

PREFACE

This book is a literary and cultural history of the modern American invention of Joseph Conrad as a “master” literary figure between 1914 and 1939. It is primarily a book about reading: reading war and peace; reading crises of U.S. and world history; reading conflicts of culture, democracy, coloniality, nation; asking why we read, and how, and whom; reading U.S. Americans who once read Joseph Conrad, and asking what this stands to contribute to contemporary comparatist and international developments in the fields of Americanist, modernist, and Conrad studies. This is also a book about dialogue: the cultural dialogue that produced Conrad as a “master” literary figure in the United States during and after the First World War, and the potential for dialogue between American studies and Conrad studies, Americanist endeavor and transnational modernist literary inquiry more generally, in ways that have been more foreclosed than one might think. Finally, this book concerns methodology. Although the empirical recovery of Conrad’s “heterotopic” cultural and political resonance in the modern United States is this book’s scholarly priority, it is also an occasion to advance and argue for an extended practice of what I call “capillary comparativism,” a critical approach predicated on the minute investigation of the constitution and contestation of “domestic” spaces by “foreign” signs. Throughout and *through* Conrad, *Our Conrad* seeks to emphasize the revisionist power of and need for this approach in contributing to other recent efforts to transnationalize the terms of global literary and cultural studies in a (still) formidably and often frighteningly nationalized world.

I hope it will be clear that the Americanist emphases of this book are professional (i.e., it is my field—and that field, I argue, includes Conrad) and strategic, not appropriative or territorializing. Though the original American meaning of “our Conrad,” as we shall see, was quite possessive, the last thing I would wish is that whatever energy and intensity one might find in this book should be construed as a gesture of “claiming” Conrad for Americans (or Americanists)—especially when what inspired this book in the first place was the example of so many different world scholars of Conrad who have pioneered

different strategies of world contact, conversation, and contemplation through the genuinely plural and planetary frame of Conrad's writings. It is an Americanist desire to participate in this global conversation, and to extend back to U.S. literary and cultural studies some of its own defamiliarizing implications and complications, that centrally motivates this study.

. . .

This book, my first, has been a while in the making and would not have made it at all were it not for the limitless generosity and insight of many friends and colleagues. My first thanks are to my teachers. I am indebted to Albert Gelpi, George Dekker, Thomas Moser Sr., and Bill Solomon—for wisdom and generosity far beyond the confines of this book. I especially thank Al Gelpi for opening American literature to me, and for one of the great guiding friendships of my life. Barbara Gelpi, David Riggs, Jay Fliegelman, and Marjorie Perloff also provided crucial support from the beginning; Ian Watt and Albert Guerard were foundational to this book's conception; and D. A. Miller and Cass Sunstein were the first to raise enduring questions of how to write and what to write for.

The heart of this book was written during sixteen months spent at the National Humanities Center on fellowship support provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the General Research Board of the University of Maryland. I sincerely thank Geoffrey Harpham, intrepid director and infectious thinker, and Kent Mullikin for their perfect hospitality and invigorating friendship; Theresa Braunschneider, Paul Saint-Amour, Phil Rupprecht, and Scott Casper for a remarkable community of collaborative criticism and convivial fun; Alice Donohue, Sheryl Kroen, Ann Firor Scott, Kyeong-Hee Choi, Mark Fiege, Catherine Gallagher, Martin Jay, Mary Kinzie, Gary Macy, and Mark Maslan for suggestive conversations relating to this book and many other things; and Bernice Patterson, Lois Whittington, Sarah Payne, Corbett Capps, James Getkin, Phillip Barron, Josh Bond, Sue Boyd, Marie Brubaker, Karen Carroll, Betsy Dain, Joel Elliott, Jean Houston, Martha Johnson, Caren Koplik, Barbara Mormile, Lynwood Parish, Eliza Robertson, Richard Schramm, Pat Schreiber, Don Solomon, Stephanie Tucker, Marianne Wason, Michelle Walton-Snow, and Felisha Wilson for making me (and everyone else) feel perfectly at home.

At the University of Maryland, I've been fortunate in the support I've received from my own department and college. Bob Levine, in one of many acts

of unstinting friendship, read completely and commented incisively on the most important draft of the manuscript. Sangeeta Ray made an especially valuable critique of the Introduction. Michael Israel, Brian Richardson, Elizabeth Arnold, Ralph Bauer, Richard Cross, Matt Kirschenbaum, Ted Leinwand, Susan Leonardi, Beth Loizeaux, Isabella Moulton, Howard Norman, Zita Nuñez, Randy Ontiveros, Carla Peterson, Martha Nell Smith, Josh Weiner, and David Wyatt all did and said things that directly mattered to this book—perhaps more than they know. John Auchard, most generously of all, knew exactly what to say and when to say it throughout the most important period of this book's composition.

Among Conrad scholars, my debts are truly too extensive to enumerate—but I must at least try to thank Keith Carabine and Allan Simmons, remarkable friends who have from the beginning generously supported and crucially advised this book; Zdzisław Najder, who graciously spent many pages and hours vitally informing its contents; Laurence Davies, who thoughtfully gave me advance access to Conrad's later letters; Gene Moore, Don Rude, Grażyna Branny, and Jack Peters, who all provided me with valuable materials on Conrad in the United States that I was not aware of; Carola Kaplan and Andrea White, comrades-in-arms in a project that ran parallel to this book; Edward W. Said, whom I met only once during the writing of this book but who impacted it significantly through that experience; Robert Hampson, whose insights on Conrad's "late" work I've found indispensable; Terry Collitts, whose remarkable *Postcolonial Conrad* and Conradian correspondence I have never properly thanked him for or acknowledged the pleasure they brought me; Robert Caserio, whose kind and sagacious words never fail to come at exactly the right time; Debra Romanick-Baldwin, whose thoughts on narrative solidarity are an inspiration; and Anthony Fothergill, who gave a talk years ago in London on Conrad in Weimar Germany that first made me think that *perhaps* a book on Conrad in the United States could be written: his incomparable *Secret Sharers: Joseph Conrad's Cultural Reception in Germany* (2006), which I first encountered in the final stages of writing this book, is the true origin of what lies here. Finally, Norris Pope, Emily-Jane Cohen, Sarah Crane Newman, Carolyn Brown, and Cynthia Lindlof at Stanford University Press have been the most meticulous, professional, expeditious, supportive editors I could possibly imagine working with.

There are six to whom I owe the greatest thanks of all. Bill and Ronna Mallios were there every step of the way with great patience and cheering support—as

they always have been. Seth Mallios is quite right to empathize with Moby-Dick, not only on the grounds he once explained to me but also because I do not know a figure whose company I would chase (harpoons aside) with more compulsive interest and excitement than his. And finally, most fortunately for me, Sam and Annabelle are the bright lights, and Elizabeth Dahl the central star, whose love and support made it possible for me to complete this book—and realize that the best parts of life lie outside Conrad.

PM