

JOSEPH CONRAD'S CRITICAL RECEPTION

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Joseph Conrad's novels and short stories have consistently figured into – and helped to define – the dominant trends in literary criticism. This book is the first to provide a thorough yet accessible overview of Conrad scholarship and criticism spanning the entire history of Conrad studies, from the 1895 publication of his first book, *Almayer's Folly*, to the present. While tracing the general evolution of the commentary surrounding Conrad's work, John G. Peters's careful analysis also evaluates Conrad's impact on critical trends such as the belles lettres tradition, the New Criticism, psychoanalysis, structuralist and post-structuralist criticism, narratology, postcolonial studies, gender and women's studies, and ecocriticism. The breadth and scope of Peters's study make this text an essential resource for Conrad scholars and students of English literature and literary criticism.

JOHN G. PETERS is a professor of English at the University of North Texas and former president of the Joseph Conrad Society of America. He is author of *Conrad and Impressionism* (2001) and *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad* (2006). He is editor of *Conrad and the Public Eye* (2008), *A Historical Guide to Joseph Conrad* (2010), the Broadview Press edition of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (2010), and volume two of *Joseph Conrad: The Contemporary Reviews* (2012).

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For Kaitlynn

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Preface

In this book I wish to present a thorough and readable overview of the history of commentary on the life and works of Joseph Conrad from 1895 through 2012. I intend to delineate the genealogy and evolution of Conrad criticism in general as well as the development of important topics of debate, while at the same time presenting a cross-sectional look at the commentary, both evolutionary and comparative. The reader should see the progress of Conrad scholarship, while at the same time comparing important trends therein.

Length constraints prevented discussions of every commentary; consequently, I had to be selective. Since the major trends and highlights in Conrad criticism generally appear in monographs, my emphasis has been on those works, and therefore I include most of the monographs on Conrad's life and works. Nevertheless, there are a number of important articles and book chapters, and I discuss the most significant of these commentaries as well. In determining whether to include a particular work, I selected based on continuing importance or historical importance. In other words, some works may no longer be very useful but are historically important, while others remain important critical resources.

Although my goals are to present a history of Conrad criticism and to discuss individual works, another aim is to present a readable narrative history rather than a collection of separate and largely isolated discussions of the kind that appear in annotated bibliographies. A narrative history lets me draw connections among works and arrange together similar works, allowing for comparison.

Finally, although various valuable bibliographies (annotated and otherwise) exist, even the most recent, Owen Knowles's *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of Joseph Conrad*, covers only criticism published through 1990 and is understandably selective in its coverage. As a result, numerous critical works have never appeared in a discussion of Conrad commentary. Furthermore, important critical trends, such as Conrad and gender and

ecocritical responses to Conrad's works, arose or became a major focus after Knowles's bibliography appeared. Thus, yet another purpose of this work is to fill these significant gaps.

This book is not meant to be especially evaluative but rather to be a narrative history of the development of the criticism. I do make some evaluations, particularly of older Conrad studies, as many scholars may be less familiar with these or they may be less readily available. For studies published since 1960, however, I make far fewer evaluations, since these studies enjoy greater familiarity and greater accessibility, and because there is often debate about the quality of many of these commentaries. However, I typically indicate those instances where there seems to be general consensus concerning important contributions to Conrad scholarship.

My discussion of individual works is weighted toward critical and biographical monographs and the most important articles and book chapters. Except in unusual circumstances, I have not included essay collections or introductory books. Since the first book on Conrad was not published until 1914, prior commentary appeared only as articles and reviews. I include all of the articles on Conrad published through 1914 of which I am aware, along with those reviews that comment on Conrad's works in general rather than solely on the work being reviewed. After 1914, articles and book chapters appear in this history with increasingly less frequency. Concerning works translated into English, I have included these works in the period in which the original work was published, except in those cases where that work was significantly revised before translation.

In organizing this book, as noted earlier, I have divided Conrad commentary into a number of periods. Within those periods, I have also included more focused periods. In discussing commentary to 1960, I have worked largely chronologically, usually only dividing commentary from biography and bibliography. After 1960, with critical conversations having begun to be established, I have grouped together (typically chronologically) studies on similar subjects or otherwise related categories. In cases where a particular study fits more than one category, I have placed it where it seems to have the greater emphasis. After grouping works together, I consider any works that do not fit into a particular category. I begin each period with critical works, followed by biographical/historical works and then bibliographic/reference works.

In addition to the narrative history, I have included a bibliography of all items discussed. Regarding the bibliography, I have included either the English or American edition, depending on which copy I had available (unless publication years differed, in which case I included the first

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published). I have included new editions of previously published works only if they were significantly different. In several instances, journal titles and publisher names appeared differently at different times; in those cases, I have maintained whatever appeared in the particular work.

It is my wish that readers will come away from this book with a good understanding and overview of the history of Conrad commentary and the critical trends that have developed since his first book appeared. Ultimately, I hope this study will be a useful resource for students and scholars.