

CWL 441: Global Conrad and the Fictions of Autobiography

The main objective of this course is to examine the ways in which the fictions in Joseph Conrad's autobiographical texts work to complicate the reading experience, offering glimpses into the dynamics of the autobiographic genre as a constant struggle between strategies of *self-concealment* and *self-revelation*. Conrad, who famously wrote that the job of an author is to "make you see... the truth" was a

spectacular confabulator of his own life story, frequently interpolating glamorous or tragic elements into his biography. While some of these adjustments were relatively minor (selling guns to pirates), others were fundamental (fake suicide attempt); yet none in any way diminish his importance as a public intellectual who sought to make readers "see the truth," his two decades sailing under the British Ensign, the dynamics of his assimilation in adoptive England, or his complex and sometimes tumultuous relationship with the reading public.

Once we have examined critical writings that elaborate a *theory of autobiography*, our second engagement will be with the logics and forces of global empire. As a Polish country-less émigré whose homeland had been ripped apart by imperial powers, and who then spent two decades serving British imperial interests as a merchant mariner and eventually as shipmaster, perhaps Conrad needed to tell a few tall tales to himself to get through the day.

As we
scrutinize
various

letters, prefaces and postscripts, and other documents from the vast Conradian archive, in addition to several short tales and a novel, we will seek to establish a concrete portrait of the man (in all his plurality and ambivalence) and his times (in all their turbulence).

Main readings:

- Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Tales* (1902; Oxford UP, 2002). Includes "Amy Foster" and "An Outpost of Progress;" also: "The Secret Sharer," "Poland Revisited," and "Congo Diary."
- Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (1911; Penguin, 1989).

Requirements:

Two response papers, a term paper, and a midterm in-class essay. No final exam.

FALL 2020

T/Th 11:00 AM-12:20 PM
Online via Zoom
CRN: 56141

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Office hours: Th, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm
by Zoom appointment

