Conrad and Quinn: A Case Study in Materialist Canon Formation

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines Joseph Conrad’s legacy as a modernist writer and argues that patron John Quinn was instrumental to securing it. The novelist wrote before the peak of modernism, belonged to non-modernist social spheres, and ultimately attained popular and commercial success unavailable to – and undesirable for – most authors considered modernist. In 1922, Ezra Pound rejected T.S. Eliot’s reference to *Heart of Darkness* in drafts of *The Waste Land*, doubting that Conrad was “weighty enough to stand the citation.” Virginia Woolf, despite admiring Conrad’s writing, predicted in 1917 that he could “never be among the classics” (“Mr. Conrad: A Conversation”). Ultimately, however, literary history has refuted the refutations of two prestigious modernist figures to place Conrad alongside them. Not only is he “among the classics;” Conrad is also a standard topic in books on modernism and in undergraduate courses on the movement. I argue that lawyer, collector, and patron John Quinn provided a network of financial and social resources that distinguished Conrad’s name from popular, middlebrow literature and situated it among an insular and elitist grouping of modernist names.

My research in this thesis takes its cue from scholarship that brackets close textual analyses to perform what Franco Moretti has called “distant reading” (1). It draws upon a branch of modernist studies—represented by scholars including Michael North, Lawrence Rainey, Catherine Turner, and John Cooper—that attempts to re-contextualize modernism into its socioeconomic milieu to determine how market forces affected the movement’s literary production. My first chapter is devoted to tracing Conrad’s absorption into a modernist canon, transitioning from cultural reviews by his contemporaries to the scholarship conducted by future
generations of readers. In a second chapter, I outline Quinn’s contributions to Conrad’s career and lasting reputation. While Quinn is most remembered for his avant-garde artistic and literary associations, he was also the popular Conrad’s earliest collector and one of his strongest promoters and supporters in America. I argue that Quinn’s money and connections were instrumental in securing Conrad’s modernist legacy.
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Periodicals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periodical</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Christian Science Monitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illustrated London News</td>
<td>ILN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Times (London)</td>
<td>LT</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>NYT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Times Literary Supplement</td>
<td>TLS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Mail (Cardiff)</td>
<td>WM</td>
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<td>Washington Post</td>
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Correspondance:

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad</td>
<td>CL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Quinn Papers, 1901-1926</td>
<td>JQP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Canonical Conrad: A Liminal Case

Literary scholarship expands through various acts of categorization. We refer to authors or works in contexts that strike us as germane to their identity. As we do so, literary history is constructed according to overlapping identifiers including – but not limited to – chronology, geography, stylistic affinity, and artistic community. Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), the subject of my study, provides a rich example of the complications involved in classifying individual artists into literary categories. We can analyze Conrad as a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century novelist and compare him fruitfully (as he compared himself) with popular contemporaries George Meredith, H.G. Wells, and Henry James. Understanding him as a naturalized British citizen, we can place him in a trajectory that might include Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens.¹ Alternatively, we can hone in on his Polish background and associate him with other continental figures like Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant or Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Ivan Turgenev. Focusing on Conrad as an adventure-writer, we can put him in conversation with Rider Haggard, R.L. Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling. Noting an experimental, disjointed edge, particularly to his early style, we can liken him to modernists D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, or James Joyce. These classifications, however, rest at odds with the artistic communities as they formed and were conceived of by their constituents. Conrad usually held himself and his writing apart from bohemian proto-modernist spheres, although several modernists admired him. To understand Conrad within his own circle is to associate him with the

¹ F.R. Leavis considered him alongside all four in The Great Tradition.
eclectic mix of Edward Garnett, Ford Madox Ford, and John Galsworthy. A variety of lenses seem appropriate to the study of this single author.

Conrad is difficult to pigeonhole – or perhaps too easy – because of his extraordinarily complex and oft-discussed biography. He was born in 1857 in a Ukrainian province of Poland. The family spent several of Conrad’s formative years (1860-1867) as political exiles in Northern Russia. Orphaned at ten, Conrad had decided upon a mariner’s life by 1874, when he went to Marseilles to learn his chosen trade. He grew up fluent in French but did not hear English spoken until 1878 when, aged 21, he signed on to the British ship *Mavis*. Conrad spent most of the next two decades at sea, living the stories that would inspire much of his fiction. He retired from the naval profession in 1893 to recover from the health ailments that had set in on an 1890 voyage to the Belgian Congo. By that time, Conrad had written *Almayer’s Folly* and had determined to pursue novel-writing in English. His second career began with the publication of *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and ended with the publication of *The Rovers* (1923) the year before his death. Several aspects of Conrad’s biography have complicated his reception. The three decades of his literary life correspond to a time of radical change in both high and mass culture. Although he began as a self-styled fin-de-siècle starving artist, Conrad became a commercial success, particularly in America after the publication of his successful novel *Chance* (1914). His Polish upbringing combined with his longtime devotion to French literature contributed to his strange and often dense style of English prose. And his self-proclaimed artistic solitude – or aversion to literary coteries – did not help early critics attempting to compare him with others. Although inveterately difficult to categorize, Conrad remains comfortably ensconced in the canon of authors taught and

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2 The biographical details that I provide come from Owen Knowles’ *A Conrad Chronology* (1989).
3 His travels and travails in the Congo would later inspire *Heart of Darkness* (1899).
4 *Suspense*, a Napoleonic novel left incomplete, emerged posthumously in 1925.
studied in academia. His writing lands on undergraduate syllabi and in literary journals as an example of late Victorian fiction, Edwardian fiction, travel fiction, imperial fiction, anti-imperial fiction, or – central to this study – a forerunner of modernist fiction.

Conrad’s multi-faceted legacy was shaped, and continues to be shaped, by a community of critics and consumers. Reception by his contemporaries has transitioned into a body of scholarship that describes his literary significance. My research focuses on the pivotal role that lawyer and collector John Quinn played in shaping Conrad’s career and legacy. Quinn (1870-1924) is a figure in modernism who has escaped close scrutiny. His amateur and professional involvement in modernism places Quinn at an intersection of avant-garde and popular culture. He is remembered for his connection to the Armory Show in 1913, for twice lobbying – successfully – to lower the American government’s tariff on imported art (1913 and 1918), and for defending The Little Review for publishing portions of Joyce’s “obscene” Ulysses in 1920 (unsuccessfully this time). He was affiliated with modernist writers including Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis and with a variety of experimental painters, mostly European.

Despite these avant-garde associations, Quinn was a correspondent of Conrad and the first collector of his commercially popular works. Their correspondence began before Conrad had attained widespread recognition and continued nearly to the end of both men’s lives. Over a period of a dozen years (1911-1923), Quinn purchased and preserved virtually all of Conrad’s manuscripts and, when he sold the collection in the autumn of 1923, amassed from them a 1000% profit (Moore 1). The only extensive work documenting his contribution to modernist culture is B.L. Reid’s Pulitzer prize-winning biography The Man from New York (1968), an invaluable source to me here. Since being featured in Reid’s work, Quinn has appeared within numerous notes and indices to studies of modernist and avant-garde movements. He has rarely,
however, occupied a central position in scholarship. My intention in this project is to bring him out of the footnotes and into the main body of textual debate. In this thesis, I trace the result of Quinn’s collection and sale on Conrad’s reputation both during his lifetime and afterward.

Quinn’s mode of patronage was diffuse, extensive, and generally behind the scenes. A New York lawyer, self-made and thoroughly middle class, he devoted countless hours to becoming a person of interest within the arts. He purchased manuscripts and rare editions, arranged significant introductions, and underwrote publication expenses. He also circulated books among an influential circle of writers, reviewers, and publishers. Examples of the types of services he provided include planning and facilitating W.B. Yeats’ highly successful American tour in 1903 and arranging for French cubist artist Marcel Duchamp to be employed as a librarian in Paris in 1915 (Reid 16-17, 210). Quinn maintained frequent and occasionally rambling correspondence with an enormous number and range of cultural figures. The list of his contacts includes writers including Yeats, Conrad, and Pound; publishers Mitchell Kennerly, F.N. Doubleday, and Alfred Knopf; experimental painters and sculptors Lucien Pissarro, Jacob Epstein, and Constantin Brancusi; and dozens of other artists, critics, and scholars. Figure 1 on the following page aptly demonstrates Quinn’s peripheral presence to contemporary arts and culture. It comes from a pamphlet that publishers Doubleday, Page and Co. circulated after hosting scholar and critic Wilson Follett’s lecture on Conrad (29 May 1917). The title page features Follett’s portrait and Conrad’s name in large, bold type. Quinn’s name appears in smaller font at the bottom of the page (“Mr. John Quinn will preside”). In his lecture, Follett undertook to show how Conrad’s biography contributed to his writings and to trace the continuity from the earlier to the most current fiction. Quinn, meanwhile, acted as mediator between speaker and audience and, before the event, collaborated with Doubleday representative
Figure 1.1: Promotional pamphlet for Follett's New York lecture
E.F. Saxton to lay out a guest list (*JQP*). This type of facilitating role demonstrates Quinn’s interest in nurturing and promoting the artistic communities in which he invested. His cultural endeavors were peripheral but not at all limited to financial support.

Quinn was attracted to both lofty and highly pragmatic self-fashioning. He responded positively to Pound’s assertion in a letter that “if a patron buys from an artist who needs money (needs money to buy tools, time and food) the patron then makes himself equal to the artist, he is building art into the world. He creates” (*JQP*). Creative patronage, or materialist imagination, appealed deeply to Quinn’s more expansive side. He reported with pride, for instance, some artists’ compliment that he “saved the art season last year [1914] by buying together with one or two others a few examples of the best men’s good work” (qtd. in Reid 209). His drive was to be an agent for these “best men” or, as he described them to artist Gwen John, “men who know” (qtd. in Reid 144). On the other hand, Quinn also viewed and expressed his hobby in simple material terms. In a letter to F.N. Doubleday dated 7 June 1916, he explained the machinations of the collecting industry, writing: “if a book is attractive in size, style of binding, weight and type, one collector recommends it to another. The person who likes to have it, who enjoys it, communicates his pleasure to others.” Describing the collector’s realm as a place of communicated pleasure, Quinn identifies the material details of binding and typeface that go into creating that pleasure. He often acted tirelessly as a middle man between author and publisher to ensure that his protégé’s work be printed according to his aesthetic criteria.  

The avenues by which Quinn supported the arts are difficult to reconstruct because of their variety and because of their rarely vaunted material and logistical nature. His support, however, was formative and

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5 He acted as such for Conrad and Doubleday and Co. between 1916 and 1919, when it seemed like Conrad’s *Complete Edition* would be immediately forthcoming. The war and several clashes of strong personalities, however, delayed the volumes, which finally appeared from 1924-1926.
invaluable to dozens of his favoured protégés, especially those in financially struggling avant-garde communities.

In the following two chapters, I address Conrad’s modernism and the material conditions that linked him to the movement. My first chapter outlines Conrad’s reception history in order to emphasize his peculiar and belated absorption into a modernist canon. The groundwork for such absorption was laid even before modernism developed as a discrete movement. Contemporary associations between Conrad and artistic experimentation allowed for later generations of critics and scholars to incorporate him into the cluster of modernists that they located and discussed. My second chapter isolates Quinn as an integral component in and facilitator of Conrad’s modernist absorption. His simultaneous involvement with Conrad and proto-modernist communities created a point of connection between the writer and a movement that was, in many ways, foreign to his life and works.

1.2 Canonical Modernism: Opening the Closed

Quinn’s position made him a middleman between numerous highbrow experimental groups, including literary modernism, and Conrad’s commercially successful, middlebrow career. While the two spheres of engagement (highbrow and middlebrow) may have seemed distinct to him and to contemporary observers, they now overlap in scholarship. Modernism has come to be one of the categories in which Conrad is analyzed. The movement is a striking category for Conrad studies because the novelist does not fit into the historical contexts in which modernists composed their works. Conrad’s death in 1924 corresponds to modernism at its apex. By that time, he was a best-selling author whose works had been published on both sides of the Atlantic and successfully adapted for the stage. His very popularity and accessibility distinguish Conrad from the modernist communities that styled themselves as elitist, bohemian, anti-populist or
otherwise difficult to approach. Despite Conrad’s essential separation from modernist communities, material conditions and stylistic tendencies connect him with modernism. Between his career and the present, discussions situating Conrad in experimental artistic contexts segued into a body of scholarship identifying his work as modernist. The categorization and discussion of Conrad within modernism is thus bound up within the broader question of what it means to be part of modernism and its canon.

Canon is a slippery item in literary lexicon. The term originated in a religious context, referring to the sealed collection of texts deemed holy by an authoritative body of religious officials. While the process of canonization can be long and fraught with dissent, its ultimate result is supposed to be one of absolute closure (and thus one dangerous for dissenters). Despite rare but always heated debate, the texts deemed canonical remain so for generations of religious followers. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces “canon” as a religious textual descriptor back to the fourteenth century. It also identifies a much later type of canon, literary in nature, and gives its earliest citation in 1929. This entry for “canon” describes a “body of literary works traditionally regarded as the most important, significant, and worthy of study” (*OED*). For much of the twentieth century, literary scholarship presumed a tacit and stable body of great works as the backbone of its enterprise. As late as 1983, Charles Altieri argued that “the past that canons preserve is best understood as a permanent theater helping us shape and judge personal and social values” (40). Increasingly, however, the canon is approached with academic skepticism as an artificial and often biased or misleading re-creation of literary communities that inadequately reflects the process by which they came to be and exerted their influence. As theories of race, class, and gender came to the fore over the course of the 1970s and 80s, the notion of a stable, permanent and limited body of great works became increasingly suspect. Inherent greatness, with
its clear connotations of hierarchy and exclusion, now seems out of place in a literary context that is increasingly pluralist. The general attitude toward canonicity is one of challenge. As scholar John Guillory has noted, critiques of the canon have both expanded the body of texts that we study programmatically (often in alternative and politically specific canons) and de-centred the concept of a canon itself to allow for more malleable approaches to literary history.

Modernist writers and their early scholars were particularly invested in the idea of a canon of great art and great artists distinct from the demands of popular culture. The early twentieth century witnessed a massive expansion in the realms of print culture, indicated by a massive increase in the number of creative writers, editors, and publishers. John Gross has shown that the number of literary professionals in London more than quadrupled between 1888 and 1911, growing from 3,400 to 14,000 (qtd. in Miller 8). In his quantitative literary study *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Franco Moretti has traced the escalating number of novelistic genres in the twentieth century and shown how periodicals appeared and disappeared with startling rapidity (29-34). Reacting against the volume and accessibility of popular literature, modernists repeatedly ignore or reject public engagement with art. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), T.S. Eliot positions the poet in relation to a organic but definitive canon and neglects to address popular reception. Ezra Pound similarly dismissed as irrelevant the concern that his magazine *Exile* (1927-1928) might be “beyond the reach of street urchins” (qtd. in Monk 439). On the Bloomsbury side of modernist London, Virginia Woolf’s advice in “A Letter to a Young Poet” (1932) is to ignore public reception and instead imagine oneself as a “poet in whom live all the poets of the past, from whom all poets in time to come will spring” (10). The anti-populist and altogether lofty attitude adopted by these modernists must be taken with a grain of salt as an artistic ideal and polemical tactic rather than an accurate description of their methods. These
writers and others like them contributed to magazines, gave radio talks, and struggled to make their works commercial successes. Their anti-public discourse, however, has cordoned such figures off within criticism to create the illusion of a removed artistic space that has come to be known as “high modernism.”

An early body of modernist scholarship likewise insisted on the movement as an elitist artistic category – in other words, it followed the self-fashioning of several prominent modernist writers. Early academic interpretations of modernism position the movement as a radical break from earlier literary eras (particularly Victorian sentimentality) and as a sphere of production separate from sordid marketplace valuations. Modernism is often presented as the domain of a few powerful canonical figures – Ezra Pound, James Joyce, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein – and their coteries. Hugh Kenner’s *The Pound Era* (1971) is one of the earliest examples of scholarship which sought to define and explore modernism. Its title constitutes an implicit first argument, defining the movement in terms of one of its most charismatic and influential figures. Kenner frames his discussion as “an X-ray moving picture of how our epoch was extricated from the fin-de-siècle” (xi). He theorizes the extrication as “a disjunction in space […] the intent eye is confronted by a sudden node, unforeseeable, a new structure, new directions” (13). The work confirms Anglo-American literary modernism’s own self-image of detachment and discontinuity. The next generation of scholarship – including C.K. Stead, Andreas Huyssen, and Fredric Jameson – worked with the same assumption, framing the modernist aversion to mass culture as an “anxiety of contamination” leading to definitive separation (Huyssen vii). The insistence on an insular version of modernism has tended to obscure the continuity between the movement and concurrent trends in mass and popular culture.
By the late 1980s, modernism’s insularity had come under scrutiny. It seems increasingly accurate to discuss “modernisms” in the plural to avoid reproducing the movement’s own claims to definitive singularity or to a discrete, detached artistic space. Cary Nelson’s *Revision and Recovery* (1989) is an early and prominent text in the ongoing modernist revision. Nelson notes the limitations of rigid canonicity. The relatively tiny number of modernist writers commonly studied, he argues, limits and distorts our understanding of historical and literary developments in the early twentieth century. His reconstruction has inaugurated a conversation that pursues strands of lost and fading modernisms. As one branch of scholarship recovered alternative modernisms lost to posterity, a complementary branch sought to maintain focus on canonical modernists with a view to challenging their presumed aesthetic supremacy over mass culture. Scholarship showing the tension between mass and exclusive cultures currently invigorates scholarly revisions of modernism. Ongoing archival work demonstrates the crucial contributions of serial fiction, magazines (both little and big), newspapers, and public performance to the era’s literary vitality. Focusing on material production and exchange, scholars can re-contextualize modernism into the larger marketplace that it denied.

One influential materialist re-contextualization is Lawrence Rainey’s *Institutions of Modernism* (1998). Rainey observes that modernist scholars have packaged modernist works in tropes of breakdown that seem to extend to the movement itself. Modernist rejection of narrative or aesthetic holism (expressed as cubistic collage or montage) has often been blurred into assumed modernist rejection of prevailing socioeconomic institutions. Rainey, like others, is skeptical of the claims (made by modernists and their critics) that modernism’s radical forms

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6 Notable works that have theorized modernism into mass culture include Jennifer Wicke’s *Advertising Fictions* (1988), the essays compiled by Kevin J.H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt in *Marketing Modernisms* (1996), and David M. Earle’s *Re-covering Modernism* (2009), and Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulffman’s *Modernism in the Magazines* (2010).
correspond to radical extrication from institutional and marketplace demands. His work traces moments of opposition but also the surprising undercurrent of complicity between modernism, public institutions, and mass culture. Others, notably including Mark Morrisson and Catherine Turner argue that the suppressed affinity between elitist art and mass appeal emerges in the strategies that publishers used to promote their modernist wares. In similar revisionist moves, scholars such as Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman describe the manner in which modernist authors brand their works as cultural commodities with an eye to marketplace success. Increasingly, modernist scholarship tacitly agrees with Jaffe’s assertion that “modernist cultural production is, in fact, cultural production” (7). The ethos of recent modernist scholarship is one of demystification and re-configuration into a broader marketplace environment.

Conrad’s popular audience and commercial success stand at odds with his place in a modernist canon. His liminality – or unlikely fringe position within modernism – makes him a rich study of how modernism was actively assembled by influential individuals. Certain material conditions had to be in place to allow for Conrad’s connection with modernism to be forged. The following chapter undertakes 1) to provide an outline of Conrad’s reception history with an emphasis on his absorption into modernism and 2) to describe John Quinn’s instrumental role within the material infrastructure that made such absorption possible. Fixing an author within any canon is a collective process. My case study of Quinn implicates a network of public and academic commentators who consolidated Conrad into modernism.
1.3 A Note on Methodology

Rather than provide “close readings” of Conrad’s work, my thesis operates in the mode that Moretti has described as “distant reading” (1). A certain distance characterizes much of materialist modernist revisions, allowing scholarship to situate the movement into broader cultural trends. Moretti’s mathematical approach allows him to graph and chart literary trends with a view to “replacing the old, useless distinctions (high and low, canon and archive; this or that national literature) with new temporal, spatial, and morphological distinctions” (91). My approach requires significantly less distance than Moretti’s methodology; his data-oriented interpretations allow for studies that explore enormous historical processes like the rise of the novel, for instance. The relatively limited time frames that interest me here are the years between 1895 and the present date – or the years of Conrad’s reception history – and especially the years between 1911 and 1923, when Quinn collected Conrad. I treat pieces of journalism and scholarship as data points in outlining the morphology of his modernist reputation. My argument is also distinct from Moretti’s in that it is less interested in “replacing [what he terms] the old, useless distinctions” than in dwelling upon the circumstances in which they were forged. Rather than argue against a modernist Conrad, I seek to clarify the reasons that Conrad could be modernist.
Chapter 2: Conrad and the Modernist Canon

Joseph Conrad has a history of evading easy categorization. In a 1999 essay on *Lord Jim* (1900), Leonard Orr writes that the novel “is described variously by commentators as an imperial adventure story, a psychological narrative, a *Bildungsroman*, the prototypical modernist narrative that subverts Victorian novelistic norms, as a great failure […] and as a popular work for a general or even youthful readership” (79). The numerous and occasionally contradictory headings under which Conrad has been placed are the topic of my discussion in this chapter. I begin by tracing the strands of the cultural conversation that circulated around Conrad during his lifetime. This examination involves two transitions: first, from the discussion of Conrad by his contemporaries to the discussion of Conrad by successors and second, from general cultural discourses to specifically academic ones. My main emphasis is on Conrad’s gradual absorption into modernist scholarship after a career as a popular novelist. My method of tracing the network of emerging associations, however, could just as easily be applied to other frameworks (those of postcolonial scholarship, for instance) that are currently germane to Conrad studies. My discussion of Conrad’s entry into a modernist canon of criticism will be followed in the next chapter by a discussion of how John Quinn and his network of human and material resources contributed both to Conrad’s fame and to his position among modernist writers.

2.1 Conrad the Traditionalist

During Conrad’s career, there surfaced an ongoing disagreement between critics who viewed him essentially as a traditional novelist of nineteenth-century popular realist fiction, and those who were inclined to associate him with more experimental movements. Those in the “traditional” camp often framed Conrad as an adventure writer. An 1895 *Daily News* article
likened Conrad’s novel *Almayer’s Folly* to popular authors Robert Louis Stevenson’s and Australian Louis Becke’s writings on imperial-minded exploration (25 April 1895, qtd. in Simmons 60). The *Spectator* similarly predicted that Conrad “might become the Kipling of the Malay Archipelago” (2 May 1896, qtd. Simmons 60). His connection with Kipling and other travel or adventure novelists would haunt and gall Conrad throughout his career. A promotional pamphlet drawn up for Doubleday, Page and Co. editions of Conrad’s novels in America (beginning in 1914 with *Chance*) describes Conrad as “the greatest sea-writer” and *Heart of Darkness* as “the most surpassing description of the tropical jungle in any literature” (“Knopf Document” 76). When the pamphlet went to Conrad for emendation, the author tried to repudiate this strong naval association. He insisted on “novelist” or “author” rather than “sea-writer” with the side-note: “writing of the sea – yes but not specializing” (“Knopf Document” 64). Fifteen years later, in 1923, Conrad was still attempting to “get freed from that infernal tail of ships” hanging off the bow of his literary reputation (qtd. in Moore, Simmons, and Stape). An article appearing shortly after his death in 1924 predicted that Conrad would always be remembered “first of all as a teller of sea-stories” (*ILN* 16 August 1924). The seafaring aspects of Conrad’s work lent him an early – and lasting – association with a traditional and Victorian school of adventure-writing.

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7 The material in this pamphlet was written by an unknown journalist (ca. 1907) and subsequently used by Alfred Knopf – then representing Doubleday, Page and Co. – to promote Conrad in America (in 1913). The provenance of this well-traveled document illustrates canon formation at its most collective. Written by an anonymous journalist, edited by an author (Conrad), and then co-opted by an individual editor (Knopf) representing a large firm (Doubleday, Page & Co.), the so-called “Knopf Document” demonstrates the material and conceptual input that goes into creating a literary reputation. For a fuller discussion of the “Knopf Document” and its origins, see Moore, Simmons, and Stape.

8 In a letter to F.N. Doubleday dated 19 May 1916, Conrad similarly wrote “that in the particular design of the [proposed Collected] edition my inclination is to avoid all reference to the sea […] I am something else, and perhaps something more, than a writer of the sea – or even of the tropics. I am not even generally exotic, tho’ at first the critics were rather inclined to class me under these heads. But this is no longer the case. I am acknowledged to be something, if not bigger, then, at any rate, larger” (*CL* 5:589).
Other critics saw Conrad as a latter-day nineteenth-century writer without linking him specifically to adventure tales. Associating Conrad with the rearguard of twentieth-century literature was made easy for contemporary commentators by Conrad’s own self-fashioning, particularly in later years. A feature article from the New York Times (1 January 1922) discusses Conrad under the title: “Great Tales of a Great Victorian.” With such a heading, Conrad emerges as a nineteenth-century novelist who “has been unable to escape the trammels of the nineties and so modernize his point of view.” The journalist’s intent is not to disparage Conrad, however, but rather to assert his difference from – and implied superiority over – “the clever young men [who] are in error if they imagine they can claim Joseph Conrad as one of themselves.” Alongside his defense of Conrad, however, the author also admits that the “clever young men” seem uninterested in making any such claims. Within this article’s frame, Conrad is removed from a community of innovative young authors by both qualities of his works and by the company he does or does not keep. A similar argument appears in a Christian Science Monitor article dated 5 January 1923. Once again, Conrad is aligned with traditional novelists against the wave of reactionary – albeit fashionable – young writers. The article argues that much contemporary poetry and prose takes a self-conscious stance against the styles of Tennyson, Dickens and Thackeray: representatives of bygone literary days. Defending his or her literary hero, Dickens, the author calls upon Conrad for support. The article cites A Personal Record (1912), in which Conrad disparages jarring stylistic narratives and “novelists who are disagreeable for no apparent reason but because they have confused the disagreeable with the ‘strong’” (CSM 5 January 1923). Conrad championed stylistically traditional and “agreeable” fiction toward the end of his career.
A Personal Record was by no means the only occasion on which Conrad positioned himself at the rearguard of literary fashion. When he made his 1923 foray into New York, one of Conrad's interviewers subtitled his article: “Noted Writer Admits if He Has a Style He Does Not Recognize It” (NYT 8 May 1923). By this point in his career, Conrad insisted frequently that his efforts had always been directed to narrating a story rather than innovating with a form. Such journalism demonstrates an early critical tendency to align Conrad with nineteenth-century writing and in opposition to burgeoning modernist style.

2.2 Conrad the Proto-modernist

The camps conceiving of Conrad as a traditional novelist – adventure-oriented or otherwise – were met by another that located him at the origins of modernism. These commentators, writing from the beginning of Conrad’s career onward, focused upon the innovation and experimentation which they discovered in his work. Unable to settle on a definitive summation of him, Conrad’s contemporaries studied him from multiple angles that allowed them to isolate different and occasionally contradictory aspects of his work. From one interpretive angle, Conrad became part of the conversation about modernist tendencies and about modernists themselves.

In some early journalism Conrad appears, if not specifically modernist (then anachronistic), then at least exceptionally attentive to style. Arnold Bennett, praising the serialized version Lord Jim (published in Blackwood’s in 1899-1900), wrote: “the strange thing is that a writer so original, so forceful, so intensely and glowingly picturesque, and so ‘stylistic,’ has not achieved an even wider popularity” (8 Nov 1900). In his early years, Conrad articulated his desire to innovate in literature: to change literary forms. In a 1901 New York Times article, Conrad himself described a collaborative novel he was writing with Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) as “an experiment” and noted “the extravagance of its form” (24 August 1901). He also
valued innovation in others. In an early defense of Dickens, Conrad told a journalist: “His is not a high art, but it conveys an exceedingly fine sense of humanity […]. He did not give a new form to English, but he used it as it had never been used before, and his very defects help to make up his greatness” (WM 1 Jan 1897). Like the later modernists, Conrad admired newness and demonstrated his search (unsatisfied by Dickens) for “a new form to English.” His self-consciously stylized prose would be the source of much praise and criticism throughout Conrad’s career. Even one of his death notices ventures that, reading Lord Jim, one “sometimes gets lost in the mazes of the technique which envelops it” (CSM 4 August 1924).

By this latest point in his career, a modernist context had begun to form. In 1924, a review of novelist Pierre Coalfleet’s Solo implied that Conrad was part of a new school in literature.9 Published mere months after Conrad’s death, the article praises Solo and places it alongside the works of the “Best of Modernists.” It goes on to qualify the characteristic feature of these “modernists,” claiming: “The subjective tendency among writers has been, of course, the distinguishing feature of twentieth-century literature, of which the late Joseph Conrad has been a notable example” (WP 5 October 1924).10 The precise meaning of “subjective tendency” remains somewhat obscure. Perhaps the reviewer had in mind the strongly individual or “trademark” style of particular authors that has received recent attention from such critics as Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman. Goldman explains that modernists use strong stylistic markers, each attempting to objectify him- or herself as “the inimitable individual, the modernist author as the exception to the norm” (7). The reviewer could also be referring to the opaque language or narrative framing devices that are strong features in Conrad’s work. Alternately, the “subjective

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9 Pierre Coalfleet was the pseudonym of Frank Davison, a Nova Scotian writer of folk novels. He is associated with modernism through his friend Marsden Hartley, an American modernist painter, and through his primitivist literary themes (Cassidy 210-212).

10 Linked to modernism in this article are Slavic writers (especially Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky) whom the author associates with Conrad’s style.
tendency” could refer to the narrative framing devices themselves: Conrad’s Marlow, in this scenario, might be seen to join ranks with the likes of Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, Joyce’s Leopold Bloom, or Ford’s John Dowell, all of whom interpret events through the highly idiosyncratic lens of their own memories and consciousness. Still another possibility is that the “subjectivity” refers to the relativist and skeptical attitude that is often associated with modernism. Whatever specifies the reviewer had in mind, the larger implication is clear: there was a new style characterizing modern literature, and the recently deceased Conrad was one of its representatives.

A Christian Science Monitor review asserted a similar type of association in an article from 21 April 1926. Quoting Miss Elizabeth Drew, a British lecturer on her American tour, the article asserts: “the attitude of novelists who represent the present era is […] one of disillusionment” (21 April 1926). The only underpinning faith that remains for Drew to observe is a faith in the individual. According to the article, both disillusionment and individualism abounded on both sides of the Atlantic, characterizing a new wave of British and American authors alike. Drew notes the formal literary shift that accompanied this affective shift. Many modern novelists, she explains, “watch experience at its work, and the innumerable gradations of its effects,” narrating the passage of time through the lens of an individual consciousness and not from an objective chronology. Conrad is cited as a prime example of the modern author qua observer, making formal choices that reflect his deeper intent to express his skepticism and his isolation. By the mid-1920s, modernism had emerged as a discrete subfield within literature. The commentary that emerged alongside it drew on Conrad as an example of modernism’s literary mood.

Journalism’s association of Conrad with modernists persisted in the years following his death. One curious article from 23 December 1934 explores Gertrude Stein’s position as the
“apostle of gibberish” \textit{(WP)}. The article puts Stein’s particular brand of experimental ("gibberish") prose in conversation with other brands. It juxtaposes her with Conrad, who remained within the “framework of traditional prose” but attended closely to untapped potential within the words which served as units within that framework. Stein, to the journalist, is the opposite, employing words sloppily without a traditional framework. Both she and James Joyce “write less for readers and more for writers.” The article places Pound and Eliot in a middling position, claiming that they operate in experimental modes but with traditional social values. Hemingway, meanwhile, appears as a comprehensible version of Stein. While it posits a range of modernist styles, the article nevertheless identifies an insular community of experimentally-minded novelists that includes Conrad.

Proto-modernist Ford Madox Ford provided an obvious link for commentators to draw between Conrad and modernists. The two met through mutual friend Edward Garnett and became neighbours at Romney Marsh in Kent, where Conrad sublet Ford’s farm.\footnote{See Iain Finlayson’s \textit{Writers in Romney Marsh} (1986) for a discussion of their relation as neighbours.} Writing two collaborative works with Conrad at the start of his career,\footnote{These were \textit{The Inheritors}, published in 1901, and \textit{Romance}, published in 1903.} Ford went on to develop close professional relationships and friendships with groups of modernists.\footnote{A prominent example of Ford’s involvement with modernist circles includes the first chapters of what would later become \textit{The Good Soldier} published in Pound’s magazine \textit{Blast} (1914). His \textit{Transatlantic Review} (1924), a short-lived, Paris-based periodical published names like Joyce, Hemingway, Stein, and Jean Rhys.} A \textit{New York Times} review of Ford’s (or Hueffer’s) \textit{Thus to Revisit} (1921) puts Conrad in early conversation with the modernists. Ford is contextualized in relation to a shifting style that ran “From Rossetti to Ezra Pound” \textit{(NYT 17 July 1921)}. He belongs, according to the article, in a recognizably proto-modernist sphere with Pound, Eliot, and Lawrence. Stylistically, however, he is also associated with an older generation, including the Rossettis and R.L. Stevenson. The article locates the decisive break between Ford and a previous literary era at the time when Ford collaborated with
Conrad in the early years of the twentieth century. The journalist asserts that “Stevenson’s romance was exactly the thing that Conrad and Mr. Hueffer were attempting to escape” (NYT 17 July 1921). An implied continuity from Conrad to Pound and his circle was suggested by Ford himself. The article quotes his claim that “Mr. Conrad’s unceasing search was for a New Form of the Novel.” Contemporary journalism honed in on Conrad’s innovative attention to form and style to position him within a proto-modernist tradition. Three decades later, a commemoration of Ford brought about a similar comparison. An article from 1965 remembered Ford as: “novelist, poet, critic, editor, and patron of young talent, collaborator with Joseph Conrad, discoverer of D.H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis, friend of James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, and William Carlos Williams” (CSM 23 December 1965). Journalists attended to the personal connection between Conrad and Ford while at the same time positing a stylistic connection between Conrad and modernism.

2.3 Becoming Modernist

The transition from the perspective of Conrad’s reviewers to that of Conrad scholars, and from the reception of his works by his contemporaries to the reception and use made of the same by his successors, is marked by ambiguity. Conrad’s reputation hovered for three decades after his death between the spheres of middle- and highbrow art and in an uncertain position between the traditional and the experimental. Early on in his posthumous reception, critics articulated the difficulty of categorizing Conrad. In 1930, Granville Hicks addressed the challenges to settling on a particular classification for Conrad, writing that he was “too simple for sophisticates, too barbaric for humanists, [and] not barbaric enough for new primitivists” (qtd. in Simmons 68). His niche was not immediately apparent to posterity. Six years later, the writer Elizabeth Bowen corroborated Hicks’ perspective, explaining that “Conrad is in abeyance […] We are not clear
yet how to rank him; there is an uncertain pause” (qtd. in Sherry 39). In 1955, a full generation later, reviewer Sylvia Norman elaborated on the continued pause, remarking on Conrad’s unique position outside of any defined literary spheres and upon the absence of a significant following of imitators (TLS 23 September 1955). Her article criticizes the biographical rut in which Conrad scholarship remained entrenched. Norman called for criticism to find new directions for approaching him, writing: “[n]ow that Conrad has been dead these thirty-one years, a new generation may need to be coaxed past the witless label ‘out-of-date’ to read him as a classic” (TLS 23 September 1955). She does not, however, elaborate on which angles scholarship should take toward her subject. For three decades after his death in 1924, Conrad was a scholarly enigma.

After the pause followed uptake. The sixties and seventies witnessed a rapid expansion in Conrad scholarship. Beginning in the 1960s, scholars began to assemble and collate the vague connections that had been circulating in the public discourse surrounding Conrad. By 1975, three independent societies in three countries had formed to facilitate scholarship, indicating the extent of his re-discovery (Simmons 81). The course of Conrad’s fate within the academy has been well documented in meta-critical works. Notable recent examples include the essays in Joseph Conrad in Context (ed. Simmons) and those in A Joseph Conrad Companion (ed. Billy and Orr), both of which have been invaluable sources for this study. Within the documentation are narrative strands that have contributed to Conrad’s absorption into a modernist canon. Simmons and Billy/Orr have assembled the titles that first noted – and thus created – Conrad’s relevance to modernism. The scholarship that definitively linked Conrad to modernism took off in the 1980s.

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14 Shortly before the boom, one observer commented in 1957, “Joseph Conrad is on the dissecting table. It was inevitable, but it is not very enjoyable” (TLS 29 November 1957).

15 These were the Joseph Conrad Society in Britain (1973), the Joseph Conrad Society of America in America (1974), and the Société Conradienne Française in France (1975). The three societies published the respective journals The Conradian, Conradiana, and L’époque Conradienne.

Scholars differ in their placement of Conrad within a modernist trajectory. White puts him in a modernist category at the site of “the collapse of realism” (qtd. Simmons 85). Jameson, meanwhile, argues that Conrad’s tendency to evade interpretation, or to provide ground for multiple interpretative frameworks, makes him “not an early modernist [but] an anticipation of that quite different thing we have come to call postmodernism” (219). Brooks studies Conrad in a liminal zone between Victorian and modernist, dubbing *Heart of Darkness* “a detective story gone modernist” (Brooks 238). He situates Conrad within a popular genre of fiction but remarks on his tendency to display “acute self-consciousness about the organizing features of traditional narratives, working with them still, but suspiciously, with constant reference to the inadequacy of the inherited orders of meaning” (Brooks 238). In the varieties of their configurations these texts have put Conrad within a spectrum of modernist literature.

The groundwork for such modernist configurations was laid long before a modernist vocabulary was available to observers, beginning with critics who perceived experimental tendencies in Conrad throughout his career. The following section traces the continuity between the perceptions, within early journalism, of innovation in Conrad’s works to the history of scholarship that has employed the same insights in categorizing him as modernist. Two overlapping strands link Conrad’s early critics to later modernist scholarship. First, there is the shared awareness of his stylistic likeness to continental forms of experimental art. Second, there

16 Jameson makes a poignant observation of Conrad’s generic elusiveness. He writes: “after eighty years, [Conrad’s] place is still unstable, undecidable, and his work unclassifiable, spilling out of high literature into light reading and romance […] floating uncertainly somewhere between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson” (206).
is the shared perception of a dichotomy between his years as “starving” and his years as “sellout” novelist. By assembling these aspects within a model of Conrad’s career, contemporaries as well as successors – and journalists as well as scholars – have situated Conrad within a modernist canon.

2.3.1 Conrad as a Continental Artist

English literary modernism is frequently examined in relation to movements exterior to it. While Anglophone modernisms are usually discussed in contexts distinct from similar movements in other languages, there is a strong undercurrent in scholarship that traces modernist influence on an international and multilingual scale. Russian and French literary schools have been particularly apposite for linking Conrad with modernism. Similarly, while modernist writers are typically discussed within literary contexts, there is a marked trend toward considering literary modernism with reference to experimentalism in other arts. The visual fragmentation employed in collage, cubism, and montage has been a particularly popular point of comparison. More pertinent here, however, is impressionism, the precursor to these movements. Separating Anglo-continental and literary-artistic points of comparison within modernist studies is difficult and somewhat artificial. Many examinations of Anglophone modernism reference the diffusion of experimental art, dance, and music from the continent as conduits of literary influence. Likewise, it is nearly impossible to compare impressionist or postimpressionist schools with modernist literature without referencing continental figures from Monet (impressionist) to Duchamp (cubist) to Kandinsky (abstract expressionism) and beyond. Multilingual and multidisciplinary analyses encompass Conrad with similar results; they implicate him in a modernist conversation.

At the turn of the twentieth century, it was still too early to connect continental schools with a modernism that had not yet developed. Nevertheless, the associations between Conrad and
experimental authors from the continent put him in line with innovative, proto-modernist literary modes. Conrad’s biography and tastes set the stage for continental comparisons. Russian and French literary schools were a natural point of comparison with Conrad because of his liminal nationality. His Polish origins and formative years in Russia (1860-1867) provided endless grounds for early (and indeed later) critical discussion. His years as a young man in France (intermittently between 1874 and 1878), admiration of French literature, and the myth propagated by Ford Madox Ford that he thought French a more expressive language,\(^\text{17}\) provided the backdrop for a comparison with French authors. Early in his career, Conrad positioned himself in the novelistic wake of realists Flaubert and Maupassant. His early letters show his commitment to their commitments: *le mot juste* and art for art’s sake. In *A Personal Record* (1912), he cites Flaubert’s spirit as his inspiration (125-126). On the Russian side, Conrad expressed his strong admiration for Turgenev, writing to Constance Garnett that “[t]he reader does not see the language – [Turgenev’s] story is alive – as living as when it came from the master’s hand” (*CL* 1:420). While he expressly disliked Dostoyevsky, numerous early critics – and particularly Edward Garnett – likened the two artists. Critics were quick to take up the similarity between Conrad and Russian writers as a cause for both praise and blame. In 1899, Constance Garnett’s translation of Turgenev’s stories in *A Desperate Character Etc.* was dedicated “to Joseph Conrad whose art in essence often recalls the art and essence of Turgenev.” Conversely, an early *Athenaeum* reviewer of *Under Western Eyes* (1911), criticized the book as “a very un-English work indeed; [it] reads like a translation from some other tongue, presumably Russian […] As always, Mr. Conrad is reckless in the form of his narration, which in this

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\(^{17}\) Ford wrote that Conrad “would declare that what he had written in French before ever trying to read English was infinitely above anything he could do in the inexact, half-baked language that English was” (*A Personal Remembrance* 55).
instance is at times tiring” (qtd. Hollywood 207). James Huneker’s *Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks* (1915) made the comparison more associatively and in a pseudo-academic context. The book’s first chapter analyzes “The Genius of Joseph Conrad,” effusively praising the novelist’s style and prosaic power. While he compares Conrad directly to the likes of Hardy, Kipling, and Dickens, Huneker’s book also implicitly situates Conrad in a broader intellectual context. His other chapters centre on, for instance, “Dostoïevsky and Tolstoy, and the Younger Choir of Russian Writers,” “Richard Strauss at Stuttgart,” “Kubin, Munch, and Gauguin,” and “The Italian Futurist Painters.” Huneker’s eclectic range of subject matter is characterized by both its continental and its experimental edge.

As the decades progressed and contemporary reviews morphed into academic commentary, Conrad continued to be associated with the continent. George Orwell, for example, praised him in 1949 as “one of the best writers of the century […] Conrad was one of those writers who in the present century civilized English literature and brought it back into contact with Europe” (489). Less than a decade later, Morton D. Zabel’s *Craft and Character* (1957) put Conrad in a more academic conversation with experimental continental writers including Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, André Gide, and the existentialist school. The always latent connection between Europe, Conrad, and modernism was thoroughly explored in in J. Hillis Miller’s *The Poets of Reality* (1965). Miller’s work is among the earliest to theorize what was not yet called modernism through an analysis of Conrad, Yeats, Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. He unexpectedly begins a discussion of twentieth-century poetry with an examination of a novelist. While Miller acknowledges Conrad’s continuity with the likes of

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18 Elsewhere, he considers Conrad’s likeness to Russian authors. In an introductory on *Under Western Eyes*, Zabel wrote that “if a novel like *Under Western Eyes* is to be referred to a Russian precedent, it is as much to that of the ‘terror-haunted Dostoyevsky as to that of ‘the impartial lover of all his countrymen’ [Turgenev]” (qtd. Kaye 127).
nineteenth-century realist novelists Dickens, Meredith, and Hardy, he also argues that “Conrad is part of European literature and takes his place with Dostoevsky, Mann, Gide, Proust, and Camus as an explorer of modern perspective and nihilism” (Miller 6). Conrad’s nihilism, for Miller, sets the stage for a poetic rejection of the idealism left over from Romanticism. A trajectory of works implicating Conrad within modernism vis-à-vis the continent includes Mark Conroy’s *Modernism and Authority: Strategies of Legitimation in Flaubert and Conrad* (1985), and Peter Kaye’s *Dostoyevsky and English Modernism* (1999), and *Proust, Mann, Joyce: In the Modernist Context* (2003). Conrad’s affinity to European experimentalists created a segue for his absorption into modernism.

The conversations relating Conrad to continental movements often invoke experimentalism in visual arts. Huneker’s *Ivory, Apes and Peacocks* groups Conrad with experimental painters and composers as well as continental writers. Huneker’s opening discussion frames Conrad as a “painter doubled by a psychologist” (1). Referring to his work in terms of a visual lens was one strategy particularly favoured by Conrad himself, especially early in his career. On 31 May 1902, for example, he famously wrote to William Blackwood:

I am modern, and I would rather recall Wagner the musician and Rodin the sculptor who both had to starve a little in their day – and Whistler the painter who made Ruskin the critic foam at the mouth with scorn and indignation. They too have arrived. They too had to suffer for being ‘new.’ (*CL* 2:418)

Conrad found expression of his modernity – or his newness – in a comparison with bold painters committed to challenging their field. The preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus* (1897) similarly explains that “[f]iction – if it at all aspires to be art – appeals to temperament. And in truth it
must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other
innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their
true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time” (162).
Conrad implicated his own work and craft within a broader artistic context.

The likeness between Conrad’s verbal innovation and that within contiguous artistic
fields was noted in reviews contemporary with Conrad’s production. On 2 May 1896 The
Newcastle Daily Chronicle dubbed his style “psychological impressionism” (qtd. Simmons 60),
linking him with the French visual artistic tradition that began in radical innovation but became
popular in the 1880s. The “impressionist” descriptor persisted throughout the course of Conrad’s
career. After his death, a review of Ford Madox Ford’s Joseph Conrad: A Personal Record
reproduces Ford’s depiction of “a writer who avowed himself an impressionist” (CSM December
6 1924). Visual art analogies – like those analogies between Conrad’s writing and its continental
counterparts – could be employed to express both admiration and criticism. In a letter to H.G.
Wells, Arnold Bennett praised parts of The Nigger of Narcissus as “exquisite in the extraordinary
management of colour they display” (Bennet 4). Later, Methuen & Co., about to publish Under
Western Eyes, objected to its title, complaining that it “gives promise not so much of a novel, as
a book of descriptive impressions” (Methuen 52). Contemporaries discussed Conrad as a visual
or painterly writer, often with the purpose of emphasizing his distinct style of subjective, even
idiosyncratic descriptions.

Drawing from a history of Conrad’s painterly self-styling and criticism, scholarship has
developed a theoretical framework to accommodate the artistic comparison.19 The framework

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19 Works to synthesize impressionism and modernism include Maria Elisabeth’s Kronegger’s Literary
Impressionism (1973), Paul Armstrong’s The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in
James, Conrad, and Ford (1988), Todd K. Bender’s Literary Impressionism in Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford,
generally situates Conrad within a community of modernists who are also thought to write with painterly styles. In *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (2001), for example, Jesse Matz writes that “the impression is nothing less than a name for the aesthetic moment itself […]

Like aesthetic experience, it pitches consciousness between sense and reason” (Matz 12). Locating Conrad’s style at the moment of perception, Matz echoes Ford’s early argument (from 1921) that “Mr. Conrad found salvation not in any machined Form, but in the sheer attempt to reproduce in words life as it presents itself to the intelligent observer” (*Thus to Revisit* 46). For Matz, Conrad’s interest in the liminality “between sense and reason” aligns him with Proust, and puts both in conversation with a cluster of like-minded writers including Flaubert, Woolf, Sartre, and Chekhov (Matz 15). An early body of reviewers thus found Conrad similar to continental writers and artists. Their work, situating him in these contexts, has allowed for a body of scholarship to align Conrad within an Anglophone modernist literary community partially defined by shared continental and visual artistic leanings.

### 2.3.2 Conrad Starving, Conrad Selling Out

Conrad’s legacy as a modernist is often presented in opposition to his legacy as a popular novelist. Criticism – both contemporary and scholarly – divided Conrad’s career into phases. The typical division distinguishes between early years (Conrad’s nineteenth-century novels), middle years (*Lord Jim* in 1900 to *Under Western Eyes* in 1911), and later years (popular novels from *Chance* in 1914 onward). The tripartite division is by no means definitive. Indeed, every critic labels his or her own time frame according to his or her tastes. Overall, however, Conrad’s critics have frequently put forth the theory that his novelistic powers peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century and then gradually weakened. Scholars discussing the theory often label it

“achievement and decline,” borrowing the title of Thomas Moser’s influential evaluation of Conrad’s career from 1957.\textsuperscript{20} Moser was by no means the first or last of a string of reviewers to trace the arc of Conrad’s career. A 1920 commentator asked, on the occasion of The Rescues’s publication, “whether the wider reputation had not come […] to a writer whose best work was already written” (London Mercury, qtd. in Simmons 64). Journalist Philip Guedalla likewise acknowledged Conrad’s fame but hesitated to approve later works. Conrad, he wrote on 12 August 1922, “had been talked about for years; but respectful allusions in cultivated conversation are a meager substitute for royalties.” Since the publication of Chance, however, Conrad had “soared (or sank) into popularity” (ILN). Guedalla’s damning vacillation between soaring and sinking foreshadowed the later tendency to elevate the earlier works over the later ones. In an environment of general celebration, some commentators perceived – justly or unjustly – that Conrad’s fame corresponded to his deterioration as a writer.

Recognizably modernist voices are among those endorsing the view that Conrad’s literary powers were in a state of deterioration. F. Scott Fitzgerald, an admirer of the early Conrad, wrote on 19 May 1923 that he would “rather have written Conrad’s “Nostromo” [1904] than any other novel” (Chicago Tribune, qtd. Knowles 140). Ezra Pound, responding to a career that had culminated in popularity, rejected T.S. Eliot’s reference to Heart of Darkness in drafts of The Waste Land, doubting that Conrad was “weighty enough to stand the citation” (Facsimile 125 n.3). Shortly after Conrad’s death, Virginia Woolf argued that Conrad’s middle period was his strongest, followed by a weaker end to his career.\textsuperscript{21} In view of this flagging of Conrad’s talents she writes, “though we should make expeditions into the later books and bring back

\textsuperscript{20} For Moser, Conrad’s writing began worsening after Under Western Eyes (1911). There is, however, no definitive consensus of the moment when “achievement’ gave way to “decline.”

\textsuperscript{21} Woolf does not give specific for Conrad’s middle period. In “Lord Jim,” however, she expressed her deep admiration for the works narrated by Marlow (1898-1913).
wonderful trophies, large tracts of them will remain by most of us untroudden” (“Joseph Conrad” 229). John Shand, contributing to Eliot’s magazine *The Criterion*, applauded Conrad’s early “epic tales of men’s struggles with the sea” but criticized the later works – particularly the “‘psychological’ novels, which will soonest be forgotten” (October 1924).

Consonant with the modernist perspective that focused attention on Conrad’s early works, his final novels have garnered relatively little attention within academic discourse, although (or perhaps because) these were his most commercially successful ventures. *Victory* (1915), *Arrow of Gold* (1919), and *The Rescue* (1920), for example, have been discussed less than works like *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Nostromo* (1904), and *The Secret Agent* (1907). The works most commonly studied correspond to those most suited for modernist analysis. Conrad’s cynical portrayal of empire has been one ground for comparison. John Cooper has interpreted *Nostromo* as a text that illustrates and repudiates contemporary imperial assumptions to undermine “great men” and “great aims of history” (149). The novel, Cooper argues, is modernist insofar as it addresses “the question of foundations, of the ground, or more especially, of the problem of groundlessness” (146). Michael Greaney similarly puts forth Conrad’s earlier, political novels as his most modernist, writing: “the political stories of [Conrad’s] middle period represent his breakthrough from traditional storytelling into the writerly aesthetic of high modernism” (1). Perhaps the most frequent grounds for asserting a connection between works written in Conrad’s middle years and modernism is the character of Charles Marlow, whose narrating consciousness frames “Youth” (1898), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900), and *Chance* (1913). Leonard Orr has described Marlow as a mechanism that blurs Conrad’s own memory into his fiction. Marlow’s free-ranging, semi-autobiographical voice allows Conrad “intratextuality between his fiction and his memoirs,” a move that “would be developed as a
modernist experimental technique by Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner” (Orr 44-45). Paul Wake, meanwhile, has situated the Marlow texts in a unique liminal position between Victorianism and modernism, following John Lyon in considering Conrad the “preface” to the modernist movement (3-5). The portioning of Conrad’s career into achievement and decline has cordoned off a subset of his middle works. These works provide the most fruitful ground for modernist analysis.

Conrad’s purported phases of achievement and decline correspond to phases of obscurity and fame. Stephen Crane was among those concerned for the young Conrad’s reputation and revenue. Less than a month before his death in June of 1900, Crane expressed his doubts concerning Conrad’s fortunes, agreeing with Edward Garnett that their friend would never be popular beyond a readership of writers (Crane 6). At the turn of the century, Conrad was dependent upon loans and gifts to support his family (Simmons 57). David Meldrum, editor of Blackwood’s, was happy to publish Conrad’s *Lord Jim* but doubted that its author would meet with success in the public eye. He wrote: “I wish I could believe that he would ever be ‘popular’ in the popular sense, but he is too good for that. On the other hand, it would seem that over ‘Lord Jim’ he is coming into his own quicker than so ‘unfashionable’ and clever an author [has] any right to expect these days” (qtd. in Wexler 37). As late as 31 August 1913, Quinn wrote to Conrad: “You will never be a popular writer. You are too fine an artist for that” (*JQP*).22 Observers of Conrad’s earlier career connected his unpopularity with his “good” or “fine” abilities as an artist, distrusting the criterion of public taste.

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22 Mere months later (in January 1914) *Chance* would disprove Quinn’s hypothesis. Quinn reported – correctly – that the novel was in its sixth re-printing within weeks of its publication (25 February 1914). He retracted his prior statement, confirming: “you have made a popular hit, and *Chance* deserves it.”
Conrad’s artistic aims appear to shift in the last decade of his career. He had always fretted about money but not, vocally at least, about his fame among peers or public. In his early career, he consistently focused on the internal aspects of writing. His apparent unconcern for popular recognition (not then forthcoming) has a modernist ring to it. His preface to The Nigger of Narcissus explains how the author becomes a slave “to the stammerings of his own conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work. In that uneasy solitude the supreme cry of Art for Art itself loses the exciting ring of its apparent immortality” (163). Fixation on (usually pained) solitude and interiority characterizes the early Conrad. Around 1907, he was still expressing his proud artistic loneliness. In correcting a pamphlet on himself, Conrad wrote: “[t]he contaminating, ruinous influence of a literary circle, he has never had to fight against […] He has carved out his work in his own original way, and hence has had success” (“Knopf Document” 68). Conrad’s self-fashioning, particularly in the first half of his career, revolves around artistic integrity and inner struggle. Older, crippled by gout, and providing for a family, the later Conrad demonstrates interest in both fame and fortune. He had begun to think of himself as a celebrity author by 12 April 1913, when he wrote to Quinn that “Youth”’s first draft would be “a curiosity in Conrad’s literary history” (CL 5:214). In a later letter to Quinn, dated 24 May 1916, Conrad laboured over the details of his Complete Edition with Doubleday, writing: “I am anxious for its success so as to add a little actual cash to the little fund I want to leave to my wife – for goodness only knows whether my copyrights will be worth anything” (CL 5:598).

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23 For a full discussion of the ambiguous composition and chronology of the “Knopf Document,” see Moore, Simmons, and Stape.
24 Conrad’s dislike of literary coteries may, in fact, have contributed to the distance he kept from the proto-modernist spheres occupied by friends like F.M. Ford, Edward and Constance Garnett, Arthur Symons, Agnes Tobin, and John Quinn.
Even before the surge in Conrad’s popularity, the recognition that the later Conrad sought was in the making. The public demonstrated curiosity in his unusual biography. Eventually, interest in Conrad as a literary figure became a question of fashion. Reviewers and admirers were fascinated by his life and personality. Journalist Gordon Gardiner wrote: “no contemporary British novelist has so devoted a following as the subject of this study” (TLS 26 April 1923). Gardiner notes that the allure was strong enough to be surprising to Conrad’s admirers and detractors alike. Cultural critic H.L. Mencken, meanwhile, speculated that “there is not much reason to believe that [Conrad as a] somewhat extravagant fashion is based upon any genuine liking, or any widespread understanding […] A clan of Conrad fanatics exists, and surrounding it there is a body of readers who read him because it is the intellectual thing to do, and who talk of him because talking of him is expected” (Mencken 56-57). Conrad’s status as a fashionable writer was also cause for Virginia Woolf to descry, with typical wit, the unattractive binding that his publisher selected for The Shadow-Line. “It is,” she explained, “not a question of luxury, but of necessity: we have to buy Mr. Conrad; all of our friends have to buy Mr. Conrad; and that Mr. Conrad of all people should be robbed even of a shred of that dignity and beauty which he more than any living writer is able to create seems quite distressingly inappropriate” (TLS 26 July 1917). Conrad had become a celebrity; and his works had thereby acquired an authorial brand that marked them out as fashionable for consumption.

Conrad, in his function as a purveyor of fashionable literary commodities, fits into the emerging discourse surrounding modernism in the marketplace. Mark Morrisson, Catherine Turner, Lawrence Rainey, and Aaron Jaffe are some of the scholars in recent years to elucidate modernism’s troubled relationship with a consumer culture. The movement, which denied its own susceptibility to capitalistic projects, was nonetheless complicit in a capitalist system of
cultural exchange. Thus, “the publicizing function of modernist authorship must be everywhere observed yet everywhere denied” (Jaffe 16). Conrad was among the earliest to feel “the tension between the claims of his art and the imperatives of the marketplace […] that the polarization between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature had firmly crystallized” (Rainey 2). It was a question of balancing a saleable image – variously described as a trademark, brand, or imprimatur – with a pose of disinterested artistic integrity. Ultimately, Conrad passed the tipping point and, at least in the years immediately following his death, was remembered as a popular author.

Interest in Conrad as a celebrity created a flurry of biographical publications in the years following his death. These works capitalized on popular interest in Conrad’s life to create a marketplace devoted to commemoration. Those close to Conrad published dozens of pieces on him as a man, sailor, and writer. Family members Jessie and Borys Conrad and friends Georges Jean-Aubrey, John Galsworthy, Ford Madox Ford, and Richard Curle are only a handful among Conrad’s many early biographers. Owen Knowles has argued that the surge in posthumous acclaim persisted to the detriment of Conrad’s more academic reputation, framing him as a sensation rather than a serious literary topic (“Critical Responses” 67-68). Conrad’s own method, particularly in his early career, of keeping balance, however, has much in common with the strategies employed by other modernist personalities. In recent years, Conrad has often emerged within conversations that explore modernism’s fraught relationship with commodification. He appears at the fringes of modernist marketplace discourse, particularly his early “impressionist” years of collaboration with Ford. Mark Morrisson contextualizes Conrad within Ford’s attempt to create a popular modernist periodical. Joyce Piell Wexler studies Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce as artists simultaneously adopting ruthless self-promotion tactics and an “aesthetic of impersonality” (xii). Modernism was a paradoxical movement insofar as its constituents strove
for commercial success while fashioning themselves as fundamentally opposed to the marketplace and its demands. While Conrad, in his later years, favoured success within the marketplace environment to any manner of overt opposition, his career is marked by the tensions of an ideal anti-populism and a practical marketplace dependency that characterizes the movement as a whole.

This chapter has been sketching a reconstructive and multi-faceted image of the various communities with which Conrad was grouped by his contemporaries and by the readers and critics of the generations that followed. Popular and academic conversations about Conrad positioned him within conceptual frameworks that placed him in meaningful associations with other figures whom the speaker deemed relevant to Conrad’s style, biography, or language. The diagram on the following page illustrates the types of associative frameworks in which Conrad has been examined. The general labels written on a black background (“Continental Writers,” “Edwardian Writers,” etc.) are among the headings under which Conrad has been grouped. The names on white backgrounds are among the most common ones to appear as points of comparison between Conrad and other writers or artists. The categories are, of course, highly suggestive while offering little in terms of definitive description. There is a marked overlap between them, allowing Hardy, for example, to be considered both Victorian and Edwardian, or allowing Stein to be at once a modernist and a continental figure. While the categories are unsatisfactory insofar as their contours are frequently blurred or permeable, this blurring permeability accurately reflects the provisional character of all attempts at artistic classification. Comparing and contrasting writers, we inevitably create imperfect categories to make conversation more manageable and more productive. Stein demonstrated the formal experimentation that makes her a relevant modernist; she also operated within a Parisian
community and marketplace that put her in conversation with other continental figures. Because of his biography, evolving style, and community, Conrad belongs to more categories than most. However ambivalent Conrad’s relationship to the wider artistic communities within which he operated, from his earliest to his most recent reviewers, he has been placed within a context of skeptical, oppositional, and formally experimental writers that have come to be labeled as modernists.

Figure 2.1: Canon Web
Chapter 3: John Quinn and Materialist Canon Formation

The following chapter considers John Quinn as a material agent who was instrumental in the formation of a modernist cluster with Conrad on its edges. Given his early time frame, relative to modernism, and his oft expressed disavowal of “coteries,” it is surprising that current scholarship so frequently conceives Conrad in terms of a modernist coterie. In order for the diagram to exist as it does, with a connection between the box labeled “Conrad” and that labeled “Modernists,” two phenomena needed to transpire: first, Conrad needed to become a name on the map, prominent and prestigious enough to be part of popular and academic discourse, and second, he needed to seem somehow relevant to a new generation of experimental writers. John Quinn (1870–1924) contributed to both of these requirements being met. He is an agent who both brought Conrad’s name to the fore and who naturalized his works within a proto-modernist sphere. Quinn’s instrumental brokering of Conrad’s work in relation to the proto-modernist community comprises a case study in collective canon formation.

Born into a large, Irish, and thoroughly middle-class family in Tiffin, Ohio, Quinn became one of the most prominent patrons of modern arts in America.25 He was a precocious speculator, buying his first collection pieces as a young adolescent and betting an extravagant five hundred dollars (unsuccessfully) on a presidential election at eighteen (Reid 4-5).26 After studying law at Georgetown, Quinn began a lucrative legal career in New York. With few family connections, he relied on intelligence, extreme diligence, and – increasingly – extravagant spending to become an important figure in cultural circles. In 1902 he organized a New York branch of the Irish Literary Society, thus beginning his long-lasting friendships with the Yeats

25 Quinn’s biographical details come from Reid’s The Man from New York (1968).
26 His earliest collection pieces were first editions of works by nineteenth-century giants Walter Pater, Thomas Hardy, William Morris, and George Meredith (Reid 5).
family (painters John Butler and Jack and poet William Butler), poet and painter George Russell, novelist and playwright J.M. Synge, and folklorist and playwright Lady Gregory (Reid 12-15).

Much of his early career as a collector was focused on works by Irish writers and painters. Over the course of two decades (from roughly 1900 until his death in 1924), Quinn’s tastes shifted in a twofold manner. First, he became increasingly interested in visual rather than literary arts. Second, he tended more and more toward the avant-garde. A constant in his career, however, was an extreme loyalty to the artists he selected as his favourites. An article from The Times, written 36 years after his death, articulates Quinn’s cultural role. It describes him as a “notable patron of artists and writers a generation ago” and remembers that, for those he patronized, “he did much to make them famous” (LT 18 Jan 1960). The services Quinn provided for his protégés included: purchasing manuscripts, first editions, paintings, sculptures, and sketches; circulating copies of books and photographs in influential circles; promoting writers and artists through public speaking and review-writing; facilitating lecture tours and publication arrangements; defending the arts in court; and providing endless (usually unsolicited) advice regarding health and diet. Quinn’s influence was by no means limited to spending; his imprint can be traced on virtually every material aspect of his protégés’ literary and artistic production.

Quinn’s involvement with early modernists demonstrates the type of patron he was and the type he imagined himself to be. In 1915 he was introduced into a proto-modernist literary community through Ezra Pound and quickly became a patron to a broad range of writers, notably Pound, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and F.M. Ford. He opened correspondence with Pound on 25 February 1915 to react against the poet’s condemnation of American art collectors and their proclivity for “dead” art (Reid 198-199). Identifying himself as a collector of new works and a generous patron to living artists, Quinn claimed that “modern art
owes me perhaps a greater debt than it does to any other living man” (JQP 25 August 1915). By this point in his patronage, he had shifted his attention from nineteenth-century cultural figures – notably George Meredith and William Morris – to privilege modern and innovative art. Quinn’s progressive edge fit well with Pound’s own tastes and agenda. On their respective sides of the Atlantic, the two Americans began a friendly professional relationship that would last until Quinn’s death in 1924. Throughout 1915 and 1916, Pound worked as his advisor and agent in purchasing art by French avant-garde artist and war victim Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915). Quinn, meanwhile, was a resource for Pound and his protégés. Some of his contributions were purely financial in nature. He purchased 20 copies each of the first and second number of Lewis and Pound’s Blast and promised to underwrite the expenses of a third, which never appeared (JQP 13 May 1916). He later purchased 40 copies of Pound’s Noh (1917) and 50 of his Lustra (1917) to encourage the publication of these works in America with Alfred Knopf’s publishing house (Reid 280). As usual, Quinn’s money followed his personal allegiances rather than any programmatic literary vision. He offered to contribute £100 per annum for two years to The Egoist when it seemed that Pound was going to work there as an editor (JQP 15 March 1916). When Pound withdrew his involvement, Quinn withdrew his support. In the same pattern of loyal spending, Quinn invested in Ford Madox Ford’s The Transatlantic Review in 1923 despite his conviction – quickly justified – that the magazine would fail (Reid 615).

Quinn’s influence, however, extends far more broadly and diversely than these purely financial contributions might seem to imply. He acted as sounding board when Pound was intent upon securing an American editorial position, discussing such mundane matters as how often a periodical should appear and how much it should cost (JQP 25 August 1915). When Pound finally became involved with The Little Review, Quinn worked tirelessly as a sort of buffer
between the often warring parties of Pound and American founders and editors Mary Anderson and Jane Heap (Reid 284-291). Upon the publication of Joyce’s novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Quinn sent copies to friends and published a glowing review in *Vanity Fair* for which Pound thanked him warmly (Reid 276, *JQP* 17 April 1917). Joyce was less frequently inclined to effusive gratitude. Nevertheless, shortly after the publication of *Portrait* he thanked his biggest financial backers, writing: “I shall go on writing, thanks to the kindness of my unknown friend and also of Mr. Quinn” (qtd. in Reid 276).27 This came even before Quinn attempted unsuccessfully to defend *Ulysses* (as it appeared in *The Little Review*) against obscenity charges (439-458). Two years later, T.S. Eliot would give Quinn the manuscript of *The Waste Land* as thanks for his help in finding a publisher for the volume (Reid 533-539).

Skeptical of the initial contract that Boni and Liveright put forth, Eliot entrusted the proceedings to Quinn’s legal expertise. Quinn was once again a go-between, meeting with Liveright and Gilbert Seldes, Eliot’s publisher at *The Dial*. The timing that the three settled upon helped to justify Eliot’s receipt of the annual *Dial* award and its substantial cash prize of $2000.

Quinn’s generosity, intervention, and tireless support of the budding group of young modernists overlapped with his earlier involvement in Conrad’s affairs. He first encountered the struggling but soon-to-be popular Conrad in 1911 through their mutual friend, the poet Agnes Tobin. At the time, Quinn was in the process of reading the serialized version of *Under Western Eyes* in the *Monthly Review* (Reid 113). In the summer of that year, Quinn purchased the manuscript of Conrad’s *An Outcast of the Islands*—the first of many that he acquired over the course of their correspondence. Quinn would buy nearly every scrap of Conrad’s manuscript material, eagerly seeking them out and paying between £40 and £150 for each work (Reid 112).

27 This “unknown friend” was Harriet Shaw Weaver of *The Egoist*, who made her contributions anonymously.
At the time, Conrad was grateful for the attention and the much-need cash. After Quinn purchased a manuscript cluster including Typhoon, “Amy Foster,” and fragments of Lord Jim, Conrad wrote to Quinn that he was “in possession of every scrap of Conrad’s MSS. up to date, with the knowledge besides that you have befriended him in a time of difficulty” (27 October 1912, CL 5:121). In the same letter, Conrad offered Quinn a monopoly of the collection by promising him first refusal of all future manuscripts. This promise proved a problem later on when Conrad dishonoured his promise. The early years of their correspondence, however, followed a pattern of mutual respect and appreciation.

Conrad benefited from Quinn’s connections in publishing and in the media. His first experience of fame and commercial success was in America with the publication of Chance in 1914. Later works such as Victory (1916) and Arrow of Gold (1919) would also prove immensely popular. While public recognition and endorsement follow fickle causal rules, some of Conrad’s American success must be attributed to his collector-friend. Quinn provided a variety of support beyond his manuscript purchases. He judiciously advised Conrad to consolidate his American publications with a single firm, rather than disperse his works with various publishers as he had done in Britain. He offered the characteristically pragmatic justification: “Book shops and the public generally know where to get a man’s things if they are all published by one firm, and besides, it simplifies it from the author’s point of view” (JQP 30 March 1913). His timing was perfect; three days earlier, F.N. Doubleday had met with Conrad and his agent J.B. Pinker in London to discuss the possibility of a uniform edition in America (Karl and Davies 5.xxi). The next year, Doubleday, Page & Co.’s edition of Chance was Conrad’s first popular hit. F.N. Doubleday belatedly corroborated the advice to consolidate in a letter to Quinn describing his “amusing experience with these English publishers in trying to get
Conrad’s books together in Great Britain. In my opinion, his situation there is most lamentable because he has five publishers” (29 April 1919).\textsuperscript{28} Between 1913 and 1919, Quinn maintained an animated and occasionally overwrought correspondence with the publishing house to encourage and guide them in promoting Conrad. He lent manuscripts to exhibitions, presided at a public lecture, and – sometimes tactlessly – negotiated matters of binding, typescript, layout, price, and timing for Conrad’s \textit{Complete Edition} (planned in 1916 but delayed until 1922).\textsuperscript{29} Quinn also arranged for Conrad to meet his friend James Huneker, the influential cultural critic who would write several pieces of glowing commentary that helped to propel the accelerating momentum of Conrad’s career.\textsuperscript{30} Quinn used his financial resources, thorough understanding of the New York publishing industry, and cultural connections to promote Conrad actively for nearly a decade.

Quinn was quite explicit about his personal motivations for collecting Conrad’s manuscripts and first editions. In a letter dated 19 January 1913, he insisted that he did not purchase Conrad materials to sell them later or to “make a ‘corner’ in them.” His aims as a collector were never mercenary and were rarely aimed toward setting or following trends in bookselling circles. He acquired the manuscripts out of admiration for Conrad’s writing and, later, out of loyalty to a man who had become his friend. While he never met Conrad (a point of contention for Quinn toward the end), the two wrote frequently and with warmth. By 15 April 1912, Quinn had stopped addressing “Mr. Conrad” and began writing his letters to “My dear Conrad.” Following his lead, the usually formal Conrad began writing to “My dear Quinn” (rather than “Dear Mr.

\textsuperscript{28} Quinn first came into contract with F.N. Doubleday (and others at Doubleday, Page, & Co.) as a go-between for the firm and Conrad.
\textsuperscript{29} In the latter capacity, Quinn contributed his own strong personality and opinions to a tense conversation between Conrad (the volatile writer), Doubleday (the haranguing publisher), and J.B. Pinker (the non-responsive agent). After arrangements collapsed yet again, Quinn closed a letter to Conrad incoherently, writing about F.N. Doubleday: “I have not heard from him and am glad not to hear from him and I hope I shall not hear from him about your work or affairs ever again or ever again call upon me for any reason” (\textit{JQP} 20 January 1920).
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks} (1915), which I discussed in the previous chapter, is one example of such commentary. The work, which praises Conrad and places him in context with continental experimentalists, is dedicated to Quinn.
Quinn” or “Dear Sir”) on 24 May of the same year. Quinn expresses his personal interest in an early letter asking Conrad to autograph and send a copy of his portrait from *English Review*. This he requests because he “should like to have the drawing framed and hang it with photographs of Meredith, William Morris, and one or two others of my favorite authors” (*JQP* 15 November 1911). Quinn does not base his request on Conrad’s fame, prominence, or artistic importance, but rather on his position as a “favorite.”

The photographic grouping of Conrad with Meredith and Morris exemplifies Quinn’s tendency in correspondence to measure Conrad – often tellingly – against other literary figures. Quinn compares Conrad to a variety of authors including Turgenev (*JQP* 15 November 1911), Hardy and Meredith (*JQP* 19 January 1913), George Moore (*JQP* 30 March 1913), and R.L. Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling (*JQP* 29 June 1916). Some of Quinn’s comparisons have topic or theme as a ground. For instance, Quinn likens works by Turgenev to Conrad’s novel *Under Western Eyes* (set in Russia). Other comparisons have to do with status. It is after *Victory’s* spectacular American success in 1916 that Quinn compares Conrad’s fame to that of a Stevenson or a Kipling. A year later, Quinn discussed Conrad with scholar and enthusiast Wilson Follett. As he recounts it in a letter to Conrad, Follett put forth a comparison between Conrad and H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy (*JQP* 18 July 1917). Quinn rejects Conrad’s similarity to Wells and Bennett, “mere journalists,” to explain that Conrad is “a great artist and not to be mentioned with them in the same breath” (18 July 1917). In accepting or rejecting these likenesses, Quinn clarifies the values in which he believed he was investing. On the whole, he admired Conrad as an early Edwardian novelist and “a very great wizard in the telling of

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31 It is fortunate, or perhaps tactically deliberate, that Quinn allowed the comparison with Galsworthy to stand, as Galsworthy and Conrad were close friends for decades.
tales” (*JQP* 1 May 1919). Importantly, he did not perceive Conrad as an innovator or an artist at the frontier of a movement.

Increasingly, however, Quinn was directing his attention toward artistic frontiers. He became more and more involved in the experimental literary scene in the nineteen-teens, although the interest had been latent since the turn of the century. Through connections with Pound, Irish revivalists (especially J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory, and the Yeatses), and numerous avant-garde artists, Quinn wound up on the fringes of experimental movements in formation. Quinn’s most important literary involvement in the last decade of his life was his patronage of Pound’s coterie, notably vorticist Wyndham Lewis, modernist poet T.S. Eliot, modernist novelist and James Joyce. His increasing association with the literary avant-garde coincided with a fallout with Conrad. The connection that Quinn facilitated between Conrad’s work and modernist reception is thus doubly ironic. Conrad – aging, commercially successful, and hostile to self-consciously literary communities – was not searching for a connection to a young generation of experimental writers. Quinn, meanwhile, initially admired Conrad as a nineteenth-century author and then turned his attention toward more new and innovative artistic movements. He did not intend to inflect Conrad’s reputation with the experimentalism that he had come to admire. Despite both men’s intent, however, Quinn’s patronage worked to associate Conrad with modernism as it formed and afterward.

Quinn’s interest in Conrad remained strangely distinct from his activities within the proto-modernist community. Conrad had numerous associations with this innovative young community; the points of connection included Quinn himself along with Ford, Symons, and Knopf. For a brief season in 1917, Quinn attempted to engage Conrad in a discussion of this new group of artists. In one letter, he recommended Joyce’s *Portrait* and mentions that he had
published an article on it in *Vanity Fair (JQP)* 16 March 1917. He also asked casually: “By the way, do you happen to know Ezra Pound? He’s an interesting man and is, I think, a great poet.” Conrad does not respond immediately to this direction in conversation. He does, however, thank Quinn for sending a copy of Pound’s *Lustra* that summer. Never a poetry enthusiast, he admits that he has not opened it “as one must in the right mood for that sort of reading” (8 August 1917). A month later, Quinn barraged him with queries and suggestions, asking if he has read *Portrait* and Wyndham Lewis’ *Tarr*, insisting that he will ask *Egoist* editor Harriet Shaw Weaver to send Conrad a copy of each, and sending a copy of Pound’s *Pavannes and Divisions* as well as a *Little Review* special edition on Henry James (15 September 1917). Conrad’s only response is to concede that “EP is certainly a poet but I am afraid I am too old and too wooden-headed to appreciate him as perhaps he deserves. The critics here consider him harmless; but as he has, I believe, a very good opinion of himself I don’t suppose he worries his head about the critics very much” (6 February 1918). Perhaps taking the hint, Quinn never again mentioned his new circle in their correspondence.

There was further common ground between Conrad and the modernist community. Ford, for example, collaborated with Conrad before developing a friendship and professional relationship with Pound, Lewis, and their crew. His publication, *The English Review* (1908-1909) was first produced in the Conrad home, circulating the work of Conrad, Hardy, James, Wells, and continental writers (including Turgenev) in its early years. In later years, after Ford had resigned his editorial post, the magazine featured Pound, Lawrence and Lewis. Arthur Symons and Agnes Tobin were likewise friendly with the Conrad family before becoming active within recognizably modernist communities. It was through his connection with Symons that Conrad had his 1896 short story “The Idiots” published in *The Savoy*, a magazine linked with continental
impressionism. And Alfred Knopf – eventual publisher for Lewis, Pound, Thomas Mann, and other experimental writers – was the editor who recruited Conrad as a hugely successful Doubleday author. All of these connections, however, had faded by the time that Quinn arrived on the modernist scene. Ford and Conrad had a tense friendship that included a major falling out in 1910 when Ford accused Conrad of monopolizing the fame from their collaborative works (Karl and Davies 3.xxvii-xxix).\footnote{Conrad acknowledged his meanness toward Ford. In a letter to Edward Garnett dated 26 March 1900, Conrad wrote: “H[ueffer] has been patient as no angel had been. I’ve been fiendish. I’ve been rude to him; if I’ve not called him names I’ve implied in my remarks and in the course of our discussions the most opprobrious epithets” \textit{(CL 2.257)}. Ford’s biographer Max Saunders has noted Ford’s sensitivity toward Conrad’s subtle cruelties (331-332). After their major falling out, the two recovered their friendship but not the intimacy of their earlier years.} Conrad increasingly distanced himself from association with his old collaborator. Symons and Tobin lost touch with the Conrad family, first because of Symons’ mental illness and then because of extensive travelling. After encouraging Doubleday, Page, & Co. to take up Conrad, Knopf moved on to Mitchell Kennerly’s publishing house and then to his own firm, where he developed a niche in continental and later modernist writings. The social and professional connections between Conrad and a modernist sphere were latent but unrealized in his lifetime.

Despite Conrad’s separation from modernist circles, a discourse developed to articulate and thus create connection between the author and the movement. Quinn provided an important part of the infrastructure that determined the extent and nature of Conrad’s legacy. He had – whatever his intentions – created his Conrad “corner,” greatly contributing to the novelist’s prestige. In \textit{A Book of Prefaces} (1917), critic H. L. Mencken wrote that

Conrad’s deals in first editions probably make more profit out of some of his books than ever he has made himself. His manuscripts are cornered, I believe, by an eminent collector of literary curiosities in New York, who seems to have a contract with the novelist to take
them as fast as they are produced – perhaps the only arrangement of the sort in literary history. His first editions begin to bring higher premiums than those of any other living author. Considering the fact that the oldest of them is less than twenty-five years old, they probably set new records for the trade. Even the latest in date are eagerly sought, and it is not uncommon to see an English edition of a Conrad book at an advance in New York within a month of its publication.

(Mencken 55-56)

Quinn’s identity and reputation gradually became bound with his Conrad collection to advance the novelist as a rare and valuable commodity in the book trade.

His most important act of promotion, however, occurred after Quinn’s good wishes to Conrad had disintegrated. The drawn out end to their twelve-year correspondence was unpleasant and unfortunate. On Conrad’s end, resentment built up as a result of a few small factors. The first was the repeated criticism that Quinn levied against J.B. Pinker, Conrad’s trusted agent and friend (JQP 29 June 1916, 5 July 1916, 19 June 1919). The second was Quinn’s drive to bring out Conrad’s American Complete Edition with all possible haste despite the complication that the Great War brought to all transatlantic dealings. The third cause was Quinn’s frequent and occasionally obnoxious insistence that Conrad visit New York to give a lecture tour and otherwise promote his work. Overall, Quinn was a pushy and sometimes overbearing correspondent who, in this case, did not demonstrate sensitivity to the wartime conditions that were tearing apart Conrad’s original and adopted homelands and threatening to claim his son at the front.
Quinn, meanwhile, was stung by large and small acts of ungraciousness on Conrad’s part. He dedicated thankless and, for a long while, seemingly fruitless hours to the Doubleday *Complete Edition*, attending to matters of arrangement, content, and binding. The years between the idea (1916) and the execution (1922) allowed plenty of time for Quinn’s pestering and Conrad’s tetchy style of ingratitude to take their toll on a friendship. Secondly, and more seriously, Quinn was hurt when Conrad breached their manuscript agreement from 1912. T.J. Wise, a dubious British book dealer later involved in a forgery scandal, offered Conrad £100 for the manuscript of *Arrow of Gold*. Finding this price better than the ones Quinn had been providing, and seizing the opportunity of safe shipping not then guaranteed across the Atlantic, Conrad took the offer. Quinn discovered the details of this deal through the snide remarks of a dinner guest and reproached Conrad for the betrayal. He wrote: “If you had notified me of Wise’s offer and its amount, I should have been willing to pay that much for the MS, for […] that would be a fair price for it, for of course I recognize that the value of your MSS has gone up since you and I began to write about MSS” (*JQP* 19 June 1919). The damage had been done, and continued to be done, as Conrad sold some future manuscripts to Wise and then to Clement Shorter. Quinn conveyed his knowledge of the sales to Conrad and re-iterated his disappointment (*JQP* 5 February 1920). Conrad attempted to justify his breach by claiming that Quinn had the complete collection of his pre-war and his pen-and-ink manuscripts, while Wise and Clement received his post-war, typed material. Quinn, however, flatly rejected this rather weak dichotomy but attempted to maintain friendly correspondence (5 February 1920). His wounded pride and declining health, combined with Conrad’s own ailments and growing coldness, resulted in the

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33 For a history of T.J. Wise’s forgery scandal, see Nicolas Barker’s *A Sequel to An Enquiry* (1982).
virtual end their friendship. When Conrad visited New York in the spring of 1923, he did not visit Quinn.

This ultimate rejection compounded Quinn’s frustration with his unwieldy quantity of manuscripts. Over the years, he had amassed a library featuring manuscripts and rare editions of hundreds of authors; his collection, by 1923, contained 18,000 items (Reid 599-602). Quinn’s purchasing habits had shifted almost entirely toward visual arts and his New York apartment was nearly bursting. His general frustration, combined with what he perceived as Conrad’s betrayal, prompted Quinn organize a massive sale of his literary collection (Reid 620). While his auction in the fall of 1923 was moderately unsuccessful as a whole, the Conrad material sold with unprecedented triumph. The Conrad lot brought in a total of $110,998, with Philadelphia-based book dealer A.S.W. Rosenbach purchasing most of the manuscripts. The price was roughly 1000% of what Quinn had paid cumulatively over the course of the previous decade (Moore 1). The manuscript of Victory, Conrad’s most popular success in America, fetched $8,100: the most ever paid for a living author’s manuscript (Reid 602). Conrad, naturally, accrued recognition but no profit through this distinction.

The sale contributed to Conrad’s reputation as a prestigious author and lent him a peculiar association with proto-modernism. Leading up to the sale, the Times dwelled on the extraordinary catalogue drawn up in preparation for the auction day. The two-volume document includes an extensive annotated bibliography of nearly all of the Conrad manuscript material (excepting what Conrad sold to Wise and Shorter). Examining the catalogue, or at least section featuring Conrad, one journalist wrote: “Mr. Conrad could not receive more spacious honour than is being done him by the Anderson Auction Company, of New York, in their sale catalogue of Mr. John Quinn’s collection of his autograph MSS” (LT 1 Oct 1923). The catalogue “is so
exhaustive in the matter of descriptive detail that it must become an important Conrad item, the only comprehensive record of a collection which will soon be scattered in many directions […It] will always possess a literary and biographical interest, even if Mr. Conrad’s genius does not appeal to posterity as strongly as to the present generation” (LT 1 Oct 1923). Even before its success, the sale generated an interest in Conrad’s manuscripts and legacy, setting him apart from transient popular sensations in literature.

The auction itself received extensive publicity on both sides of the Atlantic. The success of the Conrad sale far eclipsed the auction as a whole. When news of it reached the British press, some journalists even failed to mention that the auction included works by people other than Conrad. The Times announced the enormous success “of Mr. John Quinn’s collection of MSS and printed books of Joseph Conrad” and then listed his most important buyers and prices. It does not, however, reference the thousands of non-Conrad items also up for sale. Multiple American and British papers reported Conrad’s extraordinary results at the auction block, causing a certain discomfort to both the author and his patron. Quinn, who sold the manuscripts out of feelings of anger and disappointment toward Conrad, accidentally glorified his estranged friend (Reid 602). He also had to bear the insults of F.N. Doubleday, who suggested that Quinn send some of the profits in Conrad’s direction (Reid 603).

Conrad, meanwhile, received most of the fame but none of the proceeds, Quinn being disinclined to follow Doubleday’s suggestion. Conrad wrote in a letter to Doubleday:

The reverberation in the press here was very great indeed; and the rest is that lots of people, who never heard of me before, now know my name, and thousands of others, who could not have read through a page of mine without falling into convulsions, are proclaiming me a very
great author. And there are a good many also whom nothing will persuade that the whole thing was not a put-up job and that I haven’t got my share of the plunder. (20 November 1923, qtd. in Reid 605)

In the same letter, however, the fault lines in Conrad’s stoicism appear as he asks: “Did Quinn enjoy his glory in public and give graciously his hand to kiss to the multitude of inferior collectors who never, never, never dreamt of such a coup?” (20 November 1923, qtd. in Reid 604).

Whatever his feelings toward the sale, Conrad grew in prominence because of it. His death notice in the New York Times dubbed him the “Most Romantic writer in the English language” and then noted the $110,998 price tag attached to the manuscript collection sold at the 1923 auction (4 Aug 1924). Meanwhile, Quinn’s own death notice, preceding Conrad’s own by mere days, implicated the author into the eclectic and experimental cluster of Quinn’s protégés. A short article in the Times remembers that Quinn “formed what was probably one of the largest collections ever got together of modern artists,” one that included “a unique series of Joseph Conrad autograph manuscripts” (29 July 1924). It notes Quinn’s affinity with Irish literature and also his collection of “pictures by artists of the modern impressionist school, even including Matisse.” The journalism that mutually intertwined the dying Conrad and Quinn also encompassed Quinn’s avant-garde associations.

The sale brought about another association between Conrad and the avant-garde. In a curious moment of material connection, Rosenbach – who bought nearly all of the Conrad material – also bought Quinn’s manuscript of Joyce’s Ulysses. The Philadelphia-based literary scholar turned book dealer was at the centre of the American book trade. By June 1920, a Publishers’ Weekly article had vaunted him as “one of the most original, resourceful, and dominating figures
that have appeared in our [American] rare book field […] It is perfectly clear that Dr. Rosenbach knows exactly what he wants. His education, taste, and ambition lead him exclusively to the rarities” (qtd. in Wolf 136-137). Rosenbach’s reputed exclusivity, his rare or fine tastes, helped to boost the works that he circulated for private buyers, museums, and research institutions.

Rosenbach admired Conrad as a sea-writer and had already purchased privately printed first editions from Clement Shorter (Wolf 144). His exorbitant spending at Quinn’s auction, however, was a particularly bold venture. Biographer Edwin Wolf writes: “Never in his whole career, before or after, did [Rosenbach] plunge on his own as single-mindedly, as heavily, and without a buyer on the horizon” (190). Most of the Conrad manuscripts remained unsold at the time of Rosenbach’s death in ___. Some of these Rosenbach had selected for his extensive personal collection, intending them to complement his Melville material. He purchased Conrad as an sea writer similar to Melville, explaining that he spent so much at Quinn’s auction because “Joseph Conrad is the greatest analytical writer in the world and the greatest of sea stories who has ever existed but one exception, Herman Melville, the American” (qtd. in Wolf 190). While he invested in Conrad’s writings partially for profit, he purchased Ulysses for $1,975 with purely personal motivations, keeping the Joyce manuscript for his own collection (Reid 13).

The purchase of these two writers, Conrad and Joyce, by the same buyer at the same sale has been the cause for commentary. Reporters writing on the auction placed both on a list of sales, creating a remote point of contact. Joyce, insulted to see his work sell for so little, made the comparison himself; as Wolf reports, auctioneer Mitchell Kennerly warned Rosenbach that the writer “was temperamental and under the influence of friends had expected Ulysses to bring twice the price of Victory, not, as it turned out, less than a quarter as much” (191).

34 In a characteristically elitist letter to editor Harriet Shaw Weaver, Joyce composed the following scathing verses:
instances, the comparison between the older, popular Conrad and the young, experimental Joyce were strictly material. Rather than linking the authors through thematic or stylistic markers, observers of Quinn’s sale simply noted that they were both grouped in the same sale package. Despite its essentially non-literary nature, the associated between Conrad and a modernist was made as early as 1923 because of Quinn’s auction.

The connection between patron and novelist resurfaced three decades later in a news-worthy event that implicated Conrad within a network of experimental artists. The facts of the case are reported in a *Times* article dated 24 April 1961. After his death, Quinn’s papers went to the New York Public Library, where they were accessible to scholars to peruse but not to quote. The papers became accessible to the public and for publication in 1988. Peter Kavanagh, an Irish scholar, brought out a pirated edition of Quinn’s letters in 1960. The edition consisted of a series of extracts that Kavanagh had memorized in the public library over the course of several weeks in 1958. He printed 129 copies of the pirated letters on a homemade press and sold most to book collectors and museums. The library took legal action against Kavanagh and succeeded in obtaining and destroying 117 of the copies. The books that remained in circulation were 9 copies that Kavanagh gave to his a friend free of charge and one purchased and protected by the British museum.

The dispute stirred considerable response in the press. In the discussions that came out of Kavanagh’s pirated edition, Quinn became a link between Conrad and a largely experimental group of writers and artists. As *The Times* describes, Kavanagh’s volume tracked the

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Rosy Brook he bought a book
Though he didn’t know how to spell it
Such is the lure of literature
To the lad who can buy it and sell it. (qtd. in Wexler 49)
correspondence “between John Quinn, the well-known art patron, and people of such eminence as Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Jacob Epstein [the avant-garde sculptor]” (24 April 1961). An earlier article lists Quinn’s protégés and focuses on writers “Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, A.E. Housman, T.S. Eliot, John Synge, and Lady Gregory” and on artists Augustus John, Georges Rouault, Jacob Epstein, and Augustus St. Gaudens (18 Jan 1960). Kavanagh’s book, and the press it generated, put a variety of literary and artistic figures within an enclosure defined by Quinn’s patronage. The enclosure is somewhat eclectic, including Quinn’s project Irish Literary Revival artists (Synge and Lady Gregory) and his long-time friends (Housman and Epstein). On the whole, however, it is an experimental one, encompassing varieties of avant-garde painters and writers. Both lists that I have cited begin with Conrad before continuing on to name the likes of Joyce, Eliot, and Epstein. The association between all of the figures listed is not stylistic or thematic but materialist or chronological; the figures shared a backer and a time frame.

Quinn’s patronage provided multiple types of support for Conrad. He made meaningful financial contributions and offered strategic promotion and advice. Quinn’s investment, furthermore, created a bubble in Conrad as a commodity; his collecting effectively transformed Conrad into a collector’s item worthy of extravagantly high prices. Finally, his association with a modernist sphere extended to Conrad, particularly on the occasion of the auction. Before Conrad was taken up by modernist scholarship, he was encompassed into a proto-modernist sphere through Quinn’s patronage.
Chapter 2: Conclusion

In this thesis I have traced the continuity from Conrad’s contemporary reviewers who noted “a subjective tendency” to the present field of scholarship that considers him a representative of – or a forerunner to – modernism (WP 5 Oct 1924). Conrad’s early affinities, in public discourse, to continental writing and experimental art provided a segue from his reputation in journalism to his legacy as a modernist. His early career, characterized by a solitary, elitist self-fashioning, and his lifelong concerns with artistic integrity likewise link contemporary commentators to successive generations of scholars. Certain hallmark features of Conrad’s work make it possible to analyze him within modernism. His extreme attention to language, skeptical attitude toward empire, and narrative experimentation through the voice of Charles Marlow are among the characteristics that liken Conrad’s methods to trends set by others within the modernist canon. The grounds for comparison through contextualization and close reading certainly exist.

This study, however, has set to the side traditional modes of literary scrutinizing to emphasize the importance of material analysis. While a modernist comparison is possible, it was not inevitable or even strikingly apparent. Works by Conrad generally considered within modernist conversations – from Heart of Darkness in 1899 to Under Western Eyes in 1911 – emerged a full decade earlier than the dates typically ascribed to modernism at its height. Even at his most fragmentary, Conrad is still far more traditional, linear, and cohesive than, for example, Woolf in Mrs. Dalloway or Joyce even in Portrait of the Artist. And Conrad’s most visited setting and subject, the sea and its challenges, has long distracted readers from the formal innovations present in his work. These barriers combine with the fact that Conrad’s community was removed
from recognizably modernist spheres. His publishers and readers were main-stream by the late 1910s. When he died in 1924, Conrad’s potential connection with modernists – through Quinn, Ford, Symons, or Knopf – had faded or cooled.

Despite these factors separating Conrad from modernist groups, certain material conditions allowed the connection that has been frequently re-iterated throughout his reception history. His decade of dealing with Quinn, the rise and fall of their friendly and professional relations, provided one such condition. Beyond the important financial support that Quinn contributed as a collector were the important moments of introduction, promotion, and contextualization that he facilitated. Conrad’s lucrative dealings with Doubleday, for instance, and his excellent showing in Huneker’s reviews owed a great deal to Quinn’s intervention and support. Quinn also boosted Conrad’s fame through the unpredicted, unqualified success of his Conrad manuscript collection. All of these contributions helped to secure Conrad a place in the body of canonical authors historically deemed worthy of study. Quinn also provided a specifically modernist association and promotion. His connection with a wide and successful group of experimental artists and writers extended at moments to encompass Conrad. Some of the earliest mentions of Conrad alongside the likes of Joyce, Eliot, and Pound emerged in cultural discussions of Quinn and his patronage. Quinn thus became part of the infrastructure that allowed public and scholarly commentators to construct a modernist conversation encompassing Conrad.

Quinn was, of course, only one such point of connection. Canons come into being through collective selection and perpetuation. Conrad’s literary identity emerges from a network of his publishers, reviewers, and readers who are often mentioned in passing but rarely dwelt upon. Among Conrad’s most important allies were his patient and generous agent J.B. Pinker; his minor and major publishers, especially J.M. Dent in London and Doubleday, Page and Co. in
New York; and enthusiastic early reviewers including his wife, Huneker, Wilson Follett, Woolf, Ford, and his close friend Richard Curle. These individuals and many others besides fashioned Conrad into a cultural commodity to be configured and re-configured by later generations of commentators. All of the current discussions surrounding Conrad’s style, subject, and attitudes originate remotely in the early material networks that defined his career. The specifically modernist strand of this conversation extends in continuity with early points of contact between Conrad and a new school of experimentalists. Consolidating Conrad as modernist, as a modernist type of cultural commodity, involved a series of processes both material and imaginative. Ultimately, it is impossible and perhaps undesirable to separate the material components of his production from the imaginative acts implicating Conrad in this or any literary context.

My study here has examined how modernism inflects our understanding of the material Conrad. The reciprocal question asks how the material Conrad inflects our understanding of modernism. I have framed Quinn as a piece of the infrastructure that has shaped and continues to shape Conrad. Such an approach fits into a larger trend of studying material modernisms, a trend that involves collapsing the often glamorized distinction between high-, middle-, and lowbrow spheres of production. Material approaches to modernism react against what Michael North has labeled as “the preservation of something called ‘modernism’ in intellectual amber, something whose purported insulation from the cultural world into which it was introduced is now retrospectively accomplished by critical consensus” (11). Analyses tracing dynamic moments of production and artistic fashioning offer the opportunity to reconfigure an amber-bound modernism into a continuing history of fluid processes.
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