat of total doom and annihilation — hung over him and his parents, as well as over all his nearest and dearest. This evil, all-pervading force could reach him everywhere. [...] Feelings of terror, hopelessness and hatred had already penetrated into the core of his being. He would never free himself of that emotion. The spectre of his nation's annihilation would now hang over him for the rest of his days.<sup>61</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

In the case of Konrad Korzeniowski, this fear was by no means unfounded. From a legal point of view he was still a Russian subject — and was thus liable for a very long spell of military service if he ever chose to go back home.<sup>62</sup> All his uncle's attempts to have him naturalized as an Austrian citizen had come to nothing, which meant that Conrad could not even avail himself of the status of local citizen that the

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<sup>60</sup> Stanisław Grodziski. *Franciszek Józef I*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983, p. 127.

<sup>61</sup> Perłowski. "O Conradzie i Kiplingu", *ed. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ludwik Bazyłow. *Historia Rosji XIX i XX wieku*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1965, p. 104.

Cracow City Council had conditionally granted him.<sup>63</sup> It was only after Conrad had become a British subject that he was able to 'go back home' and visit his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski, which he did twice — in 1890 and in 1893. On neither occasion, however, did he travel through Cracow.

## 5

On 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914, almost forty years after he had left for Marseilles, Konrad Korzeniowski — now one of the most distinguished English writers of his time and known as Joseph Conrad — was back in Cracow. He was held in high regard not only by the intellectual elite, but — by virtue of the publishing success of his novel entitled *Chance* — also by the Polish reading public as a whole.

Conrad was accompanied by his wife Jessie and their sons Borys (aged 16) and John (aged 7). During their stay in Cracow the Conrads were 'looked after' by their young Polish friends Józef Hieronim Retinger and his wife Otolia.

What made Conrad return to Cracow after an absence of almost forty years? There is no short answer to this question. First of all, it must be said that the Conrads had been invited to stay at a country estate in Goszcza — to the north of Cracow and just over the border, in the Russian partition — where the patriot Marian Langiewicz had declared himself dictator during the January Uprising. The invitation had come from Józef Retinger's mother-in-law, Emilia Zubrzycka, who owned the estate. The Conrads had made the acquaintance of the Retingers two years earlier in Britain.

It would seem that the aims which Conrad had set himself in connection with his visit to Poland differed somewhat from those of Józef Retinger, who was a young but extremely ambitious politician in Galicia. Conrad wrote about his travel plans in a letter to his friend John Galsworthy:

The Mother of Mrs Retinger has invited all the tribe of us to her house in the country some 16 miles from Cracow but over the Russian border. This caused such an excitement in the household that if I had not accepted instantly I would have been torn to pieces by my own wife and children. So we are going for a month certain and six-weeks possible.<sup>64</sup>

In a rambling essay entitled *Poland Revisted* — written on his return to Britain — Conrad revealed his other reasons for accepting the Retingers' invitation:

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 134: "From the President of the City of Cracow to Teofila Bobrowska, 28 December 1872 [...] In accordance with the resolution of the City Council of the 23<sup>rd</sup> inst., it has been decided to guarantee the admission of Konrad Korzeniowski, a minor, to the local commune, with exemption from taxes, on the condition that he be granted Austrian citizenship, for which a separate application with a stamp duty of 2 Zlr [Rheinisch Zlotys] ought to be submitted to the I[mperial] and R[oyal] Governor, through the offices of the Municipality."

<sup>64</sup> J. Conrad to J. Galsworthy, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1914. [In:] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, vol. 5, pp. 406–407.

I was pleased with the idea of showing my companions what Polish country life was like; to visit the town where I was at school before the boys by my side should grow too old, and gaining an individual past of their own, should lose their unsophisticated interest in mine.<sup>65</sup>

As we can see, Conrad's reasons for visiting Cracow were mainly sentimental. He saw the trip as a return to his roots, as it were.

Retinger's reasons for inviting the Conrads to Poland — a country that had disappeared from the map of Europe — were undoubtedly of a different character. Józef Hieronim Retinger, then aged 26, was the son of a distinguished Cracow lawyer — Józef Retinger — who acted as Count Władysław Zamoyski's official representative. As an up and coming young politician, he benefited greatly from the Count's extensive international contacts. He gained a doctorate at the Sorbonne with a thesis entitled *Le conte fantastique dans le romantisme français* and also studied at the London School of Economics. Józef Hieronim Retinger was known as a literary critic and as the publisher of the short-lived, albeit excellent journal "Miesięcznik Literacki i Artystyczny" (The Literary and Artistic Monthly Magazine).

As a politician, Retinger had an agenda of his own.<sup>66</sup> With the support of politicians belonging to the National Council that had been set up in 1910, Retinger ran a Polish Office in London, the aim of which was to defend Polish interests in western Europe — mainly in Britain and France — and it was in this capacity that he first made the acquaintance of Conrad, who mentions the fact in a letter to Hugh Walpole:

My acquaintance with Joseph Retinger dates back to 1912. He came to our house with an introduction from A. Bennett who had met him in France. R. told me then that he had a general mission from the National Committee (Galician) to raise the Polish question in the press of France and England. An impossible task then, in view of the state of European alliances. He confessed to me that he could get no one to touch the subject — out of regard for Russian susceptibilities — but his intention was to remain in the West and persevere in his efforts. He was very often here for week-ends and talked to me openly of his hopes.<sup>67</sup>

Why did Retinger need Conrad? From Conrad's letters, we know that his political endeavours were initially fruitless. In all probability he wanted to win over to his cause people who were respected and well known in the whole of western Europe, something that — at the time — could certainly not be said of the leaders of Poland's main political groupings — Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski — whose names meant nothing to western politicians before the First World War. The name of Conrad, however, was a different matter altogether. We may therefore suppose that Retinger invited the famous English author to come to Poland in order to allow him to meet political leaders and gain first-hand knowledge and insights that could later be used

<sup>65</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 117.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Olgierd Terlecki. *Kuzynek diabła [J.H. Retinger]*. Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988; Stefan Zabierowski. *Polska misja Conrada*. Katowice: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1984; Roman Wapiński. "Retinger Józef Hieronim". [In:] *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXXI, pp. 148–152.

<sup>67</sup> J. Conrad to H. Walpole, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1918. [In:] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Ed. Laurence Davies, Frederick R. Karl and Owen Knowles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, vol. 6, p. 259.

to make a public defence of Polish interests in Britain and France. A similar suggestion has been put forward by Aleksander Janta:

Conrad's family trip to Poland was engineered by Retinger in an attempt to remind Britons of the Polish cause through the intermediary of one of their own writers, who — after an absence of many years — had allowed himself to be persuaded to visit the land of his birth. While both men were in Poland, however, the First World War broke out and these political calculations had to give way to more urgent considerations. The Polish politicians of Galicia entrusted Retinger, who was to return to London, with a mission: that he make contact with allied government circles in order to renew Polish demands for independence and to request that those Poles in the West who had been interned as Austrian or German citizens be treated as members of an allied nation and not as enemies.<sup>68</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

It was no accident that Conrad was invited to stay mainly in the Austrian partition, where Poles enjoyed greater political freedom. He was also to have spent some time just over the border in Goszcza in order to acquaint himself somewhat with the situation in the Russian partition. It would seem that Retinger's motives for inviting the Conrads to Cracow had nothing to do with sentimentality, but were mainly of a political nature.

Significantly, before deciding to visit Poland again, Conrad — through the intermediary of Retinger — agreed to give an interview to Marian Dąbrowski, who worked as a reporter for the Warsaw "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" weekly (and who would later marry Maria Dąbrowska, the author of the novel *Noce i dnie* [*Nights and Days*]). What is even more interesting is that the interview was given in the first days of May 1914 at Retinger's flat in London.<sup>69</sup> During this interview (from which we have already quoted) Conrad makes a whole series of statements that are crucial for an understanding of his attitude to Poland. What is important here is not only what Conrad says, but also — being mindful of press censorship in the Russian partition — what he does not say. Speaking of his attitude to the partitioning powers, he says:

I have a reasoned hatred of the Prussians for their policy of extermination and for the way they despise us. I find Austria least objectionable. It is strange but I have quite a liking for the dynasty. Indeed, it is interesting. As a child I was even supposed to go to the naval college at Pula.<sup>70</sup>

Of his own ties (as an author) with Polish culture and tradition he says:

English critics — and after all I am an English writer — whenever they speak of me they add that there is in me something incomprehensible, inconceivable, elusive. Only you can grasp this elusiveness, and comprehend what is incomprehensible. *That is Polishness.*

<sup>68</sup> Aleksander Janta. "Refleksje retingerowskie". [In:] *idem. Lustra i reflektory*. Ed. Michał Sprusiński. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982, p. 282.

<sup>69</sup> For more background details see: Ewa Korzeniewska. "Wokół 'Rozmowy z J. Conradem' Mariana Dąbrowskiego". [In:] Maria Dąbrowska. *Szkice o Conradzie*. Ed. Ewa Korzeniewska. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974, pp. 249–257; Stefan Zabierowski. "O 'Rozmowie z J. Conradem' Mariana Dąbrowskiego z roku 1914". [In:] *idem. W kręgu Conrada*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2008, pp. 9–39.

<sup>70</sup> *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 200.

Polishness which I took from Mickiewicz and Słowacki. My father read *Pan Tadeusz* aloud to me and made me read it aloud. Not just once or twice. I used to prefer *Konrad Wallenrod, Grażyna*. Later I liked Słowacki better. You know why Słowacki? *Il est l'âme de toute la Pologne, lui*.<sup>71</sup>

Conrad speaks with evident pride of his achievements as a mariner and as a writer:

Two personal things fill me with pride: that I, a Pole, am a master in the British merchant marine, and that I can write, not too badly, in English.<sup>72</sup>

As we can see, this interview was a good way of ushering in Conrad's trip to Poland.

## 6

However, let us get back to the trip itself. The Conrads left Britain on 25<sup>th</sup> July, sailing from Harwich across the North Sea to Hamburg, from where they travelled by train to Cracow via Berlin and Vienna. During their journey they could see the disturbing signs of a worsening international situation. As Conrad recalls:

At that time, it must be noted, the Austrian army was already partly mobilised, and as we came through Austrian Silesia we had noticed all the bridges being guarded by soldiers.<sup>73</sup>

They arrived in Cracow on the evening of 28<sup>th</sup> July and immediately made their way to the Grand Hotel at 5, Sławkowska Street, which — as one local historian observes — was then one of the most exclusive hotels in the city:

The 'Grand Hotel' in Sławkowska Street, opened in 1886 by Eustachy Jaxa Chronowski, who then also had a lease on the Hotel Saski, was for a quarter of a century the unrivalled leader of the hotel market in Cracow.<sup>74</sup>

The Conrads were welcomed by the owner of the hotel in person — a colourful figure whom Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki describes in his memoirs:

This Chronowski was a character who was not unworthy of a more than fleeting part in some comedy about the life of noblemen who have come down in the world. He treated everyone in the Grand Hotel — including its clientele — as if they were his underlings on a vast country estate. In the coffee lounge none of the morning guests could be given the "Czas" or the "Figaro" newspapers until "the manager" himself had finished reading them.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> Jan Rogóż. "Na Pijarskiej, u Francuza". *Dziennik Polski*, 2011, № 181, *Magazyn Piątek*; Anna Gabryś. *Salony krakowskie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006, pp. 141–142.

<sup>75</sup> Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki. *Niepospolici ludzie w dniu swoim powszednim*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974, pp. 5–6.

While his wife and younger son were resting after the hardships of the journey, Conrad, accompanied by the Retingers and his elder son Borys, set out to see the town — walking once again where he had walked forty years before. He was particularly struck by the fact that that part of the town had hardly changed at all since his departure. His description of that walk is one of the most beautiful literary portrayals of Cracow by night (rivalled only by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's *Zaczarowana dorożka* [*Enchanted Cab*], which was written many years later):

The Square, immense in its solitude, was full to the brim of moonlight. The garland of lights at the foot of the houses seemed to burn at the bottom of a bluish pool. I noticed with infinite satisfaction that the unnecessary trees the Municipality insisted upon sticking between the stones had been steadily refusing to grow. They were not a bit bigger than the poor victims I could remember. Also, the paving operations seemed to be exactly at the same point at which I left them forty years before. There were the dull, torn-up patches on that bright expanse, the piles of paving material looking ominously black, like heads of rocks on a silvery sea. Who was it that said that Time works wonders? What an exploded superstition! As far as these trees and these paving stones were concerned, it had worked nothing. The suspicion of the unchangeableness of things already vaguely suggested to my senses by our rapid drive from the railway station was agreeably strengthened within me. [...] To our right the unequal massive towers of St. Mary's Church soared aloft into the ethereal radiance of the air, very black on their shaded sides, glowing with a soft phosphorescent sheen on the others. In the distance the Florian Gate, thick and squat under its pointed roof, barred the street with the square shoulders of the old city wall. In the narrow, brilliantly pale vista of bluish flagstones and silvery fronts of houses, its black archway stood out small and very distinct.<sup>76</sup>

This piece of 'reporting' betrays many characteristics of Conrad's fictional writing (his impressionism in particular) and shows how moved he was now, as a distinguished English author, to be able to see virtually the same Cracow that he had last seen four decades earlier — when, as the young orphan Konrad Korzeniowski, he had dreamt of a great adventure. Retinger's wife Otolia has left us a different description of that walk:

Late at night I accompanied Conrad and Borys to town. We walked slowly up St. Anne's Street, Conrad recalled his school years, gazed with affection at the aged walls of the Jagiellonian Library outlined against the starry sky. The market square was already quiet by then. Suddenly the hourly bugle-call sounded from the tower of the Church of Saint Mary. Conrad strengthened his grip on my arm and stopped short. The faithful city of his youth was welcoming the sailor from distant seas.<sup>77</sup>

The next day the whole Conrad family went sightseeing, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Retinger. The following reminiscence was penned by Józef Hieronim Retinger:

We went to the Wawel castle. It was a most beautiful, sunny day. Conrad had last seen the castle when it was under the total control of Austrian troops, the castle itself having been turned into an army hospital and the cathedral into a garrison church. How different it must have looked to him now! The Royal Church had been renovated. White walls were hung with

<sup>76</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., pp. 131–132.

<sup>77</sup> *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 209.



magnificent tapestries. The side chapels had been re-painted to look their best. The silver coffin of St. Stanislaus gleamed. The Sigismund chapel glittered with gold. Solemnity and majesty reigned supreme. After his years of roaming the world, Conrad could at last show his nearest and dearest — his wife and two sons — what his origins were. They went everywhere, looking into every nook and cranny, kneeling before the Royal Crucifix and standing before monuments. And the past spoke to Conrad as if he were quite alone in the world. He was deeply moved and made no attempt to hide his emotion. As we were leaving the cool interior of the church, he said to me, “My dear Joseph, I’m so happy to have been here at last with Jessie and the boys and to have been able to show them *qu’il y a quelque chose derrière moi*.” [...] We mused over the view of the eternal Vistula river, stood for a while over the mouth of the Dragon’s Cave and recalled the legend of the Chicken’s Foot. Later we walked through quaint old streets, went round the churches and then came to the National Museum. The past did not leave us for a minute.<sup>78</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

According to the account given by Borys, Conrad showed his family the house in Poselska Street where he had lived with his father, as well as the latter’s grave at the Rakowicki cemetery.<sup>79</sup>

Conrad’s visit to Cracow was also a golden opportunity for many prominent local intellectuals to make his acquaintance — as a well-known English author and also as a compatriot. These meetings, one of which Conrad later described in his reminiscences, took place in one of the rooms of the Grand Hotel:

On the evening of the second day I was in the hotel’s smoking room, an irrationally private apartment, a sanctuary for a few choice minds of the town, always pervaded by a dim religious light, and more hushed than any club reading-room I have ever been in. Gathered into a small knot, we were discussing the situation in subdued tones suitable to the genius of the place.

A gentleman with a fine head of white hair suddenly pointed an impatient finger in my direction and apostrophised me.

“What I want to know is whether, should there be war, England would come in.”

The time to draw a breath, and I spoke out for the Cabinet without faltering.

“Most assuredly. I should think all Europe knows that by this time.”

He took hold of the lapel of my coat, and, giving it a slight jerk for greater emphasis, said forcibly:

“Then, if England will, as you say, and all the world knows it, there can be no war. Germany won’t be so mad as that.”<sup>80</sup>

No doubt Conrad had this meeting in mind when, elsewhere in the same rambling essay, he recalled:

Upon the whole there was very little inclination to talk about the possibility of a war. Nationally, the Poles felt that from their point of view there was nothing to hope from it. “Whatever happens,” said a very distinguished man to me, “we may be certain that it’s our skins which will pay for it as usual.” A well-known literary critic and writer on economical subjects said to

<sup>78</sup> Józef Hieronim Retinger. “Moje wspomnienia o Conradzie. Podróż do Polski”. *Wiadomości Literackie* 1934, № 49.

<sup>79</sup> Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle*, ed. cit., p. 399.

<sup>80</sup> Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 135.

me: "War seems a material impossibility, precisely because it would mean the complete ruin of all material interests."<sup>81</sup>

Would that we knew the names of the people whom Conrad talked to in the smoking lounge of the Grand Hotel! We can only suppose that, as he was publishing his reminiscences in the British press during wartime, he deliberately left out names so as not to create difficulties for his erstwhile acquaintances. There is one name that we do know, however. It was then that Conrad met Józef Mondschein — a translator and man of letters who wrote for the Cracow "Naprzód" (Forward) newspaper and who urged Conrad to set his novels in Poland:

I asked him whether he hadn't thought of writing a book that was set in Poland. After all, he'd painted a fearsome and shocking picture of the recent revolution in Russia, which he'd shown in a completely new light.

"No," he replied, "I don't intend to write a novel about Poland. I'm not familiar with Polish matters and many aspects of Polish Society. I know Russia somewhat better. I knew a great many Russians in Switzerland, where I lived for a long time."<sup>82</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

On 30<sup>th</sup> July Conrad took his elder son to the Jagiellonian Library, where he had been invited by his namesake Dr. Józef Korzeniowski, a librarian and well-known historian with whom he had corresponded as early as 1901:

In the range of the deserted vaulted rooms lined with books, full of august memories, and in the passionless silence of all this enshrined wisdom, we walked here and there talking of the past, the great historical past in which lived the inextinguishable spark of national life; and all around us the centuries-old buildings lay still and empty, composing themselves to rest after a year of work on the minds of another generation.<sup>83</sup>

During his visit to the Jagiellonian Library Conrad was shown his father's manuscripts — dating from the early 1860s — in which Apollo Korzeniowski also writes about his son. Conrad's signature can still be seen in the library's guestbook. It was probably on the evening of the same day that Conrad had a pleasant surprise in the restaurant of the Grand Hotel. As his elder son Borys recalls:

A table had been allotted to us on the far side of the room, and when we were about half-way through the meal, I suddenly became aware of my Father sitting quite rigid, with his fork half-way to his mouth, staring across the room towards the door. I turned to see what had attracted his attention in this way, and the picture which remains in my memory is of a tall handsome man with grey hair and moustache, standing motionless in the doorway and staring with equal intensity. Before I had a chance to ask the reason for this performance, my Father dropped his fork and leaping to his feet with a shout of 'Kostoosh!' rushed towards the door. His opposite number in the doorway burst into violent motion at the same time, and they met and embraced in the middle of the big room. When their mutual emotion had subsided somewhat, they came to our table and the stranger was introduced to us as an old school friend of

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>82</sup> J.M. [Józef Mondschein]. "Conrad w Polsce. Rozmowa sprzed 10 lat" (Conrad in Poland. A conversation that took place ten years ago). *Wiadomości Literackie* 1924, № 6.

<sup>83</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 139.

my Father's — Mr. Buszinski. He remained with us for the rest of the evening and, before leaving, invited us to spend the following day with him at his country home a few miles from Cracow.<sup>84</sup>

The next day was 1<sup>st</sup> August and the Conrad family set out on a visit to Konstanty Buszczyński's estate in Górką Narodowa (which is now a district of Cracow). Conrad's wife Jessie had fond memories of the visit:

Arrived at the house one's heart went out to those people with their old-world courteous greeting. A comfortable seat was found for me on the wide stone veranda and immediately refreshment was forthcoming. Here again I recognized my husband's national characteristic. Something in the way of refreshments would have to be produced, even in the middle of the night if, as sometimes happened, a guest arrived. Here each member of the family vied with the other to make me feel at home, and although I could not speak the language, I hope I managed to show my appreciation.<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately, the idyll was not to last, for in the meantime news came that Austria-Hungary had declared general mobilization. As Conrad later recalled:

While we were having tea outside, looking down the lovely slope of the gardens at the view of the city in the distance, the possibilities of the war faded from our minds. Suddenly my friend's wife came to us with a telegram in her hand and said calmly: "General mobilisation, do you know?" We looked at her like men aroused from a dream. "Yes," she insisted, "they are already taking the horses out of the ploughs and carts." I said: "We had better go back to town as quick as we can," and my friend assented with a troubled look: "Yes, you had better."<sup>86</sup>

The news had taken some time to reach Górką Narodowa, as mobilization posters had been put up in Cracow the previous day. When the Conrads got back to their hotel, the town had changed beyond recognition. Their own situation became more and more precarious, as they had to leave the hotel, which was due to be requisitioned by the army. Added to this inconvenience were the risks posed by the fact that a European war could break out at any moment and then the Conrads — three of whom could not speak a word of Polish and one of whom had a physical disability — would be regarded as enemy aliens living within the confines of a military district headquarters. From a letter that he wrote to his friend John Galsworthy on 1<sup>st</sup> August, we can see that Conrad realized the gravity of the situation and the difficulties he now faced:

This mobilisation has caught us here. The trains will run for the civil population for three days more; but with Jessie as crippled as she is and Jack not at all well (temperatures) I simply dare not venture on the horrors of a war-exodus. So urged and advised and after long meditation (24 hours) I have decided to take myself and all my unlucky tribe to Zakopane (in the mountains, about 4 hours rail from here) out of the way of all possible military operations. I had rather be stranded here where I have friends than try to get away and be caught perhaps in some small German town in the midst of armies.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Borys Conrad. *My Father: Joseph Conrad*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1970, pp. 89–90.

<sup>85</sup> Jessie Conrad. *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*. London: Jarrolds, 1935, pp. 167–168.

<sup>86</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 140.

<sup>87</sup> J. Conrad to J. Galsworthy, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1914. [In:] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. cit., vol. 5, p. 408.

There were no two ways about it: Conrad could not have chosen a worse time to visit Poland. He had been so busy finishing his novel entitled *Victory* that he had, it would seem, completely disregarded the signs of the storm that was brewing on the continent — and so had accepted the Retingers' invitation. As he remarked later in his reminiscences:

In July of last year I was a stranger in a strange city in the Midlands and particularly out of touch with the world's politics. Never a very diligent reader of newspapers, there were at that time reasons of a private order which caused me to be even less informed than usual on public affairs as presented from day to day in that necessarily atmosphereless, perspectiveless manner of the daily papers, which somehow, for a man possessed of some historic sense, robs them of all real interest. I don't think I had looked at a daily for a month past.<sup>88</sup>

As a result, the Conrads had come to Cracow — which was then in Austria-Hungary — at a moment of heightened tension in European politics. Let us recall that on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914, when they arrived in Cracow, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, after which events came thick and fast:

Russia replied by declaring partial mobilization on 29<sup>th</sup> July and general mobilization the next day, to which Austria-Hungary in turn replied by declaring general mobilization (in Cracow posters were put up on 31<sup>st</sup> July), while Germany declared war on Russia on 1<sup>st</sup> August and on France on 3<sup>rd</sup> August. Britain declared war on Germany on 4<sup>th</sup> August and on 6<sup>th</sup> August Austria-Hungary was at war with Russia.<sup>89</sup>

Conrad and his family were now in an unenviable situation, for as soon as war was declared they could be interned as citizens of an enemy country. Conrad later described the drama of those days in Cracow:

I cannot reproduce the atmosphere of that night, the first night after mobilisation. The shops and the gateways of the houses were of course closed, but all through the dark hours the town hummed with voices; the echoes of distant shouts entered the open windows of our bedroom. Groups of men talking noisily walked in the middle of the roadway escorted by distressed women: men of all callings and of all classes going to report themselves at the fortress. Now and then a military car tooting furiously would whisk through the streets empty of wheeled traffic, like an intensely black shadow under the great flood of electric lights on the grey pavement.<sup>90</sup>

By way of comparison, let us quote a contemporary Polish account of the beginning of the war in Cracow:

Events came thick and fast. On 31<sup>st</sup> July huge posters were put up on walls in Cracow announcing a state of general mobilization. People knew what that meant. A couple of army corps would have sufficed for a war with Serbia. General mobilization heralded a war that was closer to home and a hundred times more dreadful — war with Russia. This certitude made an immediate and lasting impact on Cracow. In family homes there began to be unusual movements

<sup>88</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 114.

<sup>89</sup> Jan Dąbrowski. *Dziennik 1914–1918*. Ed. Jerzy Zdrada. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977 (commentary on p. 175).

<sup>90</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., p. 140.

of people: brothers took leave of brothers, sons took leave of mothers and fathers, husbands took leave of wives — and all went to join the ranks to which their duty had called them. The families of the inhabitants of Cracow became less numerous, but not the total population. More and more groups of reservists made their way from the railway stations to the army barracks in order to join their units and proceed to the battlefields.<sup>91</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

## 7

It would seem that the person who masterminded the transfer of the Conrad family to Zakopane was Józef Hieronim Retinger, whose account is as follows:

After making sure that the Conrads could remain safely in Zakopane, I travelled to Lwów, as I had learned that the main Galician leaders were there. I had a conversation with Archbishop Bilczewski, with the Armenian Catholic Archbishop Teodorowicz and with representatives of the main political parties — Cieński, Dąbski and others. They asked me to be their emissary and to travel as quickly as possible to France and Britain. My instructions were simple. I was to act in the interests of Polish independence with as much boldness and determination as I could muster. They assured me that they would support all my initiatives to this end.<sup>92</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

After overcoming many obstacles, Retinger eventually managed to get to France. His mission has been somewhat loosely and humorously described by Stefan Kisielewski in his “Alphabet”:

He arrived in Paris and began to tell everyone that he was an Austrian emissary charged with negotiating a separate peace treaty. He had made up a story about Austria wanting to break with the Germans in order to conclude a separate peace deal. The French talked to him for quite a long time, after which a scandal suddenly broke out and they deported him to Spain.<sup>93</sup>

An entry in the *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (The Polish Biographical Dictionary) written by Roman Wapiński would seem to partly corroborate this account:

Despite many difficulties, Retinger managed to obtain a passport and then travelled to France via Switzerland. After his arrival in Paris — where he was briefly detained at the Conciergerie — through Władysław Zamoyski he was able to make contact with Philippe Berthelot — the general secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs — and with the [former] minister Stéphane Pichon. From then on, Retinger devoted himself entirely to championing the Polish cause in the western corridors of power. [...] The reports of his attempts to bring about a sepa-

<sup>91</sup> Antoni Stanisław Bassara. “Kraków podczas wojny”. [In:] *Kalendarz krakowski Józefa Czecha na rok 1916*, vol. LXXXV, p. 58.

<sup>92</sup> Józef Retinger. *Życie i pamiątki „szarej eminencji”*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Pelikan, 1990, p. 40 (quoted by J. Pomian).

<sup>93</sup> Stefan Kisielewski. “Rettinger Hieronim” [sic!]. [In:] *idem. Abecadło Kisiela*. Warszawa: Iskry, 1997, p. 122.

rate peace with Austria-Hungary cannot be discounted. [...] However — as with Retinger's other endeavours — their importance should not be overestimated.<sup>94</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August<sup>95</sup> the Conrads took the train to Zakopane, where — as Conrad wrote in a letter to Galsworthy — they would hopefully be safer:

The Austrians won't worry me — and as to that I can get protection anyhow; but they don't expel people with Polish names, and I'll be out of the way too. Communication would be also open[ed] with me through Count Ladislas Zamojski who has a country house near Zakopane.<sup>96</sup>

In Zakopane the Conrads first stayed at the “Stamary” boarding house, where they had an opportunity to get to know the doctor and painter Kazimierz Górski, as well as the retired Adam Jerzy Giełgud, who had once worked for the British Ministry of War.<sup>97</sup> A few days later they moved to the “Konstantynówka” boarding house<sup>98</sup> at 7, Jagiellońska Street, which was run by Conrad's close relative Aniela Zagórska, together with her daughter (also Aniela), who was later to translate her cousin's novels into Polish.<sup>99</sup> This building left an indelible impression on the mind of Conrad's younger son:

Konstantynówka was a ‘pension’ and typical of the other houses of this resort. It was built entirely of wood, clad with horizontal boards and lined with vertical matchboarding, full of knots and liberally varnished; enormous cast-iron and tiled stoves stood in each living room, throwing out a searing heat from the blazing logs with which they were filled. As the weather got colder the stoves were driven harder and the metalwork at the top and the smoke-pipe glowed red of an evening, when numerous friends came to talk in the crowded hall. The two lamps hanging from the ceiling beams only managed to produce an ‘illuminated gloom’ within the dark walls and under the layers of cigarette smoke floating above our heads. There must have been a guardian angel watching over us to protect us from fire. Why the house did not go up in flames will always be a mystery to me.

A continuous balcony or gallery ran round the house at each floor, about four feet wide, with stairways connecting them to one another on each side of the house — I spent hours rushing round and up and down. The ground floor and its balcony were about four feet above the earth and the other levels were about ten feet apart.<sup>100</sup>

It must be said that — given the difficult wartime circumstances — Conrad could not have found a better place at which to stay. Teresa Tatarkiewiczowa, the wife of the famous Polish philosopher, had this to say about Zakopane and “Konstantynówka”:

<sup>94</sup> Wapiński. “Retinger Józef Hieronim”, *ed. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>95</sup> John Conrad. *Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered ‘Ojciec jest tutaj’*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 88: “We left Cracow on my eighth birthday, 2 August, and boarded the train for Zakopané.”

<sup>96</sup> J. Conrad to J. Galsworthy, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1914. [In:] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, ed. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 409.

<sup>97</sup> Górski. “My Meeting with Joseph Conrad”, *ed. cit.*, pp. 223–226.

<sup>98</sup> Designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz and built in 1900.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Chronicle, ed. cit.*, p. 400; Maciej Pinkwart. *Przewodnik po Zakopanem*. Warszawa: Sport i Turystyka, 1992, p. 191.

<sup>100</sup> John Conrad. *Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered ‘Ojciec jest tutaj’*, *ed. cit.*, p. 88.

As everyone knows, in those days, before and during the First World War, Zakopane was a meeting place for prominent people from different partitions who took refuge there and — like the Witkiewicz's (father and son), the Żeromskis and the Strugs — often took up permanent residence. Aunt Aniela and Anielusia, who were both extremely intelligent and well-educated, as well as being very charming and good-looking, attracted [...] the most distinguished people. They were friends of the Sieroszewskis, the Żeromskis, the Solskis and the Strugs.<sup>101</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

In the “Konstantynówka” boarding house a separate extra room was placed at Conrad's disposal and, despite language problems, his wife and sons maintained a lively intercourse with their Polish fellow guests — who included the well-known lawyer Dr. Teodor Kosch and his family, the Cracow businessman Stanisław Zajączkowski (together with his family) and Henryk Jasiński — as well as with many other prominent visitors to Zakopane. Needless to say, Conrad still remained in touch with Adam Giełgud and Dr. Kazimierz Górski. Conrad's arrival in Zakopane had given him the opportunity to meet leading lights from the Polish artistic world, as well as people who were active in Polish politics. One of his most important meetings was with the novelist Stefan Żeromski. As Aniela Zagórska later recalled:

At the time, however, Żeromski was not at Zakopane. He arrived a few days later. Conrad went over to pay him a visit but did not find him at home. A couple of days afterwards, as I was approaching the house, I saw Żeromski sitting on the terrace with both Conrads and my mother. I was struck by the immense vivacity with which Conrad was engaged in conversation. Żeromski did not speak much but listened to Conrad smilingly. It was obvious that both men were at ease in the other's company. I cannot remember what the conversation was about, but I recall Conrad suddenly addressing Żeromski: ‘Do you know, that I am not only famous now, but I am even beginning to be popular.’

Those words made me feel a bit uneasy; what if Żeromski thought Conrad conceited? I glanced quickly at Żeromski: nodding his head slowly he smiled in his own unforgettable, kind manner. He understood what Conrad meant — he could feel the well-nigh childish joy that lay behind those words, the directness and trust conveyed by that confession.<sup>102</sup>

Shortly after Conrad's death, Stefan Żeromski gave his own account of their meeting:

When I had the honour of meeting Joseph Konrad Korzeniowski in 1914, at the very beginning of the war, I established a good rapport with him. Once, after a long conversation, when this rapport seemed to be as great as it could ever be, there still seemed to be something lacking. Then the great author leant over towards me, gave me a knowing wink and, slapping my knee, whispered in my ear, “You know what? You must surely have been a mariner!”<sup>103</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

Although we know so little of what Conrad and Żeromski actually said to each other, their Zakopane conversation has become part of Polish literature, being the subject of Antoni Słonimski's poem — published in the “Skamander” monthly mag-

<sup>101</sup> Teresa and Władysław Tatarkiewicz. *Wspomnienia*. Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2011, p. 81.

<sup>102</sup> *Conrad under Familial Eyes, ed. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>103</sup> Żeromski. “Joseph Conrad”, *ed. cit.*, p. 153.

azine — entitled *Dialog o miłości ojczyzny między Josephem a Stefanem* (*A dialogue between Joseph and Stephen on love for one's country*).<sup>104</sup> It must be said, however, that this hypothetical reconstruction of Żeromski's conversation with Conrad is a gross oversimplification and indeed a gross distortion of what we know of their views and attitudes.<sup>105</sup>

According to Józef Hieronim Retinger, Conrad also had meetings with other Polish writers in Zakopane. These, however — like Tadeusz Nalepiński and Jerzy Żuławski — were of a much lower calibre.<sup>106</sup> Another visitor was the painter and sculptor Jan Rembowski, who loved Conrad's novels.

Speaking about Polish literature in the interview he gave to Marian Dąbrowski in 1914, Conrad said he had never had time to read the output of modern Polish authors:

I am not familiar with more recent literature. It is a shame but I must confess in all humility that I don't know it. I had to work hard as a sailor. Now illness hampers my writing. Two months in a year are wasted. Seventy thousand words. It is no joke. And I write slowly, very slowly. And now again three quarters of a novel are written and I still have not found a title for it. So, there you are.<sup>107</sup>

During his sojourn in Zakopane Conrad had the opportunity to catch up on his reading of modern Polish authors, especially those of the Positivist and *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland) periods. As Aniela Zagórska recalls:

On his arrival in Poland Conrad knew from our contemporary literature only *Popioły* and *Panna Mery*. During his two-month stay he devoured almost all that was worth reading in fiction and drama. 'Devoured' is the right word, for he read with unusual, unbelievable speed. I was constantly bringing him new books; he used to get impatient when on his finishing one, there was not another at hand. In every case his judgement was correct — in respect both of the book as a whole and of the particular style of each author. Wyspiański and Żeromski made the greatest impression on him. 'Oh, how I would like to translate it!' he said once about *Warszawianka*. The poem *Gdy przyjdzie mi ten świat porzucić* enchanted him. His favourite books by Żeromski were *Popioły* and *Szyfowe prace*. I should also mention Prus, whom he valued as highly as the other two writers.<sup>108</sup>

There were some modern Polish authors, however, whom Conrad thoroughly disliked. He refused to read Eliza Orzeszkowa's novel entitled *Nad Niemnem* (*On the Banks of the River Niemen*) — perhaps because he could not forget the accusations

<sup>104</sup> Antoni Słonimski. *Dialog o miłości ojczyzny między Josephem a Stefanem*. Warszawa 1923. Cf. Tadeusz Skutnik, "Objaśnienia". [In:] *idem. W imię Conrada. Joseph Conrad w poezji polskiej*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1977, pp. 127–129.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Stefan Zabierowski. *Dziedzictwo Conrada w literaturze polskiej XX wieku*. Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1992, pp. 30–31.

<sup>106</sup> Józef Hieronim Retinger. *Conrad and His Contemporaries*. London: Minerva Publishing Company, 1941; Busza. "Conrad's Polish Literary Background and Some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on His Work", *ed. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>107</sup> Dąbrowski. "An Interview with Joseph Conrad", *ed. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>108</sup> Aniela Zagórska. "A Few Reminiscences of Conrad". [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes, ed. cit.*, p. 214.



that she had made against him during the “Emigration of Talent” debate.<sup>109</sup> “Don’t bring me anything written by that woman!” — he is said to have told Aniela Zagórska.<sup>110</sup> And there were also moments when Conrad found the experience of reading modern Polish literature simply too painful to bear, as Aniela Zagórska recalled:

Once I planned that we should spend the evening reading Słowacki, and all day I kept looking forward to it. After supper we sat, as usual, in the living-room. I began with *Grób Agamemnona*. I read it aloud, without interruption and not lifting my eyes from the book; finally, having reached the end, I looked up at Conrad and felt frightened. He sat immobile, looking angry and pained; suddenly he jumped to his feet and rushed out of the room, without saying a word or even looking at either my mother or myself, like a man deeply hurt. He did not reappear that evening. It was such a shattering experience to see him, as it were, escaping from the poem, that I never dared raise the subject and the reading of Słowacki came to an end. It had probably been a long time since Conrad had read that poem and he was overcome by a sudden and unexpected emotion which he could neither control nor conceal.<sup>111</sup>

During the two months that he spent in Zakopane Conrad was quite unexpectedly and at times starkly confronted with the question of his dual loyalty. The person who saw this most clearly was Aniela Zagórska:

There is no doubt that Conrad’s dual loyalty to Poland and England — with the evident supremacy of the latter — constituted a constant source of distress for him. My conviction is based not only on observation, but also on his own words. He broached the subject only once in the course of the countless conversations we had together. It was no more than just a hint. I could see how difficult it was for him.<sup>112</sup>

The holiday in Zakopane was therefore not entirely idyllic. Conrad’s prime concern was the fact that he and his family, being citizens of an enemy country, could at any time be interned by the Austrian authorities for the duration of hostilities. On top of that, their money was running out. Another cause for anxiety was the tragic fate of many Poles, who were now being forced to fight against each other in the armies of the three partitioning powers. As Conrad recalled on his return to Britain:

It was a wonderful, a poignant two months. This is not the time, and, perhaps, not the place, to enlarge upon the tragic character of the situation; a whole people seeing the culmination of its misfortunes in a final catastrophe, unable to trust anyone, to appeal to anyone, to look for help from any quarter; deprived of all hope and even of its last illusions, and unable, in the trouble of minds and the unrest of consciences, to take refuge in stoical acceptance.<sup>113</sup>

According to Aniela Zagórska — whose reminiscences are the most reliable source of information about the writer’s stay in Zakopane — Conrad then viewed the activities of Józef Piłsudski and his supporters with scepticism:

<sup>109</sup> Eliza Orzeszkowa. “The Emigration of Talent”. *Kraj* 1899, № 16 (23<sup>rd</sup> April). [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., pp. 187–188.

<sup>110</sup> Ujejski. *O Konradzie Korzeniowskim*, ed. cit., p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> Zagórska. “A Few Reminiscences of Conrad”, ed. cit., p. 217.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>113</sup> Conrad. *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. cit., pp. 135–136.

I would like to add one more detail that concerns Conrad's attitude towards the events that took place in Poland during his stay in Zakopane. He had great respect and enthusiasm for the then commander-in-chief [i.e. Piłsudski, who commanded the First Brigade of the Polish Legions]. But he did not believe that the efforts of the Polish Legions would bring about positive results; he feared that more blood would be spilled unnecessarily. He came to Poland after more than twenty years to find himself amidst preparations for an armed attempt to regain independence and the circumstances could not but remind him of some childhood experiences (in 1863 Conrad was six years old), of defeat, mourning, hopelessness. Conrad's youth coincided with the post-insurrection atmosphere. His beloved guardian, Tadeusz Bobrowski, his mother's brother, was on the side of the Whites in 1863. He was a man of great kindness and intellect but a staunch opponent of the insurrection. It must have had an effect on Conrad: he did not believe it was possible to regain independence. All his childhood memories revived in that memorable summer of 1914. I shall never forget his expression when he looked at marching Legionaries or listened to their songs.<sup>114</sup>

## 8

Conrad therefore did all he could to try and get himself and his family back to Britain. He managed to get a letter through to the United States ambassador in Vienna — Frederick C. Penfield — who represented British interests in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In his letter of 1<sup>st</sup> October Conrad wrote:

Thank you very much for the five hundred Crowns you have so kindly sent me here to make possible my journey to Vienna.

My departure depends on receiving the permission of the military command in Nowy Targ (Neumarkt in Galicia). When I asked for such permission it was explained to me that it was impossible to give it to me without the authorization of the higher authorities in Vienna — since I am a British subject.

Now I have to ask you again for your kind help in obtaining this permission for me, my wife Jessie and my 15 and 8 year old sons Borys and John, from the appropriate authorities, perhaps the I[mperial] & R[oyal] Ministry of War.<sup>115</sup>

In his efforts to return to Britain, Conrad was helped by his Zakopane friends, and in particular by Dr. Teodor Kosch — a distinguished Cracow lawyer whose clients included Henryk Sienkiewicz, Ignacy Paderewski, Stanisław Tarnowski and Cardinal Jan Puzyna.<sup>116</sup> Kosch had a junior colleague — Dr. Franciszek Kowalski — whose step-sister was a friend of the wife of General Karl von Kuk, the *Festungskommandant* of Cracow. As Dr. Kosch later recalled:

<sup>114</sup> Zagórska. "A Few Reminiscences of Conrad", *ed. cit.*, p. 222; Stefan Zabierowski. "O Conradzie i Piłsudskim". *Teksty Drugie* 2009, № 3.

<sup>115</sup> J. Conrad to F.C. Penfield, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1914. [In:] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, ed. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 414.

<sup>116</sup> Jan Pachoński. "Teodor Kosch". [In:] *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XIV, pp. 193–194.

My junior colleague Dr. Franciszek Kowalski, who was also staying in Zakopane, told me that his step-sister was on extremely good terms with the wife of no less a personage than General Kuk, the Commander of the Austrian garrison in Cracow, so it seemed obvious that the best plan would be to ask her to help us get the Korzeniowskis back to Britain.

Everything went perfectly. Dr. Kowalski returned to Cracow and told his step-sister about the plight of the Korzeniowskis, who had planned to stay in Poland for no longer than a few weeks, but were now virtually destitute and unable to buy food or even warm clothes for the winter. She in her turn told the Kommandant's wife, who was so moved by what she heard that she persuaded her husband to issue a special pass exempting Conrad and his family from travel restrictions within Austria. The wording of the pass is as follows:

“Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski wishes to travel to Vienna with his family. From a military standpoint I see no objection. All persons in authority are requested to allow this family to proceed without hindrance.”

Thus Dr. Kowalski returned triumphant.<sup>117</sup>

In Nowy Targ the pass issued by General Kuk enabled the Conrads to obtain the necessary permit — dated 6<sup>th</sup> October 1914 — allowing them to travel from Zakopane to Vienna.<sup>118</sup> Once again, Cracow had been a turning-point in Conrad's life!

Before leaving Zakopane, the writer turned his mind to political matters. According to Dr. Kosch, he intended to support the Polish cause when he was back on English soil:

While he was making preparations for his departure, Conrad often talked to me about wanting to make himself useful to the Polish cause in some way. He said that although he led a very private life in Britain — and so only had a limited circle of friends — these friends knew people in the highest places and through them he could do a lot of good just by drawing attention to a particular detail that might otherwise be overlooked by the British. Unfortunately, what he had heard here was no good at all and could hardly be used to serve the Polish cause, so he said, “Give me some proper background information!”<sup>119</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

According to Dr. Kazimierz Górski's account of these Zakopane weeks, Conrad held long discussions with Adam Giełgud on the subject of Poland's future:

Both Giełgud and Conrad thought that a favourable solution to the Polish problem could be achieved only if Russia were defeated by Germany, and Germany by England and France. Were the war to end differently, Polish prospects for independence would, according to them, be doubtful.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Teodor Kosch. “Powrót Conrada do Anglii”. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., vol. 2, pp. 266–267.

<sup>118</sup> *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., pp. 226–227: “Permit. Mr Józef Konrad Korzeniowski and his family, all together four persons, are hereby authorized to occupy seats for a single journey on the train, running according to the war timetable, from Zakopane station to Vienna, via ... or via Cracow — or, if need be, to travel by motor-car. Nowy Targ, 6 October 1914. [signed] Grodzicki.”

<sup>119</sup> Teodor Kosch. “Memoriał Conrada (Korzeniowskiego) o sprawie polskiej w czasie wielkiej wojny”. [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., vol. 2, p. 261.

<sup>120</sup> Kazimierz Górski. “My Meeting with Joseph Conrad”. [In:] *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, ed. cit., p. 224.

Here we may recall that in February 1914 (in Paris) Józef Piłsudski had predicted a very similar turn of events. In the words of his biographer:

[...] Piłsudski foresaw a war between Austria and Russia in the near future because of the Balkans. Germany would be on the side of Austria, while France and Britain would side with Russia — joined later, perhaps, by America. According to Piłsudski, Russia would be defeated in the war with Germany and Austria, after which these states would be defeated by the western powers. Eastern Europe would be defeated by Central Europe, which in turn would be defeated by Western Europe. This showed Poles what they had to do: during the first phase they would be with the Germans against the Russians; during the second phase they would be with France and Britain (and possibly America) against the Germans.<sup>121</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

These predictions — made by two very different public figures (both of whom hailed from the Polish eastern borderlands) — turned out to be surprisingly similar and remarkably accurate.

The political task that Conrad had set himself in deciding to support the Polish cause was by no means a simple one. Competent Polish political activists — i.e. the members of the Supreme National Council — had left Cracow and were now in Vienna. At the beginning of the war the situation on the eastern front had changed and the Russians were gaining an advantage. In the words of one historian:

On 6<sup>th</sup> August 1914 Austro-Hungarian troops crossed the borders of the Kingdom of Poland [i.e. the Russian partition] and their initial victories included the battles of Kraśnik and Komarów. Before long, however, the tables were turned. The Russians attacked from Volhynia, making a deep incursion into Galicia. On 3<sup>rd</sup> September they took Lwów and drove the Austrians beyond the river San. In bloody fighting on the banks of the river Dunajec Austrian troops — substantially reinforced by the Polish Legions — halted the Russian advance in the direction of Cracow and, amidst heavy fighting in the Carpathians, barred the way towards Hungary.<sup>122</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

At that time Russian troops were less than a hundred kilometres from Zakopane and were advancing towards Cracow. It was in these circumstances that Conrad — no doubt after close consultations with his Zakopane friends — decided in September 1914 to formulate certain political solutions for the future, setting them down in a document known as his “Political Memorandum” — *Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski's Memorandum on the Polish Question, October 1914*. The main points are as follows:

Feeling convinced that all European problems can be settled only after a general armistice by a congress of all the states concerned, my intentions are:

Generally: To bring up and accustom the public in England to the thought that Poles are entitled to have their nationality legally recognized both by the defeated as by the victorious states.

<sup>121</sup> Waław Jędrzejewicz. *Józef Piłsudski. 1867–1935. Życiorys*. Wrocław: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1989, p. 42.

<sup>122</sup> Janusz Pajewski. *Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1914–1918*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985, p. 82.

England would have no reason to object to such a recognition, which would have a legal basis, a high moral significance, and practical consequences, and in fact she may be persuaded to support this issue on the grounds of elementary justice.

And particularly: to support and develop goodwill towards Austria (this feeling already existed in July and was expressed by some daily papers). To point out that England is not and never has been engaged in any personal quarrel with Austria; to endeavour to create an atmosphere of favourable public opinion by explaining that the policy of Austria under the strong pressure of Russia was a result of hard necessity and was in no way symptomatic of some unjust ambition of territorial expansion — but nevertheless stressing the point that after many years of patient, cautious, and peaceful policy, Austria would be entitled to be rewarded for her efforts in this war.

[...]

It will be, therefore, in the interest of England to support an Austrian policy towards Poland (even on otherwise unfavourable conditions) and to strengthen the Polish national spirit which is hostile towards the Germans in that Monarchy which in fact can never become dangerous for England, either economically or politically, and as it is one where parliamentary institutions, so highly cherished by the English nation, are better developed than in any other European country.<sup>123</sup>

As we can see, Conrad's idea was to solve the Polish question by playing the Central Powers off against the Entente Cordiale. These proposals would seem to have been close to the 'trialist' solution, i.e. the strengthening of Poland's position as a third, equal member of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Here we may add that similar plans were put forward in Lwów by the Central National Committee (Centralny Komitet Narodowy), which was one of the leading political forces in Galicia. As Jerzy Zdrada observes:

Of prime importance were the talks which Stanisław Gąbiński held in Vienna on 2<sup>nd</sup> August with Brechtold — the Minister for Foreign Affairs — and the Chief of General Staff General Conrad von Hotzendorf. Gąbiński tried above all to obtain guarantees that the Austrians would unite the whole of the Kingdom of Poland with Galicia and would set up an independent Polish State, this being his condition for raising a Polish Army that would fight alongside Austria-Hungary. The negotiations ended in failure. [...] In the middle of August 1914 it even seemed that Austria-Hungary would herself raise the Polish question, as evinced by the apparent existence of the text of a proclamation that was to have been made by Emperor Franz Joseph to the Polish nation, heralding the creation of a Kingdom of Poland with the Austrian Emperor as Monarch.<sup>124</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

As we can see, the political proposals which Conrad brought back to Britain were not out of keeping with the aspirations — at that time — of some of the leading Polish politicians in Galicia. Conrad's departure from Zakopane was also described by Aniela Zagórska:

On their last evening — 8 October — we all gathered round the dining-room table, waiting for the carriage to come and take the Conrads to Chabówka, as beyond that point the railway

<sup>123</sup> *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*, ed. cit., pp. 303–304; "Memorial Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego w sprawie polskiej [X 1914]". [In:] *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, ed. cit., vol. 1, pp. 91–92.

<sup>124</sup> Jerzy Zdrada. "Wstęp" (Introduction). [In:] Dąbrowski. *Dziennik 1914–1918*, ed. cit., p. 15.

line was closed. The highlander who drove the cart was late; instead of coming at nine o'clock, he arrived about eleven. And so we waited without undue impatience, chatting for the last time. The Conrads intended to come by car to Zakopane the following spring. We planned various excursions for them round Zakopane and further afield. Everybody made an effort to remain calm and merry; after all, we were to see each other in a few months' time. Finally the coachman arrived. We gathered in front of the house. A thin film of snow covered the drive. The coach moved off as we were calling 'Goodbye, see you soon.' That was Conrad's last visit to Poland.<sup>125</sup>

On their journey, the Conrads were accompanied by the Cracow industrialist Stanisław Zajączkowski, who took good care of them. In Cracow they probably stayed once again at the Grand Hotel in Sławkowska Street. That, at any rate, is what Borys Conrad remembered:

When we arrived in Cracow we went back to the hotel. The friendly manager had, by now, gone off to face whatever the fates had in store for him on the battlefield and his place had been taken by a much older man. There were a number of army officers billeted in the hotel and we found it very different from when we first stayed there. My Father went at once to see the Military Commandant and was told that the necessary travel permit would be sent to us at the hotel the next day. Several of our Polish friends came to see us during the course of the evening and we heard from them that there was a lot of cholera among the troops.<sup>126</sup>

During those two wartime months the town had changed beyond recognition. As a Cracow chronicler recorded:

The atmosphere of pessimism among the town's inhabitants was exacerbated by an announcement made by the Commander of the Fortress of Cracow on 14<sup>th</sup> September to the effect that Cracow was now under martial law and that part of the population must leave the fortress area. In addition, people were advised to stock up with food supplies to last three months.<sup>127</sup>

In her memoirs, Jessie Conrad also gives a description of wartime Cracow:

We had left Cracow only two months earlier, but it was difficult to recognize it as the same place. All around the station ran a thick maze of wire, through which one saw blue-grey figures of Austrian soldiers getting into or out of the long trains drawn up in the station. The effect of this was that of a gigantic caterpillar. Here we were successful in getting one meal, but we had no permission to leave the station. [...] We sat uncomfortably in the buffet waiting-room for hours, while trains thundered into the station to discharge their human freight of sick and wounded as well as closely guarded prisoners.<sup>128</sup>

These were the last days of Conrad's stay in Cracow. On 10<sup>th</sup> October 1914 — after a not very pleasant journey — the Conrads arrived safely in Vienna, where they put up at the Matschakerhof Hotel. After all his recent nerve-wracking experiences, Conrad went down with gout and had to spend several days in bed. He was visited by

<sup>125</sup> Zagórska. "A Few Reminiscences of Conrad", *ed. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>126</sup> Borys Conrad. *My Father: Joseph Conrad*, *ed. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>127</sup> Bassara. "Kraków podczas wojny", *ed. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> Jessie Conrad. *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*, *ed. cit.*, p. 181.

Marian Biliński,<sup>129</sup> who — apart from being the brother of the Austro-Hungarian Treasurer Leon Biliński — was a Counsellor to the Court and a counsellor to the Viennese branch of the Union Bank (Bank Związkowy), as well as being head of the Postal Inspectorate in Cracow. There can be no doubt that the conversations he had with Conrad were more than just personal exchanges of views — after all, his brother could hardly have been expected to visit the citizen of an enemy state in wartime. Conrad wrote a letter to Dr. Kosch in Zakopane informing him of his conversations with Biliński:

Mr. Marian Biliński kindly visited me on Tuesday. I had the pleasure and profit of discussing with him the Polish question in general — in detail and exhaustively, for some hours, and how it might be put before a European Congress, and the hopes, fears, and possibilities connected with it. I was quite convinced by everything Mr. Biliński said, and he also won my heart for he proved to be not only intelligent, but also friendly during our long and interesting conversation. Today I visited him and we talked again for an hour or more, mainly about how the Polish question should be presented in England. It will be difficult in view of the course of events, but I can see that the way he proposes is the only one possible.<sup>130</sup>

Conrad then paid a visit to the American embassy, where he had a talk with ambassador F.C. Penfield. This meeting is also mentioned in the letter to Dr. Kosch:

I only saw the Ambassador on Thursday — i.e. as soon as I was able to get up and drag myself out of the room. I waited for about an hour in his waiting-room, because the Papal Nuncio was just then with him. Finally the Nuncio left and my turn came. The Ambassador kept me for a whole hour, discussing with me various subjects concerning the affairs of the whole world. He did not tell me much that was new. He said that His Imperial Majesty is not only well, but that current events seem to have stimulated him both physically and mentally. Well, so much the better!<sup>131</sup>

Conrad also went to the headquarters of the Austrian police, where he was informed that — on account of his own age and the ages of his children — the Austrian authorities had decided to give permission for the family to travel to Italy, which was then still a neutral country. On 19<sup>th</sup> October the Conrads crossed the Austrian-Italian border in Cormons. Their first stop in Italy was at the Palace Hotel in Milan, from where Conrad informed Dr. Kosch of the postal arrangements he had made that would allow them to keep up their correspondence after his return to Britain:

Just a word immediately to let you know that we have arrived here in fairly good condition. I have already met a certain Mr. Enrico Ruberl, via Canova 36, who is an engineer and the agent here of Buszczyński. I have arranged with him to act as intermediary in the matter of my correspondence with Austria after my return to England. Thus I shall be writing to you, dear Sir,

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Róża Jabłkowska. *Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski*. Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1964, p. 366.

<sup>130</sup> J. Conrad to T. Kosch, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1914. [In:] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, ed. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 416.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417.

‰Mr Biliński, and also to all my friends in Poland. Please be so kind as to use this channel and send us from time to time news of yourself and your family.<sup>132</sup>

Conrad sent similar letters to Marian Biliński and Stanisław Zajączkowski. The seemingly personal tone of this political correspondence was, of course, largely camouflage. In Genoa the Conrads were able to board a Dutch ship which was sailing to Britain and on 3<sup>rd</sup> November they arrived in London.

On his return to Britain, Conrad found that because of recent developments in international politics it was now impossible for him to keep in touch with his Polish friends. His political initiatives to further the cause of Polish independence would have to wait a whole two years.

## 9

Cracow without a doubt played a very important role in Conrad's extremely eventful life — not once, but twice. In all probability it was in Cracow, in the early 1870s, that the young Konrad Korzeniowski eventually decided to join the merchant marine. The long-term consequences of that decision were twofold: after a period of sailing the seas, Conrad settled down to devote himself entirely to writing.<sup>133</sup>

Conrad's second stay in Cracow (and Zakopane) forty years later was a return to his roots, as it were. The city which he had left in 1874 was known as a 'Polish bastion'.<sup>134</sup> Not insignificantly, in the royal city of Cracow and in the historic manor house in Goszcza, which were then icons of Polishness, Conrad planned to visit places that since childhood had been close to his heart.

Whereas the motives for Conrad's family trip to Cracow in 1914 were, as we have seen, of a sentimental nature, Józef Hieronim Retinger's motives for inviting Conrad were largely political. Although these plans had to be modified because of the sudden outbreak of the 'Great War' — which neither of them had foreseen — there can be no doubt that these months which Conrad spent in Poland triggered a powerful burst of feeling for his Polish heritage — so much so, that he felt obliged to do what he could to further the cause of Polish independence. The mission which Retinger had probably had in mind in inviting the Conrads to come to Cracow was, therefore, to all intents and purposes accomplished — the only (albeit important) difference being that Conrad's political thinking would seem to have been closer to that of the supporters of Józef Piłsudski, while Retinger's was closer to that of the supporters of Roman Dmowski, who at that time placed his hopes on the Entente.

Later developments would seem to have blurred these initial differences between Conrad and his young friend Retinger. In an essay entitled *Odkrycie Patusanu* (The

<sup>132</sup> J. Conrad to T. Kosch, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914. [In:] *ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Frederick R. Karl. *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1979.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Purchla. *Matecznik polski, ed. cit.*



discovery of Patusan), Maria Kuncewiczowa sought to determine what might have brought these two men so closely together:

Why did Conrad believe in his political ideas? What did a psychologist and Romantic see in this political activist? Conrad was born in the eastern borderlands. Retinger was born in Cracow. They went to the same kinds of school — but a whole generation apart. They met in Kent. Really? In Kent? I suspect that it was more likely that they met in Patusan. Over and above any tribal loyalties they may have had, both had sworn loyalty to Lord Jim.<sup>135</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

There can be no doubt that, because of his stay in Cracow and Zakopane, Conrad felt obliged to act as a *defensor Poloniae* on British soil.<sup>136</sup> Stefan Żeromski paid the following tribute to Conrad's political initiatives and to his political writing:

During the war, Joseph Conrad spoke out twice on the Polish question. In 1916 he published an article entitled *A Note on the Polish Problem* in "The Fortnightly Review" and in 1919 — in the same magazine — he published an article entitled *The Crime of Partition*. Both these articles [...] take up our legitimate cause and constitute a noble defence of our unquenchable desire to join together a nation whose lands have been torn apart. As a distinguished writer, he did what he could. Risking his name and reputation, he threw in his lot with ours. We are grateful to him for intervening on our behalf in those critical and decisive moments.<sup>137</sup> [Transl. R.E.P.]

From a chronological point of view, Conrad's stay in Cracow (and Zakopane) was but a small fraction of his life, yet the time he spent there amounted to something much more than a collection of dry biographical facts. These were decisive years that became significant cultural facts — years that have been celebrated in prose and in verse by Poland's greatest writers, to mention but the names of Stefan Żeromski, Antoni Słonimski, Jan Lechoń, Maria Kuncewiczowa and Czesław Miłosz. In this respect, too, the biography of Joseph Conrad — in its Polish episodes, at least — has become an integral part of Polish culture.

Translated by R.E. Pyplacz

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<sup>135</sup> Maria Kuncewiczowa. "Odkrycie Patusanu". [In:] *Conrad żywy*. Ed. Wit Tarnawski. London: B. Świdorski, 1957, p. 53.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Julian Krzyżanowski. "U źródeł publicystyki Józefa Conrada". *Ruch Literacki* 1932, № 8.

<sup>137</sup> Żeromski. "Joseph Conrad", *ed. cit.*, p. 148.

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