

**THE ART OF BECOMING:
DESCRIPTION, SPACE AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITY IN
AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS, LORD JIM, AND
“HEART OF DARKNESS”**

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Dissertation submitted for the degree Magister Artium in English at the
Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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November 2005

Potchefstroom

To Marlow –
and all the other travelers...

True, he [Kurtz] had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible.

Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness"

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude to:

- The North-West University for providing the infrastructure necessary for the completion of this dissertation.
- The National Research Foundation for their financial assistance. The views in this dissertation are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the NRF
- The staff of the Ferdinand Postma Library at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University for their assistance. I express my gratitude towards Mrs. Gerda van Rooyen for her help.

My gratitude to my supervisor, Professor AM de Lange, for his guidance, inspiration and patience. I have learned much.

I wish to thank Professor Jakob Lothe, Professor Jeremy Hawthorn and Dr. Harry Sewlall for their discussions with me and interest in my topic. They have aided the growth of my thinking.

I thank my parents for their financial and moral support, and the opportunities they gave me throughout a lifetime, and my mother-in-law for her interest and practical help.

My brother, sisters-in-law and friends have expressed interest in my work and has been exited for my part. I thank them for their involvement.

I thank my children, Brink, Reinier, and Stephan, who inspire me to become all I can. They have expressed interest in my work, especially "Heart of Darkness" and have had immense patience with a studying mother. I thank them for filling the house with laughter and joy, and for making my heart feel warm with the love I feel for them. I am a rich woman.

To my husband Etienne, I have not the words:

*I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleeper's den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.*

*And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.*

*My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest.
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without declining West?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.*

Soli Deo Gloria

ABSTRACT

Conrad's description and the sense of space in his texts have long intrigued readers, critics and even fellow authors. Within the context of the complexities of Modernism, understanding the relationship between Conrad's description, space and spiritual identity is imperative for an understanding the complex fabric of his work. This dissertation is an attempt to investigate this intriguing dynamic in three of his texts, namely An Outcast of the Islands (1896), Lord Jim (1900), and "Heart of Darkness" (1899).

The dissertation first takes a cursory look at the crisis of the Modernist age in chapter one. A brief discussion of the related ideas propounded by the philosophers of the time, such as Freud, Nietzsche and Bergson, as well as influences such as colonialism and industrialization provides the background to the central themes in Conrad's work. After this, the study introduces the three texts under scrutiny.

The thesis argued in the dissertation is that Conrad employs his unique descriptive techniques in describing space in order to indicate the main characters' identity crises which arise from, amongst others, their morality and spirituality. The main characters are all isolated and confronted to re-examine the self, which throws them into a crisis concerning the essence of their spiritual identity. The characters' interaction with and perception of space becomes a reflection of their moral and spiritual quest to "become", to find meaning, purpose and harmony.

The investigation of the interaction between description, space and moral and spiritual identity starts off by examining Conrad's descriptive techniques based on an analysis of An Outcast of the Islands in chapter two. The chapter attempts to clarify these techniques, which include delayed decoding, the prominence of nature description, colour symbolism and chiaroscuro, while the subsequent analysis reveals how Conrad's description of space foregrounds the main character's problematic spiritual identity.

The second step towards an understanding of the mechanism in Conrad's work pays attention to the main character's attempts at reconstructing his moral and spiritual identity through cycles of interpretation. Chapter three includes an analysis of Lord Jim

that aims at uncovering the character's process of looking, misinterpreting, looking again, adjustment, perhaps repeating the process several times.

Chapter four turns the investigation towards the experiential element of the text. Throughout the processes that the characters undergo, the overwhelming and impenetrable atmosphere which they encounter contributes to their spiritual identity crisis. Conrad's descriptive techniques also involves the reader in the emotional experience of the character, since the reader too finds the atmosphere overwhelming and impenetrable. This chapter delves into the ways in which Conrad succeeds in creating such an atmosphere by means of description through an analysis of "Heart of Darkness".

In chapter five the cathartic moments of all three texts are analysed. The characters' identity crises gain momentum until they bring each character to a pivotal moral choice and a process of adjustment. This moral choice highlights the character's conception of God and spirituality, and the character's integrity is tested, as well as the success the character had in adjusting his spiritual framework and integrating his view of God. The three texts present the reader with diverging results, indicating the verisimilitude of Conrad's work.

With this interaction between description and space Conrad succeeds in touching the very essence of human spirituality and identity. It brings the reader to a deep understanding and a first-hand experience of the complexity of the human condition.

OPSOMMING

Conrad se beskrywing en sin vir ruimte in sy tekste prikkel lank reeds lesers, kritici en selfs mede-outeurs. Binne die konteks van die kompleksiteite van Modernisme, is 'n begrip van die verhouding tussen Conrad se beskrywing, ruimte and spirituele identiteit noodsaaklik vir 'n begrip van die komplekse aard van sy werk. Hierdie skripsie is 'n poging om hierdie dinamika in drie van sy tekste te bestudeer, naamlik An Outcast of the Islands (1896), Lord Jim (1900), en "Heart of Darkness" (1899).

Die skripsie kyk eerstens kortliks na die krisis van die Modernistiese tyd in hoofstuk een. 'n Kort bespreking van die betrokke idees wat die filosowe van die tyd, soos Freud, Nietzsche en Bergson, sowel as die invloede soos kolonialisasie en industrialisasie, verskaf agtergrond vir die sentrale temas in Conrad se werk. Hierna word die drie tekste wat bestudeer word bekend gestel.

Die tesis wat in die skripsie beredeneer word is dat Conrad unieke beskrywingstegnieke gebruik om die karakters se identiteitskrisisse aan te dui wat spruit uit, onder andere, hulle moraliteit en spiritualiteit. Die hoofkarakters is almal geïsoleer en word gekonfronteer met 'n heroorweging van die self, wat hulle in 'n krisis aangaande die essensie van hulle spirituele identiteit dompel. Die karakters se interaksie met en persepsie van ruimte word 'n refleksie van hulle morele en spirituele soektog om te "word", om betekenis, 'n doel, en harmonie te vind.

Die ondersoek na die interaksie tussen beskrywing, ruimte en morele en spirituele identiteit begin met 'n ondersoek van Conrad se beskrywingstegnieke, gebaseer op 'n analise van An Outcast of the Islands in hoofstuk twee. Die hoofstuk poog om hierdie tegnieke, wat uitgestelde dekodeering, 'n prominensie van natuurbeskrywing, kleursimboliek en chiaroscuro insluit, te verduidelik, terwyl die daaropvolgende analises aandui hoe die beskrywing van ruimte die karakters se problematiese spirituele identiteit belig.

Die tweede stap in die rigting van 'n begrip van die interaksie tussen beskrywing, ruimte en identiteit in Conrad se werk gee aandag aan die hoofkarakter se poging om sy

morele en spirituele identiteit te rekonstrueer deur sirkels van interpretasie. Hoofstuk drie sluit 'n analise van Lord Jim in, wat poog om die karakter se proses van kyk, misinterpretasie, weerkyk, aanpassing, en die herhaling van die proses, aan te dui.

Hoofstuk vier fokus op die ervaringselement van die teks. Gedurende die prosesse wat die karakters deurgaen, dra die oorweldigende en ondeurgrondbare atmosfeer waarmee hulle gekonfronteer word by tot hulle identiteitskrisis. Conrad se beskrywingstegnieke betrek die leser by die emosionele ervaring van die karakter, aangesien die leser ook die atmosfeer as oorweldigend en ondeurgrondbaar ervaar. Hierdie hoofstuk delf in die maniere in waarop Conrad slaag daarin om so 'n atmosfeer deur beskrywing te vestig aan die hand van 'n analise van "Heart of Darkness".

In hoofstuk vyf word die hoofmomente van al drie tekste geanaliseer. Die karakters se identiteitskrisisse bou momentum op totdat elke karakter voor 'n deurslaggewende morele keuse te staan kom. Hierdie morele keuse beklemtoon die karakter se verstaan van God en spiritualiteit, en die karakter se integriteit sowel as die sukses wat hy gehad het in die aanpassing van sy spirituele raamwerk en die integrasie van sy Godsbeeld, word getoets. Die drie tekste verskaf uiteenlopende resultate, wat die kompleksiteit van Conrad se werk aandui.

Deur die interaksie tussen beskrywing en ruimte raak Conrad aan die kern van menslike spiritualiteit en identiteit. Dit bring die leser tot 'n diep besef en 'n eerstehandse ervaring van die kompleksiteit van die menslike kondisie.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

- The dissertation refrains from using the double pronoun form, "his/her", "his or her", "man/mankind" or "humankind" since it obstructs the reading process. Due to the fact that both Joseph Conrad himself and all three the main characters are male, the dissertation uses "he" and "his" for the sake of comfortable reading. This does not in any way denote a value judgment, and "he" and "his" could be replaced by "she" and "her" if so preferred.
- The titles of full-length novels are underlined while the titles of novellas are written in quotation marks and critical works in italics in order to indicate the distinction.
- All Biblical references refer to the New International Version of the English Bible.
- All references to An Outcast of the Islands refer to the 1967 edition by Dent & Sons, London.
- All references to Lord Jim refer to the 1989 Annotated Penguin Edition with an introduction by Cedric Watts.
- All references to "Heart of Darkness" and "Youth" refer to the 1999 Wordsworth Edition with an introduction by Gene M. Moore.
- All references to the Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" refer to 1966 Oxford University Press Edition.
- All references to "Typhoon" refer to the 1957 Dent Edition.

- CHAPTER ONE –

INTRODUCTION: THE ARTIST, THE CANVAS AND THE SCENE

I

“All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions.” (Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, 1897).

and

“It [the task of the artist] is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth – disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment.” (Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, 1897).

These citations from The Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus disclose something of Conrad's approach to writing, and unveil the sagacious appeal that his writing holds for readers. In attempting to produce art that “appeals primarily through the senses” in order to “reveal the substance of its truth”, Conrad himself exposes the complex and profound liaison between vivid description and the human truth that he is trying to convey. Conrad's writing contains many more complexities, but this link between description and meaning is so entrenched in his writing that his efforts of description almost become an elaborate painting of the human condition, so much so that the second quotation might even be mistaken for a description of a visual work of art. Conrad's focus is very similar to that of the modernist painters who worked with media after him in the sense that his focus on description deals with the profundity of description itself, its processes and that which it reveals through the process of description. One of these later artists, Paul Klee (1879-1940) explains that “he [the modernist painter] does not attach such intense importance to natural form as do many realist critics, because, for him, these final forms are not the real stuff of the process of natural creation (Klee, 1949:45). For he places more value on the powers which do the forming than on the final forms themselves.”

The role of description is often neglected in literary studies, viewed as auxiliary to

characterisation, thematics and plot. Modernist writing changed the purpose, the nature and meaning of description to some extent. Conrad, labelled by many as early modernist, not only described in order to create a revealing backdrop to the more central constructs of the text, but also described in order to communicate the deep epistemological crisis of the enigmatic modernist psyche, indicating the change in "perspective". In this sense Conrad becomes one of the writers who contributed to a shift in the emphasis of writing by stimulating a new angle of approach, the angle of "painting" the confusion of the modern psyche in the colours and strokes of immaculate verbal description, thereby stripping the central constructs of the texts until they stand before the reader revealingly naked. All this makes Conrad a highly relevant author to study for scholars who busy themselves with understanding the issues raised and addressed by Modernism. Of course Conrad's work is not just a commentary on the Modernist *Zeitsgeist*, it is much more complex than that, but Modernism does have a distinct presence in his work.

The problems highlighted by Modernism include the individual's sense of self, in other words identity, and spirituality. In Conrad's work these are closely related to each other and to the description of space, space referring to a person's conception of reality, including matter, people and culture. This dissertation concerns itself with investigating the dynamic between description, identity and spirituality in three of Conrad's early works namely An Outcast of the Islands (1896) "Heart of Darkness" (1899) and Lord Jim (1900). The first step necessary for unravelling Conrad's contribution to art, is to become aware of the world he felt compelled a new kind of disclosure.

II

The social reality within which Conrad wrote, collectively known as Modernism, was that of a universal psyche in trouble. The Victorian world order, characterised by certainty and stability, was collapsing during the time that Conrad wrote and the general mood was one of anxiety and disillusionment (Watt, 1980:161). Modernism is far more complex than can be uncovered by studying its aetiology, but considering the influences of the time can be useful in understanding the revolution(s) of the modernist era. A concise overview of the ideas of intellectuals such as Darwin (1809-1882), Nietzsche (1844-1900), Freud (1856-1939) and Bergson (1856-1941), as well as the processes of industrialisation and colonisation and psychological constructs such as space, identity and spirituality, will assist in creating an impression of the turmoil that affected the modern mind.

From the 1850's onwards, intellectuals gradually reconsidered the generally accepted ideas

about science and religion. Darwin's publication of *The Origin of the Species* in 1859 was "the last stage of the process by which man had been deprived of the assurance that he was the most important constituent of the universe which God had designed for him" (Watt, 1996:32). Traces of the direction of Darwin's thinking become visible in many of the philosophical constructs of the early twentieth century. Alfred Wallace (1823-1913), one of Joseph Conrad's favourite authors, was but one of the advocates of evolution. Watt (1996:32-34) indicates how this influenced Conrad by pointing out the evolutionary thought present in "Heart of Darkness". He also argues that this line of thinking supported the ideology of colonial expansion.

Colonialism was glorified as a new romantic dream of empire migration in Europe, providing a solution to population problems and proving that the European nations were the fittest to survive. The writings on colonial migration provide a good idea of what the impact of colonialism had been on identity and the perceptions of geographical and cultural space. Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) spoke of "high" and "low" races and "stronger" and "weaker" nations, justifying the import of European economic, political, religious and social systems into native areas "as a higher form of human organization" (Watt, 1996:34). Writers such as Benjamin Kidd (*The Control of the Tropics*, 1898) continued this ideology. Other writers added a romantic, adventurous and noble view of the colonial endeavour. One such writer was Ernest Williams, a strident imperialist scholar around the turn of the century, who published a series of articles and a book in 1898. The following extracts provide a solid understanding of the imperialist mindset, and are therefore quoted at length:

It is not fanciful to say that an Englishman, leaving Yorkshire for Ontario or New South Wales, does not abandon his own country more than he would by going from Yorkshire to Somersetshire. In both cases he journeys from his native, familiar district to another district, where he sees new faces and new prospects: in both cases he experiences a sense of home in the companionship of fellow-citizens of the same Empire, and in the enjoyment of that Empire's familiar institutions and the protection of its flag. The farther journey is not today much more formidable or distant really than the journey from one county to another was a few generations ago; and progress in transport inventions and facilities is still at work, making the trip across the Empire an affair of yearly diminishing importance (Williams, 1898a:76).

and

Have you ever felt the fascination of a map of any part of the British Empire? If you

have not, get hold of the first map – the bigger the better - of any portion of the Empire (it matters not which), and just pore over it. The sheet before you will grow into an entrancing dream of seas and islands, of mountains and lakes, of rivers and plains, of vast expanses, and of horizons limited only by the visual powers of the imagination...From this panorama of Nature's majesty you turn almost with relief to the coloured patches and borders which betoken men's presence; for they show you that men do live in these remote regions, or at least have traversed them, dividing up the expanses into provinces and counties as at home ... Finally, you become possessed of the glorious consciousness that through every part of these regions, and of many more, the law of the Queen of England runs; every wind that blows across these plains and mountains unfurls a Union Jack from its flagstaff; the whole land is part of your Imperial heritage as a free-born English citizen (Williams, 1898b:19).

Contrary to this romantic image, many of the practices in the colonies were inhuman and cruel. These inhumanities had been unknown to the general European public for many decades, but increasingly became known during the early nineties of the nineteenth century. The complete denial of the otherliness of different races and ethnic groups and their right to independent existence in the romantic idea of a worldwide Britain in writings such as those of Williams, quickly informs one of why modernist writers saw the need to write about space and existence. Sensitive observers of the atrocities in the colonies felt that the spirit of imperialism was creating empires without substance or humanity, forcing peoples to become what they were not. In "Heart of Darkness", Conrad starts out with Marlow having the same ideas about maps as the ones articulated by Williams. As he is exposed to the truth of the colonies, he realises that Kurtz is a prime example of an individual slipping into inhumanity. In addition to the damage to the colonised nations, empire migration, the practice of relocating the "surplus population" of colonial powers in an attempt to curb population growth and urbanisation, caused a cultural identity crisis, because these people were, of course, confronted with a reality far removed from the romantic ideas of people like Williams (Cohen, 2003:375).

According to Cohen (2003:383) imperialist geography faced a tension between "the projection of abstract space and the attempt to delve into the possibilities of place within the geographic logic of imperialism, between the collapse of distance and the invitation of distance, between the romance of totalizing maps and the realism of ground-level settlement". This in itself caused artists to call for a re-evaluation of the self. Apart from that, colonisation was throwing both conqueror and conquered into a cultural identity crisis. Both were confronted with "the other", so to speak, and with the self that they did not want to see.

In these circumstances, modern man had to position himself in relation to the other and to morality. Since many different factors impacted on the individual's identity at the time, this proved a difficult task. The world was largely mapped and divided by the end of the nineteenth century, and this fact restrained imperialist fantasies. Writings at this time reflected the change from colonisation being seen as heroism and adventure to it being seen as necessitating redefinition and redesign. Cohen (2003:378) mentions the way in which imperialism "integrated and fused things", giving birth to a new kind of space. This new global spatiality influenced the way individuals interacted with and perceived geographical places. Hampson (2000:28) formulates the modernist crisis in this regard well by stating that "by the time Conrad began to write, the Enlightenment project of mapping and describing was subverted by uncertainties and self-questioning: ideas of civilisation and progress, Self and Other, which had been taken for granted, were now open to question. This inward turn is continued in the works of Conrad".

The long process of industrialisation, coming into its full momentum during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, magnified and confirmed many of the above-mentioned influences. One of the main influences of this process was that life as people had known it, no longer made sense. There was an anxiety about people becoming like machines or being subjected to machines (Stevenson, 1992:74). Humanity was exploited for financial gain, and this amplified a sense of hollowness in Modernist thinking. Seemingly insignificant details such as the contrast between the city of London and the open sea in the setting of the scene for Marlow's account in "Heart of Darkness" reflects some of the bleak emotions caused by industrialisation (Conrad, 1995:5-6). The impression of modern industrialised man as hollow, urged the need for the development of a new conscience with regard to the changing world and a new perception of the radically changed reality. Modernism's emphasis of the self, of the inner being, of identity and its interaction with space, also results from the modern mind's crisis with emptiness and confusion in space.

According to Ryan (1991:9), the notion of "self underwent a radical change during this time. A person's sense of self, in other words identity, became closely linked to what that individual saw and experienced and this included a perception of physical space and time. Current geographers such as David Harvey (1935-) contribute to the idea of "time-space compression" with his spatial science propounded in works such as *Explanation in Geography* (1969). Harvey sees the experience of time and space in modernity as characterised by an increase in the pace of life, which in turn overcomes spatial barriers through, for instance, travel. This later on led him to develop a Marxist philosophy of geography in works such as *Social Justice and the city* (1973) and *Limits to Capital* (1982). The world seemed to

collapse inwards (Cohen 2003:379). Modernist times were rife with arguments concerning the nature of space, and it is no wonder that artists participated in the redefinition of this changing concept. The modernist pre-occupation with space, time, and experience started an entire line of thought that can only be lightly touched upon in a study of this limited scope, giving rise to later theorists such as Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962; *Psychoanalysis of Fire* 1932, translated 1964 and *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, translated 1971) who regarded knowing as a result of the interaction between reason and experience, including the experience of space, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) who wrote on being and time, giving rise to existential phenomenology in works such as *Being and Time* (1927, translated 1962) and Michael Foucault (1926-1984), who studies systems of knowledge in *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *The Order of Things* (1966, translated 1970). A redefinition of the world, so rapidly changed by broadened spatial boundaries and an increase in the pace of life, demands of an individual to adapt. This exercises an influence on the identity of the individual in the form of an identity crisis that hinges on an understanding of the world as redefined. Immediate experience, in other words the experience of events and space compressed in time, became part of the spiritual and emotional operation of the individual. Watt's (1996:44) comments on links between the thinking of Freud, Nietzsche, Darwin and Conrad, necessitate an understanding of the work of these thinkers.

According to Stevenson (1992:68): "Nietzsche's ideas are often given as much credit as Freud's for establishing the conditions under which 'the old world yielded'". Nietzsche's well-known pronouncement that "God is dead", was just the outright articulation of an ontological crisis that was already in development during the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, issues of faith and religious thought were openly and severely criticised, furthering religious and moral uncertainty. According to Lester (1987:68), "the parlous state of Christianity at the turn of the century receives eloquent expression within the pages of his [Conrad's] fiction ...". Stevenson (1992:69) explains the effect of the ontology - or lack of ontology - of the time by saying that: "Without this figure [an omniscient deity] of ultimate authority, or associated assumptions about the coherence and meaning of life, the subjective vision of the individual became, increasingly, the only arbiter of experience". The logical consequence of Nietzsche's "God-is-dead" statement is that he questioned the existence of coherence and meaning *per se*. The stable assumptions of the Victorian age - scientific, religious and otherwise - were rejected since Nietzsche rejected the existence of objective facts and absolute truths. According to Nietzsche meaning exists only in as far as the individual consciousness applies laws to reality in order to have a comprehensible world. Contact with the outer world is interpretative and mediated by the self. It is this perception and mediation that Conrad so accurately recounts through description. Nietzsche claims that

direct encounters are impossible. His questions regarding man's ontology thus gave rise to questions about man's epistemology. The individual, not knowing an origin and incapable of interpreting the world, was left feeling alone and alien to his own reality. Due to this problematic nature of these views, the crisis concerning spirituality became closely linked to the individual's sense of self.

Freud's ideas contributed to the general mood of the time and reached England around the turn of the century, during a time that the collective psyche was looking for a way to understand its own existence and experience. He did his major work on dreams in the 1890's and published the results in 1900, at the same time Conrad considered the nightmarish world of the Congo. According to Stevenson (1992:62): "... modernism's urge to examine the mind more completely and constantly than earlier fiction seems likely to have resulted from the new extent to which psychology had recently, startlingly, become an area both of 'conscious and deliberate' study and of widespread interest." English translations of Freud's work became coffee-table conversation among intellectuals, some rejecting and some following his line of thinking. His work regarding the investigation of the subconscious and dreams at the very least generated an interest in the self, leading modernist authors to investigate new and deeper levels of experience. Freud's work suggested a move from the objective to the subjective, from the conscious to the subconscious, and from the direct to the symbolic. In Stevenson's (1992:66) view: "Freud's view suggested the existence of areas of mind and self beyond complete rational, intellectual control, but it was exactly these areas which Freud sought to submit to rational, intellectual analysis." The result was that the individual became aware of experience itself. To a certain extent experience became truth, especially deeper, more subconscious levels of experience.

Conradian characters such as Marlow in "Heart of Darkness", Jim in Lord Jim, James Wait in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" or less known characters such as Willems in An Outcast of the Islands or Almayer in Almayer's Folly (1895) are almost obsessed with the self and experience. Karl (1975:29) says that "both Conrad and Freud were pioneers in stressing the irrational elements in man's behaviour which resisted orthodox interpretation". Freud was concerned with the logic of illogic behaviour, such as Kurtz' extermination of the natives. Conrad caught the illogic in his work. He shows how colonialism was justified with precision and method, only to surrender to savagery. Karl's (1975:29) formulation of Freud and Conrad's mutual interest is worth quoting:

"Both he [Freud] and Conrad penetrated into the darkness – when men sleep, or when their consciences sleep, when such men are free to pursue secret wishes, whether in

dreams, like Freud's analysands, or in actuality, like Kurtz and his followers. The key word is darkness; the black of the jungle for Conrad is the dark of the sleeping consciousness for Freud."

The remote spaces in which characters find themselves in Conrad's work, provide spaces where everything is justified and there is no-one to answer to. There are no consequences to evil, nothing keeps the character's darkness in check, which gives them the freedom of a dream. Marlow, on the other hand, suffers through a nightmare where he discovers depths he cannot hide, and his account serves as an analysis that provides a defense against Kurtz' evil.

The modernist view of experience was given further credence by Henri Bergson's ideas. His philosophy of psychological time impacted on the centrality of experience for the modernist individual. Stevenson (1992:104) explains that "Bergson resists, as a core of his thinking, views of time or life as a series, a succession of separate events or divisible phenomena." Bergson viewed time, as it is represented by the clock, as only an interference with man's true interaction with time, called "duration". Emphasis fell on the self-conscious time-sense. Bergson held the view that past events are not forgotten, but co-exist with other layers of experience. Each new experience opens up doors to past events, like Marlow's entrance into the Roman conquests in the opening pages of "Heart of Darkness", indicating that history is present and influential (Conrad, 1995:5-6). Begun, (1954:30) formulates this aspect of Conrad's fiction poignantly when arguing that "Conrad ... believes that life consists of fleeting moments. He believes, however, that it is the task of the artist to rescue these passing moments, and not only to portray them, but to show the truth revealed by them". Thacker (2003:3) explains the modernist idea of time further by saying that "writings on that theme have tended to emphasise temporality, the process of becoming, rather than being in space and place".

The process of becoming is a focal point in Conrad's writing, especially with regard to the formation of identity. During this process of becoming, the moment of decision is a very important theme. Bergson's ideas coincide with Conrad's description of identity formation with the view that the truest experience is found by looking inwards, and that it is stream-like and continuous. Bergson views are relevant to this study not so much for his ideas of time, but of experience. True experience was seen to be intuitive and emotional, rather than rationally. Marlow, for example, experiences reality through his senses in "Heart of Darkness". The profundity lies in his intuitive experience of his natural surroundings, his intuitive sense of good and evil. In the end his interaction with Kurtz is without words and

rationality, it is a concise summary of life in a single experience of horror. Jim's jumps in Lord Jim take place in moments of intuitive experience. Contemplation comes afterwards. Willems in An Outcast of the Islands act upon material and sexual desire without any contemplation at all.

These changes in the way the world operated inevitably had an influence on literature. In studying early Modernist and Modernist texts such as the work of Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), Henry James (1843-1916), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) or James Joyce (1882-1941), and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) the reader is often confronted with a very complex relationship between description, space, identity and spirituality. The displacement of the individual in terms of space and of morality and spirituality, including institutionalised religion, is constantly addressed through the medium of words. Conrad especially does this through description. J. Hillis Miller (1992:218) explains this aspect of Conrad's work by saying that:

"He [Conrad] enters into a game of interpretation, words bringing out the meaning of other words and those referring to other words and those referring to other words in their turn. No literary text has a manifest pattern, like the design of a rug, which the eye of the critic can survey from the outside and describe as a spatial form. The textuality of a text, a 'yarn' spun by Conrad, is the meshing of its filaments as they are interwoven in ways hidden from an objectivizing eye."

According to Stevenson (1987:14-15) Conrad "concentrates partly upon the means by which reality is perceived; upon its reflection in the individual mind..." Conrad is not only concerned with what there is to perceive, but also with how to perceive and how to tell. What is more, Conrad does so by rejecting the traditional patterns of fiction. It is in this regard that Conrad's treatment of space becomes very relevant. Stevenson (1987:15) further states that Conrad is one of "the first of many novelists in the twentieth century who have examined the encounter of British life and values with distant foreign places and peoples, sometimes under colonial rule. Many of Conrad's characters are involved in lonely struggles with alien circumstances or hostile elements, far from the support of a familiar society..."

The identities of Conrad's characters are partially supported by their familiarity with and trust of familiar spaces. Identity can in this regard be defined as a person's sense of self, and the way he sees himself in relation to others and to space. In the three texts under investigation, Conrad's characters find themselves in strange and otherly spaces. He turned to the writings of Sir Alfred Wallace (1823-1913) and James Brooke (1803-1868), who became the Rajah of Sarawak, for help in creating these spaces where his own experience ended (Clemens,

1990:25). Not only are the spaces otherly to the characters, they are also otherly to the readers, and it is through this fictive journey that Conrad wants to reveal the truth. The foreignness of the spaces in which the characters find themselves make for an interesting study of identity and space, since the characters cannot escape from these spaces and have to adjust their identities in order to survive their displacement. Hewitt (1969:6) points out that Conrad's exotic settings initially caused his work to be misunderstood as adventure literature. However, he counters this by indicating that "it is not the setting itself, but the isolation which gives that it is significant". The characters' neat European Victorian spiritual frameworks not only fail them under these circumstances, but also land them in the foreign situation, and they need to incorporate an alternative spirituality as part of their identity in order to achieve a sense of well-being. Hewitt (1969:16-17) formulates this aspect well by saying that "... in almost all his earlier books a penetrating scrutiny is directed against the simple virtues of honesty, courage, pity and fidelity to an unquestioned ideal of conduct ... In particular we notice one situation [in] which ... a man who relies on these simple virtues is confronted by a partially apprehended sense of evil against which they seem powerless." It is especially Conrad's use of description that so accurately renders the relationship between space, identity and spirituality. His work is of special importance due to the verisimilitude with which the complexity of this matter is reflected.

Given this context, this dissertation will examine the relationship between description, space and spiritual identity in An Outcast of the Islands, Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness". The three texts in question will be analysed using hermeneutic techniques of textual analysis and close reading. Therefore the concepts involved in the discussion of the analysis, namely space, atmosphere, the interpretative framework, identity and spirituality will mainly be defined and discussed within the context of the texts themselves. A survey of critical literature on the respective themes and novels will serve to verify the acceptability of the textual analysis in the community of interpreters. In studying these three texts, the argument will be structured in response to four central questions:

- Firstly: *How does Conrad use his descriptive techniques to establish the interaction between the character's spatial experience and his spiritual identity in An Outcast of the Islands?*
- Secondly: *How does Conrad use description to depict the character's cycle of attempted spatial interpretation, failure and reiterative attempts at re-adjusting his interpretative framework in Lord Jim?*
- Thirdly: *How does Conrad's description in "Heart of Darkness" evoke a vague atmosphere as the result of the character's frustrating spiritual*

dilemma and identity crisis throughout his process of revising his interpretative framework?

- Finally: *How do the cathartic moments of each text reveal the characters' re-evaluation of their spiritual identities?*

Before one can ponder these questions, one first has to have a good idea of the primary texts themselves, and therefore an introduction of the texts will follow, after which the questions will be discussed.

III

These early Conradian texts share an involvement with space, identity and spirituality that springs from the fact that the main characters in all three texts find themselves in foreign and strange circumstances. Spiritual belonging includes, inter alia, things like having inner peace, peace with past wrongdoings, peace with nature, and a thorough knowledge of where the boundaries between right and wrong lie. According to Hewitt (1969:6), it is these isolated spaces that led critics to misunderstand Conrad. He refers to the fact that "he [Conrad] was labelled a writer of adventure stories, "sea-stuff", set in exotic latitudes - the "Kipling of the South Seas". However, critics soon realised that there is more to Conrad. An anonymous review in *Speaker* states that: "Mr. Conrad's command of language in this book ["Heart of Darkness"] is remarkable, and he is generally so sure of what he means that he is able to express the most subtle ideas with quite unusual clearness" (quoted in Sherry, 1973:122). The *Daily News* calls Conrad's descriptions "vivid and wonderfully true". However, as Hewitt points out, Conrad differs from the adventure writers of his time in that the settings of his stories were not exotic for pure excitement, but to reveal the isolation and displacement which give the settings their significance. Isolation forces the character to turn inward. The structure of the main characters also differs from that of other nineteenth century writers such as Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) Honore de Balzac (1799-1850), George Eliot (1819-1880) or Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). Hewitt (1969:11) compares the nineteenth century author's focus on the "unconquered" vastness of the world and the insignificance of the individual with Conrad's almost tragic, unglorified heroes. An Outcast of the Islands, Lord Jim and "Heart of Darkness" present the reader with just such characters, and their stories provide different perspectives of the interaction between space, identity and spirituality.

Conrad started on An Outcast of the Islands in August 1894 and it was published in March 1896. It forms part of Conrad's earlier Malay fiction together with texts such as Almayer's

Folliv, (1895), Karain (1897) and Lord Jim, amongst others. Following on Almayer's Folliv, the text received mixed reviews. An unsigned review in *Daily Chronicle* calls An Outcast of the Islands "a work of extraordinary force and charm" (Sherry, 1973:63-78). The same review singles out Conrad's description by saying that "the characters - whites, Arabs, Malays - are presented with no less brilliant definition than the scenes of their ruined paradise. They affect us with a haunting presence that cannot be evaded". *The Spectator* comments on Conrad's description by stating that "the descriptions of tropical scenery glow with life and colour". However, not all the reviews are favourable. The *National Observer* calls some of the characters "a bore" and a few of the reviews are of opinion that Conrad includes too much detail and description. Whatever the attitude of the reviewer, one thing remains, they all spot Conrad's description as central to his writing technique.

The first aspect covered by description is of course physical space. The Malayan texts all share the fact that they are set against the backdrop of the Malay culture and the physical surroundings of the East, which is something that interested critics and is commented upon in nearly every review. Hampson (2000:99) indicates the characteristics of Conrad's Malay world as: "commerce, mobility, and cultural diversity". Clemens (1990:25) indicates that Conrad's Malays mostly fits the Wallace mold. They have qualities such as "impassivity, reserve, deceiving diffidence, undemonstrativeness, circuitous speech, courtesy, lack of humor, and a short range of mental activity." Both good and bad characters fit into this pattern. Apart from cultural diversity, all of the central characters in An Outcast of the Islands, namely Willems, Almayer, Lingard, Babalatchi, Patololo, and even Aissa, as well as Jim in Lord Jim, experience "rootlessness" (Hampson, 2000:107). This deeply affects their sense of self and all these characters embark on a journey of continuous re-evaluation and readjustment of their identities in order to find a way to belong. Due to the sense of "rootlessness" and physical displacement, the characters' search for belonging and for a renewed identity takes place in direct interaction with their sense of space and their own position. In this way description of spatial perception becomes something that reveals the identity struggle of the characters.

The search for identity is intertwined with a search for spiritual harmony. It affects the way in which the characters interact with their own sense of spirituality and that of the people around them, because the characters also want to belong in a spiritual sense. An Outcast of the Island provides an early Conradian perspective on the interplay of identity and space with regard to spirituality. The cultural and religious differences are very acute due to the east-west opposition in the text, which foregrounds the spiritual dimension of the text. It does not deal with religions *per se*, but rather with the spiritual crisis of man caused by a falsity of

belief, adherence to empty religious forms without any moral substance.

Conrad's Malays, mostly Muslims, are presented as being "usually bigoted, frequently violent, invariably unscrupulous and always complacently exclusive. They constantly accuse the European of being unbelievers, infidels, and sons of Satan..." (Lester 1988:41). His Muslims are prophetic, prominent, and almost too grand. Their role is to emphasise the mistakes of Conrad's Christians, namely falsity of belief, hypocrisy, exclusiveness, lack of loyalty, violence and dishonesty. The Malay antagonism towards Europeans, especially Christians, makes the character's experience of isolation more intense, in turn necessitating identity adjustment. In this way identity and spirituality are always in an interaction, the one spurring on change in the other.

A second perspective can be found in Lord Jim (1900). According to Watts (1986:16), Conrad wrote Lord Jim between 1898 and 1900. It was first published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in monthly instalments, and later published in book form in October 1900. When Lord Jim was published, Conrad's work was already quite well-known, which influenced the way in which it was received. A review in *Academy* calls Lord Jim "a searching study - prosecuted with patience and understanding - of the cowardice of a man who was not a coward" (Sherry, 1973:115). This reviewer, who could be Edward Garnett according to Conrad scholars, also states that Jim's trial represents the trials of all people, and that Jim stands for the universal, even though the story is set in surroundings quite exotic to the British reader. Many of the critics cited by Sherry (1973), speak of the content of the novel and Conrad's mastery in representing Jim's psyche. The review in *Bookman* quite accurately points out that "the book is all Jim - there is nothing else in it that counts" (Sherry, 1973:126).

Much has been written on the content of the novel in retrospect of Conrad's life and body of work as well. Cohen (2003:375) calls Lord Jim "a novel that is as much about space and movement through space as it is about the trials of a single character who has come in no small way to represent a crisis in modernist subjectivity". According to Erdinast-Vulcan (1991:36), the novel questions the distinction between facts and ideas, truth and fiction and reality and illusion. Jim has to deal with the failure of these categories through confronting the spaces he encounters. Levenson (1990:34) states that Jim tries to escape confronting his abstract surroundings by submitting himself to duty and work in order to make himself feel safe. Watts sees Jim's life on Patusan as that he "would atone for past disgrace and largely vindicate his romantic aspirations". It becomes clear that Jim searches for a new identity through his interaction with space. He progressively moves East in order to redeem

himself, and at last ends up in Patusan where he takes a bullet to finally die with honour. Jim not only searches for a sense of self and for a place to belong, but also for spiritual atonement. Van Ghent (1992:208, Vol II) comments on Lord Jim's effect on his readers by saying that: "... the story of Lord Jim is a spiritually fertilizing experience, enlightening the soul as to its own meaning in a time of disorganization and drought."

"Heart of Darkness" (1899) brings a third perspective to the investigation of the relationship between description, identity and spirituality. Watt (1996:35) points out that "Heart of Darkness" was written in the atmosphere of intensifying international conflict over Africa, and "the consequent spread of jingoist fervour in England". According to Moore (Conrad, 1999:x) "Heart of Darkness" is based on Conrad's own journey to the Congo in 1890, with many scenes resembling his own experiences. The conditions in the Congo were kept quiet until shortly after Conrad's visit, and by the time "Heart of Darkness" was published, the well-informed public was just starting to become aware of the conditions in the Belgian colonies. However, at the time writers such as Rudyard Kipling and Rider Haggard (1856-1925) were writing enthusiastic and romantic stories in favour of colonialism and imperialism, making Conrad quite the exception at the time. With minor differences, Marlow "retraces Conrad's footsteps". Kurtz seems to be based on Leon Rohm, a trader at Stanley Falls who decorated his flower-bed with the skulls of 21 people he did not like, and a trader named Klein (meaning "small"; Kurtz meaning "short") who was taken on board and died on Conrad's voyage downstream.

The story was first published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in February, March and April 1899. In 1902, it was published as the second story in the volume *Youth: a Narrative and Two Other Stories* (Sherry, 1973:129). The text was generally received well. In an unsigned review in *Academy and Literature*, Edward Garnett calls "Heart of Darkness" "the high-water mark of the author's talents". The reason he provides for this strong statement later on in the review is that the art of "Heart of Darkness" is "the relation of the things of the spirit to the things of the flesh, of the invisible to the visible..." (Sherry, 1973:132). A review in *Athenaeum* says that Conrad has a gift for conveying atmosphere "translated simply by action, incident, strong light and shade, and distinctive colouring" (Sherry, 1973:138). Once again, critics emphasised Conrad's description as something extraordinary in his work. The spaces described in this text create a symbolic space which isolates the two main characters, Marlow and Kurtz, and with which they have to cope in order to resolve their identity crises.

Like Willems and Jim, the two main characters are isolated in a space in which they are "rootless". The vastness and ambiguity of this space cause epistemological and existential

doubts and force the characters into a re-evaluation of identity. The spaces in the text are filled with spiritual symbolism, which links the search for a new identity with a spiritual quest. According to Erdinast-Vulcan (1991 :92) the characters have a need to get at the "truth of things". Watt (1980:149) describes the essence of this work well in saying that: "Marlow is driven to make a similarly obscure but crucial distinction between truth and belief", once again bringing the Conrad reader to the difference between religious belief and spiritual substance.

IV

In dealing with the first question concerning the interaction between Conrad's descriptive techniques, space, and spiritual identity in chapter two of this dissertation, it is important to note that all the main characters in the three texts are forced into foreign spaces from which they cannot easily escape, such as an island or a remote settlement. One of the characteristics of Conrad's body of fiction is his employment of spiritual and physical exile and consequent isolation (De Lange, 1995:3). This isolation makes the experience of space one of the central elements of the characters' experience. Their initial identities are partially supported by their familiarity with and trust of the spaces they know, with thought patterns and cultural interactions constituting part of that context. When the familiar space is lost to exile (voluntary or involuntary), so is the character's spiritual identity, necessitating an entirely new process of becoming.

Through Conrad's specific techniques of description, such as delayed decoding, a special involvement with nature, the use of colour symbolism, a special focus on describing visual and auditive sensations and chiaroscuro, Conrad communicates the character's sense of shock and epistemological difficulty in coping with what is experienced as an "otherly" space. Conrad's descriptions remain somewhat mystical, somewhat unclear and very abstract. These descriptions foreground the fact that the character experiences his new concrete reality as being too overwhelming to absorb. What is more, the character's interpretation of concrete space mirrors the insight he has into his own "self" and the events of his life, since the concrete space becomes a symbol of the character's journey into the "self". The character's senses, cognitive processes and perceptual framework fail him, so that he cannot penetrate the space during his attempts to interpret it, thus symbolising the fact that he cannot interpret his own spiritual position. Consequently, the characters experience a debilitating epistemological frustration.

An Outcast of the Islands provides a good example of Conrad's descriptive techniques.

Willems is isolated on Sambir due to moral failure. His interaction with nature serves as a reflection of his spiritual identity, and therefore a study of Conrad's description of especially Willems's experience of nature throughout the novel can reveal the substance of his spiritual dilemma. Chapter two will rely on this novel as an illustration of the methods Conrad use.

Reaching the second question in chapter three of this study, it is already clear that Conrad describes the main characters in these texts as inescapably caught in a spiritual crisis as a result of their interpretative failure. Each characters finds himself in a position where he has to become someone else, someone with insight. Chapter three investigates the character's attempts at "becoming". The road to spiritual insight is not clear-cut, causing the character to follow a process of attempt, failure and re-attempt. The main element of the reconstruction of the character's spiritual identity is an *inward turn*.

The character needs to navigate himself out of the epistemic trauma and ontological doubt caused by his cultural and spiritual otherness, the complexity of the world, and his interpretative mistakes, but would only be able to do so when he can successfully interact with his reality. He struggles to do this because he is caught in a traditional fixed identity. If the character can adjust his interpretative framework, weave the adjusted version into his identity, and apply his refurbished identity to the outer world successfully, the process can lead to a new workable interaction between space and identity. The character has to learn to read and interpret his space. In Lord Jim, Jim's search for belonging and becoming, especially including a restoration of his honour during the final moments of his life, serves as a good example of the process the character follows.

As the character's interaction with his physical, concrete space is frustrated amidst his confrontation with actual events, his sense of boundaries, physical as well as spiritual, also gives way, and the character remains with only a sense of overwhelming atmosphere. De Lange (1995:4) rightly points out that Conrad's atmosphere is "a vague, intangible and almost indefinable concept at best of times". The third question investigates this aspect in chapter four. The atmosphere is daunting and frustrating because it is vague and impenetrable. The character struggles to follow a decisive direction because he cannot orientate himself in his circumstances. Atmosphere is the way the character experiences interpretative failure and reveals what the character experiences. It is also the way in which the reader gets to share in the character's confusion. By creating atmosphere, Conrad draws the reader into the character's experience. Since the atmosphere is too diffuse to function in, the character goes through a process of cognitively trying to make sense of the impenetrable and vague atmosphere. The ambiguity of such an atmosphere is evocatively painted in

"Heart of Darkness", providing chapter four with ample material for investigation.

The process described above is not always equally effective, and in this sense the three novels provide the reader with interesting diverging results. The fourth question draws attention to the results of the characters' struggles and the nature of the newly created interpretative frameworks, which includes their identity and sense of morality. This aspect is discussed in chapter five. Through the entire process of spatial perception, interpretative failure and mapping of a new interpretative framework Conrad examines, problematises and reconstructs the spiritual identities of his characters. In the last chapter of the dissertation the characters' eventual circumstances in all three texts are investigated, as well as what this reveals about space, identity and spirituality to the reader.

- CHAPTER TWO -

THE COLOURS AND THE STROKES: CONRAD'S DESCRIPTIVE TECHNIQUES IN AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

"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" (Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, 1897)

I

Reading Conrad, one cannot help but to be intrigued with the way in which he succeeds in fulfilling his "task". As one of the things that adds to his success, Conrad's descriptive techniques have mesmerised readers (and critics) for many a decade. These techniques are different from other authors' in that it is not only *how* Conrad describes that is so very striking, but also *what* he chooses to describe. He does not merely describe people and events, but describes them situated in a certain space, which is not for the sake of a backdrop, it is an active space. It communicates, represents, mediates, expresses and witnesses. It reveals the meaning of the characters' beings and of the events. Hewitt (1968:13) expresses this strikingly when saying that "...because they [Conrad's characters] so dominate their surroundings and because there is no interference from outside, their inner problems are mirrored in external events and relationships. The facts of the external world become symbolic of the moral problems with which they are at grips, without ceasing to be facts which are perfectly convincing in naturalistic terms." Virginia Woolf formulated the way in which Conrad attains the goal he declared himself poignantly by exclaiming with awe: 'I wish I knew how he gets his effect of space' (Woolf, Nicholson & Trautman, 1993-1994:149), space being the physical surroundings of the characters and the way they perceive it. Consider for example how Conrad describes Marlow's spatial surroundings and his interaction with it early on in "Heart of Darkness" to convey his disillusionment with colonial rule, and the meaning of human suffering within the larger context of Marlow's personal journey:

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight

shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die (Conrad, 1999:44).

The actual descriptive detail of the scene is obscure, but from the obscurity a very clear image emerges. In this way Marlow's spatial experience comes to represent something much larger than merely a backdrop to certain events. The descriptive techniques involved in describing space become the mediator for the essential truth of the text.

At first Marlow sees only ill-defined shapes. The vagueness of these shapes gives rise to uncertainty on the part of the reader, because the undefined "lines" in Conrad's "painting" leave the reader unsure of what he is confronted with. It is perhaps representative of the veil pulled across the general European population's eyes concerning the nature of imperialist ventures. Marlow comes to the colony with a very vague and naïve idea of what is going on there, because the European presence on the map is glorified: "some real work is done in there" (Conrad, 1999:38), and scenes of horror are hidden in the shadows of the wealth that flooded Europe at the cost of the colonies.

The shapes and shadows are richly described by adjectives such as "black", "effaced within the dim light", emphasising an ominous unclarity. Verbs such as "crouched", "lay", "sat", "leaning", and "clinging" communicate a slight desperation and tired surrender in the posture of the workers. The verbs communicate a lack of energy on the part of the shapes, as if they are tired. The shapes seem like spirits, waiting finally to leave behind the concrete, stark reality of colonialism. The fluid lines of the shapes form a contrast with the rigid reality of their machine-like treatment and their death that reminds one of machinery dumped at a waste site, like the machinery Marlow encounters just prior to the scene of the dying slaves (Conrad, 1999:44). The description points out their humanity ever so subtly.

The reader is completely dependent on Marlow's description, for it is the only channel through which the reader accesses the meaning of the events. The description creates an image of suffering, but the reader is not sure of what exactly Marlow sees and can therefore not judge for himself. The image is vague, because Marlow's initial decoding is vague. The reader joins in the perception of vagueness through the way Marlow recounts his experience. It is only when Marlow has taken enough time to revise his impressions that the reader receives the grim verdict of his delayed decoding: "And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die". He realises what these "black shapes" are. Conrad communicates Marlow's shock through the order in which Marlow relates his impressions to the reader. He cannot help to first revolt with: "The work was going on".

At first the reader does not grasp the significance of this statement, because the continuation of work in itself is nothing detestable. Initially Marlow cannot figure out what he sees. When he does decode it, his shock is so severe that it is foremost on his mind, and he relates this to the readers before he can inform them of what it is that he sees. Dying people underneath a tree is not something Marlow is used to or which he can fathom in his imagination. Conrad etches the scene and Marlow's silent shock through the subtleties and nuances in the descriptions, light and shadow and the large space around the descriptions without details, violence or blood. The scene almost has a softness to it, like a charcoal sketch, thereby emphasising the horror of the scene by underplaying the shock on Marlow. Conrad's description of the scene, which reaches the reader as Marlow's interpretation, is thus directly linked to the meaning.

As illustrated by Marlow's view of things, Conrad's sense of space is certainly special and central to his writing. He indeed makes one "hear", "feel" and "see". His description carries a certain type of mysteriousness, almost vagueness. However, the vagueness has a purpose, namely to reveal the truth. Klee (1949:25) says in his treatise on modern art that "vagueness in one's work is (therefore) only permissible when there is a real inner need". Although Klee refers to visual art, abstruseness is certainly a condition met by Conrad's writing as well.

The grove of death from "Heart of Darkness" presents one integrated and complex description that contains many elements and profound meaning. What are the elements that make Conrad's descriptions so powerful? His descriptive techniques have been widely studied by scholars such as F.R Leavis, Ian Watt, Cedric Watts, Skilleas, Hampson, Sherry and many many more. These critics have seen to it that many terms were developed for describing Conrad's work. Ian Watt, for example, first coined the term "delayed decoding" in his paper *Impressionism in Lord Jim* in 1972 (Watts, 1977:143). Cedric Watts calls the same technique "cart-before-horse presentation" (Watts, 1977:142). This dissertation prefers Watt's term, since it is considered more descriptive of the phenomenon. However, Watts has other terminology that comes in handy. In his article *Conrad's absurdist techniques: a terminology*, he mentions a few terms that make it easier to unravel Conrad's description. Firstly, he speaks of "empirical hyperbole", which he describes as: "the frequent presentation of characters that are glimpsed briefly and intensely, so that their visual appearance is vividly before us while their inner natures remain arcane". The character of Brierly in chapter six of Lord Jim serves as an example of a character of whose inner psyche the reader knows very little. Yet his very presence and his physical appearance shed a certain obscure and subjective light on the events. Secondly, Marlow's perception of the machines in the field

and the dying slaves is a prime example of "reductive reification", referring to the presentation of the animate as inanimate and *vice versa*. Another useful term is the "frustrating context", where the context appears to "render unattainable the goal of an activity". Marlow often describes the forests as "impenetrable" (for instance Conrad, 1999:61), which makes it seemingly impossible to navigate the river, to fight the natives or to find Kurtz's dwelling. This technique is often coupled with delayed decoding. Sullivan (1992:259) also mentions Conrad's paralipses as technique and discusses it in the light of Lord Jim. However, this technique calls for a study of its own and will therefore not be discussed here. In addition to the terminology cited by Watts, Conrad's use of colour, chiaroscuro and nature imagery can be counted as significant techniques. Further explication of delayed decoding, the use of colour, chiaroscuro and nature imagery will contribute to the clarity of the textual analysis.

Jordan (1996:3) describes delayed decoding as a technique that "has something in common with psychological trauma: you're made to experience something, in reading, which is only described later". Skilleas (1992:79) explains it as follows:

"Delayed decoding is a feature of Marlow's narrative which is crucial for our understanding of Marlow and the way he tells the story. This narrative impressionism accentuates the lack of forged links between his past experiences and the new ones, and hence between his language and the new reality. The experience of going up the river and meeting Kurtz is so different from the set of experiences Marlow has had, which we assume the audience share through "the bond of the sea", that what meets him cannot be rendered intelligible through assimilation to the old set. Without this set we have no analogies through which we can invest what happens with some kind of intelligibility. Thus, a feeling of incomprehension and unreality accompanies his experiences".

Delayed decoding is a technique that renders something about Conrad's characters. He hints at the main character's epistemological frustration by using delayed decoding in different ways. There are instances in the text where the decoding of the misinterpreted space or event follows almost directly after the encounter or experience. These shorter and more frequent instances serve as reminders of the character's constant misinterpretation of spaces and events. Marlow's realisation that the shapes he sees in the grove of death are actually dying human beings is a good example of this, all of which adds to an atmosphere of anticipation in the text and the reader's comprehension of the character's confusion.

Another way in which Conrad uses delayed decoding is concerned with the critical moments in the text. This includes moments such as Willems' death (Conrad, 1967:360), Marlow's choice between good and evil (Conrad, 1999:98) and Jim's death (Conrad, 1989:351). Some experiences are not decoded soon after having taken place, as is the case with the dying-slave encounter, which is decoded with "and this is the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die". They are rather decoded during the cathartic moments of the text. Cedric Watts (1977:144) agrees with this aspect by saying: "Now it seems to me ... that the concept of delayed decoding could be applied not only to local descriptive effects, but also to larger narrative matters". The interpretation of the final critical moments of the character's life is the result and culmination of the separate interpretative mistakes and gives an indication of whether the character could indeed adjust his interpretative framework to such an extent that it saves him. During the cathartic moments the character either overcomes his interpretative shortcomings, or not. He can both succeed in reaching a correct interpretation of crucial experiences in his life and ascribe the correct meaning to it all, or he can fail. Failure results in the character's downfall, since he cannot adjust his interpretative framework to the new circumstances. Success means that the character conquers his epistemological crisis, grows and adjusts to his new circumstances. Consider the following example from Lord Jim:

"He was jostled. "Man in the cutter!" Boys rushed past him. A coaster running in for shelter had crashed through a schooner at anchor, and one of the ship's instructors had seen the accident. A mob of boys clambered on the rails, clustered round the davits. "Collision. Just ahead of us. Mr. Symons saw it." A push made him stagger against the mizzen-mast, and he caught hold of a rope. The old training ship chained to her moorings quivered all over, bowing gently head to wind, and with her scanty rigging humming in a deep bass the breathless song of her youth at sea. "Lower away!" He saw the boat, manned, drop swiftly below the rail, and rushed after her. He heard a splash. "Let go; clear the falls!" He leaned over. The river alongside seethed in frothy streaks. The cutter could be seen in the falling darkness under the spell of tide and wind that for a moment held her bound, and tossing abreast of the ship. A yelling voice in her reached him faintly: "Keep stroke, you young whelps, if you want to save anybody! Keep stroke!" And suddenly she lifted high her bow, and, leaping with raised oars over a wave, broke the spell cast upon her by the wind and tide.

Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. "Too late youngster." The captain of the ship laid a restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. "Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart" (Conrad,

Jim's behaviour during the accident near the training ship in the first section of Lord Jim is an example of the type of delayed decoding that indicates the larger problem of misinterpretation. There are instances of immediate decoding, but overall Conrad reserves its decoding until much later in the text. Early on in the text it is not clear what the implications of this scene are. Jim wants to jump overboard and flee, and this tendency to jump recurs and is only decoded in the final moments of Jim's life when he faces up to the fact that he has fled most of his life. At the end of his life he chooses not to jump and so overcomes his lack of adequate interpretation by dealing with the consequences of his actions, as can be illustrated by quoting the last moments of Jim's life:

"He came! He came!" was running from lip to lip, making a murmur to which he moved. He hath taken it upon his own head," a voice said aloud. He heard this and turned to the crowd. "Yes. Upon my head." A few people recoiled. Jim waited awhile before Doramin, and then said gently, "I am come in sorrow." He waited again. "I am come ready and unarmed," he repeated.

Jim does not look as if he has the urge to jump overboard in any manner. He stands before Doramin "ready and unarmed", for he has succeeded in interpreting the gravity of his actions. This sheds light upon all Jim's previous jumps, including that very first "jump" on the training ship, for it indicates a certain growth. It makes it clear to the reader that the jumps dealt with a lack of facing up to things, a lack of understanding the true meaning of things. By facing the consequences of his actions, Jim indicates that he understands the meaning of his own existence. In this way Jim's death serves as a decoding of the mystery of his jumps.

In addition to delayed decoding, Conrad employs colour symbolism as "markers" for certain emotions and beliefs. Early on in "Heart of Darkness" one finds the colours on the map symbolising colonial powers, and these powers continue to symbolise degrees of dark behaviour (Conrad, 1999:32). Yellow, the colour for Belgium, symbolises an uncomfortable ominousness throughout, indicating the nature of Belgian colonialism. In An Outcast of the Islands Willems' love for Aïssa is often conveyed in terms of shades of green and bright white light, while his unhappy moments are coloured in shades of brown (Conrad, 1967:65 and 74). While he is at peace with life and creation, bright colours abound. When Willems has to go home and tell his wife, Joanna, that he has committed fraud and been caught, losing his job in the process, the colours paint a picture worth a thousand words: "[he] stood irresolute by the little work-table where trailed a white piece of calico, with a needle stuck in

it, as if the work had been left hurriedly. The pink-crested cockatoo started,..." (Conrad, 1967:23) The white piece of cloth being left unfinished and the start of the bird indicate the end of Willems' blissful life. He has left the good things in his life unfinished by for instance deserting his family. Willems gives up his chance at harmony, as is symbolised by the bird's flight. In Lord Jim the colour of Jim's clothes is often significant with regard to his naivety and a certain innocence that he had in Marlow's eyes, despite his mistakes. The description of mist and the richness of the forest colours often symbolises the mystery of Jim's flaw, the way in which no one can really know and understand him. The colours partially represent the main character's spiritual position, since it often indicates levels of peace with creation, people, the self, a sense of identity and love.

Chiaroscuro, the use of shades of light, often symbolises the journey of the main character as well as the complexity of the situation. Conrad for example employs contrast, such as black in relation to white in "Heart of Darkness", setting up darkness of the soul and of human endeavour against light and goodness. Marlow starts his tale by declaring: "And this also ... has been one of the dark places of the earth" (Conrad, 1999:33), referring to the fact that Britain had been colonised in earlier ages. Apart from contrast, Conrad uses the nuanced shades between black and white. In the example quoted from "Heart of Darkness", Marlow perceives the dying workers in terms of shades of black, grey and white, indicating the fact that his black and white perception of colonialism has been shattered and has taken on a whole new complexity. His relief about patches of British colours on the map at the beginning of the text disappears into serious doubt as to the humaneness of the entire endeavour. From that moment on Marlow has to choose continually between the darker and the lighter shades of inhumanity, with Kurtz representing the darkest end of the continuum. It is a spiritual choice, which affects the essence of the character's sense of self. In the incident aboard the training ship, quoted from Lord Jim, Jim looks at the incident in the "falling darkness", indicating the start of his perils and his lack of action. In this text, lack of action often brings on different shades of spiritual and physical darkness, such as the Patna incident that takes place at night and Jim's dark choice accompanying it.

In Conrad's writing, nature serves as the portrait of a character's experience, becoming a tool that he uses in order to describe elements of the character's psyche. It many times serves as a symbol for the character's state of mind, spiritual balance, view of life and relationship with creation. The restlessness of the sea in the training ship incident in Lord Jim represents the turmoil in Jim's heart and mind. Marlow's perception of the light and his special mention of the tree when describing the dying workers indicate both the morbidity of the scene and the way in which the workers are much more in balance with nature than the western rulers.

Willems first realises the enormity of his downfall when he finds "himself in the garden before his house" (Conrad, 1967:23), the garden not looking half as cheerful as it used to. According to Hampson (200:72-99) Conrad was strongly influenced by the tradition of scientific nature and travel literature during his writing years. Traveller-scientists such as Wallace intrigued him, and he derives much of his natural description and scientific details from Wallace's texts. Not only is the inclusion of naturalists such as Stein in Lord Jim significant, but also the way in which the main character's spiritual interpretation and development is mediated by nature.

Conrad's employment of description cannot be categorised as ornamental, description for the sake of beauty. He describes his characters' very essence by relating their difficulty in interpreting space and coping with strange places. He reveals the humanity with which people look at the world, all by describing their interaction with space. Conrad's mastery of description is evident from the fact that this trend in his writing has a refreshingly different quality to it in his different works. An in-depth analysis of how these descriptive techniques function, merge and integrate throughout an entire text, is pivotal to the endeavour of indicating the link between description, identity and spirituality. An Outcast of the Islands, started in August 1894 and published in March 1896 (Hampson, 2000: 11), provides ample opportunity to study Conrad's techniques in depth.

II

Hampson (2000:1) emphasises the important place of Malaysia in Conrad's fiction. Conrad relied on his own experiences of the region for his writings as well as on the textual tradition of scientific writers such as A.R. Wallace and Sir James Brooke. Dryden (2000:77) shows that Conrad chose the title of An Outcast of the Islands expressly for the purpose of attracting readers of adventure literature. According to Hampson, Conrad confronted an issue that became central during the twentieth century, namely how to describe another culture. Stape (1992:63) emphasises this aspect by saying that: "the 'Lingard Trilogy' ... and the unfinished 'The Rescuer', similarly focus on individuals living in exile from their culture and blindly in pursuit of an unhappy fate". While this is not a central focus of this dissertation, it does highlight the important point with regard to the identity of the western observer and the descriptions of the westerner's perceptions of another world and its people, and especially the way in which a person views the Other certainly impacts on his own identity as well. In this regard Clemens (1990:21) notes that "Although white men and women, exiled far from their homes, are at the heart of Joseph Conrad's Malaysian fiction,

the native life forms the necessary isolating background and is of great importance.” Gekowski (1992:42) states the problem that is more relevant to this study in the following words:

“The progress of the plot suggests that it is not so much the fate of Willems that is being investigated, as some process in which he and the other characters are involved. The deepest concerns of a novel are to be found underlying those actions and events that mark the major turning points in the plot...An Outcast of the Islands is unmistakably about the drifting, dishonest Willems and his slow then sudden deterioration”.

When the reader first meets Willems, he is an individual who thinks in clearly delineated “black-and-white” frames. Right and wrong are neat little categories to him. He sees himself as able to quickly step from the one to the other and back without consequences. However, this is where Willems receives his first reality check. When Willems comes to the island of Sambir, he is thrown into a further epistemological crisis. He faces very different surroundings from what he is used to, as well as different values, and he is imprisoned there, cut off by the vast seas surrounding the Island. Willems’ continual failure to interpret central events in a way that stimulates growth in An Outcast of the Islands, leads to his ultimate demise.

Conrad continually hints at Willems’ psychological and spiritual state of mind by granting the reader entrance into the way in which Willems views his surroundings or decodes events. Consider, for example, the way in which Conrad describes Willems’ thoughts about success and failure in the very first chapter of the text:

When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect...It was going to be a short episode – a sentence in brackets, so to speak – in the flowing tale of his life: a thing of no moment, to be done unwillingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten. He imagined that he could go on afterwards looking at the sunshine, enjoying the shade, breathing in the perfume of flowers in the small garden before his house. He fancied that nothing would be changed, that he would be able as heretofore to tyrannize good-humoredly over his half-caste wife, to notice with tender contempt his pale yellow child, to patronize loftily his dark-skinned brother-in-law, who loved pink neckties and wore patent-leather boots on his little feet, and was so humble before the white husband of the lucky sister

(Conrad, 1967:3).

The very first sentence of the novel already sets the tone for the spiritual nuances in the rest of the text. Young (1992:33) formulates this well by saying:

"The novel's impulse is the progressive deterioration of Willems from his first petty crime to his further corruption...Willems' fatal illusion has been instantly announced and the paragraph proceeds [as quoted above], inexorably, to introduce, in less than a page, the spiritual and social status of the pathetic hero".

The Biblical image, a much popularised one at that, of the "straight and narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14) is indicative of Willems' somewhat narrow-minded view of right and wrong. To him there is no grey area, simply black and white, also represented by the clear delineation of sunshine and shadow. What is more, one can quickly switch from right to wrong without being contaminated by the "quagmires". The reader immediately knows that the story will deal with this theme, and the implied view is that Willems' conception of right and wrong will be proved naïve and incorrect. Humphries (1993:31) explains this well when saying:

"...[this] "episode" confirms that the character involved believes that his leaving "the straight and narrow path" will not prevent him from taking up his life where he left off, *as if nothing had happened*. The vocabulary of what follows - "imagined", "fancied" - must thus be interpreted as comment by the text on this point of view of the character: it is wishful thinking and things can never be as they were before the action in question took place. The character will always be elsewhere, just as the causes as well as the effects of the decision to deviate belong to another scene."

Willems' road ahead is set for the reader, but he remains ignorant of the implications of his acts. The way in which he perceives his garden in front of his house is quite naive, everything being very "nice". It proposes a comfortable and peaceful life, "monotonous but safe". Willems regards sunshine and shade, and the way he can enjoy both, as a blessing and the perfume of flowers as a joy. To him, this is what success feels like. Later on in the paragraph the reader receives the definition of failure:

Those were the delights of his life, and he was unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things, could dim the light of the sun, could destroy the perfume of the flowers, the submission of his wife, the smile of his child, the awe-struck respect of Leonard da Souza and of all the

Da Souza family (Conrad, 1967:3).

This paragraph confirms the theme of morality. Moral failure dims the sun and evaporates the scent of the flowers. It destroys the "very nature of things", in other words, destroying nature as Willems perceives it. Willems pities himself, becoming a hero with tragic pretensions that tries to gain the reader's sympathy (Young, 1992:34). Later on in the text, when Willems finds himself on the island of Sambir as a result of his moral failure, descriptions of nature once again serve as indication of curse and blessing. He finds himself imprisoned by the boundaries of the sea, confined amongst otherly beings.

In addition to the images of nature, delayed decoding, or rather, the absence of delayed decoding, is already present at this stage. Willems sees the differences between his initial situation and his resulting fall, but he does not decode the lesson from the events. He sees himself as a victim and does not really take responsibility for his acts, although he does have some degree of remorse. He does not decode the moral implication of his acts. The reader already receives a clue of Willems' fate because indications are already present that Willems is not growing in terms of interpretation and moral choices.

The religious undertones of the texts, with which Willems' lack of decoding is closely linked, are foregrounded in the preamble to Willems' downfall:

" ..., without any other guide than his own convenience and that doctrine of success which he had found for himself in the book of life - in those interesting chapters that the Devil has been permitted to write in it, to test the sharpness of men's eyesight and the steadfastness of their hearts" (Conrad, 1967:21).

Conrad establishes Willems as someone who manipulates religion and right and wrong, designing his own "doctrine" and finding things in the "book of life" for himself. By saying that the devil "has been permitted" to influence reality, Willems establishes himself as the victim of an outside power, the victim of his own sin, even if it is he himself that invited the Devil. Gekowski (1992:44) comments on Willems' way of dealing with his own guilt and misfortune as follows:

"It is significant that Willems does accept blame for what he has done, but only in the most perverse manner: He admits to "a slight deterioration", but holds to his contempt for other men "who were merely honest or simply not found out yet". As his mind begins to grasp the enormity of his ruin, he has a momentary flash of insight, "and for a

time he came out of himself and the concentration of personal thought". But this vital recognition, which might spur him to greater effort towards a new life, is merely demoralizing to Willems, who walks towards the wharves in order to throw himself into the sea."

Once in Sambir, Willems continues the part of the suffering victim. McLauchlan (1990:89) says in this regard:

"Very economically, Conrad has revealed a great deal about Willems; he is emerging as a figure of total moral confusion and self-delusion. It comes as no surprise when we find that the "path of his peculiar honesty" has proved to be: "such a faint and ill-defined track that it took him some time to find out how far he had strayed amongst the brambles of the dangerous wilderness he had been skirting for so many years". The significance here is that long before Willems finds himself surrounded by the gloomy forests and tangled undergrowth of Sambir, he has been operating dangerously near to a trackless, menacing wilderness – the moral wilderness in which he will ultimately discover himself to have become a "lost man"."

In Sambir Willems is isolated, for he is not permitted to assist the only other white man, Almayer, with his daily tasks, because they do not get along. Willems' lack of purpose affects his view of nature and his experience of the godly forces in his life. He feels insignificant and as if he were trapped in a meaningless existence. All this is reflected in his thoughts about nature:

He heard the reproach of his idleness in the murmurs of the river, in the unceasing whisper of the great forests. Round him everything stirred, moved, swept by in a rush; the earth under his feet and the heavens above his head ... It was only himself that seemed to be left outside the scheme of creation in a hopeless immobility filled with tormenting anger and with ever-stinging regret (Conrad, 1967:65).

The symbolic wilderness in which Willems previously found himself has now become an actual one, but it is still a moral wilderness as well. The river and the forests seem to be accusing Willems of idleness, as if he has no right to be there and is viewed as an intruder. Nature's judgement is apparent from the outset of Willems' stay in Sambir. Here, he is the only one in a "hopeless immobility" while everything "stirred, moved, swept by in a rush". Life goes on for the river, the forest, the earth and the heavens, but for Willems his life has stopped. He feels "tormenting anger and (with) ever-stinging regret". Willems perceives

nature as an otherly force, one that leaves him "outside the scheme of creation". This is quite contradictory to the homely surroundings that he came from. The surroundings symbolises the cultural and moral otherliness of Sambir, and Willems cannot decode and comprehend this space. It remains a thick impenetrable "wall" that imprisons him without any hope, any friendship or any guidance. He tries to cope with his experience of his surroundings, as in the following instance:

Later, when the enforced confinement grew irksome, Willems took one of Almayer's many canoes and crossed the main branch of the Pantai in search of some solitary spot where he could hide his discouragement and his weariness. He skirted in his little craft the wall of tangled verdure, keeping in the dead water close to the bank where the spreading nipa palms nodded their broad leaves over his head as if in contemptuous pity of the wandering outcast. Here and there he could see the beginnings of chopped-out pathways, and, with the fixed idea of getting out of sight of the busy river, he would land and follow the narrow and winding path, only to find that it led nowhere, ending abruptly in the discouragement of thorny thickets. He would go back slowly, with a bitter sense of unreasonable disappointment and sadness; oppressed by the hot smell of earth, dampness, and decay in that forest which seemed to push him mercilessly back into the glittering sunshine of the river. And he would recommence paddling with tired arms to seek another opening, to find another deception (Conrad, 1967:66).

Willems finds his new circumstances as an exile in Sambir difficult to deal with. He projects this dismay onto his experience of the physical space, which he sees as a "prison". In a sense Willems confuses his psychological entrapment with his physical confinement. He feels oppressed by the excessive heat and smothered by the density of the forest. The broad Nipa leaves are overpowering, causing Willems to feel helpless. In his perception he continually tries to escape these uncomfortable circumstances, but he simply never can, causing him to feel "a bitter sense of unreasonable disappointment and sadness". In reality it is Willems' own moral choices that seem to suffocate him, the idea that he is an exile and a marked man, but this is an insight that does not occur to him at this stage. Willems' moral death is symbolised by the "dead river" and the "decay" of the forest. He is living in the effects of his moral failure, but he does not decode the way in which he perceives his spaces. He does not take responsibility for his emotions, it is the "decay in that forest" that "push him mercilessly" into the "glittering sunshine", revealing his inner decay. In Sambir he cannot fool himself anymore, because the choices that are available seem to strip right and wrong so that he cannot soothe his conscience. Willems finds only "entanglement" and "thorny" walls because he wants to flee from an abstract oppression in a physical space. He

misinterprets every turn of the river. McLauchlan approaches Willems' interpretation of his surroundings from another angle when saying that:

"The novel contains numerous references to the roads, tracks or paths which Willems imagines himself to be following often with accompanying descriptions of his mode of preceding: walking, stumbling, wading, marching, rushing, among others. All are basic to the novel's account of Willems' totally unsuccessful way of life".

Willems' misinterpretation of his moral choices, as it is projected onto his physical space, is perhaps never completely decoded.

It is only when Willems enters into a relationship with the woman he loves, Aïssa, about three months after his arrival that he experiences nature as a gentler force. Nature seems to open up to Willems, because his psychological state is more open. Yet, there is an ambivalence because Conrad makes it clear from the start that the relationship is corrupt. Gekowski (1992:45) formulates this strikingly by saying: "...the passion of Willems and Aïssa is from the first associated with the death and decay (with the omnipresent creepers, parasitic vegetation, and decaying flowers), and is horrifying even to Willems himself". The most important of Willems' relationships with other humans are relayed in images close to nature. It is as if the state of nature around Willems reveals everything of the man himself. His delayed decoding of events is amplified by the description of nature as well. Consider, for example, Willems' meeting with Aïssa in the forest surrounding Sambir in chapter six:

Further on, the path continued, narrowed again in the thick undergrowth. At the end of the first turning Willems saw a flash of white and colour, a gleam of gold like a sun-ray lost in shadow, and a vision of blackness darker than the deepest shade of the forest. He stopped, surprised, and fancied he heard light footsteps - growing lighter - ceasing. He looked around. The grass on the bank of the stream trembled and a tremulous path of its shivering, silver-grey tops ran from the water to the beginning of the thicket. And yet there was not a breath of wind. Somebody had passed there. He looked pensive while the tremor died out in a quick tremble under his eyes; and the grass stood high, unstirring, with drooping heads in the warm and motionless air (Conrad, 1967:68).

The path that Willems is following becomes "narrow", almost as if it is an indication of difficulty waiting. The thick undergrowth slows him down, as if he is not welcome. He does not see a clear image, but only a "flash", which he cannot decode. The way in which Willems perceives visually is not adequate to provide him with a clear picture. The fact that he cannot

see clearly adds to the mystery of the sight and the desire to pursue it. The flash is not of a defined form, but only of "white and colour". The use of white already gives the reader an indication that the form Willems is pursuing is something innocent and pure.

The "gleam of gold" can be indicative of the fact that Aïssa holds happiness for him, since Willems defines happiness as experiencing sunshine. However, it is lost in the shadows, as if it is a premonition that this happiness cannot last and that Willems is lost in the shadows of his spoilt morality. The "vision of blackness" that he sees almost serves as a prophecy of the darkness that awaits the end of his happiness with Aïssa. The reader is warned that Willems might not succeed in finding the answers he is looking for and that he will ultimately be completely overwhelmed by his interpretative failure. The vision of darkness is his, and is not the darkness of the otherly forest. It lies within himself, but he never realises, faces or conquers this. Kurtz has the same inner darkness, with the difference that he gains insight in the darkness of his own soul and exclaims: "The horror, the horror".

At first he only "fancies" that he heard footsteps, not certain whether he can trust his ears. Not only his sight, but also his hearing is inadequate for an interpretation of the scene before him. He is not in touch with the physical space that he finds himself in and is probably not used to all he sees and hears in a dense forest. The moment he attempts a subtle kind of interaction with his space, instead of seeing himself as alien to it, the first decoding enters his experience: "Somebody had passed there". Nature is described as silent and almost indifferent. It is only Aïssa's movement that causes a stir. Willems is jolted into action in order to find what he thinks he saw. He has taken the first decisive action since the time he landed on Sambir:

He hurried on, driven by a suddenly awakened curiosity, and entered the narrow way between the bushes. At the next turn of the path he caught again the glimpse of coloured stuff and of a woman's black hair before him. He hastened his pace and came in full view of the object of his pursuit. The woman, who was carrying two bamboo vessels full of water, heard his footsteps, stopped, and putting the bamboos down half turned to look back. Willems also stood still for a minute, then walked steadily on with a firm tread, while the woman moved aside to let him pass. He kept his eyes fixed straight before him, yet almost unconsciously he took in every detail of the tall and graceful figure. As he approached her the woman tossed her head slightly back, and with a free gesture of her strong, round arm, caught up the mass of loose black hair and brought it over her shoulder and across the lower part of her face. The next moment he was passing her close, walking rigidly, like a man in a trance. He heard her

rapid breathing and he felt the touch of a look darted at him from half-open eyes. It touched his brain and his heart together. It seemed to him to be something loud and stirring like a shout, silent and penetrating like an inspiration. The momentum of his motion carried him past her, but an invisible force made up of surprise and curiosity and desire spun him round as soon "as he had passed (Conrad, 1967:68-69).

Willems enters the narrow path, and it is as if this is a moral choice that he makes as he chooses to pursue the narrow and difficult path of adultery. His morality is confused, because Willems perceives his pursual of Aïssa as a "narrow" path. If this is brought into context with his deviation from the "straight and narrow", his moral confusion becomes clear. At the next turn Willems sees more. He can now also see her coloured garments and a "woman's black hair". The black hair gives away the fact that she is native. The colours of her garments are not specified, giving no indication as to how this affair will end. The moment he realises that it can be a woman, she becomes "the object of his pursuit". When Willems becomes active in pursuing, he comes in full view of the woman. She is carrying water, as if she is some kind of earth goddess who holds refreshment and nurture. It immediately signals that she is close to earth and in a peaceful relationship with the earth, which tells the reader that she is more adjusted and accustomed to Sambir than Willems.

Both man and woman take a minute to perceive each other. Willems immediately takes the male authoritative role by passing her "steadily" and "firm", so that she has to move aside. However, Aïssa subtly has the upper hand as Willems becomes "like a man in a trance" and has to pass her "rigidly", while she stands composed and controlled. His successful interpretation of the flash of colour he saw in the forest does not contribute to his successful interpretation of his possible moral choices. He initially passes her, but as his interpretation of his moral danger fails, he spins around as soon as he had passed. It is this one personality trait that becomes his greatest flaw. When the wrong moral choices lie before him, he does not walk by, but turns back. He lacks adequate interpretation of where he finds himself morally and of what the dangers of his situation are. There is quite a difference in how the two of them handle the situation. Aïssa is ready to continue on her own path:

She had taken up her burden already, with the intention of pursuing her path. His sudden movement arrested her at the first step, and again she stood straight, slim, expectant, with a readiness to dart away suggested in the light immobility of her pose. High above, the branches of the trees met in a transparent shimmer of waving green mist, through which the rain of yellow rays descended upon her head, streamed in glints down her black tresses, shone with the changing glow of liquid metal on her face,

and lost itself in vanishing sparks in the sombre depths of her eyes that, wide open now, with enlarged pupils, looked steadily at the man in her path. And Willems stared at her, charmed with a charm that carries with it a sense of irreparable loss, tingling with that feeling which begins like a caress and ends in a blow, in that sudden hurt of a new emotion making its way into a human heart, with the brusque stirring of sleeping sensations awakening suddenly to the rush of new hopes, new fears, new desires - and the flight of one's old self (Conrad, 1967:68-69).

Aïssa herself is ready to "dart away", but Willems' look "arrests" her. She becomes captive to his failed moral interpretation. They are not surrounded by clarity anymore, but by "green mist", and as he would be in physical space containing mist, Willems is lost. His happiness is symbolised by yellow sunlight, and now this light completely covers and surrounds Aïssa. She is the object of his happiness. He feels alive after having felt dead for some time. In Aïssa's presence he takes "the flight of one's old self". The following description of their relationship indicates how Willems sees nature as a gentler force:

The brilliant light of day fell through the irregular opening in the high branches of the trees and streamed down, softened, amongst the shadows of big trunks. Here and there a narrow sunbeam touched the rugged bark of a tree with a golden splash, sparkled on the leaping water of the brook, or rested on a leaf that stood out, shimmering and distinct, on the monotonous background of sombre green tints. The clear gap of blue above his head was crossed by the quick flight of white rice-birds whose wings flashed in the sunlight, while through the heat poured down from the sky, clung about the steaming earth, rolled among the trees, and wrapped up Willems in the soft and odorous folds of air heavy with the faint scent of blossoms and with the acrid smell of decaying life. And in that atmosphere of Nature's workshop Willems felt soothed and lulled into forgetfulness of his past, into indifference as to his future (Conrad, 1967:74).

The sun is no longer scorching and suffocatingly hot, it is indeed "softened". Nature no longer judges Willems harshly, but allows him the space to love. With nature being symbolic of Willems' spirituality, this softening is also indicative of the fact that God, as Willems sees Him, is favouring Willems. The balance between the shadows of big trunks and the light is so to say perfect, and this welcomes Willems into the cradle of the forest. The sunlight is in a sharp and cheerful contrast to other elements of nature. The sunlight is active, like the passion of a man in love. It "splashes" on a tree like the force of an emotion. It "sparkled on the leaping water" as if dancing and lightly touching leaves. To Willems nature suddenly has

something light and joyous, in contrast to the previous oppression and confinement. The sunshine is free to touch what it wants. It lightens up the "monotonous background of sombre green tints". Willems sees a "gap of blue". He feels a certain space to breathe and sees the freedom of flight in it. The use of white in the description of the birds implies a certain purity in Willems' love. Willems experiences the heat as comforting and almost hugging, and not oppressive. He smells the blossoms, a comforting reminder of his happier times back home, yet he can forget his past and not worry about his future. However, although Willems experiences the love as pure and good and nature as more gentle, the corruption of Willems' morality is obvious. The corruption does not lie in the relationship itself, but in the extreme obsession that Willems has for Aïssa (Gekowski, 1992:45).

However deep Willems' love for Aïssa might be, there is still a wife and child in his past, and he cannot erase them. Furthermore, the circumstances in Sambir is of such a complex nature that his future is to a large extent determined by Babalatchi and Lakamba, and then there is his protector, Lingard, who will come for him at some stage and who will realise that Willems committed fraud once again, as well as Almayer's deep resentment to deal with. Willems' love for Aïssa does not indemnify him from his past, the local politics, or his own moral choices, and in this sense Conrad moves away from the romantic love-conquers-all ideal. Although Aïssa loves Willems, she seeks to ensure her father's safety and comfort above all things, and she trusts her father's old sidekick, Babalatchi, to think of Omar's best interest in his endeavours. What is more, Willems' morality has not improved, and this contributes to his downfall, because Babalatchi in a sense uses Willems' own morality against him. He sees in Willems' choice to pursue the relationship with Aïssa an opportunity to use him for political ends. The small white community as such were in the way of the plan to overthrow Patololo, and Babalatchi has to devise a way around this. His solution is to use Willems against Lingard and Almayer, and this is made possible by Willems' tendency to make poor moral decisions. In this sense Willems reflects Conrad's colonisers, aptly described in Watt's (1996:37) words: "...imperial or colonial experience is disastrous for the whites; it makes them lazy; it reveals their weaknesses; it puffs them up with empty vanity at being white; and it fortifies the intolerable hypocrisy with which Europeans in general conceal their selfish aims. Conrad made Babalatchi sum up the message of "you white men" very concisely in An Outcast of the Islands: "Obey me and be happy, or die!"

It would not be difficult for Babalatchi to establish an opposition between Willems and Almayer, since there is already a rivalry between them. This rivalry is clearly visible in the way in which they are described. Whereas Willems' appearance is rarely mentioned, Almayer's looks are often described. In addition to this, Almayer is mostly described in

conjunction with his surroundings. These surroundings usually include an establishment set-up, inside his house, on his veranda, his western clothes, and so on. This juxtaposes him to Willems, whose experience of the world, his actions, relationships and state of mind are constantly described in terms of nature. Their absolutely different personalities and irreconcilable differences are well documented in this way. The following short extract of Willems and Almayer's evening interaction is a good example:

"Lend me your gun, Almayer," said Willems, across the table on which a smoky lamp shone redly above the disorder of a finished meal. "I have in mind to go and look for a deer when the moon rises to-night."

Almayer, sitting sidewise to the table, his elbow pushed amongst the dirty plates, his chin on his breast and his legs stretched stiffly out, kept his eyes steadily on the toes of his grass slippers and laughed abruptly (Conrad, 1967:62-63).

Almayer sits in smoky light, his home is always disorderly and dirty. He speaks to Willems harshly, with contempt. Except for their past encounters with each other, Willems poses a threat to Almayer since he can establish himself as trader and oust Almayer. Almayer's decency towards Willems is limited to Lingard's direct orders. Yet he is later on described with his daughter, in fatherly tenderness (Conrad 1967:85-86). He is a grey character, neither good nor bad, and rather on the background. In this sense he is similar to Brierly in Lord Jim, who is described in vivid terms as far as habits and physical appearance goes, but who remains a vague character in terms of his psyche. Yet the unclarity and ambivalence of Almayer sheds a clear light on the almost pathetic state that Willems is in, being both innocent, naïve, immoral and cowardly. The bitterness in the relationship is sustained until the end, which means that Almayer is no help as far as Willems' safety from Babalatchi is concerned.

Conrad describes Babalatchi's character in significantly more detail than that of Almayer. This amplifies the opposition between colonialist-Christians and Malayan-Muslims. Babalatchi is not presented as the stereotypical pirate, but rather as a figure unscrupulous as well as vulnerable, defeated by Dutch interference. His spirituality is quite expressed, but in the end neither he nor the super-religious Omar are more moral than Willems.

When Babalatchi is introduced to the reader, he is introduced almost as a prophet and a semi-god, and he does indeed prove to be the redeemer of the indigenous population, oppressed as they are by both Patololo and Lingard's monopoly on trade. An unsigned

review of An Outcast of the Islands calls Babalatchi the "leader of the malcontents" (Sherry, 1973:68). Babalatchi's first words are a good example of his prophet-like behaviour:

"It was the writing on his [Omar's] forehead," said Babalatchi, adding a couple of small sticks to the little fire by which he was squatting, and without looking at Lakamba who lay down supported on his elbow on the other side of the embers. "It was written when he was born that he should end his life in darkness, and now he is like a man walking in a black night - with his eyes open, yet seeing not ... He was a great fighter in the days before the breath of the Merciful put out the light in his eyes. He was a pilgrim, and had many virtues: he was brave, his hand was open, and he was a great robber" (Conrad, 1967:46.)

Babalatchi sounds like a prophet proclaiming Omar's fate. This fate reminds one of a Cain-like existence (Genesis 4:15). For him, Omar's fate is not a matter of circumstance, but a spiritual fact. It is ironic that Babalatchi calls the god that blinded Omar the "Merciful". Adding to Babalatchi's spiritual projection, he is often described in relation to fire. Here he sits besides a fire, feeding it. He keeps himself warm. It is symbolic of his endeavours, him feeding political conspiracies. At the end of the novel it is fire that destroys almost all of the settlement, and Babalatchi carries the blind Omar out of his burning home just in time. It is as if Babalatchi feeds the fire too much and it later takes over and gets out of hand. In addition to fire, the moon plays an important role in Babalatchi's representation:

"The moon, pursuing her silent and toilsome path, attained her highest elevation, and chasing the shadow of the roof-eaves from Lakamba's face, seemed to hang arrested over their heads" (Conrad, 1967:50).

The moon is "elevated" above everything else that goes on. It is as if nature remains as a constant amidst a fluctuating human situation. The moon is "toilsome" and "chases shadows", as if it is more powerful than man in the most subtle way. What is interesting when looking at the power of nature throughout the text, is that Babalatchi is elevated to an element of nature as well:

"Babalatchi spoke again in a voice which was like the murmur of a brook that runs over the stones; low, monotonous, persistent; irresistible in its power to wear out and to destroy the hardest obstacles" (Conrad, 1967:50).

Babalatchi described as part of nature clearly indicates the power division on the island.

Almayer and Lakamba are rarely involved with nature at all, Omar is a servant of nature, and Willems perceives nature from a distance, either being blessed or cursed by it. But Babalatchi is almost nature himself, able to wear his enemies out with careful planning. However, this says nothing positive of his morality. Conrad's description of the surroundings in the settlement comments on Babalatchi's morality:

"The beaten ground between the houses was slippery with blood, and the dark mangroves of the muddy creeks were full of sights of the dying men who were stricken down before they could see their enemy. They died helplessly, for into the tangled forest there was no Escape..." (Conrad, 1967:52).

Babalatchi's trail is one of terror and his path is "dark". Colonialist and Malay cruelty, Christian and Muslim, white and eastern, in the end do not really differ. Like Willems, his victims experience a sense of "no escape". It is significant that there is plenty of reference to sight. Omar is blind, Babalatchi has one eye, victims die before they can see their enemy, and in Willems' last moments everything becomes dark. This symbolises the fact that not one of the characters in the novel become enlightened as far as morality goes. Spiritually they are all dark and they remain that way.

Babalatchi is in a sense stronger than Willems, and he is the main influence on Willems' fate in Sambir. McLaughlan's discussion of this aspect is worth quoting at length:

Always we are aware that Babalatchi is the guiding force. It is Babalatchi who at a crucial point convinces Willems that he must "submit" to Aïssa's will (that he helps Abdulla). If he does not, he may "have to live without her". At this Willems: "gasped and started back like confident wayfarer who, pursuing a path he thins safe, should see just in time a bottomless chasm under his feet". Willems' fixed idea at the height of his infatuation is to take Aïssa right away, but she consistently urges him towards the path of greatness as her people envisage it – very much along the lines laid down by Mrs. Almayer for Nina in her role as Dain's wife. Very ironically, the only time we see Willems acting competently and commandingly is when he is in desperate pursuit of Aïssa, thus furthering Babalatchi's aims. (He has now clearly committed himself to the fatal path of betrayal). Solely because he cannot otherwise have Aïssa with him, he successfully undertakes an exacting navigational operation (with all that this implies about his potential as "one of us")

Willems and Babalatchi are similar in more ways than only their spiritual darkness. Hampson

(2000:108) points out other similarities:

"Both are vagabonds; both have narratives constructed as successive 'flights', Willems' two flights - from *Kosmopoliet IV* - and from his disgrace in Macassar - end in parallel rescues by Lingard ... Babalatchi, similarly, has twice had to flee. His first flight has become a legend, and the narrative of events that occasioned his flight has something of the quality of Virgil's account of the fall of Troy".

Yet Willems comes to a fall and Babalatchi not. Hampson (2000:109) explains this by stating: "Ultimately, Babalatchi's adaptability is set against Willems' inability to adapt, his desperate assertion (like Almayer) of an originary identity". In other words, Babalatchi can incorporate "Otherliness" and revealed truth into his identity and continue on his path. He can come to a new adjusted identity, while Willems cannot transcend rigid black and white ideas of reality.

The other characters in the novel, namely Abdulla, Lingard, and Aïssa are certainly significant, but the extent of this study does not allow a detailed study of all the characters. Lester, (1987:54-58) provides an in-depth analysis of Abdulla in both Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands and Lingard is a commonly discussed character as well. Young (1992:28, Vol II) contributes in this regard with his article entitled *Lingard's Folly: The Lost Subject*. However, the character of Aïssa calls for further study, especially in her capacity as native and woman, and with regard to her insanity and voicelessness at the end of the novel.

After considering the way in which Conrad uses description to sketch the character's sense of space, identity and spirituality, it seems that he uses delayed decoding, nature, colour symbolism, chiaroscuro, and an emphasis on auditive and visual perception to show how Willems experiences reality as overwhelming and otherly, causing him to never interact with life in a way that is congruent with the reality of the situation or true to his own identity. Willems' interpretative framework, his senses, his ability to read the situation and judgement all fail him, resulting in moral and spiritual confusion. His experiences and choices are ultimately never decoded, and he never penetrates and confronts his sense of being overwhelmed. Conrad's technique of repeatedly sketching seemingly insignificant experiences and events and then decoding them, and then leaving out a decoding of Willems' death, highlights the fact that Willems ultimately dies in a meaningless void of oblivion and immortality. In addition to delayed decoding, this becomes clear through the fact that nature never becomes a welcome friend to Willems, but remains an otherly force, and colours never merge to form a colourful whole, but remain standing loose in shades too

bright, to misty or too dull. His sense of space remains obscure and ambiguous, symbolising his confused morality and sense of identity. The impression that Conrad leaves with the reader through his description seems to be of "the tremendous fact of our isolation, of the indestructible loneliness that clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave and perhaps beyond" (Sherry, 1973:67). This isolation causes the character to go through cycles of interpretation, trying and retrying to comprehend the world. Chapter three goes on to discuss this element.

- CHAPTER THREE -
PAINTING REVISITED: CYCLES OF INTERPRETATION
IN LORD JIM

*We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straws. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quite meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rat's feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar...*

(T.S Eliot, Selected Poems, 1961:75)

I

TS Eliot's hollow men could easily be a description of Marlow or Kurtz, two characters who realise man's potential for emptiness. If one takes a step back from the process through which Conrad "paints" the relationship between description, space and spiritual identity, one might see the human truth that Conrad wants his readers to "see". It is at this stage, when the reader has a sentient awareness of the characters' epistemological crises and failed interpretative frameworks, that he or she becomes the witness to the characters' processes of attempting to relate the mind to the world, to interpret and re-interpret until the interpretation finally fits the situation.

When Conrad's characters meet the world, it is a comprehensive world of the mind, in other words the character's interpretative framework, that meets a new strange world of physicality and culture, a world of isolation. The interpretative framework being, the meeting leaves the character lost in hostile surroundings, sending the character into cycles of interpretation. These cycles of interpretation are reflected by Conrad's descriptive techniques. Marlow's first look at Kurtz' dwelling is a good example of the mechanism of interpretation and re-interpretation:

"Through me glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no enclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls" (Conrad, 1999:80).

At first glance Marlow's description seems quite detailed. He describes the trees, the grass, even the undergrowth, seemingly unimportant information. To the reader it seems as if it is a very accurate rendering of the scene. The building, an inanimate object, is described as "decaying", which would befit an animate object better. The fence is described, but the significance of the description is not yet clear. The entire description seems to be an interpretation that will not need revision. However, Marlow soon realises the need for a re-interpretation:

"And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing - food for thought as well as for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascent the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house" (Conrad, 1999:85).

Marlow takes his time in describing all his actions before he admits his mistake. After saying that he has made a mistake, he once again takes his time before he really says what it is that he saw. All this contributes to the sense of the scene being re-interpreted. It is one cycle of interpretation completed, in this case through the technique of delayed decoding. This cycle of interpretation brings him closer to his final interpretative conclusion:

"True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that

inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible” (Conrad, 1999:99).

Here Marlow makes a definite choice, favouring good instead of evil, yet recognising each person’s propensity towards evil. For Willems in An Outcast of the Islands, however, there only comes one poorly illuminated moment of insight:

“He looked without seeing anything - thinking of himself. Before his eyes the light of the rising sun burst above the forest with the suddenness of an explosion. He saw nothing. Then, after a time, he murmured with conviction - speaking half aloud to himself in the shock of the penetrating thought: “I am a lost man”” (Conrad, 1967:340).

Willems looks “without seeing anything”, even though the sun rises before him. There is light, and yet he does not really see. He realises that he is a “lost man”, but in actuality “he saw nothing”. His insight does not bring him anywhere, it does not affect his actions in any way. He does not make the better choice when he is presented with it. This cycle of interpretation is never re-interpreted in any manner, and therefore his final interpretation remains flawed. He needs to adjust his interpretative framework.

The adjustment needed could possibly be called a “Picassoist” one, abandoning a unitary perspective, perhaps a very hollow one, in favour of a more complex point of view. Conrad’s characters have to abandon the tradition of seeing life, culture, people and spirituality from a single point in space and experience, an inaccurate one at that, because the spiritual and physical isolation they face is too complex for such a singular view. The character has to learn to consolidate different experiences of the world into one “picture”. It is not a once-off change, but a painful process with many fluctuations. In order to acquire and develop the skill of accommodating complexity, Conrad’s characters enter a process of revising their failed interpretative framework. They read, (mis)interpret, re-read, re-interpret over and over again. The process comprises interaction with the self on many levels, with interpretation and interpretative mistakes, and the experience of space. It is, in short, an *inward turn*. The character can potentially come to a better communion with existence if he can successfully adjust his interpretative framework, can integrate it into the broader context of his personal identity, and can apply it in practice, so that he can become someone who, like Marlow, is “permitted to draw back (his) hesitating foot” (Conrad, 1999:98) when it comes to the choice between doing right or passing the invisible line to the realm of moral decay.

Jim’s development in Lord Jim, that “free and wandering tale” (Conrad, 1989:43) serves as a

good exhibit of the fluctuations and failures involved in this long and complicated process.

II

By foregrounding Jim's spatial and spiritual crises, Conrad also implicitly explores the modernist difficulties concerning the shrinking of the globe, empire migration and the redefinition of spaces (Cohen, 2003:378). This redefinition called for a re-interpretation, and Ferrero (1995:3) formulates Lord Jim's preoccupation with interpretation as follows:

"In Lord Jim such emphasis is placed on the problem of interpretation that readers are invited to be as interested in the processes whereby textual significance is created as they are in what happens to Jim".

According to Stevenson (1992:22), Jim questions the supposition that things present themselves as they are, the reason certainly being that his own idea of how things are, fails. He needs to adjust his interpretation and his identity accordingly. Simmons (2000:31) indicates the obvious preoccupation with identity in the text by stating that:

"Lord Jim advertises its concern with the troubled identity of its central character from its very title, that combines the honorific "Lord" with the demotic "Jim", suggesting that Jim's identity lies somewhere between these two signifiers".

In the first few pages of Lord Jim, Conrad establishes Jim's interpretative framework, as well as early clues of why it might need revision. The reader's brief introduction to Jim's physique, nature and Victorian background already hints at problems with Jim's interpretative framework:

He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advance straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed-from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else. He was spotlessly neat, apparelled in immaculate white from shoes to hat, and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler's water-clerk he was very popular (Conrad, 1986:45).

Conrad's introduction of Jim in the first pages ever so slightly resembles the writing of Victorian novelists such as Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) or Emily Brontë (1818-1848). The main character is introduced right at the beginning with the employment of the standard "who", "where" and "why", roughly simulating the introduction of for instance a character like Pip in Great Expectations (1861) or Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights (1847). The first paragraphs describe Jim's physique, occupation, lifestyle, manner and background. His looks create an amiable impression, almost attractive. His occupation is nothing out of the ordinary, he is a water-clerk who should have certain skills and fulfil certain tasks. However, this seemingly Victorian resemblance only serves to undermine a certain way of thinking. In the paragraph describing Jim's tendency to take up and leave, Conrad's description takes a turn and becomes decidedly less clear, sketching only a mysterious problem without noting the cause or the consequence, constituting the beginning of the delayed decoding in the novel. Jim's manner is quite extra-ordinary. What is more, the paragraph is peculiarly positioned between those describing his ordinary job and his traditional upbringing, foregrounding and highlighting this strange aspect of the newly introduced character. Even at first glance, the reader intuitively takes note of the fact that the text might, at least in part, deal with Jim's mysterious propensity to flee east, and that this might be linked to the contradiction between this behaviour and his otherwise Victorian identity.

When delving deeper, one finds that Conrad actually subtly provides the reader with much more to rely on for this intuitive cognisance. Conrad places distance between the reader and Jim by employing a third person narrator. Furthermore, with the use of the words "He was...", the introduction is in a sense delayed, because the reader only later learns Jim's name. This creates a double removal from the character, foregrounding the reference to Jim's continual movement in an eastern direction.

Jim's slight imperfection is already hinted at in the description of his physique. He is "an inch, perhaps two, under six feet". He is tall, but only just misses the mark for a good gentlemanly length. He has some kind of "short-coming". He is "powerful built" and "advanced straight at you", but there is just the slightest hesitation to describe him as confident, since he is described as having a "slight stoop of the shoulders". This hesitation is confirmed with the use of "dogged self-assertion", "dogged" indicating a positive type of determination, but with the "necessity" of his attitude as its antithesis. His confidence is almost in self-defence, perhaps to convince himself: "it was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else". His spotless neatness and his white dress, seems as much a charade as the accountant's appearance in *Heart of Darkness*. His dress, mentioned in

relation to his popularity in the eastern ports, leaves an aftertaste of a superficial purity and an attempt at being a western semi-god. The description of Jim's physique, seemingly factual, but in the end revealing, already creates an apprehension about the character. The paragraphs following clearly disclose to the reader that there is some or another problem with Jim's interpretation of his spaces and his belonging:

"...Jim had always good wages and as much humouring as would have bought the fidelity of a fiend. Nevertheless, with black ingratitude he would throw up the job suddenly and depart. To his employers the reasons he gave were obviously inadequate. They said "Confounded fool!" as soon as his back was turned. This was their criticism of his exquisite sensibility"

To the white men in the waterside business and to the captains of ships he was just Jim - nothing more. He had, of course, another name, but he was anxious that it should not be pronounced. His incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact. When the fact broke through the incognito he would leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be at the time and go to another - generally farther east. He kept to seaports because he was a seaman in exile from the sea, and had Ability in the abstract, which is good for no other work but that of a water-clerk. He retreated in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact followed him casually but inevitably" (Conrad, 1986:45).

The disclosure of Jim's behaviour in the seaports substantiates the wavering tone of the initial introduction, but does not explain it. Jim's "good wages" and the "humouring" he received, are mentioned as if they are obvious reasons for him to be quite content with his position. However, Cohen (2003:384) reveals that "Conrad presents Jim's early history as an intricate relationship between movement and position". In fact, the humouring "would have bought the fidelity of a fiend". In contrast with this matter-of-fact illustration of his treatment, his movement is rendered in the strongest terms. He was not only dissatisfied, he had "black ingratitude". His behaviour tended to be sudden, radical and inexplicable. Yet, Conrad uses the words "exquisite sensibility" in relation to his impulsive departures, thereby making almost a cinic mockery of Jim's attempted wisdom. The reader has no idea of the causes of the behaviour. The reference to the cause as "a fact" that breaks through his "incognito" only hints at some kind of ghost from his past. Ferrero (1995:2) comments on Conrad's tendency to write texts in which facts seem to be an inadequate reflection of the meaning of things by saying:

"The novels frequently deal with situations in which the facts will not adequately speak for themselves and Lord Jim is perhaps the text in which the "facts" are most problematic; in which "the event...is the analysis and dissolution of the event".

Instead of revealing this crucial information about his past, Conrad chooses to enlighten, or mystify, the reader with a picture of Jim's upbringing that is seemingly incongruent with Jim's behaviour. In this way Jim becomes defined by his movement and halts throughout his life.

Jim's childhood is described as being quite the opposite of his adult instability, highlighting the irrationality and incomprehensibility of his actions. It is quite interesting that this information is provided later on. Conrad changes around the order commonly found in fiction up to that point. However, the information does give the reader an understanding of why Jim found it so difficult to adjust his perspective:

...Originally he came from a parsonage. Many commanders of fine merchant-ships come from these abodes of piety and peace. Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions. 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. Below, the red front of the rectory gleamed with a warm tint in the midst of grass-plots, flower-beds, and fir-trees, with an orchard at the back, a paved stable-yard to the left, and the sloping glass of greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks. The living had belonged to the family for generations; but Jim was one of five sons, and when after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself, he was sent at once to a training-ship for officers of the mercantile marine (Conrad, 1986:46).

He comes from a parsonage, "the abode of piety and peace". Once again, the reader senses a slight sarcasm, as if the piety and peace have no substance. The description of the attitudes prevailing in his home, reminds the reader of a very Victorian way of living. According to Abrams (1993:153), the Victorian middle class revealed traces of "narrow-mindedness, complacency, the stress on respectability". This Victorian attitude can be detected in the fact that "Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions". Nothing is questioned if the answer might be uncomfortable. Life is accepted as it is, interpreted in a set manner..

The description of the surroundings of Jim's childhood home reinforces this complacency. The church had a "mossy greyness", moss testifying of stagnation and the greyness of a dull single dimensionality. It has been unchanged "for centuries", stable enough so that "the trees probably remembered the laying of the first stone", emphasising the improbability of change. The "grassplots, flower-beds and fir-trees" create the impression of society fitting into neat little categories. In addition to this, the mention of the fact that Jim was "one of five sons", hints at the fact that society is thoughtlessly run according to tradition. The shallowness of the consideration of life is evident from the fact that Jim goes to sea after "a course of light holiday literature", and is actually encouraged by the equally naïve adults. Why? Jim's departure for a life at sea places him within the romantic Victorian ideas of imperialism and colonialism. According to Cohen (2003:386) "work and labor convert the openness of the sea from the blank uninhabitable blue spaces on a map to strategic networks of power". This makes life at sea virtuous and heroic, in service of the noble Empire.

Throughout the novel, Jim tries to match this mindset and his circumstances, but he fails miserably. The inclusion of Jim's attitude and thoughts regarding the training ship gives the reader a better indication of how Jim's interpretative framework distorts his relationship with space, making harmony between mind and world almost impossible:

His station was in the fore-top, and often from there he looked down, with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers, at the peaceful multitude of roofs cut in two by the brown tide of the stream, while scattered on the outskirts of the surrounding plain the factory chimneys rose perpendicular against a grimy sky, each slender like a pencil, and belching smoke like a volcano. He could see the big ships departing, the broadbeamed ferries constantly on the move, the little boats floating far below his feet, with the hazy splendour of the sea in the distance, and the hope of stirring life in the world of adventure.

On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men - always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book (Conrad, 1986:47).

The first paragraph seems to only provide an indication of what Jim did and where he found himself. However, the fact that this paragraph is placed before the description of the people around him, constitutes a variation of delayed decoding. The paragraph places distance between Jim and his fellow trainees. Jim "looked down" from his station, his position establishing a removal from his fellows, which causes faulty interpretation. This rift is reinforced by Jim's "contempt" for their ordinariness. He sees himself as "destined to shine in the midst of dangers", but this is sharply contrasted by his behaviour later on during a crisis on board the ship. His fantasies of heroism mentioned here, emphasise the discrepancy between his ideas and his actual behaviour. The sentence following Jim's establishment as a hero-to-be, describes a sedate London, reinforcing the unsuitability of Jim's heroic pretence, since it is completely irrelevant to the peaceful context. It also highlights Jim's pigeon-hearted behaviour at the stage when heroism is actually much needed.

In addition to the above-mentioned, the London scene serves as a reminder of Jim's Victorian background. The juxta-posing of "chimneys" and the "grimy sky" with the "splendour of the sea" warns the reader of the fact that Jim's background does not prepare him for the travelling life at all and reveals his lack of contact with his circumstances. Jim is in a sense not involved in the everyday reality of the training ship. His "stare" is fixed on the "big ships departing" and on the "life in the world of adventure". Jim displaces his involvement to a life outside himself, and this amplifies the distance between him and his reality.

The establishment and reinforcement of this distance is followed by a sudden dive into the humdrum of the ship and Jim's reaction to it. The reference to the "babel of two hundred voices" not only evokes images of what life is like on board such a ship, but also introduces a spiritual undertone. The verb "babel" strongly reminds the reader of the Biblical account of the events surrounding the tower of Babel. Genesis 11:2 and 4 reads as follows: "As men moved *eastward* [own italics], they found a plain in Shinar and settled there" and "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens,...'" (NIV, 2000:11). The reference to "eastward" is striking when seen in relation to the fact that Jim always "retreat(ed) in good order towards the rising sun" and the fact that he is in a type of tower on the mast when he is introduced. He wants to be close to a semi-god, just like the Babilonians, but his interpretation of how to reach this aim, is completely inaccurate and ends in confusion and chaos. It is almost as if the east promises some kind of salvation for him, a promise of greatness.

Jim lives "the sea-life of literature" while the everyday routine of the ship continues. The

inclusion of "in his mind" is noteworthy, since that is the only place where he lives this heroic life. The description of his fantasies is a contradiction to what the readers later learn about Jim, and at the same time a prophecy. Watts (1986:20) indicates that "it was the disparity between his imagined tempests and the stark reality of storms that made him flinch from the heroic opportunity of hastening to the rescue of a man overboard". When the time comes for Jim to "save people from sinking ships" and to "cut away masts", he does not do so. However, he does become "a lonely castaway", only not in the heroic sense, but rather a tragic one. His "devotion" is not to "duty", but to hiding the "fact" that chases him east. The reference to the "hero in a book" emphasises the lack of substance of his calling, since "after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself". It also reinforces the indications that Jim mis-"reads" society and space, as if it were something so separate from him that it could just as well have been fiction.

The reader can clearly see that Jim's interaction with his space is problematic. The description of the accident encountered by the training ship, continues to show the reader the more practical implications of Jim's interpretative incapacity:

There was a fierce purpose in the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seemed directed at him, and made him hold his breath in awe. He stood still. It seemed to him he was whirled around.

He was jostled. 'Man the cutter!' Boys rushed past him. A coaster running in for shelter had crashed through a schooner at anchor, and one of the ship's instructors had seen the accident. A mob of boys clambered on the rails, clustered round the davits. 'Collision. Just ahead of us. Mr. Simmons saw it'. A push made him stagger against the mizzenmast, and he caught hold of a rope. The old training-ship chained to her moorings quivered all over, bowing gently head to wind, and with her scanty rigging humming in a deep bass the breathless song of her youth at sea. "Lower away!" He saw the boat, manned, drop swiftly below the rail, and rushed after her. He heard a splash. 'Let go; clear the falls!' He leaned over. The river alongside seethed in frothy streaks. The cutter could be seen in the falling darkness under the spell of tide and wind, that for a moment held her bound, and tossing abreast of the ship. A yelling voice in her reached him faintly: 'Keep stroke, you young whelps, if you want to save anybody! Keep stroke!' And suddenly she lifted high her bow, and, leaping with raised oars over a wave, broke the spell cast upon her by the wind and tide.

Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. 'Too late, youngster'. The captain of the ship laid a

restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. 'Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart.' (Conrad, 1986:49).

The arrangement of the paragraphs of the description once again supports the distance between Jim and his circumstances. It is not first of all his interaction with the people and the events that receive attention, but the effect of the universe on him. There is always an interpretative process between him and his interaction with the situation that delays this interaction.

Jim's cognisance of the fierceness of the storm impresses it upon him and upon the reader that Jim finds himself in a situation quite far removed from fantasy and fiction. The gale has "purpose" and a "serious earnestness". The earth is "brutal". In other words, the situation is serious, it is not as light as Jim's holiday literature. In his introduction to the 1989 edition of the novel, Cedric Watts comments on Jim's idea of heroism: "One of the main bases of irony in the first half of Lord Jim is precisely the fact that real life seldom tallies with romantic fiction. Furthermore, Jim's addiction to heroic day-dreams is itself a cause of the most jarring indursion of reality in his own career" (Conrad, 1989:20).

The severity of this "real" situation calls for decisive action. His experience of the situation being "directed at him", indicates how Jim is simultaneously in the centre and removed from the situation. It is all about him, but he does not get involved. It is as if he sees himself as unable to influence the situation. The situation controls him, it for example "*made him* [own italics] hold his breath" and it "seemed to him he was whirled around", as if he has no say in it. As far as his own conduct goes, "He stood still".

The sentence introducing the interaction with the actual situation, jerks the reader as violently into the chaos as it does Jim. However, it is once again not Jim who takes action, he is "jostled". The boys who "rushed past him", stresses the fact that the situation passes him by. The reader shares in Jim's sense of loss, because the events almost pass the reader by as well, since Conrad delays explaining the situation up to this point.

The reader almost expects action from Jim now, since the severity of the situation is now clear and it feels as if it should be clear to Jim as well. However, "a push made him stagger", indicating that Jim is still completely uninvolved in the situation. It is the beginning of the problematic interaction between movement and halting in Jim's life. Even the ship reacts

with more zest, she "quivered all over, bowing gently head to wind!" A boat is lowered, but Jim so to say "misses the boat". The realisation of this fact is like "falling darkness" for Jim. The way in which the other boys handle the situation, should be instructive to Jim. A "spell of tide and wind" is cast on them, but because they take action they "broke the spell". Action is the pre-requisite if one "wants to save anybody".

The captain of the ship notices Jim's interpretative failure, and hopes that "this will teach you [Jim] to be smart". The fact that Jim was "on the point of leaping overboard" makes this tendency in Jim known to the reader. The reader is aware of the fact that if the circumstances were only somewhat more radical, and in the absence of the captain, Jim would have fled. Haugh (1992:199) says about Jim's jumps:

"In Lord Jim the dominant figure in the design is the jump from the *Patna*. But, actually, Jim's jumping enters not once, but three times. And each jump, because of the changed circumstances surrounding it, because of Jim's maturity, and because of Conrad's sense for dramatic progression, takes on new meaning. The jump resembles a recurring musical figure, with minor figures in the design giving depth and complexity".

However, Jim gets a warning that his interpretative framework is inadequate. He has the chance to rectify it, to have "Better luck next time". He clings to the belief that he is an honourable person, as Hewitt (1969:32) indicates:

"His hope, however, is that he can rehabilitate himself; as in his first failure in the training ship, he is still sure that at bottom he is ready for any emergency, that he has only been betrayed by circumstances. He will not accept his weakness and stay in a place where men know his story,..."

Jim does not learn to be smart. The reader already suspects that he would not because of the hesitations in Jim's introduction in the first few pages. Long before the description of the central event of Jim's life, namely the episode on board the *Patna*, the reader suspects a tragedy. The reader has been tipped off that 'something is not right', that some distressing 'fact' haunts Jim, and now has a quite clear indication of what the nature of Jim's flaw might be. In addition to these clues, the structure of the descriptions of the occurrence on board the training ship and cataclysm on board the *Patna* follows the same pattern, preparing the reader for Jim's possible interpretative failure. It throws the reader into cycles of interpretation through the fact that the *Patna*-event is related in different ways by different characters, and

in the end Jim's virtue in the situation remains open to interpretation. Similar to the training ship collision, the account of the events on board the *Patna* start off with a paragraph describing Jim's perception of nature:

A marvellous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security. The young moon recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon. The propeller turned without a check, as though its beat had been part of the scheme of a safe universe; and on each side of the *Patna* two deep folds of water, permanent and sombre on the unwrinkled shimmer, enclosed within their straight and diverging ridges a few white swirls of foam bursting in a low hiss, a few wavelets, a few ripples, a few undulations that, left behind, agitated the surface of the sea for an instant after the passage of the ship, subsided splashing gently, calmed down at last into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly in its centre (Conrad, 1986:55).

The reader's first superficial response to the paragraph might be that it describes a peaceful and tranquil scene. Words such as "marvellous stillness" and "serenity" adds to this impression. However, when one takes a deeper look, it becomes clear that there is more to the paragraph, especially if studied in the light of Conrad's descriptive techniques, as discussed in chapter two.

The placement of the paragraph in itself is part of a delay. It creates a distance between the reader and the events, and also indicates how removed Jim is from the reality of the situation.

The first sentence does indeed evoke an image of peacefulness. There is quiet, and the light of the stars lies serenely on the water. However, the word "seemed" undermines this impression. It hints at the fact that the "everlasting security" is in appearance only. The moon in the west establishes a difference between the pilgrims and Jim. The pilgrims are on their way to their salvation, while Jim continually flees east to find a kind of forgiveness. Neither proves successful. The comparison of the Arabian sea to a "sheet of ice" suggests its treacherousness and danger. It is "smooth and cool to the eye", seemingly calming, but by now the reader knows that the eye cannot necessarily be trusted. It is not as open for interpretation as the training ship incident, there are no other boys to follow or a captain to

obey. The "perfect level to the perfect circle" is similarly undermined by the "dark horizon". The *Patna* seems "part of the scheme of a safe universe", but its path is "sombre". The description of the foam from the ship as "a few wavelets, a few ripples, a few undulations that, left behind, agitated the surface of the sea for an instant", indicates the small effect the ship has on the vast and impenetrable sea. The hull of the ship remains as a "black speck" only, impressing the vulnerability of such a ship on the reader. The reference to the ship as in the "centre" again hints at the contradiction of Jim's simultaneous centredness in and removedness from the events. The misrepresentation of the universe as friend in this paragraph, is supported by Jim's reading of the situation:

From time to time he glanced idly at a chart pegged out with four drawing-pins on a low three-legged table abaft the steering-gear case. The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface under the light of a bull's-eye lamp lashed to a stanchion, a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters. Parallel rulers with a pair of dividers reposed on it; the ship's position at last noon was marked with a small black cross, and the straight pencil-line drawn firmly as far as Perim figured the course of the ship - the path of souls towards the holy place, the promise of salvation, the reward of eternal life - while the pencil with its sharp end touching the Somali coast lay round and still like a naked hip's spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock. 'How steady she goes', thought Jim with wonder, with something like gratitude for this high peace of the sea and sky. At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds; he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with an heroic thread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face. He was so pleased with the idea that he smiled, keeping perfunctorily his eyes ahead; and when he happened to glance back he saw the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart (Conrad, 1986:57-58).

The first paragraph prepares the reader for the fact that an important event is about to follow, since it directly addresses Jim's ability or disability to read his situation. The use of the word "chart" introduces the theme of reading reality according to the guidance of a "map", in Jim's case his interpretative framework. The position of the ship is recorded on the "chart", but it is also the situation that Jim has to read correctly. The "chart" and the position of the ship, and Jim's misreading of the ship's course, becomes a metaphor for Jim's: reading of his spaces.

The implication of the metaphor is that Jim "glanced idly" at his own map and his own reality, taking the effectivity of both the marine map and his interpretative framework for granted, unaware of the inadequacy of his map of reality. The "sheet of paper" strongly reminds the reader of the "sheet of ice" referred to at the start of the account. In other words, the chart is as treacherous and untenable as the Arabian Sea itself. The "shiny surface" reinforces this contiguity, and also hints at the light of the stars on the water referred to in the first paragraph. The "bull's eye lamp" places both the Arabian sea and its representation on the chart in the spotlight, indicating to the reader that Jim's misreading in this case is central to the events about to occur. The perfidiousness of the map is stressed for a third time in the second part of the sentence, describing it as "a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters."

The "parallel rulers" and "dividers" forbodes the artificiality and non-chalant informality with which the position of the ship has been documented. The position is marked by a "small black cross", as if it is not very significant at all. It impresses the infinitesimality of the ship when compared to the ocean. Contradictory to the small black cross, the course of the ship is demarcated by "a straight pencil-line", as if the solidity of the pencil-line really determines the course instead of recording it, just like the maps in Marlow's childhood described in "Heart of Darkness" "had got filled since my (Marlow's) boyhood with rivers and lakes and names" (Conrad, 1999:35), as if they had not been there before the maps acknowledged them. The course of the ship is firmly 'predetermined' instead of being recorded after the fact, as if that would indeed steer the course of the ship.

The irony is that Jim is mistaking the position of the ship. The ship is headed for Perim, a southern point of Yemen (Bartholomew, 1983:56 and 64), crossing the Arabian Sea, probably from Bombay in India. The assumption of the port of departure can be motivated by the fact that the ship *Patna* is named after an Indian city on the Ganges (Watts, 1986:354-355). The "pencil with its sharp end touching the Somali coast" suggests that the ship is indeed off-course in a south-western direction. The addition of the phrase "like a naked ship's spar floating" contributes to this indication by, in a sense, comparing the reading of the map to a defunct ship. The offcourse position of the ship would place it in the Indian Ocean and not the Arabian Sea. This would make the sea even more "treacherous", because they are altogether in the wrong "sea", adhering to the wrong tidal rules and marine influences. The importance of the geographical details in the novel is well motivated by Cohen (2003:389) who says: "space, like the moments of recognition, is determined by Jim's own projections". The position of the ship becomes connected to spirituality and moral implications when one takes a look at the pilgrims. In addition to Cohen's consideration of the ship's position, Lippe

(1990:59-69) considers the details and the relevance of the place where the hearing was held in his article entitled *Reconsidering the Patna Inquiry in Lord Jim*. Since space is of the utmost importance in Conrad's work, there is no coincidence in his description of space, and this matter deserves further attention.

The human pre-determination of the journey and the route is in sharp contrast to the weight that the pilgrimage carries for the "passengers", if they can be so called. It is "the path of souls towards the holy place". The journey holds the "promise of salvation, the reward of eternal life". However, the pilgrims never reach this aim, and for Jim it becomes the journey of condemnation instead of redemption. His soul's "gaze" is fixed elsewhere, "drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence". Jim is as misdirected as the "spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock". A spar is supposed to provide the direction by holding the sails, but this spar floats in the water of a confined dock, broken and useless, ignored like the pencil indicating the true position of the ship. Jim, who is supposed to lead to some extent, floats in the confines of his limited interpretative framework, as broken and misdirected as the pencil on the chart.

Jim's portrayal as floating "spar" is directly followed by the disclosure of his interpretative mistake: "How steady she goes." Jim reads the universe as being in "high peace". Coupled with his interpretative mistake, is his poor contact with reality. His thoughts are filled with "valorous deeds". His "gaze" and his soul are misdirected at these "valorous deeds", something outside himself. Watts formulates the influence of Jim's fantasies of heroism strikingly in his introduction to *Lord Jim*:

"It is when he is in a state of reverie, thinking of 'heroic adventure' instead of vigilantly scanning the sea ahead, that the *Patna* collides with the mysterious obstacle and begins to leak. Had he not been a dreamer, the collision might have been averted...As the *Patna* ships water and lists, the mate who had envisaged himself 'quelling mutinies on the high seas' finds himself taking the coward's course of leaping overboard to desert the vessel and passengers he should be safeguarding; and the seaman who had imagined himself 'in a small boat [keeping] up the hearts of despairing men' finds that in this small boat he is making a purgatorial journey alongside the despicable beings whom he had regarded as 'not belonging to the world of heroic adventure': he is literally in the same boat as the cowards and self-seekers".

His "drunk" soul reinforces his escapist tendencies. Jim softens reality by becoming "drunk" with heroic fantasy, so to say, he can blur its harshness and disharmony. He receives a

phony type of courage from his spiritual drunkenness, so that there is "nothing he could not face", the irony lying in the fact that he faces nothing. Jim is "pleased with the idea" of heroism, and this is perhaps what the narrator deems Jim's biggest flaw, since he with regret initially mistook Jim as someone "backed by a faith invulnerable to ... the solicitation of ideas", "ideas" being strongly rejected: "Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy!" (Conrad 1986:75).

The quiet underplayed report of the climax of the events following the elaborately painted backdrop, underscores the continuation of Jim's interpretative failure:

He [the drunk engineer] let go the rail and made ample gestures as if demonstrating in the air the shape and extent of his valour; his thin voice darted in prolonged squeaks upon the sea, he tiptoed back and forth for the better emphasis of utterance, and suddenly pitched down headfirst as though he had been clubbed from behind. He said "Damn!" as he tumbled; an instant of silence followed upon his screeching: Jim and the skipper staggered forward by common accord, and catching themselves up, stood very stiff and still gazing, amazed, at the undisturbed level of the sea. Then they looked upwards at the stars.

What had happened? The wheezy thump of the engines went on. Had the earth been checked in her course? They could not understand; and suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction. The engineer rebounded vertically full length and collapsed again into a vague heap. This heap said, "What's that?" in the muffled accents of profound grief. A faint noise as of thunder, of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration, passed slowly, and the ship quivered in response, as if the thunder had growled deep down in the water (Conrad, 1986:62).

The drunkenness of the engineer contributes to the confusion of the situation. What is more, is that Jim is actually equally "drunk", and this contributes in turn to his failed interpretation. In the first paragraph of the description the reader becomes caught in the sudden transition from a drunken display to an actual disaster. The exact moment of the disaster is blurred, which makes the reader's interpretation of the events more difficult. The "silence" after the engineer's fall and the "undisturbed level of the sea", adds to the discrepancy between the appearance of the situation and the actual circumstances. The reader wants to join in when

the narrator asks: "What had happened?"

The universe has to provide the answer. Jim, his fellow crew and the narrator consult the universe as if it is the only measuring stick. Suddenly the earth is presented as less powerful, the thunder is "hardly more than a vibration" and the "calm sea, the sky without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility". This places the problem away from the crew and ship in the court of external factors. The question asked is not one of what had happened to the ship, but rather "Had the earth been checked in her course?" It forms part of the way in which Jim fixes his "gaze" elsewhere, outside himself.

The engineer collapses into "a vague heap", but the vagueness actually lies with Jim and with the events. The reader is thoroughly in a haze concerning Jim's thought processes, the magnitude of the situation and the actual details of what transpired. Jim's reaction to the event is not recounted here. It is delayed, and the reader only encounters Jim's jump from the *Patna* in his version of the events in chapter nine of the text, once again starting off with a description of nature:

"He saw a silent black squall which had eaten up already one-third of the sky. You know these squalls come up there about that time of year. First you see a darkening of the horizon - no more; then a cloud rises opaque like a wall. A straight edge of vapour lined with sickly whitish gleams flies up from the south-west, swallowing the stars in whole constellations; its shadow flies over the waters, and confounds the sea and sky into one abyss of obscurity. And all is still. No thunder, no wind, no sound; not a flicker of lightning. Then in the tenebrous immensity a livid arch appears; a swell or two like undulations of the very darkness runs past, and, suddenly, wind and rain strike together with a peculiar impetuosity as if they had burst through something solid. Such a cloud had come up while they weren't looking" (Conrad, 1986:118).

In the first paragraph of Jim's account of the events, the silence of nature is no longer serene and comforting as described in chapter three of the novel. It changes to something rather threatening. Although the description quoted above is the continuation of the situation depicted in chapter three, the description of nature in chapter three is presented as if Jim had been in the situation, while the description quoted above is in retrospect, with the advantage of hindsight. The "squall" is presented as something that devours, having "eaten up" a part of the firmament that initially "shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security". Stars, previously a directing light, have now been swallowed. White is no longer perceived as being an encouraging indication of the ship's course, which of course was erroneous, but a "sickly"

power from the south-west. The description of Jim's map and south-west being the direction into which the ship has deviated, indicates that the darkness, the evil, Jim's downfall, is linked to his deviation from the intended direction and his misreading of maps, both the map of the ship's course and Jim's map of reality, his interpretative framework. The light of the stars, previously mentioned as a positive guide, is now replaced by a "shadow". This shadow blurs the sea and sky into an "abyss of obscurity", perhaps being indicative of the entire situation blurring into a vagueness. The stillness that follows has a different quality from the silence previously described. It is now a premonition of disaster. The darkness of the cloud, the "swell" and the "strike" of the wind and rain, describes the universe as powerful and possibly dangerous, no longer a quiet and serene friend. It is almost as if Jim admits to a misconception of the power of nature. After the description of nature, Jim comes to his own behaviour:

"I had jumped ..." He checked himself, averted his gaze... "It seems," he added. His clear blue eyes turned to me with a piteous stare, and looking at him standing before me, dumbfounded and hurt, I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom, mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster. "Looks like it," I muttered (Conrad, 1986:125).

According to Cohen (2003:384) Jim's jump "sets the novel's hero into motion circuiting the major trading routes of the Pacific and Indian Oceans", trying to escape from the blemish. Because the implication of the jump is so impressive, Jim's admission to having jumped is tremulous. He confesses, but then qualifies it with "It seems", as if he is not quite sure or was not quite involved in the action. He does not take full responsibility for his actions. Cohen (2003:384) adds that "while Jim is resolved to let the repressive "it seems" apply to his jump from the *Patna* as long as possible, Marlow's interest is animated by this very resolution of apparent denial". Jim's "gaze" is "averted", so that he once again looks away from the circumstance he is in, projects his guilt, and seeks his survival and his redemption in "getting out", going elsewhere. He makes excuses for his behaviour, getting by on Marlow's pity:

"I knew nothing about it till I looked up," he explained hastily. And that's possible too. You had to listen to him as you would to a small boy in trouble. He didn't know. It had happened somehow. It would never happen again. He had landed partly on somebody and fallen across a thwart. He felt as though all his ribs on his left side must be broken; then rolled over, and saw vaguely the ship he had deserted uprising above him, with the red side-light glowing large in the rain like a fire on the brow of a hill seen through a

mist.

"She seemed higher than a wall; she loomed like a cliff over the boat ... I wished I could die," he cried. "There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well - into an everlasting deep hole..." (Conrad, 1986:125).

Although Marlow is aware of how lost Jim is, he is not about to force him to face his failure. Jim, with his "piteous stare", "dumbfounded and hurt", is described as if he were a vulnerable child. His "clear blue eyes" is documented almost as if to convince the reader of his innocence and suffering. Marlow describes Jim with compassion, seeing him as flawed, yet as precious and humane. He defends Jim. When Jim explains "I knew nothing about it till I looked up", Marlow follows by telling the listener "And that's possible too". Marlow continues the defence by calling Jim a "small boy in trouble" and by assuring the listener that "it would never happen again". Marlow is indeed very sympathetic to Jim's failure. In Watts' (1986:353) discussion of Conrad's epigraph to the novel he mentions that "Marlow's sympathy helps to restore Jim's self-esteem, but also suggests the theme of human isolation and the difficulty of attaining mutual understanding, fair judgement and solidarity". Although sympathetic, Marlow can in the end not really help Jim in finding his own identity. Van Ghent (1992:205) describes Jim's crises with himself poignantly by saying:

"Jim's shocking encounter with himself at the moment of his jump from the *Patna* is a model of those moments when the destiny each person carries within him, the destiny fully moulded in the unconscious will, lifts its blind head from the dark, drinks blood, and speaks".

Jim has jumped into "an everlasting deep hole", and he keeps trying to escape from it by jumping again and again. Cohen (2003:388) states that in Jim's "constant flight from the disgrace of the *Patna* incident and inquiry, Jim's experience exhibits, through the distress and calamity that recognition carries, a traumatic and tortured version of what David Harvey terms the compression of space and time" (as discussed in chapter one of the dissertation). Marlow's sympathy does not redeem him from that fate. It is remarkable how Jim now wishes for the thing that he fled from to begin with: "I wished I could die". By attempting to avert death, Jim has landed himself something new to flee from, shame and guilt. He knows now that his interpretative framework has failed, and he enters a renewed process of attempting to adjust his mind to the world. His next jump is a conscious one, it is a jump "for redemption and geographical stability" (Cohen, 2003:384). Chapter 22 depicts Jim's next jump, which is a new attempt to make sense of his world:

"I had never seen Jim look so grave, so self-possessed, in an impenetrable, impressive way. In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of his fair hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine that trickled through the cracks in the closed shutters of that dim hall, with its walls of mats and a roof of thatch. He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence. Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds" (Conrad, 1986:211).

Patusan provides the first opportunity for Jim to escape his wrongs, exactly because it is on the periphery of the colonial world, and is excluded from the colonial scene that has become so "small" that Jim cannot hide in it. It is also excluded from the seafaring community whom Jim has betrayed by his acts upon the *Patna*. The first quoted paragraph establishes the spiritual nature of Jim's latest jump. Jim looks "grave, so self-possessed", in other words serious, calm and confident. This differs from the Jim that the reader has encountered thus far. The uncertain, apologetic young man has made way for an "impenetrable, impressive" figure. Jim's surroundings are no longer described in terms of nature, but in terms of civilisation, which is ironic when it is taken into account that he is going to the outmost parts of civilisation. It is once again an interpretative mistake. He also makes the Babylonian mistake of presenting himself as close to godliness.

"...Nothing could have been more prosaic and more unsafe, more extravagantly casual, more lonely. Strange, this fatality that would cast the complexion of a flight upon all his acts, of impulsive unreflecting desertion - of a jump into the unknown" (Conrad, 1986:212).

Dressed in white, a colour symbolising purity, he is a "stalwart", a trustworthy and loyal semi-god. Here, amongst people from a completely different culture, he becomes what he always regarded himself as: "a creature not only of another kind but of another essence". The way in which the natives see him reminds strongly of Matthew 24:30: "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory". Patusan, being a place that no colonial power is interested in, places Jim away from the colonial venture. Yet he is perceived as a semi-god, and in his behaviour on Patusan he becomes the patriarchal colonialist, not being able to break away of this thought pattern. However, Marlow enlightens the reader about the true nature of the action: "this fatality that would cast the complexion of a flight upon all his acts". It is, in fact, another jump towards spiritual death.

"...I remember, as I unfolded our precious scheme for his retreat, how his stubborn but weary resignation was gradually replaced by surprise, interest, wonder, and by boyish eagerness. This was a chance he had been dreaming of (Conrad, 1986:212).

...His fate, whatever it was would be ignored, because the country, for all its rotten state, was not judged ripe for interference. Once he got in, it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed. He would have nothing but the soles of his two feet to stand upon, and he would have first to find his ground at that. "Never existed - that's it, by Jove," he murmured to himself. His eyes, fastened upon my lips, sparkled. If he had thoroughly understood the conditions, I concluded, he had better jump into the first gharry he could see and drive on to Stein's house for his final instructions. He flung out of the room before I had fairly finished speaking" (Conrad, 1986:214).

Jim had been "dreaming" of this chance of both disappearance and heroism, although Marlow feels that "his fate, whatever it was, would be ignored". In Patusan, a true non-place, Jim has the potential to be able to "interrogate this [the imperialist] ideological formation at the ground level" (Cohen, 2003:392). Jim has a desire to reconstruct himself, to re-interpret the events of his life, and he was unable to do this in the places where his history can catch up with him through the imperial traffic that brings seafarers to the corners of the world. He "would have to first find his ground", in other words completely redesign and establish himself, and he jumped at this chance.

The question is, does he reconstruct and redesign himself? To Jim Patusan is a release from his mistakes, shame and guilt, but it could perhaps be seen as a return to and retreat into his interpretative framework. Cohen (2003:374) says:

"Having been transported from the cloistered surroundings of his father's parsonage to the seemingly infinite space of exilic wandering among the ports of the Eastern Seas, halfway through the novel Jim stands on the threshold of Patusan which figures double as a dispatch and a retreat, a displacement and a homecoming, a descent and an ascent".

In Patusan Jim indeed becomes a "Lord", a patriarchal ruler, almost in the way he envisioned in his youthful fantasies, but Van Ghent (1992:207) shows how these fantasies interfere:

"So also Jim submits himself to his dream of heroic responsibility and truth to men, fleeing from port to port, and finally to Patusan, to realize it. And, again, the ideal is the "destructive element", bringing about the compact with Brown (a compact made in the profoundest spirit of the dream) and inevitably, along with the compact, destruction. The irony is that Jim, in his destructiveness, was "true".

The second half of the novel resembles the fantasies that led Jim to make the mistakes that he is fleeing from. But Jim's reconstruction of his own identity does not lie in how he lives his life on Patusan, but in the way in which he submits to Doramin's local justice, having fled the largest part of his life from his wrongs. Watts (1986:23) says that "The failed leader who remains with his people seems a braver Jim than the mate who had deserted the voyagers on the *Patna*". Jim's "execution" constitutes the point where the flaws and fluctuations in this interpretative process cease and where his efforts culminate into a reconstruction of what he previously had been. It is during these final moments of his life that Jim can integrate his interpretative framework, his identity, spirituality and his moral choices. He is worthy of the title "one of us" and of Conrad's own sentiments about his character:

"One sunny morning, in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by - appealing - significant - under a cloud - perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was "one of us" (Conrad, 1989:44).

The fact that Jim becomes "one of us", puts him in the same frame of reference than other seamen and the reader, since the readers are incorporated into the "we", and this would mean that Jim would interpret the events of his life in an altogether different way. He has become "one of us" through his last valorous deed, he has so to say earned it by going through all the cycles of interpretation necessary to reach that point, and through Marlow's relation of the events, the readers have accompanied Jim. Van Ghent (1992:205) comments on the last level of interpretation, namely that of the reader, as follows:

Marlow's last view of Jim, on the coast of Patusan, is of a white figure "at the heart of a vast enigma". Jim himself is not enigmatic. The wonder and doubt that he stirs, both in Marlow and in us, are not wonder and doubt as to what *he* is: he is as recognizable as we are to ourselves; he is "one of us". Furthermore, he is not a very complex character, and he is examined by his creator with the most exhaustive conscientiousness; he is placed in every possible perspective that might help to define him. The enigma then, is not what Jim is but what we are, and not only what we are,

but "how to be" what we are".

However, J. Hillis Miller differs from the view that all are satisfied with Jim's honour at the end of his life, and his explanation of this fact is worth quoting at length:

"Marlow's aim (or Conrad's) seems clear: to find some explanation for Jim's action which will make it still possible to believe in the sovereign power. Many critics think that in the end Marlow (or Conrad) is satisfied, that even Jim is satisfied. The circumstances of Jim's death and his willingness to take responsibility for the death of Dain Waris make up for all Jim has done before. It re-enthrones the regal power justifying the fixed standard of conduct by which Jim condemns himself to death.

Matters are not so simple in this novel, however. For one thing, there is something suspect in Marlow's enterprise of interpretation. It may be for his own sake that he hopes to find some shadow of an excuse for Jim. If so much is at stake he is likely to find what he wants to find. "Was it for my own sake," he asks "that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before...?"

Conrad not only relates a story, but takes the reader on a journey of interpretation and re-interpretation. The journey is not always clear, neither is the conclusion. It happens in the fog of obstrucity and in the midst of an overwhelming atmosphere, as will be seen in the next chapter, but it brings Jim, Marlow and the reader to a very clear place, a very clear understanding of the dilemma of choice, isolation and morality.

The other minor characters in the novel, such as Captain Brierly, the French lieutenant, Chester, and Stein, all form part of the different layers of interpretation in the text. J. Hillis Miller (1992:225) summarises their purpose as follows:

"They function in more than one way. They are irreplaceable points of view on Jim within Marlow's point of view. They are sources of parts of his story and offer alternative ways of judging it. Their own stories, moreover, are analogous to Jim's story, though whether in a positive or in a negative way is often hard to tell".

When it comes to the reader's perspective, coupled with that of Marlow, these characters are worth studying. In this regard Stevenson (1992:231) embarks on a study of Stein in his chapter entitled *Stein's Prescription for "How to Be" and the Problem of Assessing Lord Jim's career*, and Fincham (1997:58-74) makes a contribution with her article entitled *The*

Dialogism of Lord Jim. Fincham (1997:73) comments on the purpose of these versions of Jim's story as follows:

In Lord Jim the narrative deployment of double-voiced discourse, together with the ironic juxtaposition of the authorial narrator's account with that of the protagonist narrators, similarly interrogates the category "one of us". This has particular impact in the imperial context: what is brought into question is the legitimacy of colonial authority and by implication the entire epistemology of class and race".

Brierly becomes one of the first interpreters of the event. His focus is not so much on what Jim has done, however, but on the way in which he is singled out (Fincham, 1997:71). Brierly is concerned with the concept of "one of us". As "one of us", Jim ought not to be trialed away from home and amongst inferior races. Brierly exclaims:

"Why are we tormenting that young chap?" he asked. This question chimed in so well to the tolling of a certain thought of mine [Marlow] that, with the image of the absconding renegade in my eye, I answered at once "Hanged if I know, unless it be that he lets you"" (Conrad, 1986:91).

In addition to the way in which Jim is trialed, Brierly's disillusionment is with the way in which Jim has violated the honour of the profession. It is contrary to everything that he has believed about the profession and about himself. He is as it were confronted with the possibility of himself also having a darker side, and that no amount of honour in a man is guaranteed. His dismay becomes clear when he says to Marlow:

"Brierly went on: "This is a disgrace. We've got all kinds amongst us – some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many thinkers going about loose, We are trusted. Do you understand? – trusted! Frankly, I don't care a snap for all the pilgrims that ever came out of Asia, but a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales. We aren't an organised body of men, and the only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of decency" (Conrad, 1986:93).

Even Marlow wishes to believe that being "one of us", belonging to the right race and class, will ensure honour (Fincham, 1997:72). However, Marlow's need to believe in the honour of seamen is so strong that he is willing to forgive Jim his sins because he faces the trial. At

the end of the novel, it is also Jim's willingness to face Doramin that redeems him in Marlow's eyes, partly because Marlow has such a strong need to believe in the brotherhood of seamen and the honour that accompanies it. Marlow discards Brierly's interpretation to a certain extent, and this makes Brierly's interpretation part of Marlow's misinterpretation. Marlow refuses to interpret Jim's behaviour as dishonourable, which leads to the fact that he tries to free Jim from his disgrace by finding a way to hide him, which leads to Jim's death. In this sense Brierly confronts Marlow with the disgrace of Jim's behaviour, and it is the possibility of dishonour in each man that causes Brierly to commit suicide. Marlow chooses not to see this possibility, like Brierly did. He continues to look for Jim's honour, and ultimately he facilitates Jim's later jump for the sake of finding honour in Jim so as to be able to believe in the honour of all men.

The French Lieutenant, on the other hand, lives in full realisation of the fallibility of each man's honour:

"Eh bien! Each of them – I say each of them, if he were an honest man – bien entendu – would confess that there is a point – there is a point – for the best of us – there is somewhere a point when you let go of everything (vous lachez tout). And you have got to live with that truth – do you see? Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come. Abominable funk (un trac epouvantable). And even for those who do not believe this truth there is fear all the same – the fear of themselves. Absolutely so" (Conrad, 1986:151).

The French Lieutenant faces what neither Brierly nor Marlow can. Fincham (1997:64) indicates this by saying:

"If Marlow's interest in Jim is also an interest in salvaging an ideal of conduct, then the French Lieutenant - who quietly did what Jim failed to do - is hardly a figure of fun".

The French Lieutenant makes Marlow's categories of "one of us" and the prerequisites for honourability obsolete. Being "one of us" is no longer a guarantee of honour, and it is this guarantee that Marlow so badly wants to believe in, as Fincham (1997:72) rightly says:

"He [Marlow] wishes to believe that being "one of us" – belonging to the right race and class – will guarantee the moral rectitude of the "absolute standard" which justifies imperial domination."

The French Lieutenant has dared to give an assessment, a judgement almost. In this sense he has the same type of courage that Kurtz has, naming the "evil" and judging it, he does not wish to cure Jim of this evil, to change him into another man as Stein does:

"There is only one remedy! One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!"..."Yes," said I, "strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live." He approved with his head, a little sadly as it seemed. "*Ja! Ja!* In general, adapting the words of your great poet: That is the question....." He went on nodding sympathetically....."How to be! *Ach! How to be*" (Conrad, 1986:199).

Stein wants to fundamentally change who Jim is and how he lives. He wants to submit to Jim's, and perhaps his own, romanticism. He aims at dealing Jim a hand that would enable him to fulfil his dream of honour and heroism:

"I tell you my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough. *Ja!...* And all the time you are such a fine fellow too! *Wie? Wass? Gott im Himmell!* How can that be? *Ha! Ha! Ha!*

The shadow prowling amongst the graves of butterflies laughed boisterously.

"Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns – *nicht wahr?* ...No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me – how to be?"

Jim has to realise his dream in reality, and this is where Jim is not strong enough. His eyes remains shut for the real, and since the imagination cannot function outside the real, it costs Jim his life. Stevenson (1992:223) addresses Jim's problem by saying

"For one who does "take it to heart" like Jim, it is those moments when the ideal and the real come into direct and unavoidable conflict that are the most shattering. Jim's leap from the *Patna* is, of course, one such moment, and his realisation that he has betrayed Doramin and Patusan is another."

Jim is neither strong, nor was he smart on board the *Patna* or in Patusan, but in Marlow's

view he is still a fine fellow and "one of us". Jim is part of Marlow's dream of heroism and honour, and he sees what he wants to see, but in fleeing east Jim flees from the dream, and Stein wants to bury him in a place where the dream becomes possible again.

Jim establishes himself as a Lord, a romantic hero, so much so that the natives of Patusan cannot accept the fact of his fallibility when they are confronted with it. This necessitates Jim to continue in what he knows to be an illusion. His establishment as the hero that he wants to be in the end prevents him from growing, which was Stein's initial aim (Stevenson, 1992:237). Jim becomes like the butterfly that has to die in order to become eternal in a perfect form. Jim's moment of heroism when he faces Doramin becomes eternal, but he has to die in order to attain this (Stevenson, 1992:234).

The different interpretations of Jim's life provided by Marlow, Brierly, Stein and the French Lieutenant balances between Jim's innocence and his honour, and the dream and reality. There is no ultimate interpretation that stands above all, and it is this lack of interpretation that leaves the readers and the characters with only a sense of vague atmosphere.

- CHAPTER FOUR

THE PAINTER'S HIDDEN MAGIC: ATMOSPHERE IN "HEART OF DARKNESS"

There are in our lives short periods which hold no place in memory but only as the recollection of a feeling... We are absorbed in the contemplation of that something, within our bodies, which rejoices or suffers while the body goes on breathing, instinctively runs away or, not less instinctively, fights - perhaps dies (An Outcast of the Islands)

I

Atmosphere is a crucial component in the process through which Conrad represents space. It is perhaps the one element of Conrad's writing that is most indescribable, remaining elusive and intangible. This intangible atmosphere is a central element throughout Conrad's entire body of work. Where interpretation fails, only atmosphere remains as a daunting and dangerous hole in which the characters, and perhaps the readers as well, find themselves. It fills the empty spaces left by a lack of interpretation, but at the same time it highlights the isolation of the character, the interpretative mistakes, and the moral choices before the character. It becomes the character's experience, and the reader shares in it as if lost in the same void. It "involves the reader in the interpretative process by transforming the description of space into a spatial experience for the reader" (De Lange, 1995: 112).

De Lange (1995:6) describes the effect of Conrad's atmosphere well when stating that "the characters and narrating consciousness find themselves isolated in a space so vast that actions appear insignificant and ineffectual, constantly thwarted by the accelerating and accidental world confronting them". This "accidental world" can not be interpreted, adding to the frustration of the main character.

To attempt a definition of Conrad's atmosphere is a foolish endeavour indeed. This master of atmosphere succeeds in creating different atmospheres in the scope of his body of fiction. At the end of "Youth" for example, the atmosphere created when Marlow first encounters the people of the east after having completed his maiden voyage, is one of otherliness and fascination:

And then I saw the men of the East - they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter,

the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement. They stared down at the boats, at the sleeping men who at night had come to them from the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of hidden houses peeped through the green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise (Conrad, 1999:27-28).

Colours used for describing the eastern crowd are rich and earthy and the crowd is alive with "glitter". Marlow describes nuances in the crowd's physical appearance. Some have darker skin and some lighter. He notices their eyes. Marlow's attention to detail indicates a willingness to look for beauty in the "other", but it also shows how he searches for links between him and them and for things to base an interpretation on. The silence of the moment, both with regard to motion and sound, makes it almost seem suspended in time and filled with mutual wonder. The slow and even rhythm of the paragraph contributes to this. A description of the sailors as coming to the people of the east in the night reinforces a spiritual undertone. The sailors arrive like semi-gods from the sea to bring the light (sunrise).

A description of the surroundings as brown and green indicate growth and birth, and it leaves a sense of purity and simplicity, so that the eastern people are in turn a spiritual revelation to the sailors. The physical description of the houses and foliage creates an impression of things being close to earth and solid. The solidity of the surroundings is amplified by the fact that the sentence describing it is one long unit. The forest surrounds the houses like metal armour. In the last sentence the atmosphere is captured and summarised with adjectives describing mood, such as "mysterious", "resplendent", and "sombre", providing a good indication of the abstract experience of space in this piece of text. Conrad allows the reader to experience the same wonder and mystique that the character experiences. The space is slightly uninterpretable, and ultimately there is no real interpretation, only description, atmosphere, a mutual feeling of wonder.

In "Typhoon", the atmosphere is not concerned with people, but with the forces of nature. The atmosphere the sailors experience at sea while they battle the weather is one of cosmic power and human minuteness:

A faint burst of lightning quivered all round, as if flashed into a cavern - into a black and secret chamber of the sea, with a floor of foaming crests.

It unveiled for a sinister, fluttering moment a ragged mass of clouds hanging low, the lurch of the long outlines of the ship, the black figures of men caught on the bridge, heads forward, as if petrified in the act of butting. The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last (Conrad, 1957:40).

The "faint" burst of lightning at first unveils only a moment of the power of nature, as if to warn the sailors. The lightning is contrasted to darkness. This contradiction creates the impression of the sailors almost being captive on the sea, as if in a secret chamber of darkness, suggesting an atmosphere of impending danger. If they do not survive the typhoon, they will be buried in a place where they will not be discovered. The darkness is reinforced in the description of the men on board and the darkness of the light. This use of colour symbolism creates an ominous atmosphere, preparing the reader for a climactic event. The ominous atmosphere is strengthened further by the use of the adjective "sinister" and by the image of the clouds hanging low. It is as if the clouds are interfering with the crew members' personal space. They are described as being "petrified" of the coming event:

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. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were - without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him (Conrad, 1957:40).

The strong words introducing the paragraph communicate the power of the event with words such as "formidable", "swift" and "vial of wrath". This is strengthened by the change in rhythm from one paragraph to the next, which changes to a quick and strong succession of sounds. The vial of wrath puts the men in a relationship with nature, as if nature is avenging some sin. This impression is later repeated when the men are described as being "isolate[d] from one's kind" and the wind is said to "attack[s] him like a personal enemy". The power of the event is well portrayed by words such as "disintegrating", "explode", "overpowering", and "rush". The last sentence links together several clauses, creating the feeling that the harsh conditions continue for what feels like an endless time. The atmosphere thus created is one of an overwhelming cosmic struggle.

Each one of these descriptions is unique and gives rise to a completely uncharted sense of

atmosphere. In "Heart of Darkness", Conrad continues to create unique atmospheric experiences.

II

According to Jordan (1996:6), "Heart of Darkness" is about "art's relation to horror; Marlow passionately identifies with Kurtz's access to this abominable fascination...". Conrad's efforts in creating a symbolic atmosphere in "Heart of Darkness" to communicate this "abominable fascination" are apparent from the outset. The tale becomes nothing more than atmosphere, an atmosphere that functions like a halo in order to bring out the meaning. It is the interaction between elements that eludes interpretation and only becomes clear in the atmosphere that Conrad creates. Miller (1992:218) says that:

"Though the meaning is outside, it may only be seen by way of the tale which brings it out, brings it out in the interaction of its different elements in their reference to each other".

In preparation for Marlow's tale, the atmosphere amongst the listeners to whom the tale is related is one of symbolism and mystical anticipation:

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth. (Conrad, 1999:31).

The first lines set the mood as peaceful and in anticipation of some great wisdom. The way that the ship "swung to anchor without a flutter of the sails" leaves an impression of grace and tranquillity. The first quoted paragraph, which is also the first of the novella, creates the idea that there is time and "space" for a tale to be told. The ship is "at rest" and the only thing

for it to do was to "wait", the wind is calm and there is a certain slowness implied in the change of the tide. This all contributes to a sense of serenity, and the fact that the ship lies in that magic zone between land and sea indicates the impending "crossing over" into the unknown. It is a tranquil atmosphere, which is quite a contradiction to the content of Marlow's story.

In the next paragraph, the spatial description creates an atmosphere of haziness and mystique. The length of the sentences reinforces the vastness and spaciousness of the waters. The waterway is "interminable", it lies before the ship as something to be discovered, not yet open to interpretation. The tale lies before the listeners in much the same way. The sky and sea are one, creating a "luminous space", symbolic of the unspoiled state of places where civilisation has not yet intruded. The natural scene is void of clear lines and division, except for the sails of the ships. The ships impose upon the scene of unity.

The "haze" and "gloom" "brooding" over the land and city, as compared to the luminous space on the sea, is already symbolic of the struggle between civilisation and a more natural dispensation. There is light, space and a unity of elements on the one hand, and darkness and a sense of a fractured and cluttering cityscape on the other. Conrad creates a symbolic atmosphere indicative of the tale to follow.

Conrad further prepares his readers for the charged weight of his tale through his presentation of Marlow as a mystical storyteller through the eyes of a narrator that forms part of Marlow's audience:

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. (Conrad, 1999:31).

And

"Mind", he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower...(Conrad, 1999:34).

Marlow has a mystical and almost spiritual aspect when described as "ascetic", "a Buddha" and an "idol". These symbols of religion, morality and spirituality prepare the reader for the spiritual undertones of the tale to be told. Marlow's complexion and stature represent that of

an eastern priest. He is presented as someone with the authority to relate a tale with substance. His resemblance of an "idol" sets the scene for a spiritual struggle between Marlow and Kurtz as idols and ideals on the continuum of morality and spirituality, a struggle between good and evil. Marlow later on says that "It [his journey] was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience" (Conrad, 1999:35). These words reveal to the reader that the journey about to begin is both a journey into the darkness of Africa and colonialism, and one into Marlow's being (Hewitt, 1968:18).

In Marlow's description of his preparation for the journey, the atmosphere becomes increasingly more symbolic. The events, persons and surroundings contained in this part of the text almost contain a prophecy of the spiritual and emotional dimension of the tale to follow. This lengthy passage is part of the centre of the text with regard to atmosphere:

I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to. Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on strawbottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me - still knitting with downcast eyes - and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waitingroom. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red - good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, an~ on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there - fascinating - deadly - like a snake. Ough! A door opened, a white-haired secretarial

head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself? He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. Bon voyage. (Conrad, 1999:37 –38).

Conrad's endless array of what seems like small descriptive details, creates an atmosphere of apocalyptic gloom through the repetition of words such as "dead", "death", "arid as a desert", "deserted", "dim light", "somnambulist" and the chain of events is indicative of the symbolic struggle going on in Marlow's mind. He is spiritually and morally confused, still mesmerised by the snake on the map. Marlow is not unaware of what he is in for, because he wants to "get ready". He is perceptive and aware. With the "crossing [of] the Channel" Marlow willingly enters a new dynamic, knowing that he is attempting a difficult journey, both spiritually and physically. The crossing of the channel also serves as a premonition for the choice that Marlow will later have of either choosing to cross that unseen line between good and evil or pulling back his foot. Here, Marlow crosses the boundary from a concrete appreciation of space to a symbolic awareness. It is as if he knows that his venture is one with a symbolic and spiritual nature. The atmosphere prepares the reader for the things that Marlow will confront them with later on.

The spiritual struggle is foregrounded by the colour symbolism. Apart from the colours of the map, everything is described in terms of black and white. There is a constant juxta-posing of these two colours, symbolic of a conflict between life and death, and good and evil, truth and lie. The first example is the city that seems like a "whited sepulchre". The city is a grave, but it is disguised as a holy "white" grave, while in reality the city is dark. The inclusion of white in the description serves as a contrast that emphasises the blackness. The streets are shadowy, no light enters the houses through the venetian blinds, people are dressed in black. The two women knitting black wool seem to be delivering a prophecy of death, be it a physical or spiritual death. They are knitting in the colour of mourning, perhaps Marlow is seen as an offering to the whited sepulchre, creating almost an atmosphere of looming evil. Karl (1975:37) says in this regard:

"Then we encounter the women in the Brussels office who knit black wool, suitable for Fates who send gladiators out to die in the jungle for the glory of the empire. There are, we remember, only two Fates – Clotho and Lachesis – for the presence of the third, Atropos, would indicate Marlow's death. Their black is indeed morbid against

Brussels as a "whited sepulchre".

The presence of the map is highly significant. The map symbolises the colonial race to conquer the world. Red represents England, blue France, Orange the Netherlands and so on. Although presented casually and with a tinge of colonial attitude, the atmosphere of the description leaves the reader feeling disgusted at the greed of the conquering nations. These colours are later repeated in the description of the harlequin-like man at Kurtz's camp (Conrad, 1999:80). Marlow is on his way to the yellow part of the map, the Belgian Congo. The central locality of the yellow patch is ironic, for Marlow's spiritual journey takes him from the centre to the edge, where the barbarians live. It is also a premonition of what the real situation is like, that the barbarians are in the end the civil ones, the ones who could be placed in the "centre". The snake metaphor describing the river brings a spiritual component into Marlow's journey. The snake is seductive like the snake in Eden, and Marlow can either submit to the darkness or choose the light.

The secretary reminds the reader of the figure of death, grey hair, skinny beckoning finger. His "compassionate expression" is treacherous, for "the great man himself" is not about to be involved with or concerned about Marlow. His handshake is "quick" and his murmur is "vague". However, this powerful semi-god is five feet six, just short of the imperial six foot, indicating that his power over Marlow is perhaps not absolute.

Along Marlow's journey, his perception is directed towards a spiritual struggle. His experience of the atmosphere that he finds himself in, is symbolic of a deeper awareness. Even before Marlow commences the actual journey up the river, while still travelling to the inland station from where he will depart, he is confronted with the problematic distortion of good and evil:

I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up a hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails. To the left a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly. I blinked, the path was steep. A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on (Conrad, 1999:43).

The boiler "wallowing" in the grass gives this piece of machinery animal-like attributes. It reminds of a hippopotamus wallowing in the mud. There is a confusion of life and death, with the boiler seeming life-like and real animals being hunted and killed. The broken steamer that Marlow has to fix is compared to "a carcass of some big river animal" (Conrad, 1999:54). When Marlow sleeps on the steamer, he is told about an old hippo that roams the area and is lucky enough to stay alive after being shot at by the natives. Later on, when Marlow is on the steamer itself, the "black fellows" keep some hippopotamus meat on board the steamer until it rots" (Conrad, 1999:68). After rotting to such an extent that the crew could no longer live with the stench, it is discarded into the water. The piece of machinery has the luxury of wallowing in the grass, while the animal that should be left to its natural surroundings is very dead indeed.

The railway-truck near the boiler is also compared to "the carcass of some animal". The reference to pieces of machinery as having life, and as "decaying" as if they had been alive at some stage, has several effects. The first is that it is indicative of a severely twisted reality where that which is dead is lifted to the status of the living, and the living is reduced to the status of dead objects. Secondly, it comments on the emptiness and uselessness of the venture of railway building. This is reinforced by phrases such as "this objectless blasting" and comments such as "No change appeared on the face of the rock". There is no point to the blasting or the railway, but it is at least a way of making the prisoners work. Thirdly, it amplifies the circumstances of the prisoners. They are people, but are treated worse than animals. In the last instance, it prepares the reader for the cruelty and inhumanity that Kurtz represents. He is, after all, a symbol of what happened in the colonies. The atmosphere created by the description of these objects highlights the vast emptiness Marlow feels when confronted with the realities of colonialism. He doesn't know what to think, he doesn't offer any opinion, he only offers a description, and it is the description itself that communicates an atmosphere that is so penetrating that the senselessness of the scene is impressed on the listeners much better than it would have been by an opinion of Marlow's. Marlow amplifies the effect of his description by continuing to describe the following scene:

A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them,

rhythmically clinking. Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. It was the same kind of ominous voice; but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea. All their meagre breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages (Conrad, 1999:43).

After the machinery, the description of the black men is especially riveting. The special focus on the detail of their bodies juxtaposes the scene to that of the machinery, foregrounding the inhumanity of their situation. The number symbolism is catching as well. Six black men pass Marlow within six inches. The number six is emphasised by repeating it, but certainly not for the sake of statistical reference or accurate description. Symbolically the number six is the number of evil in Christian number symbolism, as well as six feet being the depth of a grave. It links the scene to the spiritual struggle that Marlow is undergoing. It sets the tone for the revelation of imperialism as something sick that leads to evil acts and the death of its victims. Miller (1996:96) formulates this as follows:

The local population is first described in such inanimate terms, as pure material objects passing before Marlow's consciousness; presently they are revealed to be human victims of "these high and just proceedings" of colonialism. The oppressed are so thoroughly oppressed as to be pure "raw matter", deprived of any known consciousness and of the glance that is its sign.

The repetition of the colour black emphasises the grimness of the scene. Not only are the men black, but they are also dressed in black, the colour of mourning. Their clothes make a little tail at the back, and this image reduces them to animals. Although they find themselves in this position, they are proud, walking "erect and slow". Their physical state makes an impression on Marlow, their thin ribs, "meagre breasts" and "quivering nostrils". It highlights the injustice being done to them. They are maltreated by something that came to them like "an insoluble mystery from the sea". The black men had nothing to do with the cause of their disposition. The entire scene is indicative of the spiritual decay by which Kurtz is surrounded. The atmosphere is sombre and tragic, making the reader feel uneasy.

The passage is once again foregrounded by the fact that Marlow's meeting with the accountant a few pages on is quite the opposite. The slave scene is framed between the

machinery scene and the accountant scene, causing it to stand out. The opposition between white and black, good and evil, becomes clear when looking at the appearance of the accountant:

When near the buildings I met a white man, in such unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand (Conrad, 1999:45).

The first element of contrast between the white man and the slaves is that Marlow meets him near the buildings, as opposed to the slaves whom he finds on his path. The accountant represents the European attempts at establishing "civilisation" in Africa. Marlow mistakes him for "a sort of vision" which is what the imperialist project was. It was a vision, but one that could not work. The accountant's appearance is quite ridiculous within the context of his surroundings. His clothes would have been quite warm, especially with the inclusion of the alpaca jacket, the high collar and the tie. What is more, the alpaca jacket would have been produced under colonial conditions in South America, exploiting people for labour and the Llama-like animal for the raw material, so that it can be worn completely out of context in the middle of Africa, just so that the accountant can look civilised. Different words are used to describe the whitish colour of the outfit, such as "white", "alpaca", and "snowy". This is in contrast with the black clothing of the black men earlier, reinforcing the colour opposition.

The presence of the accountant becomes relevant to Marlow when the man mentions Kurtz, because to Marlow Kurtz is the man who would be able to answer all his questions (Alvarez (2005:2). However, there is more to it than that. Being the first to speak about Kurtz connects the accountant to the imperialist project. In addition to this, the ridiculous appearance of the man highlights the unrealistic aims of colonisation. This brings Marlow to his first choice, namely that of distancing himself from colonialism and its inhumane activities, or choosing to live in a fool's paradise like the accountant, who lives as if he were in Europe, as if his actions were above board and perfectly suitable in the circumstances. The atmosphere created by the description of the accountant reflects how ridiculous colonialism is. Marlow himself tells his listeners what it is that he wants to tell them:

"I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him far enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality

in view - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see - you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more that you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream - making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams..." (Conrad, 1999:54-55).

Marlow hates exactly that which he is being confronted with, a lie. The entire colonial venture as Marlow understood it before his journey was a lie, and the honourable Mr. Kurtz as well. He wants to forget it, and he tries to halt his interpretation all the while in order to not be confronted with the immensity of the lie. His misinterpretation leaves him with only experience, atmosphere. He is horrified at the thought that he might be as much a fraud as any one else. It is when Marlow is confronted with his own fallibility that he is most disturbed. All this is not tangible to Marlow, he uses the word "see" five times. He cannot interpret, he only has atmosphere, which he calls a "dream". The atmosphere he is trying to convey is difficult to communicate, it is "absurd", a "surprise", "bewilderment", and he aims to communicate its "essence" by describing that which his listeners cannot see, the sensation that reveals the truth about reality. Marlow's spiritual struggle continues in his perception and description of the space surrounding him on his actual journey up the river:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare yourself; but it

came back in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had to discern, mostly by inspiration, the sign of hidden banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a look-out for the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for the next day's steaming. When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality - the reality, I tell you - fades. The inner truth is hidden -luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for - what is it? half-a-crown a tumble - (Conrad, 1999:61-62).

Marlow's journey up-stream is a continuous action, flowing with the river, but the description of his experience is like a snatch from the sequence of events. It is a moment. This contributes to the ominous atmosphere since it suspends Marlow's experience in time, almost as if the textual description is surrounded with a space itself. Space becomes part of the psychology of the characters (Karl, 1975:37).

He feels himself small in this landscape. He is subject to the vegetation, the "trees [were] kings". He cannot penetrate the forest, it is too big and dense. Marlow finds his surroundings oppressive, and he himself is as small and insignificant as a monkey. The air is "thick, heavy, sluggish", not easy to breathe. The sun is cruel and hard instead of being a friend. It does not drive away the "gloom of overshadowed distances". Just like the physical surroundings, the silence is lonely and overwhelming. Marlow's space becomes more and more overwhelming the closer he comes to the horrible truth of Kurtz's endeavours. It is as if his natural surroundings impress the gravity of the situation on him.

On the banks there are "hippos and alligators". They are dangerous and Marlow is defenceless against them. What makes the dangers of the river even more dangerous is the fact that Marlow's sight and hearing are impaired. This makes the environment a threat. Even the trees are "a mob of wooded islands". The structure of the river causes Marlow to struggle in search of a way. He has to navigate, but the surroundings are foreign. He gets lost and feels threatened by the surroundings. For this reason

"he [Marlow] turns to Kurtz, the only one who can help him. Through all the journey, different voices have announced the white man being as an artist, as an interpreter of life, and Marlow is longing to meet Kurtz, longing for the shade of Mr. Kurtz" (Alvarez, 2005:5).

It is as if Marlow feels himself "lost" and "cut off from everything you [Marlow] had known". The world that he finds himself in, is "strange". This is not only a physical experience, but a spiritual one as well. The more Marlow is confused, the more he grapples with his natural surroundings. His internal processes are contained within his experience of atmosphere, they are confused and he is seeking clarity. The spiritual place that he finds himself in, is not a peaceful one. As a result, he cannot experience his physical surroundings as peaceful. The difficulty he experienced with the river is symbolic of his spiritual difficulty. He has to "discern" without any guidance, both spiritually and physically. His inability to interpret his surroundings and events, becomes clear when the boat is attacked:

"I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my poleman give up the business suddenly and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in. He kept hold on it though, and it trailed in the water. At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about - thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet - perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the land-side. That fool-helmsman, his hands on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse. Confound him! And we were staggering within ten feet of the bank. I had to lean right out to swing the heavy shutter, and I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes, - the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour" (Conrad, 1999:72-73)

Marlow's inability to interpret these events especially becomes clear in the change in

atmosphere that takes place. Although the boat is being attacked, the initial atmosphere is not one of war and bloodshed. Marlow's slowness in realising that the boat is being attacked contributes to this fact. He describes the poleman as if he was lying down and stretching out for a rest, not as if he had been shot. The arrows are described as sticks, which makes them seem harmless. At this stage there is still almost an atmosphere of innocence. Yet, as it becomes clear that they are being shot at, the natural surroundings remain absolutely quiet, which adds an atmosphere of ominousness. When Marlow then sees one of the attackers face to face, it opens up a world to him. He suddenly sees all of their naked bodies in the woods, almost as if a new type of humanity is revealed to him. This changes the atmosphere to one of revelation and urgency. Part of his shock is being confronted with people who are different than he is, yet just as human: "what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (Conrad, 1999:64).

When he sees Kurtz's dwelling from the river, and feels relieved. He finally sees something with which he is familiar, a settlement:

"Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no enclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that" (Conrad, 1999:80).

Throughout his journey up to this point, there is an emphasis on dense trees and thick undergrowth, making the forest a formidable force. Here at the settlement the density has been eliminated ("rare trees") and the undergrowth is missing altogether. It is as if this change allows for Marlow's interpretation to open up. The jungle and the woods form a background to the settlement. This could be very picturesque, but the building is decayed. The fence is neglected and broken. It is as if the "civilised" part of the scene has disintegrated, thus representing Kurtz's moral disintegration. The atmosphere indicates decay, so that Marlow, perhaps for the first time, realises that the Kurtz that he so wants to meet, might not be the hero he is made out to be.

Marlow's perception of the surroundings seems very clear and straight forward, but later on

the reader sees that all is not as it seems:

“And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to throw back my head as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental, but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing - food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house” (Conrad, 1999:85).

The tale has a certain slow pace, but here there is a "brusque" movement and a "leap", indicating a change in the direction of the story. The clarity of the initial description of Kurtz's dwelling is undermined by this revised version. Kurtz's place is in fact horrific. The fence is an assortment of murdered victims. Marlow receives this as a "blow". His idea of imperialism, of good and evil, of virtue, of black and white, of civilised and savage, and of humanity has received a shock. It is at this moment that Marlow's worldview is shattered, and from here on he hangs in the balance between good and evil until he makes a choice between the two. Marlow tries to communicate this to his listeners, but all he can really do is describe an atmosphere, a certain void. Jordan comments on this scene as follows:

“The severed heads scene, however, is also part of Marlow's way of telling what he saw “near enough to be grasped”. This account finds the heart of the matter in a “distinct glimpse” of something actual. [It] has to do with interpretation, “how we see it” and how we tell what we have “grasped” from that seeing” (Jordan, 1996:1).S

The very pinnacle of his struggle is not physical, but spiritual and atmospheric:

“I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair's-

breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up - he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth - the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best - a vision of greyness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things - even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. (Conrad, 1999:98).

Marlow has "wrestled with death" as if it is a physical person. The atmospheric quality of this struggle is described through absence. There is "nothing underfoot, nothing around, without spectators..." These absences amplify the fact that the struggle is in an abstract realm, that it is not concrete. Conrad juxtaposes the desire for victory and fear of defeat to indicate the lack of such contrast. What is more, the struggle takes place in "greyness", toning down the entire experience to something very unexciting. Marlow calls it "an extremity", and yet it is grey and without form, indicating how the struggle defies definition, how impenetrable it is.

The reader has no idea as to the events that constituted the final "contest". There is no description of an adversary. The reader is left with only an impression of the atmosphere, yet it provides a clear and distinct sense of the struggle. Marlow's struggle is not only a struggle with himself or Kurtz, but also with the atmosphere, perhaps above all with the atmosphere. The atmosphere is the presence that Kurtz listened to and Marlow refused to listen to (Alvarez 2005:1). For Marlow the most important aspect of the struggle with this presence is that he has nothing to say about it, recognising that he perhaps never really confronted it completely. Kurtz confronted the darkness, and could later not even see the light anymore, but he saw the darkness so clearly, "the whole universe", that he could give it a name, "the horror". With regard to Marlow, Hewitt (1968:25) states that the final struggle shows us where:

"...his [Marlow] simple ideas of virtue, justice and honour prove inadequate to explain to him the nature of the evil which he has seen and the effect which it has had on him".

The horror is that there is no real fact, no absolute truth, truth has no face (Fernando, 190:76). In a sense, atmosphere is as close to truth as one can get.

Marlow's awe and respect for Kurtz lies in the fact that Kurtz saw the abstract struggle. His stare was "wide enough to embrace the whole universe", in other words, the symbolic atmosphere surrounding him. Marlow saw only greyness, but it was the clarity with which Kurtz saw the "horror", that captured Marlow. Kurtz's victory, in Marlow's eyes, was in the fact that he saw evil and judged it, where others are oblivious of it. He is destroyed by his knowledge of evil, while Marlow is permitted a peek before he goes back to join his fellow men (Fernando, 1990:69).

Yet when Marlow comes to Kurtz' Intended, he lies about the truth that Kurtz so aptly summed up. Karl (1975:30) comments on Marlow's lie by saying:

"Marlow, that pillar of truth and morality, does Kurtz' work at the end, lies to protect the lie of Kurtz' existence, ultimately lies to preserve his own illusions. In an impure, dirty world, he desperately seeks a compromise – and finds it in the pretty illusions of naïve women. The very ground on which he stands softens and shifts. Marlow has indeed peered into the heart of darkness, his own as well as Kurtz', and found as a reflection the very nihilism he fears. Needing to believe, he lies to maintain that belief".

Conrad leads Marlow and the reader to and through the mist of moral choice with his atmosphere. It is indeed impenetrable, "with nothing underfoot". Yet it is Conrad's depiction of atmosphere that highlights the struggles of his characters. In turn Marlow's experience of atmosphere at any point in the text, is indicative of his emotional and spiritual position and the level of difficulty he is experiencing with his spiritual dilemmas. Just like in Lord Jim, Marlow needs to believe in the possibility of honour. He would excuse men their transgressions and would lie in order to be able to believe. Ultimately that is the moral choice Marlow needs to make.

After Conrad's characters have gone through several cycles of interpretation, highlighted by the atmosphere communicated in the texts, each character comes to stand before a moral and spiritual choice, the end of a pilgrimage, and it is in the choice of the character that Conrad's greatest comment on the world around him lies. Chapter five continues to investigate these choices.

- CHAPTER FIVE -

THE CENTRE OF THE PAINTING: SPIRITUAL IDENTITY IN CONRAD'S TEXTS

Presumptuous is the artist who does not follow his road through to the end. But chosen are those artists who penetrate to the region of that secret place where primeval power nurtures all evolution (Klee, 1949:49).

And

To observe his [Conrad's] pilgrimage is our [the community of critics] privilege; to note its results in his many publications is our pleasure; to contribute to the unending appraisal of their value and meaning is our design (Lester, 1988:ix).

I

The result of the "pilgrimage" of to "that secret place" through art does not always have the same appearance, and in this sense the three novels provide the reader with interesting yet diverging appeals, all equally provocative and profound. The fourth and final basic question that this dissertation set out to answer is concerned with the results of the characters' struggle to "become", and the nature of their spiritual identities. Before this question can be considered, one has to look back at the journey that the characters have embarked on. Conrad has taken the reader and the characters through an entire process of spatial perception, interpretation and re-interpretation in the midst of an overwhelming atmosphere in order to map a new spiritual identity. The last chapter of the dissertation investigates the integration of these processes to finally result in a new morality and spiritual identity.

As discussed in Chapter two of the dissertation, the first basic addressed the way in which Conrad's description reflects both the character's interpretative crisis and his attempts at rectifying it. The investigation has shown that Conrad uses descriptive techniques such as delayed decoding, colour symbolism, chiaroscuro and references to nature in order to sketch the character's dilemma. The following example from "Heart of Darkness" reinforces this finding:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps (Conrad, 1999:61).

The scene that Marlow is confronted with makes him feel small, almost insignificant. Nature is seen as an Otherly and overwhelming force. Marlow feels the need to interpret this space, but it remains impenetrable and the weather is oppressive. The waterway does not seem to lead to any interpretation or any destination that promises interpretation and answers. This is later reinforced by the skull-scene, because as soon as Marlow thinks that he has reached a space where the trees are less dense and the undergrowth is absent, making the space seem more interpretable, this space proves to elicit more questions than answers. The search for the channel is symbolic of Marlow's search for interpretation, and this lack of interpretation amplifies the invalidity of his initial framework, indicated by the fact that it makes him feel cut off from everything he had known. What he had known is not valid, it does not provide guidance. The scene forms part of a chain of delayed decoding that ends in the wrongful interpretation of the skull-scene. Marlow tries and retries an interpretation of nature until he sees that his interpretation fails altogether. The scene seems to be dominated by shades of darkness caused by the density of the forest, and this darkness is further amplified by the slow flow of the description. It makes the reader experience the slowness of the boat's progression and the apprehension that goes with it. This passage clearly shows further how Conrad's description replicates Marlow's interpretative problems.

The character's interpretative frustration leads to repeated attempts at interpretation, and the second basic question addressed these interpretative cycles by asking how Conrad's description depicts the character's attempts at interpreting. The following example from Lord Jim is but one of his attempts at interpreting his own acts and his honour and morality:

"I had jumped ..." He checked himself, averted his gaze... "It seems," he added. His clear blue eyes turned to me with a piteous stare, and looking at him standing before me, dumbfounded and hurt, I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom,

mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster. "Looks like it," I muttered (Conrad, 1986:125).

Jim attempts to face his acts on board the *Patna*, but his averted gaze and the addition of "It seems" gives away the fact that his interpretation is still unclear. He doesn't really admit to any wrongdoing, he has a piteous stare as if he is the victim, standing there "dumbfounded and hurt". Marlow, in his "resigned wisdom", does not really want to believe what Jim had done. He makes excuses for Jim several times during the novel. Even he does not admit to Jim's failures with assertion. All he can muster is "Looks like it", not admitting that it is definitely so. This is reinforced later on in the novel when Marlow argues a case for Jim being "one of us". Jim reinterprets the events on board the *Patna* with his jump into Patusan and his ultimate surrender to Doramin. Jim's surrender can in this sense be seen as an interpretative conclusion where he makes a choice different from the choices that he had made up to that point. Jim's jumps clearly indicate the interpretative cycles that the character embarks on in order to come to a more developed morality and spiritual identity. The minor characters in the novel send the reader on similar interpretative ventures due to the different interpretations of Jim's acts and trial, as has been indicated in chapter three.

These interpretative attempts take place amidst an impenetrable atmosphere, as addressed by the third basic question. Chapter four indicated how the atmosphere in "Heart of Darkness" necessitates the interpretative cycles and makes them more difficult and challenging. The following extract from Kurtz' final moments serves as an example of this atmosphere:

It was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had not much time to give him, because I was helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. I lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills – things I abominate, because I don't get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap – unless I had the shakes to bad to stand.

One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death." The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, "Oh, nonsense!" And stood over him as if transfixed (Conrad, 1999:97).

It is not only darkness that surrounds Kurtz, but an impenetrable darkness, creating an atmosphere symbolic of the darkness of his soul. Impenetrability implies difficulty in interpreting, and it is furthermore equated to the bottom of a pit that never receives sun. In other words, there is no enlightenment. The contrast of these facts to Marlow's practical work on the boat establishes a contradiction that amplifies the depth of Kurtz' darkness and the gravity of his and Marlow's struggles. Hewitt comments as follows in this regard:

...he [Marlow] still pins his own faith to a practical task; the redeeming facts to which he chiefly turns are rivets. Against the "imbecile rapacity" of pilgrims he sets the job of getting the ship in order: "Rivets. To get on wit the work – to stop the hole". His immediate work gains for him the significance of a moral principle (Hewitt, 1969:21).

Kurtz experiences himself as being in the dark when there is actually light close to him, and this is symbolic of his insight into his own darkness and the fact that he is lost, dead already as far as morality and spirituality goes. The contrasting of light and darkness creates an atmosphere of somberness, which brings the reader to a deep realisation of Kurtz' darkness. Once again there is a slowness to the description that makes the situation grave and heavy as far as atmosphere goes. It is this atmosphere that necessitates interpretation and reinterpretation, for both character and reader.

After having critically examined and explored the concepts at description, interpretation and atmosphere and their interrelationships in Conrad's texts, one can see that these things come together in a cathartic moment in the text that shows the morality and spiritual identity of the characters. The last major question in the dissertation concerns the nature of the spiritual identity and morality of each character as it is manifested during the cathartic moments of the text. Consequently, the rest of the chapter addresses this final question.

II

In his absorbing article "*The Absence of God in Heart of Darkness*", Cheatham writes extensively on spirituality in this "Heart of Darkness". He argues that God is absent, and that this can especially be seen in Marlow's interview with the Intended where he in a sense plays God in an attempt to spare the Intended the knowledge of darkness, thereby becoming complicit to the falsity of the everyman's view of good and evil. This dissertation takes the argument one step further by arguing that God is absent in all three texts, and that the three

main characters compensate for this void in different ways. Cheatum (1986:304) comments as follows on the way in which Conrad succeeds in establishing this void in "Heart of Darkness":

God's absence in "Heart of Darkness" is revealed through the variations Conrad plays on the conventional symbols of light and darkness and of ascent and descent. Throughout the story he does not imply reversal of these conventionally opposed symbols; rather...Conrad collapses or conflates them. That is, while images of darkness and descent generally retain their conventional symbolic significance of evil, images of light or whiteness and ascent lose their conventional significance of good and themselves accrete sinister, ominous, unnatural, or evil connotations. In this way both light and darkness, both ascent and descent in "Heart of Darkness" come to symbolize the same thing - evil - often within a single scene.

This interaction between black and white and light and darkness becomes evident from the processes involved in Marlow's interaction with Kurtz, Kurtz's death, Marlow's illness, and Marlow's meeting with the Intended. The light-darkness opposition in the description of the ill Kurtz is already an indication of the relationship between description, identity and spirituality. The ill Kurtz lies within a few centimetres of light, and yet he cannot see him. For him the light is false and part of the darkness. The real evil is the mixture of false light and darkness, resulting in the impalpable greyness in which Marlow's struggle with death takes place.

Kurtz's experience is not a physical one, but an emotional and spiritual one. Kurtz has already seen that which Marlow is still missing, namely that light, in a spiritual sense, is just an illusion. If the light is an illusion, it means that a choice between light and darkness does not make sense to Kurtz at all, and he faces this truth in the last moments of his life:

Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror - of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath - "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad, 1999:97).

Kurtz, who has an ivory (white) face, becomes sombre, terrified, and filled with utter despair. Marlow asks whether his reaction was a surrender to his own desires and temptations, but this is perhaps not what Kurtz surrenders to. The horror is not his own darkness, but the complete lack of light. In his final moments of "complete knowledge" he realises that the choice between good and evil is a superficial one, that white is a disguised black. The horror is that there is no such choice.

Marlow relates much the same realisation when telling his listeners about his own illness, but while he tells the story, he does not yet decode the implications of what he is saying. His storytelling is a revisitation, an attempt to uncover the meaning of the events. Yet, the essence is already noticeable in Marlow's struggle with death:

I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary (Conrad, 1999:98).

Like Kurtz, Marlow wrestles with death. The contest is not a choice between black and white. Instead it is "an impalpable greyness" without form or substance. There is no choice that assures glory and victory. Yet Marlow does not see this as clearly as Kurtz did, which is what saves him. Hewitt discusses Marlow's choice as follows:

It is when the manager suggests to Marlow that Kurtz has used an "unsound method" that we reach one of the most striking and most important phrases of this story – "a choice of nightmares". We see here that Marlow can no longer defend himself; he can no longer maintain the detachment of a man who relies on standards which are not affected by the corruption and treachery which he meets; he is faced by an experience against which concern for rivets or for points of seamanship is powerless (Hewitt, 1969:23).

It is the clarity with which Kurtz sees the horror of man's hollow existence that makes him surrender. Hewitt continues to suggest that Marlow's simple ideas of virtue, justice and honour prove inadequate to explain the nature of the evil with which he is confronted (Hewitt, 1969:25). It is only when Marlow visits Kurtz Intended that the significance of his "contest" with death becomes clearer:

The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner, with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened - closed. I rose.

She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; e seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, "I had heard you were coming." I noticed she was not very young - I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me (Conrad, 1999: 102).

The fireplace is white, and a piano, most probably with ivory keys, reinforces this tone. However, the dark gleams already provide an early indication of black encroaching into white spaces. The Intended is a mixture of dark clothing and a pale appearance. She approaches Marlow in the dusk, but the room later on becomes dark. The light becomes "sad" and her pure complexion is surrounded by an "ashy halo". It is as if the white and black elements start merging. This continues until it comes to a surprising climax. The light of the Intended is the same as the darkness in Kurtz. They are, in fact, one:

I saw her and him in the same instant of time - his death and her sorrow - I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together - I heard them together.

This is the moment that Marlow realises that there is no distinction between black and white. For this reason he can tell her that Kurtz called her name, for "The horror", is indeed her name and his. It can also be argued that Marlow does not face up to the horror, he softens it for himself because he needs a softer reality, and so he lies to the Intended in order to protect her as well. When seen from this angle, Marlow's lie to the Intended is not a moment of insight, but rather a moment of ignorance and a denial of the reality of the existence of immense darkness within the human soul. Kurtz' darkness ultimately covers the whole world, that is why "this also has been one of the dark places of the world", and still is (Hewitt, 1969:26). Karl, in his important contribution *Joseph Conrad* (1975:32), phrases this as follows:

Marlow's great revelation comes when he sees that the world is not arranged this way [just and fundamentally good] – and here the Congo is a microcosm of the great world in which those who can, plunder those who cannot. Marlow's awareness of evil comes when he notes that many men, and those the most wilful, do not share his belief in an orderly, enlightened society. Theirs is one of chaos, anarchy, "unspeakable rites"...This is Conrad's existential wedge, so to speak.

Willems also presents the reader with a character who makes a life changing choice early on in An Outcast of the Islands. He chooses to commit fraud and thereby transgresses the boundary of morality. This results in physical and spiritual isolation. However, during the course of his isolation, he gets several opportunities to make moral decisions again. He, for instance, chooses to have an adulterous relationship and to commit fraud again, this time against his benefactor. The result of his second set of transgressions is that he finds himself in the same kind of isolation caused by his initial moral failure.

Willems gets much the same opportunity than Marlow, namely an opportunity to peer into the realm of the darkness. However, their reactions are very different. Willems finds the "dark place" strangely attractive, filled with the "breath of life". His reaction to this attraction is a feeling of loneliness. In his view he does not surrender to the darkness, but he is profoundly fatigued by the struggle it takes not to give in. The reader knows that he has indeed surrendered by transgressing the boundaries of marriage and honour. He is, in fact, isolated in darkness and not in light. He wants to call for help, just like the night Lingard saved him. Willems does not have the strength of character to resist the darkness, he needs saving. He calls for help from fellow humans. He has no connections with anything higher, it is as if God or a similar entity is completely absent from Willems's experience.

In An Outcast of the Islands God's absence is emphasised by Willems's appeal to humans for salvation and his attitude of having no control over his fate. He does not rely on himself to conquer his situation. Willems does see his own lostness, he is not oblivious to the fact that he is spiritually in trouble. However, he sees spiritual darkness as something that swallows him. He can do nothing about it. In this sense he differs from Jim, who also made bad moral choices, but does strive to lift himself out of the mire of spiritual decay and paralysis into the realm of honour and light. Willems is not in touch with himself or his circumstances, and this causes him to feel overwhelmed by his fate.

The ultimate consequence of Willems's hollowness is surrender, clearly revealed by the last moments before his death:

...Willems did not move. All his faculties were concentrated upon the idea of his release. And it was only then that the assurance of it came to him with such force that he seemed to hear a loud voice shouting in the heavens that all was over, that in another five, ten minutes, he would step into another existence, that all this, the woman, the madness, the sin, the regrets, all would go, rush into the past, disappear, become as dust, as smoke, as drifting clouds - as nothing! Yes! All would vanish in the unappeasable past which would swallow up all - even the memory of his temptation and of his downfall. Nothing mattered. He cared for nothing. He had forgotten Aissa, his wife, Lingard, Hudig - everybody, in the rapid vision of his hopeful future... (Conrad, 1967:356).

The fact that Willems does not move is almost a summary of his entire spiritual identity. He does not consider action. He wants release, but takes no action towards achieving his own spiritual release. For him, physical and spiritual release are synonymous, but the reader knows that Willems's physical release from his troubles in Macassar did not end in spiritual insight, release or growth. The only way in which he takes action is to sink into surrender. Of course the surrender is not his own doing, it is "the heavens" deciding and shouting a verdict. Not even his surrender implies action. His release is not into another world, heaven or darkness, but into the past of this world. He remains in an almost horizontal movement, indicating his lack of growth and a lack of a God-presence and spiritual dimensions.

Willems dies as one of Eliot's "hollow men". There is no substance or meaning to his life, no relationship to God, to nature, or to morality. He has no spiritual awareness even up to the end. His great moment of insight is limited to a superficial appreciation of life. Willems does not grow in terms of his spiritual identity, and the end of the novel leaves the reader with an enormous sense of emptiness.

Like Marlow and Willems, Jim is presented with several choices throughout Lord Jim. He makes mistakes, but ultimately, when confronted with that final and decisive choice, he reacts very differently to for instance Willems. Jim's different jumps are aimed at fleeing from his wrong choices and restoring his honour. However, his movement to the East does not afford him any freedom. Only action and involvement with his own spiritual identity brings a change. The quintessential difference between Jim and Willems is that Jim does take this action when it comes to the final choice during his last moments:

"He came! He came!" was running from lip to lip, making a murmur to which he moved. "He hath taken it upon his own head," a voice said aloud. He heard this and turned to the crowd. "Yes. Upon my head." A few people recoiled. Jim waited awhile before Doramin, and then said gently, "I am come in sorrow." He waited again. "I am come ready and unarmed," he repeated (Conrad, 1986:350).

Instead of not taking any action at all like Willems, Jim takes "it upon his own head", like a Christ figure. He comes "ready and unarmed", like a lamb to the slaughter. He comes to be judged and sacrificed. In this the reader also notices a God absence like in Willems's life, but Jim wants to fill the God void himself, becoming Lord Jim, so-to-speak. His death is marked by symbolism emphasising Jim's elevation to a God-like figure:

The unwieldy old man, lowering his big forehead like an ox under a yoke, made an effort to rise, clutching at the flintlock pistols on his knees. From his throat came gurgling, choking, inhuman sounds, and his two attendants helped him from behind. People remarked that the ring which he had dropped on his lap fell and rolled against the foot of the white man, and that poor Jim glanced down at the talisman that had opened for him the door of fame, love, and success within the wall of forests fringed with white foam, within the coast that under the western sun looks like the very stronghold of the night. Doramin, struggling to keep to his feet, made with his two supporters a swaying, tottering group; his little eyes stared with an expression of mad pain, of rage, with a ferocious glitter, which the bystanders noticed; and then, while Jim stood stiffened and with bared head in the light of torches, looking him straight in the face, he clung heavily with his left arm round the neck of a bowed youth, and lifting deliberately his right, shceJon's friend through the chest.

The crowd, which had fallen apart behind Jim as soon as Doramin had raised his hand, rushed tumultuously forward after the shot. They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead (Conrad, 1986: 350-351).

The old Doramin rises like a judge. His verdict becomes clear with the dropping of the ring. The "talisman" that opened his world to Jim, is left to fall to the ground. Jim is specifically called "the white man", the pure one, the seat of light. This white man finds himself in the stronghold of the night, only fringed with white. In this dark setting he is the only "white man", white here implying a certain innocence and godliness. In "Heart of Darkness" the use of the black-white opposition becomes blurred and ultimately serves to indicate the lie

imbedded in the categories, but in Lord Jim the colour symbolism seems to suggest that Jim was pure at heart, and that he ultimately chose light.

The two men look each other straight in the eyes as Doramin shoots Jim. Jim offers himself to Doramin and meets his death with pride and dignity. He does not "jump". He could have fled, or attack Doramin. But he chooses to redeem his dignity and spiritual innocence by dying with honour. Even though Jim dies, the reader knows that he dies in harmony with himself. For this reason, Marlow has praise for Jim in his conclusion to the tale:

And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side...

...Is he satisfied quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us - and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all? Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet upon my honour there are moments too when he passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades (Conrad, 1986:352-353).

Jim passes away "under a cloud", invoking the image of Christ's ascension to heaven. Jim dies in no ordinary manner. He dies absolutely pure. Marlow reveals the mistake that Jim has made so many times. Jim thought that an act of heroism was something adventurous and glamorous, but he does become a hero in the end in the most extraordinary way. Even though he dies, he is a success. Like Stein's butterflies have to die in order to become eternally perfect and beautiful, Jim has to do the same. The opportunity to reclaim his honour came to him gently, like a bride. This image reminds the reader of a Christ gently approached by the bride whom he saved from eternal suffering.

Jim's death earns him that which he wanted all his life and could not attain, to be "one of us". Jim does not die, but remains to stray like a spirit. He is gone, but his presence will always remain. Van Ghent (1992:211) says of Jim's belonging:

At the end, after all – when the silver ring that is the token of moral community falls to the floor, and through Jim's "truth" his best friend has been killed and the village under his protection betrayed – Jim is only what he has been; he is of the measure of his acts. To be only what one has been is the sentence of solitary confinement that is passed on everyman. It is in this sense, finally, that Jim is "one of us".

However, it can also be argued that Marlow wants to believe in Jim's goodness so badly that he calls him "one of us". It is a denial of evil similar to Marlow's words to the Intended in "Heart of Darkness". Marlow needs evil not to be as prominent as it seems to be, so he softens it with a lie to himself, his listeners, and the readers.

Jim's spiritual identity was ultimately built around his desire to be a hero, a saviour, a redeemer, and once he took action when the opportunity presents itself, he redeems his injustices, his honour, and his inner peace. The price of his semi-divinity is that a people is destroyed, they have been used, just like the people in the Congo and Aissa in Sambar. Karl (1975:35) poignantly summarises the dilemma noticeable in all three these works:

The absence of social morality, the desire to rise at everyone's expense, the manipulation of whole peoples for purely selfish ends, the obsession with image and consensus, and personal power, the absence of meaningful beliefs, the drive for advancement and aggrandizement without larger considerations, the career built on manipulation and strategies, not ideas – all of these have become the expected burden of the ruled in our century. The rapist here [in "Heart of Darkness"] is Belgian, later German, Russian, American – with the scale varying. The great symbol of our times is the chameleon – one can be all things to all men.

Karl (1975:38) continues to argue that the Russian sailor in "Heart of Darkness", presents the void in every man that only someone like Kurtz can fill, or for that matter, someone like Jim to the people of Patashan, "every disciple needs a god".

While Willems never enters into the spiritual realm, and Jim replaces God with his own Christ-like demeanour, Marlow comes to the conclusion that the struggle is futile. This impresses the deep spiritual crisis of Modern man on the reader. It is the crisis of the non-existent God, the non-spiritual identity. As Karl (1975:39) says: "Returning from the dead, like Eliot's Prufrock, he now has to convince his audience that there is really a hell".

It thus becomes clear that Conrad succeeds in using description to indicate the spiritual

and moral crises of his character, and that he does so by sending the characters through several cycles of interpretation while they are trapped in overwhelming spaces with impenetrable atmospheres.

Conrad's use of description in this way opens up further questions concerning description, space and identity. One could for instance focus a study on the women in Conrad's texts, the way they are described, and the spaces they occupy. Aissa and Jewel, for instance, are described in terms of forces and elements of nature. They both have an angelic aspect, and they are very dependent on their male lovers. Jewel's madness at the end of *Lord Jim* is interesting when read in relation to the description of Stein's butterflies. In "Heart of Darkness", the description of the African woman and the Intended provides insight into the contrast between the colonised and Western spaces and the African and Western identities.

Another interesting element in Conrad's texts is the relationship between sea and land. At sea men are in a brotherhood, whereas on land they find themselves isolated and often go through traumatic experiences. Jim's punishment of his behaviour on board the *Patna* is exile from the sea, and this puts him apart from other seamen. For Willems his existence in Sambir implies captivity and isolation from his race and his trade. Marlow is at home at sea, but on land he is confronted with things alien and evil.

A colonialist study could provide interesting insights into the identities of African or Eastern characters versus that of the Westerner. The colonised races in Conrad's work are often more free in spirit, whereas his Western characters are trapped in an identity crisis. In this why the colonised races defy oppression, showing that it is not within the power of a Western culture to oppress their inner power, pride, culture, spirituality and so forth. The natives are often proud, for instance the African woman in "Heart of Darkness", while the Western character experiences shame. The natives are often portrayed as ultimately more civil than the Western oppressor who uses any means possible to destroy the freedom and dignity of the native.

Concerning morality, spirituality and religion, there is often an interesting opposition between Christian elements and Eastern religions. The Christian is portrayed as the "infidels" from the point of view of the native, whereas the Christians are complacent with regard to the religion of their Eastern or African counterparts. Eastern or African characters are mostly portrayed as much more dedicated in their religion than Christians. They pray more, speak of their god more, live for him more, and judge more.

Not only Conrad's texts provide interesting perspectives on description, space, identity and spirituality. Other modernist writers, such as Eliot, Pound, Cummings, Joyce or Woolf, to name only a few, are equally concerned with these matters. It is very important to study the Modernist artists in relation to each other, and such a study can be of great interest to Modernist scholars.

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