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“COULD WE HANDLE THAT DUMB THING OR
WOULD IT HANDLE US?”:
JOSEPH CONRAD’S FICTION THROUGH THE
ECOCRITICAL LENS

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SUMMARY

Key terms: *tropes, ecocentrism, disanthropocentrism, ecophobia, ecophilia, storied matter, double bind, transcorporeality, porosity, heterotopia, new animism, material ecocriticism, vibrant matter, hyperobjects*

This interdisciplinary research has been concerned with the use of ecocritical concepts and positions for the analysis of Conrad's fiction. As Joseph Conrad has already been analysed in a lot of other critical approaches, except ecocriticism, I have considered it useful to analyse most of his fiction through a large number of ecocritical concepts, which I have listed and presented in Chapter 1, "Ecocriticism: History, Concepts, Views, Methodology", such as Gregory Bateson's theory on the cybernetical mind of the universe, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's ecosophy, James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's material ecocriticism, Jane Bennett's vital materialism and vibrant matter, Stacy Alaimo's new animism and transcorporeality, Bruno Latour's object-oriented ontology and Timothy Morton's dark ecology and hyperobjects, Simon Estok's ecophobia, Andy Wheeler's biosemiotics. Social ecology and eco-Marxism have also been found in Conrad's texts. Michel Serres's natural contract and concept of parasitism describing the relation between humans and pe(s)ts and Michel Foucault's heterotopia and heterochronia have provided new insights for my research. Ecofeminism and eco-theology have also offered new angles of approaching Conrad's fiction.

Analysing it ecocritically has led me to the discovery of similarities between a number of ecocritical theories based on the concepts enumerated above, which could demonstrate a unitary view, contradicting Cheryll Glotfelty's findings of 1996, according to which ecocriticism consists of disparate diverse concepts. I have discovered through the ecocritical study of Conrad's fiction parasynonymy between concepts. Besides Bateson's identification of terms with Deleuze and Guattari's ecosophy, (e.g. *schismogenesis, homeostasis, deterritorialization, reterritorialization, rhizome*), showing how deeply Deleuze and Guattari's ecosophy is grounded on Bateson's *ecology of the mind*, I have discovered in Conrad's fiction a large number of other parasynonymies, such as *new animism, vital materialism* and *vibrant matter*. Starting from Conrad's knowledge of Polish folklore and ancient mythology, new animism may correspond to Abram Cohen's *inhuman* and David Abram's *more-than-human* concepts. It would also support Kate Rigby's *eco-theology* and David Ray Griffin's *reenchantment of the desecrated*. The aforementioned approaches would be idealistic; however, Jane Bennett, through her new vitalism, the *vital materialism* and through her *vibrant matter*, has attempted, like Conrad, to join idealism with materialism. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's *material ecocriticism* consider nature to be *animate, sentient and agentive, storied matter*, that is both narrated character and narrator. *Sentience* and *agentivity* evoke Bateson's *cybernetic mind of the universe*, Guattari's *Three Ecologies*, James Lovelock's *Gaia's intelligent adaptability* and are in the line of Griffin's *reenchantment of the desecrated*. Through the ecocritical analysis, Conrad's fiction has led me to the conclusion that the third wave of ecocriticism is far more unitary through intercommunication and interdisciplinarity than what Glotfelty found as isolated theories in 1996.

A key feature of Conrad's fiction that I started from, and insisted on in the thesis, is the centrality of nature. Conrad is definitely ecocentric and disanthropocentric, corresponding to Iovino and Oppermann's *storied matter* as the narrative and the narrator. Conrad's fiction is so much storied matter that, if we erased the nature theme from it, we would probably annihilate his literary work. "With Conrad nature is always first and man second" stated Galsworthy in

1908, in “Joseph Conrad: A Disquisition” by way of reproach, and, unawares, for the benefit of an ecocritical approach.

Mention should also be made of Conrad’s ambivalence, double binds that, I argue, have led to his expressing the schismogenesis between his humans and nature, in his atypical dual paradoxical ecocriticism, simultaneously ecocentric, ecophobic and ecophilic, disanthropocentrically misanthropic and romantically anthropophilic. As a post-Darwinian, post-Wallacian, deterministic author, he looks at nature as if it were ‘Dark Powers’ (the mind of the universe inescapably leading human destiny through hazard) and as a ‘knitting machine’ that creates man’s shackling genotype with his flawed fate inscribed in his DNA. Hence, the source of human tragedy in man’s awareness of his inner schismogenesis, of his being bound by determinism. Nature can be a colossal creator, creating perfect beings, like butterflies, but it also creates imperfect ones, like man, aware of his tragic destiny determined by the hostility of outer wilderness and the flaws of his inner wilderness. Conrad wonders whether nature is moral in creating the flawed man’s faulty destiny. “Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece . . . Perhaps the artist was a little mad” (*LJ* 159), but his ecophobia is doubled by both anthropophilia and ecophilia.

Chapters 2 to 5 examine Conrad’s best-known novels, novellas and stories through the concepts ipresented in Chapter 1. Chapter 2, “Wilderness and Heterotopian Spaces,” has grounded the analysis of Conrad’s texts on the concept of wilderness with its components: the terrestrial, the aquatic, the atmospheric, and the void. I have identified terrestrial wilderness as pristine land (“The End of the Tether”), land inhabited by the primitives (*Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*) or wasteland (*Heart of Darkness*, “The Secret Sharer”). Terrestrial wilderness in *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo* is animistic, sentient and hostile to cornucopia, while in *Heart of Darkness*, the genocide of the natives, the geocide of the land and the ecocide of the fauna and flora result from the double horror of corrupting the natives into assassins of their fauna and of their conationals, too. Ivory, an obsessive mantra, leads the white intruders to develop a wilderness-of-the-mind and to their transcorporeal reification into ivory-like bones, growing to the champion trader’s commodification into a ball, The puny humans are in a permanent state of bewilderment, being presented as antithetic to the huge animistic jungle.

Being the guardian of the silver mine in dystopian *Nostromo*, lithosphere isolates the land. The vibrant matter causes the country’s looping history of wars and the characters’ wilderness-of-the-mind, making a virtual terrorist of the capitalist who exploits the mine and a thief of an quasi-eco-Marxist honest factotum proletarian. Such monstrous evolutions add to the wild waterfall and the reified natives being used for their own destruction, as robotic resources. *Nostromo*’s people are alienated from the nature which they abuse. Wilderness pays them back with tragedy, remaining indifferent both to permanent wars and to suicide. Deep ecology allows the peace of death only to carriers, but not to the treasure-hunters, who are turned into treasure-haunters. Silver weighs more than love. Silver as ore thundering in the mountain and as a premonitory sign marking *Nostromo* throughout his story is vibrant matter which regengefully corrupts and kills before returning to its original earth. The future of the cornucopian mine looms more menacingly than tyrants, under the capitalist motto of “material interest.”

I read Patusan’s terrestrial wilderness in *Lord Jim* as several *gestalt* images: a heterotopia of compensation as redemption or one of deviation (Foucault) bringing exile and achieving execution, or a predator’s hyperorganism devouring sunlight, or the moon’s trap, or the two-faced moon mirroring the sun or expressing both the conscious and the subconscious, or medieval stasis and lack of history, or oriental art and a fairyland, or as a horror reef-land of the dead. Jim’s rhizomatic itinerary in search for redemption parallels theriomorphically a butterfly’s metamorphosis from a caterpillar, to a chrysalis, to a white specimen, master of a land of the dark and its slave by self-exile. The chapter also discusses exile with Conrad , a

theme defining most of his heroes, expressing, through deterritorialization, the metic's organic rooting in his native nature as his moral power. Stein's dangerous and necessary dream expresses Conrad's romantic paradox, his schismogenic alternation of idealism and scepticism ensuring his heroes' sanity. Quixotic Jim acts under the call of 'white man's stewardship' but his double bind of allegiances to the white and to the brown blocks him from prompt action, his rhizomatic exile seeking redemption actually leads to his execution, which shows Conrad's determinism as fatalistic.

A protean hyperobject, aquatic wilderness in permanent metamorphosis is viscous, molten, non-local, phasal, an inter-object. Dual water gives or takes life, connects or isolates. Most of Conrad's stories happen at sea (*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* "Typhoon," "Youth"), in ports (*The Arrow of Gold,* "A Smile of Fortune"), and on rivers (*Heart of Darkness,* *Almayer's Folly,* *An Outcast of the Islands*). Metamorphic water turns through all physical states, presented by Conrad in their extremes grades. As snow and ice, it is a monstrous force bringing life to a halt (e.g. "The Duel," "The Warrior's Soul" "Falk," *Under Western Eyes,* *The Mirror of the Sea*), or a fairy-tale landscape in a child's perception ("Prince Roman").

Two of Conrad's novels form a diptych: in *Almayer's Folly* water is the hope to escape the colony into the freedom of the westward leading ocean while in *An Outcast of the Islands* the monsoon is a hope-killing prison. Lovers, like rivers, are aquamorphic vibrant matter magnetically running to their destiny (*An Outcast of the Islands*). Suicides drown in the womb-tomb ocean ("The Idiots," *The Secret Agent,* *Lord Jim,* *Nostromo*), the sea is a burial site (*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* *The Shadow Line,* *Nostromo*). Dwellings are ships (*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'*), boathouses ("Falk," "Freya of the Seven Isles,") wrecks (*The Rescue*). His long requested autobiography was produced as *The Mirror of the Sea*, in which he defined himself by his sailor profession. Like himself, his heroes feel exiled on land and at home at sea, to which they are dually ecophobic-ecophilic addicts. Navigation is defined as the use and abuse of the sea ("A Smile of Fortune"). He jingoistically declares the English sailors by their phenotype, organically connected to the sea and the best among European seamen ("Youth"), whom navigation helped to become the founders of the greatest empire, justifying imperialism by cornucopian dreams for the homeland (*Lord Jim*). The sailing ship is a heterotopian planet and animistically pteromorphic (*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*). Conrad scorns steam as soulless machinery, whereas frail sail depends on nature's winds and man's sailing art. Introducing himself as exclusively a sail seaman (*A Personal Record*), he depicts composite menboats, centaurs, osmotic to their ships (*The Rescue,* *The Shadow Line*).

As the border between physical states, liminal shores have multiple functions: hiding places (*Almayer's Folly,* *Nostromo,* *The Shadow Line,* "The Planter of Malata"), trysts or farewell sites (*Almayer's Folly*), shipwreck and stranding spots ("Freya of the Seven Isles," *Nostromo,* "The Partner"), as well as dwelling places (*The Rescue,* *Almayer's Folly*). Mud and sand, as their components, signify death ("Amy Foster," *Nostromo*), burial (*Heart of Darkness*), baptism (*Lord Jim*), witchcraft (*Heart of Darkness*), or forgetting (*Almayer's Folly*). Shores may also signify *entanglements* of different historical ages in the synchronicity of the nonsynchronous (*Heart of Darkness,* "The End of the Tether"), wasteland may be retrieved wilderness (*Heart of Darkness,* "The Secret Sharer," *The Shadow Line*) or gates to the underworld ("The Secret Sharer,"), sites where time is tidally modified.

Wilderness as outer and inner void is the result of depression or delusion according to Latour's assemblages of human and inhuman actants. One finds this in *An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Shadow Line*. Associated with void, dark hides misdeeds in *Nostromo*, rivers may be isomorphic to deserts (*Heart of Darkness*) while snowscape nightmares express guilt (*Under Western Eyes*). Impressionistic fog is omnipresent, functioning as a bewildered perception of reality. White fog, for instance, is described as more blinding than the dark (*Heart of Darkness,* "An Outpost of Progress,"), foggy nights on the ship generate claustrophobia (*The Shadow*

Line), animistic fog colludes with murderers (*Lord Jim*) or triggers war crimes followed by doubt burden ("The Tale"). Depressive heroes perceive life as an exile on the earth or as void (*Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*). Conrad achieves isomorphism between overabundance and void (*An Outcast of the Islands*), excessive water and deserts (*Heart of Darkness*).

Chapter 3 "Apocalyptic Dimensions in Conrad's Fiction" has been structured similarly to Guattari's *Three Ecologies* as environmental, social and mental. Conrad's eschatology warns about the end of the human species and is an intriguing prolepsis of subsequent historic events. Besides the frequent tragic apocalypse, there is comic, eschatology, either ironic or grotesque ("Youth", *The Secret Agent*, "Typhoon"), in the multiple unveiling of parables on storms, fire, ship abandoning, ships as catalysts of conflict, cannibalism, anarchism, war, torture, crime, greed, obsession, disease, decay, and death.

Conrad's storms are presented both ecophobically (in Estok's line), and animistically (in Alaimo's line). The ocean behaves like a lunatic targeted against the ship (*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*), its anthropomorphism is looked at as disanthropocentric (in Iovino and Oppermann's line). In "Typhoon" horror is transformed into comic apocalypse through the centrality of a stupid anti-hero captain, who acts against the book. As the result of his behaviour, the elements assail the ship and cease interhuman communication. The external typhoon is transcorporeally transmitted to the porous coolies, a fighting swarm, specular to the storm outside. Similarly, in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, the frightened crew's bodies porously absorb the salty water, being modified by the sea.

Fire is an equally dangerous alternative to water for the crew in "Youth," condemned to pump into or out of the ship in two antonymic apocalypses. This ironically romantic piece expresses hydrophobia, igniphobia, aviophobia, and finally igniphilia of a maddened crew of porous theriomorphic salamanders who drink, eat and sleep on a burning ship. Deep ecology reveals rats to be wiser than humans, when abandoning a smouldering ship to die, while the sailors are opaque to their biosemiotic warning. Conrad also remarks how the sea becomes polluted because of the fire. During the catastrophe, on board of the life-boats, subject-object positions change: the whites, who had been in subject position, become the Other's contemplation theme, turning into objects.

The ship is a catalyst of conflict (*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*). I have applied Zapf's triadic analysis of *Moby-Dick* (2006) as critical metadiscourse, imaginative counterdiscourse and reintegrative interdiscourse to the discussion of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, and I have analysed the same text through Said's counterpunctal reading as theme one, theme two and coda. I have proposed the same analyses for "The Secret Sharer." Conrad's paradox is that while danger in small boats generates solidarity, starvation on a luxury cruiser leads to anomie ("Falk") and his ethical dilemma is whether cannibalism could be still a sin under the circumstances.

In the story of a coward crew abandoning the passengers to virtual death (*Lord Jim*) "the dark powers" as nature's justice condemn each to his individual apocalypse. "Amy Foster" transfers into reality *Lord Jim's* virtual crime, containing the greatest carnage of Conrad's shipwrecks, with hundreds of sleeping passengers in the hold of a ship at anchor being criminally drowned, though the real description of their horrific drowning is only hinted at. his horrorphobia being the expression of his search for homeostasis, Conrad avoids the description of drowning scenes ("Amy Foster"), skips the climax of typhoons ("Typhoon"), and narrates shipwrecks only through the auditory perception of the blind ("The End of the Tether").

Cannibalism is a recurrent apocalyptic theme in his fiction. He wonders about the Other's restraint considering the starving team of cannibals (*Heart of Darkness*). Stevie's remains are described as a cannibal's dinner and there are allusions to subconscious cannibalism in Verloc's gulping after Stevie's death (*The Secret Agent*).

Conrad considers anarchism a futile suicidal intra-species crime in time of peace. In *The Secret Agent*, anarchist London is porous to both time zones and bombs, deploying circularity in plump people, clocks, hats, circle drawings. Empire is opposed by Counter-Empire, in a mesh involving embassies, parasitic anarchists, the police colluding with informers. The Professor's plan to destroy entomomorphic mankind eugenically is a prolepsis of the Nazi camps. Nature opposes the destruction of the Greenwich Observatory, the symbol of time zone order, through a tree root which makes the bomb carrier stumble. Object oriented ontology notes the power of interveners: the bomb, the root, the coat label, the knife, the clock, the piano, their animistic logic and erratic whims determining the humans' fate.

To Conrad, war is a nonsensical intra-species, inter-racial, inter-nation crime, inscribed in the human phenotype by natural selection. In analyzing the war in *Nostromo* I have used Zapf's triadic method and Said's contrapuntal reading. I argue that Gould's prophylactic use of dynamite to ensure the mine's security while risking half the country being destroyed is proleptic of today's nuclear accidents. On the other hand, war is lucrative as anti-deep ecological horse-flesh market. War is also condemned in "The Duel," a parable on the European wars; war at sea leads to crimes as defensive strategies in "The Tale," in which the symbolic fog stands for the condition of the warrior's conscience as a participant in a collective crime. A component of war, torture adds the sadistic dimension of mass destruction, defining man in contrast with animal predators.

Like in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, Conrad finds that alterity ruins the Europeans' fragile sense of identity. Psychotic degeneration results from loneliness in wilderness ("An Outpost of Progress," *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, *An Outcast of the Islands*). Examples in this respect are Willems who fears big leaves as hands intent to strangle him (*An Outcast of the Islands*) and Decoud who commits suicide (*Nostromo*). In both cases nature remains opaque, reflecting Conrad's ecophobia.

In Conrad's opinion, in opposition to Dostoevsky's, there is no expiation of crime, because each deed produces consequences. Nature, God's executioner, always pays criminals back with drowning ("The Idiots," *The Secret Agent*), ghost-haunting ("Karain"), social annihilation, delirium tremens, and death (*Lord Jim*). Conrad foretells the genocides of the twentieth century in *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, and "Amy Foster".

A component of Conrad anti-cornucopian view is to be found in the greed for assets, such as gold, silver, ivory (*Almayer's Folly*, *Nostromo*, *Heart of Darkness*). Unlike usual representational maps, Conrad's ones are cartographic representations of areas propitious for asset plunder: pepper (*Lord Jim*), ivory (*Heart of Darkness*), silver (*Nostromo*), gold (*Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*), coal (*Victory*).

Chapter 4, "Flora and Fauna Destruction; The Anti-Pastoral and Anti-Georgic Tropes", has analysed the 'Animal' and 'Pastoral' tropes in Conrad's fiction. Conrad views animals as parasitised by man, who abuses them in every hypostasis: as pets, carriers, food, sources of assets, specimens in collections. Pets, for example, are animals forced to live as toys and mirror their masters. Animals, have no rights because they cannot speak. However, the parrot is distinct, because it can utter words. and, it is compared, ironically, with man, which actually reveals Conrad's use of deep ecology egalitarianism.

Being a source of assets, elephants are almost brought to extinction, commodified into metonymic ivory, whose consumer is the whole Europe and whose providers are colonizers, in an ecocidal system. Ivory permanently appears as *bio*, social life, whereas elephants as *zoë*, bare life, are present only as a missing referent. Being reduced to mere death, former labour becomes *zoë*, too, similar to the elephants (*Heart of Darkness*). Conrad's ecosystems can be unbalanced: exclusively birds ("The End of the Tether"), or exclusively flora (*An Outcast of the Islands*) or ruined by parasites who attack not only man, but also the inter-vegetal system (*Almayer's Folly*).

Gardens as designed second nature mirror or telltale their owners' essence. Collections involve killing of specimens for addiction or art's sake. Conrad's man is condemnable by deep ecological standards as a parasitic abuser of other species. The analysis of Conrad's ecomorphisms has found them heralding Barry Commoner's first law of ecology (1971). Viewing the universe holistically, Conrad frees kingdom and species from the borders separating them, with common features allowing for the passage from one to another. The fourth chapter has listed numerous anthropomorphisms, theriomorphisms, erpomorphisms, entomomorphisms, pteromorphisms, therianthropisms, ploioanthropisms, phytomorphisms, dendromorphisms, aquamorphisms, anemomorphisms, double specularity, reifications, commodifications, all illustrating Conrad's metaphorical perception of a holistic dynamic universe.

The anti-pastoral and anti-georgic as dark modernist tropes have been discussed in Chapter 4, revealing the anti-pastoral as an inefficient shelter against and evocatory of death (*Almayer's Folly*), haunting ("Karain"), war (*Nostramo*) and the anti-georgic as a genetic damnation for the sin of furrowing the earth by plowing or mining ("The Idiots").

"The Earth" trope has been focused on in Chapter 5, "Man *versus* the Earth: from Survival to Empire". I have noted a similarity between Conrad's views and Freud's opinions described in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). The strategies he recommends in the survival behaviour are intentional ignorance (*The Secret Agent*, *Victory*), appealing to scepticism, or accepting the mystification of truth (*Heart of Darkness*). Conrad's characters are protected from the disquieting reality by the society's coercive institutions and by the peers' opinion. Because Conrad does not offer much intergender communication in his novels and because he actually favours keeping women in illusions (*Heart of Darkness*), the eco-feminist voices condemn him to be an androcentric misogynist.

Although produced by his natural environment, man's phenotype is moulded by the community, leading Conrad's characters to resort to the powerful deflection of work, the defining value for the human species (*Heart of Darkness*, "Youth"). His characters equally resort to substitutive psychic satisfactions, which coincide with Conrad's ethical values of fidelity (i.e. honour), solidarity, work (i.e. duty), restraint, and the Victorian and navy's codes of behaviour. All of them can also be read within the ethical codes of ecology.

Conrad has described the navy crew biome to be the most effective community helping man to face nature, comparable to a monastery (*Chance*) with ethnically and culturally diverse characters. Described as an international group of deterritorialized sailors, when they start the voyage, the crew achieves reterritorialization and turns into a solidary brotherhood, lacking racism and jingoism at the end. Every voyage means a new crew's up-rootedness followed by down-rootedness at the end. Conrad is a masterly author of noble friendship stories, involving meshes of doubles. Since his characters are Janician, they are featured by two kinds of doubles, one corresponding to their *id*, close to nature, the other to their *super ego*, close to culture.

From another perspective, the budding class conscience of the proletariat of the seas may be Conrad's insight of eco-Marxism. Captains are symbiotic to their animistic ships (*The Rescue*, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, "Youth," *The Shadow Line*). The family relationships have similar characteristics: few children, who either die before their parents or are lost to other races, failed interracial marriages, barren coracial couples, all of which become symptomatic of the human species in danger of extinction.

The post-Darwinian theories of racial progress/regress have been discussed regarding the debate of degenerationist and progressionist anthropology (Thomas Huxley, Henry Maudsley, Havelock Ellis, Max Nordau), supported with examples from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "An Outpost of Progress," "Falk". Civilization is a long process of repressing savage instincts, which can be swiftly reversed, a point with which most Victorian thinkers agreed. I have found that degeneration follows various patterns in Conrad's texts: atavism; freeing

oneself from coercive bodies and peers' judgement among the savage; self-corruption and corrupting the Other, both described as horrific acts.

The discussion of Conrad's (anti)racism, (inter)racial kinship, reversed racism started from Chinua Achebe's attack on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in the 1977 article "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" in which he finds that Conrad's way of representing the natives reveals the attitude of "a bloody racist". Discussions on Conrad's racism have been unconcluded since then, with critics on Achebe's side and critics contesting his view. In the fifth chapter I have tackled the issue of racism in Conrad's fiction and I have come to the conclusion, supported by Conradian critics, that racism did not exist as a concept during Conrad's life. As Hunt Hawkins notices in "*Heart of Darkness* and Racism" (1988), Conrad is ambivalent in racial issues. I consider that, based on his cultural background and the readings of Darwin, Wallace, von Hauptmann, Conrad might have been what we call today a racist. However, in his biography, through his sailor's career, his exile's experience, his correspondence (Cunninghame Graham, Casement), he reveals himself as antiracist and anticolonialist. This double bind characterizes his whole fiction. Although Achebe's allegations request the exclusion of the novella from the literary canon on censorship reasons, he is both an imitator of Conrad's novelistic pattern in his books (Lawtoo 2013:1) and a reversed racist. In his novella, Conrad has dual antiracist feelings for his two black aids. The helmsman's death leaves him with a pain which a real racist could not have felt. He admires the attitude of the starving cannibals who refrain from attacking the whites and he feels compassion for the blacks in the grove of death. His caricatures ironize the white colonists, not the natives. Moreover, he equals the blacks' drum beat both with Christmas bells at home and with his heart beats. In other words, such attitude would be rather characteristic of eco-theology, not of racism.

On the contrary, Conrad's fiction contains the theme of the natives' reversed racism (*Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, "Karain," "The Lagoon," *The Rescue*, *Victory*) by revealing their attitude of rejection of the white colonists, of resisting their interference with the local culture. Conrad debunks Rousseau's "noble savage" theory and describes the devastating consequences of colonization, promoted as "civilization". The few stories of noble interracial friendship (*Lord Jim*, *The Rescue*, "Karain") are proof to his empathetic attitude, not of racism. Therefore, I consider Conrad an atypical Victorian, humane and empathetic to the Other, albeit eugenical and racist.

Conrad's novels are proleptic of a rhizomatically expanding Empire: they narrate the passage from colonization to Empire (*Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Lord Jim*, *The Rescue*) the passage from imperialism to Empire (*Heart of Darkness*), globalization (*Nostromo*). The Empire replaces the disciplinary society with the society of control, which moulds its subjects accordingly. In *Nostromo*, Conrad is the herald of our century's globalizing society, of the disappearance of boundaries, states, nations, of imperialism being replaced by Empire as a supernational organism. In *The Secret Agent*, for instance, Empire is already under the attack of Counter-Empire, described as anarchic, while in *Nostromo*, proto-communism emerges in Costaguana.

Conrad's endings are known to be tragic. After looking at Conrad's texts through the ecocritical lens, I can argue that the generalized tragedy in his endings cannot be put down to mere pessimism. It can be read as Conrad's warning for the future of the human species. His characters lack the spiritual support of Christianity, they act according to the Darwinian laws that regulate life and believe in the inefficiency of civilization. They reflect the author's disbelief in the triumph of good over evil; they behave in an atheist way and replace religion with ethical norms.

Similar to Bateson's dictum about the self-destruction of the creature who defeats the environment (Bateson 1972:501), Conrad advises restraint. He warns man about his doom and urges him to attempt to delay his being effaced by the avenging nature of the Earth which he

has been abusing. He does this repeatedly, as both a romantic and an ecological paradox, because he is a stubborn idealist, an optimist under his ubiquitous pessimism: “To be hopeful in an artistic sense, it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so,” he claims in one of his notes (*Notes on Life and Letters*, 1905:10).

This research has revealed a very strong connection between Conrad’s views on life, nature, human nature, the earth with its assets and ecocriticism. I have proved Conrad to be an environmentalist, a promoter of the ethical and ecological views and norms, a prophet of an apocalyptic ending to humanity unless nature is held in high respect, a humanist and an (anti)racist. The texts under scrutiny have been selected from Conrad’s long list of fictional works and considered to best reflect the author’s ecocritical views. The research has not exhausted the topic and can be continued by developing the chapters and subchapters of the thesis with more examples and other Conradian texts to support the author’s deep attachment and critique of nature.

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