Cook, Conrad and the Poetics of Error

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> In a theatre of its own design, history's drama unfolds; the historian is an impartial onlooker, simply *repeating* what happened.
>
> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (xv)

1

More than a century before the Australian National Maritime Museum's replica *Endeavour,* a multi-million-dollar folly that was scheduled to circumnavigate Australia in 2020, the Polish-born British novelist Joseph Conrad staged his own *Endeavour* re-enactment. In August 1888, while master of the iron-barque *Otago,* he sailed up the east coast of Australia and through the Torres Strait, attempting to retrace the journey along the continent's eastern seaboard that Cook had navigated in 1770. Conrad undertook this voyage as part of his normal duties as a merchant sailor, transporting a cargo of fertiliser, soap and tallow between Sydney and Mauritius. But, as must be stressed, the route he chose was highly unusual: except for mail-steamers bound for Singapore, few vessels of the period risked the hazardous reefs separating Papua New Guinea from Australia. Conrad was determined to shadow Cook. For months, he had petitioned his employer—the Adelaide shipping firm Henry Simpson & Sons—to allow him to travel north, rather than south, breaking with the itinerary through the Bass Strait which he and other sailors routinely used. This peculiar anecdote seldom receives close attention from Conrad scholars: the literature speaks of *Conrad's Eastern World* (1966) and *Conrad's Western World* (1971), to quote the titles of Norman Sherry's influential bipartite study, but seldom of Conrad's 'South.' Nonetheless, the *Endeavour* re-enactment, conducted by one of English literature's finest novelists of colonisation and empire, merits recounting in detail as it intersects with Australian history, and a myth about national origins both local and global in scale.

In *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), Edward Said responds to the vast archive of letters between Conrad, his friends and editors, and observes 'dominant themes, patterns and images,' which rival the author's 'highly patterned fiction' (xix). In a similar gesture, this essay examines the complex intent behind Conrad's *Endeavour* re-enactment, reading the event as a staged pilgrimage—devised and later described by an author who had geography and history in mind. Conrad's own documentation of the event will prove significant. 'The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened,' writes curator and art historian Amelia Jones (14). A performance's dependency on its material afterlife is also observed by performance scholar Paul Auslander: 'the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such' (5). Unsurprisingly, no photographs commemorate Conrad's voyage. Instead, three texts offer witness. It is through them that we may observe the ephemeral *Endeavour* re-enactment, which must be understood as both a textual and historical event.

The first text is the essay 'Geography and Some Explorers'—originally titled 'The Romance of Travel'—commissioned for the January 1924 edition of *National Geographic Magazine*. The essay subsequently appeared in the short-lived British periodical *Countries of the World*

(February 1924), before being collected alongside other occasional writings in *Last Essays* (1926) after Conrad's death in August 1924. Written in the author's twilight years, 'Geography and Some Explorers' recounts his childhood interest in cartography, alongside highlights from his career in the British merchant marine, two entwined obsessions which mutually climax in the *Endeavour* re-enactment, recounted in the final pages of the essay.

Two maps of the voyage also exist. Each is inscribed as follows: 'This navigation chart formerly belonged to Joseph Conrad and was used by him when at sea. The passage he made through these straits being described in "Geography & Explorers"' (Figures 1 and 2). Purchased after the author's death by George T. Keating—a significant collector of 'Conradiana'—the maps were gifted to Yale University's Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library in 1938 (Archer Gee 16). In faded pencil, navigation calculations are still visible, likely in Conrad's own hand. The inscriptions, signed by Conrad's wife Jessie, suggest the maps served as memory aids when Conrad came to recount the *Endeavour* re-enactment in 'Geography and Some Explorers.' Here we witness the author faced with our own dilemma: how to reconstruct past events on the basis of a scant historical trace.

2

Considering the cartographic significance of Cook's *Endeavour* expedition in 'Geography and Some Explorers,' Conrad describes Cook as an emissary of change, ushering in a new epoch in world history. 'Cook laid forever the ghost of the *Terra Australis Incognita* and added . . . to the scientific domain of the geography triumphant of our day' (9). Here, Conrad alludes to the myth of the Great Southern Land—a fabled continent in the Southern Hemisphere, believed to be sizable enough to counter-ballast Europe—which, he explains, survived as an enduring hangover from 'geography fabulous,' the early modern habit of populating unexplored spaces on maps with 'strange pageants, strange trees, strange beasts, drawn with amazing precision in the midst of theoretically-conceived continents' (4).

Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville—the eighteenth-century mapmaker who first employed white space, instead of speculative illustrations, to designate unknown regions on his charts—is often credited as the father of modern geography (Carroll 1–5). Yet in Conrad's potted history it is the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa (born in 1475, two hundred years before d'Anville) who plays this decisive role. From the Isthmus of Panama in 1513, Balboa was the first European to sight the Pacific Ocean, and he would soon also become the first to exploit the abundant natural resources of the region. The Pacific was quickly recognised as El Dorado, attracting 'many adventurous and devoted men, nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west,' all the while mapping the places that they visited and colonised (*Last Essays* 12). Conrad names this period in world history 'geography militant,' noting that the rapid improvement in the accuracy of maps had a powerful economic imperative, as the blank spaces of the globe were filled with ink depicting European claims and the names of colonial ventures.

Yet '[g]eography militant, which had succeeded the geography fabulous, did not seem able to accept the idea that there was much more water than land on this globe' and the myth of *Terra Australis Incognita* persisted (*Last Essays* 6). Enter James Cook, who Conrad fawningly writes was 'a modest man of genius, the familiar associate of the most learned in the land, medallist of the Royal Society, and a captain in the Royal Navy' (8). Conrad's high regard for the English captain has two rationales. First, he tells us, Cook was not motivated by greed: 'The voyages of the early explorers were prompted by an acquisitive spirit, the idea of lucre in some form

. . . disguised in more or less fine words. But Cook's three voyages are free from any taint of that sort. His aims needed no disguise' (9). On Conrad's reading, Cook was the quintessential enlightenment figure, his voyages of discovery were ventures of science, rather than finance; Cook explored with the aim of adding new flora, fauna, coastlines and continents to the domain of European knowledge. Of course, this vision of Cook, 'as the . . . Conradian captain, devoted to duty and to the Navy's bureaucratic procedures,' disguises a less palatable face, which anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere calls Cook's 'Kurtz persona,' after the renegade ivory trader in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* Elsewhere an astute observer of empire, Conrad's myopia about Cook's 'shadow side' (Obeyesekere 24) bleeds into error when he comes to re-enact the *Endeavour* voyage.

Cook's legacy as 'benevolent Prospero' (Obeyesekere 11) is safeguarded, to Conrad's mind at least, by his significant cartographic achievements: '[he was] the most accomplished of eighteenth-century explorers and navigators that went forth to settle the geography of the Pacific' (*Last Essays* 7). By mapping the east coast of Australia in its relation to New Zealand, Cook's chief discovery was the 'discovery of nothing or, rather, of the non-existence of a great southern continent' (Carter 23). For Conrad, this 'non-discovery' announced with it the beginning of a new 'triumphant' epoch of geography: a phase in which the most persistent cartographic fantasy had finally been dispelled, so that other smaller mysteries could drop away in its wake.

The ultimate triumph of militant geography was thus its own abolition. By 1904—sixteen years after Conrad's *Endeavour* re-enactment—Halford Mackinder, the first Reader in Geography at Oxford, declared that:

> When historians in the remote future come to look back on the group of centuries through which we are now passing, and see them foreshortened, as we to-day see the Egyptian dynasties, it may well be that they will describe the last 400 years as the Columbian epoch, and will say that it ended soon after the year 1900. . . . Of late it has been a common place to speak of geographical exploration as nearly over, and it is recognised that geography must be diverted to the purpose of intensive survey and philosophic synthesis. (421)

Reflecting on geopolitics, Mackinder designates the newly mapped globe as 'closed space,' an epoch in which '[e]very explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space . . . will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe' (421). His definition resonates with Conrad's periodising description of 'geography triumphant,' though for the novelist the concept is less analytic and is instead attended by significant melancholy, nostalgia for the passing of an age of discovery and adventure. In 1888 it was this lost glory—or 'sacred fire,' in Conrad's sentimental terms (*Last Essays* 7)—that the *Endeavour* re-enactment hoped to rekindle, by returning to the beginning of exploration's end, and retracing Cook's route through the Torres Strait.

3

The motivating fantasy behind the *Endeavour* re-enactment is extraordinarily illustrated, albeit in miniature, in an earlier passage from 'Geography and Some Explorers,' which describes a formative episode from Conrad's childhood in the 1860s. There he writes:

> I stand here confessed as a contemporary of the [African] Great Lakes. Yes, I could have heard of their discovery in my cradle, and it was only right, grown to a boy's estate, I [did] my first bit of map-drawing and paid my first homage to the prestige of their first explorers. It consisted in entering laboriously in pencil the outlining of Tanganyika on my beloved old atlas, which, having been published in 1852, knew nothing, of course, of the Great Lakes. The heart of its Africa was white and big. (12)

This deceptively simple memory was evidently of immense personal significance to Conrad; by the time he came to write these words in 1924 he had already staged the same scene more than once, in his 1912 memoir *A Personal Record* (26), and earlier, in 1899, in a much cited passage from *Heart of Darkness*:

> Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' (9)

As Robert Hampson has observed, when read against Conrad's schematised history of cartography, this iconic moment from *Heart of Darkness* seems to waver uncertainly between fabulous and militant geography (34–56): the schoolboy 'loses' himself in a fantasy about an exotic location—imaginatively embellishing the 'blank spaces on the earth' in a way characteristic of pre-modern mapmaking—yet with pointed index finger he also projects himself onto the map, as if to join the militant 'scramble for Africa' which was then being waged between European powers. Marlow, the protagonist of *Heart of Darkness,* does fulfil his wish to 'go there.' But what he discovers through the course of the novel is an Africa which has 'ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery' and has instead 'become a place of darkness' (10). The triumphant geography of a fully mapped globe is shown to be an amphitheatre for violence, cartographic knowledge facilitating the West's hegemonic assault on nature and native cultures. 'The conquest of the earth,' explains Marlow, 'which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much' (8)—and in *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad views this conquest as it played out in the Belgian Congo with hawklike focus.

The same memory of childhood 'map-gazing' resonates very differently within its new context in 'Geography and Some Explorers.' Most immediately apparent in this later telling is the addition of an inscriptive element to the story: 'my first bit of map-drawing,' Conrad tells us, 'consisted in entering laboriously in pencil the outlining of Tanganyika.' The schoolboy's annotation aims to bring his atlas up to date, adding the geographic spoils of Richard Burton and John Speke's 1858 expedition to the African lakes. Yet, more than this, through pencilled homage Conrad declares his place within the history of geography his essay describes, for, within the logic of this history, it is the hard-earned right of the explorer, rather than that of the belated visitor, to fill in contours and add names to the map.

This logic, as Anne McClintock writes, is already illusory: '"Discovery" is always late. The inaugural scene is never in fact inaugural or originary: something has always gone before' (28). Just as Robinson Crusoe, thinking he is marooned on an uninhabited island, is confronted by the discovery of foreign footprints in the sand, so too the shrinking 'blank spaces' on sixteenth-

and seventeenth-century world maps were in fact palimpsests, already inscribed with the geographies, histories and cosmologies of non-European cultures. Cook may have named the eastern coastline of Australia 'New South Wales' but, as Ian McLean observes, 'modern humans had been living here much longer than they had in old Wales' (15). Conrad is in this sense doubly 'late,' not only tardy to 80,000 years of Indigenous history, but also keenly aware of his belated relation to the Australian continent's European colonial explorers and settlers.

The child's outline of Lake Tanganyika might thus be considered a preparatory sketch for the *Endeavour* re-enactment: despite differences in location, scale and complexity, common emotional threads link the two events. Of the pencilled homage, Conrad writes: 'it could have been nothing but a romantic impulse which prompted the idea of bringing [the atlas] up to date. . . . Thus I could imagine myself stepping in the very footprints of geographical discovery' (12). And later, as if picking up where the previous thought left off, he recollects the *Endeavour* re-enactment: 'the sea for me has always been hallowed ground [populated by] the unforgettable shades of the masters in [exploration] . . . the calling which, in a humble way, was to be mine, too' (17). If *Heart of Darkness* traces a voyage of disenchantment, Marlow acting as witness to the violent consequences of cartographic knowledge, 'Geography and Some Explorers' offers a counter-narrative: the *Endeavour* re-enactment was Conrad's attempt at re-enchantment, an attempt to rekindle the wonder and excitement of maps when geographical mysteries remained to be solved.

4

'A Smile of Fortune,' based upon Conrad's recollections of the homeward voyage the *Otago* made after navigating the Torres Strait, was published in *'Twixt Land and Sea.* The short story operates between similar thematic poles of financial necessity and wonder or adventure. In its opening pages the narrator, a young and inexperienced captain, arrives in Port Louis, Mauritius, '[h]ungry, tired and depressed' after 'sixty-one days at sea' (5). The fertile island landscape offers some immediate relief: 'The more enthusiastic of its inhabitants delight in describing it as the "Pearl of the Ocean,"' he tells the reader, adding that: '[i]t is a good name. A pearl distilling much sweetness upon the world' (3). But it is only once he meets Alice Jacobus, the daughter of a merchant, that the narrator begins to forget his dissatisfaction with life. The scandalous child of an extramarital affair, Alice's father hides her within the walls of a private garden on the island. Her mixed heritage, as Christopher GoGwilt observes, casts her as a 'Creole heiress' (67–79), a nineteenth century character-type exemplified by Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* (1847), whom Rochester similarly cloisters on account of her 'savage' madness yet who nonetheless stands in the way of the novel's marriage plot. Like Rochester, who resorts to bigamy, the narrator of 'A Smile of Fortune' is backed into an unsavoury dilemma: a romance with Alice or his economic future, symbolised in the narrative by a cargo of potatoes. In the story's bathetic conclusion, he chooses the potatoes over the girl, regretting his mistake too late, only once he has landed in Melbourne: 'Collins Street at four o'clock in the afternoon is not exactly a desert solitude; but I had never felt more isolated from the rest of mankind as when I walked that day its crowded pavement, battling desperately with my thoughts and feeling already vanquished' (95).

This central dilemma is established early in the story, coded into the narrator's first impressions of Mauritius as viewed from the sea: 'I became entranced by this blue, pinnacled apparition, transparent against the light of the sky . . . And I wondered half seriously whether it was a good omen, whether what should meet me in that island would be as luckily exceptional as this beautiful, dreamlike vision . . . But horrid thoughts of business interfered with my enjoyment'

(3). Much later, the same antinomies of romance and economics haunt the narrator's sleep: 'That night I dreamt of a pile of gold in the form of a grave in which a girl was buried, and woke up callous with greed' (93).

Recalling his 1888 voyage, Conrad describes sailing the Torres Strait as a decision to take the alternative path, to embrace romance over economics: 'one day, all of a sudden, all the deep-lying historic sense of the exploring adventures in the Pacific surged up to the surface of my being.' Writing to his employer and suggesting the peculiar route, he feared a 'severe rap on the knuckles, if only for wasting their time in submitting such an unheard-of proposition.' He had been employed by Henry Simpson & Sons a mere six months, hardly enough time to prove his competency as a sailor, let alone to ingratiate himself with the company's management. But, having already ferried numerous cargoes between Sydney and Melbourne, six-months proved enough time for Conrad to feel overly familiar with the 'usual southern route' through the Bass Strait (*Last Essays* 15).

To understand colonial Sydney, observes cultural historian Ross Gibson, one must first appreciate the community of sailors who washed in and out of Circular Quay, and think beyond the limits of Sydney Cove, following trade routes that extended into the Pacific and around the globe. In recognition of this 'marine rather than terrene' frame, Gibson names Sydney an 'ocean settlement,' a term he uses to supplement the 'pastoralist dream [that has come] to dominate non-Aboriginal historiography' with the equally significant figure of the maritime worker (666). Sailors may not have been firm residents of Sydney or its surrounds, but their arrival and departure nonetheless formed a stable rhythm, as colonial Sydney 'pulsed with the beat of the watch and the swirl of the weather [and the waves]' (667). Indeed, as Conrad recognised, an ocean settlement is a settlement nonetheless, and life at sea is liable to the same predictability and boredom as life on land. In breaking with the established trade route through the Bass Strait, Conrad was also rejecting the idea of settlement in favour of a reimagined re-discovery. The *Otago* followed recognised routes on existing maps of the Torres Strait yet Conrad imagined that, like Cook before him, he was sailing into the blank heart of the unknown.

5

The past is by its very nature out of reach; even when history does seem to repeat itself—'first as tragedy, then as farce,' as Karl Marx famously put it (10)—its events are experienced under the pressures of an altogether different present. This reality was made clear to Conrad early in his *Endeavour* re-enactment: 'The first thing that caught my eye upon the play of green white-capped waves was a black speck marking conveniently the end of a low sandbank. It looked like the wreck of some small vessel.' And later in the journey, he recalls: 'I sighted a gaunt, grey wreck of a big American ship lying high and dry on the southernmost of the Warrior Reefs' (*Last Essays* 16). Previous commentators have interpreted the '*memento mori*' of half-sunk ships as evidence of the difficulty of the voyage, included by Conrad to emphasise his skill and heroism as a captain (see Meyers 85). Nonetheless, they must also have had a deflationary effect upon the author: the tragic evidence of prior sailors made it farcically evident that Europeans had long ago colonised the Torres Strait. He was not 'commanding very likely the first, and certainly the last, merchant ship that carried cargo that way—from Sydney to Mauritius' (41). Indeed, as navigational historian Willem F. J. Mörzer Bruyns notes: 'after Conrad's time [the] Torres Strait remained a regular shortcut for ships' (212).

To encounter errors in Conrad's itinerant essay should come as no surprise, his traffic between different cultures and geographies being a perfect recipe for generalisation, misreading and

outright appropriation. Indeed, as Richard Hibbitt observes, the word 'error' itself has nomadic roots: 'Deriving from the Latin verb *errare* [to wander], the noun "error" has of course two meanings: the primary meaning has the negative connotation of a mistake, or something wrong, whereas the secondary, obsolete meaning refers simply to an "act of wandering"' (27).

The core error of the *Endeavour* re-enactment was complicated and compounded by a litany of other inaccuracies. In recounting the voyage, for instance, Conrad writes: 'I knew the *Endeavour* [had visited the Torres Strait] in 1762' (30). The date he provides is, by some margin, wrong. The *Endeavour* departed Plymouth in August 1768, stopping at Hauhine, Bora Bora, and Raiatea west of Tahiti, before charting a route to New Zealand. In March 1770, Cook began his decisive westward voyage, which Kenneth Slessor later dramatised in a poem:

> . . . Cook made a choice,
> Over the brink, into the devil's mouth,
> With four months' food, and sailors wild with dreams
> Of English beer, the smoking barns of home.
> So Cook made a choice, so Cook sailed westabout,
> So men write poems in Australia. (66)

On 19 April, land was sighted off the coast of what is now the state of Victoria. The next day, Cook recorded in his journal: 'The weather being clear gave us an opportunity to View the Country which had a very agreeable and promising Aspect, the land is of moderate height diversified with hills, ridges, planes and Vallies with some few small lawns, but for the most part the whole was cover'd with wood' (238). The *Endeavour* continued north along the coast until, on 29 April 1770, Cook made his first landing on the continent, at what he called Stingray, later Botany, Bay.

The *Endeavour* began its demanding voyage through the Torres Strait in mid-August, appropriately the same month that Conrad staged his own re-enactment. Cook and his crew were nervous, having already run aground on the Barrier Reef, forcing them to stop for repairs on the Wabalumbaal, which Cook renamed the Endeavour River, on the Cape York Peninsula. In his diary Cook records extensive discussions and debates about how best to navigate the Torres Strait, weighing up different options, and often praying for safe passage through the labyrinth of shallows. One hundred and eighteen years later, in Conrad's day, routes through the Torres Strait had more or less been perfected. Based on Conrad's notation on his navigational charts, it seems the *Otago* took the Flinders Passage (Figure 2), a 'comparatively safe' route named for the sailor who had discovered it in 1801 (Bruyns 231), so that Conrad was never really 'stepping in the very footprints of [Cook's] geographical discovery' (*Last Essays* 12).

From his distanced vantage (in route and time), Conrad was nonetheless able to identify Cook's landmarks, pointing to an island, for instance, where 'James Cook [had gone] ashore for half an hour. What he could possibly want to do there I cannot imagine. Perhaps only to be alone with his thoughts for a moment. The dangers and the triumphs of exploration and discovery were over for that voyage. All that remained to do was to go home' (17).

This quotation represents the strangest, most telling error of Conrad's *Endeavour* re-enactment. Here is Cook's description of the same event, which occurred on 22 August 1770:

> I landed with a party of Men accompan'd by Mr Banks and Dr Solander upon the Island which lies at the SE point of the Passage. . . . Having satisfied my self of the great probability of a passage, thro' which I intend going with the ship, and therefore may land no more upon this Eastern coast of *New Holland,* and on the Western side I can make no new discovery . . . I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast . . . together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast, after which we fired three volleys of small Arms which were answered by the like number from the ship. (321)

Conrad had exorcised the primal scene of settler colonial Australia: Cook planted the Union Jack, fired a three-shot salute, and New South Wales was added to the British empire. Cook was not alone, as Conrad recalls, but accompanied by Joseph Banks, James Solander and other crew from the *Endeavour.* Approaching the shore, they spotted a group of Kaurareg Torres Strait Islanders watching from the beach: 'we expected that they would have opposed our landing,' Cook records, 'but as we approachd the Shore they all made off and left us in peaceable posession of as much of the Island as served our purpose' (311). Cook did not, as Conrad recalls, land on the island to savour 'a moment of perfect peace' or to 'commune within [himself] at the end' of his voyage (*Last Essays* 17). His goal was specific; he wasted little time. To the Kaurareg, the island had been known for many thousands of years as Bedanug, but Cook renamed it Possession, to memorialise its place within his voyage and, moreover, the role it would come to occupy in the future history of Australia.

It is difficult to locate precisely where this error creeps into Conrad's performance: it could, of course, be a mental slippage on the part of the sailor navigating the Torres Strait or, by the same token, it could be amnesia on the part of the older author, attempting to recall the voyage thirty-six years after the fact in 'Geography and Some Explorers.' On this point, it must be noted that Possession Island—its name and coordinates—appear on Conrad's maps, documents present both on the voyage and in the writing of the essay. Is it possible, then, that Possession's disappearance is less an error than a more significant repression, whether consciously or unconsciously, on the part of the author?

To claim possession of the east coast of Australia does not fit with Conrad's image of Cook, who he recounts rose above the greed and bloodshed of imperial skirmish: '*Endeavour* was the name of the ship which carried him on his first voyage, and it was also the watchword of his professional life. *Resolution* was the name of the ship he commanded himself on his second expedition, and it was the determining quality of his soul' (13–14). In emphatic, sanguine tones Conrad explains that Cook's voyages were scientific in character, free from 'the desire of trade or the desire for loot,' an innocent illusion that requires the repression of the events of Possession Island (9). Postcolonial theorists have called into question Conrad's endorsed ideas of pure, disinterested geography: 'The map is a technology of knowledge that professes to capture the truth about a place in pure scientific form,' writes McClintock. '[But] it is also a technology of possession, promising that those with the capacity to make such perfect representations must also have the right to territorial control' (27–28). Yet distorted and partial though Conrad's portrait of Cook may be, his sublimation of the declaration of possession has an odd auxiliary effect: the undoing, in an imaginative sense at least, of settler colonial Australia. Moving by way of error, Conrad erases the evidence of Cook's visit, the contours and place names that he laid down upon the map, restoring instead Australia as a 'blank space of delightful mystery. . . for a boy to dream gloriously over' in his atlas (*Heart of Darkness* 59).

6

In *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (1988), Paul Carter observes that the year 1788, the date of Arthur Philip and his First Fleet of European settlers' arrival in Australia, is 'the greatest barrier to Australia's spatial history': 'After 1788, all is solid. Even the weather seems arrested' (34). Carter is here drawing a distinction between what he terms 'spatial history' and a kind of history which seeks to reduce 'space to a stage [that] might be called imperial history' (xvi). Imperial history, Carter explains, is characterised by simply cause-and-effect, a false orderliness which aims not to examine, interpret or understand, but instead to legitimise. The imperial historian surveys from the omniscient vantage of a 'satellite eye,' homogenising the disparate, chaotic past into a singular, uniform, official, legal narrative. The imperial historian is in this sense like a theatregoer, watching a play unfold before them, the ending foreclosed in advance: 'In a theatre of its own design, history's drama unfolds; the historian is an impartial onlooker, simply *repeating* what happened' (xv). And therein lies the danger of imperial history: modern Australia—its colonial past, its present national character—is deemed not only to be good, but preordained, unavoidable, fated in advance.

The inescapable orbit of 1788 was felt one hundred years later, in 1888, the year that Conrad navigated the Torres Strait. As cultural historian Chris Healy observes:

> The 1888 celebrations marked one hundred years since the arrival of Arthur Phillip's Fleet and yet the personages and historical roles of Cook and Phillip were regularly confused. Cook was invoked in editorials, in stained-glass, a medal and even a Captain Cook cantata. . . . All this attention was enough to inspire an English biographer of Cook to urge the serious minded to 'pass over those grabbing, grubbing, copying centennial conscious colonial Australians striving—precariously albeit—in Cook to collect or create the first vestiges of a history, a national heritage unstained by convicts.' (28)

The date of 1888 is thus an important detail of the *Endeavour* re-enactment: Conrad, like settler Australia, perhaps carried away by the year's festivities, returned to the august memory of Cook. Yet the centennial errors that Healy observes should be distinguished from those we have been tracking in Conrad's *Endeavour* re-enactment. As Healy explains, settlement was the fact which centred Australians' understanding of their own history, and the distinction between Cook and Philip was torn and lost in the ineluctable drag of 1788.

Unlike Conrad, Australians did not forget Cook's declaration of possession and in fact treated it as the voyage's central drama. Yet, as Healy notes, settler Australia's monuments to Cook are built on shaky foundations: 'Cook, of course, had not only come from and returned to Europe,' but he did not live to see, nor was he instrumental in the settlement of Australia (21–22). The role of founding father proves awkward and based on a history of forgetfulness, just as Conrad's vision of Cook as benevolent visitor was mired in error.

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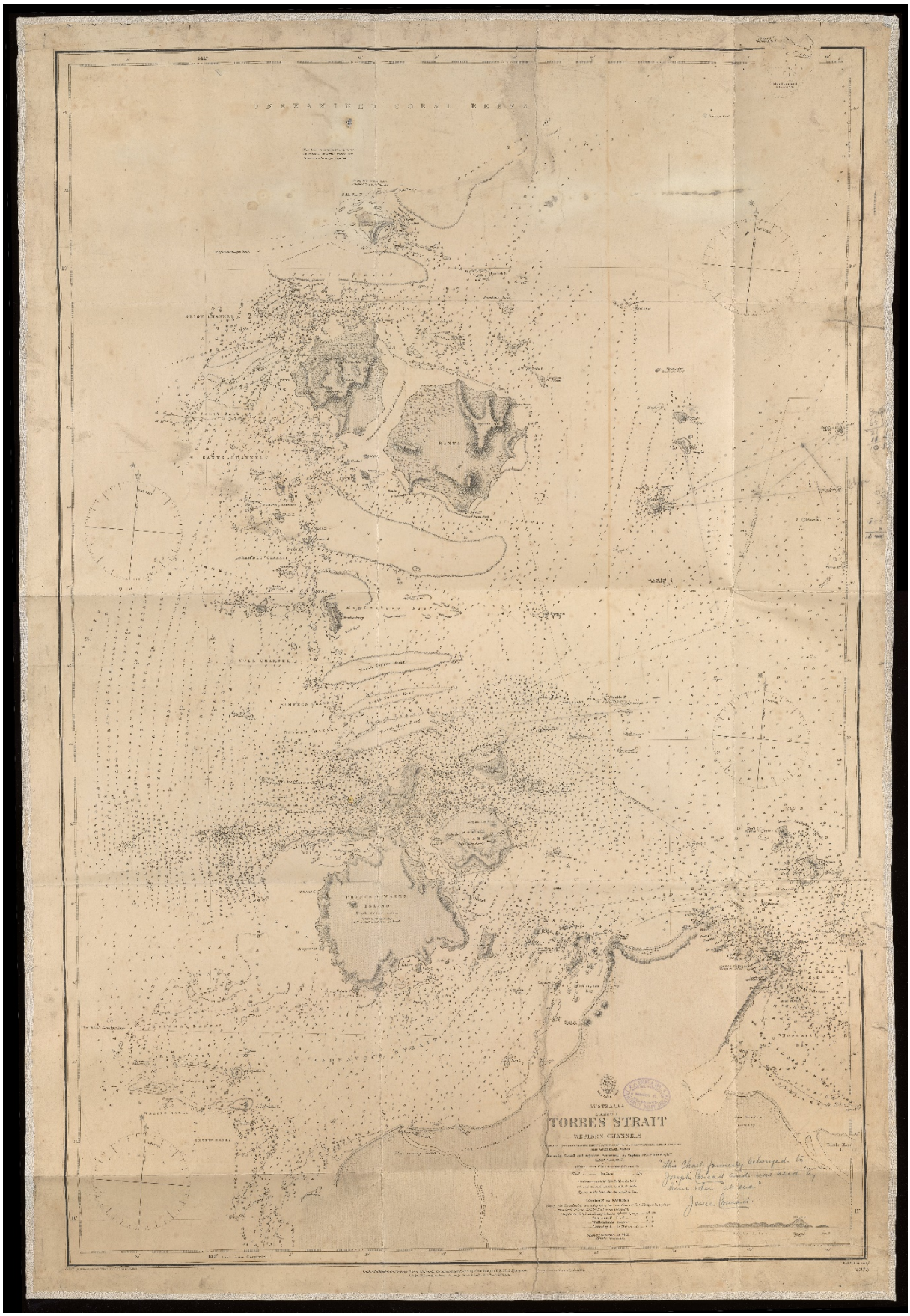

Figure 1: First Map of the Torres Strait, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. GEN MSS 1207.

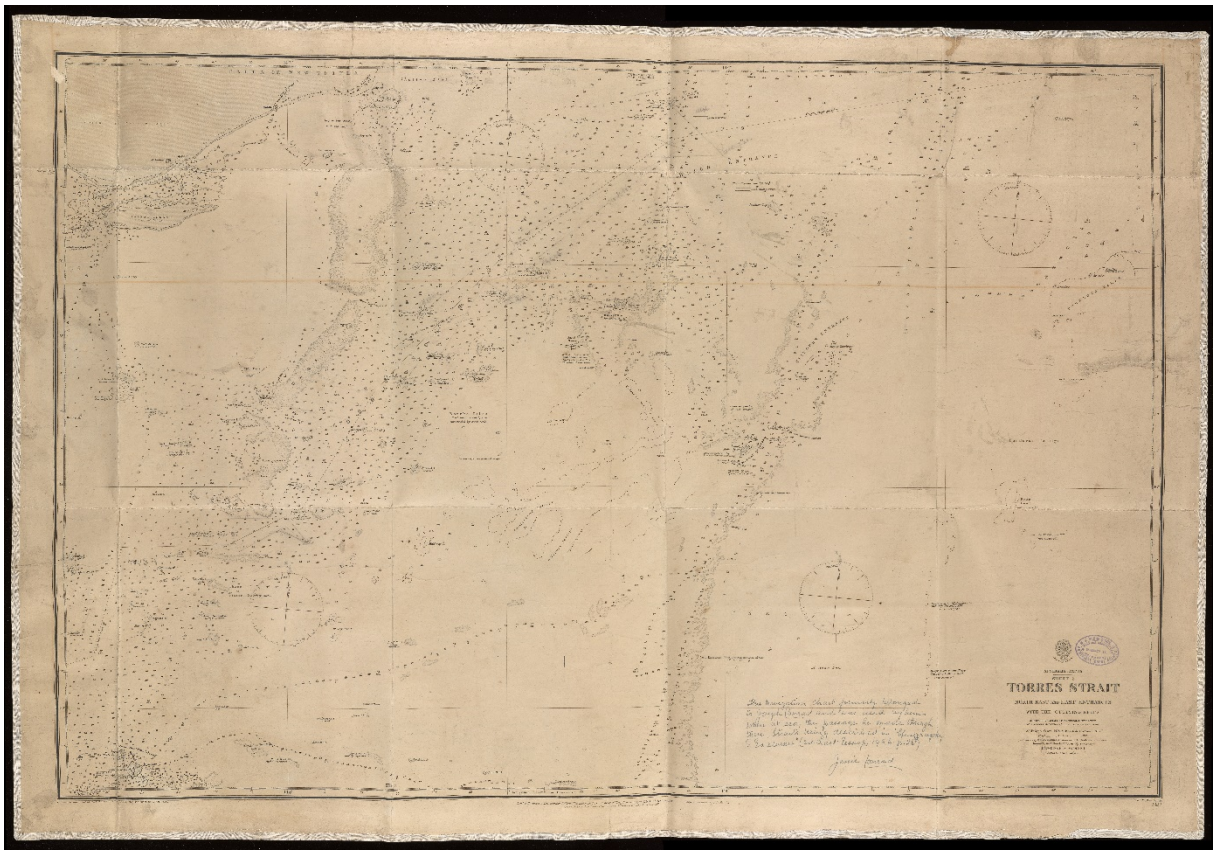

Figure 2: Second Map of the Torres Strait, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. GEN MSS 1207.

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