

Conrad's Polish-Ukrainian "Graveyard": A New Digital Collection and Exhibit at Duke University Libraries

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One of the few personal items that Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski brought along with him when he emigrated from the Russian Empire in 1874 was a small, black leather-bound photograph album, which the orphaned, Ukrainian-born, Polish-English author would later describe as "the grave-yard."³ (**Illustration 1**) And not without cause: in addition to *cartes-de-visite* photos of his Korzeniowski-Bobrowski relatives and friends, some dressed in "national mourning" (*żałoba narodowa*), (**Illustration 2**) the album included not only a memorial portrait of Conrad's late father, who was exiled (along with his wife and son) for anti-Russian political activity on the eve of the failed January Uprising of 1863-64; (**Illustration 3**); but also the Roman Catholic church in Chernihiv, Ukraine where Conrad's mother was buried; (**Illustration 4**); as well as a birch-tree crucifix over an as-yet-unidentified grave (possibly his mother's final resting place). (**Illustration 5**)

This 19th-century family photo album was purchased by Duke University Libraries in 1968, on the recommendation of Dale B. J. Randall, a professor in the Department of English who had just published a book on Conrad.⁴ When the album first came to Duke, it was primarily of "biographical" interest.⁵ But now that the Black Lives Matter movement and Russia's neo-imperialist war on Ukraine have brought anti-racism and decolonization to the fore of scholars' research agenda, the Polish-Ukrainian context in which Conrad's "grave-yard" was produced acquired a new importance. And this, in turn, necessitated another round of archival research, analysis, and description, which was started in the summer of 2022. As a result, in early 2024, the entire photo album was digitized and made freely available on the Duke University library website as part of a new digital collection, entitled *Joseph Conrad photograph album of his Polish relatives*.⁶

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³ Jessie Conrad, *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, Page & company, 1926), p. 10.

⁴ Accession Record, Duke University Libraries, 1968; Dale B. J. Randall, *Joseph Conrad and Warrington Dawson; the record of a friendship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968).

⁵ Dale B. J. Randall, "Some New Conrad Biographical Sources," *Conradiana*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1968), 69-70; Virginia R. Gray, "Young Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski," *Library Notes*, Number 43 (November 1972), 43-52.

⁶ Joseph Conrad photograph album of his Polish relatives, circa 1857-circa 1892, Joseph Conrad papers, 1850-1972, 2023, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library,

The analog version of this unique piece of Conradiana will serve as the centerpiece of an exhibit at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Special Collections Library of Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, between October 15, 2024 and April 5, 2025. *Conrad's Polish-Ukrainian "Graveyard": Memory, Mourning, and Resistance in His 19th-Century Family Photo Album* is timed to coincide with two memorable dates: the centenary of Conrad's death (1924) and the tenth anniversary of the start of Russia's war against the country of his birth (2014). In linking these events, the upcoming library exhibit seeks not only to educate visitors about Conrad's Eastern European roots but also to provide the long-term historical background necessary for understanding Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the largest military conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. Furthermore, by exploring how the invention of photography made it possible for 19th-century Polish-Ukrainian survivors of Russian imperial oppression to simultaneously commemorate political resistance, mourn personal loss, and process collective trauma, *Conrad's "Graveyard"* also seeks to foster a discussion about the documentary and recuperative roles of new information technologies, both in the past and the present.

Thanks to the generous support of the Josiah Charles Trent Memorial Foundation Endowment Fund, the exhibit opening on October 24, 2024 will feature a special guest lecture by an expert on the exilic roots of Conrad's cultural hybridity, George Z. Gasyna, Arlys Conrad Humanities Scholar, Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Program in Comparative and World Literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.⁷

For more information about Duke's new digital collection and/or the upcoming library exhibit, please contact the co-curators of *Conrad's "Graveyard"*: Ernest Zitser ernest.zitser@duke.edu and Kimberly Kresica kim.w.archiwach@gmail.com.

{Scroll down for Illustrations}

⁷ George Z. Gasyna, *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exilic Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (New York & London: Continuum, 2011); G.W. Stephen Brodsky, *Joseph Conrad's Polish Soul: Realms of Memory and Self*, edited with an introduction by George Z. Gasyna [Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives Project, Vol.

Illustrations



Illustration 1: Joseph Conrad photograph album of his Polish relatives, 1850s-1860s. Joseph Conrad papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, URL: <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/1aef9c22-1085-42fd-9849-31eeb6e7e762/jcpst001001>



Illustration 2: Teofila (Biberstejn-Pilchowska) Bobrowska in national mourning dress with veil 1861. Joseph Conrad papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

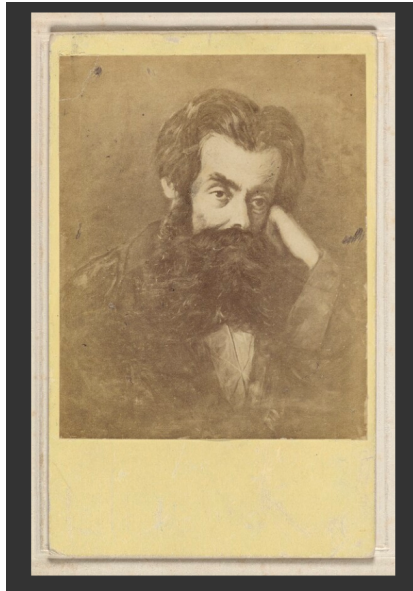


Illustration 3: Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski, as painted by Kazimierz Mirecki, 1869. Joseph Conrad papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, URL: <https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r4b56rv6c>



Illustration 4: 19th century Roman Catholic church in Chernihiv, 1865. Joseph Conrad papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, URL: <https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r4959qz45>



Illustration 5: Unidentified grave adjacent to birch tree made to look like a cross, circa 1865. Joseph Conrad papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, URL: <https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r42n5b77s>