"This Masterpiece of Nature:" An Ecocritical Study of Joseph Conrad's Fiction

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“THIS MASTERPIECE OF NATURE”

AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF JOSEPH CONRAD’S FICTION

by

Sonja Luther

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014
ABSTRACT

“THIS MASTERPIECE OF NATURE”

AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF JOSEPH CONRAD’S FICTION

by Sonja Luther

December 2014

This dissertation employs an ecocritical approach to explore the relationship between humans and nature in the works of Joseph Conrad. In his fiction, Conrad draws an impression of nature that was unusual for its time because of its complexity. Nature is not just simple scenery or a stage set in Conrad’s fiction; it plays a major role in his characters’ regression, which develops parallel to their alienation from nature. This dissertation explores the origins of man’s alienation from nature in Conrad’s work, particularly his early fiction, and the implications for society if such alienation continues.

Chapter I serves as an introduction. Chapter II examines two aspects of Conrad’s maritime fiction: the sailor’s spiritual advancement through his confrontation with the sublime, and the sailor’s alienation from nature because of new technologies. While Chapter II explores Conrad’s depiction of the sea as a symbol of life and transcendence, Chapter III examines Conrad’s depiction of the forest as a place of murder, disease, and agency for furthering man’s regression. I claim that in his jungle fiction, Conrad dismantles anthropocentrism and shows that the division between man and nature is a problem that will eventually lead to man’s decay. While Chapter III addresses the personification of the forest (anthropomorphism), Chapter IV focuses on the animalization of humans (theriomorphism) in *Lord Jim*. In this chapter, I take a deep ecological approach to Stein’s theory of nature and claim that without Stein’s comment
on the “masterpiece of Nature,” the animalization of humans in the novel would suggest a form of human degeneracy; however, because of Stein’s theory, comparisons of humans to animals are more valorizing than derogatory. Chapter V focuses on Nostromo and Conrad’s criticism of Western society’s idea of “progress.” In this chapter, I take a more focused approach by using ideas of ecopsychology and eco-Marxism. My analysis of Nostromo offers the final piece in man’s process of alienation. What started with man’s alienation from nature is now ending with man’s alienation from his own self, which results in the untimely death of the characters. Chapter VI serves as a conclusion.
The University of Southern Mississippi

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Sonja Luther

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2014
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Hans Peter and Ursula Luther, and to my grandmothers, Elli Steidel and Helene Luther.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee director, Dr. Damon Franke, for his guidance and encouragement throughout the duration of this project. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Jonathan Barron, Dr. Phillip Gentile, and Dr. Charles Sumner for their advice and support. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Ken Watson—cherished professor, committee member, and friend—who could not be here to see the completion of this project. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Mays, who guided me in my research for many years during my time at The University of Southern Mississippi.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad’s fourth novel, *Lord Jim* (1900), situates itself in a world of dichotomies, particularly the dichotomy of “us” and “them.” Difficult, life-changing situations raise questions of identity for the characters. Who is “the other” and who is “one of us”? Marlow and other protagonists repeatedly refer to Jim as “one of us,” but Jim keeps running away from “us.” Marlow tries to create opportunities for Jim to recuperate his self-esteem, but he finds himself at a dead end when Jim is not able to come to terms with his past and keeps running away. The only person, Marlow believes, that might be able to help him understand Jim is the merchant Stein, who is also an “adventurer,” “naturalist,” and “learned collector” of beetles and butterflies (122). At his cave-like home, Marlow finds a mesmerized Stein who tells him of the beauty and perfection of nature. Stein exclaims:

> Look! The beauty—but that is nothing—look at the accuracy, the harmony. And so fragile! And so strong! And so exact! This is Nature—the balance of colossal forces. Every star is so—and every blade of grass stands so—and the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces—this.

> This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature. (125)

Marlow is astounded by Stein’s words and asks, “Masterpiece! And what of man?” (125). “Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece,” Stein responds (125). With this statement, Stein sets the tone for the relationship between man and nature that we find throughout Conrad’s oeuvre. Conrad continuously portrays nature as superior to man and shows that man will not evolve to the state of nature as long as he follows his dualistic worldview.
Cartesian dualism, named after René Descartes, favors the human mind over matter, which causes man to alienate himself from the natural environment, and this alienation, Conrad demonstrates in his fiction, will lead to man’s decay.

The problem of dualisms is not that one is the opposite of the other but that with the opposition most often comes judgment—a judgment of one being better than the other. Stein’s beliefs are very much in tune with the theories of nineteenth-century evolutionists like the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel who was an opponent of dualism and believed in “the unity of nature” (The Riddle of the Universe 255). In Monism as Connecting Religion and Science, Haeckel argues for a “unifying conception of nature as a whole” that believes in “the essential unity of organic and inorganic matter,” which Haeckel calls “Monism” (n.p.). Haeckel declares, “We cannot draw a sharp line of distinction between these two great divisions of nature, any more than we can recognise an absolute distinction between the animal and the vegetable kingdom, or between the lower animals and man” (n.p.). According to Mario A. Di Gregorio, Haeckel’s “hostility to dualism” was so strong “that over time he would come to label anything he disliked as dualist” (198). Friedrich Nietzsche, who also discusses the complex of problems with binary thinking in Beyond Good and Evil (1886), criticizes “THE BELIEF IN ANTITHESES OF VALUES” and suggests that opposites might actually be “insidiously related” or even “essentially identical” (n.p.). Jacques Derrida later elaborates on Nietzsche’s critique of the logic of either/or and argues in favor of both/and as well. In Dissemination (1972), Derrida uses the Greek word “pharmakon” as an example of his ideas of indeterminacy. According to Derrida, the word “already harbor[s] within itself that complicity of contrary values”; pharmakon is both a remedy and a poison (128).
While philosophers like Nietzsche and Derrida have already deconstructed ideas of binary thinking, Western society, nonetheless, has not been able to overcome its dependence on dualisms; thus, Stein’s belief in the possibility of holding opposites in “perfect equilibrium” is still as relevant and challenging today as it was over a century ago.

Stein sees the perfection of nature in its ability to hold opposites in “perfect equilibrium” and thereby dismantles society’s belief in a dualistic world (Lord Jim 125). In Stein’s impression of the world, oppositions do not need to create tension but can exist in harmony. A butterfly can be both—fragile and strong. But despite Stein’s awareness, Conrad’s characters, even Jim, are not able to overcome their binary thinking. Throughout his fiction, Conrad presents a rather gloomy picture for man’s future; he shows the problems of man’s alienation from nature, but he does not allow his characters to reach a resolution except when confronted with the sublime. Even the sublime loses some of its power once the sailor exchanges his sailboat for a steamer. The further man alienates himself from nature, the closer he moves toward his own decay, and, according to Conrad, there does not seem to be a way back. Characters like Stein, Kayerts, Carlier, Nostromo, or Decoud have alienated themselves so far from their environment that in the end there is nothing left for them but death.

Ecocriticism concurs with Conrad’s impression of mankind and nature, particularly Stein’s theory, in that it criticizes the Cartesian worldview and tries to overcome binary thinking by seeing nature and culture as interconnected rather than as two separate entities (Wallace and Armbruster 4). Ecocriticism, despite its tremendous growth in the last two decades, is still a rather young critical field in literary and cultural
studies. In his book on *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), Lawrence Buell’s statement is still accurate today: ecocriticism “is still finding its path, a path bestrewn by obstacles both external and self-imposed” (1). What is ecocriticism? Even today, there is still no clear definition of the term. In 1996 in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty provided an extremely broad description of what she considered ecocriticism at the time: “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xviii). Glotfelty’s description is still relevant today and as true as it is problematic. Additionally, Glotfelty’s definition is tremendously broad, and the problem, according to Buell, is that ecocriticism “lacks the kind of paradigm-defining statement that, for example, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) supplied for colonial discourse studies” (*The Future* 11). Ecocriticism as a field of criticism is “issue-driven” rather than “method or paradigm-driven”; thus, the term “ecocriticism” is slightly misleading because it “implies a non-existent methodological holism” (11-2). While some scholars may declare ecocriticism to be an unscientific field of study because of its unfolding and situationist methodology, being issue-driven offers ecocritics a better chance to reach out to an audience beyond the world of academia. It is the goal of the ecocritic to mobilize the audience to reconsider their vision of the world; thus, a persuasive presentation of the case is more important than a conformist method.

One may ask, what is the purpose of ecocriticism and analyzing nineteenth-century works ecocritically? And why choose Conrad? The main goal of ecocriticism is to mobilize the audience to change their view of the world and to take political action. Ecocritics want to save the environment by giving it a voice in our culture, and the reason why this is so important is because the planet’s survival depends on it. Humans cannot
live without nature, and the more we separate ourselves from nature, the further we alienate ourselves from our own being. Conrad shows in his works that our ideas of progress are illusory. Instead of happiness, we find loneliness, sickness, and death in power, possessions, and technological progress. Ecocriticism tries to draw attention to authors like Conrad who have tried for centuries to make us reconsider our detrimental vision of the world with the hope that it may help us change our future.

Fictional literature has not always been of interest to ecocritics. The first wave of ecocritics was more concerned with nature writings and biological subjects such as evolutionary genetics and also geology and mathematics, which called for a more scientific literacy that was not always provided. It was not until the second wave of ecocriticism that ecocritics developed a more social interest not just in the “natural” environment but also the “built” environment, and, most importantly, shifted its focus from the obvious literary work of nature writings and texts primarily concerned with nature to works that at first glance did not seem to have anything to do with nature or environmental studies. One reason for this sudden shift in interest was because ecocritics eventually realized that favoring nature over culture may reinforce Western society’s dualistic worldview simply in favor of nature, which would not weaken our concept of dualism but would actually strengthen it (Wallace and Armbruster 4). Wallace and Armbruster claim that it “is essential to an informed ecocriticism” to comprehend “how nature and culture constantly influence and construct each other,” and fictional literature can give us important clues (4). Even if nature is not a novel’s conscious and most prominent interest, an ecocritical reading of such a novel may offer new insight into the origin and development of Western society’s complicated relationship with nature and
will also allow scholars to rethink their former judgments of works such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*—a novella that has received very diverse and controversial criticism—and other cultural writings and artifacts.

By examining fiction such as Joseph Conrad’s ecocritically, we begin to notice the development of our divided relationship with nature. We can watch history in the making in terms of man’s alienation from nature and his exploitation of it. We can realize the patterns of alienation and exploitation and use our newfound knowledge to improve our world today. Conrad’s work lends itself well for an examination of the development of man’s alienation from nature because nature is not just a backdrop in Conrad’s works, particularly his early fiction. William Mueller in his article on “Man and Nature in Conrad’s *Nostromo*” rightly claims that particularly in his early writing period between the publication of *The Nigger of the *“Narcissus”* (1897) and *Nostromo* (1904), “Conrad strikes again and again the theme of enmity between man and nature” (560). The further we move into Conrad’s later fiction, the more we notice nature moving further into the background of the story and the human versus human predicament becoming more and more prevalent. While nature is already losing some of its presence in *Nostromo* (1904), nature is almost entirely absent in the two novels that followed: *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), two novels that are set not in the wilderness but in the urban environment of Europe. Since one of the major subjects of this study is what Mueller calls the “enmity between man and nature,” this dissertation focuses particularly on Conrad’s early fiction between the publication of *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and *Nostromo* (1904) (560).
While there are numerous ecocritical articles, which discuss certain aspects of nature in some of Conrad’s fiction, most of these articles focus on a singular work by Conrad but do not try to see the individual work in relation to the rest of Conrad’s oeuvre. Furthermore, many of Conrad’s novels and short stories such as *Almayer’s Folly* or *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) have been entirely ignored by ecocriticism so far. The vast majority of articles that focus on a nature-oriented subject in their analyses, of course, discuss *Heart of Darkness*. For example, Geoff Berry’s “Modernism, Climate Change and Dystopia: An Ecocritical Reading of Light Symbology in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” explores the dualistic model of light and darkness in the novella in terms of the current ecological crisis (82). According to Berry, it is “the modernising quest to colonise nature with the light of culture and its technologies” that “exacerbates the ecological crisis” (83). In his article, “The Anxiety of Confluence: Evolution, Ecology and Imperialism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” Jeffrey Myers takes a similar stance. He discusses the novella’s treatment of the environmental destruction of Africa and goes all the way to the root of the problem, which is the alienation of the self from nature (98). Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy’s “‘A Choice of Nightmares’: The Ecology of *Heart of Darkness*,” also focuses on how the landscape in the novella “challenges the colonizing subject’s confidence” and at the same time “forecasts the brewing storm of ecological catastrophe” (620). While my discussion of *Heart of Darkness* in Chapter III mostly agrees with the previous studies, my analysis differs in that I see the novella in a bigger context. I analyze *Heart of Darkness* not alone but in conjunction with other works by Conrad that are set in the jungle, which clarifies and supports my claim that Conrad dismantles anthropocentrism by portraying nature as
superior to man. Even if Conrad’s Western man has come to a foreign environment to exploit it like a parasite, he lacks to notice that by destroying nature, he furthers his own destruction.

The only more extensive ecocritical study of Conrad’s fiction is Sambit Panigrahi’s *Patriarchy against Nature/Woman: A Green Study of Joseph Conrad’s Fiction*, which focuses, as the title already indicates, on the man versus nature division but with a strong focus on the role of the feminization of nature in Conrad’s work. Panigrahi draws attention to the lack of critical discourse on “the colonialist’s idiosyncratic perception of Nature as an ‘other,’ especially as a feminised ‘other,’” in Conrad’s work (17). The study uses ecofeminism as its key theoretical model to define the “analogical affiliations between the domination of Nature and that of woman” in order to then examine man’s notion of nature as “antithetical to masculinity” (18). While my dissertation agrees with many aspects of Panigrahi’s discussion of the detrimental influence of dualisms on the man versus nature division in Western society, this dissertation does not focus on the feminization of nature in Conrad’s work. Instead, this study focuses on the development of the man versus nature division in Conrad’s fiction with a particular interest in Conrad’s impression of the role of society’s idea of progress in man’s slow but certain decay.

In a Cartesian world where the mind is separate from matter, Western man perceives the mind as the superior of the two, unless he, like Ernst Haeckel, tries to dismantle binary thinking and believes in “the unity of nature” (*The Riddle of the Universe* 255). Conrad portrays man’s desire to rise above nature and to control it throughout his works, but he also shows the detrimental effects of man’s arrogance to see
himself as superior to nature. In Chapter II of this dissertation I will show how we can see in Conrad’s maritime fiction that there is a chance for the protagonist to evolve and find “perfect wisdom” through nature (Narcissus 55). Without the distraction and support by technology, man is capable of setting himself in tune with his environment. Through his confrontation with the sublime, which forces him to simplify his expectations to a simple but strong will to live, he can reach “perfect wisdom” (55). Without the experience of simplicity and sublimity, Conrad’s protagonists get lost in their desires for power, possessions, and technological progress, which I explore in Chapters III, IV, and V.

Since Conrad was a sailor for almost twenty years, many of his works are tales of the sea, which deserve a closer look. In Chapter II, I concentrate on two aspects of Conrad’s maritime fiction: the sailor’s spiritual advancement through his confrontation with the sublime, and the sailor’s alienation from nature because of new technologies. First, I discuss Conrad’s portrayal of the sailor’s impressions of the sea in terms of the Romantic conception of the beautiful and the sublime. In his Aesthetical Essays (1794), Friedrich Schiller believes that man is able to experience liberty through the beautiful as a sensuous and material freedom that is still bound by the limits of nature; however, once man experiences the sublime, a new kind of liberty arises that surpasses all imaginable boundaries and leaves behind the sensual world for a spiritual one. When the sea roughens in Conrad’s stories, the beautiful and liberating journey aboard the ship turns into a “test of manliness” through a confrontation with the sublime that pushes the sailor to his own physical limits (The Shadow-Line 34). The sea liberates Conrad’s sailor and allows him the confrontation with the sublime, which opens for him the door to transcendence. While being challenged by weather and sickness, the purpose of the
challenge for the sailor is not simply survival but personal growth. In this chapter, I claim that Conrad’s fascination with the sea is not based on the risk of physical death but rather on the possibilities of personal redemption. The sea frees the sailor of his boundaries from life on land, challenges him in his already established confidence, drives him to his limits, and lets him surpass those limits.

Besides a discussion of the beautiful and the sublime, this chapter also offers a critique of Conrad’s impressions of technology in his maritime fiction. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Conrad already foresaw man’s regression caused by advances in technology. Conrad observed that as the steamship became the dominant mode of seafaring, its use to travel across oceans left the sailor independent from forces of nature. With the death of the sailing ship ends an era of sailors, who not only had a close relationship with their ship but also with nature. With the invention of the steamer, the sailor needed fewer skills than before and was suddenly independent from the wind. While this newfound independence helped the sailor travel faster, it also disconnected him from the sea and changed his experience of the sublime. In this chapter, I show that in Conrad’s maritime fiction the sailor feels naturally interconnected with nature until he no longer needs nature’s help to move forward. Once he is independent from the forces of nature, he loses not only his respect for his environment but also his instincts and understanding of it, and with the loss of appreciation for nature comes a mistaken feeling of superiority over nature, which leads to man’s exploitation of nature of which we can see the results today.

In Conrad’s work, the sea and the land are opposites, and as Zdzislaw Najder points out in *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, “the comparison” of the sea and the land
“always comes out in favor of the sea” (141). Ultimately, the difference between the sea and the land in Conrad’s fiction is one of life and death as the narrator asserts in *Almayer’s Folly*, “Yes, when the next day broke, [Dain and Nina] would be together on the great blue sea that was like life—away from the forests that were like death” (109).

While Chapter II explores Conrad’s depiction of the sea as a symbol of life and transcendence, Chapter III examines Conrad’s depiction of the forest as a place that is closely associated with murder and disease and appears to bring out the darkness inside of man by giving him the freedom from society to act out his greed and corruption.

Chapter III focuses on Conrad’s “jungle fiction.” The first half of the chapter builds its analysis on Conrad’s allegory of the (native) trees and the (Western) parasites, which Conrad introduces in his first novel *Almayer’s Folly* (1895). The allegory, which compares the Western colonizer to a parasite who has invaded foreign grounds to steal the natives’ resources and to eventually cause their death, is one of Conrad’s most powerful arguments against imperialism. The rest of Chapter III, including the second half which focuses primarily on an analysis of Kurtz as the Western parasite, is built on Conrad’s allegory of the trees and parasites. Since in his jungle stories Conrad’s impressions of man and nature are closely related to imperialism, it is important not to take Conrad’s works out of their colonial context and adjust the critical approach of this study to one that also includes postcolonial theory. In this chapter, I claim that Conrad, in his fiction, dismantles anthropocentrism by taking nature out of man’s shadow. Despite its passivity, the forest’s presence is strong, significant, and positive. Conrad does not simply set it up as a backdrop or as “the other world” but instead turns it into a character that is superior in wisdom to the human protagonists in the stories. Conrad’s works,
however, show that the division between man and nature is a problem that will eventually lead to man’s decay, but instead of blaming the forest for man’s shallow desires, Conrad judges man himself. He describes the forest as a quiet observer who remains uninvolved and thereby lets man lose himself in his desires for power and possessions. Western man, on the other hand, willingly furthers his disconnection from nature to continue his exploitation of it. He is a parasite who takes advantage of his host without noticing that by advancing nature’s destruction he also furthers his own.

While Chapter III addresses the personification of the forest (anthropomorphism) in Conrad’s jungle fiction, Chapter IV focuses on the animalization of humans (theriomorphism) in *Lord Jim*. Today animals are often not more than raw materials to us that are turned into manufactured commodities, and as a result of our attitude toward animals, we have become very uncomfortable with any drawn comparison (Berger 13). Stein, however, has a very different attitude toward nature that sees nature’s intrinsic value as superior to man. In Chapter IV, I take a deep ecological approach to Stein’s theory of nature and claim that Stein’s ideas are ecocentric instead of anthropocentric.

Deep ecology, according to Fritjof Capra, is a new paradigm that does not perceive problems as isolated matters (“Deep Ecology” 19). While fields of study such as humanism try to answer questions from an anthropocentric angle, which regards humans as superior beings, Capra claims that “deep ecology [. . .] does not see the world as a collection of isolated objects but rather as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent” (“Deep Ecology” 20). According to Capra, deep ecology “recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings” and perceives humans as simply “a particular strand in the web of life” (Preface 7). Stein’s ideology is
very much in tune with Capra’s definition of deep ecology. Stein rearranges the great chain of being and places nature in its wholeness at the top; he thereby separates man from nature but in order to raise it above man. Nature, according to Stein, is a “masterpiece,” but man is only “amazing” (125). According to Stein, nature’s perfection lies in its “balance of colossal forces” (130). Mankind, on the other hand, appears to be out of balance, disconnected from the well-functioning eco-system. In Chapter IV, I argue that without Stein’s comment on the “masterpiece of Nature,” the animalization of human characters would suggest a form of human degeneracy, but if nature is regarded as superior to man, then a comparison of humans to animals indicates a form of human progress (125). Nature, in Conrad’s Lord Jim, is in “perfect equilibrium”; thus, mankind can only evolve further through its connection and not disconnection from nature (125).

Chapter V focuses on Nostromo (1904), a novel in which Conrad once again raises questions about Western society’s idea of “progress.” In Nostromo capitalism does not promise progress; instead, it offers stagnation at its best, which Conrad repeatedly emphasizes through his descriptions of the natural environment, which show infertile land and motionless airs. To discuss the role of the environment in this highly political and psychological novel, I take a more focused approach by using ideas of ecopsychology and eco-Marxism. Compared to previous chapters of this dissertation, Chapter V’s analysis of Nostromo offers the final piece in man’s process of alienation. What started with man’s alienation from nature is now ending with man’s alienation from his own self, which results in the characters’ untimely death. In Nostromo, Conrad shows very clearly the mental decay of men who find themselves disconnected from nature, and Conrad’s message is entirely pessimistic in that he offers his characters no return to
nature or society. While in Conrad’s early maritime fiction like *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* we still see the possibility for man reaching transcendence and perfect wisdom, in *Nostromo* this no longer seems to be an option. Instead of progress, we see stagnation and death, and the causes for this detrimental development, according to Conrad, are man’s material interests.

As a study of Joseph Conrad’s fiction, this dissertation employs an ecocritical approach to explore the relationship between humans and nature in Conrad’s work. In his fiction, Conrad draws an impression of nature that was unusual for its time because of its complexity. William Mueller rightly claims, “Few novelists of any place or time match [Conrad’s] awe of the world’s cosmic forces, and perhaps no other writer succeeds so well as he in expressing this wonderment through description of nature’s dreadful power” (560). Nature is not just simple scenery or a stage set in Conrad’s fiction; it plays a major role in his characters’ lives. Their regression develops parallel to their alienation from nature. This dissertation explores the origins of man’s alienation from nature in Conrad’s work, particularly his early fiction, and the implications for society if such alienation continues.
CHAPTER II

THE SAILOR’S SOLIDARITY WITH THE SEA

IN CONRAD’S MARITIME FICTION

“To see! To see!—this is the craving of the sailor, as of the rest of blind humanity,” Conrad exclaims in The Mirror of the Sea, and for that Conrad takes his readers to the ocean, where there is not much more to see than water and sky (75). It is Conrad’s intention to help his listeners see a “glimpse of truth” of their own nature through the mist of a moral system that was set up by civil society and that befogs their vision (Preface to “Narcissus” 147). To do so, Conrad isolates his characters and readers from civilization and places them in a “microcosm of civil society” on board a ship (Peck 167). He tells stories of ultimate freedom and transcendence that he believes can only be found at sea and away from land, of perfect wisdom and solidarity that lead to success, and of regression that disguises itself as progress. Conrad’s journeys across the oceans are not only outward but also inward journeys to explore human experience, and nature is an indispensable component in Conrad’s adventures of self-exploration. The open sea is the ultimate wilderness, farthest away from civilization, the ship and its crew a microcosm of society at large, sent out to explore the endurance of a moral society when not supervised by a legal system. Nature, as the antithesis to society, creates the challenge for man to explore what is left of his own humanity when there are no institutions manipulating his being. The sea liberates Conrad’s sailor and allows him the confrontation with the sublime which opens him the door to transcendence.

Many of Conrad’s novels, novellas, and short stories take place on the open sea where life can be difficult and dangerous at times. Throughout the centuries, the oceans
in their immensity have been a symbol of power and strength but also a symbol of mystery that creates anxiety and suspicion in humans, and after much exploration the world’s oceans still remain vastly alien to us. Their unpredictability and uncontrollability caused by their sheer size and unexplored depths and their interplay with the equally unpredictable and uncontrollable forces of the weather create respect and even fear in humans. But while the oceans have caused the loss of numerous lives, we also know today that all life on this planet once originated in the earth’s oceans; thus, the seas have been and will always be a symbol of life and death. Conrad’s impressions of the sea, however, show it as a symbol of life rather than one of death, which is a positive, more modern and more complex view of the ocean landscape and the sailor’s struggles than in the past. It was not until the eighteenth century that new developments in oceanography and the successful conquest and colonization of far-away lands replaced former fears and superstitious beliefs with a more pragmatic view of the economic success and advantages of global seafaring trade (Klein 4). At the same time, travelers began to find delight in what the British dramatist John Dennis called the “exquisite horror” of the sea, and these aesthetics of what is still today known as the sublime became popular very quickly in society and maritime fiction (qtd. in Corbin 122).

Conrad’s focus is not on the horror the sea creates in humans but the consequences that come with the sailor’s confrontation with the sublime. In Conrad’s sea fiction, while being challenged by weather and sickness, the purpose of the challenge for the sailor is not simply survival but personal growth. Conrad’s fascination with the sea does not lie in the risk of physical death but rather in the possibilities of personal redemption. The impressions Conrad draws of the sea are filled with horror and anxiety,
but the underlying feeling is always that of rapture and freedom. In Conrad’s work, the ocean creates a unique feeling of self-determination. The sea frees the sailor of his boundaries from life on land, challenges him in his already established confidence, drives him to his limits, and lets him surpass those limits. It not only reveals the sailor’s old fears and traumata but also forces him to experience entirely new feelings by pushing him to the edge. Life on land, on the other hand, is according to Conrad like the life of a “caged bird” (“Narcissus” 104). In Conrad’s world only life at sea can give you those feelings of wonder that make you feel alive. Conrad’s works demonstrate that wisdom comes through intuition and experience, and life at sea is life at full force. With every typhoon that a sailor faces and survives he learns more about his environment, his crew, and himself. With every shipwreck he realizes not only the vulnerability of his own body but also that of technology. Despite all of the dangers a sailor has to anticipate, in Conrad’s works the sea has more to offer than that it takes away. A sailor’s survival of a storm is therefore, as already mentioned, primarily not associated with the terror and anxiety experienced during the storm but the renewed life that comes after the storm is over.

For Conrad it is, however, not only experience but a combination of experience and instinct that makes a successful sailor. According to Conrad, the sea is “an intimate companion” for “the man of masts and sails” (The Mirror of the Sea 61). Nature is the sailor’s teacher who teaches him not only how to live in close “connection with the sea” but also pushes him to learn about himself—his own limits and fears (The Shadow-Line 7). The intimate relationship between sailor and sea in Conrad’s works results out of a dependence that is based on the schooner. The sailing ship is the sailor’s best friend; he
has to know it, understand it, and handle it with care. From his own experience as a sailor, Conrad knows that nature not only threatens him, but it also enables him to sail from one continent to another. Without wind, as in the story of *The Shadow-Line*, the sailor can go nowhere, and this dependence will always reinforce the sailor’s appreciation for his environment.

As the steamship becomes the dominant mode of seafaring, the use of them to travel across oceans, according to Conrad, leaves the sailor independent from forces of nature. No longer does the sailor need the skill to handle the boat nor is he dependent on the wind as he was in the past. While this newfound independence helps the sailor to travel faster, it also disconnects him from the sea. Through the dependence on wind and good weather comes the sailor’s appreciation for his environment. Man feels naturally interconnected with nature until he no longer needs nature’s help to move forward. Once he is independent from the forces of nature, man loses not only his respect for his environment but also his instincts and understanding of it, and with the loss of appreciation often comes exploitation. In *The Mirror of the Sea* Conrad expresses that “[t]he machinery, the steel, the fire, the steam, have stepped in between the man and the sea [and a] modern fleet of ships does not so much make use of the sea as exploit a highway” (62). In his works, Conrad depicts the effects of culture upon man and upon nature and upon the relationship between man and nature. His novels and short stories show that advances in technology, which may appear as progress at first, turn out to be forms of regression.

In his works, Conrad draws an impression of nature that was unusual for its time because of its complexity. In his book *Patriarchy against Nature/Woman: A Green Study*
of Joseph Conrad’s Fiction, Sambit Panigrahi notes that “[i]n the annals of the Western philosophical, critical and theoretical parlance decreed by philosophers […] and scientists […], Nature has thoroughly remained only a reticent stage for the enactment of the activities of man. Viewed in this context, Conrad’s depiction of Nature in his entire oeuvre seems beguilingly complex and intricate” (20). The sea and the weather at sea are not just a backdrop in Conrad’s maritime fiction. They play a major role in the works and affect the characters’ lives significantly. Especially in works like The Nigger of the "Narcissus,” the story would fail without nature’s role in it because it is nature that challenges man, shows him who he is and who he wants to become, and then pushes him to his limits until he overcomes his boundaries and transforms into the person he wants to be. In works like Typhoon, to use part of Lawrence Buell’s definition of an environmentally oriented work, “The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Environmental Imagination 7). The characters’ transformation in works as Typhoon or The Nigger of the “Narcissus” depends on their experience of the sublime. Conrad situates the sailor within nature, where confrontation with it is inevitable and where he must draw upon all his senses to finish his sea journey successfully. Even if the sailor is disconnected from his environment before the storm, he will have heightened his awareness before the tempest is over.

While using nature to transform mankind, Conrad shows an incredibly high degree of sensitivity and respect in regard to the environment. He demonstrates the necessity for a strong interconnected relationship between humans and their environment not for nature’s but for mankind’s sake since nature can exist autonomously while
humans will always be dependent on their nourishment through nature. Mankind is just a species that is part of a bigger organism, which will go on even if one species goes extinct. Even in the case of overexploitation, if mankind destroys nature, it destroys itself, and once it is gone, nature will recuperate again. At the turn of the last century, Conrad already foresaw that advances in technology would lead not only to man’s exploitative disconnection from nature, but even to man’s own mental regression. For the success of his sea journey, man’s instincts and skills are no longer in high demand. The advances in technology not only simplify man’s daily life but also his assumptions about the natural world. Because of his increased disconnection from nature, man feels further assured of his superiority over nature, which as a result diminishes his respect for his environment and strengthens his desire to exploit it. We can see this development of humans’ relationship with nature throughout the twentieth century. It is therefore necessary to say that awareness of ongoing environmental exploitation only grows when humans develop a desire for a closely interconnected relationship with nature. According to Sambit Panigrahi, contemporary “[e]cological literary criticism, therefore, advocates for an attitudinal change towards Nature on the part of the modern, cultural man by exposing how the narrowness of the culture’s assumptions about the natural world has limited man’s ability to envision an ecological sustainable human society” (18). While Conrad does not state the need for an attitudinal change toward nature explicitly in his fiction, his stories indicate the disadvantages of progress and man’s disconnection from the sea. Conrad’s high level of awareness of nature and man’s influence on the environment is therefore a first step in society’s attitudinal change toward nature.
The Experience of Ultimate Freedom at Sea

Conrad’s sensitivity to nature comes from his own personal experiences. His fascination with the sea developed early in life when he was looking for an escape from the troubles he was facing at home. As a child of two Polish patriots, Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) knew the meaning of imperialism since Polish lands had been partitioned amongst Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As his parents fought for Polish sovereignty, Conrad had to learn early on of the Russian regime’s power over opposition members. On top of the difficult political situation of his family and homeland, Conrad lost his parents very early in life, which left him lonely and mentally unstable. It was the adventure stories and tales of the sea he read as a child that fed his imagination, took his mind off the troubles at home, and, according to Robert E. Kuehn, “strengthened his determination to become a sailor” (1-2). By the age of fourteen, Conrad knew that he wanted to become a sailor, and to his uncle’s disappointment, Conrad began his life at sea in 1875.

As a sailor, Conrad was looking for something he could not find in his homeland which, according to Ian Watt, “was heavy with memories of irreparable national and personal loss” (5). What Conrad was looking for was freedom—not only the freedom from his painful past, but also the freedom from a most likely painful future. Due to his Russian citizenship and his father’s opposition to Czarist Russia, Conrad faced at least 25 years of military service in Russia’s military (6). It was the ocean, a place that belongs to everyone and no one, that gave Conrad a new home and also the physical liberty and emotional peace he could not find on land.
Conrad incorporated his newfound feelings of freedom into his works of fiction. In his maritime novels and novellas, he depicts the sea as the ultimate symbol of liberty. According to Conrad, nowhere else can man feel as free and alive as when he is at sea. Losing sight of the land releases the sailor from all his worries and burdens on shore; and with the newfound independence comes an immense feeling of liveliness. No longer does the sailor feel haunted by a social conscience since he is “far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges” (“The Secret Sharer” 180). Usually, the immense and powerful sea is associated with the sublime, but in its peaceful state it tends more toward Schiller’s idea of the beautiful. In his aesthetical essay “On the Sublime” (1801), Schiller argues that the beautiful is already an “expression of liberty” even though “[t]his liberty is not the kind that raises us above the power of nature, and that sets us free from all bodily influence,” but the one that “we enjoy as men, without issuing from the limits of nature” (n.p.). According to Schiller, it is “[i]n the presence of beauty” that “we feel ourselves free, because the sensuous instincts are in harmony with the laws of reason” (n.p.). Schiller sees the sublime and beautiful as two genii that accompany us “in our life in this lower world” (n.p.). Man can experience liberty through the beautiful as a sensuous and material freedom that is still bound by the limits of nature. Once he experiences the sublime, a new kind of liberty arises that surpasses all imaginable boundaries and, according to Schiller, leaves behind the sensual world for a spiritual one. For Schiller, the beautiful leads us amidst joy and laughter, to the most perilous spots, where we must act as pure spirits and strip ourselves of all that is body […]. Once when we are there, it abandons us, for its realm is limited to the world of
sense [...]. But at this moment the other companion steps upon the stage, silent and grave, and with his powerful arm carries us beyond the precipice that made us giddy. [...] In presence of the sublime we feel ourselves sublime, because the sensuous instincts have no influence over the jurisdiction of reason, because it is then the pure spirit that acts in us as if it were not absolutely subject to any other laws than its own. (n.p.)

In regard to Conrad’s world of the oceans and the sailor’s life at sea, the development from a feeling of the beautiful to a spiritual experience of the sublime is comparable to Schiller’s idea of the two. The liberty the sailor feels once he loses sight of the land is a feeling that embraces the peaceful solitude of the environment and represents the beautiful. In The Shadow-Line (1915), one of Conrad’s later works, Conrad describes the sailor’s feelings of freedom and vitality under a beautiful “unruffled, sun-smitten horizon” most clearly (64). The Shadow-Line is the story of a young seaman and his unexpected first command of a schooner, which results in the loss of his youth and immaturity. The narrator begins his confession (the novella is subtitled A Confession) with his resignation from life at sea. Despite his young age, he decides to disconnect himself from the sea but instead surprisingly becomes the new captain of an old sailing ship, the Melita. Because of the string of events that have led to his first command, the narrator believes that his appointment as captain of the Melita and his connection with the sea must be his destiny. Even though his first voyage as captain turns into a complete disaster, he never again doubts his meant-to-be connection with the sea. He feels united with the waters and in love with his ship and experiences complete liberation once the
ship enters the open sea. Even before his journey, when he is thinking about his new responsibility as captain and the approaching journey, the narrator exclaims:

A sudden passion of anxious impatience rushed through my veins and gave me such a sense of the intensity of existence as I have never felt before or since. I discovered how much of a seaman I was, in heart, in mind, and, as it were, physically—a man exclusively of sea and ships; the sea the only world that counted, and the ships the test of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity—and of love. (*The Shadow-Line* 34)

Just the thought of the upcoming journey already creates an intensity of feelings inside the narrator which he has never experienced before. Once at sea the narrator feels an “immense relief” that comes from the “spaciousness” of his surroundings which give him the “sense of a fortunate escape, a momentary exultation of freedom” (36). Already in the presence of the beautiful and not the sublime, the intensity of his feelings of liberation felt at sea do not compare to any feelings that he can undergo on land. Even if the liberation and the thereby experienced happiness is only momentary and may be replaced by fear and loneliness when confronted with the sublime, the fleeting experience of the beauty of total liberation makes the sea journey worthwhile since there is nothing on land that can give the sailor an equal sense of freedom.

Compared to the beautiful, the experience of the sublime is even less comparable to life on land; it challenges the sailor to a degree he has never been challenged before. When the sea roughens in Conrad’s stories, the beautiful and liberating journey aboard the ship turns into a “test of manliness” through a confrontation with the sublime that pushes the sailor to his own physical limits (*The Shadow-Line* 34). On September 20,
1712, in *The Spectator*, English poet and playwright Joseph Addison describes his experience of the ocean’s sublimity as follows:

[When the sea] is worked up in a Tempest, so that the Horizon on every side is nothing but foaming billows and floating mountains, it is impossible to describe the agreeable horror that rises from such a prospect. A troubled ocean, to a man who sails upon it, [...] gives his Imagination one of the highest kinds of Pleasure that can arise from greatness. (my emphasis, qtd. in Corbin 123)

The ocean appears sublime to its observer through the excitement, fear, and panic it creates. It builds the strongest emotion humans are capable of feeling because, as Edmund Burke proposes in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), “ideas of pain are much more powerful” in their influence on the body and mind “than those which enter on the part of pleasure” (24). For Lord Byron, as he exclaims in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-1820), the “terror—’twas a pleasing fear” (n.p.). For the Romantics, like Byron, man did not seek to avoid the terror but instead felt drawn to it because it stimulated his senses. The sailor could not have experienced the intensity of emotions if it had not been for his horrific encounter with the sublime. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant calls it a “pleasure that is only possible through the mediation of a displeasure” (39). The experience of the horror eventually leads to the sailor’s transcendence to which the sailor is “attracted by an irresistible force” (Schiller n.p.). He does not seek to avoid the displeasure of the sublime because it puts his existence into perspective and shows him that his physical power is nothing compared to nature’s force. What attracts the sailor to the moment of sublimity is
the contradiction between “reason and the sensuous” in which reason triumphs over the sensuous (Schiller n.p.). While the body of man, according to Schiller, “is in the hands of nature,” his will can be “in his own hands” and can let him surpass his physical limits (n.p.). Through his encounter with the sublime the sailor faces the limits of his physical body, which depends on nature, but is able to surpass those limits and experience the magnitude of the moment on a psychological level that feels liberated from the forces of nature. Once man’s mind surpasses the limits of the physical world, his mind also begins to understand the interconnectedness between man and nature. In “Mont Blanc” (1817), a poem about the awe-inspiring landscape of Mont Blanc that evokes an experience of transcendence for the spectator, Percy Bysshe Shelley describes how “My own, my human mind, which passively / Now renders and receives fast influencings, / Holding an unremitting interchange / With the clear universe of things around” (763). In the same vein as the Romantics, following one’s instinct to “become one” with the natural environment, Conrad’s sailors do not win against nature when they survive a storm but instead experience life and the force of nature in its full magnitude.

Conrad’s sailor chooses to face the horror of the sublime again and again. While in the moment of terror he may wish for a safer, more ordinary life on land, the sailor always goes back to sea. No matter how forceful and destructive, no typhoon will drive Conrad’s sailors like Allistoun, MacWhirr, Jukes, or Marlow to break their connections with the sea. In a novella like Typhoon (1902), Conrad shows how MacWhirr’s and Jukes’s struggle with the incomprehensible forces of nature awakens the sailors’ awareness for their environment and pushes them to find new confidence within themselves. The crew of the Nan-Shan, including its captain, is still inexperienced when
it comes to extreme weather. Throughout the novella Conrad emphasizes MacWhirr’s and Jukes’s ignorance in regard to rougher conditions at sea and the chastising effect of catastrophic weather on the mind of the maturing sailors. Amar Acheraïou argues that “[t]he typhoon’s might threatens the Nan-Shan and the characters’ lives, showing the insignificance of man’s endeavours in a hostile natural world” (Acheraïou 30). What had just been a sunny and friendly environment (the beautiful) turns into a chaotic whirlwind (the sublime) in which man appears insignificant and powerless. Unless experienced before, the actual strength of a typhoon cannot be imagined by the sailor, and in Typhoon the experience of the overwhelming weather conditions threatens the protagonists’ confidence. For Jukes, the first mate of the Nan-Shan, it was

more than he had expected […] like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one’s kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were—without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him. (29-30)

Through the exposure to these extreme, “overwhelming,” “immense” circumstances, man is pushed to his limits and loses his sense of measure (30). Facing the sublime, he has to face his human weakness all by himself. Jukes realizes that “[t]his is the disintegrating power of a great wind [, it] isolates one from one’s kind” (30). The separation from his
crew weakens him even further; no longer can he rely on his shipmates. Compared to nature’s strength, Jukes looks weak and insignificant.

Through the confrontation with a superior power, Jukes learns from nature about his own limits and comes close to his own defeat. He realizes the vulnerability of the ship and is convinced that “[n]othing could be prevented now, and nothing could be remedied. The men on board did not count, and the ship could not last. This weather was too impossible” (33). In this moment defeat and death seem inescapable. Jukes acknowledges the limits of mankind and science and comes close to losing his entire hope, he however gathers his confidence again after talking to a calm and focused MacWhirr. Jukes experiences “an access of confidence, a sensation that came from outside like a warm breath, and made him feel equal to every demand. The distant muttering of the darkness stole into his ears. He noted it unmoved, out of that sudden belief in himself” (Typhoon 64). In this moment of regaining his confidence, Jukes confronts the sublime by taking charge of his own mind. In his Critique of Judgment, Immanuel Kant proposes that through human reason man realizes the powers within himself that let him transcend his physical limits and overcome the terror of the sublime. Sublimity, according to Kant, “does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us (as exerting influence upon us)” (42). Man may not always be able to change the world around him, but he can, according to Schiller, “strip [himself] of [his] body” and find happiness by “learn[ing] to bear what he cannot change” (n.p.). Jukes accepts that he cannot change the circumstances around him and instead finds comfort within himself. By taking charge of his mind, Jukes rises above his bodily limits and his
inferiority to nature without having to change his environment. Once he regains his confidence, Jukes has surpassed his limits, has surpassed the sublime, which leaves him with a new understanding of himself and the world around him. He has gained more wisdom and respect concerning himself and the forces of nature and is therefore “a changed man” (Foulke 114).

Jukes’s transformation is a step closer to a state of transcendence. Under extreme weather conditions such as typhoons or hurricanes only survival matters at first, but, according to Conrad, the experience of the sublime is not about survival but the transcendence of the sailor’s mind which will lead him to the completion of his wisdom. The experience of the sea’s sublimity is therefore vital in man’s mental evolution. In The Nigger of the “Narcissus” (1897), Conrad’s narrator pontificates that man does not grow wiser when he has the comfort of “meditat[ing] at ease upon the complicated and acrid savour of existence” (55). Instead, man comes one step closer to completing his wisdom with every life-threatening moment he experiences when facing the sublime. Instead of living at ease, man’s life must “be hard and unceasing, from sunrise to sunset, from sunset to sunrise” (55).

In The Nigger of the “Narcissus,” the typhoon that threatens the lives of the sailors on board the sailing ship activates the sailors’ transcendence. The worst of the storm hits the sailors at night; the sea is “roaring” in a “monstrous rage” (“Narcissus” 32). It is a “venomous violence” that threatens the sailors’ confidence (34). Every time the crew believes that the gale “can blow no harder,” the storm worsens a little more (34). The surrounding darkness only intensifies their anxiety but does not make them succumb; instead, the sailors face the “distress, tumult, and pain of an avenging terror” until the
storm is finally over (33). The sailors overcome their fears and leave them behind in the storm. After the storm is over, all anxiety is forgotten, but the sailors have been transformed by the storm in that they are now more aware of how powerful a gale can be and show more wakefulness and respect toward their environment; however, to gain “perfect wisdom” they will have to experience more than one bad storm (55). Singleton, the oldest sailor on board the Narcissus, who has had the most experience with extreme turbulences, is the only one who, according to the narrator, has gained a complete understanding of himself and the world around him (“Narcissus” 61). Everybody else on board is far from the desired state of “completed wisdom” and will have to undergo the fear and pain again to complete their experience and mental evolution (61).

The chastising effect of the sublime forces the sailor to simplify his life and refocus on life’s essentials, and the simplicity of this new life brings the sailor closer to the desired “perfect wisdom” (55). According to the nameless narrator, the simplicity of life at sea brings “the true peace of God [which] begins at any spot a thousand miles from the nearest land; and when He sends there the messengers of His might it is not in terrible wrath against crime, presumption, and folly, but paternally, to chasten simple hearts—ignorant hearts that know nothing of life, and beat undisturbed by envy or greed” (19). The experience of the sublime brings the sailor’s focus in life back to quotidian struggles instead of abstract concerns such as “envy or greed.” Therefore, he comes closer not only to complete wisdom but also again to nature because his awareness is no longer diluted by ravenousness and materialism (19).

The theme of solidarity among seamen is another essential element in Conrad’s idea of complete wisdom because it furthers the sailor’s understanding of
interdependence. The success of a crew’s journey in Conrad’s maritime stories always depends on the crew’s solidarity to each other, the ship, and the cargo and passengers. Already in the preface to his first maritime novel, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* Conrad addresses the subject of solidarity among men. For a successful journey, each member has to do his job and work together with the rest of the crew. When sickness takes control of a ship, as it does in *The Shadow-Line,* the crew is under even more pressure to work together than ordinarily and has not only to perform their usual duties, but also take on new responsibilities. Unusual circumstances call for unusual measures, and a good sailor does whatever is necessary to protect the cargo, passengers and crew, and to complete the journey. The *Nigger of the “Narcissus”* is an example of Conrad’s sea novels in which the solidarity on board the ship is weak in the beginning and does not strengthen until it is challenged under exceptional circumstances that are brought on by a storm. On board the *Narcissus,* as the name already implies, the success of the voyage is threatened by the narcissistic behavior of shipmates who weaken the solidarity among the crew. Two of the sailors in particular, Jim Wait and Donkin, cause difficulties and risk a rupture among the group. During their voyage Jim Wait, a black sailor, claims to have fallen ill; however, some crewmembers believe that Jim is just trying to be relieved of his duties on board the ship. The narrator exclaims, “You couldn’t see that there was anything wrong with him [. . .]. He coughed often, but the *most prejudiced* person could perceive that, mostly, he coughed when it suited his purpose” (my emphasis 27). Conrad’s words imply that the perceiver only sees what he wants, that his preconception affects his perception of the situation, and the prejudice among the crewmembers further threatens the solidarity on board. The crew, however, eventually redeems itself for their bias during the storm by
risking their own lives to save Jim who is trapped inside the ship (39-41). The storm is therefore the cause for transformation and redemption in the story. Because of the storm, the crew realizes what it means to be a team and proves that it can even overcome prejudice—a preconceived judgment that is demarcated by society. The crew’s separation from society and experience of complete isolation at sea liberates the sailors of preconceived ideas and offers the chance for the creation of a new more conscious and respectful social order.

In Conrad, the feeling of liberation and isolation at sea revives the sailor while the proximity to land and society threatens his life. For Conrad it is not death at sea but the confrontation with death that can accelerate man’s personal development. All of Conrad’s sailors have to go through struggles on their voyages, but none of them dies unless of old age or by choice. Jim Wait, the only character who dies of a disease while at sea, does not die until the ship comes into close proximity to an island which indicates the association of land and death. To the old sailor, Singleton, Wait’s death came as no surprise because he believes in a connection between land and death. When Jim died, the ship was close to “the land, and there, on the fore-hatch and waiting for the sailmaker—there was the corpse” (“Narcissus” 96). For Singleton it is a classic case of “cause and effect” when the ship approaches the land and “[t]he land . . . draws life away from sick sailors” (96, 90). But Conrad’s sailors usually do not die at sea or on their way home. Instead of showing a life that ends in death, in Conrad’s work the sailor’s life is a series of deaths and rebirths. The purpose of the experience is not the mere memory of pain and fear, but the stronger appreciation for the new life that follows. For the sailors, after looking death in the eye,
[t]he hours of ineffective turmoil were forgotten; the fear and anguish of these dark moments were never mentioned in the glowing peace of fine days. Yet from that time our life seemed to start afresh as though we had died and had been resuscitated. All the first part of the voyage, the Indian Ocean on the other side of the Cape, all that was lost in a haze, like an ineradicable suspicion of some previous existence. It had ended—then there were blank hours: a livid blur—and again we lived! (“Narcissus” 61)

Conrad emphasizes the present moment, not the past or future. The past and future are engulfed in a haze—a haze that appears again and again in Conrad’s work. What matters is surviving the present moment and the transformation that is triggered by that experience. The ship and its crew that survive a typhoon are not the same as they were before the storm. From the struggle with the forces of nature, facing and overcoming their obstacles, the crew receives an understanding of the world that could not have been learned on land. Coming out of a storm, the ship in Typhoon “had about her the worn, weary air of ships coming from the far ends of the world—and indeed with truth, for in her short passage she had been [close to] the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth” (66). The ship and crew got as close to death as it is possible and through their confrontation with death acquired the awareness of truth. It is for the struggle and danger the crew experienced on their journey that their connection to the sea has grown closer and their liberation from the land has become stronger.
Throughout his work, Conrad repeats the association of sea and life compared to land and death. When there is an occurrence of a disease at sea, Conrad makes sure to indicate that the disease originates on land. In *The Shadow-Line*, on board the *Melita* it is almost the entire crew that is haunted by an illness which they did not catch at sea but which has followed them from land. Disease is not something that is found on the open ocean, but is brought to it since there is no place for it to survive unless on board the ship. If the sailors are attacked by a virus, the crew must have carried it on board while still on land. Usually, the disease is blown away by wind once out at sea, but the disease on the *Melita* flourishes on board the ship because of the lack of wind. The narrator believes that “a stronger breeze would have blown away the infection which clung to the ship” and could have carried them “into the clean breath of the sea” (*The Shadow-Line* 65). Conrad associates the sea with cleanliness and therefore the health of the sailor. The land, on the other hand, is associated with decay and death. In his fiction, life on land is everything but bright and healthy; it appears not only rather uneventful and boring when compared to a near-death experience at sea, but also limited by the lack of opportunity to experience the sublime. When the land has drained the sailor of all his vitality, it is the sea that nurtures him back to life. The narrator in *Falk*, a novella that is set in a harbor and never enters the open sea, calls salt-water, despite its “bitterness” and lack of life-sustaining qualities for humans, “the very water of life” (77). The water may not keep the sailor’s body alive, but it enlivens his mind. In *Falk*, according to the narrator, a sailor will never forget the bitter taste of the Ocean, and after being away from the salty water and “pampered by the life of the land” for too long, the sailor starts to complain of a hunger for the “bitterness of the Ocean” (77). Once a person has experienced the roughness of
life at sea, life on land cannot satisfy them any longer. Despite its bitter taste, life at sea appears more desirable and even superior to the comfortable life on land because it presents itself as a challenge. Compared to stories of the sea, “tales of experience” on land seem “artless” and primitive, and life appears ill and dead: it is musty, “rotten,” “decrepit,” and backwards (77). Life on land is so backwards that it reminds even the narrator in *Falk* of the primeval times of man. He thinks back to the period of the hunter and gatherer when life was focused on the basic physical needs of man: food and women (77). For Conrad, life at sea seems to be different with another set of priorities. It is not the physical needs of man that stand in the foreground but the mental ones. Life at sea is about the spiritual journey; it clears and refreshes the mind to help it focus on personal development and self-determination.

Conrad draws a clear distinction between sailors who are well connected with the sea and those who are not. In *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* it is the sailor Donkin who despite his experience of the sublime does not establish a connection with the sea. While everyone on board grows closer and closer together on their journey, Donkin refuses to take care of his responsibilities and keeps alienating himself from the crew. Donkin’s inappropriate behavior demonstrates his disconnection from the sea. When it is Donkin’s turn to relieve Singleton, who has been in charge of the wheel for more than thirty hours, Donkin refuses to do his job and instead “complain[s] about pains in all his bones” (59). Instead of making Donkin do his duty, Davis, another sailor, takes over Donkin’s responsibility despite his own pains. Contrary to the rest of the crew, Donkin does not learn anything from his experience at sea. He goes back to his life on land the way he left it. When Captain Allistoun tells him that he is giving him a bad discharge, Donkin does
not even care since he has no intention of returning to the sea, and the crew notices that he is not one of them. Compared to the rest of the crew, Donkin “had better clothes, had an easy air, appeared more at home” on land than everybody else (105). The chastising force of the ocean did not have an effect on Donkin. He is and will always be connected to the land and not the sea. But while Donkin separated himself from the crew, the journey brought everybody else closer together. And even though the destructive wind initially isolated each sailor from the rest, making him struggle with the forces of nature and fight for his life on his own, it is the preparation before the storm and the aftermath that proves the camaraderie among the crew.

What is most significant to the sailor’s existential journey is that it is the sailor’s decision to face the risks and dangers that are part of a life at sea. It is the sailor’s choice that determines his experience of his environment. The relationship between him and the sea is more complex than simply a fight between man and nature. The struggle would be avoidable if man decided to live a life on land, but the burden of life on land appears to be more painful or less desirable to the sailor than the physical and mental struggles he encounters at sea. It is “the sailor’s consciousness of complete independence from all land affairs” that creates feelings of freedom (The Shadow-Line 16). As the captain and narrator of The Shadow-Line describes, “I had never in my life felt more detached from all earthly goings on” (16). The ship becomes “a fragment detached from the earth” that travels on its own, “lonely and swift like a small planet” (“Narcissus” 18). Being detached from civilization, surrounded by nothing but ultimate wilderness, for the nameless young captain in The Shadow-Line the sea is “pure, safe, and friendly” and “the only remedy for all [his] troubles” that are connected to his life on land (58-9).
At sea, man is exposed to nature, and he has to adjust to its forces to survive its strength. The sailor, however, will never be in control of nature. The success of his voyage does not lie in his power but in his ability to use his skills to adjust to nature’s forces. In the end, man can learn from nature, as the narrator onboard the *Narcissus* explains, “[T]he sea . . . knew all, and would in time infallibly unveil to each the wisdom hidden in all the errors, the certitude that lurks in doubts, the realm of safety and peace beyond the frontiers of sorrow and fear” (85). With its knowledge and wisdom, the sea stands above man, closer to what Christians would call their almighty God, but the sailor by overcoming the sublime can go beyond himself. It is in the moment of sublimity, Schiller declares, that “the physical man and the moral man separate in the most marked manner; for it is exactly in the presence of objects that make us feel at once how limited the former is that the other makes the experience of its force” (n.p.). Through his mind Conrad’s sailor liberates himself from the limits of the physical world and raises himself to a new mental world in which his powers are infinite. Only in a mental state can man take control of himself and surpass the forces of nature because his mind is the only part that distinguishes him from his environment; only then will he find ultimate freedom. As a physical body of the material world, man is and will always be inferior to the natural forces at sea. Like Conrad’s sailor, man must therefore adapt to his environment and use his skills in harmony with nature to fulfill his needs, and he can do so best on board the sailing ship.

**Sailing Ships, Steamships, and the Sailor’s Disconnection from Nature**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, steamships were well on their way to replace sailing ships (Cohen 179). When Conrad became a sailor in 1875, the use of
sailing ships was already on the decline. Conrad detested the development of steam travel taking over the role of sail, but he nonetheless gave it a try. Throughout his career as a seaman, Conrad sought work on numerous steam-powered ships and, according to Cohen, even tried to find “work as a pilot on the Suez Canal,” a manmade waterway that helped lead to the extinction of the sailing ship (201). The Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, opened after ten years of construction work in November 1869. Even though the use of the Suez Canal as the route of choice for commercial trading ships increased only slowly because it was simply too expensive for most companies, in his work Conrad depicts it as a symbol for the end of the era of the sailing ship (Larabee 53-4). In his second novel, An Outcast of the Islands (1896), the narrator declares the canal not only to be the cause of death for the sailing ship but also for the mystery of the sea. He calls it an “inscrutable mystery,” which it was until the French mind set the Egyptian muscle in motion and produced a dismal but profitable ditch. Then a great pall of smoke sent out by countless steamboats was spread over the restless mirror of the Infinite. The hand of the engineer tore down the veil of the terrible beauty in order that greedy and faithless landlubbers might pocket dividends. The mystery was destroyed. (14)

Conrad dwells in the nostalgia of the old days when the sea was still “irresistible in its anger, capricious, enticing, illogical, irresponsible […]. It cast a spell, it gave joy, it lulled gently into boundless faith; then with quick and causeless anger it killed. But its cruelty was redeemed by the charm of its inscrutable mystery” (14). According to Conrad, this mystery was not destroyed from within but from outside by the greed and dishonesty that
came from the landlubbers who had solid ground under their feet. Their only ambition was money and not the spiritual liberation that the sailor was hoping to find. The progress in engineering that promoted the use of steamships destroyed the mystery of the sailor’s life by making it more predictable, safer, and less dependent on the forces of nature.

The death of the sailing ship is the symbol for the end of an era, which reaches its climax in one of Conrad’s short stories. “Youth” (1902) is a story about the young sailor, Marlow, and his experience on board the sailing ship Judea. This is the same Marlow the reader already knows from Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim, but in “Youth” the story Marlow tells his audience goes further back in time than his journey to the African continent or his experience in Patusan. This is the story of a young, inexperienced Marlow who gains knowledge and skills on board the Judea. But compared to Marlow, who is at the prime of his life, the Judea is an old sailing ship that is seeing the last of its days, falling apart slowly but incessantly. It is significant to note that it is not nature that kills the ship but the power of coal. In the beginning of the story, the Judea collides with a steamship but survives the crash. Then it hits bad weather and struggles severely under those conditions and starts leaking badly but is still able to reach the closest harbor. The biggest threat for the ship and its crew comes, in fact, from the cargo inside. Coal was at the time the dominant fuel used worldwide to power the steam engine of the steamship. Ironically, while the coal is the breath of life for the steamship, it is the cause of death for the sailing ship in “Youth.” It sets the ship on fire and lets it slowly burn to “death.” At first it is just smoke that “forced itself through bulkheads and covers” (131). Then the cargo explodes, but the ship keeps sailing, and there are no fatalities that could distract
the reader from the ship’s struggle with its own vulnerability and Marlow’s experience with the forces of nature and technology’s impermanence and fallibility.

Conrad goes even further by contrasting the approaching death of the sailing ship with the power of the steamer which comes to save the Judea but “[t]he speed of the towing […] fan[s] the smouldering destruction” (140). In this scenario, the steamer is not the center of attention but a means to show the end of an era for the sailing ship. Marlow is the last generation of sailors who learns the craft of handling a sailing ship. Being young, only twenty, Marlow is burning full of life while the sailing ship, the Judea, ends up burning to death. The Judea has reached the end of its lifespan; once a strong sailing ship, it is now slowly but gradually falling apart. It has seen the “glamour of youth” and “the fire of it,” but it is now blazing up one more time only to finally go out forever (141). In the end she goes “down, head first, in a great hiss of steam” (147). The steam is a result of the “glowing mass of coal” and the fire, but it is also ironic that the ship goes down with a “hiss of steam” (147). Conrad chooses the power of the steamship to vaporize the powerful sailing ship and obliterate it. The natural resource that fuels the steamship becomes the power that brings the sailing ship to a stop. The era of the sailing ship has thereby come to an end and has made way for the age of the steamship.

Conrad’s apathy of technological progress and his disapproval of steamships goes back to his unusual awareness and familiarity with the sailing ship and nature. Cohen explains, “Conrad was a mariner who turned to a career as a writer because he detested the quality of steam travel, and above all how steam took the art and adventure out of the work of the sea” (200). Conrad knew that once the sailing ship was traded in for the steamship, not only would the sailing ship itself die but also the sailor’s skill in handling
the ship under all environmental circumstances. According to Mark D. Larabee, “Conrad was witnessing a dissociation of effort from craftsmanship, brought about by the less complex technical demands of work in and around steamships” (67). As a result, “deckhands had come to be seen as less important to the business of seamanship in the age of steam than they had been before—becoming little more than unskilled laborers” (Larabee 67). The emphasis lies on “unskilled.” While the technology on board the ships advanced, the skill of the sailor continuously decreased.

For Conrad the loss of skill among sailors was tragic because he saw it as an art form that was going to become extinct with the death of the sailing ship. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad describes the demise of the sailor’s sailing skills as “an art whose fine form seems […] on its way to the overshadowed Valley of Oblivion” (23). Conrad believed that once the understanding of the art was lost, it would never be regained. Because of his devotion to his craft, Conrad saw himself as a seaman of the old generation who got to experience the strength, vitality, and versatility of the sailing ship (23). He was a sailor who believed in the advantages of the sailing ship and regarded the sailor’s good service to a ship not only as his duty and talent but his “fine art” (23). Every sailing ship is different—has its own character—and needs to be handled differently. Conrad claims:

> It requires not only the knowledge of the general principles of sailing, but a particular acquaintance with the character of the craft. All vessels are handled in the same way as far as theory goes, just as you may deal with all men on broad and rigid principles. But if you want that success in life which comes from the affection and confidence of your fellows, then with
no two men, however similar they may appear in their nature, will you
deal in the same way. (*The Mirror of the Sea* 21)

It is the good sailor’s responsibility to set himself in tune with the ship. To do so he needs not only his learned skills but also a susceptibility to the sea that lets him feel and anticipate upcoming changes in the environment and that makes him adjust his handling of the ship; thus, it is not only the ship that requires the sailor’s special attention but also the ship’s environment—nature itself.

There is interdependence among the sailing ship, the sailor, and nature that is lost on board a steamship. The crew of a steamship does not have “the same quality of intimacy with nature” because it is not essential to the success of the journey (*The Mirror of the Sea* 23). What is lost in this distance from nature is a sensibility toward the changes in weather and the weather’s effect on the ship. What is also lost is the sailor’s admiration of the sublimity of nature. No longer do the forces of nature appear as powerful and destructible as they did in the past even if nature’s less frightening appearance may be misleading and may still show its true force during a typhoon. The loss of dependence on the wind can tempt the sailor to underestimate the power of nature. Furthermore, without the dependence on wind, the sailor’s job, according to Conrad, “is [no longer] an individual, temperamental achievement, but simply the skilled use of a captured force, merely another step forward upon the way of universal conquest,” and with the loss of dependence and instead the expansion of power comes the loss of interest in the forces of nature (23). The sailor’s indifference toward nature destroys his intimacy with it. As long as he is taking care of his sailing ship, he has to be aware and adjust to all the different types of winds (e.g., the Westerly, South-Westerly, or Easterly Wind) that
can hit the ship when traveling across the seas and oceans. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad proposes:

> There is no part of the world [...] which is not under the sway of a reigning wind, the sovereign of its typical weather. The wind rules the aspects of the sky and the action of the sea. But no wind rules unchallenged his realm of land and water. As with the kingdoms of the earth, there are regions more turbulent than others. (69)

The sailor of the sailing ship preferably knows where he needs to be prepared for more turbulence, and he receives that knowledge not simply from books but by trusting his senses, especially his eyes and ears. Besides the importance of seeing the weather approach, according to Conrad, the “hearing plays a perceptible part in gauging the force of the wind” (31). For a skilled and mindful sailor his experience, senses, and quick adaptability can be more important and helpful than his barometer because there is always the chance that the weather will “deceive a scientific instrument” (83). For example, “[e]asterly weather,” Conrad explains, “is generally clear, [...] but whatever its mood, there is something uncanny in its nature” because no “barometer will give warning of an easterly gale, were it ever so wet” (83). In the calmness of the ship’s motion and its responsiveness to wind, the ship progresses in a naturally interdependent motion with the forces of nature, but when the gale hits the ship, the sailor’s senses have to be those of the sailing ship in that “the stress upon his body [makes] him judge of the strain upon the ship’s masts,” which is one of the weakest parts of the ship (*The Mirror of the Sea* 31).

The sailor of a sailing ship always has to adapt and react as quickly as possible to changes in his environment, much faster than the sailor of the steamship that is not
dependent on the weather, and the sailor’s goal on board the sailing ship is therefore to quickly reestablish the balanced interaction between ship and wind.

As a result of the steamship’s stronger resistance to waves and its independence from wind, the sailor’s relationship with the sea became less sensitive and was not challenged unless in extreme weather conditions. During a typhoon, the sailor, however, still got to experience the sublimity of nature but now without the experience, sensitivity, and the skill former sailors had during their days on board the sailing ships. Typhoon tells the story of the steamer Nan-Shan, which sails with a mostly British crew not under the British but the Siamese flag. The captain of the ship, MacWhirr, is a successful but naïve master of steamships who until this point is vastly inexperienced with bad sea weather.13 Because of his inexperience, naivety, and lack of intuition, MacWhirr, instead of navigating his steamer around the approaching storm, steers right into it. MacWhirr, the most simple-minded of all of Conrad’s captains, Conrad describes as “simply ordinary, irresponsive, and unruffled” (3).14 Typhoon shows that even a captain as oblivious as MacWhirr can manage to successfully complete a steamship’s journey, even when steering right into a typhoon. If he had had the command over a sailing ship, undoubtedly the journey would have been deadly for some or all of his crew and passengers because MacWhirr is not in tune with nature. Even when the barometer, an instrument that is known for its accuracy in predicting bad weather, shows that some outrageous weather is approaching, MacWhirr cannot comprehend the magnitude of what is coming. Even if MacWhirr had “been informed by an indisputable authority that the end of the world was to be finally accomplished by a catastrophic disturbance of the atmosphere, he would have assimilated the information under the simple idea of dirty weather, and no other,
because he had no experience of cataclysms, and belief does not necessarily imply comprehension” (15). Until this point MacWhirr has only experienced rather calm waters, which means he has seen the beautiful side of the sea, but a sailor does not know the sea until he has experienced its sublimity as well. With intent, Conrad makes the naïve and inexperienced MacWhirr not the captain of a sailing ship but of an “exceptionally steady” steamer (*Typhoon* 6). When the typhoon approaches the *Nan-Shan*, MacWhirr does not want to change the course of his ship because it is not a sailing ship. He believes that it would not make any sense for a steamer that is not dependent on the weather to move around it. He exclaims to Jukes, “A gale is a gale, […] and a full-powered steam-ship has got to face it” (*Typhoon* 25). Instead of moving around it, MacWhirr steers his ship right into the storm and therefore challenges nature. His direct steering into the storm is a direct confrontation with the sublime, but until the point when he actually has to face the worst of the storm, he does not feel any fear. He does not feel terror until the moment he starts doubting if the ship is going to make it through the typhoon. While the sailor of the sailing ship still holds his respect for nature from the outset of the journey because of his dependence on it, the steamship captain regains his respect for nature when he finds himself confronted with the sublime. The direct confrontation with the sublime makes MacWhirr realize not only the frailty of his technologically advanced ship but also nature’s unbounded superiority to man.

Because of his naivety, MacWhirr never comes to the point of fully comprehending the danger he is in, which, once he has steered his ship into the storm, comes as a blessing in disguise. As a result of his inexperience, MacWhirr displays a high level of confidence that calms down his crew. One may think, like Cedric Watts, that
MacWhirr’s unruffled confidence and “courage to take the ship and her crew through [the typhoon]” makes up for his ignorance and lack of professionalism; however, it is not his courage that saves him but the material of his ship (xii). It is interesting to note that the person Captain MacWhirr is based on is, according to Watts, John McWhir, captain of the sailing ship Highland Forest (xxxi). MacWhirr’s courage therefore might have been based on McWhir since Conrad regarded him “as a sustaining presence when he was out of sight” (xxxi). But despite the similar personality traits, Conrad chose to give his fictional captain, MacWhirr, the command of a steamer and not a sailing ship. By changing the vessel to that of a steamship, Conrad redirects the focus of the novella from the sailor’s usual struggle with nature’s forces to the more important struggle with his ignorance and delusion of his superiority to nature. When confronted with a typhoon, the simple-mindedness found in MacWhirr would probably not have led to a successful journey if it had not been for the steamship. The choice to portray MacWhirr as irresponsive is not only an emphasis on the captain’s courage, but it is also an emphasis on the lack of skill needed on board a ship that is powered by steam. The clash of steamer and weather is then a conflict between industrialism and nature in which man is the instigator.

Interestingly, Typhoon is not the only story among Conrad’s works that portrays a steamship that is commanded by an inadequate captain. In Lord Jim, the tragic incident of a crew abandoning their ship happens on board a steamship as well. The commander of the Patna is an incompetent captain who has already proven his inability to command a ship years ago when he ended her journey in a shipwreck. Since he had been at fault, “he probably did not care to remember himself the exact locality, nor yet the cause of his
shipwreck” (*Lord Jim* 19). It was only due to his youth that they kicked him quietly out of his ship, and the only reason they put him back on duty was the expansion of steam navigation and that “men of his craft [were] being scarce at first” (19). The captain of the *Patna* was not chosen for his skills but simply for the high demand of ship commanders. Conrad therefore calls into question the necessity of skill to command a steamship, and a novel like *Lord Jim* demonstrates that. Captains who had not been capable enough to be in charge of a sailing ship were suddenly in command of steamships.

The difference that Conrad draws between the captains of sailing ships and the captains of steamships in his works could not be larger. While he describes the captain of the *Patna* as not in control of himself—“he stumbled several times” and was acting as if “he had been stone-blind”—and MacWhirr as “simply ordinary, irresponsible, and unruffled,” Conrad draws a very different and more impressive picture of Tom Lingard, the captain of the sailing ship *Flash* in Conrad’s second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands* (*Lord Jim* 23, *Typhoon* 3).17 Contrary to MacWhirr,

Tom Lingard was a master, a lover, a servant of the sea. The sea took him young, fashioned him body and soul; gave him his fierce aspect, his loud voice, his fearless eyes, his stupidly guileless heart. Generously it gave him his absurd faith in himself, his universal love of creation, his wide indulgence, his contemptuous severity, his straightforward simplicity of motive and honesty of aim. (*Outcast* 14)

In his description of Lingard, the narrator emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between Lingard and the sea. The narrator describes him as “master” as well as “servant of the sea,” thereby making him superior as well as inferior to the sea, which creates a balance
between the human and his environment. However, according to the narrator, Lingard has the close and harmonious relationship with the sea not because of his masculinity but because of his femininity (14-5). The sea has made Lingard “womanlike,” which is not only a product of the sea but also the reason why “the sea served him humbly and let him bask unharmed” (15). While Conrad included only a small number of female characters in his works, for which he has been criticized repeatedly, Conrad establishes a connection between man and nature that is based on femininity and is made possible through the absence of female characters. While not being exposed to women, Conrad’s sailor receives the chance to explore not only his masculinity but also his femininity through his confrontation with nature; Conrad thereby gives nature a quite unusual role. Most commonly nature, as well as a woman, is perceived as the other through which man establishes his identity. By looking at the other, man knows what he is not. Talking about the importance of dualisms for humans’, particularly males’, understanding of themselves and the world and their domination of it, Donna Haraway explains that Western dualisms “have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self” (35). Some of the most problematic dualisms, according to Haraway, “are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man” (35). The problem of these dualisms is not that one is the opposite of the other but that with the opposition usually comes a judgment—a judgment of one being better than the other. Instead of seeing the other as the counterpart of the self that completes the self, dualisms often work as exclusions in that one is the
principal subject or the norm that is defined by the subordinate object or the exception. In a patriarchal world, the principal subject is man, and everything that is not man—woman, animal, nature—is subordinate to man (except for God, the “man of men” in a patriarchal world in whose image men were created).

Man and nature can be regarded as another dualism. Throughout the centuries and across different cultures, nature has been continuously associated with femininity but in two deviating senses. In the first sense, Kate Soper declares in her essay, “Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature,” that Nature is identified with the body of laws, principles and processes […]. But ‘she’ is also nature conceived as spatial territory, as the land or earth which is tamed and tilled in agriculture (and with this we may associate a tendency to feminize nature […]). In both these conceptions, nature is allegorized as either a powerful maternal force, the womb of all human production, or as the site of sexual enticement and ultimate seduction. Nature is both the generative source, but also the potential spouse of science, to be wooed, won, and if necessary forced to submit to intercourse. (141)

Nature, when associated with femininity, is therefore usually the opposition to man. However, if nature is perceived as female and the human character in the relationship is female or feminine as well, then the connection between the person and nature changes and is no longer a dualism, which means no longer an opposition of two genders that can only connect through intercourse where one has to submit to the other. Instead, there is a connection that grows out of similarity and understanding of the other and this is the case of Lingard and his relationship with the sea. Conrad’s successful sailors of sailing ships,
such as Lingard, do not define themselves through their differences but through their similarities with the sea in that in Conrad’s work both can be “fierce,” “loud,” and “fearless,” which are very strong and masculine adjectives (An Outcast of the Islands 14). Conrad thus abrogates these major dualisms of male/female, masculine/feminine, and mankind/nature in his maritime fiction, and through this abrogation he creates a closer connection between man and nature.  

In The Mirror of the Sea, Conrad shows that he doubts and even opposes the advantages of technological progress in sea navigation because at sea technological advances create a division between man and nature. Conrad, John Palmer states, believed that “commerce and machinery and material progress—‘the land,’ wherever [Conrad] is employing the symbolic dichotomy of land-and-sea—[destroy] human sensibility and self-reliance” (Introduction 3). The “man of masts and sails” knows the sea as “an intimate companion” (The Mirror of the Sea 61). Like Lingard, he fears the sea “with the wise fear of a brave man [. . .] and is grateful to it, with the gratitude of an honest heart” (An Outcast of the Islands 15). On his journeys the sailor is dependent “upon the very forces that, friendly to-day, without changing their nature, by the mere putting forth of their might, become dangerous to-morrow, make for that sense of fellowship which modern seamen, good men as they are, cannot hope to know” because their steamships are safe and independent from wind and weather (The Mirror of the Sea 61). It is “[t]he machinery, the steel, the fire, the steam, [that] have stepped in between the man and the sea” (61-2). Because of society’s technological advances, man has become ignorant toward gales, and, thus, Conrad believes that the interconnection among ship, crew, and nature is destroyed with the extinction of the sailing ship. Through continuous advances
in technology, man keeps regressing instead of progressing. The use of new technologies such as steamships leads to an upsurge in man’s incompetence. Conrad therefore depicts the steamer, compared to the liveliness of the sailing ship, as a dead piece of progress. In “The End of the Tether” (1902), Captain Whalley describes the steamer as “a dead thing” that “without the hiss of steam, the clangs of iron in her breast – lies there as cold and still and pulseless as a corpse” while the sailing ship “somehow seems always ready to spring into life with the breath of the incorruptible heavens” (n.p.). The steamer might make the sailor’s life safer and easier, but this new leisure is not desirable according to Conrad because it stultifies the sailor’s vocation and damages his respect for nature. With the death of the sailing ship ends an era of sailors who had not only a close relationship with their ship but also with nature. The sailor’s understanding of nature is lost with his loss of dependence on nature’s forces.

Sustaining a Close Relationship with Nature

In the Preface to The Nigger of the “Narcissus,” Conrad declares, “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see” (280). Among the things that Conrad wants his readers to see are the ultimate freedom and transcendence that can only be found at sea and not on land, the disadvantages of progress that destroy the intimate relationship between the sailor and the sea and which lead to man’s mental regression, and the necessity of solidarity for a successful sea journey not only among crewmembers but also between the sailor and the sea.

Numerous critics such as Ian Watt and Cedric Watts have discussed Conrad’s theme of solidarity among crewmembers; however, Conrad’s portrayal of solidarity
between the sailor and the sea should not be disregarded. Conrad draws a very intimate and advantageous relationship between the sailor and nature, which is ultimately damaged by technological progress and hence the sailor’s loss of skill and sensibility. As much as there is a necessary bond between sailors, according to Conrad, the union between sailor and sea is equally important. The sailor should nurture his natural connection with his environment for his own mental health. Conrad’s works indicate that man’s sensitivity and therefore femininity, which connects man to nature, should not be discredited as a simple primitive instinct because it is not a disadvantage but in fact an advantage for man. Nature is not only man’s mirror to his own identity, but it is also an intimate companion through which he can complete his wisdom, and man can achieve his personal transcendence not through technological progress but through the exploration of his femininity and physical limits.

What makes Conrad’s maritime fiction significant for us today is not simply his descriptive narrative of man’s confrontation with the sublime. What makes his works significant for us today is the prediction found in his works that already foresees not only man’s contemporary disconnection from nature but also the general insensitivity and mental regression that is caused by this disconnection. Instead of advocating modernization and the exploitation of nature, Conrad’s works show the benefit of a high sensitivity and respect for the environment and imply the need for a strong interconnected relationship between nature and man not for nature’s but for man’s sake. While nature can exist autonomously, Conrad’s works imply that man will always be dependent on his physical as well as mental nourishment through nature.
It is Conrad’s aspect of continuing or, if it has been lost, reestablishing communication with nature that makes his maritime novels, novellas, and short stories environmentally oriented works and significant for a contemporary ecologically sustainable human society. Despite the sailor’s experience of reason when facing the sublime, Conrad’s works do not imply that reason should replace the sensuous; instead, embracing the beautiful is equally important to our experience of the sublime because it is the physical world that connects humans to nature. In his essay on “Nature and Silence,” which provides a brief history of nature’s lack of a voice in society’s discourse on it, Christopher Manes explicates that it should not be “nostalgia for an animistic past” that should drive mankind “to reestablish communication with nature” but our inevitable relationship with it which “precludes a speaking world” (25). Humans have always been a part of nature, not only during primeval times, and this relationship should not be discredited nor can we disavow it. Admitting our connection with nature will not make us more primitive; thus, mankind should overcome its fear of associating itself with nature. Conrad already guides the way toward a healthy admittance and embrace of our primitive origins. Throughout his works, Conrad never denies mankind’s primitive past and the animalistic attributes that are still alive within humans; however, it is not the old primitive state of mankind Conrad wants to regain. Instead, it is the union of sensations and reason that is the desirable state of transcendence that liberates man without alienating him from his environment. It is Schiller’s idea of the union of the sensuous and reason that, after all, Conrad’s works aim to accomplish because it is this union that brings perfect harmony to man and his relationship with nature.
What Conrad’s works visualize is something that has become even clearer over the course of the twentieth and the current twenty-first century and that is that man must change his attitude toward nature and move his interdependence with his environment toward an ecologically sustainable human society instead of working toward complete autonomy from nature. A first step toward this change in attitude can be a change of nature’s role in fictional narratives. Manes declares that “[f]or half a millennium, ‘Man’ has been the center of conversation in the West. This fictional character has occluded the natural world, leaving it voiceless and subjectless” (25). But not every author has ignored nature’s voice. Authors like Conrad have given the environment a powerful presence in their works that is no simple scenery or stage set but, according to Scott Russell Sanders, an “energizing medium from which human lives emerge and by which those lives are bounded and measured” (183). Keeping nature alive, powerful, and speaking is a strong first step toward an organic relationship between mankind and nature, and Conrad already set standards for this type of relationship more than a century ago.
CHAPTER III

“THROUGH THE TREE”:
CONRAD’S IMPRESSIONS OF NATURE IN HIS JUNGLE FICTION

In Conrad’s fiction, the sea is the place where a man can reestablish his communication with nature. It is through man’s confrontation with the sublime in a state of simplicity that he can reach the desired state of transcendence. The sea takes man away from his past and with its exceptional vigor forces man to reevaluate his whole being. The forest in Conrad’s fiction plays the opposite role; it takes man right back to his past and without interference watches him get lost in his materialistic desires. When surrounded by forest, Conrad’s protagonists reach anything but a state of transcendence.

Conrad’s first two novels, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), and one of his first short stories, “The Lagoon” (1897), are set in the rainforests of what the Dutch colonizers used to call the Malay Archipelago and what is known today as Indonesia. Two other works of his early writing career, the short story “An Outpost of Progress” (1897) and the novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899/1902), are also set in the rainforest, but this time Conrad chose the tropical forests along the African Congo River. The common setting of the forest, similar to the sea, is not simply an exotic background to make the stories more interesting. The forests along the Congo and in the Malay Archipelago function as significant characters that create their own impressions of the invaders of their space. Compared to Conrad’s sea, the Asian and African forests are passive characters that mainly play the roles of observers, but despite their passivity, their presence is strong and significant. In Conrad’s world, both the sea and the land are man’s antagonists and are superior to him, but while the sea challenges man and thereby pulls
him both closer to nature and to a state of transcendence, the land stands back and thereby lets man lose himself in his desires for power and possessions. The result is not a powerful man but a destroyed, miserable, and usually dead man who lost himself in his materialistic urges and could not find his way back to a clear conscience.

For many centuries, forests have been regarded as a place of darkness that is outside the law. In fiction and poetry they have been portrayed as a common symbol for the darkness within humans. Robert Pogue Harrison claims that the forests’ bad reputation was first of all caused by the tree canopy that covered the heavens. Since ancient times, Harrison argues, “we have been a civilization of sky-worshippers, children of a celestial father” (6). The tree canopy with its abundance of leaves makes it impossible for the worshipper to see the sky when they are inside the woods. The forest was therefore perceived as a barrier between humans and their God and became more and more the place of the godless and lawless. Because of its lawless nature, during the early Middle Ages the forest became a haven for “outcasts, the mad, the lovers, brigands, hermits, saints, lepers, the maquis, fugitives, misfits, the persecuted, [and] the wild men” (Harrison 61). The forest was considered outside the legal system of human society, which not only made it attractive as a hideaway but also offered the option to “rise above or sink below the human level” (61). We see characters going through transformations inside forests in many literary works, for instance, in Shakespeare. According to Northrop Frye, the action in Shakespeare “begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there [. . .], and returns to the normal world” (170). But no matter how far the forest is removed from civilization, according to Harrison, it remains “a strange reflection of the order” of civil society in
which society could recognize its own “absurdity, or corruption, or contradiction, or arbitrariness, or even its virtues” (63).\footnote{20}

On the surface it seems that Conrad does not diverge from the forest’s negative image. Most of his characters perceive the forest as an “impenetrable darkness” that looks “vengeful” onto its invaders (Heart of Darkness 47, 73). However, Conrad’s image of the forest is not that simple for he draws a distinction between the object and the viewer’s perception of it and thereby demonstrates the damaging disconnection between the two. Oftentimes, the characters’ impressions of their environment are a reflection of their thoughts and feelings and not a representative image of the land. In Heart of Darkness, for instance, when the “harlequin” talks to Marlow about how Kurtz made him “see things,” Marlow’s impression of his environment shows the exact opposite of visibility (52, 55). According to Marlow, “[N]ever before did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky appear […] so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness” (55). Marlow’s impression of the land is in no way positive, in fact, it creates fear and despair. The disconnection that seems apparent between man and nature looks like an obvious result of nature’s undesirable and unapproachable appearance, but Marlow’s impression of nature is an immediate response to the harlequin’s words about Kurtz. In fact, Marlow’s words about nature call into question the harlequin’s claim of Kurtz making him see things, which is reiterated by Marlow’s rhetorical question: “And ever since you have been with him, of course?” (55). Marlow’s rhetorical question with its two little words “of course” stresses his doubts concerning the authenticity of the man’s words. In the course of the novella, it becomes clear that instead of making his fellow men see things, Kurtz blurs their vision of
themselves and their environment. Kurtz does not symbolize man’s proximity to nature and reality but his misunderstanding of it, a misunderstanding that is caused by man’s humanistic view of the world. In his works, Conrad demonstrates how man does not see nature for nature’s sake but for his own sake. A close ecocritical reading of Conrad’s jungle fiction will reveal the destructive separation between man and nature that Conrad discloses in his works.

Our separation from nature is primarily built on Cartesian dualism, which has controlled Western society’s way of thinking for centuries. Cartesian dualism is based on René Descartes’s theory of the division between mind and matter, which is encompassed in his statement “COGITO ERGO SUM” (“I think, therefore I am”) (Descartes n.p.). Ever since Descartes introduced his mechanistic worldview, humans in Western society have regarded their minds as superior to their bodies and have therefore equated their identities more closely with their minds. The more humans identified themselves with their rational thinking, the further they estranged themselves from their bodies and their natural environment. In The Turning Point, Fritjof Capra claims that by “[r]etreating into our minds, we have forgotten how to ‘think’ with our bodies, how to use them as agents of knowing,” and in “doing so we have also cut ourselves off from our natural environment and have forgotten how to commune and cooperate with its rich variety of living organisms” (40). For centuries, Western society has used Cartesian dualism as an excuse to exploit everything that is inferior to the mind of the Western man: women, non-Western men, animals, plants, the earth’s soil, etc. According to Laura Wright, the problem with our dualistic worldview is that it “always privileges one aspect of the binary and, as a seminal aspect of Western thought, is dependent on notions of self and
other that underscore and justify the West’s intrusion into non-Western cultures” (5-6). Our dualistic worldview made us believe that we had the right to intrude non-Western cultures; thus, if we want to dismantle imperialism, we need to overcome our binary thinking, and it is the goal of ecocriticism to help us succeed. Instead of continuing the dualistic worldview that has controlled us for so long, Kathleen Wallace and Karla Armbruster claim that ecocriticism tries to overcome the dualism by “understanding nature and culture as interwoven” rather than as two separate entities (4). For many years, ecocriticism focused on nonfictional nature writings to give nature a voice; however, the idea of favoring nature over culture may reinforce Western society’s dualistic worldview simply in favor of nature, which would not weaken our concept of dualism but would actually strengthen it (4). Instead of privileging one over the other, it is the effect of both on each other that should be the focus.

Ecocriticism has therefore changed its focus and has started investigating fictional literature as well, for in order to see and comprehend the interconnection between nature and culture, it is imperative to explore the role of nature in fictional literature. Joseph Meeker states that “the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species” that offers us insight into the relationships of humans with nature (4). Looking at contemporary and also earlier literature can further our understanding of the origin and development of Western society’s complicated relationship with nature. This chapter will demonstrate how Conrad, an author who wrote more than a century ago, consciously or unconsciously portrays the division between man and nature as a problem for man that will eventually lead to his own destruction. Conrad draws an overall positive impression of the forest that depicts nature as wiser than man. Instead of blaming the forest for man’s
shallow desires, Conrad judges man himself. He describes the forest as a quiet observer who remains uninvolved while the European colonizer is portrayed as a parasite that exploits and slowly suffocates its host.

To look at Conrad’s impressions of nature furthers our overall understanding not only of his works but also of Western society’s difficult relationship with the environment; however, to understand Conrad’s impressions of man and nature, it is important not to take Conrad’s works out of their colonial context. To get a better understanding of Conrad’s perception of society and the environment, one has to regard Conrad’s works not only from an ecocritical but also from a postcolonial perspective. According to Rob Nixon, what both fields, ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, have in common is that their priorities are connected to “movements of social change”; thus, in recent years ecocritics have begun incorporating postcolonial theory into the field of ecocriticism (233). Compared to ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, postcolonial ecocriticism has an even stronger focus on its political agenda (Huggan and Tiffin 12). In regard to literature, postcolonial ecocriticism continues to investigate the “aesthetic function” of a novel but also advocates its potential to be “a catalyst for social action” and is not only an “exploratory literary analysis” but “a full-fledged form of engaged cultural critique” (12). Postcolonial ecocriticism “draw[s] attention to [the novel’s] social and political usefulness [and] its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world” (14). According to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, for decades “[p]ostcolonialism’s major theoretical concerns [have been] otherness, racism and miscegenation, language, translation, the trope of cannibalism, voice and the problems of speaking of and for others—to name just a few” (135). The goal has always
been to dismantle colonialism and its racist ideologies, but to reach a post-colonial and post-imperial community, our focus must not only be to defeat racism but also anthropocentrism. Huggan and Tiffin declare that “in assuming a natural prioritization of humans and human interests over those of other species on earth, we are both generating and repeating the racist ideologies of imperialism on a planetary scale” (6). To create a “genuinely post-imperial, environmentally based conception of community,” we have to reassess humans’ role in nature and reverse our ingrained anthropocentric conceptions of humans against nature to a more ecocentric idea of humans within nature, and this reassessment is more relevant today than ever before (6).

Conrad dismantles anthropocentrism in his works by taking nature out of man’s shadow. He does not simply set it up as a backdrop or as “the other world” but instead turns it into a character that is superior to the human protagonists in the stories. As discussed in Chapter II, in The Nigger of the “Narcissus” man can only achieve “completed wisdom” through the “perfect wisdom of [the sea’s] grace” (61, 55). The sublime sea has a chastising effect on the sailor that forces him to simplify his life and focus on life’s essentials; the simplicity of his new life brings the sailor closer to nature and thereby closer to his desired “perfect wisdom” (55). If nature stands back and does not challenge man, as the forest in Conrad’s jungle fiction, man is not driven to simplify his life; instead, he tries to enrich it with materialistic wealth. The drive for power and possessions causes characters like Kurtz, Kayerts, Carlier, and Almayer to get disoriented and lose themselves in their materialistic urges, and eventually it ends in the character’s own destruction.
Over the years critics like Chinua Achebe have continuously criticized Conrad for deliberately setting up Africa and Asia as “the other world” or “antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization” only to explore the deficiencies of the European colonizers (Phillips and Achebe 60). Conrad’s impressions of everything that is not European are however more complex. When one considers *Heart of Darkness* in relation to Conrad’s other jungle stories, particularly those set in the Malay Archipelago, the meaning of the novella becomes more distinct. In his jungle fiction, Conrad continuously tears apart Western civilization’s idea of its superiority over other cultures and nature and, according to Michael Mayer, uses “nature as a decolonizing force” (181). He personifies nature in his works, but he does so to emphasize its significance. Conrad makes nature a protagonist that has more wisdom than man, but instead of encouraging a competition between man and nature, Conrad indicates again and again that man’s separation from his environment will never be in his best interest. Separating himself from nature does not stop man from regressing; in fact, as Chapter II clearly demonstrates, separating himself from nature furthers man’s regression. Conrad’s jungle stories demonstrate that a man who has not known anything but the regulating structures of society and who is not challenged by nature to rise above his human limitations will likely get overwhelmed by the individual freedom he finds. As we can see in characters like Kurtz, Kayerts, or Carlier, the freedom these characters find in the wilderness does not push them to evolve but instead allows them to lie back and get corrupted by their materialistic desires. These men do not become primitive beings who are part of nature; they become corrupted humans who exploit their environment for their own gain.
The question is what could prevent man from exploiting his environment. Hans Peter Duerr believes that communication between man and nature would stop man’s exploitation of it. He claims that “people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them” (92). Unfortunately, according to Christopher Manes, “our culture has gone a long way to demonstrate that the converse of [Duerr’s] statement is also true” (16). Manes declares that nature has become no more than a “mute object” in our humanistic discourse, but this needs to stop (17). If we want to “reestablish communication with nature,” we need to “change the subject” (25, 26). Manes argues that “we need to find new ways to talk about human freedom, worth, and purpose, without eclipsing, depreciating, and objectifying the nonhuman world” (24). Turning nature back into an expressive subject may create a ground for communication between man and nature that will bring man closer to nature again.

But even if we want to give nature its own voice, we do not need to attempt to create it without any humanistic rhetoric because it would not work. Nature outside of our perception exists autonomously, but our perception of it will always be shaped by our human comprehension. According to William Cronon, “The work of literary scholars, anthropologists, cultural historians, and critical theorists over the past several decades has yielded abundant evidence that our idea of ‘nature’ is not nearly as natural as it seems. Instead, it is a profoundly human construction” (25). Even though it is the only impression we know, Sambit Panigrahi claims that the nature the way we see is not “the real Nature” but only our subjective perception of it (23). Everything that we feel—no matter if it is sadness, fear, or happiness— influences our perception and therefore changes our view of our environment. We end up projecting our own feelings onto nature.
and thereby “render[] meaning to it,” which is something we see in Conrad’s work (23). Conrad’s narrators and characters often have inconsistent perceptions of nature. They sometimes describe nature as silent and innocent and at other times as vengeful. These inconsistencies demonstrate not only the changes in man’s feelings but also his process of making sense of his feelings by looking at the world around him. Panigrahi claims “that this is a part of man’s meaning-making process through which he constructs an image of Nature according to his whims, fancies, and imagination” (27). Our perception of nature is, according to Cronon, “so entangled with our own values and assumptions that [our usage of] the word ‘nature’ says as much about ourselves as about the things we label with that word” (25). When Conrad’s characters leave their homes to live a life in the wilderness, they are not leaving behind their past. Their life in society is a part of their being that influences the way they perceive their new environment. However, until this point in their lives, the eyes and legal system of society supervised them. Once on their own, it is up to the protagonists to decide what of all the things they learned from society they want to continue to follow. To do so, Marlow exclaims in *Heart of Darkness* that man “must fall back upon [his] own innate strength, upon [his] own capacity for faithfulness” (49). When society is no longer close enough to control him, man has to set his own boundaries. Whether he continues his society’s morals or not depends on no one but him.

Characters like Kurtz, Kayerts, or Carlier lack the innate strength to continue their society’s morals, but instead of searching for the origin of this failure inside themselves, Conrad’s characters follow their human inclinations and search for the cause of their failure in their environment. Panigrahi states, “Failing to comprehend the absurd
incongruities of his own heart, [man] puts all the blame onto the world of Nature” (9).

This chapter will show that Conrad is aware of the influence of man’s feelings on his perception of nature. Conrad draws a distinction between what the jungle is and what man makes of it. He never describes the forest as being innately bad. What he does describe is what happens to man when he enters an environment that is not only foreign to him but also outside the view of his society’s legal system. In Conrad’s works, what Western man brings to this to him unfamiliar African or Asian environment is not light or enlightenment but a simple white façade made out of white linen that simulates purity and wisdom. Instead of adjusting to his new environment, Western man furthers his disconnection from nature to continue his exploitation of it. He is a parasite that takes advantage of his host without noticing that by advancing nature’s destruction he also furthers his own.

**Conrad’s Symbolism of Trees and Parasites**

Even though *Heart of Darkness* was initially set out to be a critique of colonialism, the novella has been criticized for being too racist because Conrad’s criticism is not as frank and condemning as we expect from writers today. However, a closer look not only at *Heart of Darkness* but also at Conrad’s other jungle fiction shows a very critical Conrad who strongly disapproves of Western concepts of progress and exploitation. In his first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895), Conrad introduces his allegory of the (native) trees and the (Western) parasites who have invaded foreign grounds to steal the trees’ resources and to eventually cause their death. According to Adeline Koh, *Almayer’s Folly* “is unique among Conrad’s fiction in that it is the sole novel which encourages the reader to identify with the colonized” (643). Conrad’s allegory depicts the
relationship between Western man and natives and inspires the reader to change their viewpoint to regard the situation from the natives’ perspective, but at the same time the allegory also depicts the relationship between Western man and nature and speaks of this relationship in favor of nature. In the novel, Conrad portrays the allegory twice, one followed closely by the other (643). In the first example, the narrator describes the slow murder of the trees committed by the tangled creepers:

The big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bonds by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with the sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks in cable-like coils, leaped from tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction. (*Almayer’s Folly* 106)

The allegory of the trees and creeping parasites is a very clear criticism of colonialism. The trees like the natives have been in this place for a very long time. The creepers, on the other hand, are freshly grown weeds that one day showed up like the Europeans to exploit what had already been in this place for a very long time. The creepers are “merciless” in their exploitation of their host (106). They find their host’s weakest parts and steal from it until there is nothing left but death. To use a specific example that fits Conrad’s impression, the creepers are like the American kudzu weed, transplanted from another country (in the case of Kudzu it is China and Japan) for the supposed benefits of the land, which quickly got out of control and turned into a pest. Richard J. Blaustein, in
his article on Kudzu’s invasion of the American South, describes Kudzu as “an invasive alien species that has penetrated and persisted in the [country] and continues to debilitate natural communities and human well-being” (55). Blaustein’s description of the Kudzu could as well be a description of the Western colonizers who are a “significant threat” to the natives and their natural environment (55). The creeping weed “invades a forest [and] prevents the growth of young hardwoods and kills off other plants” just like the Europeans invaded foreign countries to take control over natives and nature to expand their wealth and power without counting the losses on the natives’ and nature’s side (55).

In *Almayer’s Folly*, shortly after the above quotation, the narrator continues the allegory of the trees and creepers. At this point, the decay of the trees has advanced while the tangled creepers are flourishing more than ever. The narrator describes:

[The forest’s] dark shade, [which is] so enticing in its deceptive appearance of coolness, so repellent with its unrelieved gloom, where lay, entombed and rotting, countless generations of trees, and where their successors stood as if mourning, in the dark green foliage, immense and helpless, awaiting their turn. Only the parasites seemed to live there in a sinuous rush upwards into the air and sunshine, feeding on the dead and the dying alike, and crowning their victims with pink and blue flowers that gleamed amongst the boughs, incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees. (107)

The narrator describes not only the inevitability of death but also the business with death. Not even death stops the creeping man’s greediness for growth and his lust for constant elevation on the social ladder. He keeps rushing upwards until he believes he has reached
the sky, until he believes there is no chance for him to gain more. The “pink and blue flowers” on top are like a symbol of the Europeans’ hypocrisy in their attempt to hide their greed behind their mission of civilizing other countries (107). According to the narrator, the flowers are cruel and simply mocking the native (tree). The parasite’s relationship to its host is completely exploitative and oppressive; the host gains nothing from this connection as much as nature gains nothing from man. In the end the natives, just like the trees, are simply washed out of their own land. In *Almayer’s Folly*, “under [Almayer’s] inattentive eyes” the river was “carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage” down to the coast and into the sea (2). As a symbol for the natives and nature, the trees are washed away by the Europeans and Arabs who have come in like a storm and brought chaos and destruction.

The Forest: an Observing Host

In addition to the allegory of trees and parasites, Conrad continuously uses the trees in his fiction to express his contempt for Western man, but at the same time his works show the awareness that man’s impression of nature is a reflection of his narrators’ or characters’ feelings. Since it is a reflection produced by various protagonists at various times, the images of trees and general nature often change along with the characters’ feelings. We see this, for instance, in the novel *An Outcast of the Islands*, which is about the downfall of Peter Willems, a dishonorable and dishonest man. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, the smell of “the steaming earth” of the forest can in one moment make a character like Willems feel “soothed” and then in another moment make him feel “oppressed” (59,52). Another character, Babalatchi, feels his sorrow making “the clammy heat more oppressive” (166). In these moments, it is not the steamy air that creates these
feelings inside the characters; instead, the air simply exaggerates or makes the narrator
and reader become more aware of the character’s feelings. In other words, the narrator
uses impressions of nature to express the character’s feelings.

At times, Conrad’s omniscient narrators do not describe nature as a reflection of
the characters feelings but use an impression of nature to make an indirect statement
about civilization. One of these instances is the previously discussed allegory of the
creepers and the trees, which is clear criticism of colonialism even if it is implicit. But no
matter whether the narrator uses an impression of nature to state a political argument or if
he uses it to emphasize a character’s feelings, in the end Conrad creates an image that
shows the flaws and failures of man while painting nature as wiser and superior.

Throughout his jungle fiction, Conrad’s omniscient narrators describe nature as
“great” and “expectant” but at the same time as “mute” (Heart of Darkness 26). The
forest always appears passive, but despite its passivity, Conrad’s narrators use it to make
an active statement about the inferiority of man. When Willems, for instance, searches for
a “solitary spot” to “hide his discouragement and weariness,” the nipa palms, according
to the narrator, “nodded their broad leaves over [Willems’s] head as if in contemptuous
pity of the wandering outcast” (Outcast 52). By letting the trees appear as if they felt
“contemptuous pity” for man, Conrad’s narrator personifies the trees, turns them into
characters, and lets them have their own impressions of humans. As the words
“contemptuous pity” indicate, the trees’ opinion of man is pejorative. Instead of letting
the narrator judge the character, Conrad lets the trees—nature—judge man. In doing so,
Conrad raises nature above man and thereby draws a distinction between the two. Like
Marlow’s or other characters’ impressions of nature, the omniscient narrator’s impression
in *An Outcast of the Islands* is another projection of the narrator’s own concepts onto the environment. The narrator articulates his own contempt for man through his descriptions of the trees. There is a German phrase of saying something “through the flower” (“etwas durch die Blume sagen”), which means that someone is pronouncing their criticism in an indirect manner to be more careful and polite in their disapproval. Conrad’s narrator articulates his opinion of man “through the trees,” and by criticizing man, the narrator compliments nature. The narrator describes the trees that surround Willems as superior to him not only in size but also in their solidity. As Willems reaches the Rajah’s stockade, “the big trees would appear on the bank, tall, strong, indifferent in the immense solidity of their life, which endures for ages, to that short and fleeting life in the heart of the man who crept painfully amongst their shadows in search of a refuge from the unceasing reproach of his thoughts” (*Outcast* 52-3). Willems, in contrast to the trees, appears weak, insignificant, and overall pitiful. He appears out of place, not in tune with his environment, and is continuously deceived by the forest’s appearance. According to the narrator, because of their old age, the trees have seen and withstood more than Willems or any man since man will always be living no more than a “fleeting life” (53).

Conrad continues the image of the mute and observing forest in his African fiction. Critics have oftentimes analyzed Conrad’s impression of nature in works like *Heart of Darkness* as dangerous and aggressive because Marlow occasionally uses words like “vengeful” to describe nature (34). The use of a word like “vengeful” supports the idea of nature being an aggressive opponent to the Europeans’ conquest of the land; however, a closer look at Marlow’s impressions of his environment shows that the
aggressions coming from nature are nothing but an echo sent out by the European conquerors, their feelings, and their technological accessories.

On his journey through the African jungle, Marlow realizes that the hostility he perceives is most of all a projection of the Europeans’ own aggressive lifestyle onto the African forest. The most frightful noise coming from the forest is nothing but an echo that was produced by the Europeans’ own boat. Marlow states, “We capered on the iron deck. A frightful clatter came out of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station. It must have made some of the pilgrims sit up in their hovels” (29-30). A German proverb says, “Wie man in den Wald hineinruft, so schallt es heraus.” Literally, this means: The way one calls into the forest, it will echo back, in other words, what you give, you get. Usually this proverb addresses humans' behavior toward other humans. In this case of the steamer and the forest, the example of the echo created by the noise on board the steamboat is symbolic of the relationship between the human invaders and nature. The European invaders have chosen to be in this unfamiliar environment; they have come to exploit this land. The chilling echo, however, is not a response by nature to this invasion. The chilling echo is a product of the invasion, which demonstrates symbolically that the invaders are responsible for the anxiety they feel towards the environment. When nature appears “vengeful” to the invaders, the feeling is a reflection or echo of the invaders’ own feelings and attitude towards nature and the people they want to exploit. The forest works as a mirror for the Europeans. Whatever feelings the colonizers are feeling, those feelings are countered by the surrounding walls of the forest. What echoes back to the pilgrims is
modern society’s impact on nature and its exploitation of it. What the pilgrims are scared of is not nature itself but how nature reflects their shallow desires.

Compared to the other pilgrims, Marlow shows a different awareness of his environment. Even if he cannot comprehend everything he sees and hears, he does not close his eyes and ears but is willing to observe what is going on around him. His descriptions of nature, instead of showing arrogance, display a willingness to see reality; for example, instead of feeling the aggression coming from his environment, Marlow’s impression of nature shows nature as virtuous and inoffensive. Critics such as Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy argue that Marlow describes nature as “a physical and moral threat” to humans (624). However, Marlow is fully aware of the Europeans’ role as intruders and exploiters and therefore interprets nature’s behavior not as aggressive but passive. For instance, Marlow describes the forest as “virgin” and thereby emphasizes its untouched and innocent state (29).

Despite his more acute awareness of nature, Marlow’s perception of his environment is nevertheless very much affected by his former life in society. Even though Marlow feels “cut off for ever from everything [he] had known once,” the past keeps having an effect on him (34). Marlow explains that the “past came back to one […] in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream” (34). His feelings toward the past create an impression of a guilty conscience or of an unwholesome experience brewing inside of Marlow. If he believes that his or his society’s unjust actions wronged nature, and if his impression of nature is a result of his own feelings, then it is not surprising that Marlow believes his environment to look vengeful. The image of the environment is once again a reflection of the individual’s inner struggle and doubts concerning the established ideals
and hierarchies not of Africa but of the parts of the world he has seen and in which he has lived. Rather than being an exception, Marlow is representative of the influences Western society has on the individual. No matter whether it is Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* or Kayerts and Carlier in “An Outpost of Progress,” what we see is a confusion happening inside the individuals once they are unsupervised by their society. The departure from society challenges the individual’s conscience. Lost in this newfound freedom, the individual has to newly define his ethics.

The projection of feelings onto the external world is a very common picture Conrad draws continuously throughout his works. Another typical example of this type of projection is a scene from “The Lagoon”—a short story that was published as part of the story collection *Tales of Unrest* (1897). Similar to *Heart of Darkness*, in “The Lagoon” the forest acts as a mirror that provides a reflection of the emotions of the protagonists. “The Lagoon” is another story set in the Indonesian forest and is about the betrayal between two brothers. Arsat tells a white man referred to as Tuan about the time when he betrayed his brother and left him to die to save his own love, Diamelen. Now, faced with Diamelen’s fatal illness and her approaching death and haunted by his own guilty conscience, Arsat tries to lighten the weight of his guilt by telling Tuan his story and making plans to go back to his home village to avenge his brother’s death. Before Arsat begins telling his story, the “land and the water slept invisible, unstirring and mute” (636). Similar to the forest in *Heart of Darkness*, through its darkness, impenetrability, and muteness, the forest in “The Lagoon” creates a wall like a blank canvas on which any type of emotion coming from the protagonists can be reflected back onto them. Not only Arsat but also Tuan feels the closeness of death, and it affects his impression of what he
sees around him. As a result of the circumstances, Tuan projects his sensations onto the surrounding nature:

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. [...] The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him—into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. (my emphasis 636)

In this scene the fear of evil, violence, and untrustworthiness comes from the subject’s own sensations and not the object; these feelings are not based in nature but flowed from the white man into his surroundings. These feelings are created by Arsat and his guilty conscience and fear; thus, nature’s appearance represents the interiority of the protagonist—his fears and anger—which he projects onto the environment. Panigrahi rightly claims that it is therefore “the complicit man’s fancy that projects this evil onto the profoundly dumb and mute stillness of Nature thereby portraying it as a stark embodiment and forbearer of evil impulses” (27). In this situation nature is a silent observer that only acts as a mirror to draw an image of the protagonists’ interior struggles.

By drawing an innocent and silent picture of the Asian and African land, Conrad emphasizes the Europeans’ parasitical trespassing. In the end it is very clear that despite Conrad’s ambiguous language throughout Heart of Darkness, the overall picture shows the European conqueror as a misplaced self-destructive parasite who abuses the values of Western civilization for greed and power over his new environment and sucks it dry. The
Western individual, when away from his home environment, unless confronted with the sublime, does not adjust to the foreign environment, let alone learn from it, but simply tries to diminish it through Western reason and technology. Human moral behavior is not innate but taught and kept under control by society’s justice system. Conrad demonstrates in *Heart of Darkness* that when the justice system is absent, the individual, like Kurtz, may no longer follow it but create a new system that follows his own ideas.

_Kurtz and Other Transplanted Parasites_

The metaphor of the invading Western man as parasite leads this discussion to Kurtz whose ambiguous behavior and words have been analyzed innumerable times since the novella was published in 1902 (serially in 1899). Critics like Walter E. Anderson see Kurtz as “morally hollow” and call him “‘diabolical Christ,’ Lucifer, even a ‘hero’ of the primitive unconscious” (404). Other critics like Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy believe that Kurtz goes completely “native” in the novella. McCarthy, in his deep ecological reading of *Heart of Darkness*, interprets Kurtz as closely connected to nature (643). He believes that the novella “features ivory as the image of Kurtz’s identification with the wilderness” and argues that Kurtz’s “European greed for ivory […] breaks down the separation between the European and the wild land” (622-3). McCarthy states that “Kurtz becomes ivory, in the end, because his voyage has been towards identification with the African interior. Many treatments of the novella present Kurtz as a convert to African tribal society, but McCarthy believes that Kurtz’s “relation to ivory insists we understand him as also a convert to the wild land itself” (623). On the one hand, McCarthy’s argument is intriguing because it suggests that Kurtz himself has become a victim of society, hunted down and exploited for what he is. On the other hand, even though it is
reasonable to call Kurtz a victim of society, I believe that Kurtz does not become a part of nature, nor does he regress “to the savagery of ‘primitive’ peoples” (McClure 139). Contrary to Conrad’s sailors, Kurtz never intends to establish solidarity with nature nor with the natives because he wants to exploit them. Like the American Kudzu, Kurtz is a transplanted parasite who feeds on its host without a method until it has sucked it dry, and his savagery is not of a primitive nature but the product of a “morally bankrupt civilization” (139).

Kurtz left civilized society not to lose but to gain power. He never intended to succumb to nature; instead, his goal was always to conquer it. His obsession with power and material gain is a sign of him not being driven by any primitive urges but by desires of any common civilized man. In his Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men (1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who like Conrad condemns progress as a corruption, claims that it is our material possessions that establish society. According to Rousseau, “The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society” (“Origin of Inequality” 60). The first person who claimed property also created the need for a legal system. Once a property is declared, it will need to be protected, traded in, or sold by the owner, which asks for general laws; thus, a civil society is created.

If the desire to own something is what makes us civil, then Kurtz is the ultimate embodiment of civil society. Kurtz wants to own everything. His relationship to nature is never harmonious or symbiotic since he never lets go of his greedy desires. As the exploiter, Kurtz does not turn to nature but away from it. Kurtz always remains the
parasite—the conqueror who exploits the land in his own interest. He has no method; he just follows his greed. The heads on stakes that are positioned in front of his house are a symbolic sign for the divide between Kurtz and his environment (57). According to Marlow, “The round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing” (57). With their ornaments, the stakes bring to mind civil society’s fence posts that establish the district of Kurtz’s property. All of the heads but one are facing Kurtz’s house, which suggests that Kurtz is where he belongs: inside the lines of his property. From inside he can enjoy the fruits of his labor; every time he looks outside he can see a symbol of his power. According to Marlow, those heads on stakes “would have been even more impressive [...] if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way” (57). As said by Marlow, it is their faces that makes these heads look more impressive; thus, since they are turned to the house, their purpose is to impress whoever is in the house. The heads demonstrate how conceited Kurtz is of his power over his environment. Kurtz is not afraid of nature nor does he feel the necessity to protect himself from it. The heads are not meant as a scare tactic; they are assets that visualize Western society’s, particularly Kurtz’s, exploitation of the African people and the African land. Their unnessessariness demonstrates the absurdity of stealing from another place and race to produce the supply of non-essential materials for the convenience and comfort of Europeans.

Greed and corruption are common characteristics of life in civilization. In the wilderness of the African forest, Kurtz’s ambition, which was ingrained in his brain by Western society, makes him a dangerous and destructive being. Outside of society’s moral system, Kurtz’s lust for power and property is no longer controlled by society’s
law enforcement. In the uncontrolled environment of the African forest, with his hunger for power, Kurtz can go berserk, and he does. Marlow is aware that Kurtz had literally “taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land,” which, according to Marlow, is hard to understand for Europeans who have never left the safe grounds of society (49). According to Marlow, Europeans cannot comprehend Kurtz’s transformation as long as they are “surrounded by kind neighbors” who constantly watch over them and influence them in their actions (49). Marlow explains:

Stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man’s untrammeled feet may take him into the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength upon your own capacity of faithfulness. (49)

Marlow has understood what a huge difference those “little things,” such as a police force or a gossiping, judging neighbor or butcher, can make (49). Those little things make a society. They control it; they keep it in its boundaries. The police officer enforces the law while the neighbor reminds one of what is acceptable and respectable in the eyes of the public, which creates a generalized idea of morality. The person who does not abide by those laws has to face “the holy terror of scandal and gallows” or will be ostracized by society and hidden away behind the walls of “lunatic asylums” (49). The butcher is the tamer of society. Like an animal tamer, he feeds the potentially wild animal so that it
feels no need to pursue its hunting instinct. In a carnivorous Western society the butcher relieves the average citizen of their responsibility to kill their own food. As a result the average citizen no longer needs to learn how to kill to survive, which eliminates a person’s need to develop and act on their hunting instinct. However, if there is no butcher, a person has to take the killing into their own hands again. A new responsibility like this can empower someone, but it can also trigger new lusts that were inactive inside the person until that point. These new desires in addition to the lack of society’s enforced moral boundaries can trigger new and ethically unacceptable behavior. Once in the wilderness it is up to the individual to decide whether they want to live by their former society’s established ideas of morality or if they want to ignore them, and until we see a person’s actions outside of civilization, we cannot predict how they will act or react to their newfound freedom once their support system suddenly disappears.

More straightforwardly than in *Heart of Darkness*, in “An Outpost of Progress” Conrad makes a clear statement about the effect of Western civilization on the individual and how this effect does not simply disappear once the individual leaves society for some time. In “An Outpost of Progress,” two Europeans, Kayerts and Carlier, are assigned to a trading station along a river in the deep interior of the African jungle. They are left in charge of this trading station, but even the director who leaves them on their own does not believe in their capabilities. He tells an old servant of the Company while watching those two white men on the riverbank, “Look at those two imbeciles. They must be mad at home to send me such specimens. I told those fellows to plant a vegetable garden, build new storehouses and fences, and construct a landing stage. I bet nothing will be done! They won’t know how to begin” (461). In other words, what the director wants the
men to do is establish civilization inside the uncivilized jungle, but without guidance these individuals feel lost. Until this point they had always been “under the eye and guidance of their superiors,” but “now dull as they were to the subtle influences of surroundings, they felt themselves very much alone, when suddenly unassisted to face the wilderness” (461-2).

Contrary to Marlow’s sometimes ambiguous criticism of imperialism, the omniscient narrator in “An Outpost of Progress” is more straightforward in his judgments of Western civilization and the specimens it sends off to conquer other less civilized places. The narrator calls Carlier and Kayerts “two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals” and claims that their “existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds” (462). Similar to what Conrad implies in *Heart of Darkness*, in this passage Conrad emphasizes society’s influence on the individual. If the individual, who has lived his entire life as a part of society, is suddenly taken out of his surroundings, his existence comes into question because everything that defined him was not created by him but by society. As the narrator explains, “[E]very great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd […] that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion” (“Outpost” 462). When living in society, the individual never has the chance to develop a self that is not influenced by the crowd not only because of their presence but also because of the individual’s desire to be accepted by the group. Any unusual, dangerous, or uncontrollable behavior would be a threat to society and therefore would alienate the individual and would eventually end in the ostracism of the person. The submissive individual thus comes to accept the rules of civilization and thus
plays his part as a member of society and thereby lets society take care of them.

According to the omniscient narrator in “An Outpost of Progress,” it is society’s fault:

Society [. . . ] had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on condition of being machines. And now, released from the fostering care of men with pen behind the ears, or of men with gold lace on the sleeves, they were like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their freedom. (463-4)

Like Conrad’s sailors, these characters are liberated from society in that society is no longer present to supervise them or to enforce its laws; however, contrary to the sailors who must still live in a community and the command of a captain on board the ship, Kayerts and Carlier are alone, lost, and overwhelmed by their new state of uncontrolled and unchallenged living. Furthermore, Conrad’s sailors are challenged by nature to the point until they are capable of using this newfound freedom to raise their awareness, gain wisdom, and reach a state of transcendence. The sublimity of the sea physically challenges man until he leaves behind his physical limits and gains focus on his mental strength. This is not what Conrad’s protagonists face inside the jungle; with the jungle playing a passive role, the characters, instead of taking their own lives into their hands, become disoriented and incapable as soon as they are left alone.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow mentions sarcastically the Company’s chief accountant who keeps up his civilized appearance despite the tough conditions of the African jungle. According to Marlow the accountant plays an insignificant role and is
only worth introducing because he is the first one that mentioned Kurtz to him. Marlow claims that he also “respected the fellow,” but his claim shows a sarcastic overtone. Marlow states, “I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser’s dummy, but in the great demoralisation of the land he kept up his appearance. That’s backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character” (18). The accountant keeps up his appearance even if it is just a façade that has no substance to it. His proper exterior does not stop the demoralization of the land; the accountant simply gives it an appearance of what it is not and hides the truth in its shadow. According to Marlow, the accountant’s façade resembles a “hairdresser’s dummy”—a term which usually refers to a doll that consists of nothing but a head. The dummy is used by someone as an instrument on which to practice new ideas and skills, which in the case of the accountant implies that he is not an independent entity but only the tool of a bigger power that stands behind him. Since the dummy is nothing but a head, it also suggests that it is a symbol of the separation of the accountant’s head from his physical body. He is all head—a rational being that is disconnected from his body’s instincts. When Marlow asks him how he managed to keep up his appearance, he answers, “I’ve been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work” (18). The accountant’s words demonstrate that his upheld appearance is a result of his exploitation of a native woman. Throughout the ages, the exploitation of women has gone hand in hand with the exploitation of nature (Capra, The Turning Point 40). In Heart of Darkness, the Western accountant is exploiting both the land and the native woman. When Marlow says that the accountant’s “proper appearance does not stop the demoralization of the land,” he does
not say that the land was immoral to begin with but that it is in the process of
demoralization, and the person who is demoralizing the land is not the native woman or
nature but the accountant who exploits her to create a fake appearance that suggests
purity and propriety (18). While he is not as destructive and dangerous as Kurtz, the
accountant, like Kurtz, is still another Western parasite who exploits the skills he has
acquired during his time in society to rule over an environment of which he does not
intend to become a part. His proper appearance, which does not blend in but stands out in
the African jungle, is the visual evidence of the accountant’s willful separation from his
environment. Neither Kurtz, the accountant, Kayerts, nor Carlier show any intention of
becoming a part of the natural world around them. Their ambitions, and in the case of
Kayerts and Carlier the lack thereof, were created by society. Once they were left outside
of society’s boundaries, it was up to them to decide whether to keep following those
ambitions or not. The jungle played no part in this except that it was used as a
playground.

The question remains, what will the individual do once they are removed from the
crowd? Will they continue to live after the rules that society tried to internalize in their
brain? Will they forget what they have been taught? Or will they go on and exploit the
knowledge they gained from the crowd and use it for their own good to manipulate their
new surroundings? Kurtz, once he enters the African jungle, lives by his own rules that
help him achieve his goals and fulfill his desires. He uses the knowledge he gained from
Western society to manipulate the new world he has entered. Marlow declares, “The
wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images […] of wealth and fame […].
My Intended, my station, my career, my ideas” (68). Kurtz wants to control and own
everything. He sees himself as a superior being who is pleased about native people worshipping him, which he expresses in his report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. In his report, Kurtz “began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, ‘must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might of a deity,’ [...] ‘By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded’” (49-50). Even when Kurtz joins the natives’ rituals, it is not to be one of them but to be their superior, their deity, and he uses his power over them to increase his fortunes: more ivory. He does not want to go back to civilization because he would have to give up his power. If he went back, he would no longer be treated as a deity and would not be able to feed his greed as easily; thus, when anyone wants to return him to Europe, Kurtz backs out in the last minute to go on another ivory hunt (56). In the forest, Kurtz declares the law; in the forest, Kurtz is the law. If he went back to civilization, Kurtz would have to readjust and succumb to the laws of society and restrain his greedy hunting instinct.

Clearly, Kurtz’s hunting instinct has nothing to do with survival instinct; it is simple greed for more possessions, which is rooted in Western society, and it can never be satisfied. Conrad already addresses the never-ending hunger of the Western conqueror in his second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), where Babalatchi, one of the Arabian characters, describes white men to be “wise and great” but that they “shall always be fools” (175). In the novel two of Conrad’s recurring characters, Lingard and Babalatchi, who had already played a role in Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly*, have a conversation about the relationship between the European rulers and the ruled natives.
In his conversation with Lingard, Babalatchi uses the trees as a symbol for non-Westerners. He tries to explain the relationship between master and slave by comparing the slave to the tree that has been there much longer than the master. Babalatchi asks Lingard, “Tell me, Tuan, do you think the big trees know the name of the ruler? No. They are born, they grow, they live and they die—yet know not, feel not. It is their land” (*Outcast* 174). In response, Lingard points out to Babalatchi that when it comes down to it, it is always the one with the most power that will not only rule but will destroy if they face refusal. Lingard argues that “[e]ven a big tree may be killed by a small axe [and] axes are made by white hands” (174). But Babalatchi is not convinced of Lingard’s words and stresses the white men’s foolishness. Babalatchi argues, “You are stronger than the wilds beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when he is not hungry—you do not. He knows the difference between himself and those that can speak; you do not understand the difference between yourselves and us—who are men. You are wise and great—and you shall always be fools” (175). Babalatchi’s words assert that white men may believe in their mental and moral superiority and power over nature and people of other races, but despite their strength, they still lack wisdom. In this case wisdom is related to awareness of oneself and one’s environment. A man who lacks wisdom is ignorant of his environment. His eyes are open, but he does not see. His perception is delusional. He believes in his own superiority over nature, but instead he will always remain nothing but a fool.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz does not know when he is hungry. He has no control over his greed, and Marlow knows that Kurtz’s grandiosity is just superficial. Marlow explains, “You should have heard him say, ‘[…] My Intended, my ivory, my station, my
river, my—’ everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him—but that was a trifle” (48). According to Marlow, in the eyes of nature Kurtz’s achievements are meaningless. His superiority over his environment is a delusion. Kurtz believes that he has everything under control, but he does not. Even though he has control over the natives, he himself is controlled by his greed. Marlow sees Kurtz’s heads on stakes as a sign for Kurtz’s lack of “restraint in the gratification of his various lusts” (57). Marlow explains:

Whether [Kurtz] knew of this deficiency himself I can’t say. I think the knowledge came to him […] only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. (57-8)

Kurtz is not in control of “his various lusts” (57). He is not able to control himself nor is he able to control nature. It is not until the end of his life that Kurtz finally realizes it was all a delusion and that he had gone mad. Like Marlow’s “papier-mâché Mephistopheles” through which one could poke a forefinger and “find nothing inside but a little loose dirt,” Kurtz has been building a façade that hides his lack of substance (26). His façade is a product of European society, as Marlow states, “[a]ll Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz,” and without his façade, there is nothing left that defines him (49). Kurtz is
“hollow at the core” because his ideals are a “trifle” (58, 48). He is the perfect oppressor but at the same time eternal victim of Western society. No matter how long Kurtz lives in the environment of the jungle, surrounded by natives and wilderness, he cannot and will not leave behind the destructive character flaws of European society, such as the hunger for power and possessions. In Kurtz’s last moments before facing death, Marlow “saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair. […] He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: ‘The horror! The horror!’” (69).

Kurtz’s exclamation of “The horror!” remains very ambiguous and does not comprise only one answer. Andrew Libby claims that it is, however, certain that the horror “is not any kind of savagery native to Africa itself” (15). The horror stands for Kurtz’s personal horror but also the horror of civilization in general; Kurtz represents the ultimate victim of civilization’s destructive influence on the individual. In the face of death, Kurtz, looking back on his life, finally realizes the gravity and immorality of his actions. He sees the horror he has created inside and outside of himself, and he performs self-judgment by admitting it. He faces his own darkness of brutality, exploitation, and greed, and, according to Marlow, “pronounced a judgment upon adventures of his soul on this earth” (69). In the end, Kurtz is broken, and nature has won.

During his entire stay in the jungle, Kurtz was nothing more than a product of society. If Kurtz had ever wanted to go native, he would have had to go on a hunt not for ivory but for his own uncorrupted human nature. In his works, Conrad never presents an example of the uncorrupted state of mind of a man; in fact, Conrad gives the impression that he does not believe in the possibility of such an existence. Like Kurtz, Kayerts and
Carlier in “An Outpost of Progress” instead of losing their corrupted state of mind lose their lives. After killing Carlier, when Kayerts hears the sounds of the steamboat, he hears “progress and civilization and all the virtues” calling to him from the river (487). For Kayerts there is no return to a society that would condemn him for his failure. Instead of putting his freedom back into the hands of society, Kayerts ends his life and shows society his tongue (489).

Throughout his works, Conrad reveals what is wrong with Western society but does not offer a peek into a better future. His portrayal of man and society is very pessimistic. Harrison goes as far as calling Conrad “not only a pessimist but also a nihilist with regard to the global future that was taking shape at that moment of history” (142).

According to Zdzisław Najder, Conrad’s trip to Africa was his last attempt to become an integrated part of society on land. Najder states, “From a psychological point of view it is important because this expedition represented his most daring, and in fact his last, attempt to become a homo socialis, a cog in the mechanism of society. By accepting the job in the Trading Company, he joined, for once in his life, an organized, large-scale group activity on land” (A Chronicle 141). Alas, the experience only worsened Conrad’s nihilistic image of society and man, but even though Conrad saw that man’s disconnection from nature was furthering his regression instead of his progress, he was incapable of reconnecting man with nature.

According to Rousseau, the only way back to “natural man” is through a rediscovery of one’s own inner self which one can only find through one’s intuition and not scientific research (“Origin of Inequality” 33). Rousseau claims that “the more we accumulate new knowledge [about the human species], the more we deprive ourselves of
the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all. Thus, in a sense, it is by dint of studying man that we have rendered ourselves incapable of knowing him” (“Origin of Inequality” 33). In the end it is, however, questionable whether society’s idea of “natural man” ever truly existed or if it is just another one of society’s ways of defining itself (Rousseau, “Origin of Inequality” 34). But even if Rousseau’s impressions of a naturally good man are unreal, Rousseau as well as Conrad need the image of the “lost natural innocence of man” to denounce society’s idea of progress and to uncover its hypocrisy (Harrison 127). Rousseau argues that we need a proper understanding of what an uncorrupted state of mind looks like to be able “to judge properly our own present state” (Rousseau, “Origin of Inequality” 34). Conrad expresses his judgment of Western man’s present state not by comparing him to other men from other cultures, whose minds have already been affected by Western societies, but by comparing him to the “virgin” forest—an uncorrupted piece of nature (Outcast 51). The result is an image of man that is inferior to nature.

Conrad’s forest is more solid and wiser than man. In Heart of Darkness, Marlow even calls the big trees “kings” (33). According to Mayer, Marlow’s impression of the trees shows nature as “devoid of any touch of civilization, reigning supreme over mankind. Such a description of African nature defies the power of the European colonizer to subdue the land [and] thus reverses the colonizer’s dominion over nature, to the extent that the colonizer’s advancement appears to be defeated by the power inherent in nature” (179). Conrad’s depiction of nature as superior to man, Mayer claims, turns nature into “a massive force against the thrust of colonialism” and thereby “paves the reader’s path (back) to nature and out of colonialism” (187). In his works, even though Conrad does
not change the world, he shows the reader what is wrong with it and why. His works imply that it is the disconnection between man and nature that furthers man’s regression and will eventually cause his destruction. Consequentially, man can improve his state of mind and place in this world by improving his relationship with nature. Unfortunately, Conrad cannot control if his readers will take the path back towards nature or not, but one thing is clear: as long as man keeps moving away from nature, he keeps moving away from himself. As long as he is disconnected from the world around him, he will continue to exploit it. In his book, *Animals and Society*, Keith Tester states, “So long as we civilized men imagine ourselves to be apart from the land, and from our fellow creatures, we shall attempt to exploit them for our private gain, and the attempt will kill us” (qtd. in T. Clark 151). Instead of man fighting a battle against nature and therefore fighting himself, it is imperative for man to begin seeing himself within nature. Kurtz never becomes a part of his environment but instead tries to control it. Even though critics have criticized Kurtz for going native, he never actually does go native because he never loses his greed for power and possessions.

Many critics have recognized that Conrad presents contradicting images of nature in his works. The inconsistencies, however, do not damage Conrad’s image of nature’s superiority but are a reflection of our struggle with our anthropocentric perception of nature. Conrad portrays the relationship between man and nature as complex. Each shift in Conrad’s narrators’ impressions of nature asks the reader to reassess their own image of the environment and therefore may inspire them to consider a new perspective. Conrad’s portrayal of the harmful disconnection between man and nature may not immediately change man’s relationship with nature, but it encourages man to reevaluate
his perception of the environment. It is Marlow’s willingness to see the world with
different and sometimes opposing eyes that is necessary for a change and improvement in
our relationship with nature, and even if Marlow is not yet at peace with his
understanding of the world and society, he is trying to come to terms with it by sharing it
with his listeners. Now his listeners, especially today, just need to start listening and then
hopefully get on their path back to nature.
CHAPTER IV

THERIOMORPHISM AND THE STATE OF BEING IN CONRAD’S LORD JIM

After analyzing Conrad’s maritime and jungle fiction, Lord Jim takes a special role in the Conrad canon because it is set in both environments of our concern: the land and the sea. In Conrad’s maritime fiction, we see how the sea offers the chance for reaching a state of transcendence. In Conrad’s jungle fiction, we see that protagonists, once surrounded by forests, run toward their own decay. Lord Jim is set in both worlds—while the first half of the novel focuses on occurrences that happened at sea, the second half deals with life on land—but the picture Conrad draws in the novel is a different one than the one we have seen so far. In Lord Jim, we see a character who receives a second chance on land to redeem himself for what he did wrong during his life at sea. Conrad shows that no matter whether you are at sea or on land, you will sooner or later find yourself in situations where you can either move closer toward transcendence or get lost and regress. Lord Jim shows that life at sea does not always bring out the best in man. Sometimes it is life on land that can help man evolve and overcome his human fears. Jim goes through a major transformation—a metamorphosis—over the course of the novel. In the beginning, he is young, naïve, and restless. His inexperience causes him to misjudge a situation, follow his survival instinct, and jump into an almost never-ending run from reality. He keeps running away from his past, always in search for a better future. He does not change until he reaches Patusan; there he finally slows down and comes as close to being Stein’s idea of a butterfly as he will ever be by simply “being” in the present instead of running from his past or searching for a different future.
Stein and his philosophy of nature are the important link at the center of *Lord Jim*; they play a significant role in our understanding of the novel. Stein describes nature as a flawless “masterpiece” while drawing attention to man’s imperfections such as Jim’s restlessness (125). Stein’s ideas about humans and nature provide a new perspective on Conrad’s portrayal of the relationship between the two. Through Stein, Conrad challenges the established idea of human supremacy and advocates a worldview that sees intrinsic value in the natural environment. Furthermore, Stein’s argument that nature, compared to man, is a “masterpiece” not only raises nature above man but also changes the meaning of animal symbolism in the novel. When regarded in connection with Stein’s impression of nature as “masterpiece,” Conrad’s comparisons of characters to animals ridicule man’s arrogance to raise himself above nature. Conrad’s novel, *Lord Jim*, is full of figurative language. Throughout the novel, Conrad draws many impressions in which he compares human behavior or human appearance to the behavior and appearance of animals (e.g., beetles, squirrels, turtles, dogs, etc.). Jim, for instance, is compared to a racehorse, a costermonger’s donkey, a bird, a rat, a squirrel, and a beetle (92, 112, 118, 158, 162). Today theriomorphism—the designation of animal characteristics to humans—is usually understood as degrading (Soper, *What is Nature?* 86). According to Greg Garrard, it “is the reverse of anthropomorphism, and is often used in contexts of national or racial stereotyping, such as when Nazis depicted Jews as rats” (141). As Garrard’s example clearly shows, the comparison of humans to animals has a derogatory meaning, which in modern society stems from man’s discomfort with the idea of a connection between humans and animals. In *Lord Jim*, the characters’ comparisons of humans to animals seemingly allow for the same kind of derogatory meaning. Without
Stein’s comment on the “masterpiece of Nature,” the comparison of a character to an animal could be understood as a sign of the character’s inferiority, but Stein's remark encourages a rereading of the use of theriomorphism in _Lord Jim_ (125). If nature is superior to man, a comparison of man to animals does not degrade but raises man and brings him closer to nature’s perfection. No matter whether Jim is compared to a donkey, a beetle, or if he has evolved almost to the state of a butterfly, his comparability to animals shows that he has not separated himself from nature as much as he would like to believe, and in Stein’s world this resemblance to nature is a compliment.

The Designation of Animal Characteristics to Humans

Humans have always used images of animals to create meaning, especially in their earliest use of language. According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his essay “On the Origin of Languages,” “figurative language was the first [language] to be born” because it comes more naturally than communicating through words (12). Images say more in less time; thus, “one speaks more effectively to the eye than to the ear” (“Origin of Languages” 8). To Rousseau it is not surprising that “the most eloquent speeches are those containing the most imagery” (“Origin of Languages” 8). Images help humans visualize the words, which then helps them understand the meaning of what is spoken. From the beginning humans used images of animals to visualize and thereby clarify the meaning of their words; for instance, for the longest time animals like elephants and bulls have been clear symbols of physical strength while the withdrawal of the turtle within its shell has been an obvious sign of escape from danger. Steve Baker declares that comparisons of humans to animals, were “part of [humans’] continuous process of self-definition” (79). In his book on _Totemism_, Claude Lévi-Strauss declares that it is the
alikeness of man and animal that encouraged man “to use the diversity of species as conceptual support for social differentiation” (101). The application of similarities and differences between the animal world and human society was not only part of a natural process of self-definition but also a sign of the acknowledgment of the proximity between humans and animals.

Despite humans’ use of animal images to communicate meaning, a disconnection between humans and animals began that let humans forget about their own origin. This disconnection, which is still happening today, started as early as the writing of the Bible. The story of Creation already declares man the master to rule over the animals below him. Later René Descartes (1596-1650) reimagined the idea of the disconnection between humans and nature. Descartes believed in the absolute division of body and soul; he thereby left the body imprisoned within the limits of physics and degraded the “soulless” animal to the level of “a machine made by the hands of God” (n.p.). Descartes’s theory of soulless machine-like animals furthered humans’ continuously growing estrangement from the animal world. The separation continued with the progression of the Industrial Revolution and urbanization. Because of industrialization, by the eighteenth century the animal’s qualities as a work force had already become dispensable. To the zoologist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, animals were now no more than “relics of the past” that no longer had power (qtd. in J. Berger 12). Buffon, nonetheless, saw only the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and missed the further marginalization of the animal that was yet to come with the invention of the railway, the motorcar, and other engines.
Technological progress and the unprecedented growth in urban population that occurred with the onset of the Industrial Revolution changed the place of animals in society. Until the eighteenth century most people continued to live in small villages in close contact with nature. In 1700 only 12% of the population lived in towns of more than 5,000 people; however, by 1911 80% of the British population lived in cities (J. F. M. Clark 10). While people were moving closer and closer together, animals were driven further and further out of humans’ daily lives. If urbanization did not kill them, it pushed them into the backcountry where people could no longer see them from their suburban homes unless they visited the country or the zoo.

One of the consequences of the disappearance of animals in society was that people started to look for possibilities to compensate for their absence in their lives. People’s interest in observing animals was nothing new. For centuries, people had already watched animals as spectacles such as in fairs or tournaments, but during the Classical Period and into the nineteenth century what changed was the increase in the arrangement of animals and plants in tables (Foucault 143). According to Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1966), people’s interest in collecting and cataloguing “was not the desire for knowledge, but a new way of connecting things both to the eye and to discourse” (143). To Foucault, it was the people’s “new way of making history” (143). So, while the wild animals and their natural habitat were vanishing from people’s environment, the number of zoos and realistic animal toys increased as well as people’s interest in collecting and cataloguing insects, and Conrad’s Stein with his beetles and butterflies collection is a typical example of this development. According to J.F.M. Clark, collecting bugs was people’s way of “captur[ing] lost nature in an increasingly urban
Victorian Britain” (10). But what made insects so fascinating to them was not their proximity to humans but their apparent distance (7). In their size and appearance they could not be any more different from humans, but in their numbers they surpassed humanity. While there are only about 4,500 mammal species in the world, the number of insect species is about 800,000. In fact, insects comprise as much as 80% of all animal species (1). According to J. F. M. Clark, “A single colony of termites can number in excess of 20 million individuals: they account for 10 per cent of the biomass of the tropics” (1).

Despite the high number of insects, there had not been much of an interest in these creatures until urbanization and new developments in the sciences made beetle-collecting increasingly popular and even fashionable among educated people of the middle class (Marren 153). At the same time, scholars’ interests in entomology, the study of insects, increased; however, their studies were less descriptive and more theory-based than the average person’s collection. One famous collector was Charles Darwin although he was more interested in insects as specimens and not collectibles (157). He started with moths and butterflies but eventually focused all his mental and physical energies on the study of beetles, which seemed more important and challenging to him (153). Darwin believed that it was collecting that gave him a new awareness of the magnificence and interconnectedness of nature (155). Even though in Lord Jim Stein is not a scientist, he shares some significant similarities with Darwin. Like Darwin, not only is Stein a collector of beetles and butterflies but he has also gained a new awareness of the world around him that has led him to undermine respected anthropocentric notions regarding mankind’s supremacy. Because of Stein’s theory and the numerous comparisons of
humans to animals, *Lord Jim* becomes an ecocentric novel that places nature at its center, and if man wants to move closer to perfection, he has to move closer to nature.

Since comparisons of humans to animals still have negative connotations today, scholars in the field of ecocriticism tend to regard theriomorphism very critically. There is an ongoing discussion about whether theriomorphism subverts or reinforces anthropocentrism. While critics like Greg Garrard believe that theriomorphism can destabilize anthropocentrism, critics like Kate Soper disapprove of it and call it nothing but negative anthropomorphism (*What is Nature?* 86). When humans are compared to animals, according to Soper, the animal is “used to police rather than confuse the human-nature divide; by associating all our ‘lowlver’ characteristics and bodily functions with animality, we assert the importance of sustaining those higher or more spiritual attributes that grant us human sovereignty over the beast” (*What is Nature?* 86). Because of our estranged relationship with animals, we define the animal as “the other” from which we see ourselves as separate and superior. We then use the animal to define terms like “humanity” or “reason” (Armstrong 1). According to Soper, by comparing our “lowlver” characteristics to those of animals, we spare ourselves “the embarrassment of a more direct confrontation with our own follies and aggression” (*What is Nature?* 83). We blame the animal in us for everything we see as inappropriate and try to eliminate or ignore any of those undesired urges.

In addition to ecocritics, Conrad scholars criticize Conrad for animalizing humans. Conrad has continuously been criticized by writers such as Chinua Achebe that a work like *Heart of Darkness* is racist because of the very savage pictures Conrad draws of the natives. Achebe criticizes Conrad for showing a Marlow who recognizes the
Africans’ humanity with surprise since all that was obvious to him until this point was their howling, leaping, spinning, and making horrid faces (Achebe “An Image of Africa” 339). Achebe argues in a conversation with Caryl Phillips, “A few statements about it not being a very nice thing to exploit people who have flat noses [. . .] is his defence against imperial control? If so it is not enough. [. . .] Ultimately you have to admit that Africans are people. You cannot diminish a people’s humanity and defend them” (Phillips and Achebe 63). Achebe criticizes Conrad for making Africans less human than Europeans, not giving them an articulate voice, but instead letting them howl at each other like animals. If Achebe took a closer look at the entire Conrad canon and not just *Heart of Darkness*, he would see that the impressions Conrad draws not only of Africans but also Arabs, Asians, Europeans, and animals in his works are much more complex than they may appear at first. Many European characters are portrayed in a very negative light, such as Almayer in *Almayer’s Folly* or Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands*. Among the characters Conrad animalizes are non-Europeans as well as Europeans, and it is not as easy as to say that only the rejected Europeans are compared to animals. Archie Ruthvel, the principal shipping-master in *Lord Jim*, and the sounds he makes, Marlow compares to the “snort” of a “frightened bullock” (27). But Achebe’s impression of Conrad degrading his characters by making them more savage is not unusual from today’s standpoint when we consider how far we have removed ourselves from nature, particularly animals, and how uncomfortable we feel about anthropomorphism and theriomorphism.

If we look at *Lord Jim* from today’s standpoint without considering the impact of Stein’s speech on the meaning of the comparisons drawn between humans and animals, then we understand not only Achebe’s point of view but also John G. Peters’s, whose
argument demonstrates Conrad’s judgment of rejected humans through his use of theriomorphism. According to Peters, Conrad portrays in his works two kinds of others: “the other-unlike-self and the other-like-self” (“Stein’s Collections” 64). Among the other-unlike-self group are not only the foreign characters who have never been part of the community but also former members who have been rejected by the community for their unsuitableness; for instance, Jim’s ship comrades on the Patna become part of the other-unlike-self group after the infamous Patna incident. According to Peters, in Lord Jim the community uses theriomorphism to expose the rejected Europeans’ inferiority to other Europeans. One of those rejected Europeans is Cornelius—husband of a Dutch-Malay woman and Jewel’s stepfather. Marlow describes Cornelius in a derogative manner that agrees with Peters’s argument; however, it is not simply the comparison to an animal that degrades Cornelius but the added adjective that reveals a judgment on Marlow’s side. Cornelius’s walk not only resembled the movement of a beetle, but it “resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle” (Lord Jim 170). What makes this comparison so derogatory is not the comparison of Cornelius to a beetle but to a repulsive beetle, which opens up the possibility that there are beetles that are not repulsive. The word “beetle” in itself does not suggest a negative meaning; it takes an adjective that establishes the comparison as either favorable or unfavorable.

The description of the Patna’s officers shows the same need for an adjective to clarify the meaning of the animal symbolism. In Lord Jim, the three responsible officers of the infamous Patna are described as “three dirty owls” (76). These men are not just owls but dirty owls, which indicates the change of meaning in the owl symbolism. In Western culture, owls usually stand for wisdom. Already in Greek mythology, a little
owl, the “owl of Athena,” accompanied Athena, the goddess of wisdom; also, the Roman’s goddess of wisdom, Minerva, was associated with an owl (C. Berger x). However, the Romans, according to Cynthia Berger, did not only relate the owl to wisdom but also saw the animal as a harbinger of death. The Romans assumed, Berger states, that “[a] bird that could see in the dark could also [. . .] predict approaching deaths” (x). Owls as bad omens became common in folktales in Western and non-Western cultures. In British literature, we see the owl as a bad omen in works like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), Wordsworth’s “There Was a Boy” (1799), or Robert Blair’s “The Grave” (1743). In *Lord Jim*, the three officers of the Patna are described as “three dirty owls” (76). The image does not seem to be referring to the characters’ wisdom since the characters appear to be anything but wise. The word “dirty” negates the usual symbolic meaning of owls as wise, making the seamen into corrupt wise men; but even the description of the men as corrupt wise men seems unfitting. Instead, the symbolic meaning of the owl as harbinger of death or bad omen appears much more appropriate. By leaving the ship without notifying the passengers, the officers ruin the passengers’ minimal chance of survival and thereby become the passengers’ bad omen. As a result of their immoral behavior, their fellow members of society will no longer accept these men; thus, their comparison to animals is also a sign of their ostracization. According to Peters, “By dehumanizing these [sea]men, the community effectually eliminates them from their society” (“Stein’s Collections” 65). Plus, by removing those “evil elements from their midst,” “the westerners” no longer need to see them in themselves (65). This means that, according to Peters, the comparison of a human to an
animal becomes the stigmatization of the person, exiling him from society by turning him into “the other.”

Even though the non-westerners may be respectable in their behavior, the western community still perceives them as the other-unlike-self that is also inferior and worth nothing more than “cattle,” which is a description the captain of the *Patna* uses to describe the Arab pilgrims (14). Peters argues that signifying the Arab pilgrims as cattle is an attempt by the *Patna*’s captain to “ensure that these others-unlike-self could not be confused with himself” (“Stein’s Collections” 66). Peters’s argument and examples are persuasive as long as one assumes that a comparison of humans to animals is always meant to be something unfavorable; however, a close analysis of Stein’s philosophy in the novel suggests that the use of theriomorphism in *Lord Jim* is not meant to degrade but to raise humans to nature’s superior position. The idea of humans sharing similarities with animals is only disreputable if animals are inferior to humans, which is a long-established belief that Stein dismantles by simply reordering the great chain of being.

**Stein: the Ecocentric Hunter and Gatherer**

Despite the rather minor narrative space that is devoted to his character, the merchant Stein is literally placed at the center of Conrad’s *Lord Jim*—right between the first half of the novel that is concerned with Jim’s former life at sea and restless escape from it and the second half that focuses on his new, settled life in Patusan. The placement of Stein’s story at the center of *Lord Jim* accentuates Stein’s significant role in the novel. Over the years, many scholars have provided very differing analyses to the meaning of Stein, his philosophy, and his beetles and butterflies collection. Stein has been considered a god-like figure or father figure to Jim by some scholars and a deceptive narcissist who
is responsible for Jim’s death by others. In context with the very differing notions of Stein’s character, scholars like Tony Tanner have spent much time considering the metaphor of the beetles and butterflies collection, trying to figure out which of the protagonists are similar to beetles and which are to butterflies; however, a closer look at the text with special regard to Stein’s speech shows that none of the characters in the novel are meant to represent butterflies. The only male character that comes close to resembling a butterfly is Jim who goes through a significant metamorphosis in the novel, but even Jim is never actually compared to a butterfly. While Conrad has his narrators and characters draw many comparisons of humans to animals, at no point do any of them compare a human to a butterfly, and whether Jim represents a butterfly or not is left for the reader to decide.

Like his beetles and butterflies collection, Stein is a very interesting specimen. As his hunting souvenirs and his name already reveal (“Stein” is the German word for stone), Stein is an avatar of the Paleolithic hunter and gatherer who believed in nature as goddess, which defines Stein’s thoughts and feelings toward his natural environment. In the Paleolithic Age, or Stone Age, man lived in caves and characteristically used knapped stone tools. While Stein may not use stone tools for his hunts, since stone tools would not be very practical for hunting beetles and butterflies, his lodgings still give the impression of a cave. Marlow describes Stein’s big house and two immense reception-rooms as “uninhabitable” rooms “full of solitude” that “you enter […] as you would a scrubbed cave underground” and which stay “cool on the hottest days” (206). According to Marlow, Stein has been living as much of a solitary life as possible among his books and collection in his cave-like environment; nevertheless, Marlow makes sure to point out to
his listeners that we should not understand Stein as a misanthrope (125). Stein has not always lived a secluded life. In earlier years he traveled extensively amongst the islands. It was when he became older that his adventurous lifestyle slowed down while his understanding of his environment increased. When Marlow no longer knows how to help Jim, he seeks out the well-traveled, well-respected, and “most trustworthy man” he knows to ask for his advice (122).

The beginning of Marlow’s conversation with Stein shows a man whose secluded lifestyle in a cave-like environment is even further removed from modern age by his ecocentric worldview. Contrary to anthropocentrism that believes in the supremacy of human beings over animals, ecocentrism is interested in the whole ecosphere and does not believe in the superiority of any individual species. The ecocentric approach in ecocriticism mostly stems from the environmentalist field of deep ecology that perceives problems not as isolated but interrelated matters (Capra, “Deep Ecology” 19). The term “deep ecology” was created by Arne Naess in his article, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements,” in 1973. It stands in strong opposition to the dominant worldview of patriarchal Western civilization, which sees humans as superior to nature and also as a separate entity. In Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered, Bill Devall and George Sessions argue that Western culture has been obsessed with the idea of dominance for thousands of years, and Western societies’ obsession with their desire for dominance has only become stronger, “with dominance of humans over nonhuman Nature, masculine over feminine, wealthy and powerful over the poor, with the dominance of the West over non-Western cultures” (66). According to Fritjof Capra, deep ecology “does not see the world as a collection of isolated objects but rather as a
network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent” ("Deep Ecology" 20). Everything (humans, animals, plants) is connected; thus, deep ecologists believe that a new holistic worldview is necessary to face the world’s interconnected problems.25 In Conrad’s work, we see the ecocentric worldview portrayed by Stein, who himself is the link at the center that connects different times and places—the sea and the land, the past and the present, Jim’s old life and his new one. Unlike modern man’s belief in the superiority of humans over other beings, Stein believes in nature’s supremacy. In Marlow’s interview, Stein gives a frank statement to Marlow about mankind’s inferiority to nature:

Marvellous! [...] Look! The beauty—but that is nothing—look at the accuracy, the harmony. And so fragile! And so strong! And so exact! This is Nature—the balance of colossal forces. Every star is so—and every blade of grass stands so—and the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces—this. This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature—the great artist.

(125)

Stein sees the perfection of nature in its equilibrium. According to Stein, nature holds opposites in balance. Something can be both strong and fragile at the same time. In Stein’s impression of nature, oppositions do not need to create tension but can exist in harmony. Stein’s idea of a balanced environment is quite the opposite of what we see in Western man’s dualistic worldview where something can be either one way or another but not both, and something always has to be better than something else. Stein’s remarks, on the other hand, suggest the possibility for a non-dualistic world. If man did not create and categorize opposites into superior and inferior parts, they could exist as equals
through the balance they create in this world. Marlow is quite surprised by Stein’s statement about nature’s perfection, and in response he asks Stein what he thinks of “man.” Stein replies, “Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece” (125). If we take Stein’s comments seriously, Stein’s view of the world is ecocentric; in fact, instead of placing humans at the top of “the great chain of being,” which would be common for Europeans at the time, Stein regards nature as one complete well-functioning organism, similar to Giordano Bruno’s idea of the world soul (l’anima del mondo) where everything is interconnected.26

Many Conradian scholars such as Marion Brady unfortunately do not take Stein’s comments about the balance of nature seriously, which is not surprising. Damon Franke indicates in Modernist Heresies that the Edwardians’ “idea of an organic society” has been ridiculed since the beginning of the Modernist movement (Franke 18). According to Carola Kaplan and Anne Simpson in Seeing Double, modernists always thought of the Edwardians’ ideas as too “simple-minded” (18). Furthermore, the critique of Edwardians did not end with the modernists, even scholars like Jonathan Rose, whose study on The Edwardian Temperament has been influenced by poststructuralism, degrades Edwardian thought (Franke 18). According to Rose, the Edwardians made it too easy for themselves because they “achieved an inner wholeness by affirming unity everywhere” (Rose 212). Considering the ridicule Edwardians had to endure for their idea of “wholeness,” it is not surprising that other scholars like Brady do not take Stein’s theory of nature’s perfect equilibrium seriously. Brady argues that Stein is an inadequate “commentator on life and truth” most of all because of his beetles and butterflies collection which is a “celebration of immobility and death” (71). Another scholar, Paul S. Bruss, even calls Stein’s remarks
“paradoxical” (492), and John G. Peters like Bruss judges Stein’s attitude toward nature as a desire to make something orderly that cannot be put in order. Peters argues:

These butterflies and beetles are all carefully classified and ordered, and this classification is indicative of Stein’s attitude toward nature. [...] But all of this classification is based on the assumption that there is order in the universe and that these collections then exhibit that order. [...] But more than this, his collections are an attempt to avert chaos—to deny the possible truth of the law of entropy. [...] Stein believes that nature is in ‘perfect equilibrium.’ His assertion that the ‘mighty Kosmos’ is ordered is a denial of a chaotic universe. (“Stein’s Collections” 49-50)

Bruss’s and Peters’s arguments are sensible if one believes nature to be chaotic; however, nineteenth-century scientists such as George Perkins Marsh and Charles Darwin as well as most twentieth-century ecologists believed nature to be essentially systematic and balanced.27 When regarded in the novel’s historical context, Stein’s remarks of finding harmony in nature are very romantic but not necessarily paradoxical. Scientists like the nineteenth-century German zoologist and evolutionist Ernst Haeckel believed in “the unity of nature”—an organized nature that was governed by an unavoidable law, which Haeckel termed “monism” (The Riddle of the Universe 255, Monism n.p.).28 Especially if we see Stein as a remaining specimen of the Paleolithic Age, his faith in the supremacy of nature is typical since Paleolithic humans believed in nature as Goddess. And even in modern times, during the nineteenth century, scientists believed in the balance of nature even if they did not necessarily believe in the supremacy of nature. George Perkins Marsh declares in Man and Nature (1864) that “[nature] has left it within the power of
man irreparably to derange the combinations of inorganic matter and of organic life, which through the night of eons she had been proportioning and balancing” (29).

According to Marsh, as long as man leaves nature alone, nature will sustain its equilibrium, and Stein’s following remark shows that Stein believes in humans’ negative influence on nature as well. Stein states, “Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him; for if not, why should he want all the place? Why should he run about here and there making a great noise about himself, talking about the stars, disturbing the blades of grass?” (125). Stein’s remark is Conrad’s most straightforward statement against imperialism, particularly ecological imperialism. Stein’s argument clearly states that humans move to places where they do not belong and disturb the natural equilibrium. Not only that but, according to Stein, humans spread out and take over “all the place” that does not belong to them, and we see this happening throughout Conrad’s works no matter whether the story is set in the Malay Archipelago, the Congo, or the fictitious South American town of Costaguana (125).

Conrad never draws the Europeans’ invasion of far-away lands as something constructive or desirable; instead, he portrays his European characters, such as Kayerts and Carlier in “An Outpost of Progress,” who have come to a place far away from home, as lost and disillusioned.

While Stein’s words are a true statement against imperialism, his words also seem a little hypocritical. Stein himself is guilty of moving to the Malay Archipelago where he is “disturbing the blades of grass” not only by being a foreigner but also by exploiting his new environment—catching “insects and birds” for his collection (125, 124). To grow his collection, Stein not only takes control over lives that he does not own but actually takes
lives, and he does this for no other reason but his own pleasure. After Stein’s ecocentric and anti-imperialist remarks, his passion for his beetles and butterflies collection seems nonsensical. With all of his environmental awareness it is hard to believe that he is also the man who goes so far as killing animals for his passion. Why would someone who sees man as inferior to nature kill animals for no reason except for his desire to possess them? After all, Stein is not enlightened enough yet. Even Marlow points out that Stein is still a student with lots of books and “a student’s face,” seeming to be willing to learn more about the world around him (122). But then, Stein also makes an interesting statement about his idea of ownership when he describes how it feels to finally possess a rare specimen. Stein explains to Marlow about the moment of taking possession:

> When I got up I shook like a leaf with excitement, and when I opened these beautiful wings and made sure what a rare and so extraordinary perfect specimen I had, my head went round and my legs became so weak with emotion that I had to sit on the ground. I had greatly desired to possess myself of a specimen of that species […]. I took long journeys and underwent great privations […], and here suddenly I had him in my fingers—*for myself!* In the words of the poet […]—“So halt’ ich’s endlich denn in meinen Haenden, / Und nenn’ es in gewissem Sinne mein.” (my emphasis 127)

Even though Stein talks of finally possessing the specimen for himself, he calls his ownership into question in the last two lines in which he quotes Goethe’s drama *Torquato Tasso*. In translation the words mean: “I hold it, then, at length within my hands, / And in a certain sense can call it mine.” The lines are spoken by Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara,
when he receives Tasso’s, the poet’s, new masterpiece. Tasso hands Alfonso the work and insists the poem belongs to Alfonso “in every sense” (Act I, Scene 3). But Tasso soon changes his mind and demands his work back. Tasso’s request confirms Alfonso’s doubts about his ownership of the poem. After all, Tasso’s created words were never Alfonso’s. No matter who claims to own the poem, Tasso will always remain its creator.

In Paul Kirschner’s article on Conrad, Goethe, and Stein, Kirschner declares that “ownership of the masterpiece ultimately eludes artist and patron alike. Similarly, Stein makes it clear that the sense in which he possessed his butterfly […] was so limited as to be illusory” (65). The emphasis in the two lines from Goethe’s drama is on the phrase “in a certain sense.” Even though Stein is the hunter and gatherer, he knows he is not the creator of the butterfly nor is he its real owner, but he is nonetheless proud of his accomplishment, so much so that he claims it to be the best part of him (123). He tells Marlow that once he dies, he wants his small native town in Bavaria to inherit his most special specimen because he wants them to have not only something of him but “the best” of him (123). Stein owns the butterfly “in a certain sense” in that he has taken it from the world, claimed ownership of its body, and is keeping it in his collection, which Stein considers an accomplishment. But even if Stein sees it as the best part of him, his self-proclaimed ownership of the beetles and butterflies is still more “illusory” than real (Kirschner 65).

Similar to Stein’s remark about “man” moving where he is not wanted, his idea of the meaning of ownership challenges the validity of imperialism. The ownership of the butterfly is similar to the imperialist’s claim of land and humans in other countries. European empires went abroad and claimed foreign land and natives as part of their
empires, but this type of ownership is arbitrary and illusive, and Stein is aware that his type of ownership is also only a qualified ownership “in a certain sense.”

Ultimately, Stein’s awareness of his qualified ownership demonstrates that he is also aware of his human weakness of following his desire for material possessions no matter their price. But his awareness does not necessarily turn him into a better human being. Even though he is less ignorant than other humans, he is still as flawed and keeps following his desire for possessions (similar to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*). Stein knows that his desires keep him from finding pure happiness, and he believes there to be “only one remedy” (128). Stein exclaims to Marlow, “One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!” (128). For Stein our cure is for us to cherish the moment instead of living in the past or future. According to Stein, man’s problem is that he is never satisfied (128):

> ‘How to be! *Ach!* How to be. […] We want so many different ways to be,’

He began again. ‘This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so. […] He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil—and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow—so fine as he can never be.’ (128-9)

Stein puts the emphasis on the momentary state of being and not the process of living or, in another word, progress. While the butterfly lives in the moment and therefore is in the state of “being,” man is driven to always move forward, and that is why no human, not even Jim, is compared to a butterfly in the novel. Even though man’s life is ephemeral in its own way, man differs greatly from Stein’s idea of the butterfly because, according to
Stein, man cannot sit still. Stein’s metaphor calls to mind another of Goethe’s dramas—
*Faust*. In Goethe’s *Faust*, the scientist Heinrich Faust cannot stop striving for knowledge
which keeps him from enjoying his life and ultimately drives him into making a pact with
the devil. He offers his soul and asks in response for the devil to help him enjoy life.
Faust is like Stein’s notion of “man” who “will never on his heap of mud keep still”
(128). Man wants to find joy in life, but instead of being in the moment, he strives so
much for what may be in the future that to find satisfaction he may go so far as selling his
own soul to the devil. Jim remains restless and unhappy until he finally stops searching
for a new life and a new self and starts living by settling in Patusan. Stein’s words about
the state of being imply that instead of striving for the creation of a self, man should
focus on the beauty of an intrinsic value.

It is the search for an identity that keeps man from being in the moment. In her
article, “‘And the Woman Is Dead Now’: a Reconsideration of Conrad’s Stein,” Elizabeth
Brody Tenenbaum states that because of its “innate essence that precedes action and
precludes deviation, the butterfly can never be other than a ‘masterpiece of Nature’—
fragile yet strong, harmonious and exact” (340). “Man,” however, according to
Tenenbaum, is “impelled by his dreams toward an identity not inherently his, is doomed,
according to Stein, to unremitting efforts to create a desired self that remains forever
beyond his reach” (340). Man is born without his identity and spends his entire life
“finding himself”—building an identity—but his expectations are so high that he never
feels accomplished. According to Stein, man has a false impression of himself that is a
result of his dreams: “[E]very time [man] shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine
fellow—so fine as he can never be” (129). According to Frederick Karl this means that
the illusion is necessary for man’s survival because “the loss of self-protective illusions is the surest way to self-destruction” (167). We see such a self-protective illusion, for instance, when Jim compares his crewmembers to animals to make himself feel separate and better than them, which I discuss more thoroughly in the next section of this chapter (78). Robert Penn Warren states in his essay on Nostromo, another novel by Conrad, that “[t]he last wisdom is for man to realize that though his values are illusions, the illusion is necessary, is infinitely precious, is the work of his human achievement, and is, in the end, his only truth” (377). Stein’s beetles and butterflies collection is to him his most precious achievement in life; it is “the best” part of him (Lord Jim 123). Despite society’s illusion of ownership, the beetles and butterflies collection defines Stein. The collection, and what he had to do to create it, has made him into the human being that he is today.

While Stein’s beetles and butterflies collection is a part of him, it is not the key to his happiness. According to Stein, happiness is a state of being (128-9). He claims that if man wants to be happy, he needs to be more like a butterfly, slow down, and not let the past or future keep him from living in the moment. We start seeing this behavior in Jim once he slows down and settles in Patusan and especially when he decides that death is more desirable than a restless life on the run from one place to the next. The goal for man is to find the perfect equilibrium that he can find in nature. For that to happen, man needs to become again a part of the environment and let go of his wish to separate himself from the natural world. Man’s dualistic worldview separates humans from animals. Since we live in an anthropocentric dualistic society where man is always perceived as the superior one of the two, every comparison of humans to animals sounds derogatory. If man accepted that opposites do not need to be opposites but can coexist as equals, then a
comparison of men to animals would no longer be degrading but just another attempt to makes sense of this world. With this in mind, the comparisons of humans to animals that are drawn in *Lord Jim* take on another meaning. What first looked like it might be a form of degradation is now just another way of self-definition that actually bridges the gap between humans and animals. The comparison of humans to animals highlights the similarities between the two and thereby accentuates their closeness. Once again, Conrad shows that man should not alienate himself from nature no matter whether it is the sea, the forest, or the animals because it is through his being in nature that he will find peace and happiness.

**Theriomorphism in *Lord Jim***

When we portray humans as animals, John Berger declares, we do so “to reveal more clearly an aspect of [their] character” (18). Comparisons to animals, nevertheless, usually do not compare the human to the entire animal; instead, they compare the human to certain attributes of the animal. Popular comparisons are, for instance, “as blind as a bat” or “as busy as a bee.” For the comparison, we usually choose the animal that we associate the most with the character trait, for instance, the lion for its courage or the hare for its lechery (18). These associations have evolved over time because the “animal once lived near the origin of the quality” (18). According to John Berger, “It was through the animal that the quality first became recognizable[, and so the animal lends it his name]” (18). In *Lord Jim* some of the similes that are used are, for instance, “as mute as a fish,” “as quiet as mice,” or “like a herd of cattle afraid of the water” (172, 236, 239). The animal may be chosen for its apparent negative or positive traits. For instance, comparisons to dogs can focus on the dog’s positive traits, such as his loyalty and
companionship, or what we perceive to be his negative character traits, such as his uncleanliness. In *Lord Jim*, one of Marlow’s companions at the courtroom stumbles over a dog, which he calls a “wretched cur” (46). The words Marlow’s companion chooses are clearly an invective. The word “cur” is not a neutral but a pejorative term for dog. Jim, who walks nearby, believes that the verbal slander was meant for him and accuses Marlow of insulting him. In this case, no person is compared to a dog, but Jim feels humiliated just by the thought of someone comparing him to a miserable dog. In *Lord Jim*, we see some flattering, some not so flattering, and some neutral comparisons to animals throughout the novel, but what should become clear after Stein’s speech about nature is that the comparisons increase the proximity between man and animal, which is flattering to man if nature is superior. What we see in these comparisons is an ecocentric worldview. The similarities between man and animals are not degrading but in fact a direct challenge to anthropocentrism. By comparing humans to animals and showing how similar the two actually are, humans are raised to the level of animals and thereby end up closer to nature and its state of perfect balance.

Marlow provides one of the more flattering comparisons in *Lord Jim* when he compares the appearance of one of the natives to an animal to show the exceptional strength of the character. Doramin is the Chief of the Bugis and father of Dain Waris, who is Jim’s closest friend. In his first comparison, Marlow compares Doramin to a strong bull. He creates an impressive picture of Doramin as “one of the most remarkable men of his race [he] had ever seen” (155). He describes him as “immense,” “imposing,” and “monumental” with “the throat like a bull” (155). There is no wonder why his people look up to him. Doramin appears big and strong and as an authoritative figure. The bull is
an animal with which the European reader is well acquainted. The British, for instance, have even named the fictional character John Bull, who personifies Great Britain, after the animal. Bulls are known for their strength and fearlessness so much so that man has for a long time loved to fight them in an arena to prove his own strength and fearlessness (Rodríguez 82). Even though Doramin is compared to an animal, this comparison to a bull is not to degrade Doramin but to create a visual picture of his strength.

In another instance, Marlow once again uses the word “imposing” to describe the grandeur of Doramin’s body, but this time he compares him to “a cunning old elephant” (164). The elephant is another animal, besides the bull, that is associated with power and strength. Like an old elephant, Doramin is exceptional among his people in life experience and wisdom. Marlow declares, “With his imposing bulk and haughty little eyes darting sagacious, inquisitive glances, he reminded one irresistibly of a cunning old elephant” (164). Doramin is wise and proud. The word “cunning” can be perceived as a negative characteristic if it is understood in regard to Doramin’s character, but Conrad seems to be more concerned with Doramin’s outward appearance since the word “cunning” visualizes the quaintness of Doramin’s stature while emphasizing the age and wisdom of the old man. Additionally, in this same instance Marlow compares the movement of Doramin’s chest when breathing to “the heave of a calm sea” (164). His breath was “powerful and regular” (164). Marlow’s comparison of Doramin to the sea accentuates the powerful positive image Marlow creates of Doramin. Throughout Conrad’s works, as discussed in Chapter II, the sea is superior to man. Through the sea, man can rise and find complete wisdom. If Doramin carries the sea in his chest, he
symbolizes the completeness of wisdom that man can achieve. He rises above everyone around him and is rightfully the chief of the herd.

The third time Doramin is compared to an animal, he is compared to an ox, but this time the image is a very different one than before. When Jim goes to Doramin to tell him of the death of Doramin’s son Dain Waris, Doramin is described as an “unwieldy old man, lowering his big forehead like an ox under a yoke” (245). Doramin makes “an effort to rise” but is struggling without his two supporters (246). He appears broken. The death of his son blew away his strength and destroyed his will to live. The image of him as an ox under a yoke creates an image of control, but this time it is not Doramin who is in control. His will is broken, and his body’s movements are limited. He is being domesticated and kept in control by a power from behind that he cannot even see or comprehend. His masculinity has been taken away from him. While Doramin was first compared to a bull—a powerful, strong, and fertile animal—he is now compared to an ox. Oxen, unless for a few exceptions that are used for breeding, are usually castrated. Their male fertility has been eliminated. In this case, Doramin’s strong manhood is gone. What’s left is a heavy old man who cannot even support his own body. The comparison of Doramin to an ox, even though it shows Doramin’s weakness, is not to show Doramin’s animalistic features but to visualize what happens to the body when someone’s heart breaks. All three of Conrad’s choices—the bull, the elephant, and the ox—draw an image of a character that is born to be powerful but not invincible. Even the most powerful will can be broken, and in this case Doramin’s will was broken by the European invaders. If the Europeans had not come to Doramin’s country and had not been “disturbing the blades of grass,” Doramin’s son Dain Waris would still be alive
Doramin and his son are examples of what imperialism does to the natives of the land. Like Stein taking control of his insects and killing them, the imperialists come into the country, take control of the natives, and kill them.\(^{29}\)

One example of theriomorphism in the novel that is less flattering is Marlow’s comparison of humans to tortoises. Marlow’s comparison is an example of where the animal’s common behavior is used to explain human behavior. When Jewel tells Marlow of her mother’s death, “the irremediable horror of the scene” shakes him up and drives him out of “that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell” (186). But the moment does not last very long, and Marlow goes “back into [his] shell directly” (186). Marlow comparing his behavior to that of the tortoise creates an image of Marlow’s sudden emotional response to the scene; it helps us visualize the sudden change in his demeanor and then the sudden disappearance of his curiosity and once again immediate withdrawal from life. However, contrary to Marlow, the tortoise only hides inside its shell in moments of danger. Most of its life, even sometimes when it is sleeping, the tortoise spends outside its shell without fear. Humans like Marlow are much more fearful and desire the safety of a shell; once they have built their own protected shell, hardly anything can make them leave their safe grounds again.

The comparison in itself of man withdrawing like a tortoise is not degrading. What is humiliating is man’s withdrawal from life in general and not just in moments of danger. Marlow’s words suggest that, compared to a tortoise that only creeps into its shell in moments of danger, humans seem to live inside their protective shell even when there is no threat because, according to Marlow, “[o]ne must” (186). The disorder of the world
outside the shell is too much for man to handle. The mind turns dark in the light because the “chaos of dark thoughts” becomes visible and overwhelming (186). In the dark, Marlow’s words come back to him and with his words the feelings of order and comfort. What we see in Marlow’s image is not someone who withdraws into his shell in a moment of danger but someone who just for a moment peeks out to see the world and then quickly disappears again into a hole that promises security. Marlow’s comparison of himself to a tortoise shows that he has not only been alienating himself from nature but also life, and the constant darkness in his life will ultimately keep him from finding transcendence and enlightenment.

Earlier in the novel, it is Jim who explains how he had been out in the open instead of hiding in a safe place. After his famous jump off the Patna, Jim and his crewmembers are stuck on lifeboats for days. Jim describes how the “sun crept all the way from east to west over [his] bare head” (78). He tells Marlow, “I suppose you think I was going mad […], but that day I could not come to harm, [the] sun could not make me mad [nor] could it kill me” (78). After having abandoned what he believed to be a sinking ship and seeing the passengers go down with it, Jim does not believe that there is anything worse that could happen to him. His shipmates, however, think differently and believe Jim to be crazy for staying out in the open. Compared to Jim, his shipmates hide in their shell for the safety it provides. Even the skipper exclaims that Jim will die if he stays in the sun. Interestingly, Jim compares this exact skipper not to a tortoise but to a “turtle,” which makes sense (78). The skipper is a seaman who lives his life at sea. While tortoises are land-dwellers, turtles spend most of their life in and around water; therefore, it would not make sense to compare the skipper to a tortoise while he is on board. Even
though Marlow is a seaman himself as well, when he compares his behavior to that of a
tortoise, he does not talk just about himself but makes a generalized statement about
“each of us” (186). It therefore makes more sense for Marlow to talk of tortoises and not
turtles.

In regard to the skipper, Jim gives an overall very animalistic description of him.
He calls him a “beast” with “fishy eyes” that “growled, and drew in like a turtle” (78). A
beast is not a specific species of animal, and Jim’s description does not compare the
skipper to just one animal but two with the sound of an undeclared third. Jim makes the
skipper look like an animal, sound like an animal, and move like an animal. The
comparisons are meant to be derogatory because of Jim’s overall judgmental view of
men. After abandoning their ship, those crewmembers who are “grunting,” “howling”
and “out-bark[ing]” each other are “beast[s]” in Jim’s eyes (73-4). To him, they did
wrong by leaving their ship. Jim, however, is no different from them, and he knows that
(76). He admits, “If I had opened my lips just then I would have simply howled like an
animal” (77). Nonetheless, what makes Jim different from his crewmembers is that he
does not withdraw from life within his shell. He may be running away from his past
throughout the novel, but he does not do so in order to withdraw from life; he does so to
start a new one.

Jim’s derogatory descriptions of his crewmembers are an example of how much
Jim’s conscience has been shaped by contemporary society—a society that has taught Jim
to respect and follow its ideas of morality. In society’s terms, it is wrong for a
crewmember to abandon the ship before its passengers. We still blame and punish
captains today when they abandon their ship before saving all of its passengers as in the
case of the Italian cruise ship *Costa Concordia*, which wrecked in 2012 and left 32 people dead, or the South Korean ferry, which sunk in 2014 and caused the death of 304 passengers. Jim judges himself for having abandoned his ship. He jumped when he should have faced death; thus, the rest of his life he spends running away from his guilt, wanting to start over, until he sees his only chance to redeem himself by offering his life to Doramin. Jim is an example of the negative effects society can have on a human being’s life. While morality is not what is wrong with society, it is the tension between a man’s morality, or in other words a man’s mind, and his instincts that can tear him apart and alienate him from his own self. This tension is once again created by the dualism that controls our culture. The mind and body are two separate entities in a dualistic society, and since one has to be superior to the other, of course, it is the mind that must reign over the body. Jim follows his society’s moral guidelines except for a split second when his survival instinct makes him jump off the ship. After his fateful jump, society and its social restrictions drive Jim away and make him incapable of standing still until he reaches Patusan where he finally finds himself capable of starting a new life.

Jim’s derogatory comparisons are a typical and very straightforward example of contemporary society’s discomfort with theriomorphism. Jim tries everything to not be comparable to an animal because he believes comparisons to animals to be degrading in his society. Jim lacks the awareness of his environment that Stein has found in his beetles and butterflies collection. He feels dissociated from animals and nature; therefore, when he tries to dissociate himself from his crewmembers, he tries to categorize them as animals. But the dissociation does not bring him peace. Jim is the classic example of the alienated modern character. He is divided. His entire life, Jim tries to find a way to
reconnect himself with something that will bring him peace, but until his death he is haunted by his social conscience. Society disables him from reconnecting with his own instincts.

Man’s willful disconnection from nature hinders Jim from reaching his full potential. He believes that progress is only possible apart from the animal; thus, he tries to move further and further away from it in order to move forward. Conrad, however, does not agree with this perception of man and nature, and he expresses his disagreement through Marlow’s encounter with Stein. If nature, according to Stein, is not the inferior but the superior of the two, then it is clear that man is not moving closer to perfection by moving away from nature but actually moving farther away from it. If man wanted to find his equilibrium, Stein declares, he would have to look for it not in the past or future but in the present moment. It is the ability to linger that promises perfect harmony.

Conrad’s works, including *Lord Jim*, show the negative consequences of man’s arrogance to raise himself above the state of nature. In *Lord Jim*, Conrad challenges man’s arrogance by comparing him to animals, yet the meaning of Conrad’s comparisons does not become clear unless we examine those comparisons in connection with Stein’s notions about man and nature. Stein, despite the rather minor narrative space that is devoted to him, is significant to our understanding of Conrad’s perspective on the relationship between nature and man. Despite Stein’s weakness for human desires, no other Conradian protagonist makes such a clear statement about nature’s supremacy over man. Despite Stein’s incapability to overcome his personal flaws, his remarks about nature as masterpiece are a direct challenge to anthropocentrism. Stein like no other character in Conrad’s works is aware of Western society’s illusion of its own dominance
and the unrighteousness of imperialism, and his view of nature, as we can see in Chapters II and III, is representative of an impression of nature’s supremacy that Conrad draws throughout his works.
CHAPTER V

“MOTIONLESS CLOUDS”:

SOCIETY AT A STANDSTILL IN CONRAD’S NOSTROMO

Contrary to his sea fiction in which Conrad’s sailor experiences life, freedom, and transcendence at sea, in Nostromo (1904) Conrad tells a story of constraints, alienation, and death. Once again, Conrad creates a microcosm of civil society at large, not on board a ship, but on an imaginary piece of land that is isolated from the rest of the world by water and mountains. The town of Sulaco, the novel’s main setting, is a place caught in stagnation, which drives its characters crazy. The town is stuck in an endless repetition of revolutions that leads to nothing but more revolutions. Jocelyn Baines argues that “[n]othing is ever achieved” by the end of the novel, and “it looks as if the future of Costaguana will be very similar to her past” (301).

In Nostromo, as in his earlier works, Conrad once again raises the question whether society’s idea of “progress” is really advancing man or if it is actually slowing him down and keeping him from rising to his full potential. In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have argued that in Conrad’s works it is the connection to nature that could help man find transcendence and perfect wisdom; isolating man from nature causes the opposite. While we have already seen alienated characters in works like Heart of Darkness or “An Outpost of Progress,” in Nostromo Conrad is taking man’s alienation to a new level. In Nostromo, we see the ambitious capitalist man completely disconnected from nature even though he is still surrounded by it, and his disconnection does not stop with nature. Characters like Nostromo or Decoud not only find themselves alienated from their natural environment,
but also from their entire human community until they eventually find themselves
estranged from their own selves. The result is not progress but death.

Compared to Conrad’s early fiction, the role of nature is not the same in
_Nostromo_ as it is in works like _The Nigger of the “Narcissus”_ or _Typhoon_. In Conrad’s
maritime fiction and also in novels like _Almayer’s Folly_, nature has a very loud voice that
screams and threatens through its winds, thunder, and lightning. Over the course of time,
however, nature turns more and more silent in Conrad’s fiction. In _Heart of Darkness_,
nature, despite its strong presence, has already become silent and has stepped back to
leave man take care of his own destruction. In _Nostromo_, nature has become even less
forceful. At this point, except for the silver, which has become a commodity, nature
seems to have no other purpose than to accentuate man’s state of being.

In the novel, the natural environment is slowly being destroyed by the increasing
industrialization of Sulaco, but the only character who understands the degree of the
destruction of nature that is caused by economic progress is a woman. According to the
narrator, “Mrs. Gould had seen it all from the beginning: the clearing of the wilderness,
the making of the road, the cutting of new paths up the cliff face of San Tomé”
(_Nostromo_ 64). Shortly before everything changed, Mrs. Gould captured the tranquility of
nature in a painting, which, according to Claire Rosenfield, “in its greenery suggested the
Biblical paradise” (51). Soon thereafter, the paradise was destroyed; the waterfall was
dammed up to produce hydropower for the mine. The sudden absence of water was
detrimental to the surrounding fauna. The luxurious “tree-ferns” that surrounded the
waterfall died of thirst (64). According to Huei-Ju Wang, Mrs. Gould’s “painting [. . .] reveal[s] the consequences of relentlessly pursuing a ‘fixed’ idea [. . .] at any cost” and
demonstrates the vast transformation that can be “brought about by capital that ruthlessly tears down anything standing in its way in the name of development, progress and prosperity” (Wang 10, 12). The painting is a reminder to Mrs. Gould of how much has been destroyed by capitalism. To her the mine presents more detriments than benefits, and her wish is to have better left nature alone (129).

In contrast to his earlier works, Conrad no longer emphasizes nature’s superiority; instead, Conrad shows the destruction of nature, which society has caused to further its ideas of progress. But the destruction of nature does not seem to be the focus of the novel. Nature is very silent in *Nostromo* and appears like a backdrop that is created to fulfill the purpose of visualizing man’s stagnation and alienation from society and himself. The “great body of motionless and opaque clouds” that hangs above the region becomes a symbol of Sulaco’s historical stagnation while the darkness at night visualizes the characters’ detachment from their environment and brings to light their thoughts and concerns (3).

In *Nostromo*, even though we see man disconnected from nature, the focus of the novel is not on the disconnection between man and nature but the next steps of this development. What follows is man’s alienation from his community and most of all the alienation from his own self, which quickly ends in the characters’ deaths. Instead of nature being man’s antagonist as it was, for instance, in *Typhoon*, man is now his own antagonist in *Nostromo*. While in Conrad’s early maritime fiction like *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* we still see the possibility for man’s transcendence and perfect wisdom, in *Nostromo* this no longer seems to be an option. Instead of progress, we see stagnation and the death of man, and the cause for this detrimental development, according to Conrad,
are man’s material interests. Already in works like *Almayer’s Folly, An Outcast of the Islands*, “An Outpost of Progress,” and *Heart of Darkness*, the characters’ pursuit of material interests, like Kurtz’s hunt for ivory, ends in the characters’ own downfall. The difference between *Nostromo* and Conrad’s earlier works is that *Nostromo* no longer focuses on the demise of one or two characters but the downfall of an entire community. Even though the novel is titled after one of its main protagonists and spends a considerable amount of time on him, Nostromo is not the main focus of this novel. Just as important as Nostromo’s demise is the ruin of other characters such as Decoud or Gould. For all of these characters, the cause of all evil is their loss of control when faced with the chance of owning material treasures.

While the whole upper-class community of men in Sulaco seems to be infected with the capitalist urges of modern Western society, Conrad, of course, offers an exception to the rule by introducing Dr. Monygham. In *Nostromo*, Dr. Monygham is Conrad’s character who comes closest to Stein’s idea of the butterfly. In *Lord Jim*, Stein explains how man will never be a masterpiece because he is incapable of living in the moment. According to Stein, man is always looking for progress, and he cannot sit still. Monygham seems to be different. He shows no personal interest in the silver but instead focuses on how he as a doctor can help his community. Except for when he is saving his own life after suffering endless torture, Monygham tries to do something for the public good. While his suffering of the torture and his eventual betrayal of his comrades estrange him from his European upper-class community, his humbleness and sensitivity naturalize him in his new South American environment (*Nostromo* 228). Even though he
is alienated from his European community, Monygham appears to be at peace with his role in this world.

Besides being ambitiously political, *Nostromo* is also a psychological novel that explores how the minds of various individuals of a society deal with the political, economic, social, and environmental changes that are happening to their society. To discuss the role of the environment in this political and psychological novel, my ecocritical approach needs to be more focused on the novel’s political and psychological aspects. If we want to analyze man’s alienation from nature, we must not exclude his psyche, but when we talk about revolutions, we also cannot ignore the political mindset of the author and his characters. My methodology for this chapter therefore follows some of the ideas of ecopsychology and eco-Marxism.

**Ecopsychology Meets Eco-Marxism**

If we add psychology to our ecological analysis of man’s disconnection from nature, we end up with the field of ecopsychology. According to Theodore Roszak, “‘Ecopsychology’ is the name most often used for this emerging synthesis of the psychological (here intended to embrace the psychotherapeutic and the psychiatric) and the ecological” (4). Ecopsychologists believe that if we want to study this bond between the human psyche and nature, we need to study it with the sensitivity of a therapist, the expertise of an ecologist, and the ethical energy of an environmental activist (Brown xvi). Our psyche is “an integral part of the web of nature”; if we want to “heal the soul” and “restore our own health,” we must heal our planet first (Brown xvi).

Psychotherapists usually do not relate man’s mental health to his relationship with nature; to do so is a rather recent development in psychotherapy. Especially during
Conrad’s time, psychotherapists like Freud believed man’s ego to be an isolated atom that was separate from the physical world (Roszak 10). For Freud, it was only the immature ego that felt itself inseparable from the external environment: “Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches from itself the external world” (Freud 13). Freud claims in Civilization and Its Discontents (1930) that after the ego disassociates itself from the external environment, it will continue as a separate entity (13). Ecopsychologists disagree with Freud’s theory. At the root of ecopsychology lies the assumption that the human psyche has always been and will always be “sympathetically bonded to the Earth”; thus, according to Roszak, if man feels disconnected from nature, he will eventually experience the feeling of something missing in his life (5). According to ecopsychologists like Lester Brown, Chellis Glendinning, Ralph Metzner, and Theodore Roszak, man’s disconnection from nature can lead to a long list of mental dysfunctions. Ecopsychologists therefore try to reverse the disconnection between man and nature by guiding man back to the natural environment of the forests or mountains to help him find his balance again by feeling connected with nature.

Similar to contemporary ecopsychologists, Conrad seems to disagree with the views of early twentieth-century psychologists like Freud who believed the ego to be separate from the external world. In the novel, the ego of a character like Nostromo appears to be detached from his external world, but Conrad portrays this detachment as detrimental. If we look at novels like Lord Jim, we see that man desires nature’s equilibrium, but to reach this state himself, man needs to move closer to nature and not away from it, which agrees with the views of ecopsychologists; however, Conrad’s views depart in that they are much more pessimistic. In Nostromo, Conrad shows very clearly
the mental decay of men who find themselves disconnected from nature, and Conrad’s message is nothing but cynical in that he offers his characters no return to nature or society. Characters like Decoud and Nostromo find themselves so far disconnected from their natural environment and their society that it is impossible for them to find their way back. Their disconnection is final. Even when Decoud and Nostromo suddenly find themselves surrounded by nothing but nature, they feel uncomfortable, discouraged, and desperate, not at peace or in harmony with their environment (Nostromo 181-3). Without the possibility of their return back to nature, their stories end in their untimely deaths.

The source for Conrad’s characters’ alienation from nature that leads to their mental decay lies in the social changes of their society that are caused by the modernization, industrialization, and the political revolutions that are happening in Sulaco. Conrad was not an advocate of capitalism and industrial progress, and he expressed his criticism openly in his letters and essays such as in “Autocracy and War” (1905/1921) when he talks about the Great Exhibition. In 1851, a few years before Conrad was born, the Great Exhibition in London displayed impressive industrial achievements from around the world, and the Prince Consort believed this exhibition to be the evidence of the significant transition from a world that was disconnected to a world of unity. According to the Prince Consort, the world was slowly but surely coming to “the realisation of the unity of mankind” (qtd. in Houghton 43). It seemed tangible to Victorians that industrial and technological progress could resolve all of the world’s problems that had been insolvable until this point (Watt 151). But the Victorians’ expectations were never met, and Conrad was not surprised by these developments. To
him, people’s “trust in the peaceful nature of industrial and commercial competition” was just an “incredible infatuation” that had to stop (Conrad, “Autocracy and War” 628).

In Nostromo capitalism and industrial progress leads to man’s alienation from nature, society, and eventually himself. The consequence of man’s alienation is utter unhappiness and desperation that is so strong that it drives a man like Decoud to commit suicide. The views Conrad portrays in Nostromo are in some respects very similar to Karl Marx’s theory of Entfremdung (estrangement). Ursula Lord has already asserted that “Marx’s insight concerning alienation in modern society can be used as intellectual foundation for, a means of coming to terms with, Conrad’s concern with the alienation of one man from others in society, the divisions created by ‘material interests’, and ultimately a man’s alienation from his own essential being” (218). Even though Marx’s theory of estrangement is first of all concerned with the individual’s alienation from labor, Marx believes that man’s Entfremdung is not only from his labor but also from man’s natural environment, his fellow human beings, and himself, which makes Marx’s ideas of Entfremdung particularly interesting for an ecocritical analysis of Conrad’s Nostromo. According to current scholars like John Bellamy Foster, Marx has been denounced for a long time for his “lack for ecological concern,” which is far from true (Foster 9). According to Foster, these scholars who have made these claims have “confuse[d] Marx with other socialist theorists, whom Marx himself criticized” (10). Foster claims, “From the start, Marx’s notion of the alienation of human labor was connected to an understanding of the alienation of human beings from nature,” particularly in his earlier works (9). Marx believed in “the interdependence of humans and nature,” which, according to Carolyn Merchant, has become “an idea now central to
the ecological vision” (137). In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx claims:

Nature is man’s *inorganic body*—nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself the human body. Man *lives* on nature—means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature. (74)

Marx’s words show that man’s internal and his external nature are interconnected.  

Through his dependence on his external nature for his own subsistence, man inevitably partakes in external nature’s transformation (Foster 73). In *The German Ideology* (1845-46), Marx reemphasizes, “As long as man has existed, nature and man have affected each other” (408). However, the further man alienates himself from his own labor, the more he alienates himself from nature, and the next step in this process is man’s alienation from himself. All in all, man’s *Entfremdung*—no matter whether it is from his labor, his natural environment, his fellow men, or himself—causes problems. The well-functioning symbiosis of man and nature is interrupted. The further man alienates himself and disrupts the interrelatedness between him and nature, the more he feels he is lacking something in his life and tries to substitute it with something else such as economic power and material possessions.

In Chapter III, I talked about Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s argument that civil society starts with the establishment of private property (“Origin of Inequality” 60). For Karl Marx, communism is the constructive elimination of private property, which creates the “genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man,
the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 102). According to Marx, if we want to reverse man’s alienation from not only nature but also from himself and his fellow society members, we need to shift our focus from our material interests to less economic goals. This shift of interest is important to protect our natural environment and thereby save ourselves.

Eco-Marxists follow Marx’s argument that capitalism is to blame for today’s ecological problems. Humans’ alienation from the world, according to eco-Marxists, causes humans to feel less guilt-ridden when abusing their natural environment. Eco-Marxists criticize Western capitalism for damaging humans’ relationship with nature because capitalism regards nature as a commodity and therefore causes man to actually feel entitled to abuse nature. In *Nostromo*, we see man exploit his natural environment for its natural resources. To take possession of the silver, like taking possession of the ivory in *Heart of Darkness*, society does not hesitate to damage or kill parts of nature. In Sulaco, society was responsible for “the clearing of the wilderness, the making of the road, the cutting of new paths up the cliff face of San Tomé,” and the damming of the torrent, which all led to a dried-up waterfall and dead tree-ferns (64). Conrad clearly shows the effects of capitalism on nature, but he does not stop there. While he is aware of the influence capitalism has on the natural environment, Conrad also sees what the destruction of nature will eventually mean for humans. In Conrad’s *Nostromo*, it is not only nature that suffers under the reign of capitalism but also man. It is capitalism that kills off Conrad’s characters one by one. The attraction of material interests makes the
protagonists lose track of what really matters in life, which is the equilibrium that, according to Stein in *Lord Jim*, can only be found in nature.

**Azuera and the Forbidden Treasure**

The novel, *Nostromo*, opens with the legend of the forbidden treasure of Azuera, which is unrelated to the rest of the novel except for its vision: portraying the risks of people’s obsession with their material interests. The legend is set on the dead soil of Azuera. Two wandering sailors, gringos, decide to find Azuera’s “forbidden treasure” (2). With an Indian, a donkey, and revolvers at their belts, they search for the treasure and are never seen again. The locals believe the donkey and Indian to have died, but the two gringos they believe are still dwelling “amongst the rocks, under the fatal spell of their success” (2). According to the legend, “their souls cannot tear themselves away from their bodies mounting guard over the discovered treasure” (2). The legend of the “forbidden treasure” foreshadows that nothing good will come of man’s material interests in the novel. Conrad makes sure that if man searches for treasure that does not belong to him, he will not find happiness but will be cursed to a never-ending life in misery.

Despite their initial “envy” of the gringos, the poor people of Azuera are aware of the risks that are involved in the search for forbidden treasures (2). In fact, the legend clearly differentiates between the poor people of Azuera and wealthy or ambitious outsiders, which is a distinction that, Ursula Lord argues, has been “overlooked and undervalued” (273). The narrator in *Nostromo* mentions an “obscure instinct” only “the poor” have that allows them to connect “the ideas of evil and wealth” (1). When closely observing their natural environment, the poor people of Azuera see a landscape that is all but fertile. The peninsula is “a wild chaos of sharp rocks and stony levels cut about by
vertical ravines” (1). It is “utterly waterless, for the rainfall runs off at once on all sides into the sea, [and] has not soil enough […] to grow a single blade of grass” (1). To the “poor,” this is a warning sign—“a curse”—of which you better beware (1). Not even their knowledge of the “heaps of shining gold” that are hidden under the rock tempts these people to risk their lives. Contrary to the wealthy townspeople and ambitious outsiders, the poor people seem to be in tune with their environment; they are aware that as long as they do not exploit nature, they will be living their lives in peace. Conrad’s message is clear: no happiness will come from stealing treasures that do not belong to you. We have already seen this same message in *Heart of Darkness*. At the end of his life, Kurtz is nowhere close to living a happy life. For years he has been exploiting the treasures of Africa by hunting elephants for their ivory. At the end of his life, there is nothing left but “the horror,” and the prospects for the capitalists of Costaguana are not much better. Like Kurtz, they claim more than is rightfully theirs and get punished for their unrestrained greed. In the end, Nostromo goes so far as to assert that it was the silver that killed him, which clearly resembles Kurtz’s outcry of the horror (Najder 236). William Mueller argues that the characters of *Nostromo*, like Kurtz, “are cursed with a lack of restraint—for silver, not for ivory and savage rites […]” and thus trespass into a territory where they do not belong (563). According to Mueller, it is their lack of wisdom that makes them unable to foresee the consequences of their trespassing; however, I would argue that according to Conrad it is not the lack of wisdom but the lack of an “obscure instinct”—something that one does not acquire but that is inherent and comes from within—that makes the money-oriented characters of Nostromo unable to predict the significance of their interference (*Nostromo* 1).
Conrad uses the legend of the gringos to establish his anti-capitalistic views in the novel. In *Nostromo*, capitalism does not promise progress; instead, it offers stagnation at its best, which Conrad repeatedly emphasizes through his descriptions of the natural environment. While the infertile land symbolizes the spiritual barrenness of wealth, the motionless air reflects the stagnation that the characters are experiencing in their lives. Throughout the novel, the narrator stresses the stillness of the air. On most days the sky reflects society’s stagnation with its “great body of motionless and opaque clouds” (3). And when there is a breeze, it is so unpredictable that it keeps seamen from moving on to their destination. As soon as the ships from Europe “cross[] the imaginary line drawn from Punta Mala to Azuera[, they] lose at once the strong breezes of the ocean [and] become the prey of capricious airs that play with them for thirty hours at a stretch sometime,” which makes the sailor’s job more difficult and dangerous (2-3). For the sailor, the condition of unpredictable winds is not better than the lack of wind; both conditions keep the sailor from reaching his destination. In *Nostromo*, the impressions of motionless nature imply the meaning of the entire novel: nothing ever really changes. Progress is an illusion. We are stuck in stagnation, caught up in endless repetitions. Our desires to rule over nature and exploit it for its treasures are not a sign of progress, nor does the fulfillment of our desires bring us peace and contentment, which we see in characters like Decoud or Nostromo.

**Decoud’s and Nostromo’s Alienation from Nature and Society**

While *Lord Jim* was still concerned with man’s disconnection from nature, *Nostromo*, even though it continues this process, focuses on man’s alienation from his fellow men. In *Nostromo*, characters like Decoud and Nostromo are not connected to
nature by their instincts; these characters have “progressed” so much that they are no longer only separated from nature, but they are also separated from their own human race. Modern man considers it an achievement to leave everyone behind on the way up the social ladder. But once man has reached the top and therefore the pinnacle of solitude, he cannot endure the isolation. Decoud finds himself all alone, craving for a companion (181). When Nostromo leaves Decoud on the Great Isabel Island, Decoud feels so alone that he is overburdened by the heaviness of his thoughts. The narrator describes, “Solitude becomes very swiftly a state of soul [and] takes possession of the mind” (303). Instead of building a new life by himself, Decoud is so overcome by the solitude that he cannot bear it and thus commits suicide (183). Instead of a blessing, his material interests have turned into a curse for Decoud.

From the beginning, Decoud is all about separation. First he wants to separate Sulaco from the rest of Costaguana. He refers to the people of Sulaco as Occidentals and claims that the “Occidental Province should stand alone” because “we occidentals [. . .] have been always distinct and separated [because w]e have the greatest riches, the greatest fertility, the purest blood in our great families, the most laborious population” (111-2). By Decoud calling the people of Sulaco occidentals, Sulaco becomes a symbolic microcosm of the Western world that tries to separate itself from the rest of the world. To support his claim, Decoud even involves nature in his scheme. Decoud exclaims, “Look at the mountains! Nature itself seems to cry to us, ‘Separate!’” (112). What Decoud is referring to is Sulaco’s geographical separation from not only the rest of the country but the entire world. Sulaco is cut off from the world by the sea and its surrounding mountains. Progress has made it to Sulaco, but it has developed from the inside. Sulaco
has its own railway, but it has not yet breached through the Higuerota Mountain to connect with the rest of the country’s railway system. The telegraph line does not yet cross the mountain but ends abruptly, preventing Sulaco’s communication with the rest of the world (82). The only comfortable way into the land is by ship, but the lack of winds slows down even this approach. Decoud sees Sulaco’s geographical separation as an advantage that should help make Sulaco outshine Costaguana. He is interested in nothing but commercial success. His goal is to climb the social ladder even if this means that he has to leave behind the rest of the world.

The situation begins to change when Decoud is asked to save the silver. The “sane materialist”—a term Joyce Carol Oates uses to describe Decoud—turns into an insane loner the further he removes himself from society (11). At first, nothing else matters to Decoud than to make sure the silver is not lost to the enemy. To save it from getting into the wrong hands, Decoud does not hesitate to isolate himself further by removing himself from his own small community of Sulaco. On his journey, however, Decoud eventually discovers that the silver is not all that matters. When “Decoud found himself solitary on the beach” of the Great Isabel “like a man in a dream,” he felt a “sudden desire to hear a human voice once more seize[] upon his heart” (183). The island, which should have been a “hiding-place” to him, has turned into a “prison” (181). The isolation quickly drives Decoud insane and eventually drives him to commit suicide. Solitude, according to the narrator, is “the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand” (302). There is a difference between choosing solitude for a certain amount of time as an escape from the stress of everyday life and the forced solitude that makes one feel lonely and desperate. In *Walden* (1854), Henry David
Thoreau, for instance, chooses his solitude to find peace in nature but still keeps society just a stone’s throw away so there is always a chance to flee the solitude and reenter society. Forced solitude, on the other hand, is the enemy that man cannot withstand. The silence that is created by Decoud’s forced solitude does not silence his mind but actually turns it louder. Never before in his life has Decoud experienced a day of “absolute silence”; thus, his first experience of it when saving the silver becomes quickly overwhelming (302). The solitude “takes possession of [his] mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief” (303). His mind starts questioning his own existence and individuality (303). As soon as Nostromo’s voice ceases, Decoud realizes the gravity of the “enormous stillness” that engulfs him (158). In this moment, nature is nothing but silent, but in its silence it appears most powerful. Through silence and darkness, nature physically isolates Decoud from his community and thereby forces him to confront his own thoughts and feelings and mental alienation from society, but Decoud cannot bear it and commits suicide.

Ecopsychologists believe that exposure to wilderness will reconnect humans with nature. Steven Harper, for instance, claims that humans would heal and “become whole again” if they “turned to wilderness,” but Harper also remarks that the experience can be overwhelming like a “culture shock” (184, 192). A more fitting term, Harper suggests, would be “expanding reality shock” (192). Harper himself, when he enters the wilderness on his journeys, experiences it “as a feeling of strangeness: a dizzying nausea may cloud my head and stomach, and sometimes anxiety, fear, and restlessness run through my body-mind [until d]oubts may arise and I might find myself asking, ‘Why?’” (192). Harper’s experience of the wilderness does not appear far off from Decoud’s. Like
Harper, Decoud experiences anxiety and restlessness. Already after a few days on the island Decoud can no longer bear being alone in this solitary environment. Decoud also seems to be losing his sense of time, which is not unusual in such situations. According to Harper, “People commonly report a sense of ‘timelessness’” after entering the wilderness (192). The feeling of time standing still can be something wonderful, but if the individual is overcome by anxiety and wants to leave the place, timelessness can feel like a curse. Harper argues that in a moment of “expanding reality shock,” we need “to transcend our culturally defined experience of time and space” so that a “process of growth and transformation” can begin, which can only happen if we “allow [ourselves] to feel the fear rather than push it away” (193). Decoud, instead of facing his fears, drowns them in the ocean. He ends his life instead of fighting for it.

Decoud’s suicide is very tragic, but it also seems illogical. Albert J. Guerard claims that it is hard to believe that “the active and loving Decoud would commit suicide so soon” (202). Decoud’s helplessness seems exaggerated as if Conrad wanted to portray the suicide sarcastically, especially since the island he is caught on is only two miles offshore and Decoud most likely could have rowed those two miles in his “dinghy” (304). One would expect a normal human being to start building a life, wait for a chance of escape, or start rowing instead. We see this type of attitude in a character like Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe who after a shipwreck is trapped on a deserted island but does not let his unfortunate situation stop him from building a civilized life by himself. Conrad, instead, chooses to have Decoud lose hope and commit suicide. According to Ursula Lord, “Suicide is the ultimate expression of our alienation from our work, from others, and finally from ourselves” (229). Committing suicide is the final step in the
process of man’s *Entfremdung* and ends with his non-existence through death. Decoud’s suicide goes against man’s natural instinct of survival; thus, Decoud’s decision to end his life suggests that he knows he will never be able to reconnect with nature nor society.

In order to reconnect with nature, man needs to reconnect himself with his own senses. Harper describes how “[u]pon entering wilderness, of the first things almost everyone experiences is an enlivening of the five senses” (189). In *Walden*, Thoreau states that “the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man” because there “can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still” (88). Harper and Thoreau draw attention to the significance of man’s senses, which are fundamental to the creation of Conrad’s impressions. Already in the Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* Conrad writes, “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see” (280). While Conrad is trying to make his readers see, most of Conrad’s characters, however, are blind despite their eyesight. Their senses are weak. Contrary to the poor folks in the legend of the hidden treasures of Azuera, who still use their senses and trust their instincts, characters like Decoud and Nostromo are no longer in tune with their senses and instincts. Decoud is so out of touch with the world around him that he cannot find any encouragement in nature, which has become a common state for the modern man. In her article, “When the Earth Hurts, Who Responds?” Sarah Conn claims, “We have [. . .] cut ourselves off from our connection to the Earth so thoroughly in our epistemology and our psychology that even though we are ‘bleeding at the root’, we neither understand the problem nor know what we can do about it” (161). Decoud
finds himself not only cut off from the Earth but also from his fellow human beings, and he has no idea what has happened or how to fix it. Even Decoud’s survival instinct is drowned in his melancholy. At this point, he is more alienated from the world around him than any other character in the novel.

By having Decoud commit suicide, Conrad finalizes Decoud’s estrangement and makes an example of him. Humans often reconnect themselves with nature once they are exposed to the wilderness. We already see the possibility of man rebuilding his awareness of nature in nineteenth-century works like Thoreau’s *Walden* and also twentieth-century works like W. H. Hudson’s *Green Mansions* (1904). Conrad chooses not to let Decoud come to terms with his new condition and environment; instead, Decoud is so far removed from his community and environment that the idea of reconnecting with it seems very disagreeable to him. However, at times it appears as if Decoud could become one with his natural environment again. According to the narrator, after three days of being stuck on the deserted island, Decoud’s individuality “had merged into the world of cloud and water, of natural forces and forms of nature” (*Nostromo* 303). The description of Decoud merging with nature is evocative of Conrad’s descriptions of sailors merging with nature when faced with the sublimity of the sea. Decoud is experiencing extreme terror, but instead of allowing himself to feel the terror, which would open up the opportunity to find “perfect wisdom,” Decoud capitulates (“Narcissus” 55). He fears that merging with nature would cost him his individuality and therefore his existence (*Nostromo* 303). At the same time, Decoud finds himself in a dilemma because he can also no longer see himself as part of society. Already “on the fifth day [of being alone] an immense melancholy descended upon him palpably” which made him decide “not to give
himself up to these people in Sulaco” (303). The solitude has robbed Decoud of his self-esteem. It has given him too much time to ponder and raise doubts about his own identity. Decoud sees himself irrevocably cut off from everything, nature and society, and Conrad exaggerates Decoud’s isolation by giving the impression that both, Nostromo and nature, have left Decoud behind to dwell in loneliness. When Decoud finds himself alone on the island, there are no sounds or sights to stimulate his senses. Decoud, now talking to himself, exclaims, “I have not seen as much as one single bird all day,” and there had not been “a sound, either” (302). The “absolute silence” that surrounds Decoud stands for absolute isolation, and by letting Decoud commit suicide, Conrad shows that Decoud’s Entfremdung is irreversible (302). Through Decoud’s suicide, Conrad kills not only Decoud’s but also the reader’s hope for an alienated individual’s reconciliation with his community and nature.

Decoud is not the only character who feels estranged from society. Both, Decoud and Nostromo, suffer from isolation and solitude, but while Decoud faces isolation and solitude in the wilderness, Nostromo ends up facing them within society. Like Decoud, Nostromo finds himself alienated from his community because of the accursed treasure. Lee M. Whitehead describes him as “the slave of silver,” and Edward Said asserts that “[t]here may even be an intended connection between his name, ‘our man’, and the mine he serves [. . .]: the San Tomé silver can say confidently of him, he is mine” (Whitehead 466, Said 104). In the beginning, Nostromo is a well-respected man who is known for his bravery, fidelity, and personal integrity, and, according to Whitehead, “[g]rowing rich had no real part in his thinking or acting” (469). Lord claims that initially Nostromo “is a fully integrated social being, whose individuality finds full expression in what Marx
would term a ‘confirmation of social life’” (208). Nostromo, nonetheless, has not been accepted as a member of the upper-class society of Sulaco. When he is asked to save the silver from the rebels, the task creates an opportunity for Nostromo to acquire even more respect in his community, especially among the upper class. The situation, nonetheless, unfolds differently. Saving the silver changes Nostromo. Lord explains, “With the theft of the silver Nostromo becomes a divided and tormented man, and like Conrad’s earlier heroes, conscious not only of his own criminality but also that society is the secret sharer in his guilt” (208). Before the infamous silver rescue campaign, Nostromo was deeply involved in his community, but once he saves the silver, he finds himself more and more estranged from his fellow men because he now understands the hypocrisy in the prestige he was searching. Once the social values of the silver no longer seem valuable, Nostromo redirects his focus on the material value of the silver and how it could change his life for the better. The result, according to Zdzislaw Najder, is “a lack of any principles other than self-interest” in Nostromo’s character (“A Century” 236).

The experience of solitude differs from person to person. Nostromo’s experience of solitude, for instance, differs greatly from Decoud’s. Once Nostromo leaves the uncultivated sea and reenters society, he suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself trapped in isolation like Decoud; however, while Decoud “was oppressed by a bizarre sense of unreality affecting the very ground upon which he walked, the mind of the Capataz of the Cargadores turned alertly to the problem of future conduct” (Nostromo 183). Compared to Decoud, Nostromo’s survival instinct is still intact, and his primal instincts are not yet lost as he returns to the land. When Nostromo reaches the beach exhausted, he immediately falls asleep. Fourteen hours later, he awakens and rises “with the lost air of a
man just born into the world” (250). In Freudian terms, one could say that despite the moment of waking, Nostromo’s consciousness is still asleep and thus he finds himself in the condition of a child whose ego has not “detache[d] itself from the external world” (Freud 13). Lord calls it “the scene of Nostromo’s rebirth, for it is here that Conrad encapsulates in one dramatic moment the tearing asunder of a socially integrated man, however spectacular and colourful his individual persona appeared, and the emergence of a fragmented, tortured individual” (218–9). For a moment, Nostromo’s mind is “free from evil” like the mind of “a magnificent and unconscious wild beast”; his consciousness has not yet awoken (Nostromo 250). The moment, however, does not last very long. Nostromo is about to reenter society as a changed man. After a short instant of releasing the primitive side in him with a “leisurely growling yawn,” Nostromo’s consciousness awakens with the “steadied glance” and “thoughtful frown” of a man (250). Until this point, Lord argues, “Nostromo’s private identity rest[ed] solely on his public reputation; when the value of the latter diminishes, the former crumbles”; thus, Nostromo “feels free to pin not his faith but his identity to material interests” (248). From this moment onwards, the old Nostromo is gone and the new capitalist Nostromo emerges—a man who sees more value in his personal wealth than in the public good. By keeping the silver to himself, John G. Peters claims, Nostromo “chooses the silver over humanity” (Impressionism 145). According to Najder, “The reputed and famous Man of Trust turns into a sham [and] becomes, in fact, the anti-hero of the novel” (236). His relationship with his community diminishes, and a new alienated and discontent Nostromo arises. Nostromo’s Entfremdung from nature and society is therefore completed.
While Decoud faces his unwanted solitude away from society, Nostromo faces it within society “between the harbour and the town,” which shows that one does not need to be alone to feel lonely (256). After returning from his journey through the wilderness of the sea, Nostromo reenters civilization with high expectations. His goal was to increase his prestige, but instead he realizes the extent of his “profound isolation” (256). Nostromo feels himself “betrayed” when “no one waited for him; no one thought of him; no one expected or wished his return” (256). Even though his fame returns eventually, Nostromo never regains “his peace [because] the genuineness of all his qualities was destroyed” (319). Nostromo attributes his restlessness and discomfort to the silver or rather the designated commercial value of the silver. He claims, “There is something accursed in wealth” (341). Every time Nostromo touches the silver, he is surprised that it does not leave any stains on his skin (319). Nostromo knows now how much wealth rubs off on you, how much it changes you, how much it pollutes your mind, but he does not change anything about his situation until it is too late. The only “genuine resolution of the conflict” between Nostromo and his environment would be for him to get rid of the silver, but Nostromo is not capable of letting go of it until a moment before his death (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 102).

At this point, towards the end of *Nostromo*, we are reminded of the novel’s opening legend. Like the gringos, Nostromo took possession of the treasure, in this case not gold but silver, without it legally being his and as a result it costs him his peace of mind. The silver haunts Nostromo, like it is still haunting the gringos, until the moment of his death and assumedly even thereafter (Heimer 575-6). His last attempt to find redemption before his death is blocked by Mrs. Gould who would not allow him to share
his secret with her. Mrs. Gould symbolizes justice, awareness, and, according to Fredric Jameson, “selfless devotion,” which she offers her husband (122). She is Conrad’s strongest female character. While she is just as feminine in her beauty and loving nature as Conrad’s other female protagonists, her mind is superior to those of other women and men in Conrad’s novels. In contrast to Mr. Gould and Decoud, Mrs. Gould comprehends the negative effects of wealth and power, maybe because she was once a member of the poor community herself. Mrs. Gould had been an orphan from early childhood and never experienced any fortune until she met Mr. Gould. In the environment she grew up, “intellectual interests” were favored over “great wealth” (Nostromo 45). For Mrs. Gould, “even the very poverty of her aunt, the Marchesa, had nothing intolerable to [her] refined mind; [...] it had the austerity of a sacrifice offered to a noble ideal” (45). We see the advantages of having a refined mind over having an abundance of material possessions throughout Conrad’s canon. Conrad’s characters—no matter whether it is Kurtz, Almayer, Willems, Kayerts, Carlier, or Nostromo—all lose control over themselves the moment they start pursuing their material desires. Their concern for wealth, power, and prestige takes over their brains, eats up their joy, and turns the individuals into outcasts. For men like Nostromo, Peters argues, “the silver changes from an object of wealth to one of enslavement, while Nostromo changes from an honorable man to a thief” (Impressionism 51). When Nostromo starts his final attempt to redeem himself by sharing his secret, he depends on Mrs. Gould’s mercy to lift the burden off his shoulders. Her rejection to share his burden, chains Nostromo to his guilty treasure eternally just like the gringos’ souls have been condemned to watch over their gold forever. Like Decoud,
Nostromo cannot resolve the disconnection between himself, his community, and nature. His *Entfremdung* is irreversible.

By denying Nostromo to share his secret with her, Emily Gould temporarily breaks the silver’s influence on her community. Contrary to the male characters in Sulaco (except for Dr. Monygham), Mrs. Gould is more in tune with her natural environment and sees what is happening to the land and to the people. Her painting of a once tranquil landscape now haunts her (Wang 11). She personifies the San Tomé mountain and thereby turns it into a commodity of capitalism. She associates it with the “merciless nightmare” of “material interest” (318). To her, the mountain was “more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness [and] possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds” (318). She knows that even without the stolen silver, there is still enough silver left to “make everybody in the world miserable” (339). Mrs. Gould nonetheless decides no longer to play her part in her husband’s and her community’s deterioration. She makes Nostromo take his secret to his grave and ends the Gould Dynasty by remaining childless. She has witnessed first hand in her own household how the treasure changes people. Her husband, Mr. Gould, whose initial motive was to provide his service to his community, is slowly by steadily transformed by capitalism to the degree that he no longer cares about anything but his mine (Içöz 262). Charles Gould would rather blow up the mine than to give up his control over it to a new government. Gould’s weakness to power and possessions is a weakness he shares with other men, and Mrs. Gould makes no secret of this when she tells Giselle to forget Nostromo because, just like Mr. Gould, “very soon he would have forgotten [her] for his
treasure” (342). While the women like Emily Gould in Conrad’s fiction seem to remain resistant to the charm of power and possessions, men like Mr. Gould, Decoud, and Nostromo get lost in their dreams of fortune and prestige and are unable to resolve the conflict between man, society, and nature.

The Isolated Dr. Monygham

There is, however, one character that is different from the rest of Sulaco’s male upper-class society, and that is Dr. Monygham. Even though he appears isolated from his community, he, more than any of the other male characters, knows what it means to be living. Robert Penn Warren sees Monygham as an “older and more twisted Lord Jim, the man who had failed the test, not like Jim by abandoning his post and breaking the code of the sea, but by betraying friends under the torture of a South American dictator” (367). According to Warren, Monygham’s “personal story, like the story of Jim, is the attempt to restore himself to the human community and to himself, though he, unlike Jim, survives the attempt” (367). I would even argue that Monygham comes closer than Jim to being Stein’s idea of a butterfly. In Lord Jim, Stein is aware that his material interests are a human weakness and that they keep him from finding pure happiness. According to Stein, “One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!” (Lord Jim128). For Stein the answer is simple: cherish the moment instead of living in the past or future. Man’s problem is that he is never satisfied (128). If he wants to be happy, he needs to be more like a butterfly. Stein explains, “This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still” (128). Man keeps striving for something outside himself that helps him define his own identity; oftentimes, he searches for answers in material possessions, but hardly ever does he find fulfillment
in those possessions. According to Stein, if man wanted to find contentment, he would need to search for his equilibrium, but he would have to look for it not in progress but in the present state of being. Because of his lack of interest in material wealth, Monygham, more than any other male protagonist in *Nostromo*, is able to enjoy wandering aimlessly (189). It is not surprising that Monygham survives while other characters like Decoud and Nostromo die in the course of the novel. From the beginning of the novel, Monygham is not really a part of the European community, but he has learned to come to terms with his past and living as an outsider in isolation.

Monygham has been more involved with the indigenous cultures of the land than any other European character in the novel, which has shaped his experience of his environment and his attitude toward progress. Monygham “made no secret of it that he had lived for years in the wildest parts of the Republic, wandering with almost unknown Indian tribes in the great forests of the far interior where the great rivers have their sources. But it was mere aimless wandering; he had written nothing, collected nothing, brought nothing for science out of the twilight of the forests” (189). Contrary to Stein, Monygham is not a collector and has no interest in collecting data for the sake of science to further the acquisition of knowledge in his culture. When Monygham entered the forest, he fully immersed himself in wilderness; no material interests blurred his vision or controlled his intentions; in fact, Monygham seems to not have had any intentions. He was simply wandering without an objective. More than any of the other male characters in the novel, Monygham appears to be at peace with himself. He wanders without the drive for constant progress. He is the opposite of Kurtz. Capitalism has no effect on him. He is not trying to bring any light into the heart of darkness. Material interests do not
control him; instead, he is capable of living in the moment without any concerns about the future.

Because of his reservation and mistrust toward other men, Monygham, whom the narrator calls “the mad English doctor,” has a reputation for being a misanthrope (262). One day, Monygham tells Mrs. Gould, “Really, it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself” (26). Monygham’s words would be a clear demonstration of his arrogance if it was not obvious that Monygham has an exceptionally low opinion of himself. Monygham does not find himself isolated from society because of his low opinion of his fellow men but because of his low opinion of himself. Heimer rightly claims that it is “Monygham’s feelings of guilt and the outward manifestations of his act [of treason that] isolate him from society” (571). Monygham’s willful detachment from his community because of the betrayal he committed many years ago makes his *Entfremdung* different from Decoud’s and Nostromo’s. Monygham consciously isolates himself, according to Heimer, “to inflict greater suffering on himself” (571). Decoud, on the other hand, has not isolated himself because of shame but because he sees himself as an authority that is superior to the people around him. While Monygham feels estranged from his fellow European upper-class society, he does not show any signs of *Entfremdung* from nature; on the contrary, his experience of torture and humiliation has bound “him indissolubly to the land of Costaguana like an awful procedure of naturalization, involving him deep in the national life, far deeper than any amount of success and honour could have done” (*Nostromo* 228). Monygham’s example suggests that it is not the prestige as the one Nostromo is looking
for that connects man with his natural environment; instead, it is modesty and awareness that reverses man’s *Entfremdung* from nature.

Instead of being a grand narcissist, Monygham is uncommonly humble and aware of his minor role in the course of the world. He claims, “I put no spiritual value into my desires, or my opinions, or my actions. They have not enough vastness to give me room for self-flattery” (193). Compared to Decoud, Monygham is able to accept his own insignificance and the impossibility of changing what cannot be changed. Monygham always tries to be of service to the public good, but he knows that he cannot always help as much as he would like. He explains, “I should certainly have liked to ease the last moments of that poor woman. And I can’t. It’s impossible. Have you met the impossible face to face—or have you, the Napoleon of railways, no such word in your dictionary?” (193). The person Monygham is talking to is the engineer-in-chief—a key figure in the progress of industrialization in Sulaco. Monygham’s words put a damper on nineteenth and twentieth-century scientists’ ambitions to always find a way to do the impossible.

Monygham shares with Mrs. Gould his awareness of the truth, but he is even more brutally honest than her. When Mrs. Gould asks Monygham whether there will ever be any peace or rest, her question has more of a rhetorical nature, but Monygham exclaims assuredly, “No!” (311). He then explains pessimistically, “There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests” (311). His words echo what he has already told Antonia previously, “There is no other remedy [to the cruelty of our countrymen]. […] the material interests will not let you jeopardize their development for a mere idea of pity and justice” (310). Monygham’s words show the overpowering strength of material interests. He does not believe there is a way to weaken the unjust powers of capitalism.
once they have established themselves in a society, which coincides with Wang’s words about “the logic of capital: once set in motion, it cannot afford to stand still” (Wang 11).

Material Interests and the Death of Man

In *Nostromo*, we see a microscopic version of society in which we can observe the effects of society’s beliefs in progress and capitalism taking over and destroying the community in slow motion. The novel, Lord states, “expresses Conrad’s concern with human alienation in capitalist society, the conflicts created by the privileging of ‘material interest’, and ultimately the disintegration of our essential being” (208). In the end, what remains is “a parade of atomized, estranged individuals [wandering] through the final pages of the novel” (Lord 209). While the capitalist characters in *Nostromo* initially believe progress to be most desirable, the novel itself portrays how Western society’s ideas of progress do not help us advance our society but actually lead us to our own destruction. In *Nostromo*, progress is nothing but an illusion that coverts our path to self-annihilation. Capitalism in the novel, according to Najder, is reduced to mere “profit-seeking,” and the silver, which is equivalent to money, is a symbol of the population’s material interests (237). In Marx’s anti-capitalistic worldview, “money is the estranged essence of man’s work and existence” (“On the Jewish Question” 67). According to Marx, “this alien essence [money] dominates [man] and he worships it” (67). In *Nostromo*, silver symbolizes monetary value—the desired treasure of the capitalist world. Silver in itself is a natural product of nature. Inherently, it has no negative attributes and has no effect on the state of society until society ascribes financial and reputational advantages to it. For centuries, many countries used silver as their basic unit of monetary value, but because of its proclaimed material worth, silver is a driving force in the
corruption and destruction of society. It is the silver that makes Sulaco and the surrounding countryside in *Nostromo* a desirable object for outsiders to possess and control. Nostromo exclaims, “This thing [the silver] has been given to me like a deadly disease. If men discover it I am dead” (159). Silver dominates man in *Nostromo*, and man worships it. Everyone who falls into the spell of the silver becomes alienated, ill, and eventually suffers an untimely death.

While the silver is a product of nature used as a commodity, the mine is a created institution that is used as “a rallying-point for everything in the province that need[s] order and stability to live” (*Nostromo* 66). The mine and its silver is Sulaco’s symbol of economic wealth, but while it brings money into the town, it does not bring happiness and contentment to the population. Even the mine’s owners, Mr. and Mrs. Gould, feel miserable despite their wealth and power. Already Charles Gould, Sr. exclaimed that the mine would eventually kill him, “and, in fact, since that time he began to suffer from fever, from liver pains, and mostly from a worrying inability to think of anything else” (33). After his father’s death, Charles Gould takes over the mine, and even though it does not make him sick, it takes over his mind and does not leave him alone. Gould, however, still tries to tell himself that his work in the mine is for the public good. When his wife claims that with their work in the mine they “have disturbed a good many snakes in that Paradise,” Charles Gould agrees, but he does not want to give up his belief that it was all for the people and the sake of civilization (127). Gould explains, “No doubt we have disturbed a great many [snakes]. But remember, my dear, that it is [. . .] no longer a Paradise of snakes. We have brought mankind into it, and we cannot turn our backs upon them to go and begin a new life elsewhere” (127). Gould is convinced of his words that
his work, being in charge of the mine, has made Sulaco a better place. He does not even notice that his wife, by remaining silent, seems to disagree with him. Gould still has not realized that the mine has not brought order and stability to the people but chaos, rebellion, and fear.

The mine and its silver are not the only significant elements in the destruction of Sulaco’s society. Just as significant as the mine and the silver is Sulaco’s railway. The community members’ isolation from each other is not only caused by the mine and its silver but also by the railway, which may seem like progress at first but turns out to be furthering the regression of society. In Nostromo, it is “Ribiera, the Dictator of Costaguana, [who] described the National Central Railway in his great speech” as a “progressive and patriotic undertaking” (19). But while the railway may seem like a financial advantage for the country and its people, the Railway Company and its ownership of the land is destructive to the people’s social life. Now that all the land belongs to the Railway Company, “there will be no more popular feasts held here” (75). A feast is one of the events in life that allows a person to cherish the moment, forget about his or her worries from the past or the future. The person feels joyful and carefree. Losing this type of carefree social interaction is the first step of social alienation.

But the railway does not only cause the demise of society but also the death of the natural environment. Where there is progress, there also seems to be death in Nostromo. Where technological progress has moved in, nature has been moved out—removed to make space. Parts of the natural environment no longer exist, such as the waterfall and the vegetation surrounding it (64). All of the tree-ferns that were once luxuriating around the pool have died off due to the lack of water. The wilderness has been cleared, a road
has been made, and new paths have been cut into the cliffs of San Tomé (64). What is left of nature is “a big trench half filled up with the refuse of excavations and tailings” (64).

In *Nostromo*, nature is caught in a state of immobility no matter whether it is the immobile clouds or the silence and darkness at night, and this immobility symbolizes the state of the Sulaco community. Since the characters are incapable of living in the moment, silence and immobility makes them so uncomfortable that it drives a character like Decoud to commit suicide. Decoud chooses death over solitude. By doing nothing, being nothing but a still and silent observer, nature allows man to fall prey to capitalism and thereby accelerates man’s path to insanity and suicide.

*Nostromo* shows that progress, when lacking a moral principle and primarily being tied to material interests, is merciless, unfair, and unstable and will sooner or later lead to corruption (Hay 170-7, Najder 237). “The pursuit of material interests,” Nursel Içöz, argues, “is not conducive to the development of social order and justice” and instead “establishes a rapacious and dehumanizing system” (262). From today’s point of view, with the advantage of a hundred years of added experience, we can see the detriments that have been caused by Western society’s addiction to material interests (Najder 237). One of those detriments is society’s lack of interest in its natural environment. Over the course of the twentieth century, Western society has admittedly moderated its greed and has started paying more attention to less economic goals such as reversing the pollution of the planet and taking better care of nature, but man’s alienation from nature still keeps him from feeling the natural interconnectedness between him and his natural environment. Ecopsychologists believe that our pollution of the planet is closely related to our alienation from our natural environment. In his essay on “Where
Psyche Meets Gaia,” Theodore Roszak mentions the 1990 conference “Psychology as if the Whole Earth Mattered,” which was held at the Center for Psychology and Social Change at Harvard. At this conference, a group of ecopsychologists concluded that our behavior towards Gaia, the great Mother Earth, would change if we expanded our self to include the natural world because our destruction of this planet would then be experienced as self-destruction (Roszak 12). So, if we saw nature as part of ourselves, we would no longer feel inclined to hurt it because the pain we would be inflicting would not only hurt nature but us as well.

Even though the natural world might not have been as polluted during Conrad’s times as it is today, Conrad’s works, including Nostromo, show how our desire for material interests has alienated us from the natural world. In his essay “Autocracy and War,” Conrad claims, “No peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests” (633). The destruction and pollution will continue as long as we do not see ourselves as part of nature. Because we see ourselves as separate entities, we do not feel the destruction of nature affecting our own being; thus, we do not feel the need to stop and reverse the damage. Metzner argues, “Like autistic children, who do not seem to hear, or see, or feel their mother’s presence, we have become blind to the psychic presence of the living planet and deaf to its voices and stories, sources that nourished our ancestors in preindustrial societies” (59). We need to open our eyes and ears again to the natural world around us. Conrad’s work is one attempt among many by various authors to make us readers, “by the power of the written word,” hear, feel, and most of all, see (Conrad, “Preface” 280). Now we just need to begin to develop and trust our senses again.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

For centuries, we have tried to deny our interconnectedness with nature. In his article on “The Psychopathology of the Human-Nature Relationship,” Ralph Metzner claims that one way to describe our current condition is “that we as a species are suffering from a kind of collective amnesia” (60). According to Metzner, “We have forgotten something our ancestors once knew and practiced—certain attitudes and kinds of perception, an ability to empathize and identify with nonhuman life, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world” (60). We have alienated ourselves from nature so much so that many people can no longer comprehend the feeling of natural interconnectedness. This alienation from nature that Metzner mentions did not happen in one day; it has been a very long process, which a part of our society is slowly but surely trying to reverse. If we want to find the perfect equilibrium that Conrad’s protagonist Stein talks about in Lord Jim, we need to come to terms with our being in nature and not outside of it, and ecocriticism, Sambit Panigrahi claims, tries to “transmit man’s cognizance towards a fuller recognition of his compliant positioning in the Natural world” (18). Ecocriticism tries to reintroduce us to a natural world that many of us have forgotten and tries to help us redevelop a symbiotic relationship with it.

Nonetheless, what may keep us from merging with nature is our fear of our own instincts and feelings. For centuries, mankind has depreciated the sensuous to be inferior to rational thinking. In a patriarchal world, for instance, woman is often regarded as being more closely connected with nature than man because she seems to be more in tune with
her instincts and feelings (Huggan and Tiffin 158). Instincts and feelings are perceived as feminine; thus, Western man tries to ignore or control his instincts and feelings to boost his masculinity. Conrad, on the other hand, criticizes man’s opposition to femininity in his work. For instance, in Chapter II of this dissertation I discussed Tom Lingard’s important role in Conrad’s œuvre because he embodies opposites. He represents masculinity and femininity at the same time, which makes him a better sailor (Outcast 15). In Chapter IV, I analyzed Stein’s theory of nature, which claims that nature is greater than man because it is able to hold opposites in a “perfect equilibrium” (Lord Jim 125).

Thus, Conrad’s stories suggest that the further we alienate ourselves from nature and our own feelings and instincts, the smaller are our chances to find a perfect equilibrium in our lives.

In Conrad’s work, man’s process of alienation does not stop with nature but continues to the point where man has alienated himself from everyone and everything, including himself. We see this development, for instance, in Nostromo and Decoud in Conrad’s novel Nostromo. In Conrad’s world, man’s alienation, which is rooted in his binary thinking, is sped up by industrialization. Conrad does not advocate modernization or industrialization in his work; on the contrary, what modern society considers progress, Conrad depicts as regression. No matter whether it is new technological innovations such as the steamer, which makes man independent from natural forces, or the exploitation and manufacturing of natural resources, which makes man greedier and more hardboiled, Conrad portrays both clearly as disadvantages to mankind. In Conrad’s world, if men, and women, want to find transcendence and “perfect wisdom,” they need to find their way back to sublime nature (“Narcissus” 55).
Conrad, however, is not advocating a regression back to a primitive state of being. Conrad’s notion of what he considers progress is more in tune with Friedrich Schiller’s idea of the fusion of the sensuous and the moral. As discussed in Chapter II of this dissertation, in his *Aesthetical Essays* Schiller shares the notion that our self-division from which we have been suffering for centuries and are still suffering from today, being both sensuous and moral, needs to be resolved not by us returning to a primitive state of being, which we experienced as children in our innocent, unselfconscious mind, but instead by allowing the fusion of our thoughts and feelings (n.p.). The ideal of human life, according to Schiller, would be a state of equilibrium of mankind’s sensuous and rational aspects (n.p.). Schiller’s idea of the synthesis of the mind and the emotions is what we see in Conrad’s sailor and his confrontation with the beautiful and the sublime. In Conrad’s fiction, it is not the one-time experience of the sublime that promises transcendence but the continuous alternation of exposure to the beautiful and the sublime that enables the sailor to reach “perfect wisdom” (“Narcissus” 55).

Why is it so hard for the modern individual to accomplish the fusion of the sensuous and the rational? Is it simply that we do not see the benefits of merging thoughts and emotions and therefore despise it? Are we incapable of giving up our binary modes of thinking? Even if we depend on dualisms to make sense of the world, can we not overcome our judgment of them? No longer categorizing dualities into superior and inferior parts would be a first step in dissolving them. If we forget about our norms and start seeing each part of a duality as equal, then the duality becomes neutral. If we begin seeing our sensuous and rational aspects as equal, then there is no reason for us to keep them separate and ignore one or the other. Instead of seeing the two parts as an
opposition, we can see them as a pair that belongs together and creates a whole. Conrad dismantles the Cartesian separation of body and mind by throwing man off his raised pedestal. He exposes man’s stupidities, defects, and depravities and demonstrates the negative consequences of man’s arrogance to raise himself above the state of nature. Conrad shows the benefit of a high sensitivity and respect for the environment and implies the need for a strong interconnected relationship between the body and the mind, nature and man, the feminine and the masculine not for nature’s but for man’s sake. In his unfavorable portrayal of man, Conrad reveals why Western society’s estrangement from nature is detrimental; however, he does not offer a peek into a better future. Conrad’s work remains ambiguous, and its ambiguity is its power. Without presenting us with clear answers, Conrad encourages us to rethink our former decisions. He shows us what we have done, our choices that have put us in the situations we find ourselves in today. He makes us see and feel our own decay but then leaves us alone with our newfound sensations. What we do with the information we have gathered is up to us.

So where do we go from here? In terms of Conrad criticism, the next step would be to explore one of his settings that I have ignored in this dissertation: the urban setting. While I have discussed the role of the sea, of the forest, and of animals in Conrad’s work, I have left out the city. Novels like *The Secret Agent* or *Under Western Eyes* are not set at sea or in forests but in major metropolitan cities. Even though cities and nature are usually thought of as two separate entities, in the past two decades discourses of urbanism have gained recognition in the field of ecocriticism (Bennett 3-4). Ecocritics now consider the urban environment as part of the entire natural environment. Investigating the city landscape in Conrad’s fiction ecocritically goes beyond the scope of
this dissertation but may be a worthwhile task if this project was to be expanded into a book.

In terms of ecocriticism and the ecocritical analysis of fictional literature, this dissertation exemplifies that a rereading of literature written more than a century ago is a worthwhile project not just in the world of the academy but in a world outside of the academy as well. Ecocriticism is a voice that is not trying to speak solely to scholars; instead, it tries to tear down the wall between the academy and the world outside (Buell, *Future* 132). By literally taking its students out into the world and back to nature, ecocriticism tries to build a bridge between the theoretical and the physical world. Ecocriticism is not a method but a movement; it wants to move people to change the world by first of all changing their perspective and then motivating them to take action (Murphy 17). The goal is to reestablish a healthy, productive interconnectedness between culture and nature, which we cannot achieve with “linear” thinking but only with an intuition of nonlinear systems” (Capra *Turning Point* 41). Rereading bygone literatures from an ecocritical perspective is a significant step in this process because it helps us understand how our culture has ended up in the condition it finds itself today. It provides us with clues about our natural environment and about ourselves that we may not have been able to see until this point. Giving nature a voice through our rereading of formerly discussed fiction may not immediately change mankind’s relationship with nature, but it encourages us—scholars, students, and non-academic readers—to reevaluate our perception of the natural environment, which is a significant step towards mankind’s return to nature.
NOTES

1. Overall nine times, Marlow and other protagonists refer to Jim as “one of us” (30, 50, 59, 67, 136, 193, 196, 214, 246).

2. Throughout my dissertation, when I use the term “man,” I am particularly referring to the male gender of the human species even if it sometimes may include women as well. I am aware that my focus on the male gender, the word “man,” and the pronoun “he,” which I use when I am referring to “man,” may seem sexist, particularly to my female audience, but also to my male audience since my analysis of “man” is sometimes not very favorable; however, for my analysis of Conrad’s fiction I believe the word “man” to be most fitting. Most of Conrad’s characters, especially in his maritime fiction, are men and not women. Every woman in Conrad’s fiction plays a special role that is different from the roles that men play in his works. Like nature, woman plays the role of “the other” through which man establishes his own identity. The disconnection from nature that Conrad portrays in his works is man’s disconnection and not woman’s. While it is arguable whether woman is not as disconnected from nature as man, it appears to be so in Conrad’s work. The relationship between woman and nature in Conrad’s fiction is an interesting aspect of his work, which is worth investigating, which I, however, have chosen not to focus on in this dissertation. I discuss some of the female characters’ roles in his fiction, but they are not the focus of this dissertation. For more information on the role of the female character and the feminization of nature in Conrad’s fiction, analyzed from an ecocritical perspective, see Sambit Panigrahi’s *Patriarchy against Nature/Woman: A Green Study of Joseph Conrad’s Fiction*. 
3. Ecocriticism has received an extensive amount of criticism by skeptics from other fields of critical discourse because the new environmental criticism appears to be amateurish; however, the issue lies in the ambiguity of its name. “Eco” stems from the word “ecology” which implies a focus on the natural environment, separate from a created environment by human hand such as the urban landscape, with a more scientific approach than literary. The focus of ecocritics’ work, however, has not only been scientific—an approach that would require a more ecological literacy than many ecocritics possess in any regard—but has also been interested in the aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical aspects of the not only “natural” but also “built” environment (Buell, *Future* 12).

4. In his work, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell identifies several trend-lines in ecocriticism while recognizing two major developments in the field. The first “wave” or “palimpsest” is the beginning movement of ecocriticism with a focus on the “natural” environment only and therefore a strong interest in nature writings and nature in relation to the sciences such as biology and mathematics. The next major development, second wave, in ecocriticism has broadened its range of interests from only being interested in the natural environment to also including the metropolitan environment. Furthermore, in addition to his initial interests, the second wave ecocritics have started paying more attention to works whose focus does not lie on nature (*Future* 17-28). Ecocritics who are considered first wave scholars are Joseph Meeker, Joseph Carroll, Glen A. Love, William Howarth, Ursula Heise, and N. Katherine Hayles. Second wave ecocritics are Krista Comer, Michael Bennett, Robert Kern, Jonathan Bate. Even though Buell does not provide
any time range for the first and second wave of the movement, one can say that the second wave gained momentum in the early 1990s.

5. “Interconnectedness” is a common term in ecocriticism. While the term “interdependence” indicates inherent power structures, which means one subject cannot live without another, “interconnectedness” expresses a natural and always present connection between two subjects with neither of them being dependent on the other for survival. The term and idea of “interconnectedness” derived originally from the field of deep ecology, which, according to Fritjof Capra, “does not separate humans from the natural environment, nor does it separate anything else from it. It does not see the world as a collection of isolated objects but rather as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent” (“Deep Ecologt” 20).

6. Numerous critics, such as John Peck, have pointed out that the ship in Conrad’s work, especially in The Nigger of the “Narcissus,” constitutes “a microcosm of civil society, with the same need for discipline and a hierarchy, and the same fears about disruption and insurrection” (Peck 167). Another critic, Joseph Kolupke, sees “the ship as ship-of-state, a political microcosm” (Kolupke 74).

7. Western civilization’s conceptions of the sea, according to Bernhard Klein, have changed over the centuries from an image of the sea as mostly “a demonic space that was reviled for its ‘barbarity’, its chaotic lack of structure (a reminder of unfinished Creation) and its imposition of natural and moral limits on the human world, to a pleasure circuit that signified refined taste, leisure and the expansiveness of modernity” (3). The ocean’s negative image found its strong roots in Christian
demonization of the sea and people’s general fear of the sea’s marginal character—
ever showing what awaits one beyond the edge of the horizon (Kinzel 28). Many
horrifying stories of the sea originated in the Bible, especially the book of Genesis.
Alain Corbin curtly points out, “There is no sea in the Garden of Eden” (2). The sea
in its immensity was regarded as “the antithesis of the garden” and symbolized the
untouched, chaotic, still uncivilized and therefore undesirable part of the world
(Corbin 125, 2).

A more positive view of the ocean slowly began to appear in the second half
of the seventeenth century because of a new direction in theology, which was called
natural theology in France and physico-theology in England (Corbin 18-22).
Physico-theologians believed that God favored the scholars’ investigations into the
workings of nature, and this belief promoted more scientific endeavors (24).
Furthermore, in the 1700s new developments in science and technology replaced
former fears and superstitious beliefs with a more pragmatic view of the economic
success and advantages of global seafaring trade (Klein 4). The observer’s former
fear of the ocean turned into an attraction to its danger and sublime horror. The idea
of the sublime, however, was not an invention of the eighteenth century. The first
known study of the sublime goes back to the classical Greek author of rhetoric,
Longinus, whose work *Peri Hypsos*, “on elevated writing,” associated the idea of the
sublime with the greatness of elevated forms of language and writing. In the
eighteenth century, writers like Anthony Ashley-Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury,
John Dennis, and Joseph Addison claimed the beautiful and the sublime to be two
different entities. While the beautiful was simply beautiful, the sublime represented
the excitement found in the terrifying. Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) even went one step further and called the two mutually exclusive. Then, Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) claimed that only the sublime was capable of making someone experience liberation.

8. To be “connected” with the sea is a term Conrad uses in *The Shadow-Line*. The narrator expresses that, similar to the Chief Steward (manager) of the Officers’ Home who once “had been connected with the sea,” he broke his “connection with the sea” when he resigned from his occupation as sailor to “become, in fact, a mere potential passenger” (7).

9. Both of Conrad’s parents were Polish patriots who fought for their country’s sovereignty and were therefore exiled to the most destitute place in Russia until Conrad and his mother fell so ill that their family was allowed to move back to warmer climates. Unfortunately Conrad’s mother never recovered and died of tuberculosis in 1865 when Conrad was only seven years old. Only four years later Conrad’s father died of tuberculosis as well, leaving Conrad an orphan who was being cared for by his mother’s brother, Tadeusz Bobrowski.

10. Schiller’s essay is a response to Immanuel Kant’s ideas on the sublime and beautiful in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790). One aspect in which Schiller and Kant differ is their idea of freedom, which for Kant can only be found in the experience of the sublime while for Schiller it can also be found in the experience of the beautiful.

11. There seems to be a shift in focus in Conrad’s later works. While his earlier works are concerned with the establishment of solidarity among the crew, Conrad’s later
works no longer waste time on this matter but show a crew that works together to
face the problems that do not arise from within the crew but from outside. John Peck
claims that the difference between Conrad’s earlier sea novels and his later works
like *Chance* is the lack of “tension on board the ship” (182). In his later works,
instead of describing life on board a ship in terms of “a broader social and political
debate,” Conrad, according to Peck, uses the ship as “the escape route that enables
[him] to move away from the problems that he detects on the shore” (182). Conrad
associates life on land with the civil burdens of society; moving the setting of the
fictional work to the solitude at sea liberates his characters from those civil burdens
and offers them space for personal transformation. While *The Nigger of the
“Narcissus”* (1897) focuses more on adequate behavior and the responsibility of
each member among a crew and his appropriate submission toward his superiors, by
the time we get to *The Shadow-Line* (1915), the focus is no longer on adequate
behavior but on the unity and improvement of status if the responsible behavior is
already established. Conrad, therefore, provides his characters the chance to
determine their fate or course of actions at free will.

12. All Conradian characters who die on board a ship die either of illness (e.g., Jim Wait
and Kurtz), age (the old captain in *The Shadow-Line*), or suicide (Captain Whalley,
Big Brierly, Decoud) but not by extreme weather conditions.

13. Nowhere in *Typhoon* does the narrator indicate if MacWhirr has ever been the
captain of a sailing ship nor does the narrator indicate if Jukes has any other
experience than with steamships.
14. While MacWhirr appears to be the most simple-minded captain among Conrad’s captains, which is partly a result of his inexperience with bad weather, he cannot be considered Conrad’s most irresponsible captain. After all, no captain is more irresponsible than the Captain of the *Patna* who abandons his ship and passengers in a moment of danger.

15. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad gives a description of a captain named MacW- which most likely refers to John McWhir, Captain of the *Highland Forest*. Conrad served under McWhir and most likely based his fictional character Captain MacWhirr on him. Contrary to MacWhirr, MacW- did not have a family that he was leaving behind and in this regard differs from MacWhirr, but both captains resemble each other in their solitary and calm nature (3).

16. Many critics, such as Joseph Kolupke and Eberhard Griem, have noted that MacWhirr’s courage redeems his naivety, stupidity, and irresponsibility. See Kolupke and Griem for more information.

17. Conrad already mentioned Tom Lingard and his sailing ship in his first novel *Almayer’s Folly* (1895). Already in *Almayer’s Folly* Lingard is described as the man “whom the Malays […] recognized as ‘the Rajah-Laut’—the King of the Sea” (3).

18. Conrad’s lack of popularity during his times, especially among women, was partly blamed on the lack of female characters in his works. In 1960, Graham Hough claims, “In my experience very few women really enjoy Conrad” (qtd. in Poole 365). People believed Conrad’s missing popularity among women was due to women’s interest in more romantic themes and their identification with female characters, and Conrad’s increasing popularity with his later works which included more female
characters and romance seemed to prove this assumption. As a result, while some critics still criticize Conrad for his lack of major female characters in his earlier works, some critics like Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan complain not only about Conrad’s sudden focus on women in his later works but also the transformation in his writing style. Erdinast-Vulcan sees Conrad’s change of voice in his writings as the author selling himself out.

The ageing author seems to have experienced a fate similar to that of his protagonist on a different level, when he discarded what he must have conceived of as his “true” artistic voice and surrendered to the “curse” of romance. He chose to write “for” women, to write (as his misogyny would make him see it) like a woman, and thereafter began to lie, to write precisely that type of fiction which he despised, but believed would appeal to women. (qtd. in Poole 368)

Contrary to Erdinast-Vulcan, other critics like Sarah Jones in her book *Conrad and Women* welcome Conrad’s interest in gender issues and particularly female identity in his later works. However, no matter what Conrad intended or not intended to do in regard to the role of female characters in his works, the lack of major female characters in his maritime fiction is reasonable since the craft of the sailor was regarded as a man’s job and women usually only had the chance to go to sea disguised in men’s clothes or as the wife of the captain (“Women & the Sea”). The lack of women in man’s environment, however, opens up the opportunity for the sailor to explore not only his own masculinity but also his femininity, which we can see in Conrad’s description of Lingard.
19. Conrad, however, only describes the elimination of dualisms in regard to sailors and not men who explore other territories such as the Malaysian and African jungles, which I will discuss thoroughly in Chapter III.

20. In more recent times, the forest has lost some of its evil darkness image and instead has become regarded as a place of retreat for the average urbanite who, according to DeLoughrey and Handley, wants to escape “the social pressures of urbanization and modernity” (31). In works like *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad at times portrays the forest as solitary retreat for the characters as well. It is in those scenes that the characters seem to melt into their environment. For example, in *Almayer’s Folly* the forest became a “shady retreat” for Dain where “he was invisible” (41, 40).

21. Nipa palms are a form of trees whose trunks are growing horizontally below the ground but whose leaves can reach a height of thirty feet.

22. For more information about Achebe’s attack on Conrad, see Achebe’s essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” and the article “Was Joseph Conrad Really a Racist?” by Caryl Phillips and Chinua Achebe.

23. George Waddington calls Stein’s interest in Jim deceptive and makes him responsible for Jim’s death (94). Waddington claims, “Stein’s altruistic exterior disguises a menacing personality whose vanity threatens, and eventually takes, Jim’s life” (94). Elizabeth Brody Tenenbaum sees “Stein’s approach to life” as “fundamentally flawed” and claims Marlow’s commentary to be unreliable in this case. Paul S. Bruss believes Stein’s words to be “unmistakably suspect and full of irony” when regarded “in the context of Conrad’s early fiction” (496). On the other
hand, John Palmer discusses Stein as a “god-like” figure (Conrad’s Fiction 23). For more information on Stein as a father figure, see Mark Conroy’s essay “Paragon and Enigma: The Hero in Lord Jim.”

24. Tony Tanner talks of Stein’s “uncanny knowledge” of the different types of man: “man as butterfly” and “man as beetle” (123). He then goes on to put the different characters into beetle and butterfly categories. While the skipper of the Patna, Chester, Cornelius, and Brown are clearly beetles, according to Tanner, Jim shows many signs of being the beautiful butterfly.

25. Greg Garrard claims that deep ecology shifts our values “from a human-centred to a nature-centred system” (21).

26. For more information on Giordano Bruno’s theory of the world soul (l’anima del mondo) see Bruno’s On the Cause, Principle and Unity (Della causa, principio et uno, 1584) or Miklós Vassányi’s Anima Mundi: The Rise of the World Soul Theory in Modern German Philosophy.

27. It should be mentioned that there have been new theoretical notions, especially in recent years, of nature being everything but balanced, and even ecocritics use the idea of a balanced nature more carefully now. Two ecocritics who promote the theory of an unbalanced nature are Ursula Heise and Dana Phillips. Both agree that our ecology is not “harmonious, balanced, and self-regenerating” (Heise 64). For more information see Ursula Heise’s Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global and Dana Phillips’s The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America.
28. Haeckel does not draw a distinction between inorganic and organic nature. In *Monism as Connecting Religion and Science*, Haeckel declares “the fundamental unity of inorganic and organic nature, as well as their genetic relation, to be an essential axiom of monism” (n.p.).

29. The structure of the sentence is awkward because Stein says it the way a German would say it, which makes complete sense. Conrad lets Stein’s German origin shine through not just in his name but also his language.

30. The only other times in *Lord Jim* that characters are compared to a bull or elephant, they are compared to the immature version of the animal—the “baby elephant” and the “bullock” (26, 27).

31. Contrary to Jocelyn Baines, who argues that the novel ends where it begins because nothing is ever achieved in *Nostromo*, there are critics like Robert Penn Warren that argue that the state of Sulaco’s society at the end is superior to its state in the beginning of the novel (Baines 301, Warren 382-3). For instance, Warren argues that “the forces of ‘progress’ [. . .] have won [and that] we must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning” (382-3).

32. Marx’s ideas on the interconnectedness of man and nature are based on his belief in materialism. According to John Bellamy Foster, “In its most general sense materialism claims that that [sic] the origins and development of whatever exists is dependent on nature and ‘matter’, that is, a level of physical reality that is independent of and prior to thought” (2). Marx rejected the separation of materialism from nature and natural-physical science. In *Capital*, Marx expresses his belief in the combination of a materialist conception of history with a materialist conception of
nature. He demanded of scientists to include materialism in their natural-physical science.

33. Marx discusses the consequences of capitalism on nature, for instance, in terms of its effects on the fertility of the soil. In volume one of *Capital*, Marx argues that the “[c]apitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance [that] disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth” (949-50). Then, in volume three of *Capital*, Marx talks about the “irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism” between the agricultural population in their rural environment and the industrial population in their urban environment (637-8). Marx believed that large-scale industry and large-scale mechanized agriculture were “robbing the worker” and “robbing the soil” (*Vol. I* 950).

34. Raymond Williams also refers to Decoud’s initial materialism as “sane materialism” (150).

35. According to Harper, since the 1960s therapists increasingly started “using the wilderness as an environment for many of the new humanistic and existential therapies” (185).

36. “Our man” is also a term frequently used in business and political dealings to imply connection and ownership, for instance, “our man in the company,” “our man in Havana,” “our man in Korea,” etc.

37. Stephen Ross is another critic who sees Nostromo’s return to Sulaco as a “symbolic death and rebirth” (137).
38. Thomas Jeffers describes Nostromo as a “‘beast’ hominid in the state of Darwinian nature, well adapted for the struggle with other ‘growling’ creatures for existence and untroubled by questions of ‘evil’ or good, metamorphosing into ‘the man,’ growing ‘thoughtful’ through the study of ‘nothing’” (95).

39. In his essay, “Romance and Reification: Plot Construction and Ideological Closure in Nostromo,” Fredric Jameson divides Nostromo and Decoud into opposites. While Decoud represents the “Ideal,” Nostromo represents the “Self” (121). Jameson further suggests that if we use the opposition of the Ideal and the Self, there would naturally be another opposition, which is that of an “anti-ideal, or cynicism,” and that of “selflessness or devotion” (122). According to Jameson, Mrs. Gould and Antonia “are evidently assigned the relatively ungrateful function of selfless devotion to the male actors” (122).

40. Warren is not the only critic who compares Monygham to Jim. In his essay, “Four Views of the Hero,” Stephen K. Land provides a thorough comparison of the two characters.
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