

CONRAD: Modern Language Association Conference / JAN 2026 / Toronto Canada

The Joseph Conrad Society of America is currently celebrating its half-centenary 1975-2025.

GUARANTEED MLA PANEL:

Joseph Conrad: False Truth & the Absurd

Panel on Conrad's critique of false or misleading "truths" in a world without set meanings. Papers considered on national/imperial truisms, or the "absurd" as a mode of actuality or critique. Short bio, 250wd proposals.

Deadline for submissions: Sunday, 16 March 2025

Mark Deggan, Simon Fraser University < mark_deggan@sfu.ca >

DESCRIPTION: In our own era of self-generated personal and ideological verities, the status of "truth" is being put to the test. Conrad's texts have a no less complex relation to notions of truth. Whether focused on social or cultural iterations of actuality, or the ways in which individuals and communities create, share, or struggle with encapsulations of the real, Conrad's works offer a critique of truth positions in a fluid realm of competing realities. At the same time, his writings examine the possibility that cultural truths are merely relational coordinates in a world not only without set meaning, but one that, outside of communal values, might touch upon the uncertainty and irrationalism of the absurd. Indeed, from *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* through *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent* or *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad's fictions often deal with individuals confronted with "fake truths" and the presumptive verities of national or imperial interests – and, as a result, the need for individuals to reinstate common values. Papers are welcome on both the fiction and non-fiction and can contest notions of "truth" in its many social or personal guises or focus on the less obviously either/or arena of the absurd. This panel is the guaranteed in-person MLA session of the Joseph Conrad Society of America.

PROPOSED SPECIAL SESSION PANEL:

Conrad and the Global South: Networks of Relationality

Panel on Conrad's sharp critique of the imperial logics of individualism and appropriation in the global south, focusing on that author's anti-colonial depiction of non-Western human entanglements and kinships. 300wd proposals, short bio.

Deadline for submissions: Sunday, 16 March 2025

Alexia Hannis, University of Toronto < alexia.hannis@utoronto.ca >

DESCRIPTION: In response to the 2026 MLA's Presidential theme concerning "family resemblances," this proposed in-person (or possible Zoom) special session panel contemplates Conrad's depiction of non-Western human entanglements and kinships in what has been called the "global south." It considers how the relational networks described in that author's fictions offer a pointed critique of the divisive imperial logics of individualism and appropriation.

Papers might consider how tensions between Conrad's intercultural "backstories" – hidden familial or intercommunal convergences – implicitly subvert expected Western or colonial narratives, thereby performing an anti-imperialist ethic. Given the contested concept of the "global south," proposals might uncover relational networks not only within individual works, but across Conrad's locations and scenarios (including the fiction and non-fiction). In seeking to recover the generative networks linking Conrad's characters (and readers) at the fringes of the colonial "South," we welcome proposals that see the human and cultural *resemblances* animated by this author not only as a pointed evaluation of geopolitical schisms, but as evidence of that author's awareness of human connectivities across cultural and familial lines.

PROPOSED JOINT SPECIAL SESSION PANEL:

Lost Girls & New Women: Woolf, Conrad, & the Regendering of Empire

Comparative panel considering Conrad's and Woolf's female characters as challenging imperial gender norms. Papers might range from Conrad's often biracial colonial feminine roles to Woolf on threatening sexualities or "New Women." Short bio, 300wd proposals.

Deadline for submissions: Saturday, 15 March 2025

Ben Leubner, Montana State University < leubnerb@montana.edu >

Mark Deggan, Simon Fraser University < mark_deggan@sfu.ca >

DESCRIPTION: Both Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf were sharp critics of imperium as well as the debilitating sociocultural fallouts of empire on individuality, individual conscience, and gender. Woolf's focus on feminine consciousness in the major fiction is pressed into new relief when read against Conrad's early interest in, for instance, the young biracial female characters at the heart of so many of his early fictions. Whether focusing on fallen or combative iterations of femininity – including characters ranging from Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, to Nina Almayer in *Almayer's Folly*, Mrs. Dalloway's Doris Kilman, Miss La Trobe from *Between the Acts*, *Victory's* Lena, or Aissa in *An Outcast of the Islands* – each author foregrounds female characters in relation to the distortions of imperial society and overturns expected discourses surrounding the roles and interiorities of women. In each case, the gender expectations of empire are not only put under pressure through the elaboration of a feminine point of view, but the authors show the ways in which imperial mores governing gender might be countermanded.

This proposed MLA in-person session is a joint project of *The International Virginia Woolf Society* & the *Joseph Conrad Society of America*. It hopes to attract paper proposals that consider one or both authors on issues of gender common to their works, with emphasis on the continuities linking the attempts of both writers to complicate imperial fiction vis-à-vis the status and agency of women. Proposals welcome on either author, but papers are sought, especially, on themes addressing both authors.