

## JOSEPH CONRAD (1857-1924)

**The following address was delivered at Canterbury Cemetery on 3 August 2024 by  
Robert Hampson, Chair of the Joseph Conrad Society (UK)**

Let me begin by saying how nice it is to see so many people here today – old friends and also some new faces – to commemorate the centenary of Joseph Conrad's death and to celebrate his contribution to English literature – and, indeed, world literature. I am particularly pleased that Anna Tarnowska-Waszak from the Polish Embassy was able to join us as well as representatives of the Polska Szkoła J.C. Korzeniowskiego in Canterbury and from the English Department at Canterbury University. I also want to welcome our former Chair, Keith Carabine – I am very pleased that he can be with us here today. I particularly want to thank our Secretary, Hugh Epstein, for all the work he has done in gaining permissions to allow us to refurbish the headstone and in commissioning the recarving. Without him, today's event would not have been possible.

As we all know, Joseph Conrad died 100 years ago today. He had complained of chest pains the day before during a car-ride with his friend Richard Curle. They returned to Oswalds where he was seen by Doctor Fox, who diagnosed the pain as indigestion. His sons, Borys and John arrived in the early evening to spend the long Bank Holiday weekend with their parents. Borys was accompanied by his wife and his son, Philip, who was for many years the Conrad Society President and well-known to some of us here. Later in the evening, Conrad complained of breathing difficulties, and another doctor was called. After a bad night, he felt easier and was able to sit in his chair in his bedroom, joking with his wife, Jessie, who was in the adjacent bedroom. At 8.30 am he seems to have had a heart attack. Jessie heard him call out and then fall. Conrad was buried here on August 7, after a funeral service at St Thomas's Roman Catholic Church. The late David Miller, another friend of the Conrad Society, wrote a short novel, *Today*, about the events of Saturday, 2 August, and the following days through to the end of the funeral.

According to Zdzisław Najder, the funeral was attended by some sixty people. These included family, friends and Edward Raczyński, representing the Polish Government. Among the friends present were: James Bone (London editor of the *Manchester Guardian*); Sidney Cockerell (Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum); Robert Cunninghame Graham; Richard Curle; the publisher Hugh Dent; Edward Garnett; Jean-Aubry; David Meldrum (from Blackwood's); Józef Retinger; Alice Rothenstein; Ralph and Iris Wedgewood; and the book

collector and forger, Thomas Wise. Jessie Conrad was unable to attend, because she was still recovering from a recent operation on her leg. Garnett described those present as a 'few old friends, acquaintances and pressmen'. Cunninghame Graham was angry about the lack of public and official recognition: he reported Jean-Aubry's comment: 'that had Anatole France died, all Paris would have been at his funeral'.

In her obituary for Conrad in the *TLS*, Virginia Woolf described his reputation, at the time of his death, as 'with one exception, undoubtedly the highest in England'. That 'one exception, was probably Henry James, another naturalised British subject.

I want to end with a few sentences from Conrad's essay, 'Poland Revisited', which he wrote in December 1914 about the visit he and the Conrad family had made to Poland earlier that year. It was many years since Conrad's last visit, and this visit, as the essay explains, was not just 'a voyage in space' but 'a journey in time' (*Notes on Life and Letters*, p.149). In Cracow, for example, Conrad recalls his schooldays there during his father's last days, and the huge funeral for his father which was effectively a political demonstration for the cause of Polish independence. He sees himself again as: 'the small boy of that day following a hearse; a space kept clear in which I walked alone, conscious of an enormous following' (*Notes on Life and Letters*, p.169). I can't help recalling, at this point, visiting Apollo Korzeniowski's grave with Philip Conrad in 1991, the first time he had seen his grandfather's grave. However, the sentences I want to end with are from an earlier part of the essay. Rather than being part of his negotiation with his Polish heritage, these expressed another loyalty. This is the paragraph where he describes the family's departure from Oswalds. It concludes: 'I carried off in my eye this tiny fragment of Great Britain': 'it was dear to me not as an inheritance, but as an acquisition'. With that distinction between 'inheritance' and 'acquisition' Conrad indicates his dual loyalty to Poland and to England.





JOSEPH TEODOR KONRAD  
KORZENIOWSKI  
BORN DECEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup> 1857  
DIED AUGUST 28<sup>TH</sup> 1924  
*ALBEP AFTER 70YLS. PART AFTER STORMIL DEAS  
KASZ AFTER WAKIL DEATH AFTER LUCASIS DEKADY PŁAZI*  
JESSIE EMMELINE KONRAD  
KORZENIOWSKA  
BORN FEBRUARY 22<sup>ND</sup> 1873  
DIED DECEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup> 1936

IN MEMORY OF  
ALFRED BORN OF  
JOSEPH KONRAD  
BORN 10<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1888  
DIED 13<sup>TH</sup> 10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1978









JOSEPH TEODOR CONRAD  
KORZENIOWSKI  
BORN DECEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup> 1857  
DIED AUGUST 31<sup>ST</sup> 1924

*SLEEP AFTER TOYLE, PORT AFTER STORMIE SEAS,  
EASE AFTER WARRE, DEATH AFTER LIFE, ODDS GREATLY PLEASE*  
1924

JESSIE EMMELINE CONRAD  
KORZENIOWSKA  
BORN FEBRUARY 22<sup>ND</sup> 1873  
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