

# WIESŁAW KRAJKA

## Conrad's Polish Footprints: A Tour in Words and Images

Wer den Dichter will verstehen  
Muss in Dichters Lande gehen.

(Goethe, *West-östlicher Diwan*)

### Editor's Introduction

Joseph Conrad is famous as a writer who chose English as his artistic medium, when it was not even his second or third language, let alone his first. He settled in England in early middle age and was to live more than half his life there, but he remained passionately attached to his origins, and carried a photograph album of his Polish relatives throughout his travels. What follows here is an evocation in words and pictures of Conrad's life in Poland, inspired by a conference.



Delegates at the conference 'Conrad's Polish Footprints'

“Conrad’s Polish Footprints,” The Third International Joseph Conrad Conference, organised by the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, took place in Lublin and Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, between 29 May and 1 June 2001. It was followed by a week-long tour of the places in Poland where Joseph Conrad, born Konrad Korzeniowski (1857-1924), spent parts of his early life, and where he brought his family on his final visit to the country of his birth. Our tour took in Cracow [Kraków], Zakopane in the Tatra mountains, and Warsaw, visiting the places associated with Conrad and with members of his family. Conference delegates were provided with a booklet (edited by Wojciech Kozak, Wiesław Krajka, Monika Majewska, and Katarzyna Sokołowska), including selected passages from Conrad’s writing about his experience and memories of each location, and excerpts from other texts, including some little-known letters and other texts in Polish, here made available for the first time in English. At each destination, Professor Krajka would gather the conference delegates, a widely international group, and read the relevant text. It became a poignant ritual and homage, as the ordinary life of present-day Poland surged around the knot of “pilgrims.”

In effect the experience was one of retracing Conrad’s Polish footprints backwards, from his last visit to Poland in 1914—when he



The pilgrims gather to listen behind St.Mary’s Church, Cracow.

took a special pleasure in introducing his wife Jessie and their two sons, Borys and John, then aged sixteen and seven, to the haunts of his schooldays in Cracow—back to the Warsaw of his earliest recall as a small child. He could remember the rather grand house from whence his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, had organised political

resistance to Russian rule, and, after he was arrested, the prison yard outside his father's cell. At the age of four Conrad was to accompany his parents when his father was sentenced to exile north of Moscow. The family returned to Poland with both parents in poor health. Conrad's mother Evelina died in 1865 when he was just seven. The 2001 tour visited the grave of his father—poet, translator of Shakespeare into Polish, and patriot—who, when he died in 1869, was given a hero's funeral, with his only son, aged eleven, as principal mourner walking alone behind the coffin through the streets of Cracow, lined with citizens paying their respects. Conrad left Poland for France in 1874 at the age of sixteen to go to sea, and was not to return until 1890, shortly before his voyage up the river Congo which was later to lay the foundations of *Heart of Darkness*. He came back in 1893, but it was then not until 1914 that he visited again. This time he brought his wife and children, on a journey which was transformed by the outbreak of World War I, leading him to seek refuge for his family in the mountainous south of the country at Zakopane. After two months it was from there that Conrad left Poland for the last time, the family travelling via Italy to avoid Germany. It is that journey of 1914 with which the following sequence opens.

The passages below are writings principally by Conrad and others, reproduced from the conference booklet. Additionally here these are accompanied by some of Jessie Conrad's accounts of the 1914 visit, including her impressions of Cracow and Zakopane, accounts which supply some further vivid details of Conrad, of the family's experiences, and of the impact of the outbreak of war. Details of the works cited are given at the end. The writings are presented with my photographs of some of the places visited on the tour of "Conrad's Polish Footprints."

Paula Burnett

### Conrad's Poland

“[W]e had received an invitation to spend some weeks in Poland....The enterprise at first seemed to me considerable....I confess that my first impulse about a projected journey is to leave it alone. But the invitation received at first with a sort of dismay ended by rousing the dormant energy of my feelings....It was like the experience of another world....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...there should have been a fibre [in my boys] which would answer to the sight, to the atmosphere, to the memories of that corner of the earth where my own boyhood had received its earliest independent impressions.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 145-6)

“[T]his Polish journey...for so many years had been before us in a state of a project full of colour and promise, but always retreating, elusive like an enticing mirage.

“And, after all, it had turned out to be no mirage.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 147-8)

“Poland then, if erased from the map, yet existed in reality; it was not a mere *pays du rêve*, where you can travel only in imagination.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 148)

## Cracow

“It is highly probable that I will move to Cracow once: if I am to bear hardships of life, it would rather be by this Holy Sepulchre, which may be a cradle for my child—a Royal, holy cradle!”

(“Apollo Korzeniowski to Stefan Buszczyński;” trans. W. Krajka)

“Cracow is the town where I spent with my father the last eighteen months of 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



Cracow: The Royal Cathedral in the Wawel Castle

into an unrelated existence. It was like the experience of another world...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,



Cracow: “that old royal and academical city”

and gaining an individual past of their own, should lose their unsophisticated interest in mine.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 145-6)

“We arrived in Cracow late at night.

After a scambly supper, I said to my eldest boy, “I can't go to bed. I am going out for a look round. Coming?” He was

ready enough. For him, all this was part of the interesting adventure of the whole journey. We stepped out of the portal of the hotel into an empty street, very silent, and bright with moonlight.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 164)

“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....”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 169)

“After his father's death Conrad, under the guardianship of his uncle Bobrowski, lived in Cracow until he was sixteen. Cracow, after the Rising, which had been ruthlessly suppressed, was sunk in the apathy of its national mourning and seemed to hold out little hope for the future. It could not have had much attraction for a gifted boy, eager to discover life for himself. Conrad must have felt stifled by the prevailing atmosphere of hopelessness, made all the more oppressive by his personal tragedy.”

(Tarnawski, *Conrad, the Man, the Writer, the Pole*, 50)

### **The Railway Station and The Grand Hotel**

“What we saw upon our arrival to the railway station in Kraków, in the evening of 28th July was startling. Stupendous tumult and chaos, military trains, soldiers, soldiers everywhere—farewells, women’s cries. War!”

(Zubrzycka, “Syn dwu ojczyzn,” 161; trans. W. Krajka)

“It must have been after six o’clock when the train ran into Cracow. We were all excited, and I could see my husband was deeply moved at being once again in the city

where most of his boyhood had been passed. He pointed out several interesting places to us from the carriage window...

“At the hotel I was touched by the ready friendliness of our reception. Before we had been there half an hour, cards poured in upon us. I saw for the first time what an immense hold one’s native country could have upon one. We forgot the possibility of war. Only my husband referred now and then to the ominous fact that troops were even on our first night pouring into the town. He kept saying: ‘I wonder if it wouldn’t be wiser to rush you all home again? Still, what a fool I would look if nothing came of it after all. What do you think, my dear?’ I cheerfully urged him to be calm and make up his mind to enjoy our visit.

“I understood my husband so much better after those months in Poland. So many characteristics that had been strange and unfathomable to me before, took, as it were, their right proportions. I understood that his temperament was that of his countrymen. It was a severe trial to my nerves, those two months amongst strangers—strangers so completely foreign, and all talking in a language of which I knew at most a dozen words. I used to collect all the little Poles I could find and take them to play in our small bedroom. Children have a wonderful way of understanding each other without the need of words.

“At night, if I happened to retire early, I would lie anxiously listening to raised voices in the next room, all talking at once. I missed their gestures, which for the most part only showed their utter despair.”

(Jessie Conrad, 67-9)

“We reached Cracow on the evening of 1st August 1914, on the very day that Austria mobilized. We stopped at the Grand Hotel, and were received by the proprietor Mr Chronowski, who came in person to pay his respects to the Conrads.”

(Retinger, 149)



The Grand Hotel, Cracow: The suite where the Conrads stayed.

“For the next two days I went about amongst my fellow men, who welcomed me with the utmost consideration and friendliness, but unanimously derided my fears of a war. They would not believe in it. It was impossible. 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’ve ever been in. Gathered into a small knot, we were discussing the situation in subdued tones suitable to the genius of the place.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 170)

“And another happy revenant of the past was there to increase his enjoyment. When in the evening we were returning to the Grand Hotel we heard in the street an elderly man crying out in astonishment, ‘My little Conrad—Konradku.’ Conrad turned his head, hesitated one second, and then calling ‘Konstanty’ fell into the arms of the

stranger. It was his old friend and school-fellow, Konstanty Buszczyński, who recognized Conrad after forty years.”

(Retinger, 157-8)

“We arrived in Cracow early in the evening....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 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.”

(Borys Conrad, 85-6)

### **The great Market Square**

“After dinner, Jessie and John, tired with the strenuous journey, retired to bed, while Conrad, accompanied by Boris and myself, went out to renew his acquaintance with the old city. I wanted to take them straight to the central square, the famous ‘Rynek.’ ‘No, my dear Joseph,’ said Conrad, ‘I want to see Rynek as I have remembered it all

these years, as one sees it from the side view of the Florian Gate under the shadow of the Church of the Holy Virgin.’ And without hesitation, after forty years of absence, he chose his way in the meander of narrow streets and broad public squares, and conducted us with certain step to the appointed place whence we slowly approached the Rynek.”

(Retinger, 150)



Left: Florianska Street, Cracow - Looking from the St. Florian Gate towards St. Mary's Church and the Rynek

Above: The Rynek, Cracow – the market square

“The street, straight and narrow, ran into the great Market Square of the town, the centre of its affairs and of the lighter side of its life. We could see at the far end of the street a promising widening of space....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 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....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. ‘We are now on the line A. B.,’ I said to my companion, importantly. It was the name bestowed in my time on one of the sides of the Square by the senior students of that town of classical learning and historical relics. The common citizens knew nothing of it, and, even if they had, would not have dreamed of taking it seriously....And then, happening to look up at the wall, I saw in the light of the corner lamp, a white, cast-iron tablet fixed thereon, bearing an inscription in raised black letters, thus: ‘Line A. B.’ Heavens! The name had been adopted officially!...I proposed that we should walk to the other end of the line, using the profaned name, not only without gusto, but with positive distaste....There was at the end of the line a certain street I wanted to look at, I explained to my companion.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, *NLL*, 164-6)



Left: The Rynek, Cracow – the market square

Right: The Rynek, Cracow – the sixteenth century cloth hall



“Conrad ceased talking to his son, he was obviously living again in Cracow, returning in spirit to moments he forgot for forty years, back in his youngster’s days. From time to time he dropped a phrase in Polish: ‘Where are those ancient chains, which formerly marked the outlets of the streets?’ ...’No, don’t show them to me, I will find them myself.’ ...’And, Joseph, the knife of the fratricide, is it hanging still?’ ...’Wait, wait, let me remember’ ...’Boris, this was a time which you, more lucky, will never know.’”

(Retinger, 151)

### The Florian Gate; the Barbican



Florińska Street, Cracow, from the Rynek end:  
“In the distance the Florian Gate...”

“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. There was not

a soul in sight, and not even the echo of a footstep for our ears. 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. At eight o’clock of every morning that God made, sleet or shine, I walked up Florian Street...Every evening at seven, turning my back on the Florian Gate, I walked all the way to a big old house in a quiet narrow street a good distance

beyond the Great Square. There, in a large drawing-room, panelled and bare, with heavy cornices and a lofty ceiling, in a little oasis of light made by two candles in a desert of dusk I sat at a little table to worry and ink myself all over till the task of my preparation was done.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 166-7)

“The night was advancing, and remembering his tiring journey I suggested returning to the hotel. ‘Not yet, Joseph, let me see the Barbacan.’”

(Retinger, 151-2)

### **The Fajll’s house at Florianska Street**

“Konrad was placed in a pension for boys run by one Ludwik Georgeon, in the Fajll's house, on Florianska Street, a choice that was certainly not accidental since Georgeon was a veteran of the 1863 insurrection.”

(Najder, 30)

“Conrad learnt temporarily in a pension, first in Kraków at Floriańska street (the pension was later moved to Franciszkańska 43), conducted by Ludwik Georgeon. Conrad was in more or less close contact with this school for three years (1869-1872).”

(Koc, 16; trans. W. Krajka)

### **43 Franciszkańska Street**

“While he was under the care of Louis Georgeon the establishment was moved from Floriańska Street to a large house at 43 Franciszkańska Street. The Taube family lived

in the same building, and Conrad became friendly with the three boys of his own age and with Janina.”

(Baines, 28)

### **9 Szpitalna Street**

“In November or December 1870, Konrad was taken away from Georgeon's pension and moved to his grandmother's flat at 9 Szpitalna Street, where he lived until May 1873.”

(Najder, 34)

“‘There,’ said he, pointing to upper windows of the building at No.9 Ulica Szpitalna, which is by way of saying Hospital Street, ‘is where we had great fun as youngsters; Josef and I used to throw toy torpedoes down on the black caftans of passing Jews, enjoying ourselves hugely when they exploded....A pogrom, I suppose,’ he laughed. Poles today don't relish that word, or the way it has been misused over here.”

(Palmer Putnam, 142-3)

### **St. Anne's Gymnasium—St. Jacek's Gymnasium**

“He himself claimed to have attended St. Anne's Gymnasium in Cracow, but his actual attendance there is in doubt, because his name fails to appear on any class rosters or in the records of the school kept in Cracow. Nevertheless, Conrad did assert he attended the school, did inform others of this fact, and it is unlikely he would confuse St. Anne's with any other school in Cracow. Whether Conrad actually attended St. Anne's or another gymnasium (St. Jacek's, with less social cachet, has been suggested as an alternate possibility), he did pass an examination for the fourth form.”

(Karl, 90)

“In 1914 Conrad said that he had left Poland ‘straight from the fifth class from Saint Anne's Gymnasium in Cracow.’ He may indeed have left ‘straight from the fifth class,’ but it was neither from Cracow nor from St. Anne’s Gymnasium. If he attended any Cracow school, which is doubtful considering his illness and the lack of any records, it may have been St. Jacek’s Gymnasium, on Sienna Street, where Georgeon had been teaching French.”

(Najder, 31)

## 6 Poselska Street

“Two candles shed a circle of wavering light on the small table where Conrad, his head propped in his hands, sat hunched in the tangled position of a boy reading. The high-ceilinged drawing room was bare and silent. On Cracow’s narrow Poselska Street, the old house at number 136 was out of earshot of the hoofbeats of city traffic; inside, voices were lowered to funereal murmurs.”

(Allen, 51)



Left: Poselska St., Cracow – the house where Conrad’s father died is on the left.

Right: Poselska St., Cracow – a wall plaque commemorates Conrad (see detail below)





“His love of reading was revealed during the last moments of Apollo Korzeniowski's life, too. His flat at Poselska 136 in Kraków was overwhelmed with a depressing mood of absolute silence. This was enhanced by the inaudible whisper of a nun....Shortly before his death the father became strangely, dreadfully quiet and totally immersed in recollections of the past. Konrad was occasionally allowed to enter the sick man's room and kiss his gaunt hand.”

(Koc, 30; trans. W. Krajka)

“I, the Dean of the Collegiate Church and the Parish Church of All Saints and a State Registrar in Kraków, was visited on 24th May 1869 by Piotr Gałuszkiewicz and Kazimierz G...l, of age, servants of the church, residing at 139 Poselska street. They testified that Apollo Korzeniowski, resident of 136 Poselska street, had died on 23rd May 1869 at half past three in the afternoon.” (Kraków, 9th November 1872, Father Franciszek Madeyski, Deputy State Registrar) (“Odpis aktu zgonu;” trans. W. Krajka)

“Yesterday at 6 o'clock in the evening immense crowds surged along the Grodzka and Poselska streets, to pay the last homage to the untimely dead poet, a worthy son of Poland.”

(“Pogrzeb śp. Apollona Korzeniowskiego;” trans. W. Krajka)

### St. Mary's Church

“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.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 166)



St. Mary's Church, Cracow

“At its entrance in the shadow of the majestic Church of the Holy Virgin we stopped, awaiting the call of the bugle (*Hejnal*) which has marked the hours for over six hundred years. Conrad, proud of his memory, with pious zeal explained to Boris that this call celebrates the death of a bugler, who in the thirteenth century was stationed to watch out for a possible attack from marauding Tartar bands. He saved the city by giving the signal, but fell transpierced by an enemy's arrow.” (Retinger, 150-1)

“We took many drives in and round the town, Conrad pointing out to us those places familiar to him during his schooldays. He also told us that Cracow, like our Canterbury, had once had an archbishop murdered in its cathedral....He showed us,

too, St. Florian's Gate, through which his father's funeral had passed. I knew already many touching facts about that part of my husband's lonely life. It seemed to draw my own boys closer to me in a curious way. I shall never cease to feel glad that they and I made that memorable journey while, as Conrad said, they were still young enough to feel impressions deeply."

(Jessie Conrad, 69-70)



St. Mary's Church, Cracow: the mouth of the bugle is just visible in the high tower.

"The day of the funeral came in due course and all the generous 'Youth of the Schools,' the grave Senate of the University, the delegations of the Trade-guilds, might have obtained (if they cared) *de visu* evidence of the callousness of the little wretch... The long procession moved out of the narrow street, down a long street, past the Gothic front of St. Mary's under its unequal towers, towards the Florian Gate... 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 pavement with fixed, serious eyes. Half the population had turned out on that fine May afternoon."

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 169)

### **Apollo Korzeniowski's grave in the Rakowicki Cemetery**

The grave of Apollo Korzeniowski in Rakowicki Cemetery, Cracow. The inscription reads: "Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski, the victim of Muscovite Tyranny. Born 21 February 1820. Died 23 May 1869. To the man who loved his fatherland, worked for it, and died for it. His compatriots." (Sherry, 15)



The grave of Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski – Rakowicki Cemetery, Cracow.

“They also went to Rakowice Cemetery and there, for the only time in his life, Borys saw his father kneel down and pray—at Apollo's grave.”  
(Najder, 399)

### **The Jagiellonian library**

“Next day the librarian of the University invited me to come and have a look at the library which I had not seen since I was 14 years old. It was from him that I learned that the greater part of my father's MSS. was preserved there. He confessed that he had not looked them through thoroughly yet, but he told me that there was a lot of very important letters bearing on the epoch from '60 to '63, to and from many prominent Poles of that time; and he added: 'There is a bundle of correspondence that will appeal to you personally. Those are letters written by your father to an intimate friend in whose papers they were found. They contain many references to yourself, though you couldn't have been more than four years old at the time....' That afternoon I went to the University, taking with me my oldest son. The attention of that young Englishman was mainly attracted by some relics of Copernicus in a glass case. I saw the bundle of letters and accepted the kind proposal of the librarian that he should have them copied for me during the holidays. 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.”

(Conrad, *First News*, *NLL*, 175-6)



Above: The Jagellonian Library, Cracow – the late Gothic cloister of the Collegium Maius, now housing the Jagellonian University Museum.

Right: A doorway at the Jagellonian University Museum, Cracow.



“For many years I believed that every scrap of his writings had been burnt, but in July of 1914 the Librarian of the University of Cracow calling on me during our short visit to Poland, mentioned the existence of a few manuscripts of my father and especially of a series of letters written before and during his exile to his most intimate friend who had sent them to the University for preservation. I went to the Library at once, but had only time then for a mere glance. I intended to come back next day and arrange for copies being made of the whole correspondence. But next day there was war.”

(Conrad, “Author's Note,” *PR*, X-XI)

“Late in the evening Conrad, Borys and ourselves took a stroll in the city. We walked slowly along St. Anne’s street. Conrad recollected his school years, he looked with

affection at the centuries-old walls of the Jagiellonian Library, visible against the starry sky. The Market Square was already silent at that time. Suddenly, sounds of the bugle were heard from the tower of St. Mary's church...Conrad wrung my arm and stopped."

(Zubrzycka, "Syn dwu ojczyzn," 161; trans. W. Krajka)

### **The Jagiellonian University**

"I have only the haziest recollections of being shown round the town—the quadrangle of the university was filled with scaffolding and we had to clamber round blocks of stone and building materials to see the doorway through which my father passed on his way to his tutor many, many years before."

(John Conrad, 87)

### **The Wawel**

"To-day he was going to show his town to his beloved wife. And of course we drove first to the Wawel. The Wawel is the hill towering above Cracow on which stand the buildings most precious to a Pole. It is the most memorable soil in Poland. It is the symbol of everything Polish....It contains the castle of the Kings of Poland, the oldest cathedral church, the most ancient building in the country. There rest the remains of all Polish Kings and many of the great men of Poland. It is her heart! The day was full of majestic, warm, August sun. We ascended the hill. The last time Conrad had seen the royal castle it was in a state of complete abandon. The Austrian Government had been using the old kings' palaces as army barracks, while the cathedral church, where forty Polish kings were crowned, served as a garrison church to the soldiery....Now it was different. The cathedral, returned to the nation, had been restored, the castle was just being rebuilt. And so Conrad, after forty years, was showing it to his wife and

sons in an appearance which he never contemplated himself. They wandered everywhere, peering into dark crypts where kings, statesmen, and poets are buried; they knelt before the ancient dark crucifix of the Queen Jadwiga. In one of the majestic chapels, all gold and lace-like sculpture, a Mass was being read. Jessie bowed her head and, an indifferent Protestant, joined in the prayers of the Catholic religion, overcome with sentiment and emotion.”

(Retinger, 153-5)



The sixteenth century courtyard of Wawel Castle.

## **Zakopane**

“The best move which occurred to me was to snatch them up instantly into the mountains to a Polish health resort of great repute - which I did (at the rate of one hundred miles in eleven hours) by the last civilian train permitted to leave Cracow for the next three weeks.

“And there we remained amongst the Poles from all parts of Poland, not officially interned, but simply unable to obtain the permission to travel by train, or road. It was a wonderful, a poignant two months.”

(Conrad, *Poland Revisited*, NLL, 171)

“We left Cracow on my eighth birthday, 2 August, and boarded the train for Zakopané. I do not know whether it was chance or my father’s forethought but we had the last compartment of the last carriage of the train to ourselves. Looking out from the windows we were able to see the engine winding up the curves ahead and my father kept me fully occupied going from side to side to watch the engine negotiate the steep gradients. I remember being fascinated by the numerous rods and levers, the little whiffs of steam, and the beat of the exhaust as the engine toiled up the slope.”

(John Conrad, 88)

“The little railway station of Zakopane is engraved for ever on my memory; no photograph or coloured picture could convey the depth of that impression. We soon discovered the dismal fact that only one of our trunks had got through, and, searching through our pockets, we failed to find our registration ticket. The second trunk we recovered in a most unexpected manner two months later in Vienna.

“Two days after our arrival we heard that England had come into the war. We had been confident she would. Then followed a nightmare of rumours. During that fortnight we were told that our army had been completely wiped out, and that all our fleet was at the bottom of the sea. Only news from German sources reached us, and every reference to England was accompanied by the most revolting insults. Every cartoon represented England and the English in some odious form...

“Sometimes the trains remained standing in the station with their passengers still aboard, there not being enough food in the place to admit of more people coming in.”

(Jessie Conrad, 75-6, 78)

### **The “Stamary” pension**

“In Zakopane they stopped first at a big pension, Stamary, and after a few days moved to Zagórska’s Konstantynówka.”

(Najder, 400)



The Stamary Pension, Zakopane

“I met Conrad in Zakopane in the first days of August 1914....Conrad was staying in the villa of Mrs. Zagórska, his cousin; the Gielguds and ourselves were staying in the Stamary hotel. We met almost every day after

breakfast on the terrace on the sunny side of the building. We were sitting in comfortable cane armchairs and had a good time discussing various subjects, connected mostly with the war waged, and forecasting the future of Poland.”

(Górski, 1; trans. W. Krajka)

## The Konstantynówka “pension”



The Konstantynówka Pension, Zakopane

“We arrived at Zakopané where the line terminated and after loading our belongings onto a horse and trap drove to Konstantynowka the house of Madame Zagorska, where we were to stay for the next two months....Konstantynowka 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



The Konstantynówka Pension: “a continuous balcony or gallery ran around the house”

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....A continuous balcony or gallery ran round the house at each floor, about four feet wide, with stairways connecting them to one another – 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. The grounds of the house were separated from the footpath by a hedge and on the opposite side the pinewoods began at the edge of the road. Rushes and mosses grew by a tiny stream and here and there the gray mass of a lump of rock showed through.”

(John Conrad, 88-9)



The Konstantynowka Pension: a memorial to Conrad.

“Madame Zagórska gave them a warm welcome at her overcrowded house. The place was full of distinguished refugees, and despite a general shortage of money, clothes and food, Conrad seems to have enjoyed the life of cafe conversations and late-night discussions. It was fine cloudless weather, but as August wore on, increasingly cold.”

(Tennant, 212)

“The house where we had found refuge was full of other refugees; some slept in the dining-room, some in the drawing-room, and one was never out of earshot of excited voices. All talked at once, all were without money, many with scanty clothes. Small change was there none, and the only thing to do was to deposit a hundred-mark note with a café, or shop-keeper, and to spend against it. I had no vest, and when it got very cold I annexed one of Borys’s (who had three), and to this day he teases me because I trimmed the neck with a little embroidery as a small concession to my femininity.” (Jessie Conrad, 76-7)

“Zakopane. The 3rd or 4th of August 1914. A beautiful morning. I come back home and hear some strangers’ voices in the parlour. My mother talks with some guests. I enter: a grey-haired, elderly man rises from the armchair. He has a stern face and distinguished appearance. Conrad!”

(A. Zagórska, “Kilka wspomnień o Conradzie;” trans. W. Krajka)

“We had two small bedrooms opening one from the other and on to a narrow wooden verandah....The house was built of enormous logs like a Swiss chalet and surrounded by a small, weedy garden. Numerous fowls of the bantam breed scratched unsuccessfully, and added greatly to its forlorn aspect, besides providing endless cause for trouble between the tenant and the old landlady (of evil aspect), who had retained two rooms on the top floor. There she lived closely shut in with a maid, as ill-conditioned as herself, appearing, as it seemed, always at the worst moments to continue her quarrel with her tenant about the bantams. I discovered that Madame Z. [Zagorska] had purchased them from some wily dealer in the fond belief that they would grow into large fowls. It took more than a month to persuade her that they were then at their full size and old at that. Later on a goose with a broken wing was added to the live stock. For two days we bore the sight of the poor bird waddling around, and trying hard to avoid treading on its own wing, which trailed beside it. At last Borys caught it and severed the wing with a small pocket-knife. We dressed the wound with some carbolic on a rag, and the goose became quite friendly. The day it formed the midday meal (an October goose in Poland is as great a traditional feast as our turkey at Christmas), we missed our dinner. Apart from the fact that we were

unable to get permission to move from the place, those two months in Zakopane were free from immediate anxiety.

“Scarcely an echo of the war reached us. Only trains full of refugees kept pouring in, or native carts with human freight; clad often in the dress they had been wearing at some dinner-party days before, penniless in spite of valuable jewellery. In one shop window in the main street I have seen hundreds of wedding-rings offered for sale... Soldiers’ uniforms were mostly made by the ladies in the place, and mostly all by hand. Often a young soldier would appear and leave behind him a bundle of wool to be made into socks.”

(Jessie Conrad, 77-8)

### **The waterfall**



Left: Drivers halt for visitors to see the waterfall on the road to Morskie Oko.

Right: Morskie Oko in the Tatra Mountains in June.



“During our stay in Zakopané we made several trips along the roads into the mountains in an open trap drawn by a single horse. My mother enjoyed these trips as they helped to break the monotony of being house-bound by her injured knee. One afternoon we took a drive towards a mountain pass to see a famous waterfall which dropped a considerable height into a large hole at the side of the road from which there was no visible outlet, though it did not overflow. I was fascinated by this and asked my father numerous questions which he answered by explaining that the water passed into a subterranean stream and, after travelling a considerable distance underground, it joined the main river in the plains to the south of the mountains.”

(John Conrad, 89-90)



Tatra Mountains: an underground river reappears.

“Madame Z. [Zagorska], a charming, highly cultured woman, was a connection of my husband’s by marriage. She was completely out of her element here, but very talkative and excitable. I sometimes went shopping with her in the village.

We would drive the short distance, do our shopping, and engage another small trap to return. Almost invariably there would be a heated argument between her and the driver, whose eloquence I could not of course understand. It generally ended by the man following her into the house shouting his demands; if he happened to be fairly old and feeble, Madame would succeed in ejecting him without resistance. She would close the door with great decision, and, before removing her hat, seat herself at the table and begin laying out a patience, grumbling all the time. I had the greatest affection for her and shall treasure her memory always.”

(Jessie Conrad, 79-80)

“About the 6<sup>th</sup> of October we were able, through the kindness of a Polish military officer, to get permits to proceed to Vienna...

“We left our place of refuge at one in the morning. Snow was lying thick on the ground and frost glistening on the hedges in the moonlight. The two unshod horses and their grisled driver, who was attired in skin shoes made as a continuation of his trousers, and a short skin tunic secured around the waist with a string, made a weird picture in the moonlight. His coarse grey moustache, dripping with moisture, made me shudder. The trap was of the old country-fly type, with two hoods made to meet in the middle, without doors. Underneath was slung a large piece of canvas containing fodder for the two horses; hung around the back, in what appeared a very unsafe manner, was the luggage...The inside of the trap was lined with sheepskins, peopled with tiny creatures which effectively kept us awake. The horses trotted noiselessly along the steep roads. Now and again the driver would dismount and trot by the side, or flick his steeds with a long whip, and allow them to get many yards ahead of him. These moments filled me with dismay. On both sides of the road there was a deep drop, and I remembered hearing, only a few days before, of other travellers on that very road who had been badly hurt by being tipped over the edge while the driver was some distance behind. Every now and then the wheels rumbled over a long wooden bridge, or the driver pulled up with a jerk, while some peasant, who had at last responded to his cries, lifted the long pole fixed across the road. This and the glare of the soldiers’ lanterns thrust into our faces, while their owners satisfied themselves we were what our papers stated, were the only incidents till we reached the little wayside station...

“We were all very cold and tired when we reached the station, where seats had been reserved for us in a train for Cracow...I shall never forget the hours we spent in Cracow. We had no permission to leave the station, and had to sit eleven hours on hard wooden chairs. Numerous trains thundered through, stopping to discharge their varied loads of anxious travellers, wounded soldiers, and one or two prisoners. One of these, a tall Russian General, sat stiffly between his two Austrian captors, glancing superciliously around the big refreshment-room, without taking the least notice of anything going on around him...I managed at last to make one of the officials understand that I wanted to wash my little boy’s hands...I followed them, with my hand on John’s shoulder and leaning on my stick. We passed through long, narrow passages reeking of blood and fennel, past long rows of bloodstained figures seated against the wall, some with their eyes closed; others were evidently trying to endure pain in silence, and sat wringing their hands and swaying slightly to and fro. The railway station was also a dressing-station. Suddenly I caught sight of a huge pail full of human scraps, and I hurriedly covered my boy’s eyes with my hand...Our train was due to leave at eleven. At last it thundered into the station, and we started on another phase of our too eventful journey. Always at the back of all our minds was the fear that we might be stopped and held up in some remote place away from our Polish friends. Every now and then my husband would ask, ‘Do you still wish to go on?’ The decision always rested with me, and sometimes, waking at night, I was panic-stricken and almost decided to say so, but with the daylight my courage invariably came back. I held my tongue and we travelled on.”

(Jessie Conrad, 80-5)

## **Warsaw**

“In the spring of 1862 your father left for Warsaw—in the autumn of 1862 your mother followed him. The aim of his move to Warsaw was to establish a literary periodical called ‘Dwutygodnik.’”

(Bobrowski, “Dokument Dla wiadomości Kochanego Siostrzeńca mojego Konrada Korzeniowskiego;” trans. W. Krajka)

“In May of 1861, Apollo went to Warsaw under cover of founding a new literary monthly on the order of the *Revue des Mondes*, to be called the Fortnightly (*Dwutygodnik*), although his real mission was clandestine political work, intended to foment an insurrection against Russia—what was to surface in 1863 as another abortive attempt.”

(Karl, 44)

## **The building at Nowy Świat 45**

“It was thus that from a volume of posthumous memoirs dealing with those bitter years I learned the fact that the first inception of the secret National Committee intended primarily to organize moral resistance to the augmented pressure of Russianism arose on my father’s initiative, and that its first meetings were held in our Warsaw house, of which all I remember distinctly is one room, white and crimson, probably the drawing-room. In one of its walls there was the loftiest of all archways. Where it led to remains a mystery; but to this day I cannot get rid of the belief that all this was of enormous proportions, and that the people appearing and disappearing in that immense space were beyond the usual stature of mankind as I got to know it in later life. Amongst them I remember my mother, a more familiar figure than the others, dressed in the black of the national mourning worn in defiance of ferocious

police regulations. I have also preserved from that particular time the awe of her mysterious gravity which indeed, was by no means smileless.”

(Conrad, “Author's Note,” *PR*, XI-XII)

“In early October 1861, shortly before a state of emergency was declared in the Kingdom, Ewa Korzeniowska and her son moved to Warsaw. On 17 October the underground Committee of the Movement - the kernel of the future Central Committee and National Government—was formed in the Korzeniowskis’ flat at Nowy Świat 45.”

(Najder, 15-16)



Above left: Nowy Świat – the house where Conrad lived with his parents as a small child

Above right: Nowy Świat – the plaque commemorating Conrad

### **The Pavillion X of the Warsaw citadel**

“Three days later, Apollo Korzeniowski found himself within the walls of the Pavillion X of the Warsaw Citadel. The shadows of alien ghosts thickened into brutal force.”

(Najder, 16)



The prison van: the Warsaw Citadel.

“On 21 October Apollo was arrested when the police raided his home, and Conrad retained a memory of himself standing with his mother in a big prison yard where he glimpsed his father's face watching them from behind a barred window.”

(Sherry, 9-10)



Left: The prison yard, Pavilion X, the Warsaw Citadel – Apollo Korzeniowski's cell was behind one of the ground floor windows.

Right: A cell in Pavilion X, the Warsaw Citadel.





Pavilion X, The Warsaw Citadel:  
Conrad, it seems, saw the prisoners  
through the fence.

“‘The Kossacks of the escort,’ these are Conrad’s exact words repeated over and over again, ‘were riding slowly up and down under the snowflakes that fell on women in furs and women in rags. The Russians had put the men into barracks the windows of which were tallowed. They fed them on red herrings and gave them no water to drink. My father was among them.’”

(Ford Madox Ford, 74)

“As far as my family is concerned, my brother-in-law Korzeniowski became the first victim. He went to Warsaw apparently to conduct literary activities, but in fact he joined patriotic conspiracy there...he gained an eminent position in this movement. However very soon, in October 1861, he was arrested, imprisoned in the Citadel and judged by the commission chaired by colonel Roźnow, a former colleague of my brother Stanisław of a regiment of hussars in Grodno, and later - the governor of Warsaw.”

(Bobrowski, *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, 457; trans. W. Krajka)

“The Citadel clock struck five o’clock in the morning. The Citadel in Warsaw is a specially prepared destructive machine for the town. It is also a boundless dungeon in which the Tsar buries Polish patriotism. This machine only waits for some tyrant’s caprice. As a dungeon—constantly opened and closed—it takes a heavy toll of the lives of thousands of innocent victims. Tsar Nicholas built the Citadel and christened

it by the name of his predecessor and brother. It is called the Alexandrian Citadel.”

(Korzeniowski, “Polska i Moskwa;” trans. W. Krajka)



The Warsaw Citadel: a modern memorial to prisoners like Apollo Korzeniowski.

“In 1862 my father was imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel, and after a few months’ stay there—deported to Vologda. I accompanied my parents in their exile.”

(“Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski to Kazimierz Waliszewski;” trans. W. Krajka)

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