JOSEPH CONRAD’S ENCHANTED SPACE

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

By

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Washington, DC
April 6, 2018
ABSTRACT

This thesis reads Joseph Conrad’s obscure narratives as a formal response to the spatial problems of his historical period. By situating *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Typhoon* in the contexts of a disenchanted world, I argue that Conrad’s colonial novels register his protest against the rationalization of the era’s over-exploration of the earth, and the reification of space and human relationships. This thesis aims to solve the tension between Conrad’s artistic goal to “make you see” and the text’s obscurity that prevents the reader from seeing. I suggest that Conrad uses “re-enchanted space” to distance the readers from their “remote goals” in order redirect them to their immediate surroundings. Through the estrangement effect of his narrative, Conrad makes his readers rediscover the familiar.

I began by identifying Conrad’s literary impressionism as an innovative narrative technique to re-mystify space. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses fragmented sight and incomprehensible sounds to preserve the authenticity of his European characters’ colonial experiences in Africa. The obscurity of sight and sounds make the African continent an impenetrable space for the readers. Creating the heterotopic Patusan in Southeast Asia in *Lord Jim*, Conrad uses real-and-imagined geography as an alternative method to re-mystify the world. Conrad’s portrayal of the heterogeneity and ungraspability of space manifests his protest against the reified space. Finally, I argue that in *Typhoon*, Conrad
alters his readers’ conventional perception of space by evoking an intensive storm; in addition, he obscures the nautical world with a hollow-centered storm and de-centered narrative. In this work, Conrad estranges readers from their familiar surroundings by exploring the obscure space of exotic worlds.

   Key words: enchanted space, rationalization, reification, exploration, obscurity
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Prof. Cóilín Parsons for his continuous encouragement for my research and writing. He taught me the methodology to carry out my research and to write. It was a great pleasure to study under his patient guidance. I could not imagine finishing my thesis without his generous support. I would also like to thank him for his empathy and great sense of humor.

My sincere thanks goes to my second reader Prof. Patrick R. O’Malley for his careful reading and timely feedback. I deeply appreciate his wise counsel, patience, encouragement, and firm support. I am extremely grateful for what he has offered me.

In addition to my advisor and second reader, I wish to thank Prof. Samantha Pinto for her wonderful and stimulating thesis seminar, Prof. Nicole Rizzuto for leading me into Conrad studies, and Prof. John Pfardrescher for giving me invaluable suggestions during the early stage of my thesis writing.

I also would like to thank my classmates Hannah Mae Atherton, Sally Baker, Beverley Catlett, Daniel Dougherty, Tess Henthome, Galina Kossareva, Grace Latimore, Jacob Myers, Queenie Sukhadia, Madhuri Vairapandi, Alyvia Walters, and Adonis Williams for the stimulating discussions and insightful suggestions in our thesis seminars. I would like to give a special thanks to Jewel Pereyra, who workshopped and exchanged drafts with me throughout the writing process, providing inspiriting comments and feedbacks on my thesis drafts.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to my parents for supporting me both emotionally and financially. Their love and understanding has accompanied me throughout my research and writing process. It would not have been possible for me to have finished the thesis without their support.
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“The fate of our time,” argued Max Weber in his 1918 “Science as a Vocation” speech, “is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (155). Weber suggested that the pre-modern world was filled with mysteries, because people’s knowledge about the world they lived in could not sufficiently explain the events happening in the world. In such a world, one needed “recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed” (139). However, as science continued to progress throughout the centuries, people found new, rational explanations for previously inexplicable phenomena. The result of the scientific achievements, as Weber insightfully pointed out, was that “there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play” (139). Weber illustrated how rationality and science disenchanted the world through “technical means and calculation” (139).

The disenchantment of the world that Weber describes is well reflected in the achievement of geographical exploration and the development of cartography. Since the fifteenth century, European explorers were advancing into the parts of the world that had been unknown to them. By the turn of the twentieth century, as the famous English geographer Halford Mackinder wrote, it was “a commonplace to speak of geographical exploration as nearly over” (421). The achievements of the great exploration were manifested in cartography. Mackinder proudly announced that “the outline of the map of the world has been completed with approximate accuracy” (421). Cartography promoted the disenchantment of the world, as it translated the unknown into a graspable form.
Joseph Conrad, a former sailor who spent twenty years of his life on seas and lands far from Europe, was personally involved in the process of geographical exploration. Conrad admired the early explorers for their adventurous spirits and their contributions to the development of science. However, his attitude toward the subsequently developed maps was complex: he endorsed the maps that recorded both the explored areas and the unknown blank spaces, but rejected later maps that clearly represented the whole world. Instead, Conrad enjoyed the blank areas on the map, which cultivated his geographical imagination. For the same reason, he disapproved of cartographers’ decisions to eliminate unknown spaces on modern maps.

Conrad’s attitude toward the changing maps is reflected in his writings. After Conrad emigrated to London and chose to become a writer, he wrote novels conveying European sailors’ colonial experiences—their life in exotic places and their engagement with the local peoples. Those novels demonstrate Conrad’s endorsement of romantic adventures as well as his protest against the rationalized world and reified space.

Examining Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, and Typhoon, this thesis explores Conrad’s ambivalent response to an age characterized by rationalization and disenchantment. I argue that Conrad incorporates fragmented sights, unintelligible sounds, non-chronological time and shifted points of view in his narrative to mediate colonial spaces and individual experiences. Through this mediation, rather than a direct reflection, Conrad obscured the world that he is describing.¹ The difficult prose becomes

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¹ I borrow the word “mediation” from Raymond Williams, who differentiates “mediation” from “reflection.” Williams argues that the idea of art as ‘reflection’ is challenged by the idea of ‘mediation,’ because ‘reflection’ alienates “the material social process” of the making of an artwork; ‘Mediation,’ instead, is intended to “describe an active process” that involves “an act of intercession, reconciliation, or interpretation between adversaries or strangers” (Williams 97).
Conrad’s formal response to the over-exposed earth, as his narrative re-enchants the world by restoring its mysteries. Through the creation of an obscure, remote world, Conrad attempted to defamiliarize his readers from their habitual life and the reified world that surrounded them. Conrad aimed to use the power of art to make them realize their numbness, to shock them out of their everyday experience and to make them see hidden meanings or even new possibilities in their lives.

In 1897, Conrad wrote in his preface to The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ that “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” (147). Scholars have taken this oft-quoted sentence as Conrad’s manifesto of his artistic goal as a writer, and have been interpreting Conrad’s narrative techniques in light of this quote. Ian Watt, for example, explains how Conrad uses sense-data: “the individual’s sensations of the external world are registered and translated into the causal and conceptual terms which can make them understandable to the observer” (179). For Watt, Conrad bases his narrative techniques on sense-data to convey characters’ individual experiences to the readers.

However, there are also scholars who cast doubts on this manifesto, arguing that Conrad fails in his mission to “make you see.” Janice Ho points out the incongruity between Conrad’s difficult style and his artistic credo. Even though Conrad “emphasizes the emotive effects of language which . . . are generated through a clear evocation of sensory perception,” Ho argues that “Conrad’s style in fact evokes no such thing” (5). Rather, “Conrad’s stylistic penchant for obscurity reveals a striking disjunction between

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2 I borrow the word “difficulty” from Leonard Diepeveen, who defines it as “a barrier to what one normally expected to receive from a text, such as its logical meaning, its emotional expression, or its pleasure” and defines the reader’s experience of difficulty as “the experience of having one’s desire for comprehension blocked” (Diepeveen x). I suggest this is how Conrad uses his written world to re-enchant the world.
his professed artistic credo and his actual artistic practice” (5). Given this disjunction, should we declare that Conrad’s artistic goal has not been actualized? If not, how does his obscure narrative contribute to his artistic goal?

Nidesh Lawtoo comments that Conrad’s writings “[go] against a long and venerable philosophical tradition that has its origins in Plato’s Republic”; instead, Conrad “counters ancient devaluations of art as a mere imitation, reproduction, or shadow of an ideal transcendental reality in order to advocate the creative, productive, and above all illuminating power of artistic creation” (227). This critique could be read as the key to reconciling the apparent paradox between Conrad’s style and his artistic goal. Lawtoo notes that Conrad refuses to treat art as “a mere imitation” or “reproduction,” but emphasizes the creative power of his art. Building on that, I suggest that Conrad does not represent what is out there, but mediates it through his writing, which can be read as a “process of reconfiguration by which cultural products refract the historical moments that produced them.”

Note that Lawtoo’s comment does not contradict Watt’s interpretation that Conrad uses such techniques to make the individual sensations understandable to the reader. Through the use of sense-data, which takes the form of fragmented sight and incomprehensible sound, Conrad translates the characters’ colonial experiences for his readers.

How does Conrad’s mediation of the colonial world fulfill his artistic goal of making his readers see, when, as Ho points out, it is exactly his mediation that contributes to the obscurity of the text? The answer, I propose, is to be found in the text’s impenetrability. It brings the readers into an unfamiliar world that distances them from

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3 This definition is taken from one of the meanings of “mediation” in the history of criticism that Nathan K. Hensley summarizes.
their habitual world. In this way, the readers are made to see their own surroundings. Before discussing Conrad’s narrative, I explore how Conrad wrote against the modern capitalist society he lived in—a society, according to Georg Lukács, characterized by reification of human relations and human beings’ mode of thought.

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács sets up his discussion by identifying the commodity-structure as central to capitalist society, and commodity fetishism as “a specific problem” of modern capitalism (83-84, original emphasis). Building on that, Lukács notes two features of capitalist society: objectified human relations and a reified mode of thought. First, the relation between people “takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity,’” an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people” (83). Relations between people are highly influenced by commercial activities. Being reified by commodities, human relations are also objectified and take on the characters of a thing.

From the subjective and objective commodity relations between people, Lukács realizes that commodity structure influences “the total outer and inner life of society” (84). Lukács noted that commodity fetishism and its reifying effects were also eroding “the modern modes of thought” (84). The logic of commercial trades dominates the modern people. The economic basis of modern capitalist society teaches them to think in qualitative terms. They evaluate things by calculation, and make decisions according to numbers that suggests profits. Both one’s connection with others and their understanding of the world are quantified. The objectified human relations and the reified mode of thought characterizes the capitalist society.
Aligning with Lukács’s observation of reification, the Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky conceptualizes the reification of human life in modern society. He argues that when “perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic . . . and so life is reckoned as nothing” (16). He writes that as prevalent as the problem of habitualization may be, it could be solved through art:

art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (16)

In art, Shklovsky discovers the function of defamiliarization: to alienate and distance an audience from their customary lives. He suggests that this distance could prolong the reader’s process of perceiving objects, allowing the reader more time to rediscover what is obscured by the habitual.

Conrad’s artistic practice works from the opposite direction: he mediates the unknown in remote parts of the world, familiarizing the reader with the unfamiliar. He attempts to shock his readers by altering their process of perception and evoking a sense of remoteness to distance them from their habitual life. In the preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' Conrad announces that he writes “to arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant

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4 Bertolt Brecht uses “Verfremdung Effect” (or, Alienation Effect) to describe a similar process in theater performance: “the V-effect consists in turning the object of which we are to be made aware, to which our attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected. It makes the obvious "in a certain sense . . . incomprehensible," but the ultimate goal is to make it "all the easier to comprehend" (188).
goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile” (148). In order to make people look at their surroundings with new eyes, he introduces them to the unknown and the esoteric, awakening them from their familiar relations with their immediate environment. This defamiliarization, which serves as Conrad’s protest of the reified world, also aims to emancipate readers from their frozen emotions and indifference to ordinary life.

In this thesis, I explore Conrad’s formal responses to the problems of geographical exploration, rationalization and reification. I analyze Conrad’s re-enchantment of the world through three different but interrelated forms of space: the impenetrable space, the heterotopic space and the de-reified space. Chapter I examines the impenetrable space in *Heart of Darkness*. Focusing on Conrad’s mediation of the ungraspable space in Africa, this chapter analyzes how Conrad’s manipulation of sight and sound contribute to his re-making of enchanted space. This chapter regards Conrad’s literary impressionism as one of his major approaches for obscuring the remote world, and argues that his difficult narrative uses the unfamiliar to distance the readers from the familiar. This helps the readers see their own world with new eyes.

Chapter II explores the heterogeneous space in *Lord Jim*. Drawing upon Michel Foucault’s “heterotopias,” this chapter contrasts the setting of the concrete sea with the real-and-imagined colony to show how Conrad explores new forms of space in the colonial world. This chapter also identifies Conrad’s experimental narrative as an alternative means of obscuring space. Emphasizing the fluidity of space with a
decentered narrative, Conrad revolutionizes the reader’s spatial experience as he re-
mystifies the world.

Chapter III researches the de-reified space in Typhoon. Through an examination of the novella’s protagonist McWhirr, this chapter identifies the logic of capitalism that characterizes MacWhirr, and analyzes how Conrad uses the storm on both a physical and narrative level to impact the mode of thought that MacWhirr represents. This chapter argues that Conrad opens up a thirdspace in the non-European world, which becomes an enchanted space that he invites his readers to explore.
CHAPTER 1: *Heart of Darkness* and Impenetrable Space

**Looking into the Nebulous Space**

Although Janice Ho suggests that “the romance of travel seems to be predicated on preserving whatever is alien, unknown, and therefore exotic about a destination,” she writes that by the turn of the twentieth-century, “developments in mapping had rendered the entire globe visible and consequently knowable”: “cartography [had] transformed the foreign into the familiar” (2-3). Ho articulates Conrad’s literary dilemma: modern maps, which recorded achievements from European geographic exploration, minimized the mystery of the exotic, a common theme in travel literature. From this standpoint, *Heart of Darkness* tells a story about Marlow’s experiences in a place already captured by maps “with rivers and lakes and names” (8). Marlow expresses his disappointment in the eradication of unknown space, because Africa has “ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery” (8). However, his experiences in those explored spaces “with rivers and lakes and names” reveal to his readers that explored places can still contain mysteries.

Ian Watt uses “literary impressionism” to describe Conrad’s narrative style. Though Conrad himself may not agree that his writings are “impressionistic,” his works nevertheless have a similar effect on the audience as Impressionist paintings do. About such paintings, Watt explains that “the artist’s ostensive ‘subject’ was obscured by his representation of the atmospheric conditions through which it was observed” (169). Similar to those paintings, Conrad’s difficult narrative also obscures Africa. Refusing to represent Marlow’s journey and exploration of Africa in clear and unambiguous terms, Conrad restores a sense of mysteriousness that had been considered lost. In *Heart of*
Darkness, Conrad constructs a remote colonial space, re-enchanting the world. Through the mediation of Conrad’s literary impressionism, Africa becomes a somewhat impenetrable space for the reader. The re-enchanted space excites the readers’ curiosity, encourages them to explore what is rendered obscure, and makes their reading experience resemble romantic adventures from past times.

Conrad’s literary impressionism is manifested in his description of the African continent. Africa is shown to the reader as an undefinable continent, because Conrad mediates it through nebulous descriptions. Marlow’s first sight of the African coast exemplifies Conrad’s style:

Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. . . This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there greyish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pinheads on the untouched expanse of their background. (Heart of Darkness 13)

Through Marlow’s eyes, Conrad shows us an Africa that is half revealed and half veiled by the mist. It appears as a featureless bulk that is “still in the making.” Marlow’s unformulated description of the continent gives the impression that the land is undefinable. As readers, we have difficulty penetrating the land, because we are unable to see the land. Conrad’s characters cannot see the land, either; even though the steamship is
approaching the African continent, Marlow does not have a better view of it. The colossal
jungle that encircles the land blocks Marlow’s view, as if deliberately hiding the
continent from the invaders’ eyes. Conrad reinforces this sense of blurriness through his
use of colors, as he seems to find difficulty in selecting suitable colors to describe the
land. Phrases like “so dark-green as to be almost black” and “greyish-whitish specks . . .
in the white surf” all reveal a sense of indecision. The feeling of blurriness not only
characterizes the land, but also pervades the novel. It reminds the reader that even though
this continent is represented by a defined shape on maps, Africa is still rich in its mystery
and potential for further exploration.

Similar to his mediation of the African land, Conrad also creates a sense of
remoteness with his unformulated narrative of the African people. After Marlow comes
ashore, he encounters six chained black slaves who walk under the supervision of a white
man. Conrad writes about Marlow’s mediation on them:

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were
not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of
disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all
the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial
surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were
then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—
and nearly as thin. (17)

Marlow describes the “savages” as “black shadows” and “moribund shapes” that are as
free and thin as air. Such a description attaches a sense of incorporeality to their bodies.
Conrad’s description estranges human bodies from the reader. The bodies, instead of
being described in ways that are familiar to the reader, become non-representable and ungraspable. Conrad makes the common incomprehensible, which has a distancing effect that defamiliarizes the reader from their habitual ways of perceiving their surrounding world.

Marlow’s sight of the “thin” bodies also contribute to Conrad’s construction of Africa as a mysterious space. Because of the bodies’ incorporeality, they are easily lost in the dark background of Africa. Withdrawing the black bodies from Marlow’s and the readers’ sight, Conrad creates a feeling that our invading eyes can neither comprehend nor touch original African bodies. Conrad makes Africa mysterious by preventing us from gaining a comprehensive understanding of it.

Another technique that is crucial to Conrad’s literary impressionism is fragmentation. After Marlow sees the chained slaves, he recalls his encounter with a young black man:

I began to distinguish the gleam of the eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. (17)

Marlow not only refuses to give an overall description of the youth; he does not even make it explicit that he is describing a human being. He only shows fragmented parts of a body. The reader has to piece each part together—the gleam of the eyes, the suddenly visible face, the shoulder and the eyelids—before the full scene becomes clear. Marlow continues to relay how the youth takes the biscuit that Marlow offers: “the fingers closed
slowly on it and held—there was no other movement and no other glance” (17). Marlow
does not explain or interpret what is going on; he only describes what he sees.

Like the incorporeal black bodies, the fragmented body parts also contribute to
Conrad’s construction of an enchanted space. His writings are selective. He only shows
some fragmentation that Marlow sees in Africa, leaving the rest of the scene undescribed
in a dark background. The surroundings swallow every other thing, revealing only the
most relevant fragments—a pair of eyes, a face, or a shoulder. Conrad’s impressionistic
narrative filters Marlow’s experiences and obscures how he sees Africa. The reader only
has limited access to this unfamiliar remote space; the rest of the continent remains out of
sight and largely unknown. Obscuring Africa with his literary impressionism, Conrad
makes it impenetrable. He preserves the mysterious space of Africa by establishing it as
an enchanted space.

The Incomprehensible Other

Citing Conrad’s preface to The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ as evidence, Jennifer A.
Janechek notes that “much Conrad scholarship . . . treats his early fiction as privileging
sight over hearing” (15). Yet, the auditory plays an equally important part in Conrad’s
narrative. Conrad mediates the colonial space not only through nebulous sights, but also
through incomprehensible sounds. Eric Rawson claims that “the soundscape of Heart of
Darkness informs Conrad’s narrative method” and “generates much of the
epistemological uncertainty of the tale” (37). Focusing on the human voice in Heart of
Darkness, Rawson argues that “The sound of the human voice, not semantics, as he
forcefully reminds us in the figure of Kurtz, is the basis of meaningful communication
but is not in itself particularly communicative” (43). I agree with Rawson that the human
voice does not always make sense in *Heart of Darkness*. Instead, its incomprehensibility, combined with the impenetrable silence of nature, contributes to Conrad’s re-enchantment of the African space. Moreover, it also generates an epistemological uncertainty that disrupts the reader’s typical mode of thought.

Conrad also writes incomprehensible sounds into Marlow’s journey: “Suddenly there was a growing murmur of voices and a great tramping of feet. A caravan had come in. A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks” (*Heart of Darkness* 19). Marlow hears the “murmur of voices” when he arrives at the Central Station and knows that these sounds are made by the local Africans. In the next sentence, however, his description of the sounds changes to “a violent babble of uncouth sounds.” The change in diction reflects Marlow’s inability to make sense of what he hears. Because that the narrator cannot comprehend the African speech, the reader also cannot understand its content through Marlow. The communication among the indigenous thus remains as much a mystery to the reader as it does to Marlow.

Substituting “murmur of voices” with “uncouth sounds” also reveals Marlow’s attempt to distance himself from the subjects uttering the sounds. It suggests that Marlow perceives a hierarchal relationship between the Europeans and Africans. In other words, the change in phrasing and diction sheds lights on Marlow’s imagined cultural superiority: as an Englishman, Marlow does not know any African languages, and naturally finds the utterances made by the Africans incomprehensible. However, instead of acknowledging his ignorance or inability to comprehend African languages, Marlow shifts the blame to the Africans, and dismisses their speech as “uncouth.” At this point in the novel, Marlow’s perceived cultural superiority seems to make him an embodiment of
the conventional Englishman in the hierarchical relationship between the Englishman and
the African.

Janeche suggests that “Conrad’s text participates in the imperial project of
distinguishing between barbaric noise and civilized speech” (11). When Marlow comes to
the Central Station, “all the carriers were speaking together, and in the midst of the
uproar the lamentable voice of the chief agent was heard ‘giving it up’ tearfully for the
twentieth time that day” (19). The African speech are described as incomprehensible, and
the African themselves are portrayed as a crowd with their individuality being deprived
of. The murmuring of voices and the sounds of tapping feet make people
indistinguishable from one another. In contrast, a distinct European voice rises from the
Africans’ unrecognizable faces and commingling utterances. The voice is familiar and
understandable to Marlow, enabling him to pass the agent’s words on to his imperial
readers. It is also a singular voice, rising from the noisy background composed of African
voices. Because of its comprehensibility and singularity, Marlow differentiates European
speech from the African sounds.

Paul Armstrong argues for “the impossibility of capturing the Other in writing”
(22). The lack of reciprocity between the Europeans and the Africans makes it extremely
difficult for the former to comprehend the latter. To Marlow, the yells, hands clapping,
and feet stampings of the indigenous are an “incomprehensible frenzy” and make him
feel that he is “cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings” (Conrad, Heart of
Darkness 35-36). Conrad, however, overcomes the difficulty of capturing the Other;
through a unique mediation of the incomprehensible and the ungraspable, Conrad writes
about Marlow’s perception of two separate layers of time. Marlow identifies the African land as prehistoric earth and the African people as prehistoric man: “We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign— and no memories” (35-36). Marlow uses spatial terms to describe the time that the indigenous live in, stating that “those ages are gone” and are far from the time that they live in.

Conrad’s portrayal of Africa space is different from its representation on the map: a space filled “with rivers and lakes and names” (8). Instead, it remains remote and unreadable. Even when Marlow physically penetrates into the continent, he still feels as if he exists in a different layer of time than that of the indigenous. Marlow de-reifies Africa from the map by opening up new blank spaces—blank spaces in the Europeans’ acquired knowledge of Africa and the people dwelling in this remote land. Resisting a rationalized representation of Africa, Conrad mystifies the land with a new form of time and space. The enchanted space is restored through Conrad’s mediation of the remote world.

This technique, however, exposes another problem: Marlow’s denial of coevalness. In Time and the Other, Johannes Fabian describes “the denial of coevalness” as “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (31). Fabian explains that “such use of Time almost invariably is made for the purpose of distancing those who are observed from the Time of the observer” (25). Such “separation and distancing in colonialist praxis,” notes Fabian, “drew its ideological justification from

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5 Stephen Kern writes that “Marlow's journey is an allegory of the history of mankind in reverse, a devolution of the spaces into the past, into darkness, into nothing” (167). Kern's reading implies that Marlow differentiates the African time from the modern European time. Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy also ponders over Conrad’s phrase “the prehistoric earth.” He proposes that “the vast time span of the hundreds of millions of years” that the geologists affirmed gives “the familiar earth ‘the aspect of an unknown planet’” (631).
Enlightenment thought and later evolutionism” (27). In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow demonstrates an imperialist ideology, as he distances himself from the Africans and speaks of them in contrast to the Europeans. When Marlow refers to the Africans as prehistoric men, he denies the co-existence of the Europeans and the Africans. However, as the story progresses, the narrative erodes the contrast, requiring us to ponder over Conrad’s more complex understanding of the relationship between the two cultures at their moment of encounter.

**The Collapsing Contrast**

Marlow’s separation and distancing of the Africans does not remain stable throughout the novella. Rather, he later counteracts this tendency by attempting to identify with the Africans:

> What thrilled you was just the thought of their [the Africans’] humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. (*Heart of Darkness* 36)

Even though his speech conveys a strong sense of superiority, Marlow nevertheless finds in himself a “faintest trace of a response” to “the terrible frankness of that noise” and has “a dim suspicion of there being a meaning.” Marlow’s impulse to respond the Africans reminds him of the Darwinian thought that all human beings have the same origin. This
“remote relationship” becomes Marlow’s basis for pondering the possibility that they—the Europeans—might be able to comprehend the other race. Marlow’s growing doubt about the absolute distinction between the two races creates the potential for communication.

After this moment, the barrier between Marlow and the Africans seems to weaken, and Marlow starts to perceive emotions in the previously unintelligible African sounds. In the scene in which Marlow and his shipmates are attacked by the indigenous people, Marlow hears grief and sorrow in their cries, instead of incomprehensible sounds. Pondering over “the nature of the noise,” Marlow relates: “Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief” (43). Marlow recognizes that he also experiences the sorrow and grief he hears in the Africans’ cries. His acknowledgment of their shared emotions is the first step in his recognition of the Africans’ humanity.

Soon after this moment, Marlow describes a scene after an African was killed: “the tumult of [the Africans’] angry and warlike yells was checked instantly, and then from the depths of the woods went out such a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope from the earth” (46). Hearing the sound change from “angry and warlike yells” to “a tremulous and prolonged wail,” Marlow not only feels the Africans’ emotions, but is also able to imagine their “mournful fear and utter despair.” Marlow’s interpretation suggests that the African sounds become readable to him. He is now capable of identifying with and sympathizing with their grief. The pains and sorrows that Marlow feels suggest that he
finds common ground between himself and the Africans that builds a connection between them.

As the communication barrier between Marlow and the Africans dissolves, a barrier between Marlow and other Europeans begins to appear. Again, as Rawson points out, the sound of the human voice does not necessarily produce meaningful communication. Though Marlow can talk freely to other agents who speak European languages, such talks do not necessarily convey meaning. Rather, there are times when the European voices are nothing more than background noise to Marlow. Upon Marlow’s arrival at the Central Station, the news that his steamer broke down awaits him. It is a simple piece of information, but an agent tells it to him “with great volubility and many digressions” (21). Even though language does not present the barrier to their communication that it does in Marlow’s interaction with the indigenous, this exchange of information is not effective at all.

Just like the voluble agent, the General Manager is portrayed as “a chattering idiot” (23). He starts to talk as soon as he sees Marlow, but as Marlow comments, “all this talk seemed to me so futile” (23). Though they are talking, Marlow does not glean anything meaningful from their conversation. To Marlow, the General Manager not only “originated nothing,” but “sealed the utterance” (22). The purpose of communication is to convey ideas, yet the General Manager’s language seals utterance and meaning. Despite sharing a language, Marlow’s exchanges with the agent and the General Manager are no more productive than those with the Africans.

As the meaning of language fades, the Europeans become less communicative. After the helmsman is shot dead, Marlow is urged to look for a substitute among his own
people. “Can you steer?” Marlow asks one of the agents, and then recounts, “He looked very dubious; but I made a grab at his arm, and he understood at once I meant him to steer whether or no” (46). Because his attempt to convey meaning through language fails, Marlow must pass on his message through body gestures. This exchange mirrors Marlow’s communications with the indigenous at the Central Station, as he describes how “one evening, I made a speech in English with gestures, not one of which was lost to the sixty pairs of eyes before me” (20-21). Though Marlow makes a speech in a language that the indigenous do not understand, he still effectively conveys his message through gestures. Because Marlow’s question fails to reach the European agent through their shared language, Marlow effectively conveys his intentions by making a “grab” at the agent’s arm—a bodily gesture. The similarities between Marlow’s communication with the indigenous and with the Europeans seem to suggest Marlow’s skepticism about the unbridgeable cultural gap between the two races. Conrad questions European exceptionalism as he examines the communicability of languages and sounds.

In addition to exposing its hollowness, Marlow reveals the hypocrisy of European language. When Marlow mentions their plan to rescue Kurtz to the General Manager, the General Manager expresses his impatience over the time required to repair the steamship, which is the only means of transportation that could send them to Kurtz. Marlow believes the General Manager’s desire to rescue Kurtz is genuine, for the General Manager assures him that Kurtz is “the best agent he had,” “an exceptional man,” and “of the greatest importance to the Company” (23). However, when Marlow overhears the General Manager’s private talk with his nephew, Marlow realizes that the General Manager was not being truthful when he publicly praised Kurtz; to his nephew, General Manager
describes Kurtz’s talk as “the pestiferous absurdity” (33). He also reveals his aversion to Kurtz, whose eminence might endanger the nephew’s promotion. The European agents’ inconsistent voices align with the *Lord Jim* narrator’s criticism of “the haggard utilitarian lie of our civilization” (168). Marlow’s disapproval of the European agents’ speech unsettles the supposed binaries between Europe and its colonies.

In his description of Africa, Conrad conveys the unreadability of the Europeans’ colonial experiences, the complex interactions between the two races, and the communications among the Europeans themselves in the exotic land. Marlow’s interaction with the Africans and the Europeans not only deconstructs the stereotypical West/East binaries, but also ruptures the reified African space on the map. With the complexity of the Europeans’ experience on the continent, Conrad proves that Africa cannot be defined by the shape of the continent or the names of the rivers, but should be understood as an Other world as complex as their own. It seems that Conrad recreates an enchanted space from his paradoxical tendency to both introduce the unfamiliar world to his readers and to block them from thoroughly entering this remote world. In this way, mystery is retained in the heart of the dark land.

**Nature as Ungraspable**

Conrad mediates the colonial space not only through his characters’ connections with other human beings on the land, but also through nature itself. Judith Paltin argues that “the African continent stands for Marlow as a kind of infinity, or black hole, which consumes every limit assigned to it” (785). Nature, as an inseparable part of the African continent, is portrayed as profound and immense as a black hole.
Conrad’s Africa not only overwhelms tangible material bodies, but also absorbs intangible sounds produced by western civilization. The absence of sound is one of the ways in which Conrad portrays nature’s mysteriousness. Marlow begins to feel nature’s immensity as he reaches the African continent:

It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. (Heart of Darkness 14)

When analyzing this passage, Rawson writes that “the transplanted sounds of a familiar civilization are muted here” : “the faintness of the sound is indicating the impotence of the military enterprise” (44-45). Rawson accurately captures Conrad’s mockery of imperial expansions in this passage, as this scene is a quintessential manifestation of how European empires conquer and claim their colonies through violence. European explorers and merchants came to the African continent on ships equipped with modern weapons, taking the land as their own and subjugating the native people living on the land.

As early as in the opening of the novella, Conrad shows his disapproval of the Europeans’ deeds, particularly the “civilizing” mission they claim to undertake. Conrad ingenuously casts Marlow’s aunt as the representative of European ideology, and makes us hear speak the following words: “weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid
ways” (*Heart of Darkness* 12). These words are written in the style of King Leopold II’s speech, and Conrad uses gender inversion to mock Leopold II for the crimes he committed in the Congo.⁶ By making a minor female character speak Leopold II’s words, Conrad shows his contempt for Leopold II and the empire’s exploitation of Congo.

Conrad also shows his disapproval of imperialism through describing the futility of the modern weapon. Nature absorbs the sounds that suggests the imperial invasion. The ship fires a shell into the air with “one of the eight-inch guns,” but it does not even reach the land before the surrounding sea swallows it up (14). The shell soon submerges, leaving only a transient “small flame” and “a little white smoke” behind it. Instead of making an explosive sound to showcases the weapon’s power, the shell only makes “a feeble screech,”—and the water soon absorbs this sound, too. Nothing is produced, and nothing is changed; the weapon does not bring any destruction to the land. The invading ship, along with its modern mechanical equipment, is portrayed as small and powerless in comparison to the immensity of nature. The futility of the weapon foregrounds the profundity of nature.

Conrad’s portrayal of the immensity of nature contrasts with his description of Brussels. When Marlow goes to Brussels, he sees “a narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds,” and “immense double doors standing ponderously ajar” (10). The European city appears crowded and devitalized, and its narrow street and high houses create a smothering atmosphere. The repetitive quality to the “innumerable windows” adds a feeling of dullness to the

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⁶ Leopold II is the king of Belgians, who notoriously exploited Congo with violence during his reign. Najder quotes Leopold II’s speech that “to bring civilization to the only part of this globe where it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness which envelops entire population—is, I dare say, a crusade worthy of this age of progress” and suggests that Leopold II “knew how to make clever use of slogans about progress, the civilizing mission, and the enlightenment and ennoblement of savages” (126).
cityscape. Brussels is portrayed as an unimaginative city. By contrast, the sea and the African continent are of an absolute different quality. “For a time I would feel I belonged still to the world of straightforward facts,” says Marlow when he comes to this new world, “but the feeling would not last long” (14). Unlike Europe, nature is not a reified space that consists of “straightforward facts.” Instead, it is a space characterized by its depth, its unreadability, and its impenetrability. While Marlow can comprehend Europe on a surface level, or by reading a map, he could never do that with nature.

Since Conrad’s nature cannot be represented by definite sounds and facts, nor rationalized by human intelligence, how does Conrad make his readers “see” nature? I suggest that Conrad mediates nature through a negative form of expression. Nature does not impress us with what it does, or what it sounds like. Our impression of nature is formed through its emptiness and soundlessness. Annika J. Lindskog proposes that by writing “to make you hear, to make you feel…is, before all, to make you see,” Conrad means that his readers should “ideally experience the world represented in the text through their senses” (15). She also notes that “such effects rely on the ability of the text both to represent sense impressions successfully and of the readers’ ability immerse [sic] themselves completely in the representation of the experiencing subject’s perspective, so as to face the text-world as if they were in it” (14). I agree with Lindskog that the readers have to immerse themselves in the space that Conrad’s characters occupy, but more often than not, such a space is constructed through the characters’ difficulties in perceiving sight or sound. Conrad mediates ungraspable space through the disappearing traces of the human civilization and the absence of sound. He makes us experience the immense
African space through the disappearing shell and its muted sound. The space is enchanted by its ungraspability.

At the end of Paltin’s essay, she argues that “Unspeakability and absolute incommensurability afford the nonhuman an escape from a restrictive and abusive human economy, from being subject to the vagaries of human recognition and being valued according to improvident human purposes” (792). Paltin’s argument sheds new light on Conrad’s difficult style: Conrad de-reifies space through his mediation of unrepresentable nature. If nature could escape from human beings’ grasp, it would avoid reification through both the measurement of scientific methods and the confinement of maps.

Conrad uses negation to write about nature in all its immensity and mysteriousness without using definite terms. In turn, the elusiveness of nature also contributes to the making of Conrad’s enchanted space.

Nature as Silent

Conrad’s nature not only re-obscures the external space, but also de-reifies the characters’ interior space. The unproductivity of nature reduces the European characters to their simplest states, the lack of material goods in the primitive world emancipates human relations from the influence of a commodity structure, and the silence of nature diminishes the corporality of the exterior world, compelling the characters to make an inward turn. Conrad puts his characters in nature in order to experiment with how an unfamiliar environment might change Marlow’s and Kurtz’s habitual perceptions of the world and understandings of their own lives.

Conrad describes Marlow’s intimate communion with nature after Marlow learns that his ship has broken down:
The moon had risen [...] Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through that dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard,” says Marlow, “the silence of the land went home to one’s very heart—its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. (*Heart of Darkness* 26)

Marlow hears the “faint sounds” when the loquacious human voices fade, but even those faint sounds are buried in the silence of nature. In this moment, Marlow finds himself penetrated by silence. Lindskog proposes that the silence in the novella “creates an impression of something concealed inside it, something that remains unsaid,” which she identifies as “the whisper of some horrible, hushed truth” (53).

Rather than concealing something, I argue, the silent space actually reveals what has been concealed to Marlow—not the horrible truth of life, but the mysteriousness and greatness of it. Conrad seems to have a different definition for the word “reality.” For Conrad, “reality” means the truth of life, which he perceives from the “general sense of vagueness” in nature, as opposed to “straightforward facts” from the reified Europe. The silence that penetrates Marlow’s heart seems not deadly, but edifying. The invading silence softens Marlow’s heart and accommodates him in a fluid and commodious space in nature, temporarily distancing him from the harsh industrialized world. As silence opens up Marlow’s interiority and emancipates him from the bourgeois mentality, Marlow is able to find the hidden meanings of his life. By distancing Marlow from his familiar surroundings, Conrad re-shapes Marlow’s perceptions of the world and his life.

However, the silence of nature has different effects on Kurtz than on Marlow. Marlow spends most of his time at the Central Station, “an important center for trade”
and “a center of communication and transport” that is “inhabited by well over one hundred Europeans” (Najder 133). The text essentially fashions the Central Station as a reproduction of a European port; even in Africa, Marlow is still surrounded by the jabbering Europeans, and he finds their loquaciousness uninformative and distasteful. The silence of nature in some way alleviates the crowdedness and noisiness that Marlow dislikes about the Central Station. Kurtz, on the contrary, works and lives in the Inner Station, where Europeans are hardly seen and European languages are hardly heard. Kurtz’s circumstances are revealed to us through Marlow’s speech:

> how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man’s
> untrammelled feet may take him [Kurtz] into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion?

(49; emphasis mine)

Marlow parallels “silence—utter silence” with “solitude—utter solitude” to suggest that Kurtz is in a solitary state in the silent heart of the African land, which only results in Kurtz’s utter loneliness. The unexpected and unfamiliar silence makes Kurtz realize that he has lost the “voice of a kind neighbor,” and has been stripped of any connections with familiar people. In front of him, he only finds a strange, hostile land and utter silence. The contrast between Marlow’s and Kurtz’s experiences in the silent nature makes the African space more esoteric and more intangible.

Conrad describes Kurtz’s presence as a voice against the silent nature, which makes the story even more uncanny. Similar to the Africans whose bodies are perceived as fragmentations, Kurtz is also disembodied. He is a symbolic mouth detached from a
substantial body. Benjamin Steege notes that nineteenth-century organic physics “recast
the relationship between the voice and human subjectivity: it removed the voice from the
privileged position of guarantor of interiority, externalized it, and showed it to be
mechanically reproducible” (qtd. Janechek 17). Likewise, Kurtz’s voice becomes
externalized. This distinct voice that is understandable to the reader becomes jarring, as
the reader perceives it against the silent soundscape of nature. It is as if we cannot
perceive anything substantial in the esoteric space.

If we explore the nature of Kurtz’s voice, we would find that it speaks on behalf
of European imperialism. “Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards
better things,” preaches Kurtz, “a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing,
improving, instructing” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 33). Kurtz’s utterances suggest that
he positions himself as a representative of Europeans who undertake civilizing missions
in the empires’ “unenlightened” colonies. This mission, which requires Kurtz to
“civilize” and “humanize” the Africans, establishes an intimate relationship between
Kurtz and the indigenous. Yet, this intimacy, rather than building on a relationship
between equals, serves Kurtz more than the Africans. The Africans become a source of
enrichment for Kurtz’s African life, as they serve as substitutes for Kurtz’s absent
neighbors and prevent him from living a life without connections.

Turning Kurtz into a voice helps Conrad mystify the colonial space. Janechek
argues that Conrad constructs “a diegetic space wherein the air is electrified by the
vibrations from the voices of absent speakers—in particular, the voice of the seemingly
bodiless Kurtz” (10). The disjunctive narrative separates Kurtz’s voice from his body and
makes him ghost-like. This relates to Kurtz’s other feature: his inauthenticity. Kurtz’s
words appear to be eloquent, ambitious, and magnificent, but they also sound empty and insincere. The agents describe Kurtz as “a prodigy,” “an emissary of pity, and science, and progress” (25), but Marlow claims that these descriptions only represent “the shade of the original Kurtz” (49, 68). With his voice separated from his physical body, Kurtz is understood not as “doing” but as “discoursing,” and becomes a hollow icon of European ideology (47).

Another effect that Kurtz’s voice might produce is reminding both Marlow’s listeners and Conrad’s readers to spend time meditating upon their own lives. Despite being described as an externalized voice, Kurtz has his inward turn at the last moment of his life: “I saw it—I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself” (66). Kurtz is forced to confront his inauthenticity, speaking of “A voice! A voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart” (67). The inner voice compels Kurtz to acknowledge the hollowness of the life he lived in Africa, and makes him see the meaninglessness of the imperial mission. For Conrad, Kurtz’s disillusion is a reminder from the remote world to reflect, compelling readers to pause and examine the lives they have been living.

Conrad’s description of Kurtz as a disembodied voice exemplifies how he detaches the colonial space from a substantial reality. The African space thus becomes eerie and enchanted. Conrad’s narrative is also so obscurely rendered that it almost makes the Europeans colonial experiences elusive to the reader. However, Conrad aims to achieve his artistic goal through revealing moments of the Europeans’ lives in the esoteric space, because the unfamiliarity of the exotic might “make them pause for a
look, for a sigh, for a smile” (148). Ultimately, through the power of art, Conrad wishes to make his readers re-examine their own lives with new eyes. *Lord Jim* also aims at distancing his readers from their old modes of thinking, but through a different approach. By setting the novel in a place that is both real and imaginative, Conrad rejects the reification of the map and explores alternative ways to comprehend colonial spaces.
CHAPTER 2: Lord Jim and Heterogeneous Space

Developing Michel de Certeau’s “contemporary critique of the map as a ‘totalizing device,’” Harvey regards the map as “a homogenization and reification of the rich diversity of spatial itineraries and spatial stories” (252-253). The “totalizing vision of the globe,” which allowed “the whole population of the earth . . . to be located within a single spatial frame,” generates “environmental determinism and a certain conception of ‘otherness’” (249-250). These critiques underlie the spatial stories in both Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim. Building on Pierre Bourdieu, David Harvey describes the map as a system of representation that “converts the fluid, confused, but nonetheless objective spaces and time of work and social reproduction into ‘a fixed schema’” (253). Rejecting the map’s reification of European knowledge of the globe, Conrad wrote Heart of Darkness to reverse the cartographical process, that is to say, to release the ungraspable space from the reified map, to restore its fluidity, and the re-enchant the world. Lord Jim, sharing the same goal with Heart of Darkness, arrives at its end through different means.

While Heart of Darkness de-reifies space by translating individual experiences into impressionistic pictures, Lord Jim creates heterogeneous space to re-enchant the world. This chapter argues that Conrad rejects the over-explored earth in a new form of space that cannot be captured by a map. Following the English sailor Jim, the novel leads us from the seas in Southeast Asia to Patusan, a remote land that is both real and imagined. The break-down in the “presumed absolutes of homogeneous time and space,” notes Harvey, “was the central story of the birth of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forms of modernism” (252). Conrad’s mediation of representable space is manifested in his creation of Patusan, which enables him to show the heterogeneity of the
modern world. This creation is Conrad’s formal response to the reification of capitalist maps.

In his 1976 speech “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault coins the term “heterotopology” to describe “a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” and defines “heterotopias” as real places in the world where “other real sites . . . are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). Describing heterotopias as “at once absolutely real . . . and absolutely unreal,” Foucault illustrates the heterogeneity of spaces that people experience in the twentieth century (24). The perception of such a heterogeneity, however, is not exclusive to the latter half of the twentieth century. The modernist perception of space is also manifested in Conrad’s colonial novels. For Foucault, the colony is an extreme type of heterotopia: it is a place that indigenous people occupy, but also a place where the colonizers reproduce their own societies. They are “irreducible to one another” but also “absolutely not superimposable on one another” (23).

Foucault’s description of colonies informs the reader’s understanding of Conrad’s colonial spaces, where different worlds collide. Exemplified by *Lord Jim*, Conrad’s colonial world shows a strong sense of localness, but is simultaneously subjected to the influence of the imperial powers. Exploring the tensions between these two worlds, Conrad both reveals and re-obscures the mysteries of the world. *Lord Jim* was written in the ages of New Imperialism,\(^7\) and its first half exemplifies how space, enveloped by rationality and disenchantment, stifles the imagination of the exiled imperial subject in the capitalist world. The latter half of the novel, which I read as Conrad’s attempt to

\(^7\) The concept of “new imperialism” has been used to describe a period of time that is characterized by western nations’ expansions into Africa and Asia.
redeem his character Jim from the harsh and hostile world, registers Conrad’s resistance

to a world denuded of mysteries. The ship, the sea, and the colonial land are three major

sites that are central to Lord Jim. Drawing upon Michel Foucault’s theory of

“heterotopia,” I analyze Conrad’s modernist narrative to demonstrate how he mediates

the conditions of spaces—namely, the ship and the sea—in the real world.

**Reified Space of the Ship and the Sea**

Regarded by Foucault as “the heterotopia *par excellence,*” the ship exists

between the real and the imaginative (27). It is both “a floating piece of space” and “a

place without place,” both “the great instrument of economic development” and “the

greatest reserve of the imagination” (27). Reading the ship in Lord Jim through this

heterotopic lens helps us to see how Conrad understands the ship’s functions. According

to Foucault, the ship serves as both a site crucial to overseas capital accumulation While

Foucault describes the ship as both a place for accumulating overseas capital and for

cultivating the imagination, Conrad separates the two functions of the ship

chronologically. Conrad describes ships in the seventeenth century as places for fostering

the sailors’ adventurous spirit; however, Conrad views ships from his time period as

imperial working places.

Conrad relates how Patusan had been discovered by European traders in the

seventeenth century: “The seventeenth-century traders went there for pepper, because the

passion for pepper seemed to burn like a flame of love in the breast of Dutch and English

adventurers about the time of James the First” (Lord Jim 137). Conrad acknowledges the

economic motivation behind the imperial traders’ journey, but not without referring to the

imperial adventurers’ passion for adventures. Conrad also points out the dangers and the
toils of the traders’ journey, linking them again to the explorers: “the bizarre obstinacy of
that desire made them defy death in a thousand shapes; the unknown seas, the loathsome
and strange diseases; wounds, captivity, hunger, pestilence, and despair” (137). Due to
the hardships of the journeys, Conrad suggests that the economic motivation is not
enough to embark on long voyages: “it seems impossible to believe that mere greed could
hold men to such a steadfastness of purpose, to such a blind persistence in endeavour and
sacrifice” (137). What sustains them, implies Conrad, is their curiosity and their passion
for the unknown. “To us, their less tried successors, they appear magnified, not as agents
of trade but as instruments of a recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in
obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the
future” (137). The traders almost became adventurers.

Moreover, Conrad’s traders did more than trading and exploring: they also
recorded their journeys “in the aspect of the seas, in the customs of strange nations, in the
glory of splendid rulers” (137). By transferring what they see onto a map, the traders
became cartographers. Unlike medieval cartographers who draw “pictures of strange
pageants, strange trees, strange beasts” with their creativity, the traders resemble
cartographers from the Renaissance onward, who record “the truth of geographical facts”
they see with their own eyes (Conrad, Last Essays 4, 11). While it is verify the historical
accuracy of Conrad’s depiction of the seventeenth-century traders, as Conrad may have
projected his own fantasy of the their lives, his comments nevertheless reveal his
emphasis on the non-commercial purposes of those trips. The journeys of modern
travelers, as far as Conrad demonstrates, are of a different nature.
In *Lord Jim*, Conrad describes the modern ship as a concrete space. The ship is a site of trade for the imperial workers and therefore an instrument for capital accumulation. Even in the opening chapter, Conrad establishes the ship as a workplace. When the narrator introduces Jim’s abode in England, he mentions the commanders of “fine merchant-ships,” which reveals the ship’s commercial function (*Lord Jim* 8). As the novel unfolds, the other ships that sail in the eastern seas or rest at the ports are all merchant ships engaged in imperial trade. Mark D. Larabee refers the world that Conrad’s sailors occupy as a “working empire,” for the sailors “move in an unidealized business world of ordinary trade goods and unremarkable ships” (50). The novel represents the economic role of modern merchant ships, as it takes place in the age of empires.

Conrad’s emphasis on the practical function of the ship, however, represses its role as the “reserve of the imagination” that Foucault describes. On the contrary, the modern ship in *Lord Jim* hampers sailors’ geographic imaginations. The modern traders only value trade, regarding work ethic as their only virtue; they do not value anything unrelated to profit or efficiency. For this reason, Jim’s romanticism seems jarringly anachronistic in the novel. The sailor’s old and romantic way of traveling has become impossible, given the economic function of trips. The commercialization of modern ships also makes Jim’s obsession with the heroic trips seem quixotic. In a sense, Jim’s fate is sealed from the beginning.

Conrad depicts the way in which Jim becomes a seaman: “after a course of light holiday literature [Jim’s] vocation for the sea had declared itself” (*Lord Jim* 8). Captivated by seamen’s heroic lives in romances, Jim enters the same profession. The
uncertainty of plunging into the unknown thrills him, and the inexplicable mysteries in exotic seas and lands excite him. What Jim does not realize, however, is that the descriptions of seamen’s lives in the romances are authentic to their time period, but not to Jim’s. Dominated by imperial capitalism, Jim’s world involves only mercantile trade. Jim’ is thus doomed by his anachronistic daydreams. His illusion of seamen’s romantic lives is dispelled the moment he begins to work. In a sense, Jim is driven by historical forces to leap off the Patna. Jim’s failure in the society defined by commercial values indicates Conrad’s rejection of a world reified by capitalism. As Jim abandons the ship, it is imperative for Conrad to find another place to hold Jim and his idealistic dreams. The sea is the first site of Conrad’s experimentation.

Unsurprisingly, this experiment fails, for the sea has also been reified in the capitalist world. During a journey on the Red Sea, the ship Patna, where Jims serves a first mate, hits an object. Jim abandons Patna and its eight hundred passengers, as he fears the ship might sink. Because of this, Jim undergoes a trail at the court, and his “certificate [is] gone” and his “career [is] broken” (51-52). Jim is rejected by the sea, the world that Conrad describes as an interconnected network of communication and trade. Fredric Jameson describes the sea as “a place of work and the very element by which an imperial capitalism draws its scattered beachheads and outposts together” (213). Jameson’s identification of Conrad’s sea as “a place of business” and “a place of labor” foregrounds Conrad’s sea as a working place (213). Because the sea world in Lord Jim is a trade space connected to other trade spaces, it fails to shelter Jim.

“You must know that everybody connected in any way with the sea was there [in the court], because the affair had been notorious for days, ever since that mysterious
cable message from Aden to start us all cackling” (Conrad, _Lord Jim_ 25). Jim’s rejection by the sea and the seaman community comes partly as a result from the wide-ranging publication of his scandal. The cables for telecommunication (a revolutionary technology in Conrad’s time) gird around the world, spreading the news that the widely used steamboat increases the seamen’s mobility. Eventually, the connection between different seas enables every seaman to attend the court and learn about Jim’s case. Though Jim’s disgrace might have been buried as a secret in the old age, the combined forces of modernity and its interconnected trade network make his failure transparent to the public in the modern age. The concrete space of the sea and the technological development in telecommunications contribute to Jim’s alienation from his career. Jim becomes “a seaman in exile from the sea” (8).

Conrad mediates Jim’s plight with Jim’s geographical displacement. By pinpointing each place that Jim has stayed, Conrad exposes Jim completely to the reader. No matter where Jim goes, he is exposed on Conrad map, which forces Jim to leave again. We learn from the frame narrator that “in the course of years he [Jim] was known successively in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Penang, in Batavia” (8). We also learn from Marlow that Jim has been working in a rice mill (122), with Egström & Blake in Singapore (114), and with the Yucker Brothers in Bangkok (119). Jim cannot stick to any of those jobs for more than six months, because he keeps running into his old shipmates or those who know about the _Patna_ incident. This seems to be Conrad’s deliberate arrangement: by making Jim stay by the sea, Conrad actually creates conditions for Jim to run into someone who knows about the _Patna_ event.
The trajectory that Conrad designs for Jim might also have other implications. Sanjay Krishnan notes that Jim embarks on “an animal-like meandering” because of the “jobs that drive him further east” (160). Conrad does write Jim into hard situations as Jim is being chased, cornered, and forced to move on like a “rolling stone” (*Lord Jim* 119). However, Conrad is also trying to find a solution to Jim’s dilemma by leading him eastward. Eventually, Jim will leave the over-explored imperial world for a heterotopic world that is both real and imagined.

Even though the novel describes the sea as a place where nothing can be hidden, it contains a narrative that develops an opaque world. Conrad establishes his shifting perspectives and non-chronological narrative through the way in which the sailors live at sea. The first five chapters of *Lord Jim* exemplify a narrative style that is typical to Conrad: the narrative point of view is constantly changing. Marlow relates Jim’s story with fragmented information that he collects from various sources, namely from different seamen. His fragmented style makes the text hard to follow, because Conrad does not narrate the events in chronological order. This narrative style is generated from the process by which Marlow captures and comprehends the information he collects: each of the seamen he meets knows a part of Jim’s story; since Marlow’s encounters with them are all contingent, Marlow learns about different fragments of Jim’s story at different times and in different spaces. This, I argue, becomes the base of Marlow’s non-chronological narrative.

To illustrate the non-chronological narrative, we might consider Marlow’s encounter with the French lieutenant, whom Marlow meets in Sydney three years after the Jim’s incident, illustrates how Marlow gleans information about the *Patna* from
various sources. Marlow learns the rest of the Patna story from the French soldier at a location thousands of miles away from where Jim abandons the Patna; his experience not only reflects “the shrinking globe” that characterizes Conrad’s world, but also demonstrates Europeans’ access to the extensive geographical sites. Because seamen live a fluid life, they are more likely to spread what they know about Jim to more people in more areas; because Marlow travels constantly, he is able to meet people who happen to know a fragment of Jim’s story. The three-year interval and the distance between the Red Sea and Sydney also reveal the uncertainty of the seamen’s lives. The time and location in which Marlow meets the seamen, whether they know Jim and what they know about Jim’s story are merely a matter of chance. Because of the seamen’s mobility and wide coverage of the earth’s surface, they live a relatively fluid life. This makes them likely to learn, retell or collect stories and fragments of stories in any place they visit. The seamen’s uncertain geographical displacements and their eclectic knowledge of the sea world inspire Conrad to recount Jim’s story in experimental narrative methods: multiple perspectives, fragmented narrative, non-chronological time and disjunctive space.

Conrad’s sea narrative paradoxically obscures the seamen’s lives as Conrad mediates the seamen’s experiences through his narrative. Conrad’s difficult narrative style creates an opaque world, which shows his ambivalent attitude towards the idea of exploration and how he wants his readers to engage with this novel. In order to protest the elimination of the unknown space on the map where the European explorers took romantic trips in the past centuries, Conrad creates a new form of space that still retains some mystery. With a convoluted configuration of the narrative space and time, Conrad surrounds the story with a layer of mist. In this way, he obscures the story, and restores
the nebulous unknown space that obstructs our effortless penetration. However, Conrad’s encoded narrative also invites more intense attention to the text. We are turned into explorers the moment we begin to search for meaning in the esoteric space. Being at once open and closed to us, the text blurs the boundary between the penetrable and the impenetrable. It produces an alternative in-between space, reviving our imagination as we pry into the secrets we hope to find in the heart of the novel.

**The Heterogeneous Heterotopia**

Conrad’s re-creation of obscurity takes a different form in the second half of *Lord Jim*: he constructs a heterotopic place that cannot be reified by a map. After it is evident that Jim cannot hide anywhere in the sea world, Conrad sends Jim to Patusan, a heterotopic colonial space. In “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault described heterotopias as “always [presupposing] a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (26). In *Lord Jim*, Patusan is described as a remote district of a native-ruled state” (133). It is a hundred miles away from “the streams of civilisation” (137), and three hundred miles “beyond telegraph cables and mail-boat lines” (168). Due to its remote location, Patusan, experiences isolation from the outer world: “it was known by name to some few, very few in the mercantile world. Nobody, however, had been there” (132). In this sense, Patusan is closed to Europeans. However, the stories that Conrad sets in in Patusan also suggests that it is a penetrable space: not only does Jim settle in Patusan, but other Europeans like Marlow can also come and leave freely. Patusan is therefore described as open to Europeans at the same time.

Besides being both open and closed to outsiders, Patusan’s status as a colony marks another aspect of its another heterogeneous nature. Again, in “Of Other Spaces,”
Foucault identifies the colony as an extreme type of heterotopia, because it is both real and imaginative. The colony is a real space, because it is a concrete place where the locals live and trade. But simultaneously, it is also a “space of illusion” for the colonizers, because they project their imagination onto the colony, and rebuild their own society there (Foucault 27). Conrad’s Patusan is such a heterotopic space. It is a place where the local Malays live and trade, but also an absolute Other place where Jim projects English society as he participates in the local political and familial life. Patusan’s heterogeneous nature forms a contrast to the substantial space of the sea and foregrounds Conrad’s de-reification of space in *Lord Jim*.

Based on Conrad’s description of Patusan’s geographical location, scholars have attempted to find Patusan on the map, but location estimates range from East Borneo to East Sumatra. On the one hand, scholars’ attempts to locate Patusan shows the degree to which readers capture its sense of realness. On the other hand, the scholars’ failure to reach agreement on its location also reaffirms that Patusan is an imaginative space. Patusan’s heterotopic nature makes it unmappable. This keeps Patusan in obscurity, which allows Patusan to accommodate Jim in a space that cannot be found in the concrete sea world. By situating Patusan between real and unreal, Conrad also places the reader in a state between knowing and not-knowing. Because what we consider knowable on a map becomes fluid, the space on map is de-reified. The changing perception of space may as well defamiliarize readers from their own surroundings, and compel readers to look at them with new eyes.

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8 In “Conrad’s Heterotopic Fiction,” Robert Hampson provides evidence for the identification of Patusan with these two places. He also points out a third place, a village in West Borneo, where the name of “Patusan” came from.
The contrast between the sea and the land as well as the blurry boundary between the real and imaginative also underlie Jim’s ambiguous status between a dispersed being and a representative of the empire. Because of Jim’s abandonment of the Patna, which the public considers an act of betrayal, Jim is rejected by his community at sea. Even under such circumstances, Jim refuses to return home, because he cannot face his father after having done such a disgraceful deed. Jim alienates himself from his childhood shelter. In The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard describes the house as “the human being’s first world” that “maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life” (7). Unable to return home, Jim becomes a vagrant: “he wandered on the quays all by himself, detached from his surroundings, […] like a ghost without a home to haunt” (Lord Jim 53). However, as Jim’s bond with his homeland breaks, he also becomes a free being that roams around the vast sea in a remote part of the world and in a heterotopic land that seems closed even to Europeans. Jim demonstrates the potential for unbounded movement from the heart of Europe to the margins of the world, which precisely resembles imperial expansion.

As a place of compensation for Jim, Patusan is also an ambiguous space in terms of its relationship to Jim’s homeland. Conrad shows a topographical similarity between Patusan and Jim’s parsonage in England. Marlow introduces Patusan to us as such: “At a point on the river about forty miles from the sea, where the first houses come into view, there can be seen rising above the level of the forests the summits of two steep hills very close together” (Lord Jim 133). Patusan’s topographical features immediately remind us of Jim’s childhood abode: “The little church on a hill had the mossy greyness of a rock seen through a ragged screen of leaves. It had stood there for centuries, but the trees
around probably remembered the laying of the first stone” (8). Similarities between the two places are apparent: they are both ancient, stand on hills, and are surrounded by trees and green space. Such similarities must make Jim feel dreamy: Is it a colonial space? Or is it home? The way in which Patusan is presented to Jim blurs the distinction between home and not-home. This troubling vision may also impact the reader’s perception of space. By creating a topographical similarity between the space in the remote world and the land in England, Conrad makes the unfamiliar familiar to the reader. This connection transcends the distinction between the reified Other space recorded on maps and the real space that Conrad’s readers live in. By annulling the distinction between the real and the imaginative, Conrad emancipates the space on the map, and revolutionizes the modernist perception of space.

The Self-Contradicting Narrative

There is an obvious distinction between Jim’s life in Patuan and his life at sea. Con Coroneos rightfully points out that there is a “an ontological difference between land-being and sea-being,” both thematically and representationally (145). I agree with Coroneos in that the former is heroic, while the latter is vagrant; the space in Patusan is ambiguous, while the space of the sea is concrete and reified. Scholars such as Fredric Jameson and Janice Ho note a narrative disjunction between the two parts of Lord Jim. However, I would argue that the change in location does not necessarily result in a narrative break. Conversely, I suggest not only that no such disjunction exists, but also that Conrad’s narrative remains de-centered throughout the novel. The centrifugal movement of the narrative contributes to the obscurity of the text.
Fredric Jameson discusses *Lord Jim*’s concurrent shifts in genre and narrative, which views in conjunction with the story’s shift in location. Jameson argues that there is a tangible “break” in the narrative of *Lord Jim*, a quantitative shift and diminution of narrative intensity as we pass from the story of the *Patna* and the intricate and prototextual search for the “truth” of the scandal of the abandoned ship, to that more linear account of Jim’s alter career in Patusan […] a virtual paradigm of romance. (206-207)

Jameson dismisses the second half of the novel as a romance, “a degraded subgenre into which mass culture will be articulated,” when he recognizes its “diminution of narrative intensity” (207). Janice Ho shares Jameson’s view, attacking the “more linear narrative” that characterizes the latter half of the novel. Where Ho diverges from Jameson, however, is in Jameson's identification of the Patusan episode as a romance. Instead of “providing readers with a ‘wish-fulfilling’ romance,” writes Ho, Conrad “presents us with the bleak tragedy of Jim’s execution” (11). In this way, the novel’s ending “undermines the convention of romance that [Conrad] has deployed in the novel’s latter half,” and thus shows how Conrad “stages the impossibility of romance” (11).

I agree with Ho that it is problematic to regard the Patusan episode as a paradigm of romance, but for different reasons. Though Jim’s second leap sends him to Patusan, where he fights a war, becomes a political leader, has a love story and builds strong friendships with the local people—elements crucial to a romance—Conrad’s narrative of Jim’s adventure story is not as spectacular nor as penetrable as a romance should be. Contrary to Jameson and Ho, I argue that there is no disjunction between the two halves
of the novel’s narrative. Conrad’s changing perspectives, non-chronological narrative time, and means of conveying meaning remain consistent throughout the novel.

The Patusan episode is not a lighter narrative. Rather, it is told in more convoluted style than the *Patna* event. Conrad maintains the multiple sources through which Marlow accesses Jim’s Patusan story: Marlow knows Patusan from Stein, and among others, learns Jim’s story from Jim’s lover, his servant, and even from Jim himself. We might take the war episode (chapter 25-27) as an example: though Jim’s tale is told by Marlow, we hear other characters’ voices from him, and their narratives contradict Marlow’s. The bifurcation of the story’s narrative voice disrupts Marlow’s dominance of the discourse, which makes the text even more difficult to comprehend.

Marlow’s partiality to Jim is manifested when he describes Jim’s mythic power and build shim up as a legendary figure. In the war preparation scene, Jim is in charge of transporting the heavy weapons up to the hilltop, yet no labor is shown in this process:

He[Jim] had mounted Doramin’s old ordnance on the top of that hill; two rusty iron 7-pounders, a lot of small brass cannon—currency cannon. […] The thing was to get them up there. […] The last hundred feet of the ascent had been the most difficult. He had made himself responsible for success on his own head. He had induced the war party to work hard all night. Big fires lighted at intervals blazed all down the slope, ‘but up here,’ he explained, ‘the hoisting gang had to fly around in the dark.’ (*Lord Jim* 158)

Using the sentence structure “Jim had something done,” Marlow only emphasizes the result of an action, but omits both the subject who initiates the action and the action itself. More eerily, it appears that things work on their own when Marlow
uses expressions like “big fire lighted” or “the hoisting gang had to fly around.”

Disconcertingly, actual labor, toil, and sweat are never shown, even though the
characters are transporting weapons. By creating tension in a scene that should center on
labor, Marlow builds up Jim’s image, which is shown more explicitly in what follows:
“From the top he [Jim] saw men moving on the hillside like ants at work. He himself on
that night had kept on rushing down and climbing up like a squirrel, directing,
encouraging, watching all along the line” (158). In this moment, Marlow elevates Jim to
a high status, exalting him for his command of a spectacular project. At the same time,
Marlow’s description belittles the colonial subjects, not only depriving of individuality,
but also presenting them as degraded animals at work. In doing so, Marlow liberates Jim
from the mundane work, raises him high above the Patusan residents, and establishes
him as a legendary figure with mystical power. Instead of merely glorifying Jim,
Marlow deifies him.

However, Jim’s heroic image is immediately called into suspicion when we hear
Marlow’s counter-narrative:

Old Doramin had himself carried up the hill in his arm-chair. They put him
down on the level place upon the slope, and he sat there in the light of one of the
big fires— ‘amazing old chap—real old chieftain,’ said Jim, ‘with his little fierce
eyes—a pair of immense flintlock pistols on his knees. (158)

The words “the flintlock pistols” instantly subvert the power relations previously
depicted between Jim and the locals. The weapon on Doramin’s knees suggests that he is
the real supervisor, whereas Jim, whose life is threatened by the deadly weapon, is the
one being supervised. This scene makes us recall that Jim also brings a pistol to Patusan,
but it is unloaded. Conrad uses weapons to indicate the power hierarchy in Patusan. The text, therefore, presents opposing information for the reader to digest at the same time, which makes the difficult narrative even more ungraspable. Conrad invites us to piece together a more comprehensive picture of Jim’s life in Patusan. However, he also prevents us from doing so with his ambivalent and convoluted narrative.

Marlow continues to use alternative sources to tell Jim’s story. In the following chapter, he introduces us the perspective of an “outsider.” As “a very respectable householder of Patusan,” Sura appears to be an objective source, yet her vocation as “a professional sorcerer” makes her an enigmatic figure, paradoxically casting doubt on the reliability of her words (159). Marlow hears from Sura that “Jim had carried the guns up the hills on his back—two at a time” (159). Sura’s “stranger’s eyes,” subverts Jim’s heroic image once more, but also helps restore the absent labor in the previous scene: it is Jim who carries the heavy weapons uphill. A voice from the “outside relocates the physical toil that had been dislodged from the actual transportation scene. Such a removal and dislocation requires both our intense attention to the narrative and our deliberate effort to decipher Conrad’s encoded text. Jameson’s assertion that the Patusan story has a less intense narrative does not stand, because the many contradictory voices make the latter half of the novel equally hard to penetrate.

**The De-Centered Narrative**

The war narrative also calls into question Jameson’s and Ho’s comment regarding the “more linear” narrative of the Patusan episode. The war that the Bugis wages against Sherif Ali is not told in chronological order. The narrative of the war is, first of all, fragmented, and then reshuffled into what appears to be an arbitrary order. Marlow first
describes the outcome of the war by showing the remnants of Sherif Ali’s camp. Marlow then shifts between descriptions of war preparation and the war’s influence. At last, the war episode seems to end—but not fully—with the battle scene. The non-chronological narrative of the war in the Patusan story counters the critique that it is “more linear.”

Conrad’s obscurity is foregrounded by the curious presentation of the battle scene. “With the first slant of sun-rays along these immovable tree-tops the summit of one hill wreathed itself, with heavy reports, in white clouds of smoke, and the other burst into an amazing noise of yells, war-cries, shouts of anger, of surprise, of dismay” (161). Though it is assumed to be the central event in a romance, the war scene—if we can call it a “scene” at all—is placed at the end of the sentence, which also marks the end of the war narrative. Such a peripheral location makes the war scene more likely to escape us. Conrad’s means of depicting the climax makes war scene even more elusive: not only does he not show a spectacular scene, but he also omits both the movements in the battle and the warring subjects from the narrative. Instead, Conrad chooses to represent the battle with sound. Yet, curiously, we are only able to identify the war through the local people’s shouts. The collisions of the metal is not heard; Conrad’s mediation of the war makes it almost unidentifiable. Conrad’s ambiguous narrative refutes the claim that Jim’s Patusan adventure is a paradigm of romance. At the same time, Conrad’s war narrative reveals the fundamental difference between the space of the sea and of the land: while the former is a concrete place for trade, the latter is more fluid and elusive.

The ungraspable battle scene foregrounds a decentered narrative form, which underlies Lord Jim’s nonstop textual production (Jameson 219). When the center of the war—the actual scene of the battle—is dislodged, a centrifugal force scatters piecemeal
descriptions of the war all over the episodes of Jim’s Patusan life. For example, Marlow’s description of the war narrative merges with his recount of Jim’s familial life. Marlow begins to introduce Jim’s servant Tamb’Itam before the war episode ends, and his account of the war’s influence also seeps into the story of Jim’s familial life with Jewel. As the text blurs the boundaries between consecutive narratives, it also shifts the reader from one setting to another. As the narrative shifts between the battlefield and Jim’s home, the reader experiences the fluidity of space in the heterotopic land.

Edward Soja uses the term “thirdspace” to describe a new way of thinking about space and spatiality. It is similar to Foucault’s heterotopia in that it is also a “real-and-imagined” place (6). Building on its heterogeneity, Soja’s thirdspace sets aside the “either/or” choice and “both/and” logic that people used to understand space. With this new method, Soja invites us to “enter a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, incompatible” (5). Drawing on Soja’s “thirdspace,” I read Conrad’s creation of a decentered narrative as a radical experiment to search for an Other space. As Conrad dislodges the centers of each narrative episode, their peripheries merge onto each other, and the kernel becomes indistinguishable from the halo. Conrad’s decentered narrative breaks the binaries between the core and the periphery, between inside and outside, and between meaning and non-meaning. The text’s decentered and self-undermining narrative render it obscure and ambiguous. Conrad produces a new form of space out of this equivocality: a space not only unexplored, but one that cannot possibly be fully explored.
Conrad’s obscure style and convoluted narrative creates a nebulous space between the real and the imagination that requires deliberate effort to penetrate. Robert T. Tally Jr. comments that “creative writers engage in a form of literary cartography by which they figuratively map the real-and-imagined spaces of their work, both within the text and with reference to a space outside of the text” (3). In an age when modern maps have exhausted the surface of the earth, Conrad re-mystifies the world with his written words. He creates a world in which reality manifests itself, but as a result of his experimental mediation of the thirdspace, the reader also perceives the re-enchanted space of the world. In *Lord Jim*, Conrad restores the unexplored space to the overexposed earth. He rekindles our passion for unraveling mysteries, rouses our insatiable thirst for knowledge, and emancipates our imagination that that was repressed by the map’s precision. Using heterogeneous geography as a setting and the decentering narratological form, Conrad preserves an untainted space in the remote part of the world, escaping the European map.
CHAPTER 3: Typhoon and De-Reified Space

Published in 1902, two years after Lord Jim and three years after Heart of Darkness, Typhoon is a manifestation of the progress that Conrad made in comprehending the economic and ideological factors that block effective human communication. Typhoon continues to seek solutions in the non-European world through the thirdspace that Conrad creates, which re-enchants the world and suggests new possibilities in the shrinking globe. Conrad’s exploration of the thirdspace unifies the novella’s central symbol, the typhoon, and its circular narrative form. The typhoon emancipates space that are reified by the superficial facts of the capitalist world, and the whirling narrative causes vertigo, distancing the readers from their own familiar life. By opening up the other space, Conrad invokes the readers’ spirit of exploration.

Reification and the Logic of Capitalism

Conrad’s Typhoon relates a story of how Captain MacWhirr, while transporting Chinese coolies to a Chinese port, commands the ship Nan-Shan directly into the eye of a typhoon. Upon discovering signs of an approaching typhoon, the chief mate, Jukes, tries to persuade MacWhirr to change the ship's course. MacWhirr refuses for several reasons: he does not believe that the storm is coming, he does not care to make the voyage more comfortable for the Chinese coolies, and he dislikes the idea of traveling extra miles and increasing the cost of the voyage. Underlying MacWhirr’s reasoning is his rigid mode of thought, which is reified by the logic of capitalism. This rigidity inhibits effective communication between MacWhirr and Jukes.

In History and Class Consciousness, Lukács argues that, although “commodity exchange and the corresponding subjective and objective commodity relations […]
existed when society was very primitive,” “commodity fetishism is a specific problem of […] the age of modern capitalism” (84). In modern society, this problem already influences “the total outer and inner life of society”; “the modern modes of thought are already eroded by the reifying effects of the dominant commodity form” (84; original emphasis). In Typhoon, MacWhirr exemplifies how a society’s economic system influences people’s mode of thought. MacWhirr is depicted as obsessed with numbers, or rather, he is only capable of thinking in quantitative terms.

When Jukes carelessly comments that sailing under the Siamese flag makes him feel queer—presumably because he feels uncomfortable sailing in a non-British ship—MacWhirr assumes that Juke means the flag was made incorrectly. MacWhirr does not understand figurative language, nor Jukes’ feelings. He consults the “International Signal Code-book […] where the flags of all the nations are correctly figured in gaudy rows” (Conrad, Typhoon 8). Seeing no difference between the printed flag and the flag on their ship, he protests: “No. I looked up the book. Length twice the breadth and the elephant exactly in the middle” (8). MacWhirr measures the flag with exact numbers and cites them as evidence for his judgment. Although the measurement demonstrates MacWhirr’s rigorous logic, his interaction with Jukes shows his inability to communicate in non-literal terms. By exaggerating the extent to which MacWhirr is obsessed with numbers, Conrad shows his disagreement with MacWhirr’s rigidity and his lack of imagination.

Conrad also uses MacWhirr to illustrate the problematic logic of capitalism and its reification effect. Lukács proposes that relations between people “takes on the character of a thing” in capitalist society, and “thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’” (83). MacWhirr’s familial relationships are described as materially bound, which in turn
objectifies these relations: MacWhirr rents a house in the northern suburb of London, and pays “five-and-forty pounds a year for it,” which is a high price. But he “did not think the price too high, because Mrs. MacWhirr was admittedly ladylike”; she is “considered by the neighborhood as ‘quite superior’” (Conrad, Typhoon 11). It is clear that MacWhirr thinks it worthwhile to pay a high rent to keep his ‘ladylike’ wife and maintain her ‘superior’ status. The narrator almost explicitly suggests that MacWhirr pays money in exchange for Mrs. MacWhirr’s social status. Conrad’s portrayal of MacWhirr shows capitalism’s reification effect on his mode of thought.

Likewise, MacWhirr’s letters home also quantify his familial relationship in numbers and hollow terms, as he “wrote home from the coast of China twelve times every year, desiring queerly to be ‘remembered to the children,’ and subscribing himself ‘your loving husband’” (11). Instead of the affectionate letters home that readers might expect, MacWhirr’s writing appears mechanical. Expressions of emotion become queer and meaningless when they come from MacWhirr. Fredric Jameson describes the process of rationalization as “the analytical dismantling of the various traditional or ‘natural’ unities” into their “reorganization into more efficient systems which function according to an instrumental, or binary, means/ends logic” (227). In Typhoon, MacWhirr’s mechanical calculation shows how natural familial relationships can be dismantled into either “efficient” numbers or meaningless terms. Conrad exaggerates the extent to which MacWhirr is controlled by economics; he makes MacWhirr’s mode of thought seem unnatural to readers, distancing them from the reification of capitalism.

MacWhirr’s reification of human relations, which, as Lukács points out, “takes on the character of a thing,” is best exemplified by his treatment of the Chinese coolies on
his steamship, *Nan-Shan*. This relationship is not characterized as one between human beings, but between men and objects. When the chief mate, Jukes, refers to the Chinamen as “our passengers,” MacWhirr asks “Passengers? . . . What passengers?” (Conrad, *Typhoon* 23). Upon Jukes’s explanation that he was referring to the Chinamen, MacWhirr exclaims: “The Chinamen! Why don’t you speak plainly? Couldn’t tell what you meant. Never heard a lot of coolies spoken of as passengers before” (23). It never occurs to MacWhirr that the Chinamen are full human beings, just like the European merchants and travelers; MacWhirr carries the Chinamen for profit, and presumably takes them as cargo. Thus, the logic of capitalism also influences MacWhirr’s treatment of the coolies.

Though he cites economic reasons for refusing to change the ship’s course—“a pretty bill to show” for “three hundred extra miles to the distance” (24)—MacWhirr’s ideology also influences his decision: he dismisses the racial other as unimportant and unworthy of his consideration. MacWhirr deprives the coolies of their humanity and objectifies them, which explains why he treats them as cargo. Conrad, however, seems to cast doubt upon the imperial ideology that MacWhirr embodies. Jacob Lothe also differentiates Conrad from MacWhirr’s voice. Lothe discovers a “distance between the authorial narrator and the crew” (113). Based on that, he argues for “an implied sympathy on the part of the authorial narrative” (113). Distance lies between the authorial voice and MacWhirr’s speech, and this distance is perceived through the way in which the narrator exaggerates MacWhirr’s reactions to Jukes’s words. This reveals Conrad’s disagreement

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9 See Forman for a discussion about whether Conrad regarded the Chinese coolies as cargoes or passengers.
10 For a further discussion of Conrad’s commodification of humans and of his attitude to imperial and capitalist ideology, see Pearson, who argues for Conrad’s epistemological uncertainty based on an analysis of the text’s treatment of the Chinamen.
with MacWhirr. If he does not criticize MacWhirr, Conrad at least questions MacWhirr’s unfair treatment of the racial other. Pearson rightfully suggests that “perhaps part of the intent here, as in *Heart of Darkness*, is to employ the racial other in the critique of the imperial project” (33). The perceived distance between the authorial voice and MacWhirr also estranges the readers from MacWhirr’s point of view, making them recognize MacWhirr’s problematic mode of thought, which they too may share.

**The Need for a Change**

MacWhirr is portrayed as too imperceptive to recognize the approaching storm, too unimaginative to comprehend the description of a storm in his guidebook, and “too dense to trouble about” (Conrad, *Typhoon* 14). He extracts no useful information from the fall of the barometer, the book describing storms, and Jukes’ warnings. MacWhirr confines himself to his rigid mode of thought, refusing to examine his surroundings and his life. The narrator comments that:

> Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are on sea and on land such men thus fortunate—or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea. (14)

The phrase “[sailing] over the surface of the oceans” has two layers of meaning. On a literal level, it describes MacWhirr’s peaceful sailing experiences: he has never run into an extreme weather or any dangerous situation that has submerged the ship. On a figurative level, it suggests that MacWhirr, whose life by and large consists of sailing, leads a superficial existence without ever discovering its depth. However, Conrad writes
that many men “[skim] over the years of existence” yet are still “ignorant of life,” suggesting MacWhirr is not the only one to not recognize life’s depth; many of his readers may not have discovered it, either (14). Such readers are too used to habitual life to see the beauty, terror or sublimity in it. Conrad has to remind them that the space in the world is more immense and life is more profound than they think. In order to de-reify their mode of thought and to make them realize the superficiality of their previous lives, Conrad employs the mysterious power of a storm.

Interestingly, Conrad also makes distinctions among his readers. As Jukes is able to foresee the storm’s arrival while MacWhirr is not, some of Conrad’s readers might be able to read the sign of the storm, while for others, the same signs are meaningless. In the first chapter, for example, Conrad already shows “the fall of the barometer” (5), “the clammy heat” (15), and “the continuous, monotonous rolling of the ship” (19), which may be clear enough hints of a coming typhoon for readers with meteorological knowledge. However, for those without meteorological knowledge, the ability to read suggestive language, or the imagination to link the title of the book to the plot of the first chapter, recognition of the approaching storm would be delayed. Those readers will have to linger in the labyrinth of the text, as the remote world mediated by Conrad’s obscure narrative may seem extremely nebulous to them. Those unimaginative readers might only realize the meaning of “dirty weather” is when they are “attacked” by it (15). The differentiations Conrad made among his readers, I argue, are the means by which Conrad makes them “see.” His more sensitive readers will “see” the storm before it actually comes. His more literal readers will have weaker foresight, and Conrad will make them “see” with the violent impact of the physical storm. In this way, the text sharpens his
readers’ senses; the storm becomes the means by which Conrad leads them to their awakening.

De-Reification of Space through Literary Impressionism

Ian Watt comments that “Typhoon stands out in the Conrad canon partly because its values are so completely dedicated to the triumph of facts” (109). Instead of the triumph of “facts,” I suggest, the novella becomes remarkable because of its attempt to break down the facts that reify the world. Conrad places his characters in an unknown space—the wild sea—and subjugates them to the mysterious forces of nature. The powerful sea is not just “full of every-day, eloquent facts,” but also unpredictable and unfathomable (Conrad, Typhoon 11). Conrad begins the story on a heterotypic ship floating in the vast sea, but a violent storm soon causes commotion for his characters. During the storm, Conrad’s characters become submerged by the violent waters—and his readers become submerged in his narration. However, Conrad submerges his characters and readers to emancipate them from the superficial facts that reify their lives. Through his literary impressionism, Conrad de-reifies space, particularly with the fragmentation of sounds and sights.

The storm first becomes observable to the readers in the form of physical violence: “the real thing came at last […] it was something formidable and swift, 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” (30). The ferocious wind comes suddenly, setting off waves that disturb the surface of the water. The turbulent water swallows the steamship, annulling all of its industrial power. The storm also dramatically changes the sailors’ living
conditions at sea: “the disintegrating power of the wind […] isolates one from one’s kind” (30). The sailors almost lose their initiative, as they remain passive when the storm strikes the ship.

Conrad mediates the storm not only through direct descriptions, but also through his characters’ individual perceptions. Conrad separates the voices from human bodies to manifest the storm’s disintegrating powers; the fragmented voices demonstrate how natural forces prevent human communication. “The voices of the lost group reached him [Jukes] after the manner of men’s voice in a gale, in shreds and fragments of forlorn shouting snatched past the ear” (27). Rather than telling or describing the ferocity of the storm, Conrad shows it:

“Watch—put in—wheelhouse shutters—glass—afraid—blow in.”

Jukes heard his commander upbraiding.

“This—come—anything—warning—call me.”

He tried to explain, with the uproar pressing on his lips.

“Lighter air—remained—bridge—sudden—north-east—could turn—thought—you—sure—hear.” (28)

These broken sentences reveal the sailors’ failed attempts to communicate with each other, denoting the strength of the wind. Because the storm is blowing their utterances away, Jukes and MacWhirr can only hear each other intermittently. The broken sentences illustrate how Conrad’s literary impressionism both conveys the storm’s violence through sensation and through its blurring effect, denies the reader easy access to the text. Through the floating utterances, readers experience the strength of the wind, but they must also piece together the broken words to gain meaning from the conversation.
Conrad’s fragmentation of sight also exemplifies his mediation of the violent storm through literary impressionism. He describes his characters’ visual perceptions as they experience the storm: “Captain MacWhirr could catch a desolate glimpse of a few tiny specks black as ebony, the tops of the hatches, the battened companions, the heads of the covered winches, the foot of a mast. This was all he could see of his ship” (32). Conrad distorts MacWhirr’s visual perception, and in doing so, mediates the disintegrating power of the raging storm. Rather present the full picture of the struggling ship, Conrad uses a limited point of view to describe what MacWhirr sees—or cannot see—in the storm. Amar Acheraïou interprets Conrad’s fragmented narrative as “the crisis of representation,” because when “voice and gaze are reduced to their simplest,” “the act of narration is put to a severe test and seriously challenged” (30). However, it seems to me that Conrad does not reduce the voices to their simplest because of his inability to describe the storm. Instead, he uses a reduced narrative to more effectively engage the reader’s sensations.

The storm changes the sailors, as its disintegrating power reintegrates them. The threatening storm destroys their sense of security, makes them realize their vulnerability, and forces them to seek support from their community:

All at once, in a revolt of misery and despair, he [Jukes] formed the crazy resolution to get out of that . . . But as soon as he commenced his wretched struggles he discovered that he had become somehow mixed up with a face, an oilskin coat, somebody’s boots. He clawed ferociously all these things in turn, lost them, found them again, lost them once more, and finally was himself caught in
the firm clasp of a pair of stout arms. He returned the embrace closely round a thick solid body. He had found his captain.

They tumbled over and over, tightening their hug . . . (31)

In the middle of the commotion, Jukes sees a man’s fragmented body and clothes; he struggles to grab hold of them but fails. He then is caught by a “pair of stout arms,” which turns out to be MacWhirr. The storm makes the sailors realize their smallness and weakness, and thus the necessity of each other’s support. Jukes and MacWhirr tighten their hug, as if determined to confront the storm with combined forces.

Conrad views the modern seamen as individuals who by and large remain isolated, as they are only loosely connected with their fellow seamen. In his essay “Ocean Travel,” Conrad laments that “the whole psychology of sea-travel is changed” (Last Essays 27). Because the steamship has gradually replaced the sailing ship, what used to be a home for the sailors has become a “luxurious prison” providing “sham comforts” (27). Typhoon also shows the sailors’ broken connection to the ship and to their fellow sailors. The narrator describes the second mate as “one of those men who are picked up at need in the ports of the world”: “they come aboard on an emergency, care for no ship afloat, live in their own atmosphere of causal connection amongst their shipmates who know nothing of them, and make up their minds to leave at inconvenient times” (Conrad, Typhoon 21). Conrad feels nostalgia for the past, when travelers were “citizen[s] of a small community” (Last Essays 28). He dislikes the modern seamen’s isolated state; he wants to restore the intimacy between the seamen as well as a sense of belonging to the seamen community.
Typhoon restores the intimacy between the seamen, as they share the same fate during the powerful storm. When Nan-Shan is submerged by the sea, the seamen’s breaths are suspended; when the ship springs back up, they regain hope. The back and forth is excruciating, yet MacWhirr and Jukes “kept hold of each other,” refusing to be torn apart (Conrad, Typhoon 35). Their gesture denotes their new reliance on each other. Moreover, the bodily contact also becomes an alternative means of communication when language fails. In light of Soja’s thirdspace, which is “a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives,” the ship and the sea become a thirdspace where Conrad explores alternative ways of changing the European sailors’ isolated state. At the same time, Conrad’s employment of the South China Sea as a remote space also de-reifies MacWhirr’s mode of thought and his way of forming relationships. Conrad creates the storm in the non-European world to solve the problems that Europeans face in a modern capitalist society.

The storm’s de-reification effect extends to MacWhirr’s treatment of the Chinese coolies. Before encountering the storm, Captain MacWhirr dismisses the Chinamen as cargo, and ridicules Jukes for referring to them as passengers. After MacWhirr experiences the disintegrating power of the storm, his attitude to the Chinese coolies changes. In chapter V, Conrad describes how a strong wave strikes the ship, stunning the crew. As soon as they recover from the shock, they think about their captain, who is alone in the engine room. However, when MacWhirr regains his connection with the crew through his speaking-tube, the Chinese coolies’ wellbeing first comes to mind. He immediately commands that “Now then, Beale! […] Pick up all the money. Bear a hand
now. I’ll want you up there” (54). MacWhirr sends Beale to take care of the coolies. It is possible that MacWhirr makes the command to guarantee the safety of the coolies because they are his source of profit, and may still regards them as cargo to some extent; nevertheless, he thinks of the coolies first and cares about their conditions in their fighting —concerns he does not have before the storm.

As Conrad’s violent storm nearly drowns the European sailors, blocks their hearing and blurs their sight, the storm disorients the reader. His difficult style and obscure narrative prevents readers from collecting information easily, and denies them a comprehensive picture of the colonial world. Conrad re-enchants the world with his literary impressionism. In his Marxian reading of Conrad’s modernist sea narrative, Cesare Casarino suggests that the world of the sea ceases to be the central site of production when industrial capitalism replaces mercantile capitalism. Consequently, it is only possible for the narrative to capture things in the “more decentralized system” with “a logic of selective elimination and strategic incorporation” (Casarino 4-5). Casarino provides an insightful Marxian interpretation of Conrad’s modernist narrative, incorporating the relationship between the infrastructure and the superstructure. However, I propose an alternative reading concerning Conrad’s attitude toward the spatial problem occurring at the turn of the century. I argue that Conrad’s literary impressionism manifests itself in his effort to obscure the text; he aims to preserve the enchanted space in parts of the world that still remain somewhat unknown to the European world.

Conrad’s literary impressionism is understand as his protest against reification in an artistic form. Jameson argues that “both positivism as ideological production and
impressionism as aesthetic production are first to be understood in terms of the concrete situation to which they are both responses: that of rationalization and reification in late nineteenth-century capitalism” (225). Building on Jameson, I regard Conrad’s use of fragmented sentences and senses as ways of protesting the world where only “very little of what still be called obscure” remains (Last Essays 67). Conrad employs the storm to make MacWhirr see the depth of the sea, to emancipate him from his superficial understanding of the world. Simultaneously, Conrad also uses the unfamiliarity of the sea to distance his readers from their immediate surroundings, to make them see the profundity of space, and to make them realize that their lives are not filled with superficial facts, either.

**De-Reification of Space through the Whirling Narrative Movements**

In *Typhoon*, Conrad not only emancipates space through the physical storm, but also through the novella’s plot and narrative, which share the form of the hollow-centered typhoon. The typhoon in the novella takes place both outside and inside of *Nan-Shan*. As the physical typhoon sets off waves that disrupt the peaceful surface of the sea and threatens the ship, a symbolic typhoon also takes place inside the ship:

> When the boatswain threw open the door it seemed that an eddy of the hurricane, stealing through the iron sides of the ship, had set all these bodies whirling like dust: there came to them a confused uproar, a tempestuous tumult, a fierce mutter, gusts of screams dying away, and the trampling of feet mingling with the blows of the sea. (*Typhoon* 55)

The storm inside the ship is formed by the physical bodies of the coolies, who fight to pick up their scattered coins on the floor. Their yells blend in with the howling wind,
their trampling footsteps mingle with the commotion of the sea, and their wrestling bodies bear a formal resemblance to the storm. Joseph Kolupke argues that “the figurative language of the storm description becomes the literal denotation of struggling coolies” (qtd. Pearson 32). Brendan Kavanagh also notices that “the narrative writes the noisy flow of the coolies’ bodies into a ‘whirl’ that mirrors that of the typhoon(8). Both scholars relate Conrad’s description of the human storm to the natural storm. This parallel breaks the boundary between the natural world and the human world, formally bridging the gap between human beings and the surrounding environment that they have been kept away from looking for a long time.

The unification of the external and the internal storm draws our attention to the novella’s whirling structure and its hollow-centeredness. MacWhirr’s name, the narrative of the story, the reader’s knowledge about Asia, and the storm itself all share the same structure. As Pearson notes, the name MacWhirr means “‘son’ or ‘offspring’ of a spinning motion” (34). MacWhirr’s name indicates a spinning motion that creates a hollow center, which accords with Conrad’s characterization of MacWhirr as a man without interiority. Jen Hill also considers McWhirr as “the narratological embodiment of the whorl” (454). This definition connects the figure MacWhirr with the deeper structure of the novella, because his name resonates with the whirling movement of the typhoon. The resonance is also crucial to the thematic analysis of the novella: the crux of the problem that the novella attempts to deal with is the de-reification of the capitalist mode of thought. Conrad employs a violent whirling storm in South China Seas to disrupt the commodity structure of European society that generated this mode of thought. The storm diverts MacWhirr from the hard facts of life in the capitalist society, and allows his to
turn inward. The theme and the form of the novel thus converge with the meaning of MacWhirr’s name.

The novella’s narrative also shares the hollow-centered structure of the storm. Ian Watt points out that “both the first and the last chapters end in the same way: the pattern is repeated, with each chapter containing a sequence of letters from MacWhirr, Rout and Jukes” (105). Watt discovers symmetry in the story’s structure, but does not discuss the relationship between content and structure. The letters describe three sailors’ experience at sea that are unfamiliar to the readers of the letter in the story. Though Mrs. MacWhirr, Mrs. Rout and Jukes’s friend read the letters in London, the content of the letters engages with the unknown space of the remote sea. The narrative frame resembles a shell with a hollow center. The empty interior is then made of the middle chapters of the novella, which detail the characters’ experiences in the unknown space.

The plot and the structure of the story are both associated with a typhoon, the novella’s whirling symbol. The novella unifies different narrative elements through a shared hollow-centered structure. The spiraling storm and the rotating narrative movement cause the reader’s vertigo. As the storm de-reifies the concrete space that the Europeans perceive, the readers’ vertiginous feeling might also temporarily detach them from their habitual life fused with superficial facts. The whirling movement becomes Conrad’s formal attempt to explore the openness of the thirdspace, through which he aims at emancipating the reader’s spatial imagination.

Though the symbols and narrative elements may seem unified, there are also asymmetrical features in the structure of the storm narrative. Ross G. Forman describes a tension “between the third-person narrative that opens the tell […] and the first-person
one which closes it” (422). Though the first and last chapters seem symmetrical to Watt, Forman discovers a change in the narrator’s point of view near the close of the novella. Forman’s discovery reveals Conrad’s intention to draw the reader closer to the discovery of remote space on Earth. Conrad does not end where he started. Rather, he breaks the closed circular form to suggest alternative possibilities. The change from third-person to first-person narrative may also suggest Conrad’s desire for a change in the narrator’s role. Rather than having a detached narrator tell the story, Conrad encourages the reader to see the world from the narrator’s first-person perspective. This perspective might incite the reader’s curiosity and stimulate further exploration into the unknown world.

Another aspect of the narratorial asymmetry is illustrated by an ellipsis in the plot. The novella spends the first five chapters describing how Nan-Shan comes into the eye of the typhoon. Since the ship cannot remain in the center of the typhoon, it must come out of it. However, the novel makes no such description of its escape. The narrative has a sudden ellipsis, and chapter VI starts with Nan-Shan’s arrival at the Chinese port Fuchao. The other half of Nan-Shan’s struggles with the typhoon is skipped over. Susan Jones reads the break as a gap that requires the reader to collect other “narratorial hints from alternative textual evidence such as letters and dramatized moments of dialogue” in order to piece together the whole story (200-201).

Continuing with Jones’s discussion, I suggest that the narratorial gap allows the Europeans’ insufficient knowledge to be made manifest. Simply reading the literal words is not enough to penetrate the text, and simply recording the shape of the continents and the names of rivers on the map is not enough for Europeans to comprehend the world. As the readers have to search for alternative textual evidence in order to understand the text,
they also have to search for alternative means of comprehending the globe that simultaneously shrinks and becomes larger. Hill proposes that Conrad’s “model of geographical imagination” is supplemental to “the linear, rationalized mappings of latitude and longitude, center and network that persist in our understanding of Victorian era geographies” (443). Conrad’s novella opens up a thirdspace in the remote world. While revolutionizing the modernist perception of space, Conrad also brings the margins of empires to their center of their focus by his literature.
CONCLUSION

*Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim* and *Typhoon* show a trajectory of Conrad’s changing perceptions of space, which is manifested by the settings of the novels. Conrad describes the steamship in *Heart of Darkness* as a tool through which European explorers and colonizers invade Africa. The historical facts told by the novella represent the ship as an invading imperial force. Likewise, Conrad gives a concrete portrayal of Africa: this continent is a place of violence where European colonizers exploit the indigenous people and the natural resources of the land; it is also a place where loneliness and hollowness disillusion Europeans. Conrad shows more realities about Africa rather than the uncertainties and possibilities that may be discovered in this remote place.

The settings of *Lord Jim*, however, already become fluid. The sea is described as a concrete place where the European sailors and traders work, but the interconnectedness between different areas of the sea also enable them to move freely. The steamship becomes more than a mere means of transportation that connects two real historical sites. Instead, it sends Conrad’s characters from a known world to a place that is at once real and imagined. The creation of Patusan in *Lord Jim* reveals how Conrad’s imagination opens up. He sets Patusan in the Malay Archipelago, and removes it from the reified European map. The heterogeneous nature of Patusan not only makes it a concrete place where the locals live a real life, but also allows Jim to have a chance to restart his life beyond the European world. Conrad’s spatial perception moves a step forward from concrete to imaginative.

This exploration of heterotopias reaches its apogee in *Typhoon*. Foucault regards the colony as an extreme type of heterotopia, and the ship as “the heterotopia par
“excellence” (27). Conrad sets the whole story in a ship, which is placed in the middle of a sea under the influence of the imperial powers. The settings of the novella are simple but not concrete. The ship is almost ungraspable as it goes up and down in the stormy waves. The sea also appears to be mysterious as its condition largely remains unknown to the reader. Setting the whole novella in heterotopias, Conrad makes full use of the imaginative quality of places in *Typhoon*. Simultaneously, he foregrounds the potentialities of changing the Europeans’ modes of thought with the fluidity of space. Conrad’s emancipation of space from concrete to imaginative registers his protest against the shrinking globe. In doing so, he opens up the space of the world that has been bounded by the map at the turn of the twentieth century.

The imaginative use of space is not exclusive to Conrad’s colonial novels; it also characterizes his urban novels. *The Secret Agent*, for example, manifests the heterogeneous urban space of London. There are times when spaces in London are shown as concrete. On Verloc’s way to the Embassy, he walks confidently from the thoroughfare to the alley without ever being “deceived by London’s topographical mysteries” (Conrad, *SA* 12). Streets in London are clearly represented to the reader. At other times, however, the urban space becomes more ungraspable. In his Author’s Note, Conrad refers to London as “an enormous town […] more populous than some continents,” where the characters keep getting lost in its labyrinth of pathways (236). With indefinite terms, Conrad makes London seem profound and mysterious. The opposing spatial descriptions of London estrange and distance the city from the readers’ initial impressions.
Conrad also distorts space through physical explosions. The plot of *The Secret Agent* centers around an explosion: the embassy asks Verloc to detonate the Greenwich Observatory—a symbol of science—in outrage to the “civilized world” (25). Yet, Verloc unintenially explodes his mentally handicapped brother-in-law and kills him. The violent accident creates “sudden holes in space and time” and displaces the characters (57). Simultaneously, the narrative sequence is disrupted into non-chronological order. The explosion creates a commotion that subverts the conventional representation of space and time in novels. Conrad emancipates urban space to force an alternative understanding of it upon his readers. Like his colonial novels that distance his readers from a familiar world to make them “see” with new eyes, Conrad’s urban fiction also urges them to “pause for a look” at their “surrounding vision[s]” (*The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* 148).

Although Conrad continues with his revolutionary depiction of space in later works such as *The Secret Agent*, his earlier novels have a larger spatial coverage and involve more extensive geographical regions. As Conrad’s urban fictions situate people of different nations into cosmopolitan centers, his colonial novels spread the cultural encounters to the margins of empires. Those encounters are inevitable as Conrad’s European characters advance into the remote parts of the world. Andreas Huyssen borrows the phrase “modernism at large” to describe “the cross-national cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous, the colonial and the postcolonial in the ‘non-Western’ world” (9). This is what Conrad’s novels manifest. Registering Kurtz’s domination of the indigenous people on the African continent, Jim’s negotiation with the Bugis in South East Asia, and Jukes’s sympathy with the Chinese coolies in the South China Seas, Conrad’s colonial novels become embodiments of
modernism at large. Breaking the national boundaries, the cultural encounters between
the European and the non-European world refreshes modernism.

Conrad’s enlistment of the non-European culture and geography in the making of
the modernist text thereby requires us to rethink and remap the spatial distribution of
modernism. From Conrad’s colonial novels, we come to realize that modernity is not
exclusive to European cities. It also exists elsewhere, in the exotic spaces beyond our
metropolitan imagination, and in the contact zone between imperial powers and colonial
spaces. Conrad’s extensive trans-geographical travels in his early years enable him to
comprehend the world from more diverse perspectives. The transnational cultural
encounters he had also manifest themselves in his novels, making them perfect examples
for researching alternative modernisms.

However, there are also problems with Conrad’s employment of the other space
and of other races. *Heart of Darkness* uses an unfamiliar African environment and the
racial others to reveal the Europeans’ hollowness and disillusion. *Lord Jim* anticipate
Jim’s salvation in the eastern world and among the Southeast Asians. *Typhoon* de-reifies
Europeans’ mode of thought of capitalism with the power of the storm in the South China
Seas and manifests how their objectified human relations are fixed through the Chinese
coolies. Conrad’s employment of the alternative geographies and the racial others to
revivify Europeans seem to reveal an imperialist ideology inherent in his novels. His
artistic practice to make his European readers “see” is still controlled by European
perspectives. With the native vibrancy of the colonies, Conrad renews the lives and souls
of European sailors. The colonies become places of experimentations where their
authenticity become tools to estrange and to reform Europeans. As Conrad opens up non-
Western spaces with his written words, Conrad’s colonial novels also manifest his exploitation of the colonies in a different form. The dominance of discourse exposes the traces of imperialism hidden behind Conrad’s writings.

Though Conrad is influenced by the imperialist ideology, which takes on strong national traits, his works embody the spirit of Empire at the same time. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe Empire as “establish[ing] no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (xii-xiii). Conrad’s heterotopic ships and seas de-center the European urban places and bring the margins of empires visible to Conrad’s European readers. The extensive geographical coverage in Conrad’s writings on the exchanges between European and non-Europeans annul the absolute distinction between the center and the periphery of the world.

Jameson notes in his essay “Modernism and Imperialism” that the postmodern subjects think about the Third World in a different way “not merely because of decolonization and political independence, but above all because these enormously varied cultures are now speaking in their own distinctive voices.” He notes that those voices are no longer marginal ones; they have “an unavoidable and inescapable influence, not merely on other Third World cultures […] but on First World literature and culture as well” (156). Jameson argues that there is no such case in the modernist period because “the prototypical paradigm of the Other” circulates in high literature in the late nineteenth century. However, we might use Conrad’s turn-of-the-century colonial novels to revise Jameson’s argument because Conrad’s modernist literature has already been mediating
the voices of the Third World and has been making them heard by the First World.

Conrad’s works anticipated a postmodern de-centered world view of the empires’ relation to their others.
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