

JOSEPH CONRAD:  
TIMES REMEMBERED

*‘OJCIEC JEST TUTAJ’*

JOHN CONRAD

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

JOSEPH CONRAD:  
TIMES REMEMBERED

*‘OJCIEC JEST TUTAJ’*

JOHN CONRAD

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1981

First published 1981

Set, printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Fakenham Press Limited, Fakenham, Norfolk

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

Conrad, John

Joseph Conrad, times remembered.

1. Conrad, Joseph – biography
2. Novelists, English – 20th century – biography

I. Title

823'.9'12 PR6005.04Z/ 79-41596

ISBN 0 521 22805 0

*To the memory of Richard Curle  
and friends of my father*

## Preface

Soon after we arrived at the hotel in Vienna in the late afternoon of 9 October 1914 my father asked me to take a message to some Polish friends who were also staying there. He took me into the corridor and said, ‘When you have found their room, knock on the door and say, “Ojciec jest tutaj”’. Now don’t forget, “Ojciec jest tutaj” – it means “father is here”.’

I have not forgotten. The words themselves will not mean much to the many people who admire my father’s works, but over the years of writing down these memories they have acquired a special meaning for me, and I feel that I am in duty bound to include them as a subtitle.

To those who read these reminiscences, which are a true record of the last fifteen years of my father’s life, I can only hope that they will be aware of my father’s presence in these pages.

Neither my mother, my brother nor I ever learnt to speak Polish but I still remember the few words and sentences which my father taught me, and in those words are many recollections of the years that have passed. When I tell an anecdote to friends their response is always ‘Why don’t you write it down?’ Among my many friends, Richard Curle was the most insistent and whenever we met he took me to task, saying, ‘You really ought to write your reminiscences. Get them down on paper. They give a picture of your father that no other person can give. You owe it to your father; he would expect it of you.’

I can recall in my mind’s eye the picture of his room at West Coker, lit by a single bright bulb in a dark shade, as we talked far into the night. In the shadow his figure, reclining in a deep armchair, his face and eyes appearing every now and then when lit by the glow of his cigarette. For a while I was silent then said, ‘Dick, you may laugh at me but many years ago when I realised JC’s position in the world of letters, I decided that I would not intrude into that world. So many

people have written about his work that I feel that any contribution that I may make could well be superfluous.'

He said, leaning forward and gazing into the fire, 'It could be so but then your recollections would be personal, more authentic about your father. You know far more about him as a person and a father than anyone else because you seem to have spent more time in his company, especially in the later years. By time I mean the actual hours and minutes when you were together but of course in "years" you knew him for the shortest time. You have told me a lot about him that I did not know but which I had assumed, and although I knew him well I know him better now. I only knew the family life of a generous host who always made a fuss of me, but now the picture is complete. You know as well as I do that very few books have been written about your father himself. About his books, yes, and we must be very grateful that his work has created so much interest though some of the books, one suspects, were written more for their author's edification than to appraise JC's ability.'

Eventually he persuaded me that I ought to make the effort, and over the years I jotted down various recollections, but it was not until I gave a talk on my father that I cast aside the last lingering doubts. I had never promised JC, and nor had he asked me, to keep quiet. I am convinced that it never occurred to him, not seriously at any rate, that any of us would write about him. He encouraged my mother to write her cookery book but never tried to persuade me to write at any time.

A year or so later I sent my first effort to Richard Curle for criticism and received a long letter of valuable advice pointing out that I had hardly mentioned my father's friends and only referred to himself *en passant*. He wrote: 'You have chosen an apt title but you must realise that your father's friends are an important part of his life and, while I do not pretend to have influenced him, I am part of that life – an important part if what you have told me is true about your father's references to me.' Dear Dick, he forgave me but I felt even more inadequate for the task and time passed all too quickly. His sudden death in 1968 was a great shock and loss after a friendship which had lasted over fifty years. But time moves on and all that is history now.

A feeling of adventure mixed with trepidation was the sensation that I had when I first put pen to paper to record these recollections. One's inadequacy seems to hover over the blank page, anxiety

flickers on the horizon like summer lightning and doubt lurks in each full stop and comma. Have I the ability to do justice to the subject? Can I justify my father's trust in me?

It is so easy to embroider memories, but I shall try not to do so, from the earliest days in the cottage at Aldington through the years at Capel House, the brief period at Spring Grove and the last four years at Oswalds. I hope I shall be able to convey the interest shown and the companionship given by an understanding and, perhaps, over-generous father, who nevertheless impressed upon me at a very early age that 'I must justify my existence on this earth, be honest with myself and with all men, be confident but not conceited.'

Recalling some fifteen years of memories from the age of three to eighteen it seems logical to arrange them in defined periods of time but not strictly in chronological order within those periods. Also I found it easier to recall the past by dividing my reminiscences into the following intervals:

Aldington, 1909–10, the infant

Capel House, 1910–14, the child

Capel House, 1914–19, the boy

Spring Grove and Oswalds, 1919–24, the youth

Apart from checking dates in the *Life and Letters* edited by Jean Aubry (2 volumes, Heinemann, London, 1927) I have not read any books about my father's works for a number of years. Nor have I read my brother's book or those by my mother, as I want to record only the events which I remember personally. I shall call attention to events about which I was told in later years but otherwise I shall relate events as I remember them. For a fuller account of the life and work of my father I would refer the reader to Jocelyn Baines's book *Joseph Conrad: a critical biography* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1960), and to Norman Sherry's books, *Conrad's Eastern World* and *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge University Press, 1966 and 1971). From time to time I mention my grandparents and my father's dislike of Russians. The brief explanation is that my grandparents, along with my father, were exiled to Siberia for being involved in protests against the tyranny of the Tsars and the ruling classes, and that my father's mother was brutally forced to travel back to Siberia when she was obviously dying of consumption; orders were given that no mercy should be shown to her or my father and they were sent back to an area where there was no medical attention whatever. For

further explanation the reader is referred to *Under Western Eyes*, and to two essays by my father 'Autocracy and War' and 'The Crime of Partition' (J. M. Dent and Sons, uniform edition, London, 1921).

I shall refer to my father as JC though I did not address him in this way until much later, about 1920, when we were living at Oswalds. As a child I called him 'Dada' when the need arose but never 'Dad' or 'Father'. My mother would tell me to take things to 'your father' but to me it never seemed a suitable form of address, not that he was aloof or distant (except when annoyed). He was a most approachable person but he expected good manners and had no time for anyone who butted in when other people were speaking.



## Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi

### ALDINGTON DAYS, 1909-10

1 The infant. Early recollections – pretending illness – the cure – the cottage – Mr and Mrs Post – playing on the bank – Mr Slingsby – the iron horse – cuts and bruises – clean and tidy for meals	3
--	---

### CAPEL HOUSE DAYS, 1910-14

2 The child. Capel House – garden – interior – galley – Nellie Lyons – Mrs C cooking – knots – emissary – toys – talks after tea – nautical – geographical – Lear – <i>Æsop's Fables</i> – faces in the bark of trees	13
3 Warping ships – stout ball of string – Hope – maritime activities – visit to Hopes – vases – Hope's quietness – sketching ships – no disparagement of effort – ports and harbours – Strait of Malacca – <i>Otago</i> and <i>Dragonfly</i> – JC falls into pond – newts and fish – the lost swallow	22
4 Dogs and cats – the postman – wasp sting – called to drawing room – sennits – André Gide – meccano – steam engines – kitchen table	31
5 Tree climbing – look out for guests – shopping – gardening – pedal motor – reward for careful driving – silent travel – horn – ashtray – oast-house – hops – sulphur up – pressing – pocketing	38
6 Cadillac – Gibbons at Dymchurch – marsh fog – half men and cows – lost wheel – calmness at the unexpected – Campbell and Leacon Hall Corner – Model T Ford – waggon and horses – Gibbons at Trottiscliffe	46

7	Garnett – Millais – Symons – Will Cadby – Douglas – Oliver – Hueffer – Cunninghame Graham – Marwood – Horton Priory and Jenny – Galsworthy – Richard Curle	55
8	Mother cooking – typing – food – preferences – Nellie Lyons – foreign visitors – illness – no slacking – Dr Tebb – Dr Mackintosh – Dr Fox – dentist – comedy – mannerisms – eyeglass – accent – Lear – Carroll – verse	78
9	Poland – Hamburg – Berlin – Cracow – Gorski portrait – Vienna – Milan – Genoa – Gibraltar – Tilbury	86

#### CAPEL HOUSE, 1914–19

10	The boy. First lessons – no hobbies – Mrs C's lack of interest – friends in uniform – prehistoric animals – Colvins – Wedgwoods – Maskelyne and Devant – Pinker – lunching out – Jane Anderson – first bicycle – circuses – school – ticking off	99
----	--	----

#### SPRING GROVE AND OSWALDS, 1919–24

11	The youth. JC visits the navy – 'Q' ships – air-raid – Mrs C's knee – Sir Robert Jones – brother gassed – half-term lunch – Nellie Lyons – Spring Grove – looking for a car – operation in Liverpool – back to Ripley Court – driving lessons	117
12	Oswalds – hedges – trees – the little people – noises in the roof – Milward – water under the floor – lighting plant	127
13	Deal – Baker – seasickness – sailing – <i>Jeanette</i> – Goodwins – Gull lightship – Scandinavian ship – assumed toughness – wish to return to sea	134
14	Study – elm tree – drawing room – rented houses – Leacon Hall – furnishing – Mrs Willard – Mrs C's bedroom – JC's bedroom – the crew – Audrey Seal – flowers – clothes – visit to the church – power of observation – Milward	144
15	Quietness – sympathy – dress – Foote – breakfast – shopping – Petit – Bing – Courts – Goulden – lunch – afternoon runs – Ninnes – Romney Marsh – Deal – dinner – cigarette jug	154

16	Anxious traveller – Burwash – games – billiards – ping pong – no interest in cricket – colonels – memory – cruising around – besique – <i>The Rescue</i>	162
17	Mrs C short of occupation – telegrams – burst tube – Christmas lunch – Corsica – books – Cunninghame Graham – Galsworthy – broken belt – ability to switch thoughts – Walpole – carpenter – ticking-off for poor Latin	169
18	Picked up at school – Leigh – coach and four – Goudhurst – room in the roof – scars of a duel – Saturday cricket – coach trip to Deal – JC pilot – Thursday cricket – Milward – manners – maid	178
19	Missing tools – aversion to police – lost tool case – lost stick – the thief spotted – bread pellets – drawings – Rothenstein – flying around	187
20	Welsh trip – change of car – Daimler – chess – Northcliffe – Zagorska – Graham – billiards – Curle	192
21	Walpole – Hypocrisy – dislike of Russians – Goodburn – Epstein – Powell – Tittle – Aubry – Le Havre – Gide – Aubry's parents – Bost family	203
22	Arrival Le Havre – lunch at Gide's – Sheppard – Sneller – doctor's locum – 3 August – Lyons – funeral – a thought	209

## Illustrations

*(Unless otherwise stated the illustrations are from the author's private collection.)*

Joseph Conrad.	<i>frontispiece</i>
Borys and John Conrad while at Aldington, 1909-10.	<i>page 8</i>
Joseph Conrad at his desk, Capel House.	15
Evelina Korzeniowska, the mother of Joseph Conrad.	19
Apollo Korzeniowski, the father of Joseph Conrad.	19
Mrs Conrad and John, Capel House.	32
Albert Bampton (coachman-chauffeur) and John, Capel House.	48
Joseph Conrad wearing his havelock coat. Mrs Conrad and John, outside Capel House.	51
Edward Garnett. (Reproduced by permission of Dr David Garnett.)	56
Mrs Conrad, Joseph Conrad and John in the drawing room at Capel House. (Photograph by Will Cadby.)	61
Joseph Conrad and John in driveway at Capel House. (Photograph by Will Cadby.)	62
Joseph Conrad by fireplace in dining room at Capel House. (Photograph by Will Cadby.)	65
Ford Maddox Hueffer (Ford), 1909.	66
R. B. Cunninghame Graham.	71
Arthur Marwood.	73
Itala car at Genoa 1914.	93
John, Jane Anderson, Mrs Conrad and Joseph Conrad in the garden at Capel House.	107
Jack Burchett and Louis Ford, gardeners at Oswalds.	128
Luther Milward.	132
South side of study at Oswalds.	145
Oswalds, 1919-25.	145
Corner of drawing room at Oswalds.	148

Gontran Goulden.	158
Mrs Conrad and John at Oswalds, 1922.	170
J. B. Pinker's coach and four leaving Bury Court, Leigh near Reigate, 1921.	179
John, Borys, Joseph Conrad and J. B. Pinker in front of Oswalds, 1921.	182
Daimler, 38 horse-power, ex-royalty.	195
Richard Curle at Oswalds, 1923.	199
Joseph Conrad. (Photographer unknown.)	214
Copy of the only remaining letter from Joseph Conrad to John.	217

Aldington days, 1909–10



# I

The infant. Early recollections – pretending illness –  
the cure – the cottage – Mr and Mrs Post – playing  
on the bank – Mr Slingsby – the iron horse – cuts  
and bruises – clean and tidy for meals

When my parents left 'The Someries', near Luton in Bedfordshire, it was to return to Kent, to a tiny cottage at the bottom of Ruffins Hill at Aldington. It was a dark and gloomy place rendered more so by the dark paint which seemed to be the usual colour for dwellings at that time. Add to this the fact that it was built on the north side of an abrupt hill which effectively cut off any sunlight from early autumn to late spring, and one had all the ingredients for a thoroughly depressing abode. It was primitive in the extreme: water from a well outside the back door, a bucket in a shed at the end of the garden as a toilet, and fires that produced more smoke than heat, hardly created the atmosphere in which to write anything, let alone masterpieces of literature.

The darkness of the cottage forms the background for my few and rather sketchy recollections of that time, dominated in a strange way by the silhouette of the frame and bars of the window through which I remember seeing the branches of a tree against the sky. The stairs were very steep and narrow, without any daylight, but there was a rope which helped to lead one up to the tiny landing and the two bedrooms.

I still remember, vividly, sitting on a wooden chair with my feet on another chair, a blue rug with red lines forming a squared pattern thrown over my legs, groaning and trying to snap my fingers as I had seen my father do when he had an attack of gout. My mother, passing through the room on her way upstairs, would stop and say: 'I think you ought to find something better to do.' I suppose it was a normal reaction for a child to what must have seemed the very frequent attention that my father needed when he was ill.

The game of 'being ill' was cured but the memory of that unhappy



morning has remained with me ever since. We had a daily help as my mother was lame even in those days and suffered a lot of pain from her damaged knee. One day when my father was ill she had to go out, presumably to fetch the doctor, and I was left alone with the daily help. Whether it was devilment on my part, or boredom, is immaterial, but when my mother had gone I sat myself down on a chair with my feet on another with the rug thrown over my knees, twiddling my thumbs and groaning. Suddenly I was seized by the arm, dragged up the stairs and thrust into my father's bedroom where he was lying in bed, his throat so swollen that from where I stood I could only just see his forehead. I broke free of the grip that held me and clambered down the stairs followed by the 'ogre'. When I hear, in a coarse and raucous voice, 'That'll teach yer', those awful moments come rushing back and the memories of nightmares peopled with beings with vastly swollen throats jostle for attention in my mind.

When my mother returned she was very worried by my scared appearance but I was too frightened to tell her what had happened. I could feel the eyes of the daily help following me about the room warning me not to say anything. I never told my mother but somehow she found out and we very soon had a different daily help. My mother must have realised what had happened because as soon as the swelling of my father's throat had gone down I was taken in to see him. Thoughtless as the action was it cured me of playing at being ill!

The cottage was the northern one of a pair on the east side of the lane that passes through a small group of cottages and houses dominated by the church which is surrounded by the remains of an archiepiscopal palace, in the original village of Aldington. The next-door cottage was occupied by a butcher, but the only other thing I can remember about him was that his name was Dryland.

About eighty yards up the hill on the other side of the lane stood a row of cottages along the top of a bank, the nearest one of which was the home of Mr and Mrs Post, an elderly couple of country folk with whom my parents seemed to get on well. On fine evenings the three of us would walk up the hill, climb the rough steps cut into the bank and arrive on the square paved area in front of their cottage. My parents used to sit on the low wall that ran round two sides of the paving where it was pleasantly cool in hot weather as it faced east towards the farm on the other side of the lane where Mr Slingsby