

Joseph Conrad and the remembrance of things past : remembering, writing, and narrative

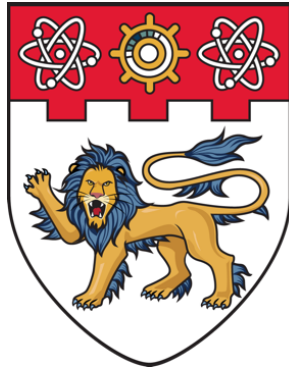
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**Joseph Conrad and the Remembrance of
Things Past: Remembering, Writing, and
Narrative**

Yao Xiaoling

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

2019

JOSEPH CONRAD AND THE REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

YAO XIAOLING

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Yao Xiaoling

School of Humanities

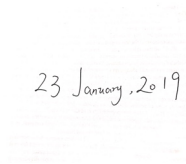
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2019

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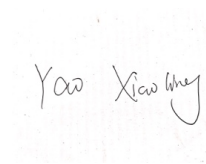
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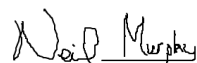
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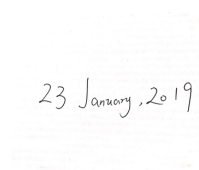
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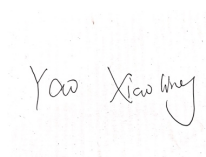
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Abstract

This dissertation aims to explore the ways in which Joseph Conrad's autobiographical memory and writing cross-fertilize each other in *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *Heart of Darkness* (1902), and *The Shadow-Line* (1917). By studying how Conrad repeatedly returns to and continuously reworks his past moments through the use of different stylistic and narrative strategies in these works, I challenge the idea that narrative is a transparent mirror of received experiences. Instead, the author's lived past is transformed into a remembered one that warps, rewrites, or illuminates his initial experience. As such, I argue that Conrad's continuous writerly engagement with his past registers, and progressively dramatizes, the complexity of personal remembering. More specifically, this dissertation begins by investigating Conrad's initial engagement with memory and writing in *Almayer's Folly*, primarily proposing the presence of unconquerable memory, and the idea of writing as a means to remember a lost past. The discussions of *Heart of Darkness* highlight the writer's increasingly complex understanding of the remembering process by focusing on the narrative's inability to recapture the original past, and remembering as an essentially interpretative act. Its examination of Conrad's verbal rendering of personal experience culminates in exploring *The Shadow-Line*, a text where the narration of past events and the present act of writing are conflated. Ultimately, it foregrounds the polyphonic interactions between experience and expression, as well as the porous boundaries between fact and fiction.

List of Abbreviations and Note on Editions

- AF* *Almayer's Folly: a Story of an Eastern River*. Eds. Floyd E. Eddleman and David L. Higdon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.
- CL* *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Eds. Frederick Karl and Laurence Davies. 9 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Print.
- MS* *The Mirror of the Sea*. Auckland: Floating Press, 2011. Print.
- The Nigger* *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. New York: Doubleday, 1919. Print.
- PR* *A Personal Record*. Eds. Zdzislaw Najder and John Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.
- SL* *The Shadow-Line: A Confession*. Eds. John Stape and Allan Simmons. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print.
- Selected Letters* *The Selected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Ed. Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Print.
- UWE* *Under Western Eyes*. Eds. Roger Osborne and Paul Eggert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print.
- YHE* *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether*. Ed. Owen Knowles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.

Introduction: Remembering the Sailor Turned Writer

It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light. There are the ambitions, the fears, the hate, the hopes, and they remain in my mind, just as I had seen them – intense and as if for ever suspended in their expression.

(Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*)

In *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) figuratively portrays a mental travel along the river of memory back to the past. Marlow, a seaman-rememberer,¹ penetrates deeper and deeper into the labyrinth of memory, celebrating how the human mind is “capable of everything, everything is in it, the past and the future” (*YHE* 79). Herein lies one of the human mind’s central functions: the ability to remember. Reflecting upon what characterises the writer’s novelistic interests, Geoffrey Harpham points out that he is “a novelist of memory”. The actions in Conrad’s works, as Harpham has it, “have already happened and must now be recalled, examined, commemorated, fertilized by meditation and narrative recounting” (56). Indeed, central to understanding the writer’s works is the manner in which he recollects and narrates past events.

Memory and its verbal articulation thus become Conrad’s primary concerns. This results partly from his disconnected and protean life experiences. Born in a Polish family, Joseph Conrad was a sailor turned British writer who successfully adopted his third language, English, as his creative language. Deprived of a stable and continuous pattern of living, the author was self-conscious of his political exile and cultural displacement. Edward Said perceptively notes that he was “an uncertain Anglo-Pole” who wrote about “obscure

¹ This dissertation borrows the term “rememberer” from Evelyne Ender. She argues that Proust is “a striking embodiment of the ‘person who does the remembering’ whom scientists now call the ‘rememberer’”. Please see Evelyne Ender. *Architexts of Memory: Literature, Science, and Autobiography*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005, P2.

experiences in an alien language” (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 4). At the heart of Said’s observation is the seemingly negative impact Conrad’s protean living experiences may have on his writing. His fragmented and multitextured life, nevertheless, also armed him with an acute sense of effectively appropriating his rich experiences in writing as a unifying force between his past and present. Thus, it comes as no surprise that memory or, more specifically, autobiographical memory, looms large in his writing, working to grasp bygone impressions and shape the discontinuous life.

Proposing that the act of writing resembles rescue work, Conrad demonstrates how memories of past experiences constitute an essential feature of his narratives as follows:

the creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values – the permanence of memory. (“Henry James” 586)

This quoted passage points to the crucial role memory plays in the writer’s creative production. He likens the act of writing to rescue work, a persistent effort to snatch the “vanishing phases of turbulence” and bring them from “native obscurity into a light” in words. Memory is central to this struggling process, enabling him to perpetually revisit and seize past moments. Furthermore, memory can transfix and crystalize the fleeting and ephemeral life, acting as a means to wrestle with the ever-changing world of “relative values”. The key point in this passage, therefore, lies in understanding the intricately entangled interrelationship between memory and writing, or to put it in Conrad’s own words,

understanding the way in which he disguises vanished moments and received experiences “in fair words” (586).

Indeed, memory propels the sailor into authorship, with the writer repeatedly returning to his past for emotional connection and intellectual inspiration, while struggling to understand the past in his works. Given the significance of the past to Conrad’s writing, as well as his cumulative reflections on the transformative force of memory, it is surprising to find that there has been no sustained study devoted to exploring the dynamic interactions between memory and writing in his fiction. While several scholars have, to some degree, investigated how Conrad recreates the past, these investigations deal either with his memoir texts or other issues,² and have only dealt with the influence of the past on Conrad’s writing of memory secondarily. Thus, this dissertation sets out to offer an in-depth and extensive study of the writer’s memories of his maritime experiences and their verbal expressions in his fiction.

The nuanced and multi-layered tensions between lived experience and that which is recreated in narrative will be explored in this dissertation. For example, how does Conrad’s writing compel one to reflect on the perennial tension between memory and forgetting? How does the act of writing function to commemorate the past? How does language come into play in constantly shaping, changing, and transforming the fictional representations of lived reality? How do style and narrative strategies mediate received impressions and traces, and

² Discussions of Conrad’s memoir texts mainly focus on *A Personal Record* and *The Mirror of the Sea*. Please see the first chapter, “The Secrete of my Life: Joseph Conrad”, in Jerome Maunsell. *Portraits from Life: Modernist Novelists and Autobiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p2-37; Douglas Kerr. “Going About: Conrad’s Progress in *A Personal Record*.” *Outposts of Progress: Joseph Conrad, Modernism and Post-Colonialism*. Eds. Gail Fincham, Jeremy Hawthorn, and Jakob Lothe. Cape Town: Cape Town University Press, 2015, p156-170; Lynda Prescott. “Autobiography as Evasion: Joseph Conrad’s ‘A Personal Record.’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 177–188; Ray Stevens. “Essays and Memoirs: *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), *A Personal Record* (1912), *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921) and *Late Essays* (1926).” *A Joseph Conrad Companion*. Eds. Leonard Orr and Ted Billy. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999, p305-324; Michael Levenson. “Writing at Sea: Conrad’s Personal Record of ‘My Life,’ ‘My Two Lives’ .” *Modernism and Autobiography*. Eds. Maria Dibattista and Emily Wittman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p31-43.

ultimately, serve to exhibit the complexity of the process of remembering? How do life-sensations and emotions transform the way in which the remembering individual recreates past events for readers?

Ultimately, I argue that Conrad's continuous writerly engagement with his past registers, and progressively dramatizes, the complexity of personal remembering. Put precisely, the writer repeatedly returns to, and commemorates, the essential past moments in his writing. At the same time, he continuously reworks them by employing stylistic and narrative strategies. His lived reality is transformed accordingly into a remembered past that warps, rewrites, or illuminates his initial experiences. In short, this dissertation will discuss the polyphonic interactions between Conrad's lived experiences and the act of writing (or narrating), as well as the porous boundaries between fact and fiction.

Conrad the Rememberer as an Artist

It was not usual for Conrad to formulate theories about his own writing. Yet, his statements in letters, author's notes, and memoir essays to either defend his own works or express his creative principles help to conceptualize how he transforms memories into artistic expressions. His assertions in these places invite readers to regard him as an artist who writes about intensely felt personal experiences. In this respect, F. R. Leavis brilliantly remarks that "as a writer...[Conrad] used [English] to bring to definition an intensely personal sense of life, and did this with a responsiveness to the finer potentialities of the language so vital and delicate..." (*Anna Karenina* 94). For Leavis, Conrad not only brings into existence his "intensely felt personal experiences" in his works, but does so like a poet who perpetually highlights the "finer" texture of language.

This touches upon an essential question in writing (and art in general): is narrative a mere replica of the material world and received experiences? Bearing this question in mind,

the following contextualization of Conrad's ideas about writing and its dynamic interplay with his past will mainly focus on two points: firstly, the writer seldom invents events and characters, but rather relies on his intensely felt maritime experiences in narrative; secondly, influenced by his artistic temperament, the writer obsessively constructs his experience into an artistic work instead of rendering it as a transparent mirror of his life. Ian Watt regards this creative principle as one "characteristically personal without being directly autobiographical" (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 93).

As a sailor-turned-writer, some practical reasons make Conrad repeatedly return to his sea life. He never "wrote a line for print" before thirty-seven. It is a common practice, as he puts it, to look upon "the whole possession of his past" as his writing materials. He further asserts the significance of memory thus: "one's literary life must turn frequently for sustenance to memories and seek discourse with the shades" (*PR* 14). The sum of his received experiences, reflections, and sensations provides life materials for his creative recreation, reminding the reader how his writing is structured around his remembered moments.

More importantly, Conrad reveals himself as a constant interlocutor with his past. In order to keep his life flowing continuously, he has to "seek discourse with the shades" of the past, make sense of it, and formulate a continuous identity. In speaking of the purpose of writing his memoir *A Personal Record*, the writer states that he wishes "there may emerge at last the vision of a personality...coherent justifiable personality both in its origin and in its action" (18). This impulse to formulate a "coherent justifiable personality" compels the author to repeatedly gaze into the obscure past, aiming to order and define the by-gone days. Thus, his obsessive return to seafaring experiences does not signal his "bad economy," but

instead demonstrates his persistent quest to penetrate into the density of his past and illuminate the process of how he becomes who he is (13).

In the process of looking back to and recapturing what happened in the past, Conrad is committed to grasping subjective emotions and impressions instead of historical referents. As he puts it, what he endeavours to reproduce in his memoir *A Personal Record* are the “feelings and sensations” connected with his first book and his first contact with the sea, rather than actual events (18). In reaction to the question of whether *The Shadow-Line* was autobiographical, he wrote that “it *is* personal experience seen in perspective with the eye of the mind and coloured by [the] affection” (*SL* 6; emphasis in original). While Conrad acknowledges that the story takes its shape from his recollected personal experiences, he has not promised a truthful representation of it. A similar pattern can be found in the writer’s comments on *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*. He confesses that *Youth* is “a feat of memory” with “sincere colouring,” whereas *Heart of Darkness* is “written in another mood,” regarding a past moment that is “pushed a little (and only a little) beyond the actual facts of the case” (*YHE* 6).

All these statements testify to a key issue in the writing of memory: the remembered past is not a transparent mirror of received experience. Conrad sketches the power of memory, or what he terms “the eye of the mind,” suggesting that it “make[s] things loom large because the essentials stand out isolated from their surroundings of insignificant daily facts which have naturally faded out of one’s mind” (*SL* 7). In other words, with the benefits of temporal distance, one can consciously select “essentials” from his experiences, while deleting other “insignificant daily facts” when it comes to the imaginative recreation of the past.

In *A Personal Record*, by asserting that the most powerful force for a writer of personal experience derives from the faculty of imagination, Conrad offers readers an ideal image of an artistic rememberer as follows:

Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life. An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories may serve worthily that spirit of piety towards all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of the man reviewing his own experience. (*PR* 35)

The statement – “an imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories” – summarizes the writer’s view of recollecting and giving form to the past. For him, the imaginative process of recreating “authentic memories” in narrative is regarded as “the supreme master of art,” an idea that compels one to view the interaction between writing and memory in a different way.

In this way, Conrad defends the agency of writing whose mission is not to mimetically reflect the past, but to interpret it. Commenting upon Henry James’s artistic craft, Conrad argues that an artist “in his calling of interpreter” must be “courageous enough to interpret the ultimate experience of mankind in terms of his temperament, in terms of art” (“Henry James” 587). By regarding an artist as an interpreter of human life, Conrad concedes that recounted memory is constructed, or at least, partially constructed. But this does not so much mean that memory is an invention of past experiences as it is an acknowledgement of the fact that writing reproduces, rather than merely reflects, the past. Thus, an artistic rememberer should not preoccupy himself solely with recovering and representing the irrecoverable facts, but seek instead to illuminate the effects of the irretrievable experience.

This idea stems from the writer’s conviction that the medium of art (writing in particular) is a legitimate ground to re-collect and reshape lived experiences. In a letter to

Sidney Colvin, Conrad expressed this sentiment unequivocally: “experience [of his first command in *The Shadow-Line*] is transposed into spiritual terms – in art a perfectly legitimate thing to do, as long as one preserves the exact truth enshrined therein” (*CL* 6: 37). In the process of transposing initial experience into “spiritual terms,” the real past succumbs to the writer’s imaginative recreation. What is retained in narrative is merely the “exact truth” of the past, or in another word as Conrad suggests, the “essentials”. In this way, the writer frequently remodels his past into an *artefact* – a blending of fact and fiction, an act that heavily relies on his sophisticated artistic techniques.

Unsurprisingly, what concerns Conrad most are stylistic and narrative techniques with which he believes he can illuminate certain aspects of the connection between memory and writing. For example, he wrote to Edward Garnett that he was “haunted, mercilessly haunted by the necessity of style” (*CL* 2: 50). A variation of the same idea is articulated in what has been referred to as Conrad’s artistic credo, the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, in which he states that writing should attend to “the perfect blending of form and substance”. This grants one a better understanding of what the writer declares in the first line of the same Preface: “[a] work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line” (*The Nigger* xi). It effectively exhibits the necessity of stylistic concern in every sentence and its relation to render justice to the visible universe.

By taking care of the “shape and ring of every sentence” in his writing, Conrad attempts to awaken one’s awareness to the fact that style also works to convey poetic, thematic, and ideological concerns (*The Nigger* xi). For example, one central point of Conrad’s writing lies in the fact that certain experiences are elusive and ineffable because of the inherent inadequacy of language. From this aspect, F. R. Leavis’ accusation of Conrad’s “adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery” seems unfair to the

writer as this very stylistic feature remains consistent with Conrad's thematic concern: certain memories are "inexpressible" and even "incomprehensible" (*The Great Tradition* 197).³

Thinking Conrad's Idea about Personal Memory Writing with Theorists

Conrad problematizes conventional autobiographical writing by his conceptualization of writing personal experiences as the "imaginative exact rendering of authentic memories," as well as his insistence upon the "necessity of style". However, these two points can find their theoretical underpinnings in Jean Starobinski's influential essay "The Style of Autobiography". He opens his discussion by challenging conventional conceptual mode of autobiographical writing, proposing that autobiographical works "require that the work be a narrative and not merely a description" (73). Rather than as a static and photographic portrait, autobiographical writing narrativizes the past by, in Starobinski's words, "add[ing] time and movement" (75).

This points to a key point in the writing of personal memory: it is first of all a constructed narrative. This idea is informed by and in keeping with the modern research of memory. In other words, memory is fundamentally a process of selecting from and creating a pattern for our received experiences, as evidenced in Frederic Bartlett's conviction of remembering as "efforts after meaning" (20), in Daniel Schacter's argument of memory as a "fragile power" (8), as well as in Jens Brockmeier's proposal of a "postarchival approach to remembering and forgetting" (*Beyond the Archive* ix). At the centre of their research is that memory is continuously, as Daniel Schacter has it, "constructed by influences operating in the present" (10).

³ For other challenges of F. R. Leavis' observation on Conrad's obsession with using adjectives, please see especially C. B. Cox. Introduction. *Conrad: Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes: A Casebook*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981; Richard Ambrosini. *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p5.

Though Starobinski acknowledges that autobiographical memory is conditioned by one's consciousness, a sentiment that recalls James Olney's contention that "memory and narrative, together and alike, are the two major epiphenomena of consciousness" (417), he does not negate the importance of lived past. He asserts that autobiographical works are subject to, and simultaneously transcend, the confines of lived history. Style becomes an indispensable element only when it "satisfi[es] the conditions of the genre [of autobiography]" which "require[s] the truthful narration of a life". Yet, he further observes that autobiographical writing, when it meets the requirement of reporting the author's life, "leave[s] the writer the right to determine his own particular modality, rhythm, span, etc." (Starobinski 75). From this point, the literary critic's observation on autobiographical writing echoes Conrad's stance of adopting an imaginative mode of storytelling to recount his personal experience.

Style, according to Starobinski, is not an ornament added to narrated contents (and past realities) in autobiographical works, but rather should be regarded as "the originality in the autobiographical style" (58). This new way of perceiving style will "offer us a system of revealing indices, of symptomatic traits". Readers can thus examine the "psychic uniqueness" of the man who holds the pen. Similarly, Georges Poulet argues that a book is an embodied consciousness, and can be read as the "biographical explication" of "what [the author] thought or felt" when he wrote it (58). In other words, the style should not be judged by "its inevitable infidelity to a past reality," but rather assessed by its value "in a relation of fidelity to a contemporary reality" (Starobinski 75). This "contemporary reality" Starobinski refers to is the reality related to the act of writing, such as the writer's emotional states, desires, and purposes that repeatedly transform the past. "The individual mark of style," as Starobinski has it, "adds the implicit self-referential value of a particular mode of speaking" to "the explicit self-reference of the narration itself" (74).

This split between “explicit” and “implicit” self-referential values in autobiographical writing underscores the division between the I of the past and the I in the writing, and also the dichotomy between narrated past events and the “contemporary realities” in the creative present. Acknowledging that the present act of writing and the present narrating situation may intervene in the accurate narration of past events, Starobinski, however, highlights a more important function of the present realities:

But obviously, the past can never be evoked except with respect to a present: the “reality” of by-gone days is only subject to the consciousness which, today, gathering up their present image, cannot avoid imposing upon them its own form, its style. Every autobiography – even when it limits itself to pure narrative – is a self-interpretation. (74)

It is the present “consciousness” that brings past events into existence. By gathering up memory images and organizing them into an organic narrative, the act of writing inevitably contaminates the actual happenings with its own traces of style. Consequently, the style serves as a place par excellence to trace, to use Bruce Johnson’s term, Conrad’s “models of mind,” or more specifically, his ways of perceiving the past (3). Commenting on Starobinski’s observation on style and arguing that it is “a formal device significant in its own right,” William Howarth expands on the use of formal devices to not only include style, but also imagery and structure. These “technique components” combine to form “a second factor in autobiographical strategy” (87). Therefore, an investigation of Conrad’s deployment of stylistic and narrative strategies will offer the reader insights about his perceptual mode when it comes to dealing with the connection between experience and expression.

Rethinking Conrad's Idea about Personal Memory Writing with Conrad Scholarship

As indicated above, both Conrad and Starobinski affirm the significance of lived experience, an indispensable component in any autobiographical work. At the same time, both of them emphasize the presence of style and how the creative present complicates and expands initial experiences. At the heart of such perception is the shift of one's attention from the referential representations of past life to the stylistic complexity of the writing itself.

When discussing how Conrad translates his lived experience into a remembered one in his works, most Conradian critics will remain alert to the dual dynamics of fact and fiction that dominate Conrad's writerly concerns. For Conrad, writing is not an act of holding up a mirror to his past, nor a condensed expression of his personal memory in the sense of Freudian psychology, nor a fantasy world in which he imagines everything. With John Gordan, readers are directed to how Conrad makes himself a novelist through the means of "the exploitation of the past" (31), while Albert Guerard goes further to "journeys within, and journeys through a darkness" to reveal the inner mechanism of consciousness in Conrad's writing (13).

One of Guerard's comment is of particular relevance in this discussion, and prompts reconsideration of Conrad's autobiographical works as a whole. It is stated thus:

"Heart of Darkness" is a slightly overembroidered exercise in Conrad's most elaborate style; "The Secret Sharer" and *The Shadow-Line* perhaps his two great triumphs of a style plain and pure. Of the five, at least these two maintain exquisite control over their materials without preventing the unconscious from coming into important play. (14)

Guerard's complaint about the elaborate style in *Heart of Darkness* fails to consider the interaction between formal design and the kind of remembering it enables. Conrad evolves his style of expression to pay proper attention to, and highlight, the multi-layered and protean characteristics of remembering. From this perspective, *Heart of Darkness* is not "overembroidered," but rather produced as such by the writer to tackle issue of remembering that is different from *The Shadow-Line* and the "Secrete Sharer", as I will show later in Chapter Three.

In *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (1979), Ian Watt observes that Conrad's writing is "intensely personal" (xi), perceptively noting as follows:

[it is] a paradox in the metaphysics of creation, that he worked best not by inventing situations and characters, but by so intensely and questioningly remembering the past that it finally disclosed much more than had actually happened. (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 93)

As Watt suggests, the obsessive engagement with his past reveals how Conrad's artistic version of his lived reality discloses *more* than the actual version. Therefore, the way in which Conrad organizes and orders his past comes to the fore. This necessitates a rigorous study of his uses of imagery, style, and narrative strategies, through which readers are shown a "possibly buried self", to use Guerard's words (61).

Taking Watt's observation as the point of departure, this dissertation will offer insights about what forces drive Conrad to "intensely and questioningly remember the past" (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 93). As Chapters Two, Three, and Four will illustrate later, Conrad's intense remembering of the past affirms how one's writing is influenced and modulated by experiences, while the act of questioningly remembering one's received

experiences registers and justifies writing as a place to explore the multiple possibilities that memory and narration entail.

By enthusiastically engaging with the writer's conscious mind and his experience in *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (2008), Said offers readers a preliminary view of Conrad's perceptions about the interplay between past and present (3). After analysing the writer's narrative techniques and strategies, Said argues, for example, that short stories

become that long, extended moment wherein past and present are brought together and allowed to interact. The past, requiring the illumination of slow reflection on former thoughtless impulses, is exposed to the present; the present, demanding that "desired unrest" without which it must remain mute and paralyzed, is exposed to the past. (93)

For Conrad, a text is where the past and present meet, merge and communicate. The past requires understanding and explanation from the present, while the present needs to be activated and vitalised by perpetually revisiting the past. This mutually beneficial interaction between past and present are prevalent in Conrad's works. Therefore, Said's observation above does not lose its efficacy when applied to the writer's novella *Heart of Darkness*.

There are other observations made by Said, which provide inspirations for this dissertation for further investigation. For example, having studied some critical scenes of delay in the author's short stories, he proposes that for Conrad, the present is "inevitably one of calm, of critical delay, of time circumstantially at a standstill" (94). Indeed, Conrad's works are replete with various delays, paralysis, and suspended time. These frozen moments mirror Conrad's mental states when confronted with creative blocks in *The Shadow-Line*, as I will show later in Chapter Five. Said also asserts that Conrad's mind not only "ensure[s] its

own fanatical self-consciousness,” but also “make[s] art of its emotional struggles” with the attempt to “combine fictional representation and philosophical thought into an indivisible whole” (103). This statement about Conrad’s “fanatical self-consciousness” and his endeavours to make it a part of his art inspires the writing of the third chapter. Following Said’s insights, this chapter shall discuss how the simultaneous existence of oral and written narrative modes enable readers to witness Marlow’s conflicting self-consciousness in the process of remembering.

To conclude, critical treatment of Conrad’s memory and narrative is divided into two groups. The first group regards his art as being referential and representational which mimetically portrays the writer’s past. These critics thus fix their attentions on the factuality of Conrad’s renditions of his lived reality, assuming that the past is a static and fixed reference point, and that memory will not edit and compose it into a new experience. In contrast, some critics tend to minimize the existence of autobiographical details in the writing, subjecting Conrad’s lived experience to such discourses as psychoanalysis, symbolism, and the like. They put autobiographical details in bracket as if the writer invents a whole story world to either moralize or criticize.

However, this dissertation seeks to examine Conrad’s fiction with particular attention paid to how Conrad perceives and understands his autobiographical experiences, and also how he recreates his life understood and examined into an *artefact* by employing different narrative techniques, imagery, and stylistic features. This way of study affirms and justifies what Jakob Lothe notes “a very close relationship between narrative methods and thematics” (295).

Text Selection

This dissertation includes *Almayer's Folly*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *The Shadow-Line* as the primary texts for the present discussion based on the following two principles: firstly, they take their inspiration and material from the writer's personal experiences, rather than being purely invented or imagined; secondly, these three texts trace the trajectory of how the writer develops his abilities of appropriating style and narrative methods in an artistic fashion to represent the past.

As Conrad's first literary endeavour, *Almayer's Folly* prefigures various themes and issues that the author develops into maturity in his later works. Commenting that Conrad's first text is "very much worth reading for its own sake" rather than be regarded as a supporting text for discussing other works, Ian Watt perceptively notes that *Almayer's Folly* illuminates "many of the technical problems which characterized Conrad's whole development as a novelist, including the dominant role of memory" ("*Almayer's Folly*" 177). Therefore, an investigation of memory and its evolution in the writer's career should be traced back to his first text. Given how this text was written during Conrad's transition period from a seaman to a writer, it records and transforms the author's anxieties, doubts, and dreams during that time. It would also be a suitable text, in this sense, to examine the dynamic interplay between his act of writing and the narrated events in the text.

Unlike *Almayer's Folly* which utilizes the impersonal third-person point of view, *Heart of Darkness* features Conrad's subjective storyteller Marlow who struggles to recollect and understand his Congo trip. Watt claims that "both the form and the content of *Heart of Darkness* are centered on the consciousness of Marlow" (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 102). In other words, Marlow's memory of his encounters in the Congo constitutes the content of this text, while his oral storytelling becomes the

predominant formal feature. As such, Marlow is utilized as a medium for the writer to report the conscious activities, memory, and at the same time, to highlight how Marlow struggles to translate his memories into narrative. The complex narrative techniques, such as embedded narrative, unreliable storyteller, and Marlow's different recounting of his initial experience to different interlocutors, are suitable to discuss the complexity of remembering process.

Like other texts, *The Shadow-Line* is chosen for the discussion in that it is based on the writer's first command of the sailing ship *Otago*. In this text, the writer abandons complex narrative strategies and adopts first-person point of view to confess a personal memory of an ordeal in the past. Considering how the writing process of this text is also a trial for the writer, this text offers readers a great opportunity to investigate the intricate interplay between Conrad's process of writing and the narrated sea voyage.

As Daniel Schwartz claims that "[Conrad's] eloquent letters and nonfiction prose give us important insight into his mind" (*Rereading Conrad* 6). Hence, this dissertation will heavily quote Conrad's letters to his friends, his literary agents, and his publishing house. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, *The Selected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, and *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* are its main resources for reference. Conrad's other autobiographical works *A Personal Record*, *The Mirror of Sea*, *Youth*, and *The Nigger of the Narcissus* will be frequently cited to discuss relevant issues in the dissertation.

This dissertation will not follow a systematic theoretical framework to discuss the multi-layered interactions between past and present. Instead, it believes that the rich texture of Conrad's texts serves as the best place for one to explore the multitextured relationships between memory and narrative. Therefore, this study will offer a close reading of Conrad's texts, underlining his creative appropriation of language, his writing process and its dynamic

relationship with the writer's conscious activities. Each chapter will draw on discourse from narratology, life writing, memory studies, and psychological analysis wherever this study finds they are useful.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 takes Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* as the departure point to explore how Conrad initially engages with memory and writing by focusing on the dynamic relationships between forgetting and remembering. It will demonstrate how the eponymous protagonist conducts a hyperbolic process of forgetting, and how he, ironically, ends up in failure. It then proposes to read Almayer's expressionless face as an extended metaphor of memory, and links it to Sigmund Freud's metaphor of the mystic writing pad, demonstrating why Almayer's obsession in effacing his daughter's traces does not yield the desired result of forgetting her. This chapter also explores how the writer suggests an alternative method to Almayer's way of forgetting, an alternative advocating of the premise that forgetting and its presumed opposite, remembering, are inseparable.

Proposing that the writer's initial efforts of discussing memory and forgetting have its real roots in his life, Chapter 2 proceeds to discuss how the act of writing *Almayer's Folly* functions as a commemorative act for Conrad to remember his lived experience. It will first closely scrutinize a crucial image in *Almayer's Folly*, a faceless corpse, and how Conrad represents it by utilizing disjointed times and spaces. This chapter then proceeds on to suggest that writing serves as a means for Conrad to suspend his experienced endings – the closing of his maritime career and the death of his uncle, and allow them to continue existing in his text. Thereafter, it will explore how Conrad's commemorative act is enacted in the narrative by his psychical identification with Almayer, an experiencing agent, who is placed in a similar situation as Conrad. Almayer's experience in the text reminds the writer of the

inseparability between past and present, and also affirms the possibility of incorporating the past into the present.

Discussion of Chapter 3 highlights the writer's increasingly complex understanding of the remembering process in *Heart of Darkness*. This chapter will explore how the writer dramatizes Marlow's doubt that narrative can recapture the complexities of initial experience. The ironically-charged text underscores the disparity between the real past and the narrator's remembered past, between Marlow's desire to shape a pattern out of initial experience and his concurrent awareness of lost complexity. Marlow's efforts in recounting the Congo journey, thus, illustrate how he actively engages with, and tries to transcend the confines of, the limits of remembering, yet is inevitably conditioned by these very limits. It will initially propose to read Marlow as a poetic rememberer. Thereafter, it proceeds to examine how the narrator remains conscious of the fact that, in shaping his incomprehensible experience into an intelligible narrative, he misses the complexities of the past. It will also explore two inherent limitations of rendering memory in narrative: one involves the uncommunicable life sensations, while the other concerns the permanent loss of original past. By compelling readers to see how the complexity of experiences exposes the incompleteness of narrative, this text offers a paradigmatic narrative that casts doubt on realistic representation of memory, reminding the reader of an alternative possibility that initial experience may not be completely mastered by the rememberer.

Chapter 4 offers an alternative reading to Marlow's incomplete remembering in the previous chapter, underlining how remembering is inherently a continuous act of interpreting the past. The discussion will be centred on how Marlow repeatedly returns to his Congo trip, how he retells it in different versions, and how these different interpretations act to help him better understand his initial experience. One of the central scenes in the text will also be

explored: the sudden attack of Marlow's boat by the natives. The analysis of this scene will demonstrate that some understanding of past moments can only be attained in later recollection, thus proposing that remembering is essentially an interpretative act. It then proceeds to discuss why Marlow's first interpretation – a lie – is what Bruner terms an “interpretative feat” of the narrator, rather than an immoral act to exclude women from truth (“Life as Narrative” 13). It will also explore how the rememberer reinterprets his Congo experience to the seamen on the *Nellie*, thus enhancing his understanding of it.

Different from the previous chapter's focus on how Marlow consciously interprets and recreates the past, Chapter 5 will examine how the rememberer in the creative present unconsciously reshapes the landscape of memory in *The Shadow-Line*. Through exploring the journey of the young narrator's sea voyage in the narrative in relation to Conrad's process of creating this text, this chapter will discuss how the past and present conflate in the text. A parallel reading of these two journeys will reveal that they both feature endless delays and consequently, the psychological depressions. Drawing on Sartre's discourse on the function of emotions in consciousness, it then explores how Conrad's depressive mental state in his act of writing unconsciously transforms the narration of events and scenes in his original sea voyage. Thus, the text dramatizes the writer's creative inertia and the concurrent mental states of his writing process. Ultimately, *The Shadow-Line* offers an oblique commentary of how it becomes a site of narrative where past events and the act of writing converge and conflate.

Chapter One: Boarding the Ship: Erasure and the Tenacity of Memory

“Ford” – he [Almayer] murmured from the floor – “I cannot forget.”

“Can’t you?” – said Ford innocently with an attempt at joviality. – “I wish I was like you. I am losing my memory. Age, I suppose – only the other day my Mate –”

(Joseph Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*)

As Conrad’s first attempt at exploring “the tenacity of memory,” *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) initiates the discussion of memory’s interlocking relationship with forgetting (151). The epigraph above suggests two different interactions between them. Forgetting is inevitable and irremediable as a result of the erosional effects of time. As Captain Ford declares, “I am losing my memory. Age, I suppose”, this is bound up with aging and the gradually dysfunctional mind. In this respect, men are condemned to lose their memory. Conrad also brings up the second layer of the relationship between memory and forgetting in the epigraph, as articulated by Almayer that “I cannot forget” (153). The titular character’s inability to forget his unpleasurable memories underscores the fact that some experiences of the past remain persistent.

This chapter seeks to understand how Conrad explores the intricate interplay between Almayer’s process of forgetting – what Michael Fried terms a task of “hyperbolic forgetting”⁴ – and his obsession with erasing unpleasurable memory traces in the text. By exploring how Almayer tries to control his memories, his daughter’s departure in particular, I argue that some memories cannot be forgotten by the act of consciously erasing and

⁴ Michael Fried coins this phrase to indicate that Conrad throws too much emphasis on describing how Almayer decides to forget Nina in a systematic way, from burying Nina’s footprints on the beach to the burning of the house that contains memory traces of her. Please see Michael Fried. “Almayer’s Face: On “Impressionism” in Conrad, Crane, and Norris.” *Critical Inquiry* 17.1 (1990): 209.

concealing previous memory traces. An effective forgetting process requires the protagonist to negotiate and reconcile with his pain and loss. The following discussions will revolve around two points of consideration: one examines the relationship between Almayer's conscious effacement of Nina's physical traces and forgetting, while the other regards the question of what an effective forgetting process calls for.

This chapter will first explore how the writer appropriates shifting perspectives and visual imagery in the opening paragraphs to anticipate Almayer's process of forgetting in the future. Specifically, I suggest that the text's beginning serves as a miniature narrative to demonstrate how Almayer perceives the relationship between past, present and future. This perception influences how he conducts his task of forgetting later. Furthermore, the beginning also prefigures some key elements that result in the protagonist's act of forgetting. Thereafter, this chapter proceeds to investigate Almayer's hyperbolic process of forgetting in detail. This includes his act of effacing Nina's footprints in the sand and burning the house where they had lived. In the process of presenting the protagonist's obsessive actions, the writer utilizes irony and changes in style to distance himself from his character. In doing so, the writer displays his awareness of the intricacies of forgetting. Subsequently, the third section will discuss how Conrad devises a metaphor for memory in the narrative to reveal the interplay between forgetting and remembering. I propose to read Almayer's expressionless face as an extended metaphor of memory and link it to Freud's metaphor of the writing pad.⁵ This metaphor will show why Almayer's conscious erasure of Nina's traces does not yield

⁵ In his influential essay "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'", Freud argues that the writing pad works as "an ever-ready receptive surface", while, simultaneously, it retains "permanent traces of the notes that have been made upon it". Its structure is composed of a wax slab and a thin transparent sheet. This transparent sheet consists of the upper "covering sheet" and the lower "waxed paper". The stylus scratches the upper surface first and then "presses the lower surface of the waxed paper on to the wax slab" In this way, visible traces leave their marks on the sheet. If one wants to erase the traces, "all that is necessary is to raise the double covering-sheet from the wax slab by a light pull", and the mystic writing pad is "clear of writing and ready to receive fresh notes". Please see Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Eds. James Strachey and Anna Freud. 24 vols. London: Hogarth Press 1966, p19: 228.

the desired result of forgetting her. I postulate that Almayer's error in his process of forgetting lies in his obsession with erasing Nina's physical traces in Sambir, while, according to Freud, refusing to discharge his emotional force attached to her through proper ways. Therefore, the last section will investigate the presence of such a persistent affect in Almayer's mind: his strong sense of disgrace resulting from Nina's choice of being a Malay. This section will also discuss how the writer suggests an alternative method to Almayer's way of forgetting in the narrative, an alternative that proposes the inseparability between forgetting and its presumed opposite, remembering.

The Beginning: A Miniature Narrative to Anticipate Almayer's Forgetting

Almayer's Folly rehearses Conrad's artistic and philosophical concerns. By proposing that this text appropriates "material from his own adventures as source material," Schwarz asserts that Conrad's first work "tests and refines themes and techniques that he will use in his subsequent fiction" (*Conrad: Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes* 3). In this respect, it is necessary to trace the development of Conrad's gradual maturity in writing memories of his past back to his very first work.

Set in Malaya in the late nineteenth century, *Almayer's Folly* tells the story of a Dutch merchant, Kaspar Almayer, who marries a local Malay girl for the promise of a gold mine from Lingard. Almayer and his wife live on the shore of Sambir with their half-caste daughter, Nina, who becomes the foundation of Almayer's faith after he realizes that the gold he has been promised is nowhere to be found. Almayer weaves a dream for himself that he and Nina will one day return to the Netherlands, wealthy and respectable. The unexpected appearance of a Malayan prince, Dain Maroola, into their lives changes everyone's fates dramatically. Dain and Nina fall in love, and their decision to depart from Sambir deprives Almayer of his "dream of splendid future" (*AF* 5), leaving him heart-broken and depressed.

After Nina leaves, he begins his hyperbolic business of forgetting her, first by burying her footprints on the beach, and then burning the house they lived in. Almayer's maniacal preoccupation with effacing the memory of Nina ironically ends in failure, leading to his death. The only white man on the shore of Sambir dies of his impotence in forgetting his daughter's departure and coming to reconciliation with his painful experiences.

It is in this text that Conrad initiates his exploration of the nature of memory. In *Conrad the Novelist*, Albert Guerard mentions in passing that the long flashback from chapter two to chapter five in this text can be perceived as "some of the best writing of the book" (76), which features the free flow of the remembering process. According to Guerard, these chapters convey how recollection is rendered neither as a "nominal recollection of one of the characters, nor as a sequence of author's conscious ordering," but "as the free wandering flow of an unidentified memory speaking in a personalized [and] often ironic voice" (76-77).⁶ The juxtaposition of "personal" and "ironic" modes to articulate memory suggests that Conrad revisits the past enthusiastically to render his individualized sensations. On the other hand, the writer also distances himself from his lived past in order to achieve ironic effects. The narrator's mind's eye moves freely forward to gaze at details closely and backward to reflect upon them, alternating between "highly visualized particulars" and a "panoramic" long view. Though Guerard does not examine further the nature of memory and how it manifests itself in *Almayer's Folly*, he orients us to meditate on the idea of memory and how the process of remembering works.

⁶ In this book, Guerard further argues that this narrative method – the free flow of memory – presages the vocabulary of Conrad's later impressionistic writing style: "he [the nameless narrator] shares Marlow's impulse to actualize the irrelevant through highly visual detail; and to pass over the absolutely essential in a casual subordinate clause. He has begun to develop, in other words, the vocabulary of that impressionism allegedly taught by Ford Madox Ford; a narrative method of deceptive emphasis and constantly shifting perspective, depending for much of its beauty on swift oscillations between the long view and the close, between the moralizing abstract and the highly visualized particular". Please see Albert Guerard. *Conrad the Novelist*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958, p77.

Given the complicated dynamics between memory and forgetting, I suggest that one way to understand how memory works can be achieved by shifting our attention from the sovereign domain of remembering to the process of forgetting. Memory and forgetting are inseparable entities, to the extent that Thomas Butler argues how “[a]ny proper study of memory, then has also to take into account forgetting” (16). To use Michael Fried’s words, the last three chapters in this text wrestle with “Almayer’s project of hyperbolically forgetting Nina” (197). Considering that these three chapters deal with the final stage of Almayer’s story, it is better for one to start from the beginning first to examine how it sets a stage for the advent of the pivotal moment. As Daniel Schwarz observes, “Conrad’s novels take us from the opening sentence into a unique imagined world. Upon rereading, we see how the opening paragraphs establish a grammar of psychological, political, and moral cause and effect” (*Rereading Conrad* 5). Therefore, the following discussion will closely scrutinize Conrad’s opening paragraphs to investigate how they echo and anticipate Almayer’s future work of forgetting and his fate. This is based on rereading, as Schwarz notes.

Conrad opens his narrative as follows:

“Kaspar! Makan!”

The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less.

No matter; there would be an end to all this soon! (*AF* 5)

Conrad writes his first sentence in his writing career in Malay. In hindsight, readers know that Kaspar is the first name of Almayer. Makan is the Malay word for eat. Therefore, the first sentence means that Mrs Almayer calls the protagonist to go back home to have dinner. With these opening words, readers who do not understand Malay are immediately thrown

into an unknown and foreign world. Uncertainty and ambiguity which are so characteristic of Conrad's oeuvre are revealed in his very first sentence.

More importantly, the writer gives his first voice to a female. As Michael Greaney tells readers, the first female voice "punctures a masculine dream of a self-centred universe [of Almayer]" (105). Indeed, in the narrative, Almayer's fate is changed dramatically by the main female characters, including Mrs Almayer, Nina, and Taminah (a servant). Mrs Almayer tricks the protagonist into believing the death of Dain so that Nina can elope with the Balinese prince Dain. Nina abandons Almayer. Taminah tells Almayer the news of Nina's elopement. One by one, Almayer is driven to the destructive task of forgetting his past life, which culminates in his death

The "shrill voice" of Mrs Almayer in the second paragraph in the block quote above gradually introduces readers to the protagonist's consciousness. Jeremy Hawthorn notes that "[a] failure to be alert to Conrad's use of FID [Free Indirect Discourse] can lead to serious misreadings: typically, an attribution of statements and sentiments to Conrad's authorial narrator instead of to the character" (4). To follow Hawthorn's suggestion, this chapter will pay particular attention to who is perceiving in the opening paragraphs quoted above.

The suddenness of the voice "startle[s]" Almayer's dream of "splendid future" and brings him back to "the unpleasant realities of the present hour" (*AF* 5). In the block quote above, the second sentence in the second paragraph is thus: "an unpleasant voice too". This sentence indicates Almayer's consciousness and flow of thoughts. The voice is unpleasant, while the present is unpleasant as well for Almayer. By relating this sentence to the latter half in the first sentence of the same paragraph, one can better understand that the idea of "unpleasant realities of the present hour" comes from Almayer's inner thoughts. In other words, the latter half of the first sentence is perceived by Almayer. Yet, the first half of the

first sentence of this paragraph is introduced by the narrator. In this way, it is from the outset that Conrad directs us to pay attention to who the seer is by blurring and blending what the narrator sees and what the character sees. Allan Simons suggests that this is “Conrad’s manipulation of point of view, or what we would now term ‘focalization,’” a narrative technique that plays an important role in distancing the writer’s insight from his characters (41).

By revealing the flow of the character’s inner thoughts, these two opening paragraphs paint a preliminary picture of how Almayer perceives the relationship between past, present, and future. As an obsessive dreamer, Almayer places all his hope on the future and ultimately, turns himself into a tragic Beckettian character who endlessly waits for the coming of Godot. Yet, his conviction that there must be a better future for him makes readers alert. As the third paragraph shows, the future might not be as good as the protagonist has expected it to be. His dream of wealth and power is built on the return of Dain, the Balinese prince, as the writer tells us “let only Dain return” (*AF* 6). Dain becomes an unstable and even a destructive element in the realization of his dream, for reasons which will become clear later. Given how Almayer heavily invests his attention in the future, the present is devoid of any meaning, merely serving as an intermediate stage for him to realize his dream. To make matters worse, the marked contrast between his imagined successful future and the unpleasant reality further renders his life unmoored from the present. In this respect, it is unsurprising why the protagonist tries every means to escape his present experience.

Conrad clearly discloses how Almayer sacrifices the present for the future in the text. He writes that Almayer “absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years; forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward”. The present is riddled with “bitterness of toil and

strife,” while the future is a promising land of “wealth and power”. In order to forget the unpleasant struggling, Almayer “absorbs himself in his dream” (6). Commenting on Conrad’s *Karain: A Memory*, a short story published in 1897, Ted Billy and Theodore Billy argue that modern consciousness “subverts the experience of today by obsessively dwelling on thoughts of yesterday and tomorrow” (128). This observation applies to Almayer’s case as well. By obsessively dwelling on his future dream, Almayer endeavours to neglect and forget the present experience. The notion of forgetting is first introduced here as a self-defence mechanism of Almayer who desires to escape the prison-like life on the east coast. This point is critical to the failure of Almayer’s task of forgetting, as this chapter will show later.

As the narrative progresses, more about Almayer’s consciousness is revealed. Taking no further notice of the present call of Mrs Almayer, the protagonist keeps standing on the verandah of his house, “looking fixedly at the great river that flowed”. He then focuses his attention on one of the uprooted trees with interest:

The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and soon getting free of the obstruction began to move down stream again, rolling slowly over, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in a mute appeal to heaven against the river’s brutal and unnecessary violence. Almayer’s interest in the fate of the tree increased rapidly. He leaned over to see if it would clear the low point below. It did; then he drew back, thinking that now its course was free down to the sea, and he envied the lot of that inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness. – As he lost sight of it altogether he began to wonder how far out to sea it would drift? Would the current carry it north or south? South, probably. (6)

This paragraph follows Almayer's consciousness of perceiving a drifting tree on the water. When he sees the "denuded branch," he compares it with "a hand lifted in a mute appeal to heaven against the river's brutal and unnecessary violence". On the level of the plot, upon rereading, one could argue that the simile is perceived and comprehended from the perspective of Almayer. The help-seeking hand mirrors his own mental state of desperation after he spends "twenty-five years of heart breaking struggle" in Sambir (5).

Yet, as suggested earlier, Conrad shifts his narrative focalization between the narrator and the characters frequently. It could also be possible to view the focalizer of this narrative moment as the narrator, thus enabling one to offer an alternative interpretation of the simile above. In addition to regarding the uprooted tree as depicting Almayer's mental state, the denuded branch and the hand lifted in a mute appeal also suggest another layer of meaning. In rereading the story, this hand implies Almayer's cries for help in that he is to be stripped of his promising future. His splendid future is to be ruined because of "the river's brutal and unnecessary violence."

Almayer's future is contingent on the return of Dain. Yet, as the text will show, Dain's boat has capsized in a brutal storm. Though Dain survives the shipwreck, one of his boatmen dies. This boatman's body is destroyed by Mrs Almayer to trick all the residents of Sambir to believing it to be Dain's. In this way, she can help Nina to elope with Dain and seek revenge for Almayer's unfair treatment of her in the past years. Unaware of Mrs Almayer's scheme, the protagonist is duped into believing that the mutilated body is Dain's. Because of the (fake) death of Dain, the protagonist's future is ruined. He feels that he "falls over a deep precipice" and wants to encourage himself to cut his own throat to "end this suffering" (76). In this sense, the imagery of the brutal river, the denuded branch, and the

hand crying for help prefigures why Almayer will make recourse to forgetting and why he ends in death.

In addition, Almayer's act of watching the flowing of the tree and following its journey to the sea in the quoted paragraph anticipates a central scene of the text. When Almayer is deserted by Nina, he "looked at them [Nina and Dain] as they went down the beach to the canoe...looked at the line of their footsteps marked in the sand...He looked at them embarking and at the canoe growing smaller in the distance" (146). That is to say, Almayer's act of watching the flowing of the tree prefigures what will befall Almayer in the future. He will watch the leaving of his daughter out to the distant sea for the sake of living her own life.

If one rereads this narrative moment, one will understand how the writer creates a sense of irony in the tree imagery above. When Almayer is looking at the tree which is "free down to the sea", he senses that he "envies the lot of that inanimate thing" (6). Ironically, he does not know that two days later, when he follows Nina's boat to the sea, he would "[feel] himself torn to pieces" (6, 146). Allan Simon suggests that "such privileged insight contributes to the ironic distance from which the reader is invited to view Almayer" (30).

According to what this chapter has discussed so far, the beginning paragraphs serve as a miniature narrative to not only demonstrate Almayer's perception of the relationship between past and future, but also prefigure some key elements that result in the protagonist's forgetting. Firstly, the female characters act as a catalyst to his tragedy, making him decide to forget his past. Secondly, he sacrifices his present for the dream of the future. Thirdly, two destructive key elements that lead to Almayer's strong desire to separate himself with the past are implicated in the tree image: one is the (fake) death of Dain, while the other is Nina's desertion of Almayer. Lastly, what the narrator sees differs from what Almayer perceives,

thus creating an ironical effect. This distance between the narrator and the character offers one an opportunity to explore the tension between what is hidden and what is revealed when it comes to the discussion of memory and forgetting.

Almayer's Hyperbolic Task of Forgetting

As the plot develops, the implied meanings in the above miniature narrative are fully elaborated in detail in Almayer's hyperbolic act of forgetting. The narrative opens with Mrs Almayer's "shrill voice" which startles Almayer into the unpleasant realities of the present hour (5). This portends the coming of Almayer's tragic fate and the deprivation of his promising future. After he realizes that his father-in-law has failed to secure him the gold promised earlier, the Dutch merchant places all his hope on Dain. He "shared the knowledge" of a gold mine with him and hopes that he can find the "immense fortune" (48). Yet, what comes to him instead is the news of his partner's (fake) death, destroying Almayer's only hope for a wealthy future. More devastating things take place soon after. Taminah tells him the whole story of "the deception as to Dain's death of which he ha[s] been the victim" and Nina's plan to elope with Dain (122). In desperation, Almayer attempts to stop his daughter, but ultimately fails in the end.

Nina's departure from Sambir unsettles Almayer's world and brings him great suffering. After news of Dain's death, Nina becomes the foundation of Almayer's hope. With Nina's leaving, his only "faith was gone" and there is no "greater torment" than this (134). After Nina deserts Almayer, the only wish of the protagonist is to "live only long enough to be able to forget" her (147). In speaking of unhappy events, Friedrich Nietzsche strongly proposes that forgetfulness is a salutary solution to people's well-being, arguing that "[f]orgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic...it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without

forgetting” (113-114; emphasis in original). It is no coincidence that the text abounds with darkness, either on the Pantai river or in the forest. Deprived of the ability to forget, one will be chained forever by what has happened in the past, and condemned to remember everything. Thus, the act of forgetting is, according to Nietzsche, an act to prevent the past from “becoming the gravedigger of the present” (62).

In this respect, it is beneficial for *Almayer* to actively seek to forget unpleasant events. Having watched Nina’s prau vanish “in the shadow of the steep headland” (*AF* 146), *Almayer* begins his first move:

“Wait,” whispered *Almayer*.

Now she was gone his business was to forget, and he has a strange notion that it should be done systematically and in order.

He fell on his hands and knees, and, creeping along the sand, erased carefully with his hands all traces of Nina’s footsteps. (147)

Almayer’s act of “eras[ing] carefully with his hands all traces of Nina’s footsteps” touches upon a very important issue in forgetting: the erasure of footprints (and symbolically speaking memory traces) and the presumed result of successful forgetting.

Therefore, Conrad brings up an intricate issue here by demonstrating *Almayer*’s way of forgetting: is memory the diametrical opposite of forgetfulness? *Almayer*’s behaviour seems to suggest that forgetfulness will come as long as he effaces all the traces Nina has left. By borrowing Paul Ricoeur’s observation on traces, I use the word trace for two different meanings in this chapter: it refers to the physical traces that can be effaced (such as footprints and other written documents), while simultaneously, it also refers to the “psychical trace” that

persists in one's mind (Ricoeur 415).⁷ Delicate treatment of these two disparate traces is needed, as Ricoeur suggests. However, Almayer oversimplifies the process of forgetting by reducing it to the mere erasure of Nina's footprints and other historical facts that prove her existence in Sambir, while ignoring the possible persistence of "psychical trace" in his mind.

Almayer's reductive way of trace effacement continues when he returns home. Any remnants of Nina's existence remind him of her, especially the house where they had lived together. It is full of his memories of Nina: "the brass nails of Nina's European trunk shine[s] in the large initials N.A. on the cover" (148); some of Nina's dresses are hung there; the business that he has once done is to give Nina a better life. Standing among the "torn books", "broken shelves" and other ruins in the room of Lingard and Co., he thinks "mournfully of his past life" (150).

This house, in effect, symbolizes a house of memory that defines the protagonist's life. As a house of memory, it is supposed to give stability, or at least, the illusion of stability, to Almayer's life. Yet, as the narrator informs the reader, the room of Lingard and Co. is filled with "books open with torn pages," an office desk with one of its legs broken, broken drawers, and a destroyed revolving chair (148). All these images evoke the sensation of instability and destruction, which precisely project the protagonist's inner world. Almayer's self-pity increases as he thinks of how he had suffered all the "strife" and "weariness" in the past for his daughter, only to be abandoned (149). Witnessing how his past is destroyed and future ruined with Nina's leaving, he mutters to himself: "forget".

In discussing the interrelationship between a house and memory, Gaston Bachelard perceptively notes as follows:

⁷ For more discussions on different sorts of traces, please see Paul Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, p415.

Here space is everything, for time ceases to quicken memory. Memory – what a strange thing it is! – does not record concrete duration, in the Bergsonian sense of the word. We are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of all thickness. The finest specimens of fossilized duration concretized as a result of long sojourn, are to be found in and through space. (9)

Bachelard is suggesting here that memory is not merely a record of calendar time and events that successively happen in one's life. Instead, it registers individualized and intuitive experiences. When the past is past, one can only re-collect it, but does so only at the expense of its "thickness," or the singularity of experiences. Space, however, according to Bachelard, enables one to retain the thickness of memory and conjure up profounder images of the past.

Though Conrad had not read Bachelard's claim about the connection between place and memory, his descriptions of how *Almayer* reacts to the previously affectively-charged house affirms Bachelard's idea. *Almayer* is aware of how the house acts as an inseparable connection between his past and present. Reflecting upon what he should do with the house, he is endlessly haunted by an idea: "for a long time he stood in deep thought, lost in the alarming possibilities of unconquerable memory, with the fear of death and eternity before him" (148). He realizes that the house must be taken out of his life. Otherwise, the spectral past would constantly torture him and he would remember his daughter to eternity. This idea returns us to Bachelard's argument again that a profounder past can be "found in and through space" (9).

Thus, *Almayer* "started a sequence of events, a detailed programme" to eliminate "all his past life", a programme that the writer ironically dramatizes in the text (149-150). Following his "strange notion that [forgetting] should be done systematically and in order"

(146), Almayer assumes that he knows how to accomplish the task, describing it as “first this, then that, and then forgetfulness would come easy. Very easy” (149). The implication here is the protagonist’s ignorance of the complexity of forgetting. Therefore, his reductive actions that ensue for the sake of forgetting Nina are not surprising. After he gathers everything together “in one corner of the room” (150), readers are bombarded with a series of quick actions:

He came out quickly, slammed the door after him, turned the key, and, taking it out, ran to the front rail of the verandah, and, with a great swing of his arm, sent the key whizzing into the river. This done he went back slowly to the table, called the monkey down, unhooked its chain, and induced it to remain quiet in the breast of his jacket. Then he sat again on the table and looked fixedly at the door of the room he had just left. He listened also intently. He heard a dry sound of rustling; sharp cracks as of dry wood snapping; a whirr like of a bird’s wings when it rises suddenly, and then he saw a thin stream of smoke come through the keyhole. The monkey struggled under his coat. Ali appeared with his eyes starting out of his head.

“Master! House burn!” he shouted. (150)

Compared to the slow progress of the narrative and the tropical torpor that hover above the horizon of the text, this paragraph features a series of successive actions which happen quickly one by one. Among the different actions that Almayer takes, there also exist differences between his journey to the river and his return home. Stronger and more powerful verbs are adopted for his leaving the house and the throwing of the key into the river, such as “slam,” “run,” “swing,” and “whizz,” while the pace of the narrative and the cadence of the prose are slowed down when Almayer comes back home “slowly”. This recourse to

successive actions dramatizes Almayer's simple-minded thought that forgetting starts and ends with "a sequence of events" (149).

Besides the salient feature of using verbs in the quoted passage, Conrad also initiates a narrative technique in the above quote— which Ian Watt terms "delayed decoding" — that he developed into mature use in his later fiction (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 270). As a writer obsessed with style, it is possible that he utilizes style to bring into play some hints and clues in terms of Almayer's process of forgetting. Conrad confessed in a letter that "style is a great concern to [him]" and that he is continuously "haunted, mercilessly haunted by the necessity of style" (CL 50; emphasis in original). As such, close scrutiny of his style and formal features in *Almayer's Folly* not only pays tribute to Conrad's great effort in formulating his own style, but also speaks to the covert message buried under the veneer of his carefully-crafted writing style.

In discussing Conrad's delayed decoding, Cedric Watts observes thus:

Conrad developed to sophisticated extremes the art of "delayed decoding" (Ian Watt's phrase) in descriptive passages: he presents the effect while withholding or delaying the knowledge of the cause; and the result is that the event gains in vividness of impact while initially seeming strange, random or absurd, a quality diminished but seldom erased by our subsequent perception of the rational explanation. (*The Deceptive Text* 43)

The essence of the delayed decoding, as Watts suggests in the above remarks, is that it reveals the result first and then the cause. Readers are overwhelmed by a series of sensations and impressions, which are subsequently explained.

Bearing this in mind, a return to Almayer's key-throwing episode and his act of forgetting will reveal more information. One is bombarded with the concatenation of fast-moving actions without knowing the reason. This sense of confusion, or what Watts calls "strangeness" (*The Deceptive Text* 43), is not resolved until the moment when the reader hears Ali's shout: "Master! House Burn!" (*AF* 150). At this point, the narrator offers a rational explanation to the reader's confusion: in order to close and bury his past, Almayer sets fire to the house and throws the key into the river. In doing so, he assumes that he can completely separate himself from the past.

With this "subsequent perception of the rational explanation," to return to Watts again, readers have a better understanding of Almayer's series of actions above (43). In rereading the house-burning scene, readers will agree that the narrator's utilization of fast and strong verbs that call to mind powerful and effective actions reveals Almayer's anxious desire to control his fragmented life. This desire in turn obliquely expresses that forgetting is by no means, in Almayer's words, "very easy" (*AF* 149). In this way, the writer draws attention to Almayer's oversimplified way of treating the issue of forgetting and underlines the potentially complex interactions between memory and forgetting.

Another noteworthy feature in this key separation scene is that Almayer watches the burning of the house as a detached observer. The descriptive passage above creates a vivid image of how Almayer observes the disappearance of his own memory. He first hears "a dry sound of rustling" and then the sound of "sharp cracks as of dry wood snapping" and finally a whirring sound like of "a bird's wings". Subsequently, he sees "a thin stream of smoke come through the keyhole" (150). While Almayer's action to burn the house demonstrates his firm resolution to forget his daughter, the writer's descriptive process weakens or even counterbalances this resolution. Almayer's intense attention paid to the burning of the house

and the subsequent acoustic and visual effects that Conrad's descriptions create imply the presence of a covert meaning: instead of forgetting, Almayer is in effect mourning the loss of Nina.

Noting that the narrative technique, distance, involves more than spatial and temporal ones, Jakob Lothe argues that "it can also indicate a difference between narrator and character in matters of information, insight, and attitude". He proceeds to highlight that "Conrad's fiction exhibits intricate modulations of distance" (14). Relating Lothe's insight on the writer's employment of distance to the present discussion, I propose that the house-burning scene evinces Conrad's attitudinal distance from Almayer in the matter of forgetting. In other words, the writer does not believe that forgetting can be achieved by merely effacing the physical traces of Nina. Instead, Conrad structures his text in a particular prose pattern and guides the reader's response carefully towards what he really wants to convey in the narrative.

While readers know that Almayer's way of dealing with painful experiences is not effective and shall not bring him the anticipated forgetfulness, one has to go through the changing emotional journey with him. A linear process of reading makes one initially experience the protagonist's conviction in the efficacy of trace effacement. Subsequently, one is gradually exposed to his disappointment and his final psychological collapse. At last, Almayer suffers from the fact that though he "has done all he could do" and that "every vestige of Nina's existence has been destroyed," his longed-for forgetfulness is, to his disappointment, postponed. The delayed coming of forgetfulness aggravates his sensations of anxiety, while the "tenacity of memory" leaves him "with dread and horror of death". He is "lost in the alarming possibilities of unconquerable memory" (151).

Having burned his house, the protagonist moves to Almayer's Folly, another house he built for the British empire to take over Sambir. However, this plan never materializes. The name of this house becomes the title of the novel, indicative of the folly of Almayer in building a lavish house and waiting for nothing. As a central motif in the text, it prefigures Almayer's "undying folly of his heart...to wait in anxiety and pain for that forgetfulness" which will never come (149). Postulating Almayer as a "quintessentially modern" hero who "wait[s] for nothing," Michael Greaney argues that he is "too eager sacrificing the present to the future to notice that there might be value in the *act* of waiting as well as in the object of waiting" (107; emphasis in original). Greaney's insights about the act of waiting and the act of waiting for nothing foreshadow the fate of Almayer.

A more significant aspect that Greaney brings up in his discussion of waiting is that Almayer sacrifices his present for the future. Specifically, Almayer's objective is to forget his daughter. This preoccupation makes him focus all his attention to the coming of forgetfulness, while turning his present into a stagnant one. This passive waiting finally leads him to death. At the end of the story, Conrad writes:

The only white man on the east coast was dead, and his soul, delivered from the trammels of his earthly folly, stood now in the presence of Infinite Wisdom. On the upturned face there was that serene look which follows the sudden relief from anguish and pain, and it testified silently before the cloudless heaven that the man lying there under the gaze of indifferent eyes had been permitted to forget before he died. (*AF* 155)

Almayer's death makes him get rid of "the trammels of his earthly folly". It is only at the moment of death that he is "permitted to forget" and has "that serene look". Yet, he forgets at the expense of his life.

It is also only at the moment of death that the writer tells his readers directly that Almayer has been experiencing “anguish and pain” in his act of waiting for forgetfulness (155). Before this, Conrad evokes the sensations of his central character’s suffering, but refuses to describe it squarely. Almayer’s pain is obliquely observed and mirrored by other characters’ comments of him. For example, Almayer’s servant Ali tells his friends that his master becomes a “sorcerer”. During night, his master speaks to a spirit, “weeps over it, laughs at it, scolds it, begs of it to go away, [and] curses it” (151). Likewise, Captain Ford is shaken by Almayer’s firm resolution to forget Nina, commenting that “his firmness is altogether too much for his fortitude” (153). Almayer’s excessive steadfastness overwhelms him, forcing him to remain self-constant and faithful to his words. This action constrains him within a single course of action – that is, to forget Nina – and leaves him little room for plasticity.

Almayer’s Expressionless Face as an Extended Metaphor of Memory

In Almayer’s journey of forgetting, it seems that forgetting and living are mutually exclusive. He can only be permitted to forget at his deathbed moment. As long as he is alive, he is condemned to “remember [Nina] forever”, and this “tenacity of memory” is indicated in the text (151). When Captain Ford goes to visit Almayer, Conrad writes: “Almayer let go his arm and stood very straight with his head up and shoulders thrown back, looking stonily at the multitude of suns shining in ripples of the river. His jacket and his loose trousers flapped in the breeze on his thin limbs” (153). By comparing this quote with Conrad’s previous description of how Almayer watches Nina leave, it is clear that even though a long time has elapsed, Almayer’s time seems to be frozen at the moment when he loses Nina. In both narrative moments, Conrad portrays Almayer in a similar way. His face is expressionless. The islet Almayer is on when he watches Nina depart is “full of the talk of the rippling

water” (146). After a long time, he is still “looking stonily at the multitude of suns shining in ripples of the river” (153). The image of his loose trousers flapping in the breeze transport one back to the moment when Nina leaves, as Conrad writes: “as the sun declined, the sea-breeze sprang up from the northward and shivered with its breath the glassy surface of the water” (146). All these similar representations of Almayer serve to alert one that the writer is aware of how the persistence of memory traces can unsettle Almayer’s process of forgetting.

Furthermore, Conrad employs visual images, irony, style changing, and metaphor to suggest the intricate interactions between remembering and forgetting. Metaphors are important in Conrad’s oeuvre in that they make complex things more accessible, while maintaining the quality of suggestiveness that he endeavours to create in his writing. As Conrad put it in a letter to Richard Curle, “explicitness” is “fatal to the glamor of all artistic work, robbing it of all the suggestiveness, destroying all illusion” (*Selected Letters* 448). The implication here is that the value of an artistic work lies in its indefiniteness and symbolic meanings rather than certainty and unequivocal conclusions.

One of the most compelling visual images and metaphors in the text is Almayer’s expressionless face when he realizes that Nina’s betrayal will be the inevitable result:

He looked at it [the sea] also but his features had lost all expression, and life in his eyes seemed to have gone out. The face was a blank, without a sign of emotion, feeling, reason – or even knowledge of itself. All passion, regret, grief, hope or anger, all were gone, erased by the hand of Fate, as if after the last stroke, everything was over and there was no need for any record. Those few who saw Almayer during the short period of his remaining days were always impressed by the sight of that face that seemed to know nothing of what went on within, like the blank wall of a prison enclosing sin, regrets, and

pain, and wasted life, in the cold indifference of mortar and stones. (*AF* 142-143)

Two images in the paragraph above are arresting. Firstly, emotional traces on Almayer's face are erased suddenly by the hand of fate. Secondly, the expressionless face is likened to a "blank wall". Some pages later, the writer highlights this visual image of the expressionless face for the second time after Nina vanishes from Almayer's sight.

Almayer, his head bent on one side, seemed to listen to his invisible companion, but his face was like the face of a man that has died struck from behind—a face from which all feelings and all expressions are suddenly wiped off by the hand of unexpected death. (147)

Likewise, the writer stresses the suddenness and the violence of how Almayer's emotional traces are wiped off his face in the passage above. This sudden effacement of traces recalls many scenes and visual images displaced in the text, either literally or symbolically: Almayer erasing Nina's footprints on the sand; the denuded branch raising its hand in mute appeal to heaven; the brutal storm that takes the life of Dain's boatman; the faceless corpse; the final death of the protagonist; the house-burning scene. As a condensed imagery of trace erasure, this expressionless face serves as a good metaphor to discuss the intricate interplay between memory and forgetting.

Conrad himself invites readers to consider the expressionless face as an extended metaphor of memory as well in the text. When Almayer watches Nina and Dain gradually walk towards the sea, Almayer

looked at the white dress, at the falling masses of the long black smaller in the distance, with rage, despair, and regret in his heart and on his face a peace as

that of a carved image of oblivion. Inwardly he felt himself torn to pieces, but Ali-who now aroused-stood close to his master, saw on his features the blank expression of those who live in that hopeless calm which sightless eyes only can give. (146)

The image of the face is mentioned twice in the juxtaposition of both Almayer's inner pain and his outer composure above. On the one hand, his face is represented as a peaceful one like "that of a carved image of oblivion". On the other hand, it is like a "blank" one absent of any "expression". In other words, the expressionless face is suggested as a metaphor of oblivion. The verb "carve" implies an unexpected violence imposed on the "image of oblivion" (Almayer's face), which is the wiping away of Almayer's expressions on his face (146). Therefore, I propose to read Almayer's expressionless face as an extended metaphor of how Conrad perceive trace erasure, forgetting, and remembering.

The writer's metaphor of the expressionless face recalls Freud's memory metaphor of the writing pad: the receptive face that records emotional traces; the hand of fate that suddenly effaces all expressions on the face. In order to understand the writer's metaphor better, a return to Freud's writing pad is necessary. In his influential essay "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'", Freud argues that the mechanism of memory resembles the structure of the writing pad. Here is how Freud connects the writing pad with our memory and perception system:

I do not think it is too far-fetched to compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system Pcpt.-Cs. and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception. (*Complete Psychological Works* 19: 232)

In other words, the system of Pcpt.-Cs (perception-consciousness) is compared to the transparent sheets above the wax slab, acting as the “protective shield” to ward off unpleasurable and excessive external excitations (19: 232). The wax slab under the transparent sheets is likened to unconsciousness which retains permanent memory traces. The act of writing on the transparent sheets is seen as a process of the mind’s consciousness receiving exterior stimulus, a process inseparable from that of perception.

The affinities between the writer’s descriptions of the expressionless face and Freud’s writing pad are not difficult to note for readers. The face, taken as the receptive surface (the transparent sheet), receives variegated emotions and feelings from the hand of fate. These emotional traces on the face are made and unmade according to different occasions and moods. In order to show the complexities and subtleties of the workings of memory, Freud’s model involves complex interactions between the upper covering sheets and the wax slab (i.e. between consciousness and unconsciousness). Yet, what matters most for the purpose of the present study is the act of erasing traces on the sheets and its influences.

After establishing the connection between Almayr’s act of forgetting, his metaphorized expressionless face, and Freud’s memory metaphor, I propose that the act of intentional effacement does not necessarily bring about oblivion. Freud states that “the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights” (*Complete Psychological Works* 19: 229). By these words, Freud posits that the effacement of what has been written on the receptive surface does not equate to a complete loss of them. What is effaced are the physical traces (the physical writing on the covering sheet), while some psychical memory (the lasting writing on the wax slab) will

persist. In other words, what was once experienced and written on the human mind will be remembered forever, either consciously or unconsciously.⁸

The persistence of psychical traces manifests itself and culminates in Almayer's failure to forget. According to Freud and Breuer, there are two ways for unpleasurable affects to be disposed of. One is by "abreaction", while the other is by free "association" (*Complete Psychological Works* 12: 9, 11). To put it simply, abreaction includes "the whole class of voluntary and involuntary reflexes – from tears to acts of revenge – in which, as experience shows us, the affects are discharged" (12: 8). When affects are not discharged properly and timely by means of "abreaction" (12: 9), they "enter the great complex of associations" and later experiences will rectify these affects gradually (12: 9).⁹

Yet, neither solution is taken by Almayer. In other words, Almayer does not dispose of his affective power to Nina through proper ways. After Almayer buries Nina's footprints, he makes a last "effort to shout out again his firm resolve to never forgive" Nina:

Ali watching him uneasily saw only his lips move, but heard no sound. He brought his foot down with a stamp. He was a firm man – firm as a rock. Let her go. He never had a daughter. He would forget. He was forgetting already.
(*AF* 147)

Ali sees "Almayer's lips move" in his last "shout out" without hearing any words. In other words, the "rage, despair, and regret in his heart," rather than expressed and discharged, are

⁸ Freud argues that one unconsciously remembers traumatic experiences by repetition: "the patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it." Please see Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Eds. James Strachey and Anna Freud. 24 vols. London: Hogarth Press 1966, p12: 150.

⁹ Here is an example Freud and Breuer give in their essay. If someone had a car accident, [s]he would feel unsafe and insecure about cars and relates them with danger. Yet, her or his later safe traveling experiences with cars will rectify their sense of insecurity about cars.

held back by Almayer. This is partially because of his personality of firmness: “[h]e was a firm man – firm as a rock” (147). Though Almayer “felt himself torn to pieces” inwardly when Nina deserted him, his firmness turns him rock-like, showing no affects. The tension between Almayer’s inner suffering and his external manifestation evokes the sense of suppression.

In other words, it is difficult for Almayer to watch Nina abandon him emotionlessly without having recourse to suppress unpleasurable emotions. She is “the foundation of his hopes and the motive of his courage”. The blank face hints at Almayer’s “firm resolve” to suppress his feelings within (144). As the writer has told us in the text, the blank face is “like the blank wall of a prison enclosing sin, regrets, and pain, and wasted life, in the cold indifference of mortar and stones” (143). Freud and Breuer observe that “whether there has been an energetic reaction to the event that provokes an affect” is critical to the wearing away and disappearance of “affective strength” in memory traces. Almayer’s blank face encloses all his emotions within and blocks proper pathways to dispose of the affect, such as crying, shouting, reproaching and the like.

To make it worse, Almayer’s repetition of the blank face reveals his denial of “uninhibited association” to, in Freud and Breuer’s words, discharge his affective strength towards Nina (*Complete Psychological Works* 12: 11). According to the two psychoanalysts, “a memory of a trauma, even if it has not been abreacted, enters the great complex of associations, it comes alongside other experiences, which may contradict it, and is subjected to rectification by other ideas” (12: 9). This free association of traumatic memory with other experiences necessitates that the individual is open to receive new experiences. In the text, the writer suggests that Almayer’s expressionless face is a closed-off system: “there [is] no need for any record” (*AF* 143).

In reality, Almayer locks himself to the decaying Almayer's Folly. He "longed for loneliness; he wanted to be alone"; he is reluctant to speak to anyone and "gradually he became more silent-not sulkily-but as if he was forgetting how to speak"; he is not curious and inquisitive about the external world; he hides himself "in the darkest rooms of the house" and "looks like an immense man-doll broken and flung there out of the way" (152). Such insulation of himself from external experiences makes it impossible for his memory to acquire contact with later experiences and thereby be rectified by them.

Based on what has been discussed, one can approach Conrad's understanding of forgetting and memory through the metaphor of Almayer's expressionless face. Affects resulting from unpleasurable experiences, if not properly discharged, will persist in the human mind. This explains why Almayer fails in his process of forgetting. Furthermore, the writer's demonstration of the blank face prefigures the death of Almayer. Conrad mentions in the text that on the blank face, there exists "a peace as that of a carved image of oblivion" (143). He also writes elsewhere in the narrative that peace is analogous to "a dreary tranquillity of a desert". Peace exists in the desert "only because there is no life" there (88). The threatening death beneath the peaceful surface foreshadows Almayer's final annihilation. Therefore, the apparently expressionless face is by no means expressionless, but rather asserts itself as a most expressive one to defend the ineffaceable memory traces in the text.

An Alternative to Almayer's Method of Forgetting

Almayer's error in the task of forgetting lies in the fact that he obsessively erases his daughter's physical traces in Sambir, but refuses to discharge his emotional force attached to her through proper channels. The persistence of affects in Almayer's memory drives him to the boundary of psychological madness, and eventually leads him to death. Therefore, the next question this chapter is about to deal with is thus: what is the particular affect that

Almayer refuses to discharge? In effect, Conrad gives readers the answer in the text: “it would be a disgrace – all over the islands – the only white man on the east coast. No it cannot be – white man finding my daughter with this Malay. My daughter!” (138). As readers can clearly see from these remarks, Almayer’s racial pride is the cause of his pain when he is made aware of Nina’s elopement with Dain, a Malay chief. This sense of disgrace persists in his mind and brings about his destruction. The writer, however, suggests an alternative to Almayer’s failed method of forgetting in the text. In order to successfully forget Nina, Almayer has to forget his deep-seated notion of racial polarities and remember Nina as she really is, as well as follow her dream rather than his own.

To Almayer, his dream is to return to Europe. He feels ashamed that he had married a Malay, and that his daughter is half-Dutch and half-Malay. When he is offered by Lingard to marry Mrs Almayer, he feels “a confused consciousness of shame” since he is “a white man. He marries her merely because this marriage can help him to realize “all the possibilities of an opulent existence” (6). Yet, when he accepted the marriage proposal, he had already had a plan to abandon his wife: “he had a vague idea of shutting her up somewhere, anywhere, out of his gorgeous future. Easy to dispose of a Malay woman, a slave after all” (10). In this respect, his infatuation with gold and success results from his illusion that material prosperity can conceal his own disgrace in marrying a Malay. Therefore, Mrs Almayer becomes a tool for the protagonist to realize his dream of wealth and power, and return to Europe.

Conrad is more explicit in showing Almayer’s hostility and disgust towards Mrs Almayer, while his disclosure of the protagonist’s hatred of Nina is more implicit. Robert Hampson observes that

it is [Almayer’s] sense of ‘shame’ at being married to what he considers a ‘savage’ wife that provides the energy behind his dreams, not love for Nina.

He wants to be accepted back (and accepted back at his own evaluation) with his ‘transgression’ forgiven and forgotten. It is because this is what he wants – and because he has internalized this judging (and, he hopes, ultimately forgiving) white world – his awareness of Nina is so distorted (16).

Hampson’s remarks tell us of the inner drive of Almayer’s dream of returning to Europe and his idea of taking Nina with him. This drive is motivated by his sense of shame and his desire to reconnect with Europe again. In his dream, he and Nina would “live in Europe...They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth” (5). His obsessive dream distorts how he thinks of Nina, believing that immense fortune can make others blind to the fact that Nina is half-Malay. Ironically, it is he who is blind to (and who forgets) the obvious fact that his daughter inherits half her personality from her Malay mother. Beneath his blindness is his deep-seated racial prejudice towards Malays (and Nina).

Furthermore, Almayer imposes his own dream on his daughter, never caring about Nina’s needs and who she really is. Before Nina leaves, she points out the naked truth of Almayer’s (and the European’s) hypocrisy:

You wanted me to dream your dreams – to see your visions. The visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self – then this man came and all was still – there was only the murmur of his love.
(134)

Almayer structures a dream for Nina and wants her to dream with him. Yet, his dream is a white man’s dream. Nina is cast out of this world. Her ten-year experience in Singapore

teaches her that there is “a barrier that nothing can remove” between white people and the Malays. After being rejected by the whites, she eventually decides to follow her own identity as a Malay, exclaiming proudly that “now I am a Malay” (134). Nina’s choice to be a Malay threatens the white man’s dream in which he endeavours to be blind to her “savage” identity. His “white man’s pride” makes it unbearable to accept that his daughter is leaving him for a Malay (23). He questions why Nina gives herself up to “that savage [Dain]. For he is a savage!” (133). Thus, his resolution to not forgive her and forget her soon becomes a defensive gesture to protect his dream.

In addition to Almayer’s method of forgetting, the writer pictures another possible solution for him:

And yet he was afraid. She had been all in all to him. What if he should let the memory of his love for her weaken the sense of his dignity? She was a remarkable woman. He could see that; all the latent greatness of his nature – in which he honestly believed – had been transfused into that slight, girlish figure. Great things could be done! What if he should suddenly take her to his heart, forget his shame, and pain, and anger, and – follow her! What if he changed his heart if not his skin and made her life easier between the two loves that would guard her from any mischance! His heart yearned for her. What if he should say his love for her was greater than . . .

“I will never forgive you, Nina!” he shouted, leaping up madly in the sudden fear of his dream. (144)

In the paragraph above, the writer utilizes the subjunctive mood to suggest an alternative solution to that of Almayer’s. There could have been a different world if Almayer had followed the dream of his daughter rather than his own. The mental states of Almayer moves

from his self to Nina, from his racial pride to his parental love for Nina, from his connection back to Europe and to his imagined embraced world of the Malays. This trope of movement forward and backward is employed to embody the protagonist's racial prejudice and his struggle to cross the boundary. If he could have succeeded in giving up the divisive line between his dream and Nina's, the result would have been a happy ending. He and Dain would "guard her from any mischance" (144).

As a key characteristic of *Almayer's Folly* (and Conrad's oeuvre), the use of ellipsis in the last sentence of the first paragraph is worthy of one's critical attention. Conrad once defended himself in a letter to Ford Madox Ford concerning its usage, with respect to the unwelcome reception of their collaborated work *The Inheritors*. Containing more than 400 instances of ellipses, this was a major source of annoyance for its critics. Conrad defended himself thus: "Note *The Scotsman's* review. Obscurity! Do you see what's the matter? It is the typographical trick of broken phrase: . . . that upsets the critic. Obviously. He says the characters have a difficulty of expressing themselves; and he says it only on that account. We must be careful as to that with our next" (CL 2: 340). Commenting on these words, Anne Toner argues that Conrad's awareness of the typographical trick and his suggestion of "a systematic plan for the novel's punctuation" indicate that Conrad's use of ellipses is not spontaneous and fortuitous (154). Given the deliberate efforts that the author has put into his works by ellipsis points, this dissertation has every reason to believe that they are intended to convey the author's certain meanings.

Thus, it could be argued that the ellipses, together with the subjunctive mood, are employed as a narrative technique to suggest a possible alternative to Almayer's erroneous way of forgetting, a possible world where Almayer would not have to force himself to forget Nina. Conrad insists that "the imagination of the reader should be left free" (*Selected Letters*

124). Indeed, in the what-if clauses above, readers are momentarily relieved of emotional engagements with Almayer's psychological pain. Instead, one embarks on a journey to imagine other promising futures for the protagonist. If readers are invited to complete the last sentence of the first paragraph in the block quote, it could be as follows: "What if he should say his love for her was greater than his love for his racial pride as a white man?" (*AF* 144) It is impossible to change his skin, but the white man can change his heart.

Yet, an alternative world also means an unrealized (or possibly unrealizable) one. Almayer's blurted-out sentence "I will never forgive you" forecloses the possibility of him following Nina's dream (144). With Almayer's "sudden fear of his dream" of following Nina, readers are thus brought back from the imagined future to the realistic present. The writer interrupts the flow of Almayer's thoughts, partly because the newly emerging idea is incompatible with, and above all intolerable to, his character's preconceived notion about the relationship between himself and his daughter. Sensing the threatening force in following Nina's dream, the protagonist retreats from his imagined world, a self-defensive action to protect himself.

Almayer's unwillingness and fear to change his fixed mindset about race entrap himself within his constructed conceptual prison. His "vivid desire to forget [Nina]" is regarded as "his duty to himself – to his race – to his respectable connections" (144). This duty needs the sacrifice of his individual desires and emotions for his race and culture. As the writer suggests in the text, he could have chosen another path. Yet his firmness in aligning himself with the colonial ideologies about race inhibits other possibilities. Commenting on Almayer's madness, Ian Watt argues that "his whole existence has been a continuously accelerating process of protecting his ego ideal by insulating it from reality" (Introduction lxi). The above remarks suggest that the purpose of his insulation from external realities is to

protect his “ego ideal”.¹⁰ The isolation does not restrict itself to the isolation from external realities, as Watt suggests in the quote above, but also involves his isolation from any possible idea that threatens his ego ideal.

Indeed, Almayer imagines himself in the form of an ideal self, one that is influenced by his family and his father-in-law. Lingard is “a hero in Almayer’s eyes by the boldness and enormous profits of his ventures” (AF 9). When he persuades Almayer to take his offer to marry Mrs Almayer, he conveys the idea that nobody “will see the colour of your wife’s skin. The dollars are too thick for that” (10). Wealth becomes a priority for Almayer. Apart from Lingard, Almayer is also hugely influenced by his mother. All through his whole life, he tries every means to secure immense fortune so that he can return to Europe, respected and wealthy, a desire that he had got from his mother. She “bewail[s] the lost glories of Amsterdam” and dreams of returning home one day. Even though he has never been to Europe, he “[has] heard [his] mother’s talk so often that [he] seems to know all about it” (16).

This is not surprising, considering that Almayer is a victim of historical conditions. In a time when the West viewed the East as an exotic place, full of treasure and uncivilized people, Almayer is conditioned to dream what the West dreams and hate what the West hates. Edward Said claims that “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” (*Orientalism* 204).

¹⁰ The concept of “ego ideal” recalls Freud and his observation on the function of it in our mental structure. He first puts forward the idea of ego ideal in his essay “On Narcissism: An Introduction”, in which he describes the origin of it thus: “[Man] is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when ... he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal”. An infant develops a state of original narcissism, believing he is perfect and omnipotent. Yet, as a result of the parents’ criticism of him, the child gradually loses the delusion of his perfection, and thus transfers his infantile narcissism to an ego ideal in the external world. Please see Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Eds. James Strachey and Anna Freud. 24 vols. London: Hogarth Press 1966, p14: 94.

Almayer is no exception, attempting to mask his guilt by insisting that it is his racial pride that forms his mindset. More importantly, by insisting that not forgiving Nina is a duty to himself and his connections in Europe, Almayer builds another illusion of self-deception, an illusion that he is a tragic hero and “carr[ies] his burden to all eternity” (119). Ironically, it is only a self-defensive act that reflects his unwillingness to wake up from his dream and recognize his own failure.

These illusions are necessary to sustain his life, and Almayer keeps crafting new ones for himself to stay within his world of dreams. “It may well be impossible to live by an illusion,” Juliet McLauchlan observes, “it is even more impossible to live without it” (81). Indeed, the dream scene in the text highlights the impossibility of Almayer’s living without an illusion. After Almayer is deceived into believing that Dain is dead, he gets drunk and has a dream on the exact night when Nina and the Malay chief elope. Out of her love and (or) hate for Dain, Taminah goes to Almayer’s house to expose their conspiracy. Almayer is gradually shaken by her “out of the senseless annihilation of drunken sleep” to return “through the land of dreams, to waking consciousness”. In his half-waking mental state, he hears Taminah entreat him to “go, go before it is too late”. The narrative presents Almayer’s half-awake psychological activities as follows:

Get away! But how? If he attempted to move he would step off into nothing and perish in the crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support. And what were the voices saying? Urging him to move! Why? Move to destruction! Not likely!...He got a firmer foothold and stiffened his muscles in heroic resolve to carry his burden to all eternity. (*AF* 119)

As his psychological activities show, Almayer has his own defence mechanism to protect himself from external threatening realities. He will not move a step to get himself out of his

own world, knowing that if he were to move, he would “step off into nothing”. He believes that he is “the only support” for himself in “the crashing fall of the universe” (119). He has his own way to deal with the unpleasurable experiences that threaten his own dream: to keep dreaming regardless of the expenses that follow.

Affirming that Almayer is “gifted with a strong and active imagination,” the narrative shows us how Almayer keeps weaving dreams for himself even if Nina’s departure robs him of his last hope of success (10). After Nina leaves, Almayer crafts another illusion for himself: his hyperbolic task of forgetting Nina and isolating himself from all the traces she has left in Sambir. He blames everything on Nina as a defensive gesture. By emotionally distancing himself from Nina – a threatening stimulus from the real world, he defends his dream - and in order to sustain his dream, he seeks refuge in opium. Ironically, it is shown earlier that Almayer loathes “seek[ing] consolation in opium” due to his “white man’s pride” before Nina forsakes him (23). That he abandons himself to opium – which he had once regarded as the sign of degradation – proves his desperate determination to sustain this illusion at any cost. Nevertheless, isolating himself from Nina is fated to be the “failure of his life” (5).

In order to forget Nina effectively, Almayer has to wake from his own dream and experience the world as a waking world. It is important for him to remember, rather than to forget, that Nina is a half-caste and that she has the freedom to choose an identity for herself. Nina is Dutch, while being Malay as well. Yet, strictly speaking, she is neither Malay nor Dutch. What matters most is to embrace Nina as she is and respect her dream. If Almayer could wake from his dream, forget his racial polarities, and realize that everything is interconnected instead of being fixed, he could have avoided his painful task of forgetting.

When it comes to the interconnectedness between remembering and forgetting, one can find this idea in Conrad's descriptions of landscape. As a stylist, Conrad's "stylistic energy" of *Almayer's Folly*, as Albert Guerard observes, comes from "distancing". Guerard further suggests that one example for such act of distancing is Conrad's "excessive amount of landscape description" (76). Indeed, regarding what the writer intends to convey to readers, his descriptions of landscape sometimes can reveal more than the overt plot.

Here is a typical Conradian description of natural scene from the narrative. Before Dain departs from Sambir to find the gold, he has a secret rendezvous with Nina on the river of Pantai. When they are ready to part, Conrad orients readers to perceive the intense workings of nature:

The intense work of tropical nature went on: plants shooting upward, entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion, climbing madly and brutally over each other in the terrible silence of a desperate struggle towards the life-giving sunshine above – as if struck with sudden horror at the seething mass of corruption below; at the death and decay from which they sprang. (*AF* 55)

The savage and primitive force that is at work here stirs one's imagination and constantly haunts one in comparison to the overall dreamlike paralysis in the narrative. However, the descriptions of a primitive land offer the writer an imaginative refuge from a rigid and mechanical conceptual mode (such as *Almayer's*), particularly in the larger context of the historical optimism in the nineteenth century. In this sense, landscape descriptions are strategically controlled by Conrad, and employed as a means to suggest an alternative understanding.

In the verbal rendering of the natural scene above, one can feel Conrad's poetic sentiment as well as his rhetorical eloquence. Ian Watt sees the above imagery as "typical of

Conrad” in presenting “nature in motion” (Introduction liii). He describes the kinetic nature as follows: “nature’s cycle begins in death and decay, and though some spectacular flowers may manage to thrust themselves up into the sunshine, they soon fade, die, and sink back into the corruption where they began” (liii). For Conrad, nature exists not only as a place for one to inhabit and observe, but as a place to illuminate human experience, for example, the experience Almayer has encountered in the text. In other words, landscape description offers the writer a metaphoric locale to meditate on and articulate the intricate relationship between memory and forgetting. The natural cycle of the entangled plants striving for survival proves impossible for delineating a clear line between life and death. It resists polarities by blurring such dichotomies as life and death, human and nature, light and darkness, order and chaos, up and below. The plants that are “entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion” exemplify the interconnections between different elements in the world.

In this way, the writer delivers the idea that forgetting and its presumed opposite remembering are “entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion” (*AF* 55). Almayer tries every means to push aside his memories of Nina, yet he fails. His efforts are to forget his daughter, yet he remembers her to eternity – death. In other words, Conrad seems to suggest that forgetting Nina does not mean to keep her outside of his consciousness. Conversely, Almayer should embrace and keep her *within* himself. This idea is demonstrated in the footprints-burying scene where Almayer “erase[s] carefully with his hands all traces of Nina’s footsteps” and “piles up small heaps of sand” which look like “miniature graves” (147). Commenting on this scene, Ian watt sees this metaphorical scene as one of Conrad’s achievements to express Almayer’s inner feelings:

Conrad perhaps obtrudes himself somewhat more than Flaubert would when he supplies the metaphorical gloss “graves” for Almayer’s piles of sand; and

the symbolic action itself is rather more unrealistic than anything in Flaubert, presumably because Conrad, lacking Flaubert's great ability to put us directly into the mind of his characters, preferred to present even their interior life through externalized action; but this is itself a development of Flaubert's efforts to present thought as well as action in terms of sensory images.

("Almayer's Folly" 169)

Watt assumes that Conrad conceals his inability to directly present the character's consciousness by metaphorizing the piles of sand as "miniature graves" (*AF* 147). Yet, a look at Conrad's own words may reveal more. In his letter to Hugh Clifford, he insists that every word contains the truth: "the things 'as they are' exist in words; therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts should become distorted – or blurred" (*Selected Letters* 124). Considering his obsessive thoughts on the use of language, I believe the image "miniature grave" delivers truth in his eyes. Watt further argues that the "sensory image" of the grave pictures Almayer's "interior life" ("Almayer's Folly" 169). Indeed, the protagonist's rage, desperation, grieve and regret are all embodied by his externalized action to pile up the graves on the beach. I also propose that the writer utilizes the imagery of grave as an alternative solution to Almayer's rigid way of forgetting.

Nina's footprints are erased and substituted by the miniature graves on the sand. Reflecting on the imagery of the graves, Michael Fried proposes that "genuine erasure is impossible". He further argues that the act of substituting footprints with the graves

defines erasure as a visible marking over a pre-existing writing – more precisely, as itself a mode of writing that renders irretrievable a prior writing (as the heaps of sand and miniature graves cover up Nina's footprints) but whose own legibility *as* erasure depends on a certain material survival of the

original ‘text’ (as the heaps of sand and miniature graves may be seen as inverting the impressions Nina’s footsteps made in the sand)”. (212; emphasis in original)

Fried’s definition of erasure in the context of *Almayer’s Folly* is inspirational. If one regards the act of trace erasure as a symbolic act of forgetting, it is reasonable for one to presume that, to follow Fried’s suggestion, Almayer’s forgetting is itself “a mode of writing that renders irretrievable a prior writing”. Specifically, the prior writing refers to Almayer’s memories of Nina. His act of erasure (and forgetting) suppresses his previous memories to the innermost depth of his consciousness in order to protect his ideal self. Yet, his act does not generate a genuine erasure, but instead leaves new “visible markings” – or memory traces in his life (212). The miniature graves are these new memory traces. The graves act as a visual imagery reminiscent of the act of mourning and commemorating. In other words, the writer seems to suggest that the act of forgetting is closely interlocked with the act of mourning and commemorating.

Seen from this perspective, Almayer’s isolation of himself from external realities can be read in a different way. His behaviour follows the one who is mourning: preference of loneliness; refusing to talk to others; losing interest in the external world. According to Freud, a completed work of mourning is represented by a “free and uninhibited ego” through a “slow and gradual” course, in which the libido energy is displaced to another “substitute” (*Complete Psychological Works* 14: 244-245). This process of detaching from the original object (Nina) and reattaching libido energy to another substitute is stated as a process to incorporate the lost object within. In reading Freud, Edward Casey explicates the process of incorporation thus: “I interiorize the other, set him or her up *within me* as an abiding presence” (*Remembering* 240; emphasis in original). As a result of this process of

incorporation, the mourner keeps the deceased within, but simultaneously his ego is rendered, in Freud's words, "free and uninhibited again" (*Complete Psychological Works* 14: 245).

However, the process of incorporation is impeded by Almayer. For him, Nina "[has] to be taken out of his life, stamped out of sight, destroyed, forgotten" (*AF* 149). This proceeds from his realization that Nina is a reminder of his broken dream and ruined future, a threatening factor that has to be driven away from his consciousness. To keep Nina "out of his life" delimits a divisive line between what should be forgotten and what should be remembered (149). As such, the mind acts like a censorship mechanism. This "self-conscious [and] willful forgetting," according to Casey, can only "end by a forceful return of what has been censored into the realm of the remembered" ("Forgetting Remembered" 300).

In other words, what Almayer has censored in his mind will return in a more forceful way. Almayer's hallucination of Nina is such a signal. In the ruined house, he is haunted by the presence of a ghost-child. As the writer tells us that "wherever he went, whichever way he turned, he saw the small figure of a little maiden with pretty olive face" (*AF* 153). Robert Hampson argues that "the phantom child, not Nina, was the real basis of his hopes. In his despair, this phantom haunts him to remind him of his dreams and his self-ideal" (30). While the real basis of Almayer's dream is sabotaged, he takes pains to suppress this fact and keeps living in his illusion. On the level of the plot, the haunting child returns to remind Almayer of his failure. However, it also serves as a sign to remind readers that the protagonist can forget Nina in a proper way. Unfortunately, Almayer's inability to give up his racial pride and recognize Nina's own identity eventually causes his death. In death, he is "permitted to forget" both Nina and his unpleasant realities (155).

The presence of the haunted Nina, thus, undermines Almayer's assumptions about forgetting, and at the same time, figuratively indicates the writer's attitude about the dynamic

relationship between remembering and forgetting, an attitude that acts as a counterpoint, while providing an alternative as well.

Conclusion

As is shown in the discussions above, Almayer's forgetting process motivates the unfolding of the plot thematically and structurally in the narrative. By reading and rereading, one can see how Conrad manipulates shifting perspectives and various imagery in the opening paragraphs to prefigure Almayer's act of forgetting in the future. Albert Guerard openly commends the writer's skill of modulating the reader's attention to oscillate from character to narrator, a skill that Guerard celebrates as "the beauty of changing perspectives" (82). By indicating that what the narrator (and Conrad) sees is different from, and even contradictory to, what Almayer perceives, the text is itself fraught with multi-layered tensions and ironical effects.

As a miniature narrative of Almayer's forgetting task, the beginning of this text allows readers to have a glimpse of Almayer's perception of the relationship between past, present and future. The protagonist's obsession with his dreams and his tendency to sacrifice the present for the future prefigure his tragedies and the eventual death. In addition, the tree imagery in the opening paragraphs suggests two key destructive elements that give rise to Almayer's strong desire to separate himself from the past: one is the (fake) death of Dain; the other is the desertion from his daughter Nina.

Almayer's exaggerated way of forgetting his daughter includes burying her footprints on the beach and burning the house where they have spent time living together. His arduous efforts to systematically erase every trace of Nina's existence, as a matter of fact, dramatize his fruitless quest, and highlight the undeletable and indestructible residue of lived experiences. In the process of presenting the protagonist's obsessive fascination with physical

trace effacement, the writer distances himself from his character by utilizing different styles. For example, in the key-throwing scene, Conrad abandons his elaborate way of describing people and events, turning instead to a series of precise and concrete strong verbs. This change of style enables one to visualize Almayer's actions more vividly and directly experience his felt sensations.

Conversely, in describing how Almayer watches his house burning, the writer returns to his sensation-evoking style to intellectually distance himself with his character. For Almayer, the intense attention paid to the burning of his house is an attempt to cut his relationship with his past and ensure that every trace is wiped off. Yet, the reading process of this scene invites readers to reflect upon an alternative possibility: Almayer is mourning the loss of Nina. This impression is effected by the acoustic and visual effects that Conrad's highly affectively-charged descriptions generate in the text, and the concurrent attention Almayer pays to the burning house. Through the technique of distancing, the writer demonstrates his awareness of the intricacies of forgetting.

Bearing this in mind, this chapter conceives of Almayer's expressionless face as an extended metaphor of memory and subsequently links it to Freud's metaphor of the writing pad. What the investigation has found is that the conscious erasure of physical memory traces is not the same as the absence of memory. Almayer's desired oblivion is "so slow to come" (*AF* 150) because the affective force attached to Nina is not properly "disposed of" either through "abreaction" or through "association" in the sense of Breuer and Freud's use of these two terms (*Complete Psychological Works* 12: 9, 11). In other words, Almayer's folly in his forgetting process lies in his obsessively effacing Nina's physical traces in Sambir, while refusing to discharge his emotional force attached to her through proper ways. As a result, the persistence of affects drives him to the boundary of psychological madness.

The discussion that follows shows that the persistent affect that inhibits Almayer's forgetting is his racial pride. His deep-seated sense of racial polarities makes him blind to (and forget) the present realities that Nina is a half-caste. However, Nina's choice to be a Malay reminds him of his failure in the past, threatens his racial pride, and makes him feel disgraced. In response to this threatening element, Almayer consciously weaves an illusion for himself, refusing to awaken from his dream. He assumes that forgetting her is a heroic action to remain loyal to European connections. The tension between acknowledging Nina's Malay heritage and preserving his racial pride gives rise to his death.

However, the writer suggests an alternative way to Almayer's failed method of forgetting in the text. His uses of what-if clauses and ellipsis marks invite readers to imagine an alternative world for Almayer, a possible world where Almayer does not have to force himself to forget Nina. What he needs to do is to give up and forget his own racial pride, recognize and remember Nina as who she really is, and follow her dreams. Furthermore, the writer also seeks help from his descriptions of natural landscape to suggest the dynamics between remembering and forgetting. The intense work of natural environment in Sambir embodies the interconnections between different elements, and also figuratively affirms the subtle interactions between remembering and forgetting. In doing so, the writer imparts the idea that forgetting and its presumed opposite remembering are "entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion" (*AF* 55). This brings one to read Almayer's footprint-burying scene anew, in which he substitutes footprints with miniature graves. This sensory image of miniature graves implicitly suggests the delicately interlocked relationship between forgetting, mourning and commemorating. Yet, an alternative world means an unrealized (or possibly unrealizable) world. Almayer's fear of stepping out of his own dream forecloses the possibility of achieving a desired result.

As Conrad's first literary attempt, *Almayer's Folly* celebrates the permanence of memory and resists polarized thinking between remembering and forgetting. I propose that Almayer's unsuccessful process of forgetting in the text succeeds in another way for Conrad as a writer-rememberer of his own past outside the text. John Gordan observes: "[Conrad's] memory was responsible for his being a writer. He turned to the past, not to exploit, but 'to snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life...'" *Almayer's Folly* was a commemoration; *The Nigger* and *Youth* were valediction" (30). Gordan's comments on *Almayer's Folly* is insightful as it reveals that the text serves as a commemoration of Conrad's memory of his lost past. How does Conrad's writing function as an act to commemorate his past? What does Conrad celebrate in the commemorative space of text? These questions provide the inspiration for the next chapter, where I will discuss the questions of writing as a remembering medium and text as a commemorative space by identifying Conrad the writer-rememberer outside the text with the central character Almayer in the text.

Chapter Two: Leaving Port: Writing to Commemorate the Past

There are in life events, contacts, glimpses, that seem brutally to bring all the past to close. There is a shock and a crash, as of a gate flung behind one by the perfidious hand of fate. Go and seek another paradise, fool or sage. There is a moment of dumb dismay, and the wanderings must begin again...

(Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest*)

Almayer's Folly (1895) features radical breaks from the past, both literally and symbolically. These include, among others, Nina's departure from Sambir and break with her old life; Mrs Almayer's challenge and revenge against Almayer's established authority at home; and Almayer's forced exile from his promised land of gold and his respectable life. The epigraph demonstrates that there always exist some endings in "life events" that "seem brutally to bring all the past to close". This necessitates one's strenuous efforts to construct a continuous link between the past, the present and the future, ensuring that life can move forward. As Conrad himself reflected: "the wanderings must begin again" (*Tales of Unrest* 134). Chapter One has discussed Almayer's impotence in reacting to the unexpected abandonment of Nina and the dispossession of his splendid future. His refusal in incorporating the work of remembering into his forgetting process renders his quest for redemption fruitless. As such, properly reacting to loss is critical to transforming an ending into a new beginning of life, or as Conrad has it in the epigraph, a new "wandering".

This chapter seeks to understand the root of Conrad's patho-logical¹¹ obsession in crafting literary tropes and scenes that entail tremendous ruptures from the past in *Almayer's*

¹¹ According to Paul Ricoeur, Aristotle distinguishes the act of recollection and memory. For Aristotle, memory is "directly characterized as affection (pathos), which distinguishes it precisely from recollection". For Conrad, I maintain that recollection is a conscious act of searching for the lost past, and that the verbal re-presentation of it is driven by his "pathos" for past traces. Conrad's own emotional attachment to his past is thus implicated in his

Folly. I posit that these literary expressions of endings have root in Conrad's own biographical experiences, in particular, the closing of his maritime career and the death of his uncle. In turn, re-presenting his personally felt endings in disguised verbal form offers him a stage to experiment ways of perceiving and preserving the past. As such, I argue that the act of writing *Almayer's Folly* (and other early texts) functions as a commemorative act for Conrad to preserve and extend his own past experiences in the future. Two issues are raised and answered: one concerns why the act of Conrad's writing *Almayer's Folly* serves as a commemorative act, while the other involves how this commemorative act is enacted in the text through Conrad's psychical identification with his protagonist Almayer.

For the purpose of developing my argument, this chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, it will set out to investigate Conrad's biographical details during the writing of the text, through which I postulate that Conrad the writer experienced similar losses and endings in his own life, just as Almayer does in the text. Thereafter, it will proceed to closely scrutinize a central image in *Almayer's Folly*, a defaced corpse, to discuss how writing can suspend death and endings, and prolong their existence in texts. In this sense, the act of writing for Conrad is transformed as an act of commemorating, an act that allows him to establish a continuity between his past maritime adventures and his writing experiments. In the last section, by proposing to read Almayer as an experiencing agent¹² Conrad has psychically identified with, it will explore how Conrad's commemoration of his past is enacted in the text. Almayer's unproductive quest of forgetting in the text validates the inseparability between past and present, as well as the possibility of incorporating the past

strenuous act of searching for the best scenes and tropes to re-present what he recollects in his writing. Please see Paul Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004, p15.

¹² As I will show later, the term "experiencing agent" is borrowed from David Herman's idea of "experiencing minds". Aligning himself with those who insist that the force of narrative can transgress the boundary of qualia (that is, the first-person-point-of-view consciousness), Herman argues that "narrative... is uniquely suited to capturing what the world is like from the situated perspective of an experiencing mind". Please see David Herman. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2011, p156.

into the present. This encourages Conrad the writer to keep writing “volume after volume” by looking back at his past seafaring experience (*PR* 30). Accordingly, Conrad had not completely abandoned his identity as a seaman as he started his new career as a writer. Nor had he indulged himself in his glorious past and refused to embark on new wanderings. Instead, he chose to dig into his lived experience and transform it into mnemonic scenes and images. Witnessing his past experiences being altered and retained on the pages of his work, the writer succeeds in commemorating his losses in an artistic way, and also turning them into inexhaustible sources of his creation.

A Turning Point of Conrad’s Life in 1894

Almayer’s Folly is principally based on the real story of William Charles Olmeijer, a Dutch trader whom the author came to know in 1887 when he was sent to Singapore to seek a medical cure. In his memoir *A Personal Record*, Conrad confessed that when writing *Almayer’s Folly*, he was “thinking of the man Almayer” (*PR* 73). After their first encounter, Olmeijer, and other “Malays, Arabs and half-castes” often visited Conrad’s residence. In recalling his first novel, Conrad tries to convince one that Almayer and these “sun-bathed existence[s]” “demand to express [themselves] in the shape of a novel,” because of “that mysterious fellowship” that unites people on the earth (73-74). That Conrad attributed his first work to the “mysterious fellowship”, however, seems too general and thus unconvincing to readers (73). Regarding the question of what had propelled Conrad to write *Almayer’s* life as his first literary labour, Ian Watt, himself citing Jean Starobinski, affirms the importance of “proper names” on the continuity of memories to individuals (Introduction lxiii). As he further argues:

For Conrad it was through memory that the past of the sailor was to become the future of the writer; the *names* enshrined in Conrad’s memory were the

most objective bridge between his past and his present; they were the symbolic tokens of the unknown but continuing identify of the man who had carried them in his mind. (Introduction lxiii)

Judging from the quotation above, it is no coincidence that there is little change between the name of Conrad's first fictional central character Almayer and his real friend Olmeijer except for the anglicized form of spelling (*PR* 23). This name, as a referent of a historical existence in the outside world, transports Conrad back to the scene where they first met each other and the whole world of his past as a seaman, anchoring his own existence accordingly as a continuous one among the vicissitude of his life events.

Yet, from the scant historical evidence one can get of Olmeijer, one learns that he "died back home at Surabaya in 1900 – that is, five years after publication of *Almayer's Folly*" (Watt Introduction xxii). As many scholars would agree, literary creation is not necessarily faithful to real experiences. Nevertheless, when one relates the function of Conrad's first novel in bridging his two disparate lives and thus constructing a continuous identity for himself, this incongruence invites meditation on the reason why he invents Olmeijer's death, especially when he himself declares that

An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories may serve worthily that spirit of piety towards all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of the man reviewing his own experience. (*PR* 35)

Two things are worthy of attention here: one concerns Conrad's structuring principle of reproducing his memories in writing, while the other regards the issue of the "spirit of piety". In the process of rendering the past in words, Conrad does not see imagination as the opposite

of memory. Conversely, he points out that the act of writing engages with both “an imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories” (35).

Conrad’s idea about imagination and its role in rendering memories is in keeping with his philosophical and artistic contemplations. He claims in a letter that “[h]omo duplex has in [his] case more than one meaning” (*Selected Letters* 172). At the heart of such a concept as homo duplex is the quality of duality that dominates Conrad’s life experiences, personality, artistic creations, and even Conrad scholarship.¹³ Two opposed forces divide, unite, and drive the unfolding of both the writer’s life and his works, a tension that holds everything about Conrad together.

When one relates the homo duplex idea to the recreation of personal experiences, it means: firstly, Conrad remains true to original experiences, while at the same time possesses a free mind to conduct imaginative mental travels; secondly, he looks back to the real past, while simultaneously extending its existence in imaginative and illusory narrative. This Janusian face that features the process of Conrad’s translation of “authentic memories” is proposed by him as “the supreme master of art as of life” (*PR* 35).

This way of conceptualizing the rendition of memory brings one to the second issue in the quote above – the “spirit of piety”. Though Conrad has openly acknowledged and succinctly formulated his idea of writing lived experience as “an imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories,” it does not mean that he will appropriate imagination to invent scenes and events (*PR* 35). Instead, in recollecting how he began his first work, Conrad revealed that “a sentiment akin to piety” precipitated him to “render in words assembled with conscientious care the memory of things far distant and of men who had

¹³ Nidesh Lawtoo discusses how Conrad’s life acts as double and his critics as double in detail in his introduction to *Conrad’s Shadow: Catastrophe, Mimesis and Theory*. Please see Nidesh Lawtoo. *Conrad’s Shadow: Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory*. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2016, pxiii-xviii.

lived” (24). The men who lived far away both in space and time refer to those acquaintances he had met in Singapore. According to Conrad, the production of his first novel resulted from his desire to pay tribute to those people living in his memory. Therefore, in returning to the past, he endeavours to search for the best expression “with conscientious care” in the hope of rendering justice to them. This means that he should be very careful in dealing with those existences in his mind.

Surprisingly, Conrad invented the scene of Olmeijer’s death in the text, an act that betrayed his “retrospective piety,” to use Ian Watt’s terms (Introduction lxii). For a writer who does not like inventing scenes and events, what does this invented death reveal about him? I suggest that a cross reading between the text and Conrad’s biographical details will be fruitful in this discussion. The growth of *Almayer’s Folly* from the first line to its publication between 1889 and 1895 was a long journey for Conrad, replete with various accidents and interruptions. Readers will notice that the year of 1894 was a turning point of Conrad’s life: he ended his sea life while he was producing the tenth chapter of *Almayer’s Folly*; his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, passed away.

These two changes can be detected, either explicitly or implicitly, in the plot as well as formal design of *Almayer’s Folly*. In *A Personal Record*, Conrad recollects how his process of writing this chapter was interrupted unexpectedly by others. On board the ship *Adowa* in Rouen, Conrad was scribbling lines on a pad while the third officer asked him this question:

“what are you always scribbling there, if it’s fair to ask?”

It was a fair enough question, but I did not answer him, and simply turned the pad over with a movement of instinctive secrecy: I could not have told him he had put to flight the psychology of Nina Almayer; her opening

speech of the tenth chapter and the words of Mrs. Almayer's wisdom which were to follow in the ominous oncoming of a tropical night. I could not have told him that Nina had said: "It has set at last." He would have been extremely surprised and perhaps have dropped his precious banjo. Neither could I have told him that the sun of my sea-going was setting too, even as I wrote the words expressing the impatience of passionate youth bent on its desire. (*PR* 20)

The opening sentence of the tenth chapter – "It has set at last" – not only acts as the catalyst on the level of the plot and leads to the "ominous oncoming of a tropical night" in the text, but also connotes Conrad's nostalgic sensibility and his mourning for the setting sun in his seafaring life. In 1893, Conrad signed on the *Adowa*, a ship that Conrad confessed was his "last association with a ship," yet never got the chance to set off on its journey (*PR* 21). During his "contemplative life" on the *Adowa*, Conrad began the tenth chapter of *Almayer's Folly* with the opening sentence "it has set at last" (20-21). As he wrote this sentence, he felt that "the sun of [his] sea-going was setting too" (20). In 1894, he ended his life as a seaman. The sunset in the text conflates with the sunset of Conrad's maritime career.

What does it mean that the sun has finally set both in and outside the text? Conrad continues to explain it like this:

While the sun shone with that dazzling light in which her love was born and grew till it possessed her whole being, she was kept firm in her unwavering resolve by the mysterious whisperings of desire which filled her heart with impatient longing for the darkness that would mean the end of danger and strife; the beginning of happiness, the fulfilling of love; the completeness of life. – It had set at last!" (*AF* 111)

In the text, the sunset is the dividing line between day and night, between the “dazzling light” and the “darkness”, between a new “beginning of happiness” and an “end of danger and strife” (111). Though the sunset means a new hope, Nina is overwhelmed by “the faltering distrust of that unknown future waiting for her in the darkness of the river” (111).

Figuratively, this emotional structure of hope and fear serves as a paradigmatic one for someone who is about to break up with the past yet simultaneously uncertain about the future, a tension that well mirrors Conrad’s mental state in 1894. Back then, Conrad sensed the imminent ending of his sea life and, above all, he had to make sense of that ending. In a letter to his aunt shortly after he had ended his maritime career, he wrote: “I well understand this yearning for the past which vanishes little by little, marking its route in tombs and regrets. Only that goes on forever”. In this same letter, Conrad referred to the time of his sea-life as the “epoch of the greatest possible perfection” before he committed himself to artistic creation, but he felt that this episode of the past was “vanishing little by little,” and finally would enter the realm of oblivion (*Selected Letters* 172). In this sense, it could be argued that he indeed could “well understand” Nina’s nostalgic impulse to return to the past.

If Conrad’s ending of his sea life is a symbolic and abstract loss, then the death of his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski one month after he bid farewell to his ship exacerbates the situation, thus making him feel the sense of loss and deprivation more deeply. A letter to Marguerite Poradowska, his aunt, attests to his grief and pain. Conrad wrote that, with his uncle’s death, “it seems as though everything in [him] has died”. He further acknowledged that his uncle’s death “seems to have carried [his] soul away with him” (*Selected Letters* 26). Even ten years later, Conrad “feel[s] his loss” and “cannot write about Tadeusz Bobrowski...without emotion” (171).

Therefore, the complicated emotions that enveloped the young Conrad back then generated a need for expression in a certain way, be it in a letter to his aunt or a reshaping of the sensations in a fictional work. As Hanna Segal suggests, “the emotional constellation” during the period of writing *Almayer’s Folly* is “the source of [Conrad’s] creativity,” including not only the emotional turbulence stemming from his ending of the seafaring life, but also the grief and pain that the news of Bobrowski’s death produced on him (100).

Almayer’s Folly is dedicated to the memory of Conrad’s uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski. This dedication invites one to meditate on the possibility that Conrad, either consciously or unconsciously, had projected the sense of losing his uncle in a fictional work. Conrad received the bad news regarding the death of Bobrowski on 11 February of 1894, during which time he was drafting the tenth chapter of *Almayer’s Folly*.¹⁴ It seems uncoincidental, then, that towards the end of this chapter, Almayer is told of the devastating news that Nina, his last hope, has abandoned him. This way, Conrad vicariously re-creates the sensation of his being abandoned by his uncle and cut adrift from his last emotional connection with Poland.

According to Paul Kirschner, Conrad completed “the final quarter of the book he had been working at for four years” and “completely revise[d] the manuscript” in three months (18). *Almayer’s Folly* has twelve chapters in total, with the last three chapters – or, in Kirschner’s words, “the final quarter of the book,” – principally dealing with the scene of Almayer’s death. Given the long stretch of time taken for Conrad to create this text from

¹⁴ According to Conrad’s recollection and other historical evidence, Conrad was writing the tenth chapter on *Adowa* before he was informed of the bad news regarding Tadeusz Bobrowski’s death. Conrad signed as a second mate in *Adowa* in 1893. While the ship was waiting for the order to depart from Rouen between 4 December 1893 and 7 January 1894, he was writing the tenth chapter of *Almayer’s Folly*. For more information, please see Joseph Conrad. *A Personal Record*. Eds. Zdzislaw Najder and John Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p19-35; Joseph Conrad. *Almayer’s Folly: a Story of an Eastern River*. Eds. Floyd E. Eddleman and David L. Higdon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pxvi-xvii.

1889 to 1894, the fact that he completed three chapters and finished the editing work in less than three months implicitly suggests how the loss of Bobrowski, together with the ending of his seafaring career, impacted his process of writing. By taking all these factors into consideration, one would notice the subtle connection between the death of Bobrowski, the ending of his seafaring life, and the death of his first protagonist, Almayer.

I realize that there is little actual evidence pointing to the proposed connection above. However, as a writer who disliked inventing scenes and characters, the oddity of Conrad inventing the death of Olmeijer – his old friend who was still alive in 1894 – in his first fictional work can be thought to involve more than an act of literary imagination. It also implicitly suggests the possibility that Conrad had projected certain aspects of his mental state during that time into his writing, especially when one considers that the ending of *Almayer's Folly* was rapidly completed after he was informed of Bobrowski's death. As Leonard Orr and Theodore Billy remark of Conrad's first two works: Conrad's "failing career" and "the death of [his] maternal uncle and financial protector" explain why Conrad's initial writerly engagement is overwhelmed by the "overall atmosphere of death and demoralization" (28). In other words, the overall narrative surface of *Almayer's Folly* is indeed shaped, to some extent, by the loss that Conrad experienced in 1894.

Furthermore, the sense of loss and deprivation manifests itself not only at the climactic moment of Almayer's death, but also at other narrative moments that describe how Almayer feels and reacts when confronted with the death of an important person in his life. When duped into believing Dain's (fake) death, Almayer, standing in front of the faceless corpse, falls to the bottom of his depression:

A dead Malay: he [Almayer] had seen many dead Malays without any emotion; and now he felt inclined to weep, but it was over the fate of a white

man he knew; a man that fell over a deep precipice and did not die. He seemed somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble. Poor, poor fellow. Why doesn't he cut his throat? He wishes to encourage him; he was very anxious to see him lying dead over that other corpse. (*AF* 76)

This passage could be easily taken as a piece of evidence of Almayer's schizophrenic tendency, namely, the act of splitting himself into two halves to avoid pain. Specifically, one half of Almayer is experiencing an unbearable psychological breakdown due to Dain's (fake) death. In order to block and get rid of the sensation of suffering, the other half of Almayer attempts to persuade himself to commit suicide.

The above passage, first of all, shows the voice of the narrator who detachedly observes how Almayer feels when confronted with Dain's death, and keeps an ironical distance from the protagonist. The narrator regards Dain's death as an incident that strikes Almayer as a funny one as it greatly changes the "fate of a white man [Almayer] knew" (76). This white man is Almayer himself. In a playful tone, the narrator situates Almayer in a position in which he objectifies and observes himself as "a white man he knew". As a result, a certain ironical effect is produced. In marked contrast to Almayer's intense suffering, the narrator's narration distances readers from fully experiencing the former's pain.

However, this same passage reveals such a powerful affective force that it drives readers to penetrate into the core of Almayer's pain. Though with a detached tone, the narrator's descriptions of Almayer's quasi-madness compel us to actively react to the protagonist's pain. The shock of reading how Almayer persuades himself to commit suicide enables one to feel at once the protagonist's state of insanity and, more importantly, the destructive effects that Dain's death inflicts on him. In this respect, the passage produces two

related yet contrasted readings: one is directed to distance readers from emotionally engaging with Almayer's loss, while the other brings readers more closely to his pain.

This episode remains a crux of the text as it not only excessively depicts the protagonist's reaction to death, but also, I propose, emerges as a critical link between Almayer's experience and Conrad's received experiences. Both of them are deprived of one of the most important persons and things in their lives. The free indirect speech, "poor, poor fellow", makes Almayer lose its definitive hold on his status as a fictional character, acting as a disguised veil for Conrad to register and articulate his pain and self-pity at that time (76). When Almayer leads the Dutch officials to see Dain's dead body, he cries out his desperation – "I am much more dead," a narrative moment that immediately calls to mind Conrad's letter to his aunt, expressing how the death of his uncle "seems to have carried [his] soul away" (*Selected Letters* 26).

Hence, from this perspective, Conrad's act of writing the text could be considered a redemptive one in nature. He once wrote to his friend H. G. Wells to discuss his understanding of writing: "for me, writing – *the only possible writing* – is just simply the conversion of nervous force into phrases" (*Selected Letters* 165; emphasis in original). To put it simply, writing must remain faithful to lived experience, felt emotions in particular. The loss in Conrad's life in 1894 produced huge emotional disturbance for him, yet it also greatly facilitated his process of writing. It is, as Conrad himself suggests, a process of converting "nervous force into phrases" (165). In turn, the symbolic transformation of his received pain and loss in his writing is, to cite Kirschner's words again, "an instance of the healing powers of creative work" (18). Yet, the act of writing functions more than as a psychological cure for him. It also serves as an act of commemorating the two endings in his life.

Writing as an Act of Commemoration

To respond to his losses, Conrad successfully found a way to give an after-life to his affectively-charged events and people in the past. Reflecting on how his “work of fiction” – he specifically mentioned *The Nigger of the Narcissus* – bears witness to “the end of the sailing fleet,” Conrad pointed out the significance of writing in witnessing and preserving lost past (*Selected Letters* 172). Therefore, writing was one of the ways in which Conrad dealt with and commemorated the inevitable loss of people and things over time, an act that enabled him to repeatedly return to these losses, neutralize the pain, and crystalize them in his works.

In retrospect, Conrad recalled that *The Nigger* “puts a seal” on his golden time (*Selected Letters* 172). *The Nigger* thus becomes Conrad’s valedictory to his sea life. Yet, readers will find that his first literary attempt had already been in a gradual process of mourning the loss. In a book that mainly explores why Conrad began *Almayer’s Folly*, he asserts thus: “I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there the only reality in an invented world amongst imaginary things, happenings and people. Writing about them he is only writing about himself” (*PR* 12). This autobiographical confession helps one better understand why his first novel features a central character who resembles him in many aspects.

Except for the protagonist, both Dain and Nina, to some extent, mirror certain aspects of Conrad who was tortured by the ending of his previous career. Dain, enchanted by mysterious sea life, “[feels] a sudden impulse to speak to [Nina] of the sea he love[s] so well” just before they elope (*AF* 130). It would be easier to understand Dain’s sudden impulse to let Nina know how he loves the sea just before they depart from Sambir, if one regards it as an act mirroring Conrad’s mental state when he had had to abandon his maritime career. Due to

the reason that it was becoming more and more difficult to find a position in a ship, Conrad was forced to leave his beloved sea and to begin earning his living by writing. This separation with the past generated his nostalgia for past moments, a nostalgia that is best represented by Nina's desire to go back to her father (and past life) before she leaves. However, Mrs Almayer discourages her by saying that "give up your old life. Forget!" (113).

It is in this respect that Conrad's complex emotions towards his own sunset of his maritime career are filtered on the pages and commemorated. Conrad himself concedes that "there is a good deal of retrospective writing in the story" (*PR* 29). The meanings of "retrospective writing" refer to not only the action of turning his friend Olmeijer's story into a fictional work, but, more importantly, the action of commemorating his own past in his writing. When Conrad completed *Almayer's Folly*, he wrote to Poradowska:

My dear Aunt,

I regret to inform you of the death of Mr Kaspar Almayer, which occurred this morning at 3 o'clock.

It's finished! A scratch of the pen writing the final word, and suddenly this entire company of people who have spoken into my ear, gesticulated before my eyes, lived with me for so many years, becomes a band of phantoms who retreat, fade, and dissolve – are made pallid and indistinct by the sunlight of this brilliant and somber day.

Since I woke this morning, it seems to me I have buried a part of myself in the pages which lie here before my eyes. And yet I am – just a little – happy. (*Selected Letters* 27)

Edward Said once suggested that Conrad's letter is a place where he gradually discovers his identity as an intellectual, while his fiction is a space where his personal feelings are hidden.¹⁵ If one follows Said's observation, this letter of Conrad to his aunt, then, is not merely a simple act to announce the death of his first central character.

The beginning of this letter seems to imitate the style and tone of a funeral speech, mourning the death of Almayer, and then commemorating his life events. Bernard Meyer kindly draws our attention to the fact that "his announcement of the death of Almayer [is] a paraphrase of the message he had received not long before announcing the unhappy news from the Ukraine" about his uncle's death (103). Considering the critical role this mock-funeral letter plays in linking the death of his uncle and the death of his first protagonist, readers are invited to reflect upon the relationship between death, the act of writing, and the act of commemoration.

Here, I propose to read Conrad's announcement of Almayer's death as a commemorative act to re-enact his real loss – the death of his uncle – in writing. Two things are noteworthy of one's attention in the third paragraph of the letter: one is that Conrad buries a part of himself in the text, while the other is that he buries that part of himself in writing the text. In terms of memory, Paul Ricoeur discusses it in terms of a "cognitive" dimension and a "pragmatic" dimension. The "pragmatic" level of memory involves "the act of exercising memory," an act that reminds one of Merleau-Ponty's expression "I can" (57). Conrad's assertion that he buries himself in the text reveals, firstly, his presumption that the text is a medium to preserve a part of himself; and secondly, his assumption that he can do this via

¹⁵ Please see Edward Said. *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2012, pxix-xxi.

writing. In other words, Conrad exercises his ability to write with the hope that his past can be preserved and extended on the pages.

Conrad's conscious re-enacting of his uncle's death by "advertising a fictional one," to use Bernard Meyer's words again, offers him a creative possibility to articulate loss and the concurrent mental suffering. As Meyer perceptively notes, in writing the letter, "Conrad was attempting to master a painful real loss... thus becoming the active-author, rather than the passive recipient of a piece of bad news" (103). Contrary to Conrad the victim who was powerless to do anything and who could but passively received the news about his uncle's death, Conrad transforms himself into an "active-author" in the letter who announces the death of his character. In this transformational process, Conrad re-lives his loss, yet keeps a distance as well from the pain. In other words, as a witness (and creator) of Almayer's death, the writer re-enacts, masters, and commemorates the irrevocable loss of his uncle in a figurative way.

Therefore, the textual space is where the author commemorates the past as an active rememberer. This accounts for why Conrad expresses a sense of happiness when he announces Almayer's death in the letter: "and yet I am – just a little – happy" (*Selected Letters* 27). The happiness arises neither from Almayer's death, nor from the writer's completion of the book, but from what he can do with the protagonist's death. The death of a fictional character affords the author a chance to master his own painful past. In this way, readers unpack the semantic complexity of the "retrospective writing" in *Almayer's Folly*, a text he wrote "line by line, rather page by page" (*PR* 29).

The text itself suggests this way to read Conrad's act of writing as an act of commemorating the past. It is figuratively represented by a central motif in the text: a faceless corpse. In chapter seven, the tranquillity of the tropical morning is unexpectedly

interrupted by Mahmat's shout: "“There's a body – of – a – man – in the river! – Come and see! – A – dead – stranger!”" (AF 71). When Almayer reaches the place where the dead body lies, he is shocked by what he sees:

After some struggles, Almayer arrested his fascinated gaze on the body lying on the mud with covered face in a grotesquely unnatural contortion of mangled and broken limbs, one twisted and lacerated arm, with white bones protruding in many places through the torn flesh, stretched out; the hand with outspread fingers nearly touching his foot. (AF 74)

This disfigured mass of flesh and bones becomes a most telling image of fragments, and of what has been destroyed. It forms a marked contrast to the living and all that living can possibly bring about, such as hope, fame, reputation, and the like. Conrad ironically juxtaposes the formless corpse and the hopeless living Almayer together, as he writes “[h]e was alive and whole, and Dain was dead with all his bones broken. It struck him as funny”. Death and life are not themselves funny when considered alone. Yet, the juxtaposition of the mutilated dead body and the living Almayer produces such a funny effect, which dramatizes how Almayer is deprived of his hope and ruthlessly thrown into “the utter abandonment of despair” (76).

A more disturbing issue arising from this disfigured dead body is that no one can identify who it is. The flesh and bones are still there, but “there is no face for [Almayer] to look at”, and “no man could look at him in death and be able to say: ‘this is my friend’s face’!” (AF 75). In other words, this faceless body makes recognition a difficult task. Edward Casey argues that “the face is a paradigm of recognizability” (*Remembering* 127). Yet, as defaced as this face is, all the related past about this dead stranger is inaccessible to witnesses

as no one can recognize it. Casey expounds further on how a moment of recognition can successfully bind the past and present together:

[T]he past pertinent to this experience was made one with the present in which recognition occurred. Indeed, the suffusion was such that not only past and present but the manifested and the manifestation, meaning and vehicle, identity and phenomenon – all merged in the decisive moment of recognition (*Remembering* 127).

As shown above, the act of recognition plays a key part in linking what we know with what we perceive. Paul Ricoeur refers to this act of recognition as the “mnemonic act par excellence” (449). Yet, without it, the identity of the corpse is separated from its external manifestations, a separation that leads to a rupture between past and present. Accordingly, no one can say it is Dain’s corpse. Likewise, no one can say it is not Dain as well.

In his discussion of the shapeless body, Michael Fried insightfully ties the “recurrent images of disfigured faces” up with the “writer’s relation to the act of writing” (211). He suggests that the act of effacing facial features in the text should be understood as an act of deletion in Conrad’s process of writing. In doing so, Fried calls our attention to the relationship between the corpse and Conrad’s act of writing. Based on Fried’s observation, I highlight another aspect of the writer’s act of writing. It is that Conrad’s deployment of narrative technique to represent the unrecognizable face points to the act of commemorating.

As the text shows, the body becomes the residents’ “object of interest” and is rendered as a motif that is discovered and rediscovered (*AF* 70). This recurring image of the disconcerting corpse stretches “over nearly a quarter of the length of the text”, according to Leonard Orr. He proceeds to argue as follows:

Instead of having the corpse discovered and described once, we see it as a series of discoveries from the viewpoint of the fishermen, Babalatchi, Mrs. Almayer, Almayer, and the Dutch. The corpse becomes a text differently (and wrongly) interpreted by each, all thinking only of what Dain's death means for them in the schemes they are plotting against the others. (43)

Considerable attention should be given to the word "text" in the above quote. The fact that the dead body is turned into a text explicitly suggests the dynamics between death and narrative. Death means absence, yet narrative can re-produce the absent in an imaginary way. To put it in a different way, writing enables Conrad to make his dead uncle present in his fiction.

That Conrad repeatedly stages a dead body obliquely reflects his desire to return to and recreate his absent past in his writing, and thus reveals how he works to resist death and master time. In this way, writing provides an imaginative space to remember the dead. On the other hand, death and absence exert great impact on representational arts, as Louis Marin notes: "it is this ("the absence of the founding body") that will constantly require throughout the ages that the body be covered over, buried, and in a way monumentalized by and in its representations. Such would be the first effect of representation in general (quoted in Derrida *The Work of Mourning* 152). Marin makes this statement based on his analysis of Christian culture. The death of Jesus Christ and the absence of his body in the tomb require that it should be interpreted and reinterpreted in imaginary representational arts, either in the form of narrative or painting. These representations function to commemorate and monumentalize the absent body. Commenting on this paragraph, Derrida stresses the significance of two words in Marin's argument: "in general". In doing so, he transcends the confines of the particular Christian culture that Marin refers to, and includes all kinds of representational art.

In discussing the effect of artistic representation, Derrida points out that it results “precisely from the lack or absence” (*The Work of Mourning* 152). In other words, the force of representational art originates from death and the concurrent absence.

The formless body (or death) in the text affirms Derrida’s argument that death enacts the force of representational art (of writing). The dead stranger is not even given a name in the narrative when he is alive. As the author reveals: “that was one of [Dain’s] boatman” (*AF* 70). He is only mentioned as a boatman of Dain’s, without a name and an identity of his own. But after he is dead, the corpse enters into the realm of a text. In other words, it is turned into a text, discussed and re-discussed by others. In this way, the faceless corpse sets in motion a dynamic interpretative process, and thereby suspends the effects of death. It is transformed into a powerful force to resist death and loss. This force does not come from a definite answer that this dead body is Dain’s (or anybody else’s), but rather originates from the bewildering question of whether this faceless corpse is Dain’s.

Conrad’s shifting narrative points-of-view significantly contribute to the process of suspending losses and prolonging the existence of the absent in language. More specifically, he employs different perspectives from different characters to tell how they discover and interpret the corpse. The corpse-turned-text resembles a stage where various personas are assembled and given chances to perform. The dead stranger is first discovered by Mrs Almayer, who subsequently gives Dain the suggestion to put his ring and anklet on the dead body. In order to disguise the corpse as Dain’s, Mrs Almayer also “batter[s] the face of the dead with a heavy stone” so that no one can recognise it (97). This corpse is then rediscovered and reinterpreted successively by Mahmat, Taminah, Babalatchi, Almayer and the Dutch officers. In chapter seven, Mahmat discovers a dead stranger in front of his house. Then he and other residents, including Almayer, are told by Babalatchi that this body is

Dain's. In chapter eight, the narrative perspective is shifted from Mahmat to Taminah, a servant who had witnessed Mrs Almayer's trickery: "it was not true of course – she knew it well" (89). In this sense, the corpse is reinterpreted again. In the very beginning of chapter nine, through Babalachi's perspective, readers are shown how he notices Mrs Almayer's scheme and forces her to tell the truth. At this point, other characters have already learned the truth regarding the corpse. However, the writer holds this secret from Almayer until the very end of this chapter, nearly driving him to madness.

The utilization of disjointed temporality to represent people's different reactions towards death is criticized for its inability to penetrate into characters' inner emotions. After commenting on how Conrad "handles the retrospective method with considerable skill," Ian Watt continues to argue that "[t]he manipulation of chronology and point of view to achieve suspense" pulls readers away from "any continuous closeness to the minds of the character" (Introduction, lviii). Undeniably, the shifting of perceiving consciousness and the disconnected times inhibit readers from intimately sensing characters' feelings.

Yet, this detachment also suggests another concern of Conrad's "retrospective method" (Watt Introduction, lviii). His frequent change of perspective revolving around the identity of the dead valorises the ability of writing to commemorate loss. In other words, the process of repeatedly returning to the corpse halts the linear progression of the narrative sequence, and thus works to suspend and freeze it in time. In the narrative, Conrad cuts back and forth between different layers of interpretations of the dead body. This registers his status as a writer and simultaneously affirms the agency of narrative strategy in dealing with death. It is only in writing that these multi-layered perspectives can be assembled together. By commencing and recommencing discussions of the dead from different perspectives, the

writer prolongs the existence of the deceased in his writing. In this sense, writing functions to commemorate loss and subsequently give it an after-life.

Edward Casey perceptively notes the reciprocal interaction between loss and commemoration. He argues thus: “[c]ouldn’t we say that much of the motivation for commemoration derives from having to confront “separation anxiety” – for which death merely provides the most acute occasion?” Commemoration is a reaction to separation, while death is an extreme case of separation. The process of commemorating loss enables one to preserve it in the “minds and bodies of its commemorators” (Casey *Remembering* 255). From this aspect, the different perspectives of characters in the text act as different commemorators to extend the loss in their act of commemoration-like discussions and interpretations.

Indeed, the dead body is kept alive in people’s commemorative act. The mystery of the dead body and the failure to recognise it become big news in the settlement of Sambir and bond people together:

The news as to the identity of the body laying now in Almayer’s compound spread rapidly over the settlement. During the forenoon most of the inhabitants remained in the long street discussing the mysterious return and the unexpected death of the man who had become known to them as the trader. His arrival during the N. E. monsoon, his long sojourn in the midst, his sudden departure with his brig, and above all the mysterious appearance of the body, said to be his, amongst the logs were subjects to wonder at and talk over and over again with undiminished interest. (*AF* 82)

The corpse is mistaken as Dain’s among the residents. Yet, it does not detract from the force of commemoration. Dain’s life events, from his first arrival in Sambir, to his “long sojourn”, and to his “sudden departure,” are re-lived in people’s “undiminished interest” as they talk

about it “over and over again” (82). The dead corpse is not dead as it, to borrow Casey’s words again, “acquires an ongoing *ending* in and through commemoration” (*Remembering* 256; emphasis in original). In other words, the act of commemorating turns the ending into an ongoing process. Writing for Conrad is thus a commemorative act in reaction to his losses.

Identification with Almayer

The discussion above offers a close reading of the faceless corpse and how Conrad assembles different perspectives to represent death and loss. The act of writing asserts itself as a means of commemoration by suspending the closing effect of death, and extending the past into the present. The job of carrying the past forward into the present, according to Edward Casey, should be “in th[e] fashion only if [the past] has attained a certain consistent selfsameness in the wake of the perishing of the particulars by which it has once presented itself”. *Almayer’s Folly* is, at the end of the day, a chronicle of Almayer’s life events rather than Conrad’s.

Yet, Casey also points out that there are different ways to re-enact the past in the act of commemoration, including “ritualistic, textual, or intrapsychic” ways (*Remembering* 256). Of great relevance to the present discussion here is the intrapsychic way, a means that is also termed by Casey as “intrapsychic memorialization”. Casey argues that this way of commemoration is operated through “*identification* understood in Freud’s sense of the term” (*Remembering* 239; emphasis in original).¹⁶ Casey’s observation here points to how Conrad

¹⁶In his reading of Freud, Casey argues that “commemorating could take place within the psyche – without the support of concrete memorabilia, much less of a surrounding community of co-commemorators. As such purely psychical commemorating is without a text, so it also without a ritual.” The identification in the sense of Freud’s use of the term has three characteristics: “first, it is an entirely *psychical* process...; second, the identification itself occurs by way of a psychical *incorporation* that is analogous to the ingestion of a meal but decisively different in its history and consequences. Third, the identification typically occurs *between oneself and one other person...*”. Please see Edward Casey. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009, p239, 243.

employs the intrapsychic way in *Almayer's Folly* to commemorate his own past through the act of writing Almayer's story.

In other words, the re-enactment of Conrad's losses is actualized through his intrapsychic identification with Almayer. Geoffrey Harpham notes this act of intrapsychic identification, arguing that *Almayer's Folly* "seems actually to have come from Conrad's experience of discovering himself...within the other man". He also argues that the text enables the writer to "locate himself, his own authentic essence, outside himself, in another being" (19). This means that Almayer is employed as a medium to incorporate and express the writer's concerns.

Conrad's selected epigraph for *Almayer's Folly* explicitly suggests that he psychically identifies with his protagonist: "Qui de nous n'a eu sa terre promise, son jour d'extase et sa fin en exil?" (*AF* 1) This sentence is taken from a Swedish philosopher, Henri Frederic Amiel. Ian Watt translates it as follows: "who of us has not had the promised land, his day of ecstasy, and his end in exile" (Introduction lxi). As shown in this epigraph, it could be argued that Almayer is chosen as a representative character to express a universal theme, namely, the possession and dispossession of hope. Giving and simultaneously taking away hopes set a basic tone for this narrative. Consequently, the tension between these two complementary yet contrasting forces galvanizes the slow progression of the text and holds everything together.

When it comes to the characterization of Almayer, it is not difficult to note the multifaceted similarities between Conrad and him. Both of them are cast adrift from their own cultures; they both are enchanted by life and adventures on the sea; they both possess similar temperaments, melancholy, insecurity, anxiousness and are ineffectual; they both are abandoned and left disillusioned by the past; they both are nostalgic about the golden days of

the past. Ian Watt's hypothesis about how Olmeijer impacted Conrad's writing is worth a close examination:

If it was indeed the memory of Olmeijer which set off the unconscious process by which Conrad interlocked both the outer and the inner world of his past self with his present existence, and projected them into future life through his novel, it becomes somewhat easier to understand why Conrad, while failing to come to terms with his central character, should nevertheless have asserted that if he had not 'got to know Almayer . . . there would never have been a line of mine in print. (Introduction lxiii)

While Watt does not directly mention Conrad's identification with Almayer in his comments, readers will not find it a surprise that the "unconscious process" he raises in the quoted passage is an "unconscious process" of identification. The author's memories of Olmeijer, to Watt, "set off the unconscious process" of his mental time travel to the past. This remembered past includes both external events and interior mental states during that time.

Almayer as An Experiencing Agent

After the intrapsychic identification between the author and the character is established, the writer sets Almayer out as his experiencing agent of pain and loss. This section borrows the idea of the experiencing agent from David Herman's "experiencing minds" in narrative. Aligning himself with those who insist that the force of narrative can transgress the boundary of qualia (that is, the first-person point-of-view consciousness), Herman argues that "narrative...is uniquely suited to capturing what the world is like from the situated perspective of an experiencing mind" (157). More specifically, narrative has the function of enacting unique sensations and emotions that are only accessible to a particular character situated in a particular time and space. Because of Conrad's intrapsychical identification with

Almayer, what the latter encounters and experiences while being abandoned by Nina will be “assimilated,” according to Casey, “in its full emotional resonance” by the author (*Remembering* 242). Said reminds one of the fact that a text is “for Conrad a produced thing, the produced thing – something he returned to as author, critic, defender, spectator or victim” (118). As an author as well as a critic of his own text, Conrad repeatedly returns to it for the sake of both editing and experiencing the fictional representations of his own loss, representations that are manifested, mediated, and masked by his fictional character Almayer.

Almayer thus becomes Conrad’s imaginary experiencing agent of tremendous loss. The protagonist, abandoned by his most emotionally-attached Nina, experiences a radical break from his past. In a similar fashion, the death of Conrad’s uncle cuts the only emotional relationship with his motherland and his family in Poland. The abandonment of Nina to Almayer is the abandonment of his uncle to Conrad. The text positions its central character Almayer into a similar situation as the author. The gist of this story, hence, should be sought more from Almayer’s emotional and affective responses towards external events imposed on him, rather than the events he had experienced.

Ian Watt observes Conrad’s great skill in depicting the details of tropical landscapes and life events and how it influences the reader’s sensations:

In *Almayer’s Folly* there is a steady pressure on the reader to experience what it is like to live in Sambir; from the careful attention to its topography and daily routines, to the evocation of the changing moods of the river and the sky and the public yet mysteriously oppressive nature of its social life, we get a sense of a special atmosphere of doomed and stagnant enclosure from which, like Almayer and Nina, we want out. (“Almayer’s Folly” 173)

Watt brings to the fore the disturbing quality of nature and the oppressiveness of public life. The “doomed and stagnant enclosure” that readers experience in their reading process evokes a real-life sensation and influences our engagement with the external world. Readers desire to escape from the described world in the text.

Likewise, Conrad experiences the world of *Almayer* in and through his writing, and thereby wants to take himself out of his protagonist’s doomed fate. As an experiencing agent for Conrad, *Almayer* fails in dealing with his chaotic emotions in relation to Nina’s departure, enclosing and blocking them within the decayed house *Almayer’s Folly*. This extreme madness of suppressing negative somatic affects in an attempt to control the past gives rise to his final death. As a reader of his own work, Conrad’s reading process enacts, in Monika Fludernik’s words, the “mimetically motivated evocation of human consciousness and of its (sometimes chaotic) experience of being in the world” (22). Therefore, in and through his imagination, Conrad experiences the discontinuity resulting from *Almayer’s* passive reaction to loss. This invites him to examine his own situation and past. In this sense, *Almayer* fails successfully for the writer. His failure alerts the writer to react to his own loss in a proper way.

This suggests that, with Conrad’s repeated return to the text, his losses in real life are re-enacted and commemorated vicariously. *Almayer*, with whom Conrad identifies emotionally, creates the narcissistic effects of memory. In reflecting how memory resembles a mirror, Evelyne Ender claims that “memory truly acts as the mirror – a diffracting mirror that reveals, around each mnemonic encounter, the person, who, in the very act of looking at the created scene, emerges as a subject” (216). When looking into his own creation of *Almayer* who shares a similar loss and pain, Conrad vicariously sees himself in *Almayer* among the artistically crafted words and symbols. Therefore, the symbolical rewriting of the

writer's loss into *Almayer's Folly* not only registers and articulates the author's pain of loss, but also functions as a locale where Conrad imagines what will happen if abandoned and cut adrift from the past. In reading Almayer's self-destructive behaviours due to his inability to get rid of the past, Conrad is affirming outside the text the indestructibility of the past and the persistence of past traces.

Commemoration in Other Early Texts: *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and *Youth*

As this chapter has shown, *Almayer's Folly* initiates Conrad's endeavours to commemorate his lost past. Yet, the commemoration, through intrapsychical identification with the text's central character, is so covert that Allan Simon claims that Conrad's first two books (*Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*) "[have] left his past untouched". Like the covert plot Cedric Watts has discovered in *Almayer's Folly*, the work of commemoration is going on beneath the currents of Almayer's life story in a subtle way. This requires readers to psychically identify with Conrad, imitate his emotional and mental states back to the year 1894 when two turning points in his life befell him. If readers pay less attention to the overt plot and reposition this piece of writing to the wider historical contexts from which Conrad created it, we will find a subtle yet decisive connection between the author's life and the character's.

Indeed, Conrad's first novel is a covert display of his sentiment to commemorate the loss of his past. Yet the other early texts testify to his active action in commemorating bygone days. It is not surprising to regard *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897) as a mirror of his sea life, telling the story of how the crew deals with a dying black sailor, James Wait, on the ship *Narcissus* during their voyage from Bombay to London. When attacked by a storm off the Cape of Good Hope, the crew risks their lives to save Wait from being submerged by the

hurricane. After the storm passes, a near-mutiny takes place among these sailors, which is eventually prevented by the captain. Before they reach their destination, Wait dies on board.

In the text, Conrad revisits and rebuilds a “national myth” of merchant ships where mariners from all walks of life and disparate cultural backgrounds are gathered to meet an unpredictable challenge – the storm. The crew’s devotion and fidelity to their ship, coupled with their fine art of sailing, eventually helps them cross the line of dangers. I agree with Allan Simon’s contention that *The Nigger of the Narcissus* is the writer’s “first and most sustained attempt to probe the meaning of his past career and render justice to the community he had known for sixteen years”. The style and techniques utilized in this narrative, Simon argues, suggest that Conrad is “engaged in a determined search for ways to make the significance of his life as a mariner more accessible to the reader” (13). A noteworthy narrative technique is that the writer utilizes is the first person plural narrative. Brian Richardson terms it as “we-narration” (220). The effort that Conrad puts into the text testifies to his determination to be a professional writer. The use of we-narration also highlights Conrad’s desire to connect with his ship and his sailing experiences. He returns to the past and endeavours to make it an essential component of his writing.

The text *Youth* (1898) introduces the well-known Marlow as a storyteller for the first time. As a narrator-rememberer in his old age, Marlow recollects his first journey to the East to other aged ex-seamen. This text brilliantly visualizes the scene where the young Marlow watches his ship sinking into the sea. Here are the most compelling paragraphs in the text:

She burned furiously; mournful and imposing like a funeral pile
kindled in the night, surrounded by the sea, watched over by the stars...

Then the oars were got out, and the boats forming in a line moved
around her remains as if in procession – the longboat viciously leading. As we

pulled across her stern a slim dart of fire shot at us, and suddenly she went down, head first, in a great hiss of steam. (*YHE* 34)

Here, Conrad offers a most vivid example of Marlow witnessing the ending (death) of a sailing ship. In the text, the young Marlow has no choice but to watch the burning and sinking of his ship: “the boats forming in a line move[s] around her remains as if in a procession” in a funeral (34). Bearing witness to an ending does not mean a mere recording of events and happenings. Instead, for Conrad, it is more about mourning and commemorating the loss like what the mourners do in a funeral.

Conclusion

Conrad hated to be defined by a stereotype and refused to be confined by labels. One of his letters to a friend invites one to think with him the being-in-the-forming:

When once the truth is grasped that one’s own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown the attainment of serenity is not very far off. Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one’s impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps nearer to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are ‘ever becoming’ – never being’ then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know well that I never will be anything. (*Joseph Conrad: life & letters* 186)

As the remarks suggest, Conrad resisted to be catalogued and labelled as a fixed being. The declaration that he “will never be anything” summarises his life, considering how various transformational forms of life he led. This philosophy of life supports his transformation from a seaman to a writer as well, a process which, according to him, is “nearer to truth”.

Daniel Schwarz notes that Almayer bears witness to the “fictional projections of self-doubt, weariness, and anxiety that Conrad desperately wishes to leave behind”. After proposing the identification between Almayer and Conrad, Schwarz contends that “the early novels are acts of initiation for the artistic self”. He further argues that in these novels, Conrad endeavours to “cast off the seaman identity with which he had achieved success and self-satisfaction” (*Conrad: Almayer’s Folly to Under Western Eyes* 20). Indeed, Conrad was beset with confusion and self-doubt during his transitioning period from a seaman to a writer. However, it is less important for the writer to cast off his past and leave his successful seaman life behind than to configure a continuity between these two distinctive lives.

Writing and sailing are not separated as they might appear on the outside. Instead, they both are “modes of the adventure, both quests to establish the self,” as Roy Roussel suggests (43). Indeed, writing one’s past is also a mode of adventure. Remembering is often seen as a private act, merely accessible to the rememberer. Writing, however, turns this singular and private act into a public and shareable one. Reflecting on this, Casey “take[s] the verbalizing and sharing of memories to be an adventure activity” (*Remembering* 113). Following Casey’s observation, the verbal rendition of personal experiences does not deviate from Conrad’s previous career. In reproducing the absent past and making it present in his writing, Conrad travels outbound to his past, traverses the sea of uncanny sensations and life events, and returns to the present with specific cargo of remembered details.

For Conrad, recreating past experiences does not mean the establishment of a superficial connection between past and present, but to examine the past closely and extend what Casey terms “selfsameness” of the disappeared details in the present writing (*Remembering* 256). In doing so, writing allows Conrad to ruminate on his departure from the sea life to which he had been accustomed, and simultaneously enables him to reclaim that

which might otherwise have been dispersed in the abyss of oblivion via retrospective reflections. He tries out ideas on Almayer whose failure reminds him of the significance of “look[ing] ahead in looking back” (Casey 255). In this regard, his second career not only continues his first one, but also extends the experience of his seafaring adventures in the future. Indeed, Conrad confessed that he finished *Almayer’s Folly* after “several long sea passages,” “a visit” to “the scene of [his] childhood,” and a journey to the Congo (PR 26). From this perceptive, writing resembles a journey of sailing. On the other hand, sailing is a fine “art of handling ships” (MS 31). What Conrad experienced as a seaman is transformed into the life of his characters.

In *Almayer’s Folly*, Ian Watt contends that “the retrospective parts” affords Conrad an opportunity to “give free play to the movements of the remembering mind”. His further observation on the method how the “free play” of the remembering work informs the next chapter: “later Conrad achieved this freedom mainly through the use of intermediate narrator” (“Almayer’s Folly” 181). Following Watt’s insight, Chapter Three will discuss how Marlow – the “intermediator narrator” – represents the “free play” of remembering.

Chapter Three: Voyage Out: Becoming a Poetic Rememberer

But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

(Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*)

Chapters One and Two illustrate Conrad's early engagement with remembering and writing. If the writer's concern with memory in his literary debut is embedded beneath the primary plot, then his critically acclaimed *Heart of Darkness* (1902) openly brings the role of remembering to the fore. In the narrative, the process of remembering is figuratively presented as a journey, traveling up the river of memory to search for an absent past. Thus, central to understanding this text is how Conrad offers an intricate retrospective account of his journey to the Congo. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the writer demonstrates the complexity of remembering through his fictional narrator Marlow.

I argue that Conrad dramatizes Marlow's doubt that narrative can recapture the complexity of the past. In the process of shaping his complex initial experience into an intelligible narrative, Marlow remains conscious of the fact that he misses the totality of it. Thus, his efforts in recounting the Congo journey illustrate that he actively engages with, and tries to transcend the confines of, the limits of remembering, yet is inevitably conditioned by these very limits. In the discussion that follows, I will first examine the function of Marlow as a character-commentator and the effects his role produces in the text. I propose to read Marlow as a poetic rememberer who recalls and comments on his past, while refusing to pass definitive judgement on his lived experiences. Thereafter, I

shall discuss how Marlow's narration of his initial encounter with Kurtz presents him as a poetic rememberer. This section is further split into two parts. The first part will investigate how Marlow's desire to render justice to Kurtz generates a pressure for his act of narrating. Specifically, his narration is guided by a teleological purpose, a purpose that requires that he structures and shapes his memories of the Congo trip into an intelligible and unified narrative. Yet, Marlow is also keenly aware of the complexities of his initial experience which constantly elude him. Therefore, the second part will discuss how Marlow complicates his narrative by pointing out two inherent limitations of remembering-storytelling. Firstly, the narrative is unable to convey experienced life sensations. This, according to Marlow, misses the essence of any given life episode. Secondly, the permanent loss of an original past renders his narrative of the Congo experience unreliable. In other words, the memory becomes an inevitable recreation from the narrator's present consciousness. As such, Marlow exhibits his skeptical attitudes towards memory and its ability to recover the original past in its entirety. In the last section, by investigating how embedded narrative enables the reader to witness the narrator's silence and hesitation in the middle of his storytelling, I proceed to discuss and highlight Marlow's inability to recall the past in a chronological fashion. Ultimately, the poetic remembering subject, Marlow, compels readers to witness and reflect upon the incompleteness of narrative, compared to the complexities of initial experience.

Marlow as a Poetic Rememberer

As a classic text of the modern period, any summary of *Heart of Darkness* would be an "inconclusive experience", a sentiment that is indicated by Conrad himself in the narrative. It features two different layers of narrative, focusing on Marlow's remembered experience of traveling up the Congo River and "what he saw" along this journey (*YHE*

47). At the outset, the *Nellie*, anchored on the Thames river, is waiting for “the turn of the tide” (43). A primary narrator introduces Marlow, Marlow’s audience, and the concomitant background of the narrator’s tale-telling. He then hands the narrative over to Marlow, who starts to recall his experiences in the Congo. The trip up the Congo River is a disillusioning one for him. Before he arrives at the Outer station, he recollects how the white people ludicrously fire at the empty shore, and allege that their enemies lurk behind the bushes. In the Outer Station, Marlow remembers the shocks he receives from the chained black people and the grove of death. The Central Station is even more absurd: the rivets that he needs to repair his ship are perpetually delayed; the absurdity also includes the mysterious Manager of the station and his conspiracy of sabotaging the company’s plan to save Kurtz by sinking a ship. During their trip to the Inner Station, Marlow is attacked by the native people (it is revealed later that Kurtz gives this order). Ultimately, the narrator meets and brings back Kurtz, who, unfortunately, dies on the trip back to London. Before Kurtz dies, he entreats the narrator to take care of his memories – “a packet of papers and a photograph” (116). His deathbed words “The Horror! The Horror!” continuously reverberate in Marlow’s memory (117). After the narrator returns to London, he attempts to recall and sum up his experiences in an effort to account for why Kurtz had been transformed from a civilized man to a morally degenerate one, and in so doing attempts to render justice to him. At the end of Marlow’s oral storytelling, the narrative is handed back to the primary narrator who tells the reader that the “tranquil waterway” of the Thames “seem[s] to lead into the heart of an immense darkness” (126).

As a seaman-turned-narrator, Marlow possesses the idiosyncratic talent to tell stories. In her essay “Joseph Conrad,” Virginia Woolf spoke highly of Conrad’s created Marlow, whom she called “one of those born observers”: “[I]ntrospective and analytical” in character. Marlow sits on the deck of *Nellie*, “smoking and recollecting” (*The Common*

Reader 226). In marked contrast to Woolf's insight, Henry James calls the narrator "that preposterous master mariner," arguing that the latter "mix[es] himself up with the narrative in *Heart of Darkness*" (qtd. in Watt *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 206). This unfavourable criticism results partially from James's concerns that Conrad loses authorial control over his created character and lets his narrator meddle with his own narrative in the text. More precisely, James has differing views from Conrad with respect to the function of a storyteller and the method of tale-telling. Thus, it is no surprise to find that he regards Marlow as a "preposterous" narrator.

Conrad highlights Marlow's different temperament from the outset, reminding readers that the latter should not be taken as a conventional storyteller. As a seaman, he does not "represent his class". He is at once a seaman and a "wanderer," curious about what lies behind the "foreign shores, the foreign faces, [and] the changing immensity of life" (*YHE* 45). As Cedric Watts puts it, he is "a prober of mysteries" (*Conrad's Heart of Darkness* 35). Not satisfied with reality on the surface, he is brave enough to lift his eyes and look into the depth of mysterious secrets, an essential idiosyncrasy that distinguishes him from others.

Marlow's preferred manner of storytelling, featuring various digressions, also reflects that he is a wandering character rather than someone who is confined to conventions. The primary narrator describes him thus:

The yarns of seamen have an effective simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But as has been said, Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted) and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the

likeness of one of these misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (*YHE* 45)

This paragraph from *Heart of Darkness* is often quoted due to its semantic richness, stylistic elegance and the suggestiveness of its meanings. As a seaman who still “follows the sea”, Marlow has a propensity to spin yarns that he had gathered during his trips to foreign countries. Unlike other seamen’s yarns, what Marlow attends to in his narrative is not the “kernel” of tales, but the outside that “envelop[s] the tale which bring[s] it out” (45). In other words, Marlow’s recounting of his memory will not merely offer us some facts from his past, but rather foregrounds the process of remembering which brings out his initial experience in the Congo.

As a storyteller, Marlow is at once the “inside” character and the “outside” narrator, experiencing and commenting on his own past.¹⁷ Yet, the assumed omniscient narrator is at times shown to be as bewildered as Marlow the ignorant character. Unlike other omniscient narrators, Marlow acknowledges that he can only grasp evanescent impressions and sensations. With respect to recovering past events in narrative, he is not sure if he can reproduce them as they were. He dramatizes this doubt in the ability of remembering at the outset – “[n]o. Not very clear” (48). Herein lies Marlow’s uncertainty of his recreated moments, pointing to his awareness of the limits of remembering.

Readers are thus invited to question if Marlow remodels his experiences, consciously or unconsciously, or even tells a dream in his mind, especially when he

¹⁷ For more discussions on the double function of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, please see Paul Wake. *Conrad’s Marlow: Narrative and Death in ‘Youth’, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, p11; Jeremy Hawthorn. *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment*. New York: Routledge, 1990; Jakob Lothe. *Conrad’s Narrative Method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

continuously evokes dreamlike sensations in the process of his narration. Nevertheless, there are other times where Marlow, like other omniscient narrators, sums up his experiences and offers his insights. For example, he asserts that “[the] conquest of the earth mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (47). At the heart of this observation lies Marlow’s judgement and criticism of western colonialism.

Marlow’s role constantly shifts between narrator and character in the text. Paul Wake phrases his liminality as a narrator-character thus: “Marlow is a similarly liminal figure, repeatedly crossing the thresholds between character and narrator, deliverer and interpreter of narrative in each of the texts in which he appears” (11). Being neither a pure character nor a pure narrator, Marlow continuously transgresses the boundaries between them, thus inhibiting the formulation of a consistent and unified image of him. Marlow the narrator lacks control of a coherent narrative, while Marlow the character is sometimes endowed with the privilege of hindsight. According to Wake, *Heart of Darkness* is turned into a narrative that “not only invite[s], but also include[s] [its] own commentary” (12). To relate it to the present discussion of memory, these words suggest that the text embeds within itself both Marlow’s lived experiences, and simultaneously, his analysis of them.

Ian Watt brings to our attention Marlow’s principle function as a rememberer, and sees him as “a more direct expression of [Conrad’s] preoccupation with writing as the voice of memory”. At the heart of Watt’s insight involves how writing is transformed into a voice that recounts memory. He proceeds to explain that *Heart of Darkness* “formally hark[s] back to that most ancient of the forms of storytelling which begins with ‘I remember’,” and sees Marlow as a “remembering eyewitness” (*Conrad in the Nineteenth*

Century 211). Along these lines sketched out so far by Watt, Marlow witnesses Kurtz's experiences, and retells this episode of memories to the crew of the *Nellie*.

Owen Knowles argues that Marlow is a mediating device between lived experiences and the imaginative recreation of them. In 1902, Conrad published *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*. *Heart of Darkness* and *The End of the Tether* are the other two stories. Given the autobiographical elements in these three works, Knowles notes the reciprocal relationships between Marlow and the accounts of the writer's own lived experiences in the East and Africa:¹⁸

Conrad considered for this volume – *Tales of Memory* – underlines the sustained effort of retrospection that went into its making, while also pointing to a further significant fact about the handling of some of the autobiographical material: that is, with the introduction of Marlow, the very *act* of memory, the often difficult process of recovering and recreating meaning from past experiences, gives the stories a more inward character and becomes a central feature of thematic development and structure.

(xxxiv; emphasis in original)

As Knowles points out, Marlow's way of recollecting past events mirrors Conrad's efforts in handling his raw material. As a rememberer, Marlow conducts the "very *act* of memory" in the hope of "recovering" and "recreating" his past experiences into a meaningful narrative. This process is not without difficulties, particularly in *Heart of Darkness*, which heavily embraces doubts, uncertainty, and the resistance of orders. As

¹⁸ For more information on the autobiographical details in these three works, please refer to Owen Knowles' introduction to Joseph Conrad. *Youth, Heart of Darkness, the End of the Tether*. Ed. Owen Knowles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pxxxiv.

such, the act of remembering and the resultant struggles should be more emphasized than the narrated events in Marlow's stories.

More importantly, Marlow's act of remembering is central to the *Youth* volume's thematic and structural development. In retrospect, Conrad considers *Youth* "a feat of memory," a narrative which features Marlow's first appearance and concludes with the following paragraph (*YHE* 6):

And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone – has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash- together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions. (39)

At this point, Marlow completes the recounting of his first experience of going to the East. The "polished table" here is utilized as a metaphor for the function of memory. It reflects the audience's wrinkled and lined faces, figuratively suggesting the ravages of time and how the past "has passed unseen". It also mirrors one's desire to "look anxiously for something out of life".

Commenting on this ending of *Youth*, Owen Knowles notes two "reflections of contrasting kinds" (Introduction xi). On the one side, it is the "reflection of the old man" on the loss of youth. Such a perspective is explicitly shown in the seamen's acute nostalgia for the "moment of strength, of romance, of glamour – of youth" (*YHE* 39). On the other side, it also suggests Marlow's reflection on how to "rescue meaning from the vanishing past and recover it as a form of aestheticized 'still-life'" (Introduction xl). As a rememberer, the old Marlow stands in the present, gathers up some significant episodes of his life, composes them

into a narrative and tells it to his listeners, “a director of companies, an accountant [and] a lawyer” (*YHE* 11). For the audience, Marlow’s accounts situate them in a position to sense how his past is gradually and unavoidably lost, and simultaneously, how experience is gained and accumulated.

Heart of Darkness also features Marlow, sitting on the deck of the *Nellie* and recollecting his trip to the centre of Africa. At the very beginning, the atmosphere of Marlow’s remembering is peaceful and calm: he is “at rest” and his surroundings are “nearly calm” (43). In Conrad’s memoir *Mirror of the Sea* (1906), he avers that the shore symbolizes a connective place between the land and the sea, the past and the future.¹⁹ In a similar sentiment, Conrad echoes this viewpoint in *Heart of Darkness*, stating that the “venerable” Thames estuary is not regarded by sailors as a temporary space where ships “come and depart”, but rather as an “august” repository of “abiding memories” (44). In this respect, the steamboat *Nellie* anchored on the Thames estuary functions as a motif binding the past and the present. The tidal current, which “runs to and fro in its unceasing service,” symbolically maps the topography of Marlow’s unceasing mnemonic labour which oscillates between past and present (43). The *Nellie* is waiting for her departure, a departure that, according to Conrad, “does not imply so much a sea event as a definite act entailing a process” (*MS* 5). Metaphorically, the beginning scene invites readers to witness the journey of how Marlow departs from the present and searches for a lost past.

The act of remembering above seems to suggest that it is an individual and solitary act, confined within Marlow’s mind. Indeed, Conrad’s impressionistic style of writing owes much to Walter Pater, as many scholars have noticed.²⁰ In his conclusion to *The*

¹⁹ For more information about the sailor’s viewpoints on landfall and departure, please see Joseph Conrad. *The Mirror of the Sea*. Auckland: Floating Press, 2011, p7-10.

²⁰ For discussions on the influences of Walter Pater on Conrad, please see Ian Watt. *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. California: University of California Press, 1979, p172; Todd Bender. *Literary Impressionism in Jean*

Renaissance, Pater points out that individuals can only experience fleeting and elusive sensations, emotions, and impressions due to “the narrow chamber of the individual mind”. As a result, the experience of the mind becomes the most individual and solitary experience, in which “[e]very one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world” (153). His words on the loneliness of individual consciousness reverberate through Marlow’s extreme cry in the text: “[w]e live, as we dream – alone...” (*YHE* 70).

Fortunately, retelling the remembered (traumatic) past to others saves Marlow from the above isolated situation. He reaches out to his ex-seamen for sharing his past. Memory is thus turned into a communicational act. In this respect, Ian Watt convincingly points out:

Marlow’s memories of his lonely experiences on the Congo, and his sense of the impossibility of fully communicating their meaning, would in themselves assign *Heart of Darkness* to the literature of modern solipsism; but the fact that Marlow, like Conrad, is speaking to a particular audience makes all the difference; it enacts the process whereby the solitary individual discovers a way out into the world of others. (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 212)

These remarks show readers two sources of Marlow’s solitary memory. He has no witness for his last meeting with Kurtz. To make it worse, he senses that his experiences in the depth of darkness cannot be communicated.

Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, and Charlotte Brontë. England: Taylor & Francis, 1997, p66-67; John Peters. *Conrad and Impressionism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Nevertheless, the act of retelling enables Marlow to establish a concrete connection between his memory and the external world, preventing him from endlessly abandoning himself to the unreality of memory images. No one on the *Nellie* invites Marlow to share his yarns, as the primary narrator informs readers. “‘And this also,’ said Marlow suddenly, ‘has been one of the dark places of the earth’” (*YHE* 45). This unpredictability of Marlow’s recounting of his experiences indicates his compulsion to talk. Immediately after Marlow comments on the darkness of London, the primary narrator depicts other audiences’ response as follows: “[h]is remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even” (46). Though his narration receives little attention from the audience, he still keeps talking about his memories. And the audience knows that “‘they [are] fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences” (47). All these signs suggest Marlow’s strong desire to share his memories with others. Marlow confesses that he “[doesn’t] know why [he] was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blankness of that experience” (111). The reason lies in the fact that sharing stories makes Marlow feel less solitary and more tied up with external realities. In other words, the act of tale-telling goes beyond the confines of his individual mind to connect with his listeners.

While relating his past to others is an effective way to get Marlow out of his solitary memory, it does not mean that the past can be effectively conveyed. Imbued with dreamlike effects, Marlow’s narration produces an illusory feeling that he is telling a dream rather than an episode of lived reality. For example, his descriptions of the Congo landscape produce a sense of strangeness, a sensation that one experiences in a dream. The vegetation “riot[s] on the earth”; the big trees are kings; hippos and alligators “sun themselves side by side” (77). These descriptions create the effect of defamiliarization, drawing attention to the constructed or invented nature of memory. In many respects, the

inexplicable and strange mnemonic moments in the narrative deflate the notion that memory is a mimetic reflection that aspires to reproduce past events as faithfully as possible.

This dreamlike manner of storytelling stems partially from his singular belief in what constitutes the essentials of a tale-telling. Let us return again to the primary narrator's expressions used to describe the characteristics of Marlow's storytelling. The primary narrator utilizes such words as haze, glow, misty halo, spectral illumination of moonshine to illuminate Marlow's unique manner of narration. It appears clear that Marlow is drawn to and fascinated with the idea of elusiveness, emptiness, and indeterminacy. In Cedric Watts's words, the significance of telling a tale for Marlow "may be elusive, indeterminate, delicate, evanescent, perplexing"; and "the significance may be altogether illusory" (*Conrad's Heart of Darkness* 36). Watts's observation affirms that Marlow's storytelling is not a certain one. More crucially, his narrative may appear illusory. This leads E. M. Forster to complain that "[Conrad's work] is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel" (138).

Marlow's uncertainty about the past results from his awareness of the limits of one's ability to understand and communicate experience. In the text, Conrad writes thus:

Marlow paused again as if reflecting, then added:

"Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know...." (*YHE* 70)

Marlow splits and distinguishes two different selves in the quoted passage: the self who was experiencing events in the past, and the self who is telling a story in the present. As a

storyteller, he is present in front of his audience. In contrast, Kurtz remains an abstract word for him in the past: “[he] was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do” (70). Therefore, he insists that his listeners can “see more than [he] could [see Kurtz] then”.

The narrator’s self-awareness of the limits of one’s understanding leads to Ian Watt’s conclusion that “Marlow’s ironic consciousness of how far he is from being able to tell ‘the full story,’ and the overt enactment of this within the novel are two of the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* anticipates the unauthoritative, self-reflective, and problematic nature” of later modern fictions (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 211). As Watt remarks, the narrator struggles to understand what had happened to him in the past, a process he openly enacts and invites readers to witness in his storytelling. This requires courage. *Heart of Darkness*, in this respect, becomes a fictive space to celebrate Marlow’s (and, in general, the human’s) bravery in the face of dark truths.

Marlow’s uncertainty in comprehending the alien Congo world is reflected formally: disjointed narrative time; intermittent silence and hesitation in the midst of his narration. The incompleteness and discontinuity of his narrative are not a gesture of him surrendering to the elusive external reality, but instead act as a signal that acknowledges the complexity of actual reality. Such a perspective distinguishes itself from that of a realist storyteller who either pretends to master reality or does not realize the complicated structure of the external world. By highlighting his own confusion in the then-there situation in the past, the rememberer demonstrates himself as a self-reflective and courageous being who is unavoidably conditioned by, but not subject to, one’s limits of understanding complex experience.

The narrator’s view about how much one can know and comprehend external reality is in line with Conrad’s. In a letter to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad dramatizes the limits of human understanding thus: “life knows us not and we do not know life – we don’t know even

our own thoughts” (*Selected Letters* 89) Herein lies Conrad’s sceptical view about life and human knowledge. One may rely on memory, rational analysis, and imagination to approach closer to the truth of life, yet one would be continuously frustrated if he or she insists on getting a definitive and final answer.

Thus, I propose to read Marlow (and, by extension, Conrad) as a poetic rememberer who recalls and interprets his past, while refusing to pass definitive judgement on his lived experiences. This idea is inspired by William Howarth’s term “poetic autobiographer” (377). In “Some Principles of Autobiography”, Howarth divides autobiographies into three groups: autobiography as oratory;²¹ autobiography as drama;²² and autobiography as poetry (368, 372, 377). Poetic autobiographical artists regard the act of self-expression as a “poetic act of continuing self-study,” instead of that as an act of preaching a moral lesson or imparting wisdom to readers. Poetic autobiographical writers are characterised as such in Howarth’s essay:

[They] draw only tentative, experimental self-portraits. They share equally strong doubts, especially about their current state of mind. Uncertain of the present, they study the past for explanation of their later difficulties. They are a moody, unpredictable lot, strongly critical of themselves and others, committed only to the right to change their ideas. (377)

²¹ This group of autobiography features as follows: “...preach an ideology...share analogous oratorical aims”. St. Augustine is a great case in point. Please see William Howarth. “Some Principles of Autobiography.” *New Literary History* 5.2 (1974): 368.

²² This group of autobiography is described thus: “None of these writers has a thesis about his development; he assumes that he was and is essentially the same person, so his book depicts the past as a series of spontaneously ordered events. As an author he is unpretentious and impertinent, viewing life as a staged performance that he may attend, applaud, or attack, just as he pleases”. Benvenuto Cellini, Benjamin Franklin, Sean O’Casey, and William Carlos Williams are the representations. Please see William Howarth. “Some Principles of Autobiography.” *New Literary History* 5.2 (1974): 372.

Uncertainty, self-doubt, self-examination, and unpredictability are central to understanding poetic autobiographical artists. Howarth argues that Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry James, among others, are typical of poetic autobiographical artists. Considering Conrad's knowledge of Rousseau, and how his writing is influenced by James,²³ I suggest that Conrad's invented autobiographical narrator Marlow is motivated by the idea of the poetic representation of lived experience. Indeed, what characterises a poetic artist's narrative can also be found in Marlow's narration: he is doubtful of his abilities to comprehend experience; he is critical of what he perceives; he is subject to change in ideas; his temperament is unpredictable. To borrow Howarth's terms again, Marlow does not "fully understand himself," and therefore "suppresses moral judgements, and refuses to say what he means – or mean what he says" (377).

This doubt is best exemplified in Marlow's encounter with the dying Kurtz whose deathbed words "The horror! The horror!", keep haunting the former. In commenting on the ivory agent's last words, Marlow withdraws his moral judgement, inviting readers to think with him: "I like to think that my summing up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry – much better". Uncertain of whether his judgement covers all the secrets and meanings of Kurtz's last words, the poetic rememberer Marlow withholds his final words on Kurtz's experience in the Congo. If certain events can be eventually understood after the initial stage of incomprehension, then Kurtz's experiences in the Congo are perpetually delayed and remain recalcitrant to Marlow's attempts to understand them. Marlow insists that Kurtz's cry is a better one to explain itself, while his summary would be "a word of careless contempt" (*YHE* 118). Due to this uncertainty, readers are thus invited to

²³ See Zdzislaw Najder's discussion on the interaction between Conrad and Rousseau in Zdzislaw Najder. "Conrad and Rousseau: Concepts of Man and Society." *Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration*. Ed. Norman Sherry. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976, p77-90. The intimate relationship between Conrad and Henry James can be found in Conrad's letters and his critical essay *Henry James: An Appreciation*.

solve the puzzle of what Kurtz's cry means and why Marlow retreats from passing moral judgement.

Marlow as a Caretaker of Kurtz's Memory

As a poetic rememberer, Marlow endeavours to penetrate into the depth of ineffable external reality and recapture them in words. At the same time, he is highly critical of his own abilities to fully comprehend the intricate phenomena in the Congo. This tension drives the unfolding of the plot as a patchwork of Marlow's conflicted self-consciousness, and becomes the dynamics of his narrative. The following discussion will explore how the narrator's desire to render justice to Kurtz comes in the form of structuring his past into a unified and meaningful narrative, and how this desire is met with his own doubts as to whether this can even be done. In short, I will discuss how Marlow's act of narration illustrates his continuous desire to explore the labyrinth of his initial experience, rather than the desire to seek a definitive resolution to it. In doing so, Marlow presents himself as a poetic rememberer.

Before Kurtz dies, the ivory agent asks Marlow to look after his documents. As the narrator recollects: "One morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph – the lot tied together with a shoe string. 'Keep this for me,' he said" (116). Kurtz entreats the narrator to "take good care of '[his] pamphlet' (he called it) as it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career" (96). The pamphlet becomes the only physical document that proves Kurtz's existence in the world. After Marlow returns in London, he thought "his memory [of Kurtz] was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man's life – a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passages" (121). However, unlike other deaths that barely leave traces in his life, his memories of Kurtz are imprinted on his mind.

The narrator's "unconscious loyalty" to Kurtz implies the persistent presence of the latter in his memories (119). Indeed, he is a responsible caretaker of Kurtz's memories, properly distributing the ivory trader's pamphlets to different people. Yet, the core of Kurtz's experience in the Congo does not lie in these physical documents. Instead, the narrator tells us: "I affirm Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He had said it". In Marlow's eyes, Kurtz is remarkable, not only because he had summarized his life in an incomprehensible environment, but more importantly because he had articulated it. This constitutes Marlow's essential memory of Kurtz, as he himself affirms that "[this] is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last" (116). Compared to the preservation of the written documents, remaining loyal to Kurtz's last words presents itself as a more challenging task.

Relating Kurtz's life experiences to others is one way to preserve the ivory agent's memory. In the very beginning, Marlow tells his audience that "we live in the flicker – may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling" (46). These remarks seem to suggest that our existence resembles the burning of the fire, which stops as soon as the fire of life is extinguished. What is left are merely traces. In discussing cinders, Derrida observes that "[...] there is this incineration, this experience of incineration is experience itself...there is incineration as experience, as the elementary form of experience" (*Points* 209). If living is an "experience of incineration," it is a constant process of losing life and losing our memory. The dissolution of memory over time is inevitable. What bothers Marlow is the loss of the loss of memory, which refers to the fact that Kurtz's memory will be permanently lost if he does not retell it to others. To some extent, his retelling is critical for Kurtz's experience to live and exist in the memories of others. As Marlow relates in *Lord Jim*:

I suppose I must have fallen into a sentimental mood; I only know that I stood there long enough for the sense of utter solitude to get hold of me so completely that all I had lately seen, all I had heard, and the very human

speech itself, seemed to have passed away out of existence, living only for a while longer in my memory, as though I had been the last of mankind... This was, indeed, one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth; I had looked under its obscure surface; and I felt that when tomorrow I had left it for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion. I have that feeling about me now; perhaps it is that feeling which has incited me to tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality – the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion. (*Lord Jim* 302)

Here, Marlow is recounting what he saw and heard in the island of Patusan to his audience in *Lord Jim*. The remarks above suggest his motive of retelling stories about Patusan in a succinct way: to keep the memories of Patusan – a forgotten place – as a witness of its existence. Otherwise, if Marlow does not repeat it to others, this place and its memories will slip into the abyss of darkness and be forgotten forever. Likewise, given that Marlow is the only witness of Kurtz's last words, the best way to keep Kurtz's past is to retell this tale. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow states little about the necessity of transmitting Kurtz's words and speech. However, his act of repeating Kurtz's experiences, initially to the latter's colleague and cousin, then to the Intended, and at last to the crew on the *Nellie*, keeps the ivory agent's memory alive through storytelling.

In addition, the caretaker Marlow insists upon commemorating Kurtz by means of rendering justice to him. Laurence Davies notes there are two different ways for Conrad to deal with the relationship between the living and the dead: one is through "supernatural means," while the other is by memory's "ritual partners justice and commemoration". Conrad's later work *The Shadow-Line* utilizes "supernatural means" to suggest how the late captain haunts the living Mr Burns on board, while Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*

seeks to do justice to and commemorate the dead Kurtz by his “work of memory” (Davies 117).

This points to not only what memory can do, but also what memory cannot do. In other words, Marlow’s retrospective return to his past is mediated by a particular purpose, an act that generates a form of pressure on him. He has to select details from Kurtz’s experiences and reorganize them into a meaningful narrative to render justice to Kurtz. In terms of how memories are always filtered and ordered around a specific goal in the present, Georges Gusdorf states thus:

The illusion begins from the moment that the narrative *confers a meaning* on the event which it actually occurred, no doubt had several meanings or perhaps none. This postulating of a meaning dictates the choice of the facts to be retained and of the details to bring out or to dismiss according to the demands of the preconceived intelligibility. (42; emphasis in original)

The postulation of “conferring a meaning” on a life episode is the original sin of any remembering act (42). Due to the advantage of temporal distance, the rememberer is blessed with God’s point of view that takes everything under his eyes. It is in this sense that the rememberer can reshape raw materials into a narrative structure to confer meaning on the past. However, as Gusdorf asserts in the quotation above, things might not have such gravity as that which the rememberer gives them, or might have many different meanings. By reducing multivalent possibilities to only one interpretation, it is inevitable that some essential details are magnified, while some others are underrepresented, ignored, or even distorted.

The beginning of the text indicates Marlow’s desire to confer meaning on his past experience. He assures his audience that it is not merely a personal story. Instead, it is “the

furthest point of [his] navigation and the culminating point of [his] experience” which will “throw a kind of light on everything about [him] – and into his thoughts”. From the start, Marlow presumes that his encounter with the “poor chap” in the centre of the Congo is the “culminating point” of his life events (*YHE* 48). It is thus natural that his narrative will unfold as a justification process. The moment that Marlow reaches the centre is the moment he concludes his experiences and confers meaning on this life episode.

Yet, the narrator is also aware of the limitations of having to confer a meaning on his Congo experience. Katherine Baxter notes that “Marlow’s quest is undertaken in existential angst and he is forever torn by the knowledge that he needs to give his activities a meaning but that, whatever it is, that meaning is at best arbitrary and at worst immoral” (20). Baxter points to Marlow’s unwillingness (or inability) to confer a meaning on his encounter with Kurtz due to the complexities of the initial experience. This means that the narrator is aware that it is impossible to extract a precise, clear, and definitive meaning from his past. In spite of this, the narrator still endeavours to organize his complex experience into an orderly narrative, and to relate it to his audience in the hope of rendering justice to Kurtz.

Marlow’s last interview with the ivory agent suggests what kind of justice he desires to render to Kurtz. After Kurtz’s death, the narrator offers his reflections upon his experiences in the Congo:

I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness with nothing under foot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right and still less in that of your adversary. (118)

The repeated use of the word “without” brings to the fore that the centre of the Congo is deprived of everything that one can access in western civilization: the surveillance and

influences from the public, the pride and glory, as well as the desire to win one's adversary. It is "hollow at the core" (104). This sensation of hollowness and blankness is incomprehensible to one who lives on the side of civilization. Yet, Kurtz journeys down to the depth of this hollowness and brings back some knowledge: "The Horror! The Horror!" Marlow himself confesses that Kurtz is a remarkable man as the latter has something to say at the last moment, while he, although "within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement," finds himself "that probably [he] has nothing to say" (118). Thus, the justice that Marlow wants to render to Kurtz is how the first-class ivory trader penetrates the depth of darkness and discovers "hidden secrets" from the incomprehensible and menacing land – the horror (103).

Unsurprisingly, the narrator's narration is structured by his efforts to evoke the sensations of horror. The condensed moment of horror comes from Kurtz's last words "The horror! The horror!" (117). The multitudinous meanings of the word "horror" that Kurtz had pronounced become a typical interest of critical attentions. The French philosopher and literary critic Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe asserts that "the West is the *horror*" (112; emphasis in original). In taking issue with Lacoue-Labarthe's stress on the political aspect above – the Western imperialism, J. H. Miller argues that the horror delivers a "more ubiquitous and pervasive underlying horror" ("Prologue" 19). In other words, the sensation of horror involves not only political horror, but the horror experienced in the human psyche at the face of threatening non-human nature. Furthermore, Miller identifies the horror with death.

The pervasive sensation of horror acts as a centripetal force to unify and regulate reader's reading process from the outset to the most compressed moment of Kurtz's pronouncement of it. Some carefully selected details are dispersed along Marlow's journey to communicate the sensation of horror: two ghost-like knitting women; a strange doctor who "lifted a warning forefinger" before Marlow leaves for the Congo(50); the grass that grows

through men's ribs; the European ship's ironic firing at the empty land; the chained natives; the "gloomy circle of some inferno" replete with dying black shadows (57); the "middle-aged negro with a bullet-hole in the forehead" (62); the inscrutable ritual rites performed on the land with "the throb of drum and the drone of weird incantations" (113); the shrunken heads on the pole outside Kurtz's hut; the crawling of the natives towards Kurtz and the like.

These consciously-selected details work together to underscore the mysterious power of darkness and its horror. Though Kurtz is finally swallowed by the darkness, Marlow shows his sympathy for the latter's lonely confrontation with it in the centre of the Congo:

You cannot understand? How could you – with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows, and lunatic asylums – how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude – utter solitude without a policeman – by the way of silence – utter silence where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion. These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. (94)

This paragraph summarizes Kurtz's living condition in the centre of darkness – "utter solitude" and "utter silence". In other words, Kurtz lives in a world where disciplined civilization completely disappears. Under these circumstances, one has to rely on one's "inner strength" to avoid the endless gratification of one's desires. Unfortunately, Kurtz lacks self-restraint, consequently succumbing to his monstrous lust. Yet, in the same passage above, Marlow does justice to Kurtz as well. The narrator stresses that people (including his listeners on the *Nellie*) cannot understand the destructive power of utter silence as they live

on the safe side of civilization. As Marlow observes, “these little things make all the great difference” (94).

It is evident that Marlow endeavours to make his audience see the aforementioned differences in his narration. In other words, the narrator tries to relate the completely alien and menacing world in which Kurtz lives. This is in line with Conrad’s own artistic credo, as he expresses explicitly in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*: “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” (*The Nigger* 19). Interpretations of the expression “to make you see” are multi-layered. Given how Conrad is familiar with Baudelaire and Walter Pater, “to make you see” seems to suggest symbolism and literary impressionism.²⁴

Commenting on Marlow’s endeavours to make his audience see Kurtz’s living condition in his storytelling, Con Coroneos offers readers some insight, arguing that

For Conrad, communication depends very much upon perceiving what lies in between things. On the cognitive level, this is dramatized in the super-subtle understandings of Marlow...but it also has an acute physical presence in his work. Seeing is frictional, massy, and carries a certain transactional weight.
(113)

In other words, to make his audience see is not merely to present his readers with objective events and things, such as the atavistic rituals performed by the natives. Neither is it to impose Marlow’s felt experiences on his listeners. Instead, it is to see “what lies in between things” (113). This sort of seeing is rooted in the frictional interactions between the seer and the seen. Yet, as the audience has not seen the Congo that Marlow and Kurtz have seen, it is thus too difficult for them to imagine the same scenario.

²⁴ Please especially see Ian Watt. *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. California: University of California Press, 1979, p168-180.

Kurtz's uncommunicable experience finally leads Marlow to lie to the Intended. To render justice to Kurtz is the "idea at the back of" Marlow's retelling of his experiences, and he shows his "unselfish belief in the idea – something [he] can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (47). The narrator offers his biggest sacrifice when asked by the Intended what Kurtz's last words are. As a person who "hates, detests and cannot bear a lie", he shocks readers in a striking way by substituting Kurtz's whispered "The horror! The horror!" into his fiancée's name (69). In this way, Marlow believes he "render[s] Kurtz that justice which [is] his due" (126).

In terms of the idea of lying in narrative, Michael Gazzaniga argues thus:

What is so adaptive about having what amounts to a spin doctor in the left brain? Isn't telling the truth always best? In fact, most of us are lousy liars. We become anxious, guilt ridden and sweaty... Still the interpreter is working on a different level. It is really trying to keep our personal story together. To do that, we have to learn to lie to ourselves. (26)

The act of lying works to keep past experiences within a controllable pattern, and thus keep our life narrative going on. This explains Marlow's act of lying to some extent. He believes that it is impossible to articulate the singular darkness that he and Kurtz had experienced in the Congo. No one on this safe side of the world can understand him, as he recalls: "[he] felt so sure they could not possibly know the things [he] knew" (*YHE* 119).

Therefore, by reorganizing his uncommunicable experience into an intelligible version – a lie that Marlow manufactures as an illusion both for himself and for the Intended – it is more easily to be recognized and accepted. For Marlow, it is a way to continue his life. In this light, Ted Billy perceptively notes that "if experience is a constant process of disillusionment, then the manufacturing of personal illusions must be equally constant in order for human beings to go on living" (75). Marlow's trip upriver to the Congo disillusion

him and allows him to gain insight about human nature, colonial enterprise, and western culture. Of equal importance, however, is that Marlow has to return to daily life and go on living after he sees all the darkness in the human world. Given how the process of disillusionment is inseparable from the fabrication of new illusions in one's life, as Ted Billy observes above, the narrator's act of lying to the Intended is not only beneficial in certain areas, but a necessary decision as well.

Loss of Emotions in Narrative

Marlow chooses to lie to the Intended so that she has some words to "live with" (125). Likewise, he chooses to lie to himself by reducing the complexities of his Congo trip into a comprehensible version (replacing Kurtz's word horror with the Intended's name). Yet, according to William Earle, Marlow's consciousness "could not lie to itself". Otherwise, the consciousness "would not be aware of what it had to lie about" (40). That is to say, Marlow knows that it is impossible to render justice to Kurtz by constructing a coherent and intelligible narrative. In other words, the narrator is sceptical about the effects of his act to confer a meaning on Kurtz's experience. This self-consciousness surreptitiously sneaks into Marlow's storytelling, thus disrupting the supposed order and harmony.

The illusion of a unified narrative is disrupted in the middle of the narrator's storytelling. After Marlow recalls the moment when their boat is attacked by the natives, he is overwhelmed by the idea of being deprived of the chance to talk to Kurtz. At this point, readers are baffled by how the orderly narration of events is abruptly disrupted. His narrative suddenly leaps forward to describe his meeting with the Intended which happens much later, and returns to introduce Kurtz's personal history. Daniel Schwartz shares his insights with the reader in reading this dramatic change of Marlow's narrative rhythm.

Although every event is informed by his present attitudes, Marlow's meditation follows the order of the original experience until he reaches the circumstances surrounding his first meeting with Kurtz...Marlow defers recounting the meeting with Kurtz in order to leap ahead to his meeting with the Intended, to comment on Kurtz's megalomania and to relate how he saw the shrunken heads. He has difficulty recollecting his impression of the more gruesome details of his experience. (*Rereading Conrad* 127)

Schwarz discusses here why Marlow delays the narration of his first encounter with Kurtz. The narrator does not lose control over his storytelling rhythm until he has to relate his encounter with Kurtz. Schwarz suggests that the reason lies in Marlow's inability to recall "the more gruesome details of his experience" (127). This is also what Marlow himself claims is "the culminating point of his experience" (*YHE* 48).

Based on Schwarz's observation, I suggest that the narrator's inability to recall his first meeting with Kurtz stems from how challenging it is to communicate life sensations in narrative, a problem that Marlow is acutely aware of. Pierre Janet argues that "the essential goal of retention and remembering is not limited to recounting actions; rather, it is to bring hearers to an experience of the sentiments they themselves would have had if they had been present at the event" (qtd. in Ross 148). Echoing Janet, Marlow also believes that retelling an episode should not be restricted to actions, events, and facts, but rather should include the essential emotions and sensations as well. Unfortunately, as Marlow narrates, it is impossible to convey life sensations in narration.

Marlow expresses his sceptical attitude towards language when he is in the Central Station. The brickmaker continuously alludes to the fact that Marlow will see Kurtz soon, an influential figure in the company. At this point, the narrator interrupts his talking, impatiently asking: "'Tell me pray,' said I, 'who is this Mr Kurtz?' 'The chief of the Inner

Station,' he answered in a short tone looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said laughing; 'and you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that.'" (*YHE* 67). Herein lies the emptiness of language and the ability of language to hide the truth. Words refer to other words, a continuous process that involves one in a language game, but does not convey any truth. It does not communicate anything meaningful in mentioning Kurtz as the chief of the Inner Station, a statement that instead works to distance one from knowing who he is. In an ironical way, the narrator enacts the process of how language inhibits one from accessing truth and reality.

Similarly, in commenting on Kurtz's elegant talk, a talent that Kurtz is well known for among the western public, Marlow relates to his audience: "[Kurtz's] ability to talk, his words – the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating steam of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (92). For Marlow, language is a medium which at once both reveals and distorts, often betraying what the speaker desires to say, at times confounding listeners, at others illuminating experiences. In other words, his recounting can convey Kurtz's experiences in the Congo, but only at the cost of being stripped of certain truths. This includes, among other things, what the narrator regards as the essentials of a life episode and life sensations.

In spite of the loss of emotional experience in narration, the narrator has to remember and retell through language. This causes anxiety and depression for Marlow. In the midst of his storytelling, he laments that:

...No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence-that which makes its truth, its meaning – its

subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream –
alone... (70)

To Marlow, what constitutes the quintessential truth of a “given epoch of one’s existence” is the felt and lived “life sensation”. The emotional and sensational experience penetrates the density of life and pricks the rememberer’s soul. What dismays the narrator is his inability to translate his deeply-felt emotions into words and relay them to his audience.

Richard Niland points out that “the memory of past individual experience bring comfort as well as a corresponding awareness that it will always remain personal” (101). The implication here is that although Marlow can relate his past experience to others as comfort for himself, he is also aware of how personal memory is singular to the rememberer. The audience might imagine Marlow’s experienced emotions through his descriptions, yet their understanding is inevitably distorted by their own consciousness. Aware of this, Marlow shouts out an insurmountable barrier in our life, that is, “we live, as we dream – alone...” (70).

In *Autobiography as De-facement*, Paul de Man echoes Marlow’s meditation on how language deprives readers of emotions in autobiographical writing. According to de Man, “the resources of [autobiographers’] medium” and “the technical demands of self-portraiture” regulate autobiographical writing, instead of the other way around (920). Marlow’s narrative (and most autobiographical narratives) hinges upon language to bring the past back to his audience. However, language is only “the representation [of the thing itself], the picture of the thing”. As such, language is “silent [and] mute as pictures are mute”. In short, de Man claims that in autobiographical narration, readers are deprived of “the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding”

(930). This implies that the private understanding of Marlow's last interview with Kurtz and the sensation of horror is only accessible to him.

Marlow's sincere confession about the limits of language, in turn, enables readers to sense a deeper truth in his narration. In other words, the narrator shows his uncertainty in how much narrative can reproduce the past. More importantly, he enacts the process of how he is tortured by the inherent limitation of storytelling, as he tells his audience:

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, surprises and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams... (*YHE* 70)

Here, the act of narrating his remembered past is compared to the act of telling the illusory "dream-sensation". Though aware of the fact that he seems to be telling a dream, he still keeps telling it in an effort to communicate what he saw in the Congo. In this way, Marlow dramatizes the gap between narrated events and lived experiences.

Hence, Marlow challenges the assumption that narrative can recapture lived experiences in a striking way. Mediated by language, the essential emotions are stripped away in the act of narrating the past. Yet, in the process of retelling his journey, Marlow still strives arduously to describe his felt-sensations. F. R. Leavis observes Conrad's insistence on the use of adjectives in the text, and accuses him of his "adjective insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery". To some extent, Leavis is very observant and convincing in arguing that Conrad, with "emotion insistence," is obsessed with expressing the unrepresentable (*The Great Tradition* 177). In *Heart of Darkness*, the adjectives that are intended to describe the indescribable can be seen everywhere:

“inscrutable intension,” “incomprehensive frenzy,” “unspeakable secrets,” “unspeakable pain,” “immense jabber,” “mysterious stillness,” “implacable force,” “unfathomable enigma,” “bewildered wonder” “inconceivable” and the like (*YHE* 77, 79, 86, 109, 111, 126). This descriptive excess leads Fredric Jameson to criticize Conrad’s style as “impressionistic will to style” (196).

Yet, this “will to style” suggests more than the writer’s insistence upon stylistic effects. Instead, it attempts to underline the critical place of emotions in individual experience in an adventurous fashion. Here, Jean Starobinski’s insight about style would be helpful to understand Conrad’s idiosyncratic quirks in writing. In discussing the significance of an author’s style in autobiographical writing, he maintains:

So style...takes on an importance that is not limited to the introduction of language alone, to the technical search for effects alone: it becomes “self-referential,” it undertakes to refer back to the “internal” truth within the author. (81)

According to Starobinski, the fact that Marlow uses adjectives obsessively to describe the ungraspable testifies to another “internal truth” about himself (81). This truth mirrors his desire to convey his felt-sensations to the audience, an intention that is clearly indicated at the outset. What he tries to achieve through his storytelling is to make his audience “understand the effect of [his river trip]” on him (*YHE* 47). To Marlow, the effects are mostly about his sensations and emotions.

Thus, I suggest that Marlow acknowledges the limitation of recalling past traces via language, yet he performs this limitation repeatedly by obsessively utilizing excessive descriptive words, an act that dramatizes his wish to recapture life-sensations in language. In other words, Marlow attempts to make a virtue out of performing the limits of narrative.

Loss of Original Traces and Reconstruction in Narrative

The discussion above discloses Marlow's doubt in narrative's ability to convey life sensations. These life sensations that storytelling fails to recover are what Marlow believes to be the essence of his Congo experience. This is the first aspect of narrative's inherent restrictions in reproducing the past. Besides, considering how the original past is permanently lost, Marlow knows that his narration of Kurtz's experience misses the totality of the initial past as it is a reconstruction from his consciousness. In other words, with Kurtz's death, Marlow has to reconstruct the ivory agent's story from his own mind and from the present moment. This story of Kurtz is therefore not purely about him, but is one that is edited by Marlow, an edition that loses the authenticity of memory. This is because Marlow's understanding of Kurtz is incomplete and might be incorrect.

One scene in the text demonstrates Marlow's awareness of his incomplete reading of Kurtz's experience. Before they reach the Inner Station, the narrator and his pilgrims find a book in a deserted hut on the bank: "its title [is] *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* by a man Towzer, Towson – some such name – Master in His Majesty's Navy" (YHE 81). This book is itself not an "enthraling book," yet it has been brought to the Congo and heavily studied, a fact that attracts Marlow's attention. As Marlow narrates, he has some difficulty in recognizing the author of this book: Towzer, Towson – some such name. This difficulty of reading highlights the belatedness of his arrival. Yet, unlike the others, Marlow is unwilling to reduce the multiple possibilities into one interpretation by dramatizing his scepticism about whether the author is Towzer or Towson. Moreover, the narrator highlights the undecipherable notes on the book's margin: "such a book being there was wonderful enough, but still more astounding were the notes penciled in the margin, plainly referring to the text. I couldn't believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes,

it looked like cipher” (82). These notes are written in cipher, which the narrator is unable to grasp. In other words, Marlow can understand neither the author of this book, nor the notes on the margin which refer to the text.

As a miniature narrative, this scene symbolically mirrors Marlow’s difficulty in reading Kurtz and Kurtz’s experiences in the Congo if one compares the book to Kurtz. A similar pattern will emerge from this comparison. Marlow does not know who Kurtz really was. In the Outer Station, the Company’s accountant tells him Kurtz is “a first-class agent” and “a very remarkable person” (60). The brick maker in the Central Station frequently mentions Kurtz as “a prodigy,” “an emissary of pity and science, and progress” (67). After he returns from Africa, Kurtz’s cousin reveals that Kurtz is “a great musician”. Indeed, his concluding remarks reveal how uncertain he is of who Kurtz is: “and to this day I am unable to say what was Kurt’s profession, whether he had ever had any, which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers or else for a journalist who could paint” (120). Having noticed the complexity of Kurtz’s life, Marlow refuses to give the last judgement. He knows that any definitive reading of Kurtz would miss the totality of Kurtz’s experiences.

Similarly, others’ comments on Kurtz are invited to be taken as the notes written on the margin of Kurtz’s lived experiences. In this respect, Marlow shows his sceptical attitudes towards getting to know a person by means of reading others’ comments, saying:

I don’t like work – no man does – but I like what is in the work – the chance to find yourself – your own reality – for yourself – not for others – what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show – and can never tell what it really means. (72)

This paragraph seems to highlight the ethics of work and encourage people to find themselves in working. However, Marlow confesses that he does not like work in its own right. For him, work affords him an opportunity to experience life as his own reality. Otherwise, life can only be a mere show that others watch and discuss. In a similar way, the life show that others watch is never the real life lived and understood by the individual.

Marlow's attitudes towards work sketches out his idea about how significant it is to live and understand experiences in person. It is then not surprising that the narrator acknowledges that he "can never tell what it really means" for Kurtz to be a first-class ivory agent in the company (72). What he has in his mind about Kurtz is merely some fragmented and abstract information. The image of Kurtz is fleshed out a little more clearly for the first time when Marlow overhears a conversation between the manager of the Central Station and his nephew:

As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse. The dugout, four paddling savages and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home perhaps, setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I also did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. (75)

For the first time, Marlow forms a specific visual impression of Kurtz: he is a "lone white man," choosing to exile himself to "the depth of the wilderness" and returning to his desolation. Kurtz is therefore not just an abstract word for him anymore. Yet, Marlow confesses that he is unable to understand Kurtz's "motive" of returning (75). Here, Marlow is gradually revealing some information about the ivory agent, but at the same

time discreetly guiding readers to reflect upon whether one can properly understand another's experiences by others' comments and talks.

For Marlow, the most important thing is to see Kurtz himself, talk to Kurtz himself and understand Kurtz's experiences. Therefore, he crawls up the river toward the Inner Station slowly. As he asserts, he "crawled towards Kurtz – exclusively" to talk to him and get to know his inner reality. Traveling among the curtain of trees as a "wonderer on a prehistoric earth," Marlow has occasional "flash of insight" (79, 82):

I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz, but before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine would be a mere futility. What did it matter what any one knew – or ignored? What did it matter who was Manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach and beyond my power of meddling. (82)

Marlow's dubious attitudes towards his longed-for talk with Kurtz suggest that the essentials of one's experience is "beyond [his] reach and beyond [his] power of meddling" (82). To speak to Kurtz or not matters little since Kurtz's inner realities constantly elude him.

At last, Marlow sees Kurtz himself and hears him speak. Yet, he is too late to be the witness of Kurtz's life in the depth of darkness. What he has witnessed is a mere glimpse of a compressed moment on Kurtz's deathbed. He hears "the remarkable man who [has] pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth". The judgement Kurtz makes before his death is "The Horror! The Horror!". However, this often-pronounced word has lost the original meanings that Kurtz had intended. Reflecting

upon this, Marlow expresses his concern: “The voice was gone. What else had been there?” (117).

Only the person who has lived through the horror can truly know the meaning of this simple word. J. H. Miller contends that in *Heart of Darkness*, readers are not given a “living witness”. He continues to argue that “Marlow did not go far enough into the darkness, but if he had, like Kurtz he could not have come back. All the reader gets is Marlow’s report of Kurtz’s last words, that and a description of the look on Kurtz’s face” (*Tropes, Parables, and Performatives* 189). Indeed, as Miller observes, the narrator “draw[s] back his hesitating foot” and does not see what lies beyond “the threshold of the Invisible”. This act of retreating from the depth of darkness inevitably determines that he cannot understand Kurtz’s last word horror, as he himself is aware of: “It is [Kurtz’s] extremity that he seems to have lived through” (*YHE* 118; emphasis added). That he seems to have lived through Kurtz’s life is *not* the same as the fact that he had lived through the horror himself.

Kurtz’s death renders his original experience lost forever. Any reproduction of his life stories is from the perspective of Marlow at the present moment. However, Marlow’s memory is subject to his imaginative re-construction. This effect of belatedness is characteristic of memory, as James Olney claims:

[Memory] necessarily remains hidden, unconscious, unknown to the individual until the time when it rises to consciousness *after the fact* to present itself to him [the rememberer] as recollections that he can then trace back – a kind of Ariadne’s thread – to discover the shape that was all the time gradually and unconsciously forming itself. (240-241; emphasis in original)

Olney's remarks help one understand Marlow's incertitude about whether or not he can reclaim the lost past in its own shape. Memory of past experience happens only *after* the past is permanently lost. Kurtz's death makes his experience in the Congo accessible to no one.

Many years after his encounter with Kurtz, Marlow sits on the deck and recounts this episode of memory, doubting if he reproduces it as it was. He reflects that "the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration" (*YHE* 93). This reflection is a good piece of evidence that the initial experience about Kurtz is perpetually lost. What is left is merely the vibration that lingers in the narrator's mind. Thus, Marlow reminds readers from the outset that the past is "not very clear" and what he will report is "one of [his] inconclusive experiences" (*YHE* 47-48).

The text demonstrates this tension between the original past and the constructed one. Marlow's boat trip to the Inner Station is a symbolic process of him crawling slowly towards the origin of his memory, as he tells readers: "[g]oing up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world". When the narrator and his pilgrims "penetrate deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness," he is frustrated to realize that he is a lost "wanderer on a prehistoric earth" that "wore the aspect of an unknown planet". They are suddenly confronted with a group of howling natives on the bank. Yet, the narrator does not understand the meaning of their cries: "the prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell?" (78) Overwhelmed by uncertainty, he explains it away as follows:

We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember,
because we were travelling in the night of the first ages, of these ages that are
gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories. (46)

These reflections of Marlow make it clear to readers that the past glides away and disappears once and for all. One fails to remember and understand because one is too far away from the original past. Cut adrift from any familiar cultural signs, Marlow feels that "the earth seemed

unearthly”. Anne McClintock argues that “in ‘unearthly,’ as elsewhere in Conrad, the negative affix itself comes to carry a thematic value of its own, signalling that the world can be known and described only in terms of what it is not” (46). In other words, due to the fact that Marlow is too distant from the beginning of culture, he has to rely on present cultural signs to describe unknown objects. Therefore, for Marlow, the howling of the native is “unearthly”.

This means that the present serves as a reference point for Marlow to perceive, understand, and interpret the past when he is cut adrift from the original past. This inevitably leads one to construct the past from the present, especially when Marlow has to describe the inscrutable howling to the audience. In other words, what Marlow narrates is only a constructed past that is conditioned by and, simultaneously adapted to, the present. Marlow feels that there is a “remote kinship” between himself and the “howled and leaped” creatures. He senses similar “humanity” in them as well. Yet, he still finds these “horrid faces” uncanny because “we are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster” (79). The constructed conception about what native people should be like – conquered and shackled – distorts the fact that they are, in reality, free and vigorous. In other words, the image of the truth is modified by later construction.

The scene above illustrates how Marlow is permanently isolated from the original experience of Kurtz. Any reproduction of the initial experience, however vivid, is informed and shaped by his present consciousness. Olney warns readers that “we can recall what we were only from the complex perspective of what we are, which means that we may very well be recalling something we never were at all” (241). In short, what Marlow has resuscitated in his storytelling is not the original past any more. Aware of this, Marlow opens his speech by emphasizing that his recounts are about “the effect of [past events] on [him]” (*YHE* 47). What

happened in the past is already lost with Kurtz's death, and what can be told and shared is merely the effects of Kurtz's experience on him.

Two elements are brought to the fore by Marlow's emphasis on sharing the effects of his initial experiences. There is an original story – what really happened in the past, while there is a constructed narrative about the past – Marlow's tale on the *Nellie*. Objective events and happenings are transformed into ones to convey the effects that Marlow desires to make his audience see and feel. In this way, the narrator dramatizes his inability to recall the original past by highlighting the fact that his narration is merely his own interpretation of what has happened.

The Embedded Narrative

Given how Marlow has doubts about his ability to recover the past without missing the totality, his narrative is an “inconclusive experience” (47). The process of him retracing the past informs readers that the act of remembering is continuously interrupted by his doubts, and digresses accordingly from the designed path. This dramatizes his conflicts in his self-consciousness: he desires to render the complexity of his initial experience, while at the same time he constantly senses his inability to do so. Thus, a sense of uncertainty, struggling, and futility characterizes the overall texture of the narrative.

The tension between his desire to shape the ungraspable story into an ordered one and his concurrent self-consciousness that he is unable to do it galvanises the unravelling of the plot, and also forms a central concern of the text. In other words, his conflicted consciousness constitutes the thematic concern and also conditions the process of narration. Pain and loss hover above Marlow's struggling process to comprehend and shape the complicated past. In this sense, this text also registers the narrator's anxiety and

pain towards the loss of an original past, the inability to recover it, and his self-consciousness that the recovered past is not the past as it was any more.

That Marlow's storytelling is embedded in another layer of narrative helps us witness the tension and the heightened anxiety. In the preface to *The Nigger of "Narcissus"*, Conrad declares that "[m]y 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" (emphasis in original). However, *Heart of Darkness* is overwhelmed by voices and discourses: Marlow's compulsion to talk; Kurtz's eloquent ability to discourse; the native's jabber, noises and shouts. What does Conrad want readers to see in his voice-prevailing text? I suggest that, first of all, the writer wants one to see the physical presence of Marlow in the text, as he writes that Marlow "has sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol" (*YHE* 43-44).

Furthermore, Conrad calls our attention to Marlow's hesitation and silence in the middle of his storytelling. In the text, Marlow's process of narrating is replete with silence and narrative gaps. After Marlow's boat is attacked and his helmsman shot to death, he stops his recollection and sits there smoking. He keeps silent for a long time, as the primary narrator tells us: "[t]here was a pause of profound stillness...He was silent for a long time" (*YHE* 92). On the level of plot, Marlow's "profound stillness" suggests the shock and horror he receives from his helmsman's death. Yet, as Richard Ambrosini observes, Marlow "performs his role as narrative device" that "originates changes in [narrative] rhythm" (92). In other words, Marlow's silence interrupts the flow of his narrative rhythm. His audience has to wait for him to resume his storytelling.

Marlow's silence serves as a formal reflection of his thematic concern about the act of remembering. It dramatizes his concern that memory is full of chaos and gaps instead of being an ordered narrative. Commenting on the difference between oral and written modes of relaying memories - Holocaust memories in particular - to others, Laurence Langer observes that oral testimony has some advantages over written ones, such as "gesture, a periodic silence". However, the written memoir utilizes a "narrative voice" to "impose on apparently chaotic episodes, a perceived sequence" (141). The advantages of oral storytelling that Langer refers to here apply to Conrad's design of embedding Marlow's oral storytelling within a written narrative as well. Marlow's oral storytelling reveals silences and violent breaking of narrative rhythm.

When Marlow resumes his tale-telling, he meanders and traverses between different time and spaces, wandering from the absurd attack to his lies to the Intended, from Kurtz's obsession with ivory to his eloquent piece of writing, from the smell of the "dead hippo" to his loyalty to Kurtz. This break of narrative continuity indicates that coherence in the remembering process is illusory. In other words, a unified and linearly connected narrative is structured and shaped by the rememberer. Marlow's silence in the text materializes the chaos of memory.

In spite of the discordance and discontinuity that Marlow's remembering act generates, it offers an example of what the remembering process is really like. In this respect, Ford Madox Ford argues:

And it is in that way life really presents itself to us: not as a rattling narrative beginning at a hero's birth and progressing to his not very carefully machined but predestined glory – but dallying backwards and

forwards, now in 1890, now in 1869, in 1902 – and then again in 1869 – as forgotten episodes came up in the minds of simple narrators. (55)

As Ford suggests, remembering is in effect an arbitrary act, rather than one that follows a patterned order from the start till the very end. Disorder and sometimes repetition are a constituent feature of memory, a feature that is purposely denied and repressed in realistic storytelling. It is fair to say, in this sense, that Marlow's manner of tale-telling recovers a true image of memory for readers, insofar as it allows one to see remembering's forward and backward movements.

The primary narrator serves as a witness to Marlow's narrative gaps and silence above. More importantly, as one of Marlow's audience, his understanding and manner of storytelling serves as counterpoint to Marlow's.²⁵ The primary narrator's account offers a simplified understanding of experiences, thus forming a contrast to Marlow's. In speaking of the Thames, he comments: “and indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, ‘followed the sea’ with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames”. Subsequently, he cites some legendary generals such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin. In his eyes, these characters travelled afar on the River Thames and brought back immense treasure in the past. They are “great knights-errant of the sea” (*YHE* 44). In this way, Conrad dramatizes the primary narrator's simplified understanding of sea adventures, whose complexities are ignored. For him, the river represents success, treasure, fame, conquest, and national pride. His reductive way of understanding sea explorations is summarized by his own remarks: “what greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown

²⁵ The primary frame narrator might be a female character. Yet, for the sake of convenience, I use the pronoun – he – to refer to the primary frame narrator.

earth! ... the dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires” (45).

Unlike Marlow, the primary frame narrator does not penetrate the depth of these sea explorations and unsurprisingly cannot see the dark side.

In contrast to the naïve primary narrator, Marlow shows an alternative understanding of Britain’s conquest of the earth from the very beginning, a conquest that “mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (47). By comparing the primary narrator’s and Marlow’s different understandings of sea explorations, the writer underscores Marlow’s complex comprehensions of his Congo trip. However, the more complicated Marlow’s understanding is, the more difficult it becomes for him to shape his initial experience into a unified narrative.

Conclusion

In his “Author’s Note” to *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*, Conrad comments that *Heart of Darkness* is “like another art altogether” as Marlow’s tale-telling is not a “sincere colouring” of past experience. It is an experience “pushed a little (only a little) beyond the actual facts” (6). It is rather common for authors to draw materials from their own life and transpose them into fiction. Yet, Marlow’s narrative is not a transparent mirror to reflect Conrad’s traveling experience to the Congo. As a poetic rememberer, the narrator doubts that memory can resuscitate the past as a way to redeem the loss of original experience.

Marlow’s linear process of remembering is frequently disrupted and replaced by his obsessive fascination with describing landscape which, unlike his memory, evokes a sense of reality and stability. For example, when he recollects his conversation with the brick maker in the Central Station, he is frequently drawn to describe the smell of primeval mud, the murmuring of forest, and the visual image of the illuminating moon. This metaphoric

moment suggests Marlow's impotence to remember an ordered pattern of his initial experiences. By diverting to landscape descriptions, Conrad calls the reader's attention to one's inability to chronologically recall memory. In this way, the narrator's narration not only acknowledges the limits of remembering, but highlights that verbal rendering of original experience can also illuminate remembering experience. It reveals the reader how memory distorts reality and stages the truth that memory is, in effect, constructed.

Narration of the past is thus inevitably a process of selection and deletion, as William James remarks: "[t]he artist notoriously selects his items, rejecting all tones, colors, shapes, which do not harmonize with each other and with the main purpose of his work" (33). In this respect, a narrated event is about the past event rather than the past itself. Marlow the narrator is aware of this. When he endeavours to shape his complicated memories into an intelligible narrative, he dramatizes that this process has lost the complexity of the initial experience.

This doubt is embodied by Kurtz's Russian disciple in the Inner Station. According to Marlow, "he looked like a harlequin. His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown Holland probably but it was covered with patches, all over with bright patches, blue red and yellow – patches on the back, patches on front, patches on elbows, on knees" (*YHE* 98). These patches recall Marlow's view about narrating past experience: memory is a process of weaving different patches together from his present consciousness. Yet, no matter how "beautifully" he pieces them together in narrative, Marlow is aware of the fact the he has already missed the totality and completeness of original past. This involves the uncommunicable life sensations and the meaning of the initial experiences.

Thus, the text compels readers to see how the complexity of experience exposes the incompleteness of narrative. Indeed, historical evidence from Conrad's letter to Edward Garnett affirms the coexistence of different consciousness in a single text. In September

1898, Conrad wrote to his literary agent Garnett, discussing the nature of human consciousness:

The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness... But, don't you see, there is nothing in the world to prevent the simultaneous existence of vertical waves, of waves at any angles... Therefore, it follows that two universes exist in the same place and in the same time – and not only two universes but an infinity of different universes – if by universe we mean a set of states of consciousness. (*Selected Letters* 102).

Considering how this letter was written when Conrad was composing *Heart of Darkness*, this particular notion about consciousness must have influenced his representation of memory (a conscious activity) in the text. Conrad contends in the remarks above that there is the simultaneous existence of different (and even infinite) states of consciousness. Likewise, Marlow valorises the plasticity of human mind in the text as such: “[t]he mind of man is capable of anything because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future” (*YHE* 79-80). Indeed, the text *Heart of Darkness* examines the coexistence of different universes of consciousness: while Marlow is aware that past experience can be appropriated to serve for the present purpose, he is also conscious of how he would miss the complexities of his experience if he strives to shape a unified and ordered narrative.

This tension operates in Marlow's narration of his past, thus rendering his narrative a continuous movement to and fro, like the movement of waves. One moment of confidence is staged, and soon it is undermined by another moment of doubt, leaving readers baffled and lost. John Lyon vividly describes the reader's response in reading *Heart of Darkness* thus:

As we read, each narrative moment appears remarkably clear, vivid and immediate; *on reflection*, we are in danger of getting lost in a narrative maze.

And, in the light of the confusing experience of reading the work, the obvious *aesthetic* orderliness of *Heart of Darkness* itself becomes something of a marvel". (xxv; emphasis in original)

These words suggest that Conrad's imagination structures and controls his narrative, a difficult process given that the narrative is like a maze. The reader's experience affirms that Marlow's act of remembering does not follow a coherent and chronological mode. In our reading, we are aware of the narrator's narrative gap, his shifting of time and space, and his struggle to organize his chaotic memories into a unified one.

In short, the ironically charged text *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes the disparity between the real past and the remembered past, between the illusion of an ordered remembering process and the chaotic representation of a remembering act, between the desire to shape a pattern out of the past and the awareness of lost complexity. In other words, the writer draws our attention to how the process of inscribing past events into words includes the writer's doubts and anxiety within itself. As such, this text offers a paradigmatic narrative that casts doubt on authentic representation of memory, reminding the reader of an alternative possibility that initial experience may not be under the rememberer's control, or even completely elude him. Conrad's reluctance to close his narrative hints at his attitudes towards retracing the past in writing above. Given how complex Marlow's Congo trip is, his narration is also a continuous process of understanding his initial experience. Thus, the next chapter will discuss how Marlow enacts his past differently to different interlocutors in order to better understand his past.

Chapter Four: Rescue Work: Against One Interpretation

And besides, the last word is not said – probably shall never be said. Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention? I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth. There is never time to say your last word – the last word of our love, of our desire, faith, remorse, submission, revolt. The heaven and the earth must not be shaken, I suppose – at least, not by us who know so many truths about either.

(Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*)

The previous chapter discussed Conrad's persistent efforts in *Heart of Darkness* (1902) to communicate the complexity of his initial experience in the Congo, an act that dramatizes the limits of remembering. Alternatively, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the plasticity of memory and how Conrad seeks to better understand his past by enacting it in different ways. After examining Marlow's different versions of telling his past, first to the Intended and then to the crew members on the *Nellie*, I argue that autobiographical remembering is essentially an interpretative process, a process that involves the rememberer's repeatedly returning to and interpreting the past.

I will first investigate one of the central scenes in *Heart of Darkness*: the sudden attack of Marlow's boat by the natives. By exploring how Marlow initially mistakes arrows for flying sticks, I suggest that a comprehensive understanding of a particular past episode can only be attained in later recollection. This renders meaning-making constitutive of autobiographical remembrance. The discussion above sets a stage for this chapter to examine Marlow's continuous process of making sense of his encounters in the Congo by repeating his experiences to different interlocutors. The second section will revolve around Marlow's

interpretation of his past as a lie to the Intended, an act that I propose to read more as, in Jerome Bruner's words, an "interpretative feat" of the narrator, than as an immoral act to exclude women from truth ("Life as Narrative" 13). The Intended's way of perceiving the world and people (Kurtz in particular) is highly mediated and controlled by the schematized and conventional knowledge in the western world, which leads Marlow to conclude that it is impossible for a white woman to understand, to borrow Schachtel's terms, his "precivilized, unschematized experience" in the Congo (295). This understanding of the past is reread in the narrator's tale-telling on the *Nellie*. Therefore, the last section of this chapter will explore how Marlow enhances his knowledge of the past by highlighting the act of narrating his affectively-charged mnemonic scenes and events. As a result, readers will find that not only is Marlow's storytelling woven into a rich tapestry of bodily sensations, but that the rhythm of his narration is also dictated and structured around the feelings he experienced in the past. By drawing attention to Marlow's remembering as a meaning-making process, the thrust of this chapter is to demonstrate that the past, albeit with its irremediable loss in recollection, can be better understood in continuous interpretations.

The Belated Knowledge of the Past in Retrospection

The meaning of the title *Heart of Darkness* is open to disparate readings. One of Cedric Watts's interpretations is of particular significance here: "awareness is better than unawareness. We may become aware that it is better to be unaware, and we may even learn that ignorance is bliss" ("Heart of Darkness" 21). For Watts, the tension between knowing and not knowing forms a paradox in the text. Knowing that darkness is the heart of everything is worse than remaining ignorant. To be denied the knowledge that the centre is impenetrably blank denies one the possibility of a full life. The curiosity of "what is in there" will dangerously and unstoppably drive one to perceive more (Conrad *YHE*

69). This paradox is based on Marlow's experience in the text. Having penetrated the depth of darkness, Marlow returns with dangerous knowledge, declaring that people in the London street are "intruders" and their knowledge of life is "an irritating pretense" (119). This knowledge-gaining trip turns out to be a disillusioning one for the protagonist, rendering him doubtful of knowledge and civilization. This recalls Watts's argument above that "ignorance is bliss" ("Heart of Darkness" 21). In this sense, the paradox, as heart-wrenching as it is, involves continuously interpreting the past and then discerning new meanings from it.

Explaining the title's meaning from the perspective of Marlow is the first step to understanding the importance of interpretation involved in his autobiographical remembering. The belated knowledge valorises the human faculty of hindsight, and broaches the subject of human ignorance in the past as well (21). The incident of the attack in the text can best exemplify the belated understanding in retrospection. About one and a half miles away from the Inner Station, Marlow's steamboat is attacked by the natives. In his recollection, Marlow relates to his audience the following details:

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 splashy thump of the stern-wheel, and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows by Jove! We were being shot at. (*YHE* 89)

This paragraph demonstrates Conrad's narrative technique perfectly, which Ian Watt terms "delayed decoding" (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 270). The narrator regards himself as "an immediate witness" of an event who experiences "the sensations" first and then gradually discloses "their actual cause or meaning" (270). His perceptual image of the flying sticks is only understood as arrows after the immediate moment has elapsed. Indeed, Marlow's perception and his process of understanding are temporally separated in these lines.

Here, Conrad dramatizes Marlow's ignorance in the immediate moment of being attacked, rendering him a passive receiver of fleeting sensations. His belated understanding of the flying sticks as arrows relies on the faculty of retrospection. Henri Bergson argues that each moment in our life is split into two aspects: one is the fleeting perceptual events which constantly "go forward", while the other "continually reflect[s] the perception as a memory" for later recollection (181). Herein lies the significance of memory for everyone: revisit what has happened, form a continuous understanding of the surroundings, and, as Bergson puts it, save our existence from "a mere abstraction" (181). More emphatically, Bergson celebrates these double roles of our mind thus:

But it is far more than this. What is duplicating itself at each moment into perception and memory is the totality of what we are seeing, hearing and experiencing, all that we are with all that surrounds us. (182)

According to Bergson, the coexistence of perception and reflective memory in the mind constitutes the totality of one's experience at each moment. Changing stimuli from the external world allow one to experience new things and keep our lives moving forward. On the contrary, memory enables one to return to the past and re-live our unrepeatable life. From this respect, memory is a remedy for the permanent loss of the past.

Bergson's observation on the reciprocal relationships between perception and memory produces one problematic angle: the assumption that all perceptual images can be registered in our experience in their entirety. As William James avers, human experience is not equal to "the mere presence to the senses of an outward order" and it is not "of something simply *given*" (402; emphasis in original). The "selective attention" of the subject constitutes our experience:

Millions of items of the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience? Why? Because they have no *interest* for me. *My experience is what I agree to attend to.* Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind – without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos. Interest alone gives accent and emphasis, light and shade, background and foreground – intelligible perspective, in a word. It varies in every creature, but without it the consciousness of every creature would be a gray chaotic indiscriminateness, impossible for us even to conceive. (402-403; emphasis in original)

James is suggesting here that external stimuli will not be automatically experienced by one. In other words, the impressions will not leave their traces on our mind (and therefore our memory) unless the mind agrees to pay attention to them. More importantly, our attention is guided and influenced by our interests.

James's insight about how individual interests shape the realities experienced by a conscious mind brings us back to Marlow, whose isolated processes between perceptions and knowledge can be understood anew. Before Marlow's ship is shot, he expresses that the exclusive purpose of his trip is to talk to Kurtz, as he narrates: "[where] the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don't know...For me it crawled towards Kurtz – exclusively" (Conrad *YHE* 78). Completely absorbed in his fascination with Kurtz, Marlow's most important objective is to safely steer his ship to the Inner Station. As such, he is the last one on the ship to notice the attack when it happens. The poleman reacts to the unexpected shooting by "giving up his business suddenly and stretching himself flat on the deck"; his fireman has "sat down abruptly" and "ducked his head" (91).

Yet, what enters Marlow's consciousness is the strange behaviour of his poleman and fireman, with his confused sensations: "[he] was amazed" (89). The poleman and the fireman attract Marlow's attention as they are indispensable in managing the ship to crawl towards Kurtz. Because of this, he gives, to return to James again, "accent and emphasis" on what his poleman and fireman are doing, rather than what is happening outside (403). Though the narrator has perceived his crewmen's strange behaviours, his attention is still absorbed by his own business of manoeuvring the ship, "look[ing] at the river" very quickly to avoid "a snag in the fairway" (Conrad *YHE* 89). He also notices the flying sticks around since they "strike behind [him] against [his] pilot house".

Ironically, at this time, Marlow still assures readers that "all this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet – perfectly quiet". What he can hear is only the "heavy splashy thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things [arrows]". The narrator recognizes the acoustic effects his "stern-wheel" makes – "heavy and splashy", but he

merely mentions the sound of the flying arrows as “the patter of these things” (89). His attention is still not oriented to “these things” at this point.

The flying sticks are finally brought to the foreground when Marlow has managed to “clear the snag clumsily,” and then are registered and articulated as his experienced consciousness: “Arrows by Jove! We were being shot at” (89). To sum up the detailed discussion above, initially, Marlow does not pay attention to the attacking arrows due to his infatuation with Kurtz, and therefore does not register them as an experienced reality. The arrows do not enter into Marlow’s conscious experience until his “selective interest”, to borrow James’ terms, is shifted from his ship to the attack itself (402).

This selective attention foregrounds the inherent limitations of the human mind, highlighting that one’s experienced reality is shaped by one’s own selective principles. The split between Marlow’s perception and knowledge exemplifies this. John Peters claims that the text discloses “a significant aspect of the epistemological process,” that “meaning is not inherent but must be constructed” (39). He proceeds to explain that most people depend on their “common-sense realism” to perceive objects in the external world and do not even realize “that their initial perception was not of an ordered phenomenon but rather of one unordered” (39). In short, one must realize and know that perceptual images are constructed. Following Peters’s observation on the process of perception, the discussion that follows underlines how Marlow’s initial perception of his past is gradually understood and interpreted in recollection.

Even though exterior stimuli have become part of our conscious experience, one may not entirely understand it. Regarding how remembrance can reclaim some unnoticed meanings of the past, Georges Gusdorf suggests:

In the immediate moment, the agitation of things ordinarily surrounds me too much for me to be able to see it in its entirety. Memory gives me a certain remove and allows me to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space. As an aerial view sometimes reveals to archaeologists the direction of a road or a fortification or the map of a city invisible to someone on the ground, so the reconstruction in spirit of my destiny bares the major lines that I have failed to notice. (38)

With regard to how one should make sense of the past, the quoted passage invites meditation on the disadvantage of the immediate moment and the advantage of recollection afterwards. With the benefit of temporal distance, memory grants one a better understanding of the past, an understanding that places events and people in a comprehensive temporal-spatial context.

In the immediate past moment, however, one might be overwhelmed by “myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent,” to use Woolf’s remarks (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 160). This “incessant shower of innumerable atoms” that Woolf mentions will not be registered as one’s experience understood if they had not first been reflected upon. That is why Woolf persuades modernist writers to “record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall,” and “trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 161). To record the impressions is a way to temporarily stop fleeting conscious activities, analyse what one has received from the external world, and subsequently give them a form of existence in narrative. This reflective activity requires the ability of memory, an ability that enables one to return to past impressions. This is what Gusdorf has pointed out in the quoted passage above when

he is discussing the advantage of memory: “memory gives us a certain remove” from the overwhelming specificities of the immediate past (38).

In short, human memory enables one to escape the dictates of the immediate situations in the past, and furthermore, grants one more information to make sense of the past. As suggested earlier, Marlow is split into two different personas in the text: the participant in the past and the narrator in the present. As a participant of his initial experience, Marlow is as confused as anyone who encounters a particular situation for the first time. In retrospect, the narrator has made sense of the confused sensations. When Marlow retells his story to the audience on the *Nellie*, he interprets the attack thus:

What we afterwards alluded to as an attack was really an attempt at repulse. The action was very far from being aggressive; it was not even defensive in the usual sense; it was undertaken under the stress of desperation and in its essence was purely protective. (*YHE* 87-88)

Given “all the ins and outs of the matter”, to borrow GUSDORF’S words (38), Marlow maintains that the attack is “really an attempt at repulse” (*YHE* 88). When the narrator arrives in the Inner Station, he meets Kurtz’s last disciple, a young Russian adventurer, who tells Marlow that “Kurtz ordered the attack to be made on the steamer” (110). According to the young Russian, Kurtz summons the natives to “scare away” Marlow and his pilgrims. In so doing, they would “give up” and “think him dead” (110). The result of the attack is indeed as Kurtz has expected it to be. After the ship is attacked, the pilgrims “ha[ve] given up Kurtz [...] and the station;” they thought “Kurtz was dead and the station had been burnt – and so on – and so on” (97). Therefore, the purpose of Kurtz’s ordering this attack is more about avoiding being “taken away” from his station.

Bearing a complete picture of the attack in mind, Marlow's recaptured story adds another layer of understanding: it is "an attempt at repulse" (88). People in the dark land are enchanted by Kurtz's talk, treating the white man as their god. They even "crawl" before him, "crawl[ing] as much as the veriest savage of them all" (105). In Marlow's narration, he explains that it is not an "aggressive" attack, but rather a "purely protective" action to stop their god from being taken away (88). Their sincere devotion to Kurtz can be detected on the day when Kurtz is carried onto the ship and brought back to London. Two thousand people "fill the clearing," following the movement of the boat, "shout[ing] periodically together strings of amazing words" and "roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance" (114). Yet, Marlow obtains all this knowledge and understanding afterwards when he meets the Russian disciple and Kurtz's people. In the immediate past when the attack takes place, however, what Marlow has noticed is merely the fusillade, the flying of arrows, the "warlike whoop," the howls and the smoke of rifles (90).

The restricted access to knowledge in the immediate moment is dramatized figuratively by a fog scene in the text. When the fog develops gradually on the way to the Inner Station, Marlow is isolated from the external world, unable to see anything except for the "steamer [they] were on" (84). He continues to comment that "[t]he rest of the world was nowhere as far as our eyes and ears were concerned" (84). The crew is cut adrift from what lies ahead of them and trapped by the immediate situation. As a result, they cannot make a move, either to go up, down, or across the river, and is, accordingly, lost in an instant. When the fog is lifted two hours later, Marlow sees "an islet" in the middle of a stream which Marlow finds out later is "the head of a long sand-bank or rather of a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river" (88). This dramatized episode of Marlow being trapped on the foggy stream brings to the fore, as Werner Senn observes, the difficulties of "identify[ing] and nam[ing] things" in the

immediate instant. He further argues that this necessitates a greater “intensity of Marlow’s preoccupation with visual perception” on what has happened on him rather than understand the meaning of it (73). Figuratively, this means that, for Marlow, a revisiting of his foggy past is necessary and beneficial.

Mark Freeman proposes the idea of “autobiographical understanding” to explicate the belated knowledge of the initial experience, arguing that interpretative activities, such as self-reflections and remembering, can reclaim unnoticed meanings. By drawing on Gusdorf, Freeman suggests that “the truest rendition of experience comes not from the immediate reality of the moment, flesh-and-bone solid though it may be, but from reflection, memory, *narrative*” (132 emphasis in original). Here, Freeman calls attention to how self-reflection, memory and narrative contribute their share in obtaining the “truest rendition of experience” (132). Yet, these three ways of meaning-making are not separated, but rather, are integrated.

Similarly, Max Saunders postulates the redemptive function of memory to reclaim bygone impressions, noting that “modernism explores the redemptive possibility that lost experience can be regained in memory”. Furthermore, he points out the importance of narrative techniques in this process: “the characteristic way modernism expresses this temporal self-alienation is by disrupting linear chronology, and following instead sequences of mnemonic association” (56). To follow Saunders’ observation, Marlow’s disjointed times and spaces in his narration feature the sequence of his remembering process, a process that remains faithful to “mnemonic association”.

The complexity of experience itself influences the extent to which one can make sense of the past. In terms of highly complex experiences, such as Marlow’s trip to the Congo, the multitextured reflections and dreamlike memories may make it difficult for the rememberer to start the process of narrating. In other words, Marlow may be overwhelmed by what he gains from the highly complicated experiences. The narrator starts his journey of

recollection with this sentence: “‘And this *also*,’ said Marlow suddenly, ‘has been one of the dark places of the earth’” (*YHE* 45). Any act of remembering needs an entry point so that the return to the past can be animated and re-enacted. Marlow’s use of the word *also* suggests a circular character, which symbolizes his inability to directly start the retelling process.

The word *also* denotes the dynamic process of “autobiographical understanding” that Freeman refers to above (132). Marlow’s Congo trip allows him to gain deeper understanding of London. After Marlow declares that London is also one of the darkest place on earth, he continues by relating a historical incident from nineteen hundred years ago – the Roman conquest of London, a historical instance that Gene Moore regards as a narrative of “*Heart of Darkness* in *miniature*, as the tale of a young Roman sent off to the blank edges of the known world” (3). The implication of this comparison is that the Roman conquest prefigures British colonization of the Congo; and what the young Roman soldiers have experienced sheds light on what Marlow will confront in the dark land. Indeed, Marlow describes how the Roman soldiers feel thus: the “utter savagery...[and] that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forests, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men”; the “incomprehensible” things are everywhere in the “inland post” of England (46). Indeed, these descriptions summarise the narrator’s sensations in the jungle.

However, this does not mean that the history of the Congo repeats the history of London. Rather, Marlow’s illuminating trip enables him to think of the London of the past as a similarly dark place as the Congo he sees now. England was once regarded by the Romans as a place of “wilderness” teeming with “mysterious life” and “wild men” nineteen hundred years ago (47), in the likeness of the Congo that Marlow has experienced and recalled. That version of England is the Congo of the present. With the “spectral illumination” of Marlow’s Congo travel, the “misty halos” of England’s history (and the general history of colonialism and imperialism) are made visible and clearer (45). From this aspect, the word *also* suggests

that the narrator's story is inherently embedded in another similar story, which helps to anchor the narrator's act of storytelling. Marlow's summary remarks about colonial expansions point to an essential issue. The successes of the conquerors – first the Roman and later the European Continent – are nothing but contingent on external historical conditions, or as Marlow comments, “just an accident arising from the weakness of others” (47).

Marlow's First Narration of His Past: The Last Word is Your Name

As discussed above, Marlow's experience in the Congo enables him to have a better understanding of England's history. This highlights the process of how new experiences reconfigure the past. After Marlow returns from the jungle, the Thames river is not what he once believed, “evok[ing] the great spirit of the past” that England is proud of, but rather understood as replete with “cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death” (44). What makes *Heart of Darkness* so captivating and powerful is that the author not only asserts the belated understanding of past experiences, but also proposes that the process of interpretation is a continuous one. In other words, autobiographical remembering is a continuous process of reading and re-reading the past, with the rememberer repeatedly returning to the past and discovering new meanings from it. The actualization of this process in the text owes much to Marlow who takes great pains to continuously interpret his stories.

Jens Brockmeir proposes a “narrative approach to autobiographical remembering, an approach that conceives of memories as inseparably fused with their interpretation in narrative and larger contexts of self, identity, and culture” (*Beyond the Archive* 98). His observation outlines two critical dimensions of autobiographical memory: it exists as a continuous interpretative process, and more importantly, the act of interpreting is situated in larger historical contexts. In this respect, this section suggests placing Marlow's first

interpretation of his initial experience – a lie – in dialogue with larger contexts, and then considering why he chooses the act of lying.

Marlow's experience in the Congo culminates in his meeting with the dying Kurtz. On his deathbed, Kurtz "cried in a whisper" his last words: "The horror! The horror!". Marlow describes his immediate experience as follows:

It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory visage the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of 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 – (Conrad *YHE* 117)

The impenetrable veil of Kurtz is finally lifted at his last moment. Yet, what Marlow can read from the ivory trader's face and last words is nothing but uncertainty. The juxtaposition of paradoxical words above suggests that Marlow is inadequate when it comes to understanding Kurtz's last words (and more importantly Kurtz's lived experience in the Inner Station): the pride is sombre; Kurtz's "ruthless power" is counterbalanced by his "craven terror"; the cry in the form of a whisper which is "no more than a breath". The narrator's bewilderment is best exemplified by his doubt if Kurtz "live[s] his life again" at his last moment. In this way, he draws our attention to the fact that the mysterious Kurtz is "beyond [his] reach and beyond [his] power of meddling," which becomes his "intense and hopeless despair" (82, 117). Underneath this juxtaposition of contradictory words lies Marlow's desire to understand, and his concurrent depression that results from his inability to understand.

Bewildering as this experience may appear to him, the narrator admits that retrospection helps him to see the past more clearly. After Kurtz dies, Marlow admits that “the most [he] can hope from [the mysterious life] is some knowledge of [himself] – that comes too late – a crop of unextinguishable regrets” (117). Marlow shifts the focus of his attention from endeavouring to understand Kurtz’s experience to understanding himself instead. He capitulates to the “mysterious arrangement” of life that is beyond his meddling, a sentiment that is best demonstrated in his unwillingness to sum up his experience: “[Kurtz] was a remarkable man...Better his cry – much better” (117-118). His surrender in the face of Kurtz’s ungraspable cry testifies to the complexities of experience. What he can get, among all other possible interpretations, is his own understanding of the dead.

The complexity of past experiences sets in motion a chain of interpretative narratives, among which Marlow’s lie to the Intended is the first rereading of his encounter with Kurtz. His re-narration is a new interpretation of the past *by* and *for* him. As Bruner claims: “[Autobiography] is a way of construing experience – and of reconstruing and reconstruing it until our breath or our pen fails us. Construal and reconstrual are interpretive” (“The Autobiographical Process” 161). Marlow’s first “construal” of Kurtz’s last words leaves it as it is – “[b]etter his cry” (*YHE* 118). However, this life episode is not sealed yet, but rather is still under what Bruner terms the process of “reconstrual” in Marlow’s interview with the Intended (“The Autobiographical Process” 161).

When the Intended asks about Kurtz’s last words, Marlow tells her a lie to protect her from the dark world. As Marlow recollects:

“Repeat them,” she said in a heartbroken tone. “I want – I want – something – something to – to live with.”

I was on the point of crying at her, “Don’t you hear them?” The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind.

“The Horror! The Horror!”

“His last word – to live with,” she murmured. “Don’t you understand I loved him – I loved him – I loved him!”

I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.

“The last word he pronounced was – your name.” (*YHE* 125)

Here, Marlow is, voluntarily or involuntarily, reinterpreting his initial experience, distorting Kurtz’s last words into the Intended’s name. As a result, he excludes women from men’s secret – the darkness of the world. Because of this, Marlow has been criticized by contemporary feminist commentators, most notably by Nina Pelikan Straus, Johanna Smith and Elaine Showalter.²⁶

Yet, I want to underscore Marlow’s *act* of lying instead of what he has said (the content) in the lie, with an attempt to elucidate that lying to the Intended is a necessary means for Marlow to re-examine and reconstrue the past. Vincent Pecora notes that as long as the gap between what the words said and what the words mean exists, what

²⁶ Please see Nina Straus. “The Exclusion of the Intended from Secret Sharing in Conrad’s ‘*Heart of Darkness*’.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 20.2 (1987):123-137; Johanna Smith. “‘Too Beautiful Altogether’: Patriarchal Ideology in *Heart of Darkness*.” *Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*. Ed Ross Murfin. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989, p179-195; Elaine Showalter. *Sexual Anarchy*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991.

Marlow actually says in the text “become[s] morally significant – or insignificant – in ways that contradict [his] original contexts” (998). Two observations can be derived from Pecora’s argument. The lie can be “morally significant” in that Marlow does exclude the Intended from the truth, while it is also “morally insignificant” if readers bear in mind the suggestiveness of words (998). Instead of focusing on the shifting meanings and effects of Marlow’s lie, it would be helpful to attend to his *act* of lying, and subsequently locate it in the bigger picture of his continuous efforts to make sense of the past. This act of lying, thus, thickens Marlow’s lived experiences as it colours the past with a new interpretation from the present.

Regarding the supposedly immoral act of lying as a rightly interpretative act requires one to ground it in Marlow’s specific narrative situation. By narrative situation, I refer to the different elements and factors that are at work when Marlow meets the Intended: his interlocutor is the Intended who has “the mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering” (122); the Intended needs Kurtz’s last words to “live with” (125); Marlow desires to render justice to Kurtz; he has been informed of more life details about Kurtz after he returns from the Congo.

How one interprets one’s past hinges on the narrative situation, which is usually discursive, differentiated, and unpredictable. In one of Freud’s letter to his friend Wilhelm in 1896, Freud confirms the “transcription” feature of memory, and avers that the “re-arrangement” of memory and past experiences depends on newly emerging conditions:

As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychical mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a

rearrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a
retranscription (*The Complete Letters* 207; emphasis in original).

The word “*retranscription*” suggests that the mechanism of memory resembles a text, which allows for reading and re-reading. Yet, Freud underlines the fact that the “*retranscription*” of original memory traces is contingent on “fresh circumstances” which emerge later. A text can generate different versions of reading if situated in different political and cultural circumstances. On a similar note, the appearance of new circumstances will produce new interpretations.

In the text, a new factor introduced to Marlow’s situation comes when he has to repeat the unspeakable horror to The Intended, a representative girl from the drawing room in the west. Before Marlow goes to meet the Intended, he already had an impression of her from the photo Kurtz has left him. She has “[a] beautiful expression,” possesses the “delicate shade of trustfulness,” and is “ready to listen without mental reservation” (*YHE* 120). As Marlow indicates in the very beginning of his tale, the world of women is “too beautiful altogether,” and it “would go to pieces” if they were exposed to the “truth” from the outside world (53). His preconception about women’s lives and their fragility that renders them unable to endure dark truths may be politically reprehensible for many contemporary feminists, but as I have stated earlier, I am more interested in how this idea influences how he re-reads the original memory. He believes that “[i]t would have been too dark – too dark all together” for women to know the truth outside (126). More than that, he assumes that men are responsible for keeping them in the drawing room at any expense, which leads him to make his decision: “I couldn’t tell her” (126).

This does not mean that Marlow had not experienced struggle, hesitation, and self-doubt before he lied to Kurtz’s fiancée. He is haunted by Kurtz’s whisper “The horror!

The horror!", even feeling that the surroundings are repeating this ghost-like sentence. He is nearly "on the point of crying at her" about the truth. Yet, with her persistent plea for some words to "live with", he pulls him back from the impulse of telling the truth (125). He surrenders: "The last word he pronounced was – your name," deciding to keep the horror to himself "for the salvation of another soul [the Intended's]" (121). This final compromise is not done without difficulties. He has to struggle within himself and "pull [himself] together" (125).

William Freedman responds to Marlow's lie as follows: "In the end, of course, he will not share it with the Intended. He will lie to her, not, too simply, because he wished to be loyal to the nightmare of his choice but because the tale he had to tell was horrible, unthinkable, and unutterable" (120). Indeed, the true tale is horrible and unbearable to women, according to Marlow. More importantly, the truth is "unthinkable" for the Intended. Alternatively, even if Marlow tells the truth, it would be too difficult for her to imagine and accept it as a truth.

The singularity of the narrator's experience cannot be understood if one had not personally experienced it. Marlow's scorn for common people on the street shows this newfound understanding: "[they] were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretense because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the meanings I know" (119). The Congo experience is unthinkable if one had not first exposed oneself to utter solitude and despair, while unmoored from any familiar sign of civilization. The sensations of horror, absurdity, and fear will not be a part of one's consciousness if these very sensations were not first lived and examined. From this perspective, the narrator believes that the Intended will not understand the truth even if he risks telling her everything.

The Intended's knowledge of the world and Kurtz is shaped by the highly organized and mediated western civilization. She avows that she "understand[s] [Kurtz] better than any one on earth," but she has this conviction because Kurtz had told her so (123). Jeremy Hawthorn argues that the Intended is "cut off from reality, and restricted to a world of sterile ideals and lifeless illusion" (189). Indeed, she lives in an insulated world of ideals and illusions constructed jointly by Kurtz and the public, whose words and deeds are uncritically accepted and interiorized by her. During their meeting, the Intended mourns the loss of Kurtz for herself, for Marlow, and even for the world, saying that "it is impossible that all this should be lost – that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing – but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had, I knew of them too – I could not perhaps understand – but others knew of them" (124). This passage shows how the Intended believes and supports fervently what "others" in the west (including Kurtz) think and understand.

Marlow's trip to the Congo, to some extent, acts as a means to deconstruct the ready-made ideal image that the public has of Kurtz, and even the entire constructed discourse about the mighty western civilization. As a representative, Marlow is sent to the Congo to feel, witness, and experience what it is like to be in Africa, another completely different civilization, and test whether what "others" say "in print and talk" is true or not (53). It is a trip to perceive and feel by himself, an individualized experience. At the outset, he is very excited to get the job in the inner land, which, as he suggests, is a realization of his childhood dream. Yet, the entire trip turns out to be a disillusioning one. Kurtz is not an "emissary of light", but rather an unrestrained and "unlawful soul" who gratifies his "monstrous passions" endlessly (113), who kills the natives (he calls them rebels) and hangs their heads on the poles outside his hut, who makes people "crawl"

towards him, who orders his people to attack Marlow's ship, and who prefers to crawl back to the "gleam of fires" and the "drone of weird incantations" (113).

Seeing such a monstrous yet verbally gifted Kurtz, Marlow articulates his feelings and impressions thus:

[s]heer blank fright, pure abstract terror unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made these emotions so overpowering was – how shall I define it –the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought, odious to the soul had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. (111)

When exposed to the real image of Kurtz in the jungle, Marlow acknowledges the incapability to describe his sensations. He has to make recourse to such abstract and empty words to highlight how he is morally shocked: "as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to soul" (111). Far from offering one a clearer picture of how he personally feels, this description, utilizing the phrase *as if*, discloses more of uncertainty and hesitation. Yet, these intensely felt feelings are a testament to the true version of Kurtz, a version that contradicts what the western world claims.

Marlow's inability to capture individualized feelings in words finds theoretical underpinnings in Ernest Schachtel's writing, in which he seeks to explain how schematized and civilized memory inhibits one from expressing personally felt sensations:

Conventionalization is a particular form of what one might call schematization of memory. Voluntary memory recalls largely schemata of experience rather than experience. These schemata are mostly built along the lines of words and concepts of the culture. Also the so-called visual or

the auditory memory reproduced schemata of visual or auditory impressions rather than the impressions themselves. Obviously the schemata of experience as well as of memory are determined by the culture which has developed a certain view of the world and of life, a view which furnishes the schemata for all experience and all memory. (294)

In this excerpt, Schachtel proposes how conventional ideas and schematized knowledge in a civilization can shape a human mind in a powerful way. What one can remember and articulate stems from the culture that one can gain access to. Highly schematized knowledge determines highly schematized expressions of feelings. A consequence of this is that it becomes difficult, or even impossible, to articulate very specific and individualized sensations in verbal form without turning to schematized concepts and formulaic expressions.

Closely following the quoted passage above, Schachtel proceeds to argue:

But the range and differentiation of a culture like that of Greece, India, China, or modern Western civilization is of considerable scope. It offers highly differentiated and subtle as well as very conventional, banal, and commonplace schemata. By conventionalization of the memory (and experience) schemata, I understand those memory processes which are subject to the most conventional schematization and which, therefore, are not capable of reproducing individual experience, but can only reproduce what John Doe is supposed to have experienced according to the Joneses's and everybody else's ideas of what people experience. Every fresh and spontaneous experience transcends the capacity of the conventionalized memory schema and, to some degree, of any schema. (294-295)

Here, Schachtel points to the danger at the core of conventional and schematized memory. When confronted with different cultures or events that do not fall under the scope of predetermined concepts and perceptions, one is not able to register and reproduce the “fresh and spontaneous experience” in appropriate language (294).

This explains Marlow’s confusion in the face of the transformed Kurtz and his frustration in finding appropriate expressions to articulate it, as he acknowledges: “how shall I define it” (Conrad *YHE* 111). When he hears Kurtz’s last words “The Horror! The Horror!”, Marlow decides to keep it in its original form – a cry. What he feels and experiences – the horror, the unspeakable secretes, the mysterious religious ritual in the Inner Station – are beyond his familiar and schematized experiences, and therefore, beyond his ability to express. He does not know how to register it in language without having recourse to schematized concepts and words. Yet, this act of seeking help from conventional expressions is a reductive and simplified way to transmit his authentic sensations.

Kurtz’s last word - horror - is not a simple one that can be explained away without distorting its complexities and subtleties. Even Marlow, who has voyaged to the Congo, cannot grasp the meanings of the horror in its entirety. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine the Intended’s shock and confusion. Let us imagine this scenario: what if Marlow told her that Kurtz pronounced “The Horror! The Horror!” instead of her name on his deathbed? How should Marlow explain that word to her? How is Marlow to reveal that Kurtz had turned into a savage God of the natives? Pondering over these questions, he hesitates to reveal the truth. He knows that his “precivilized, unschematized experience”, to borrow Schachtel’s terms again, cannot be understood by the Intended, who perceives the world in a categorized and conventional way.

It is not the only problem of the Intended, but the issue of the western civilization. Schachtel helps us to understand the deficiency of the way in which westerners perceive and experience the world, remarking as follows:

[i]n a culture oriented towards efficient performance of profitable activities, a society in which everybody has to fit like a cog in a machine and where powerful pressure is exerted to make people equal, in the sense of uniform, autobiographical memory is discouraged in its development and predestined to atrophy. (320)

Devotion to efficiency and profit turns one into a uniform machine whose sensations and feelings are atrophied. The chief accountant who fully devotes himself to the ethics of efficiency in the Outer Station is a great example. When he hears the natives talking about a dying chief agent outside his office, instead of showing his compassion, he is very annoyed by their noise that distracts him from “mak[ing] correct entries of perfectly correct transactions” (61). He becomes, as Schachtel suggests, “a cog in a machine” without feelings towards external events and people (230).

Unlike the chief accountant, the atrophy of the Intended’s sensory abilities comes from another aspect of the highly efficient culture. Her uncritical acceptance of the existing western beliefs and values, according to Schachtel, “reduce[s] all experience to the perception...seen by the family, peer group, and society” (238). To put it in simple words, what the Intended has felt and perceived are not her own sensations, but rather the schematized ideas from Kurtz and the public.

If the Intended desires to understand Marlow’s (and Kurtz’s) experience, she needs “a far-reaching change in the whole way of perceiving and experiencing the people and the world around [her],” a change that, according to Schachtel, “the adult mind is quite unable

to imagine concretely” (301). On this occasion, Marlow understands that revealing the truth to her may be not so important.

Furthermore, the devoted wife will not change her idea of Kurtz even if Marlow were to tell her the truth. This is indicated by another faithful follower of Kurtz, the young Russian. When asked about what he thinks about Kurtz’s killing of the natives and hanging their heads on the stakes, the Russian says: “I don’t understand...I’ve been doing my best to keep him alive and that’s enough...He was shamefully abandoned. A man like this! With such ideas” (105). Like the Intended, this Russian disciple accepts whatever Kurtz says, an act that worries Marlow. He points out the potential danger for the reader:

I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz thought. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far. (*YHE* 101)

In this respect, this fervent supporter of Kurtz is a transparent shadow of the Intended, given how ready they are to devote to Kurtz. Marlow’s experience with the Russian disciple serves as a signal for what the Intended will do, either for helping herself live in a protected world, or for protecting Kurtz’s reputation. In their meeting, she frequently mentions “Kurtz’s greatness,” “his general mind,” “his vast plans,” and firmly believes that her fiancé’s words “must remain” (124).

In addition, Marlow does not feel there is a necessity to talk openly about the secrets in the jungle and enlighten others, an insight he has gained on the way to the Inner Station:

I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz, but before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine would be a mere futility. What did it matter what any one knew – or ignored? What did it matter who was Manager? (82)

What is the point of “talking openly” with the Intended and the public? It does not matter so much if the Intended knows who Kurtz really is. The final result would be “a mere futility” (82). No matter what Marlow does, Kurtz “won’t be forgotten” since “whatever he was he was not common” (96). This is the “merciless logic” of the mysterious life (117).

Thus, the act of lying is what Jerome Bruner terms “an interpretive feat” for Marlow. Bruner perceptively points out that:

When somebody tells you his life...it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given. In the end, it is a narrative achievement. There is no such thing psychologically as “life itself.” At very least, recounting one’s life is *an interpretive feat*. Philosophically speaking, it is hard to imagine being a naïve realist about “life itself”. (“Life as Narrative” 13; emphasis added)

A completely faithful “recital” of the past is “hard to imagine” for Bruner, while any autobiographical retelling involves the act of interpretation. Rather than as unreflective behaviour, Marlow’s act of lying is his “interpretative feat” (13). It is *his* way of understanding the initial experience. Believing that the Intended cannot understand what he had experienced, he chooses to lie to her.

Marlow's rereading of his experiences testifies to the necessary dialogue between the past and the continuously-changing present. Initially, his purpose of meeting the white woman is to put his past to rest by cutting the only connection with Kurtz that remains – the Intended's photograph and his letters. Jens Brockmeir argues that “autobiographic process...turns out to be a continuous stream of discursive interactions that whirl up a variety of ideas and experiences, past, present, and future” (“Possible lives” 465). This means that the autobiographical process does not necessarily follow a designed path and sail towards a single goal, but instead always changes the passage according to “discursive interaction” with newly-emerging circumstances (465). As Marlow says in the text: “I wanted to give that up too to the past in a way – to surrender personally all that remained of [Kurtz] with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate” (Conrad *YHE* 121). Yet, this “last word” is never said in his meeting with the Intended. His act of lying suggests that his connection with Kurtz is still there. After he lies, Marlow wonders if “he had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due” (126). This generates another necessity to review his past and check if he has indeed rendered that justice to Kurtz, an act that brings readers to his second recounting of the past on the *Nellie*.

Marlow's Second Narration of the Past on the *Nellie*: I Have a Voice Too

Marlow is a passive listener in both his first and second reading of his encounter in the Congo. In his initial experience, he is enchanted with Kurtz's great ability to talk, while in his meeting with the Intended, he remains silent about the truth and lies to the Intended. Yet, his third reading on the *Nellie* reveals him to be a compulsive storyteller whose voice cannot be silenced. Furthermore, he embeds his own comments about the act of lying within the narration, reminding the reader that his repeated return to the complicated past is to better understand it.

In his discussion of *Heart of Darkness*, Peter Brooks claims that the purpose of this text is not to transmit the meaning of either Kurtz's or Marlow's experiences, but rather lies in the dynamic process of the transference of meanings – “the act of narration” (255):

[h]aving once presented a lying version of Kurtz's story, he apparently needs to retell it, restituting its darkness this time, and in particular showing its place in Marlow's own story... He is not simply a teller of tales, but a reteller. He must retell a story, that of Kurtz, *mistold* the first time. And in doing so, he must complicate it by telling how he came to know it, thus adding another layer of plot and eventually transforming the relation of telling to told, so that it is finally less Kurtz's story that he tells than his own story inhabited, as it were, by Kurtz's story. (255)

Brooks' statement on the reason why Marlow has to retell his life experience again is of great relevance in the present discussion in the sense that Marlow's retelling “add[s] another layer of plot” to the existing one (255). In other words, Marlow's retelling on the *Nellie* becomes a palimpsest of his initial understanding (a cry), his second reading of it (a lie), and his third reading.

Yet, Marlow's reinterpretation of his past is not to justify or correct his mistold version – Brooks calls it “a product of failure in the original telling” (259) – to the Intended. Jerome Meckier notes that “the scene with the Intended depends for its success on the interaction between the Marlow who actually lied, vanquished by an inability to tell a woman harsh truths, and the regretful Marlow who looks back at his failure” (378). To some extent, Marlow is indeed regretful since he wants to know if he could have dealt with the Intended in a better way rather than merely lie to her. However, his decision to

retell his stories is not because he regards the act of lying as a failure. For Marlow, the act of lying is a way of interpreting his past.

Similarly, his act of reinterpretation on the boat is also a process of making sense of the past. He begins to doubt if keeping the secret to himself is the best way. In the middle of Marlow's storytelling, he tells the audience:

“I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,” he began suddenly... “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it – completely. They – the women I mean – are out of it – should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr Kurtz saying ‘My Intended.’ You would have perceived directly then, how completely she was out of it. and the lofty frontal bone of Mr Kurtz! (93)

Marlow confesses that he had left the Intended “with a lie”. At the outset, he still believes that it is right to keep the fragile creature out of the dark truth: “she is out of it – completely”. His second restaging of the same reason to defend his lie becomes less confident, insisting that women “should be out of it” (93). Marlow reaches a crisis of confidence when he says the same thing for the third time. He tries to seek affirmation from public opinion by utilizing the first-person plural narrative, implicitly suggesting that the narrator is questioning himself. Marlow's uncertainty looms large by this repeated gesture of self-defence to justify the act of lying, especially when he is neither questioned nor asked to do so.

This uncertainty undermines the illusion that the past can be interpreted once and for all, reminding the reader that there are other alternative possibilities to perceive and

understand it. Indeed, Marlow's questioning of his previous act of lying suggests that he does not regard the initial experience as a fixed entity, but instead regards it as one that can be reopened to explore more possibilities of interpretations. Jerome Bruner claims that "any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told. That must surely be as true of the life stories we tell as of any others" ("Life as Narrative" 32). These remarks warn us that life stories can be told from different perspectives and we should attempt to approach our lives by "considering other possible ways" (32). His first narration to the Intended focuses on the question of whether she can comprehend his experience. Yet, in his second recounting, Marlow focuses on expressing the emotional effects of what he had experienced on himself. He tells his listeners that his narrative is about "the culminating point of [his] experience", and he believes that his narrative will "throw a kind of light on everything about [him] – and into [his] thought" (*YHE* 48). In other words, his act of narrating focuses more on expressing how he had felt in the past, an indicator that he attempts to understand the past in a *different* way.

In short, the narrator recollects and retells his life to others *for* himself this time. Richard Kearney argues that "it is not possible to tell whether one narrative is any *truer* than another, only whether it is *better* than another, to wit, *more effective*" (43; emphasis in original). According to Kearney, different interpretations of one's past should not be judged by their fidelity to what really happened in the past, but instead be evaluated according to whether a new narrative is "more effective" and "better" than another one (43). His recounting on the *Nellie*, indeed, functions as effective narration, which values what he regards as essential for life, namely, life-sensations. As he reminds the reader in the text: "life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence...makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence" (Conrad *YHE* 70).

As a result of Marlow's focus on relating his own felt experience, readers will find that his narrative is woven by a rich tapestry of bodily sensations. The visual effects stand out in a haunting fashion. Readers are invited to see the "vegetation riot on the earth and the big trees like king"; the "hippos and alligators sun themselves side by side" (77); people "advance in a file toil up the path" with "an iron collar on [their] neck and all were connected together with a chain" (57); a badge of a dying boy with its white thread "looking startling round his black neck" (59). The acoustic efficacy is highly provocative and stirring. It is a world where "[t]he monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibrating"; where the blacks "chant each to himself some weird incantation" and the low "droning sound" generates "narcotic effects" (111). There are other times when readers are blocked from all audible sounds, with the mere "mysterious stillness" lingering in their minds. There are even some moments in which readers are disturbed by the "enthusiastic outbreak [like] in a madhouse" and a cry that takes the form of a whisper (79). The olfactory world in this text is presented to a lesser degree, but in a more unpleasurable way. Readers have to endure the smell of a rotten hippo all along Marlow's trip from the Central Station to the Inner Station. In this way, Marlow's narrative mode mirrors his belief that the essence of a life episode lies in its life sensation.

The discussion above proves that the text is itself pieced together by Marlow's sensory feelings. More importantly, the narrator's rhythm of storytelling is dictated and structured around how he felt in the immediate moment in the past. He either stops his narration to reorganize his thoughts or impatiently flashes forward to tell his experience when he is strongly affectively-influenced. Throughout the text, his recounting is mainly interrupted by himself (twice) and punctuated by his listeners once, each time involving a particular kind of emotion. The first intercept takes place in the Central Station when

Marlow cries out that Kurtz is “just a word” for him. The second one happens after Marlow travels up to the Inner Station and senses the “stillness of an implacable force” (77). The last one comes when Marlow’s helmsman dies during an attack and the narrator wishes to change his blood-tainted shoes immediately.

Marlow ceases his process of remembering for the first time when he is listening to the brick maker in the Central Station talk incessantly about Mr Kurtz. Marlow is told that he will meet Kurtz, a first-class ivory agent in the company, yet he is denied access to more information about Kurtz. The motive that drives him to “let [the brick maker] run on” is that he thought “it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at that time [he] did not see” (69-70). However, because of Marlow’s silence and unresponsive attitude, the active talker is enticed to believe that he has influential connections on the European continent. Yet, the narrator confesses that “[there] was nothing behind [him]” and feels guilty for his action, condemning it as something that “[goes] near enough to a lie” (69).

For Marlow, the act of lying has the “flavor of mortality”. He concludes his emotive responses towards lies as this:

[y]ou 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 flavor of mortality in lies – 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. (69)

This critical passage points to the first reason why Marlow suddenly loses control of his narrative rhythm for the first time. Marlow’s act of “letting the young fool there believe...[his] influence in Europe” is regarded as a lie by him, a lie tainted with “a flavor

of death”. He proceeds to explicate how this sensation feels like, vividly picturing for readers that it is “like biting something rotten would do”. This taste of death “makes [him] miserable and sick” (69).

In discussing the quoted paragraph above, commentators place great value on the connection between a lie and death.²⁷ Yet, I would like to orient critical attention to Marlow’s description of his feeling towards the act of lying. It involves the most subjective and singular bodily sensation – taste, as his own words “a flavor of death”, suggest (69). As sensory modalities to experience external objects, taste and smell are more personal and singular than other senses such as seeing and hearing. Marlow likens the feeling of death (and lying) to the bite of a rotten object. This comparison is not purely imagined, but originates from his lived experience. The pilgrims on his steamboat “[have] brought a little rotten hippo meat with them which couldn’t have lasted very long anyway”. This smell is a nightmare for Marlow who complains that “[y]ou cannot breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping and eating and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence” (85). However, as the direct contact between him and the texture of rotten things is singular, his olfactory sensation of the rotten hippo is therefore difficult to be known and felt by others.

Neuroscientists have a technique term – qualia– for this singularity of subjective experiences. As a form of conscious experience, it is “a first person matter” involving a unique individual mental state (Edelman 114). The *Oxford Companion to the Mind* explains this complicated notion as follows:

²⁷ See Paul Wake. *Conrad’s Marlow: Narrative and Death in ‘Youth’, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

[t]his Latin plural (of which the singular is *quale*)...is, as the name implies, a qualitative rather than a quantitative one. To specify a *quale* is to say what something is *like*; and an irreducible reference to the phenomenological character of our experience, to the way in which things appear to the conscious subject, may be involved here. Examples of *qualia* are the smell of freshly ground coffee or the taste of pineapple; such experience has a distinctive phenomenological character which we all have experienced but which, it seems, is very difficult to describe. (Gregory 666; emphasis in original).

The qualitative feeling of what-it-is-like is central to understanding the experience of qualia. Specifically, what is it like to smell the “freshly ground coffee”? What is it like to taste pineapple (666)? To Marlow, he specifies the “flavor of mortality” for readers. Yet, what is it like to “bite something rotten” (*YHE* 69)? It is an everyday experience to taste freshly brewed coffee, yet it is not common for one to smell or even taste a rotten hippo. Therefore, Marlow’s audience cannot fully understand the “flavor of death” as he does, a fact that he is keenly aware of. This makes him frustrated and on the verge of breaking the rhythm of narration.

This sensation of frustration is intensified by Marlow’s inability to see a concrete image of Kurtz. He had heard a lot about Kurtz from the brick maker, yet as he laments that “somehow it didn’t bring any image with it – no more than if [he] had been told an angel or a fiend was in there”. In order to concretize the quasi-illusory existence of Kurtz, Marlow sacrifices his integrity by letting the brick maker assume that he had some influence in Europe. However, it turns out that the brick maker’s talk confuses him more. His desire to see a Kurtz in tangible form is vividly represented by his curiosity to see more: “[w]hat was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there and I had heard Mr Kurtz was in there” (69). This experience of being uncertain about who Kurtz is

and what he is like culminates at the point of his cry: “[h]e was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do” (70).

The narrator’s anxiety influences how he structures the act of narrating. Instead of carrying his story forward, Marlow digresses suddenly to ask his audience: “[d]o you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?” This brusque turn to listeners points to his inner mental state of incertitude, irritation, and desperation in the face of an abstract Kurtz. He even assumes that his audience is in a better position to see Kurtz’s story: “[o]f course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know...” (70). The juxtaposition of Kurtz’s absence in Marlow’s initial experience and the presence of himself before the audience renders the narrator more anxious.

According to Ernest Schachtel, the benefit of seeing the psychical presence of an object is stated thus: “[m]any more features of the object are grasped simultaneously, and by virtue of this, each object looked at is given to the perceiver more fully, in more dimensions than through any other sense” (104). For Marlow’s audience, their eyes can move from the left to the right, from the top to the bottom, to get a comprehensive image of what Marlow is like and is doing. Conversely, Marlow can only gain access to Kurtz by hearing others’ talk, which is imprecise, partial and obscure. In turn, this lack of a concrete image makes Marlow desire all the more a tangible and complete Kurtz. However, given that he is still far away from Kurtz’s station, this desire is impossible to be gratified at that moment.

So far, I have discussed two reasons why Marlow breaks his rhythm of storytelling for the first time: the singular sensation towards the act of lying; the anxiety of being unable to see a concrete Kurtz. These two aspects eventually lead to Marlow’s crisis of narration, as he acknowledges: “[i]t 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”. At this point, Marlow pauses his act of narration and remains silent for a while.

If Marlow’s first digression in narration stems from his helplessness in reporting a death-like lie and the tension between what he had heard and what he had seen, his second interruption results from his terror of utter isolation and unbearable solitude. After Marlow regains his composure and re-collects his thoughts, he continues his narration and redirects the audience to an arranged order of what had happened in the past. He narrates how he leaves the Central Station for Kurtz’s station, how traveling up the Congo River is “like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world”, and how he is overwhelmed by external “realities of strange world of plants and water and silence”. More disturbingly, the primitive landscape isolates him from everything he is familiar and conformable with, as the narrator concludes: “[y]ou lost your way on that river as 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” (*YHE* 77). When thrown into a completely alien world, Marlow senses that his existence is disoriented. Knowledge and experiences that the narrator had acquired before are not applicable in the centre of the Congo.

It is at this point that Edward Casey’s notion about body memory and familiarity comes into play. According to him, “[f]amiliarization is the distinctive work of body memory...It is a matter of the approximate positioning of things in experience” (170). The implication here is two-fold: previous experience is set as the background of our lives, orienting and stabilizing our behaviour when confronted with new situations; at the same time, the work of familiarization will not be operative if a situation is completely new. Based on Casey’s observation, it is not difficult to understand why Marlow has the

sensation that he seems to live in “another existence,” when he is exposed to a situation where no previous memory works to orient him.

The narrator likens his sense of getting lost to the experience of walking in a desert: “[y]ou lost your way on that river as in a desert” (*YHE* 77). Commenting on this simile, Geoffrey Harpham speaks highly of Conrad’s sensitivity towards language and suggests that “[Conrad’s] sensitivity enabled him to make the connection between a *deserted* river and a *desert*. And so, by way of a hidden pun, the passage proceeds from an account of a lonely boat trip to a meditation on the experience of finding yourself bereft of your past, your identity” (27). Harpham’s insight invites readers to read Marlow’s boat trip to the Inner Station as a journey in which he is gradually deserted by his own past experience and civilization.

An extreme separation with familiar cultural signs brings about anxiety. “[A]nxiety,” based on Schachtel’s research, “arises with any separation from the state of embeddedness or with the threat of such a separation if the person is or feels helpless to cope with the situation of separation” (44). Indeed, Marlow is trapped in this situation. The absence of his sheltered culture – the embeddedness of life in Schachtel’s words – evokes a sense of extreme anxiety in Marlow. Threatened by “the stillness of [the] implacable forest” which “brood[s] over an inscrutable intension,” he attempts to avoid the extreme sensation of anxiety by preoccupying himself with keeping the boat afloat on the river – he calls it “monkey trick”. However, he feels that his “monkey tricks” are “watched by the “mysterious stillness” around him. This brings to the fore the narrator’s helplessness in handling the increasingly disturbing stillness. The external world in this sense is not an object any more, but rather seems to be a threatening agency that objectifies and watches Marlow, rendering him a passive receiver.

At this juncture, Marlow's narration suddenly deviates from the chronologically-arranged events to talk about his audience: "[it is] just as it [the wilderness] watches you fellows [Marlow's audience] performing on your respective tightropes – for – what is it? – half-a-crown a tumble —" (*YHE* 77). At this moment, Marlow's narration is intercepted by a member of his audience: "[t]ry to be civil, Marlow," growled a voice; and I [the primary narrator] knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself". Marlow's digression from the narration of the Congo landscape, first to the mentioning of his "monkey trick," and then to his abrupt comment on the tightrope performance, mirrors his chaotic mental state when cut off from historical moorings in the past.

More significantly, this abrupt comment reflects the narrator's unconscious desire to leap forward to comment on Kurtz's horrible living conditions, and to justify the latter's collapse in the inner depth of darkness. I postulate that the tightrope performance Marlow mentions serves as a symbolic expression for Kurtz's deeds in the Congo. Warned by his audience, Marlow apologizes and continues his storytelling: "...I beg your pardon. I forgot the heart ache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter if the trick be well done" (78) These remarks disclose Marlow's view on Kurtz and Kurtz's tightrope performance in the Congo. Acrobats perform on the tightrope for "half-a-crown a tumble" (77). Likewise, Kurtz goes to the Congo due to "his impatience of comparative poverty" (124). His stumble is not a literal one, but a moral one. In the wilderness, Kurtz loses his "inner strength," and his "unlawful soul" dominates his desires. Indeed, Kurtz's moral corruption is, as Marlow suggests, the "price" he pays for lacking restraint and inner strength (78).

Therefore, the utter isolation Marlow experiences when he travels up to the depth of darkness connects him with Kurtz in an implicit way. The use of the tightrope

performance suggests his general commentary on the latter's deeds. Since Marlow has a big picture of Kurtz's story, his meandering from the boat trip to the tightrope performance might make sense for himself. Yet, as his listeners are not given the whole story at that point, they will find that his remarks about the tightrope performance is too quick a shift and an unexpected act. It is then not a surprise that one of his audience would interrupt Marlow's narration, reminding him to recount the story in a chronological and progressive manner.

The narrator interrupts his own narration for a second time when his boat is met with an unexpected attack. When he sees his helmsman shot by spears and falling down beside him, Marlow's feet "felt so very warm and wet that [he] had to look down" (91). Consequently, he realizes that "[his] shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark red under the wheel". At this moment, Marlow's instinctual response is to throw his shoes overboard and change into a new pair.

In the midst of recounting how he throws the shoes away and laments the possible death of Kurtz, Marlow suddenly asks his listeners: "why do you sigh in this beastly way – somebody?" (92). Immediately after he raises this question, he proceeds to comment on his own action of shoe-throwing in the past: "Absurd! Well, absurd. Good Lord! Mustn't a man ever – Here, give me some tobacco" (92). At this point, the rememberer punctuates his own retelling with "a pause of profound stillness", smoking and thinking.

In hindsight, both Marlow and the reader know the multifarious meaning of absurdity in the text: Marlow's morbid act of throwing a pair of bloody shoes overboard; his lunatic thought about being "robbed of belief" and "his destiny in life" because of the rumour of Kurtz's death (92); the unexpected attack from the natives who do not appear aggressive; the after-the-fact knowledge that this attack is ordered by Kurtz himself. No

matter what the word “absurd” alludes to, it is first and foremost Marlow’s conscious *feeling* of the absurdity that interrupts his own narration.

When the narrator resumes his storytelling, he tells the sensation of absurdity to his audience thus:

“Absurd!” Marlow cried. “This is the worst of trying to tell... Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal – you hear – normal from year’s end to year’s end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be – exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes”’. (93)

The multi-voiced word “absurd” features Marlow’s changing impressions, sensations, and attitudes towards his past. The narrator’s first pronouncement of “absurd” explains why the audience may have the sense of absurdity towards his behaviour of shoe-throwing, as he tells us that they are positioned in disparate living circumstances. In other words, his audience lives in organized civilization, while he (and Kurtz) is embraced and watched by an unspeakable force in the wilderness. This knowledge that Marlow gains afterwards has not been revealed to his listeners yet at that point of his narration, making him feel the presence of a gap in terms of knowledge and information, and which consequently leads him to the state of frustration he experiences. His eagerness of explanation is then transformed into contempt when he remarks: “And you say, Absurd! Absurd – be exploded!” The narrator feels powerless to dispel their sense of absurdity in that exact moment, yet his narration has to move forward. At last, the narrator suspends his desire to

explain the meaning of absurdity, returning to commenting on his state of “nervousness” when confronted with a dead body.

Marlow’s narration after the episode of shoe-throwing and the concurrent feeling of absurdity features the most disorderly case of tempo-spatial digression. He rushes forward to recount his meeting with the Intended; he leaps forward to tell his meeting with Kurtz, how absurd Kurtz’s situation is in the Congo and how he rises from his terrible situation to become the first-class agent of his company. At the same time, the narrator flashes back to introduce Kurtz’s background and his written report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs before Kurtz goes to the Congo.

Yet, if readers reorganize this fragmented and disorderly part by sticking to the principle of life sensation – a sentiment which Marlow himself attaches so much importance to – it becomes clear that the narrator’s seemingly meandering narration above is structured around his bodily sensations in the past. Bearing this in mind, let us return to examine why Marlow leaps forward suddenly to relate his meeting with the Intended. The helmsman’s death makes him desire to immediately throw his shoes overboard. In his recounting, the narrator describes in detail his sensory reaction when his shoes are contaminated by the helmsman’s blood. It is “warm and wet”. When he pays attention to the “pool of blood”, he found that it “lays very still”, “gleaming dark red under the wheel” (91).

How Marlow felt when he was touched by the blood transports readers back to a small detail he has mentioned before. He “hate[s] and detest[s]” lies since they contains a “flavor of mortality”. His close contact with death (the blood) makes him deviate from his narration of the boat attack to talk about how he “laid the ghost of [Kurtz’s] gift at last with a lie”. It seems that he himself does not expect that he will divert the narration to his

meeting with the Intended: “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl?” (93). For readers, the text can reveal more information if one connects the “flavor of mortality” that Marlow experiences in the helmsman’s death to his abhorrence of lies, and to the actual lie that he had told the Intended.

It also makes it easier to comprehend why Marlow flashes back to relate Kurtz’s written report and make an extended comment on the importance of self-restraint. Before Marlow throws the body of the helmsman into the river, he narrates:

Poor fool! If [the helmsman] had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint – just like Kurtz – a tree swayed by the wind. As soon as I had put on a dry pair of slippers I dragged him out after first jerking the spear out of his side, which operation I confess I performed with my eyes shut tight.

(96)

Marlow’s lived sensation makes him comment on how both Kurtz and his helmsman lack self-restraint. Earlier, Marlow points out the importance of self-restraint in the incident of rotten hippo. When the narrator has to smell the rotten hippo at every moment in the circumscribed space of a steamboat, it completely hinges on his inner strength to put up with it. This sensation of self-restraint under harsh circumstance makes Marlow lament: “Poor fool! If [the helmsman] had only left that shutter alone” (96).

Similarly, Kurtz becomes a victim of the lack of self-control. In his narration, Marlow problematizes Kurtz’s monstrous desire to possess everything: “‘my Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my...’ Everything belonged to him... The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over” (94). In the depth of the Congo, Kurtz’s inner

wilderness is awakened, and his inner strength surrenders to the endless gratification of human lust. He lost himself to the power of darkness.

As reflected in the analysis above, Marlow's third reading of his own experience reveals his deeply felt affects along the trip to the centre of the Congo. More importantly, the narrative rhythm revolves around the narrator's changing emotions. As Marlow tells us in the midst of storytelling: "[the past] came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming of realities of [the] strange world of plants and water and silence" (77). The "unrestful and noisy" past lingers on in the narrator's mind. Even many years later, he still recollects it in a highly affectively-charged way when he retells this story to the crew on the *Nellie*. Also, the unrestful past shapes itself into a narrative pattern revolving around the narrator's feelings.

Conclusion

An episode of past life will never be gone, given how it is in a continuous process of interacting with newly-emerging factors and situations. Marlow's different versions of the past in *Heart of Darkness* are seen as continuous acts of him interpreting his initial experience in order to better understand it. Readers are reminded in the text that knowledge comes later at times; and recollection is essentially interpretative. Distortions and modifications occur ineluctably in the process of Marlow's strenuous interpretative act. Yet, as Mark Freeman claims, "the aim of autobiography is not simply to depict the past as it was but precisely to understand it, to make sense of it, to fashion meanings that were not, and could not be, available in the flux of immediate experience" (132). Similarly, Conrad argues that the interpreted life is truer than the mere recording of historical facts in that fiction is "based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena," while history relies on "documents" and other "second-hand impression" ("Henry James" 588). In other words, a

documented history of one's experiences is not an experience perceived and understood by individuals, and therefore, not as true as fictional renditions of it.

Indeed, autobiographical memory is not a static archive of past raw materials. Rather, it is a meaning-making process which depends on the dynamics of storytelling and interpretative act. Aware of the complexities of Kurtz's last words, the narrator decides to leave it in its original form— a cry – in his initial experience. In the second reading, Marlow's lie to the Intended mirrors his mental states and his understanding of the uncommunicable experience in the Congo. Many years later, though Marlow knows that these life sensations will remain shrouded in narrative, his last try on the deck to recount the past transcends his previous understanding, and offers the reader a glimpse of truth. Replete with images, sounds, smells and other sensory feelings, the text is woven into a narrative of multi-layered life sensations, around which the narrating act shapes and structures itself. The narrator's three different readings of his lived experiences in the Congo provide us a comprehensive story, drawing our attention to the complexity of life experience. More importantly, it also tells us why the narrator deviates from a usual way to lie to the Intended.

In this way, Marlow resists the impulse to limit his recollection of initial experience to a single interpretation, showing us that the same story can be comprehended and told in different ways. No authoritative and definitive interpretation is presented in the text, a gesture that reminds the reader that one should not presume there exists an accurate explanation of past events. Indeed, each interpretation of Marlow's encounter in the Congo in the narrative has the same efficacy to him in the immediate moment.

In other words, the integrity of Marlow's different interpretations is not compromised by the simultaneous existence of a conflicted one. Observing how the writer synthesizes different ideas within a single text, Geoffrey Harpham argues that “such

oxymorons exhibit a certain regularity that is crucial to Conrad's cognitive and expressive style" (81). Presented as an ideal site to accommodate differences, the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* indicates that each remembered past is merely provisional and temporary, contingent on historical conditions and circumstances. In this regard, Marlow's continuous and inconclusive interpretation of his initial experiences affirms the plasticity of memory.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the core issue of Marlow's recollection is his belief that emotions constitute the essentials of life, which, nevertheless, cannot be communicated to others. This leads to his different ways of interpreting his life: one is to lie, while the other is to acknowledge the uncommunicable experience yet still carry on the act of narrating the emotional effects of the past on him. In the next chapter, I will discuss how Conrad confronts the heightened emotion of depression in *The Shadow Line* (1917), a piece of confessional writing that abandons his fictional rememberer-storyteller Marlow and adopts first person narrative.

Chapter Five: Crossing the Shadow Line: The Conflation of Narrated Sea Voyage and the Writing Process

A mankind which has invented the proverb: "Time is money," will understand my vexation. The word "Delay" entered the secret chamber of my brain, resounded there like a tolling bell which maddens the ear, affected all my senses, took on a black colouring, a bitter taste, a deadly meaning.

(Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-Line*)

Both *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *Heart of Darkness* (1902) culminate in pivotal moments of delay. These critical moments in the texts find their echoes in narrative innovations, enhancing the author's understanding of the dynamics between lived experiences, remembering, and narration. Yet, neither *Almayer's Folly* nor *Heart of Darkness* uses first-person point of view when it comes to narrating the author's life. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine how Conrad employs the immediacy of the first-person narrative to describe a continuously delayed sea voyage and the concurrent emotional landscape in *The Shadow-Line* (1917).

The Shadow-Line tells the story of the narrator's first command of a ship and how he crosses the shadow line between the naiveté of youth and maturity.²⁸ As the discussion will show later, the narrative primarily focuses on demonstrating the young captain's emotional state of depression when confronted with a becalmed ship. Similarly, according to historical reference, the writer experienced intense depression as well because of his creative paralysis

²⁸ I realize that the narrator in *The Shadow-Line* should not be taken as Conrad the autobiographer. Yet, one would agree that the young captain in the narrative is, as it were, Conrad the captain, or Conrad's younger seafaring self, if one takes Conrad's biographical details into account. As Jacques Berthoud remarks: "we are never left in any doubt that he is Conrad learning to become Conrad." Please see Jacques Berthoud. Introduction. *The Shadow-Line* by Joseph Conrad. London: Penguin, p7.

when he wrote the story.²⁹ By examining the way the narrator narrates his sea voyage in relation to Conrad's process of creating the text, I propose that affective particulars act as a point of contact between the young captain and Conrad's self in the creative present. As such, I argue that the text provides a subtle commentary on the process of its own creation, or more specifically, on Conrad's act of writing it. The depressive mental state in Conrad's creative present leads him to unconsciously transform the landscape of his past memories. Ultimately, *The Shadow-Line* offers an oblique commentary of how the text becomes a site of narrative where past events and the act of writing converge and conflate.

This chapter will initially examine how Conrad repeatedly stages a constellation of emotions in his autobiographical works. A similar repetition also takes place in *The Shadow-Line*, where Conrad replays the narrator's depression and extreme anxiety across different genres, pointing to the fact that emotions are central to understanding Conrad's recollective accounts. I propose that autobiographical remembering is a continuous process to repeatedly revisit some scenes and emotions with an effort to rescue more fragments from the past. The second section reads the young captain's sea voyage in the text and the author's writing process of *The Shadow-Line* in a parallel manner. The discussion will showcase that both journeys share a similar structure, featuring endless delays and the consequent depression. This highlights how emotions become the interface between the past sea voyage and the present act of writing. Following that, the third section proceeds to discuss how Conrad's emotion in the creative present remodels the past. Drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre's discourse on the function of emotion in consciousness, I will investigate how the writer's anxiety and

²⁹ I do not speculate Conrad's emotional state when he was writing *The Shadow-Line* by reading the narrative. Rather, I rely on such historical evidence as the writer's letters to his friends, his words in the preface and etc. In these writings, readers are informed that Conrad was in a mental state of anxiety and depression when he was creating the text. Through a parallel reading of the ship-sailing journey in the text and the fiction-making process, I then arrive at the conclusion that both journeys share a similar structure.

depression during the First World War unconsciously transform his recounting of the younger self's experience. Consequently, historical traces of the war are implicitly registered in *The Shadow-Line*. By dedicating the text to his son (and the young generation) who were experiencing the trial of the war, Conrad transcends the boundaries of individual remembrance and paints a psychological portrait of the collective during war time.

Emotion as a Central Concern of Conrad's Recollection

Completed in December 1915 and serialized in a magazine thereafter, the basic plotline of *The Shadow-Line* is based on the author's command of the barque *Otago* in 1888. In summary, the text offers an account of an old Captain who recollects how his younger self is appointed as the captain to command a ship for the first time in his maritime life, how he goes through an ordeal on the sea, and how he eventually crosses the line between youth and maturity. The story opens with a dramatic moment: the young captain throws up his berth on a steamboat for no reason. While waiting for a home-bound ship in Sailor's Home in Singapore, he is offered his first command. Unfortunately, the voyage is replete with various obstacles and delays, including the disease-stricken crew on board; the mad chief mate, Mr Burns, who obsessively sticks to the idea that the late captain has cursed the ship; the lack of the medicine quinine and, most importantly, the mysterious calmness and stillness of the sea. In the end, with the assistance of his responsible seamen and the seaman-like cook Ransome on board, the young captain still succeeds in crossing the windless Gulf of Siam and anchoring his ship in Singapore for medical supplies and recruiting new crew members. The novel closes with the young Captain's readiness to leave for Australia as soon as his new helpers are on board.

After producing his highly acclaimed symbolic narratives such as *Heart of Darkness* (1902), *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Nostramo* (1904), as well as his commercially successful texts

like *Chance* (1913) and *Victory* (1915), the chronologically arranged narrative in *The Shadow-Line* seems to suggest a return to his earlier, less sophisticated sea adventure stories in terms of both form and content. For example, by highlighting the unpredictable delays and particularly the presence of a superstitious chief mate on board, the text builds, suspends, and gratifies the reader's expectations. It seems that the power of the narrative relies on some supernatural elements and the stereotypical structure of an adventure story. It comes as no surprise that Gerald Gould regards it as a "more bare and simple" narrative when compared to Conrad's other writings in his review in *New Statesman* (qtd. in Sherry *Critical Heritage* 243). It is true that the text unfolds as a seemingly unambitious text at first glance. Yet, the simplicity of the plot and characters is deceptive, like most other Conradian narratives which possess both an overt and covert plotline.³⁰

Indeed, delving deeper into the text reveals its poetic subtleties and symbolic richness. In the "Author's Note" to *The Shadow-Line*, Conrad opens his writing by calling attention to "its brevity" as well as its status as a "fairly complex piece of work". This highly complex texture does not restrict itself to the "supernatural causes" (qtd. in Sherry *Critical Heritage* 230). One might argue that the seemingly supernatural element creates a pleasurable reading for minds bent on mysterious and fantastic things. Yet, as the author declares: "this story...was not intended to touch on the supernatural". Conrad proceeds to argue that "the world of the living contains enough marvels and mysteries" which "act upon our emotions and intelligence in ways so inexplicable that it would almost justify the conception of life as an enchanted state". With these words, Conrad affirms that the text does not seek its inspiration from supernatural elements, but stresses the fact that the mysterious living world

³⁰ For discussions on the deceptive nature of Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*, please refer to Cedric Watts. *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots*. Brighton: Harvester, 1984, p90-91. In this book, Watts mentions the "secular" plot of this text, that is, how the young commander overcomes obstacles and obtains experiences. He also explores a "supernatural" plotline which lurks behind the overt plot design, involving how the late captain curses the ship and how it is exorcised.

is rich enough for one to explore. He draws our attention to the significance of one's emotional responses towards external stimuli, particularly some inexplicable emotions that constitute part of what the writer calls "an enchanted state" (SL 5).

The text begins with such an "enchanted state" when the young captain signs off from his ship suddenly for a reason that is so "inexplicable" to others and even to himself as well (5). He attributes it to the "green sickness of late youth", an emotional state that involves the "menace of emptiness" and "spiritual drowsiness" (12, 25). When pushed to explain the reason why he had abandoned his berth, he describes the impulse as follows: "[i]t was as though all unknowing I had heard a whisper or seen something. Well – perhaps! One day I was perfectly right and the next everything was gone, glamour, flavor, interest, contentment – everything. It was one of these moments, you know" (12). It becomes clear that the young narrator is unsure about the motivation behind his action, so he has to attribute it to "moments of boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction" (11). Therefore, the reader is compelled to experience the narrator's whimsical action, his inability to understand himself, as well as the overwhelming atmosphere of ennui and listlessness from the outset.

On this occasion, the unexpected captaincy enables the young narrator to reanimate his psychical inertia and emotional drowsiness. Indeed, it is mentioned that looking at his own ship gives him "such a sense of the intensity of existence that [he] has never felt before or since". His lethargic mental state is eliminated and his sense of existence is intensified. Furthermore, when his eyes first catch sight of his ship, sublime pleasure surges up in his breast, a sentiment that confirms "how much of a seaman [he] was, in heart, in mind and as it were physically – a man exclusively of sea and ships" (38):

Yes, there she was. Her hull, her rigging filled my eye with a great content.

That feeling of life-emptiness which had made me so restless for the last few

months lost its bitter plausibility, its evil influence, dissolved in a flow of joyous emotion. (45)

It is at this moment that the young captain realizes that the root of his emotional and spiritual emptiness is the result of the separation from his beloved *sailing* ship. He leaves his previous steamboat as it requires no sailing skills to steer her. Its voyages, albeit with “new and various experience,” appear to the young captain “dreary, prosaic waste of days” (14). Yet, this sailing ship is different because of its “great content” and its requirement of great skills to handle it (45). His “feeling of life-emptiness” dissolves and his emotional state is reactivated again to sail in the world full of “forms and colours” (34).

Yet, captaincy is still an abstract word in the narrator’s mind at this point, as he informs the reader that he is “still young enough, [and] still too much on this side of the shadow-line”. He has not gone through the “test of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity – and of love” (36, 38). Indeed, tests befall him shortly after he boards the ship, and take the form of various unexpected delays. His crew is stricken by tropical diseases, while the ship seems to be held by an “evil spell” which makes it almost “motionless” (69). At this moment, the young captain feels “an uneasy feeling” that his luck of being offered the captaincy “has got perhaps to be paid for in some way” (68). It becomes noticeable that his original sensation of elation is gradually replaced by anxiety. To make matters worse, the “fitful and deceitful” wind intensifies the young captain’s anxiety by “rais[ing] hopes only to dash them into the bitterest disappointment” (69). The alternation between hope and disappointment creates a tension that compels the young captain to oscillate between distinct mental states, namely, the “promise of advance” and the desperation of being stranded on the sea (69). This leads him to believe that an inimical force surreptitiously emerges to haunt the ship.

Ultimately, the young captain is caught in a tight grip of anxiety and depression. Conrad's carefully-selected epigraph clearly reveals this heightened sense of depression: "D'autres fois, calme plat, grand miroir, De mon désespoir!" (11). These lines are taken from Baudelaire's "La Musique" in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which are translated in English as follows: "At other times, dead calm, the glass Of hopelessness" (Baudelaire 139). Knowles remarks that the epigraph "has a powerful proleptic function" in terms of the "themes and form" of *The Shadow-Line*. Indeed, thematically speaking, the epigraph functions as a miniature narrative of the text, heralding the narrator's confrontation with the windless calm of the sea and the concurrent psychological changes that he experiences. In terms of narrative style, the epigraph suggests that the text will focus more on portraying the protagonist's emotional state (depression in particular) than on telling a plot-based story about events that have already taken place.

The writing of emotional states dominates Conrad's novelistic interests and defines his narrative surface from the outset. As his first literary endeavour, *Almayer's Folly* examines how the protagonist, who is dissatisfied with his present realities, indulges himself in the past and his reverie of a glorious future in an obsessive manner. The narrative centres upon Almayer's emotional change from his expectation of a promising future to his eventual state of desperation. *Youth* revolves around how Marlow's older self offers a nostalgic account about the loss of youth, grandeur, and strength. *Heart of Darkness* reveals a commingling sensation of bewilderment, absurdity, and horror. With regard to the state of depression, its first appearance can be traced back to the writer's first novel *Almayer's Folly*. When the mysterious hand of fate takes away the protagonist's hopes in the form of Dain's fake death and Nina's elopement, he is completely gripped by despair. Consequently, Almayer splits himself into two selves with one attempting to persuade the other self to

commit suicide. Kurtz's utter solitude in the depth of the dark land drives the depressed civilized man into a savage cannibal.

In doing so, the writer invites us to pay particular attention to emotions and their manifestation in his works. In marked contrast to the representation of actions, emotions involve particular mental states that are relatively static and unhelpful in moving the plot forward. This is not effective when it comes to captivating readers' attention, and much less in luring them into the created world of the text. That is why Albert Guerard asserts that emotion is "true to life but is unrewarding for fiction" (33). The oddity of Conrad's narrative that focuses on (negative) emotional states provides the inspiration for this chapter to consider the question: why is Conrad obsessed with describing and showing emotions in his autobiographical narrative?

Here, Guerard shares his insight:

[A]t its best the novel dramatizes rather the experience of immobilizing depression. Such a subject is humanly important, for all the dangers Matthew Arnold saw in it. But perhaps only a rich environing fantasy, as in Kafka, or a frame of environing action, as here with a sea voyage, can save it for fiction.
(33)

In the remarks above, Guerard points out the effects that "the experience of immobilizing depression" in *The Shadow-Line* has dramatized. It is at once "humanly important" and potentially dangerous to an artistic work. Given the pernicious effects created by the endless display of emotional immobility and stillness, the "frame of environing action" such as the sea voyage in the text acts as a source of redemption. That is to say, the external framework of the sea journey is employed by Conrad as a catalyst for the unfolding of the plot. At the

same time, it also calls attention to the consciously dramatized static emotions within the framework.

Though the dramatized mental state of depression and other related sensations are rehearsed in the writer's other works, the restaging of them in *The Shadow-Line* serves new purposes. In this light, Said offers his insights on the text:

Although the tale [*The Shadow-Line*] does stand alone on its own considerable merits, two points need to be emphasized, I think, in order fully to appreciate its important relation to the rest of Conrad's work. First of all, it is evident that much in the tale is strikingly similar to many of the earlier works. Yet, if the preceding tales are recollections and interpretations of past experience, reworkings of it, *The Shadow Line* is a reworking of not only a single past experience, but also of the whole experience contained in the other works. Any attempt to locate his fiction within the matrix of Conrad's inner life must see *The Shadow Line* as the final, searching re-examination in a long series of self-dramatizations. (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 167-168)

These lines reveal Said's admiration of Conrad's last work in terms of self-experience and "inner life" (168). The whole set of experiences that Conrad sets out to rework includes, among other things, his experience of emotions. Each reworking of his self-experience offers one a chance to rescue a new fragment from the past. Echoing Said's observation, Evelyn Ender argues that autobiographical remembering is essentially "an incremental process":

What then if autobiography were an incremental process, like a series of themes with variations, discrepancies that keep unfolding in a connective,

narrative chain that can be stretched for as long as is needed – as the memory of a memory of a memory of...and so on? (218)

At the heart of Ender's observation is that autobiographical remembering is a continuous process of repeatedly revisiting some scenes and emotions with an effort to discover what otherwise would be ignored. If one follows Ender's explanations of the autobiographical process, it would be easier for readers to understand the writer's repeated staging of similar events, impressions, and emotions in many of his autobiographical works: to rescue more fragments from the past.³¹

Thus, one of *The Shadow-Line*'s primary aims lies in returning to the past and discovering new meanings. As follows, what meanings can be rescued relies partly on the methods employed by the rememberer to resuscitate the past. In this respect, the subtitle, "*A Confession*", demonstrates how the writer shifts from his previous impersonal third-person narration to first-person narration to express emotions. The intended act of confessing unequivocally suggests Conrad's wish to recount his memory in an intimate way in order to bring his lived experience to the readers as closely as possible. Withdrawing from the highly complex and sometimes obfuscating narrative strategies embodied by Marlow's narration, the writer in *The Shadow-Line* adopts a simpler and more direct first-person narrative. From the third person point of view in *Almayer's Folly* to the more direct oral storyteller Marlow, and eventually to the most direct and confessional first-person narration, the distance between Conrad and his readers is gradually reduced.

The first-person narrative provides more leeway when it comes to conveying individual emotions. Jeremy Hawthorn argues that narrative in *The Shadow-Line* is a "more

³¹ For more discussion on the repetitive writing of similar events in Conrad's fictionalized autobiography, please see Edward Said. *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2012.

free-floating narrative voice” which gets rid of previous “narrative scaffolding” (xxxii).³² More technically, this refers to the fact that “the narrative *represents* events, experiences, states of mind, without making use of a narrator who *expresses* this information within the world of the fiction” (xxxii; emphasis in original). In other words, Conrad’s attitude towards his lived experience is allowed to be narrated directly, while readers are given the chance to be exposed to the immediacy of portrayed events (and emotions in particular). Hence, the first-person narrative is more conducive to the theme of confession and expressing emotions.

The Sea Voyage and the Writing Process

The Shadow-Line mirrors how Conrad deals with the interactions between emotion and remembering, given how it is committed to confessing innermost feelings. The subtitle – *A Confession* – recalls Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s autobiographical work *Confessions*. It starts with Rousseau’s resolution to confess as much as he can to readers about who he is and what he has done: “I am resolved on an undertaking that has no model and will have no imitator. I want to show my fellow-men a man in all the truth of nature; and this man is to be myself” (5). Ironically, Rousseau hides the true reason for the act of confessing, which renders his confession incomplete and partial.³³ Familiar with Rousseau’s work, Conrad’s subtitle seems to suggest the same intention as Rousseau’s. In this light, the writer does not make any attempt to hide the autobiographical elements in *The Shadow-Line*, calling it “an exact

³² In terms of the “narrative scaffolding” in Conrad’s previous works and the more “free-floating narrative voice” in *The Shadow-Line*, Jeremy Hawthorn observes thus: “[s]ome variation and flexibility can be provided by means of a retrospective shift from the younger Marlow to the elder Marlow, and from Marlow to the unnamed frame narrator (as in ‘Youth’, ‘Heart of Darkness’, and *Chance*) or to the ‘privileged man’ who receives Marlow’s concluding written narrative in *Lord Jim*. Such shifts have to be handled very carefully if they are not to appear artificial or confusing. The lack of an equally precise narrative anchoring in *The Shadow-Line*, however, allows Conrad greater flexibility. There is for example no foundational written source for the narrative (apart from the brief extracts from the diary) such as caused him difficulty in *Under Western Eyes*”. Please see Jeremy Hawthorn. Introduction. *The Shadow-Line: A Confession* by Joseph Conrad. Ed. Jeremy Hawthorn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pxxxiii.

³³ Please see de Man’s discussion of Rousseau’s partial revelation of himself in *Confessions* in Paul de Man. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, p208.

autobiography” and “a piece of as strict autobiography as the form allow[s]” in different letters to his literary agent and friends (*CL* 25, 37).

Similar to how Rousseau’s confession turned out to be incomplete and partial, *The Shadow-Line* was criticized for the writer’s alteration of some historical facts.³⁴ Although many scholars pointed out that the author’s biographical details have been distorted and reinvented for the purpose of artistic effects, I suggest that the text still offers a reasonable confession of the author’s life. It involves and “dramatize[s] with first-person immediacy the trials of a young, untested sea-captain” (Knowles xxvii). That is to say, some details are indeed modified for either artistic or moral consideration. Yet the immediacy of young Conrad’s mental states in the text is neither invented nor imagined.

In Conrad’s letter to Sidney Colvin, he not only confirms the autobiographical nature of this text, but reveals more information:

there can be no possible objection to your recognizing the autobiographical character of that piece of writing [*The Shadow-Line*]– let us call it. It is so much so that I shrink from calling it a Tale. if you will notice I call it A Confession on the title page...it is that – and essentially as sincere as any confession can be. The more perfectly so, perhaps, because its object is not the usual one of self-revelation. My object was to show all the others and the situation through the medium of my own emotions. The most heavily tried (because the most selfconscious) the least “worthy” perhaps, there was no

³⁴ Please see Owen Knowles’ introduction to Joseph Conrad. *The Shadow-Line: A Confession*. Eds. John Stape and Allan Simmons. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pxxv-xlvi; Zdzislaw Najder. *Joseph Conrad: A Life*. Columbia: Camden House, 2007, p122-125; Norman Sherry. *Conrad’s Eastern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, p228-245.

other way in which I could render justice to all these souls “worthy of my undying regard. (*Selected Letters* 370)

This passage shows Conrad’s confirmation of the text as a “sincere” chronicle of his autobiographical experience. Yet, he also calls our attention to the fact that the objective of his confession is “not the usual one of self-revelation” (370). In *A Personal Record*, Conrad criticizes Rousseau’s usual way of self-revelation as “a form of literary activity...of justifying his own existence”. For Rousseau, the act of confessing serves to “justify” his action and to moralize, which explains why his confession remains incomplete. By contrast, in the letter, Conrad clearly states his unusual objective of confession in *The Shadow-Line*: as a “writer of fiction” who “stands confessed,” he intends to render justice to other people who had worked with him on the *Otago* (PR 88).

Yet, a close reading of the letter reveals that Conrad’s act of rendering justice to others is mediated by his emotions. In other words, Conrad’s retrospective return to the past is selected and filtered by his personal emotions. In the “Author’s Note” to the text, the writer puts forward the notion of how individual perspective transforms the workings of remembering: “[t]he effect of perspective in memory is to make things loom large because the essentials stand out isolated from their surroundings of insignificant daily facts which have naturally faded out of one’s mind” (SL 7). The key point here is that the rememberer selects and structures the narrative around the essentials of his or her past experiences. Following Conrad’s own observation on the function of personal perspective, *The Shadow-Line* provides readers with a looking glass through which to contemplate how the narrative is shaped by intense affects.

In the text, the essential affects revolve around the shifts in the young narrator’s mental state, ranging from elation, uneasiness, guilt, to the most heightened sensation –

depression. When it comes to the emotional state of depression, Conrad's selected epigraph offers us a clear indication about how it structures the entire narrative and predicts the unfolding of the plot. Let us return to the writer's epigraph for a second time: "At other times, dead calm, the glass Of hopelessness" (Baudelaire 139). First and foremost, these words prefigure the climactic moment of the sea voyage in the narrative: the becalmed ship and the sailors' psychological activities onboard.

At the same time, as the discussion will show later, Conrad's process of writing this text was continuously delayed. As a result, the writer experienced intense depression as the young narrator does in the text. Thus, the sea voyage of the young narrator and the writing journey of the author converge in this highly condensed metaphorical image – still glass – and the depression that the stillness brings about. Given how both journeys feature continuous delays, the consequent emotional state of depression, and eventual success, I propose that the process and structure of Conrad's writerly engagement with his first command conflate, or at least can be detected, in the pattern and design of the narrative itself.

In other words, the text provides a subtle commentary on its own making, or more specifically, on Conrad's process of creating it, reminding the reader that the process of writing *The Shadow-Line* resembles the young narrator's journey of sailing his ship in the narrative, a journey filled with various delays and tests. This requires the reader to continuously shift between two different journeys: the sea voyage within the text and the writing process outside the text. At the same time, readers have to connect these two activities together and imagine how they merge with each other. For Conrad, both the sea voyage and writing process are artistic activities, featuring the sophisticated handling of their media and involving intimate communication with their objects.

Indeed, the beginning of the text invites the reader to reflect that ship-sailing is a fine art for Conrad. It begins with the young captain “throw[ing] up his job” in his previous ship, a “rash moment” as he calls it (*SL* 11). Though unable to account for the irrational behaviour, he alleges that he “ha[d] heard a whisper or seen something” (12). After eighteen months’ service on the ship, the young narrator senses that “there was no truth to be got out of it”. Arousing one’s sense of curiosity, the young narrator’s confession, however, disappoints the reader by suspending the meaning of the mysterious “whisper” or the “truth” that leads him to abandon the ship. Perhaps he himself does not know exactly what it is, as the text informs us: “I felt – how shall I express it? . . . What truth? I should have been hard put to it to explain. Probably, if pressed I would have burst into tears simply. I was young enough for that” (14). The felt yet inexplicable truth tortures the young captain, especially when he is pushed to rationalize his urge to leave his ship.

As Conrad writes in the narrative, the young captain – or the younger version of Conrad’s seafaring self - is indeed too young to explain that rash moment in his life. Yet, in retrospect, the aged writer managed to figure out why he had thrown up his berth suddenly in the manner in which “a bird flies away from a comfortable branch” (12). In *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), Conrad shows his admiration and respect towards sailing ships, given how they require sophisticated sailing skills. On the other hand, he also expresses his concerns about the rising predominance of steamships:

And the sailing of any vessel afloat is an art whose fine form seems already receding from us on its way to the overshadowed Valley of Oblivion. The taking of a modern steamship about the world (though one would not minimize its responsibilities) has not the same quality of intimacy with nature, which, after all, is an indispensable condition to the building up of an art. It is

less personal and a more exact calling; less arduous, but also less gratifying in the lack of close communication between the artist and the medium of his art.

(*MS* 33)

In marked contrast to sailing ships, which necessitate intimate communication between a sailor and the ship, the commanding of steamships demands “less arduous” communication between them (33). The modern steamship is primarily regarded by sailors as a machine to realize an “exact calling”, while dealing with a sailing ship for Conrad is a fine art, calling for an intimate communication between the artist (the sailor) and the medium of his art (the sailing ship).

Bearing this in mind, readers will find the answer to the young narrator’s irrational action of signing off the previous ship. A close examination of the text’s opening scenes shows us that the ship the young captain had abandoned was a steamship. As the narrator says: “she was that from the keel up – excellent sea-boat, easy to keep clean, most handy in every way, and if it had not been for her internal propulsion, worthy of any man’s love” (*SL* 12). The young captain loves this ship except for the “internal propulsion” which hints that it is a steamship. This complex sentiment towards steamships is further explored in his confession that follows:

my action, rash as it was, had more the character of divorce – almost of desertion. For no reason on which a sensible person could put a finger I threw up my job – chucked my berth – left the ship of which the worst that could be said was that she was a steamship and therefore perhaps not entitled to that blind loyalty which...However, it’s no use trying to put a gloss on what even at the time I myself half suspected to be a caprice. (11-12)

As the young narrator suggests, the steamship is not worthy of his “blind loyalty”. In contrast, in *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad discusses enthusiastically how he blindly devotes himself to sailing ships: “[t]o forget one’s self, to surrender all personal feeling in the service of that fine art, is the only way for a seaman to the faithful discharge of his trust” (*MS* 32). Here, Conrad describes his experience of remaining loyal to the sailing ships as a sailor, stressing that commanding a sailing ship requires a fine art.

On a similar note, Conrad compares the art of writing to the artistic handling of a sailing ship. Writing becomes a symbolic space where the artist sails with another medium of art – words. As “a single-handed struggle with something much greater than yourself,” sailing a ship for Conrad is inevitably visited by moments of “incertitude” and moments of “doubt and heart-searching” (*MS* 33). It is the same with his writing experience. In one of his letters to Edward Noble, Conrad mentions how he managed to “cultivate the poetic faculty” of writing:

you must give yourself up to your emotions (no easy task) you must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image – mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse; you must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain-you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression. And you must do it sincerely, at any cost. (*Collected Letters* 1: 252)

The “emotion” that the writer refers to above includes “inward feelings” and “live feelings” (252). In order to search for the right images and expressions, the writer mercilessly sails within his brain till “the most remote recesses,” indicating Conrad’s indefatigable quest for style. However, this process of searching for the best words to articulate ideas also generates doubt and uneasiness for a non-native English speaker like Conrad. By placing his discussion

of Conrad's writing practices in the context of his sailing experiences, Mark Larabee comments that "[a]s Conrad's writing demonstrates, the heritage of his first craft [of handling sailing ships] had equipped him well for the next [writing career]" (73). In short, the art of handling sailing ships resembles the art of writing, while the sea voyage is likened to the writing process.

In *The Shadow-Line*, the sea voyage and the process of writing the text are conflated. The young sailor has to singlehandedly go through the ordeal of his struggle with the inexplicable stillness of his ship, while the writer must stand the test of solitude and anxiety of being unable to command his pen to sail forward to the next page. Hence, the spatial voyage of the young captain from Bangkok to Singapore overlaps with the author's temporal process of creating the narrative.

The above suggestion that the spatial and temporal travels are intertwined for Conrad can find substantial support in "Polish Revisited" (1915), an essay that Conrad had completed just before he began writing *The Shadow-Line*. In 1914, Conrad was invited to revisit his homeland Poland with his family for the first time since his childhood. Unfortunately, this trip was interrupted due to the breakout of the First World War. Conrad wrote "Polish Revisited" immediately after he returned to England, in which he described his journey back to his homeland. Knowles points out two connections of this essay to *The Shadow-Line*:

As Conrad the writer's first attempt to picture a Europe suddenly transformed by war, it registered his sense of having crossed a historical shadow-line; and, since the essay's revision ran concurrently with the beginning of *The Shadow-Line*, it turned out to be a significant catalyst in the story's germination.

(xxviii)

The second point mentioned above is of great relevance to the present discussion. Given how “Polish Revisited” discusses a trip back to his motherland, and how it acts as a “catalyst” for Conrad’s writing of *The Shadow-Line*, it is useful for one to examine how the writer perceives the spatial trip to Poland and the temporal journey to the past in this essay.

In the essay, the writer regards the return to his native soil as more of a travel through time. He portrays a different attitude towards this trip from his family: “moreover, as we [Conrad and his family] sat together in the same railway carriage, they were looking forward to a voyage in space, whereas I felt more and more plainly, that what I had started on was a journey in time, into the past” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 120). Here, moving towards a destination may be a gradual approach to the end in terms of spatial distance, but it serves a more important purpose – a trip that penetrates into the past. *Heart of Darkness* also proposes this way of reading space travel as time travel, as Marlow tells us that his trip to the Inner Station is like “traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world” (*YHE* 77).

Yet, the sea voyage that the young captain takes in *The Shadow-Line* does not resemble Marlow’s, or the Polish trip, which slowly takes us backward to the beginning of time (or the past). For Marlow, the spatial movement towards the eventual destination is simultaneously a regression towards the beginnings of time. In other words, Marlow’s journey integrates time travel and space travel. Instead, the young captain’s voyage starts from Singapore and ends in Singapore with various delays in the middle. Though the narrative does not engage directly with time travel to the past, the process of finishing it involves the consumption of physical time. According to Gotthold Lessing, the art of literature (and writing) is the art of time, employing signals such as sounds and words, and

chronologically arranging them over time.³⁵ In other words, writing and finishing *The Shadow-Line* requires a duration of time. Therefore, the spatial and temporal movements are paralleled in *The Shadow-Line*. They both have the same goal: to cross the shadow line of either the Gulf of Siam for the young narrator or the creative paralysis for Conrad the writer. As such, the spatial movement in *The Shadow-Line* serves as a symbolic act that reflects the writer's writing process. In this sense, the motionlessness of the ship provides a signpost for the reader to detect the process of Conrad's writing and his mental state.

Historical references about Conrad's production of *The Shadow-Line* offer us ample evidence to read the sea voyage in relation to the writer's writing process. After returning to England from his interrupted homeland trip in 1915, Conrad wrote to his literary agent J. B. Pinker, proposing a story about his first command of the *Otago* for the *Metropolitan Magazine*, with the tentative title *First Command* (which is later known as *The Shadow-Line*). He said that it "[would] run to some length. An early personal experience thing" (CL 5: 441). Yet, it was just an abstract idea that he had carried in his mind without any specific plan of elaboration. The writer started writing this text in February 1915, commencing his artistic endeavour with the plan to write a short story. However, as Stape and Simmons observe: "he almost certainly had no clear idea that the new piece would...develop, instead, into a novella" (SL 117). These are strong pieces of evidence that the writer had no idea of what the story would be like from the outset.

³⁵ The contention of Lessing is stated thus: "I argue thus. If it be true that painting employs wholly different signs or means of imitation from poetry, – the one using forms and colors in space, the other articulate sounds in time, – and if signs must unquestionably stand in convenient relation with the thing signified, then signs arranged side by side can represent only objects existing side by side, or whose parts so exist, while consecutive signs can express only objects which succeed each other, or whose parts succeed each other, in time." This idea about the division between painting and literature is contested by contemporary critics such as Joseph Frank who asserts that literature should be read as a spatial narrative rather than a temporal one. Please see Gotthold Lessing. *Laocoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Trans. Ellen Frothingham. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 2013, p91; Joseph Frank. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Likewise, the young captain realizes that “a command is an abstract idea” without the “concrete existence of a ship” when offered his first command in the narrative (38). This implies an implicit connection between the writer’s book project and the young captain’s sea voyage. At this point, readers are recommended to regard the sailor’s abstract captaincy as the writer’s abstract idea of the story he had intended to write, with the concrete ship as concrete words on the pages. Ultimately, to the young narrator, the sea journey of moving towards the destination is the process of finishing the novella to the writer.

If the discussion above about the connections between the sea voyage and the writing process are speculative and tenuous, the young captain’s description of his first command in the narrative reveals more solid pieces of evidence. Due to the lack of wind, the ship on the sea resembles a “model ship set on the gleams and shadows of polished marble”. The key point here is that the windless sea is compared to “polished marble” by the young sailor. Furthermore, the “polished marble” is described as a surface with “gleams and shadows,” a surface that figuratively includes the presence of brightness and darkness (63). This imagery of polished marble with brightness and darkness calls to mind the image of a (white) paper that is gradually blackened by words. For example, Conrad describes his act of writing *Almayer’s Folly* as an act of “blackening over [the] manuscript page” (PR 69). In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad sees a letter as a piece of paper “blackened with close handwriting” (UWE 89).

Thus, it is reasonable to liken the act of writing on the page to the advancing of the ship on the sea. With a pen in his hand and paper on his desk, the writer begins his “lonely task” of writing. Yet, the writing process of *The Shadow-Line* remains very slow, a sentiment that is echoed by Conrad’s comment to his friend: “I don’t feel like scribbling at all” (CL 5: 459). With a strong desire to get his ship under way as quickly as possible, the captain

impatiently gives his first order: “let her head come up to south”. Symbolically, this voices out the writer’s longing as well: to get his pen down to the direction of the south – the bottom of the paper – and consequently blacken the page.

The link between the writing process and the captain’s sea journey becomes more apparent later on the same page:

Leaning on the rail I never even raised my eyes. The motion of the ship was imperceptible. Presently Ransome brought me the cup of morning coffee. After I had drunk it I looked ahead and in the still streak of very bright pale orange light I saw the land profiled flatly as if cut out of black paper and seeming to float on the water as light as cork. (*SL* 64)

The calm surface of the sea is likened to a “black paper”, on which stands the ship whose “motion...[is] imperceptible” (64). In a symbolical way, the immobility of the ship evokes the sensation that Conrad is staring at the blank paper and unable to write. Conrad’s inability to write frequently haunts him, as evinced in his letter to Edward Garnett: “I have written one page. Just one page. I went about thinking and forgetting – sitting down before the blank page to find that I could not put one sentence together” (*CL* 1: 288).

The ship is continuously plagued with silence and darkness. “The darkness,” as J. Hillis Miller observes, is “first of all a sensible experience,” an experience that divides between the visible and the invisible. He proceeds to argue that the “engulfing sensation” of being in darkness is that “there is nothing to sense” (*Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-century Writers* 27). To some extent, silence, which appeals to acoustic sensory modality, is intended for a similar effect. When the ship leaves the shore and moves very slowly on the sea, the young narrator describes his impatience when encountering darkness and silence as follows:

After sunset I came out on deck again to meet only a still void. The thin, featureless crust of the coast could not be distinguished. The darkness had risen around the ship like a mysterious emanation from the dumb and lonely waters. I leaned on the rail and turned my ear to the shadows of the night. Not a sound. My command might have been a planet flying vertiginously on its appointed path in a space of infinite silence. (*SL* 63)

The phrase – “a still void” – sums up the young captain’s sentiment when enveloped by darkness and silence. It seems clear that he is trapped by external reality. With nothing to hear and see, the image of complete silence and darkness points to both his powerlessness and nature’s indifference to human suffering.

Surely, the indifference of nature above does not require “symbolic explanations” in their own right, as Ian Watt claims: “[darkness] will be justified for its own sake; [and] it is in keeping with Conrad’s frequent use of [it] for his narrative climax; and it may well have been dark when the actual events occurred which served as basis for the story”. Though he is aware of this, Watt still encourages readers to find “larger meanings” from it (*Essays on Conrad* 160).

Indeed, the overlapping relationship between the sailing voyage and the writing process enables one to read the narrated darkness and silence in the text as a sign of the writer’s creative inertia. Steeped in absolute darkness, the young narrator attempts to convince himself that the darkness “must have been the darkness before creation” (*SL* 90). While some critics seek the meaning of the word “creation” from the perspective of history

and ethics,³⁶ I propose to read the word “creation” as the literary creation of the text: *The Shadow-Line*.

For the writer, darkness and the act of writing are inherently linked with each other, as he illuminatingly reveals what writing means to him in his discussion of Henry James’s art:

The creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light... (“Henry James” 103)

As the remarks above suggest, creative art is likened to “rescue work” that is “carried out in darkness”. As a result, writing can seize the “vanishing phase of turbulence” and bring it “out of the obscurity into a light”. In other words, past moments remain dark before they are translated into words. This is central to understanding Conrad’s action of writing and its relation with darkness. When it comes to the writing of *The Shadow-Line*, Conrad was still unclear about how to develop it into a full story at that time. In other words, he was unable to recapture the chaotic and floating images in his mind and translate them into words. He concluded that “[t]o be able to think and unable to express is a fine torture” (288).

Considering the long stretch of Conrad’s creative inertia from February to October, his process of writing *The Shadow-Line*, according to John Stape and Allan Simmons, was “extremely slow, painful and halting” (*SL* 119). Indeed, the slow movement of the ship (and Conrad’s writing) becomes a research focus for scholars. Among others, Albert Guerard contends that *The Shadow-Line* “gets underway very slowly and uncertainly” (30). It

³⁶ Please see a brilliant introduction about how darkness and the young narrator’s first command bring up the issue of human solidarity in Ian Watt. *Essays on Conrad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p152-169.

becomes more reasonable if one regards this continuously-delayed journey from Bangkok to Singapore as an artistic metaphor for Conrad's creative inertia in writing this book. Initially, the writer turned to writing this story "as the easiest subject", which points out Conrad's untested confidence (qtd in Knowles xxvii). Nevertheless, when Conrad started writing, delays haunted him. In a revealing letter to Henry James, Conrad confessed that "I haven't written 10 pages since last November". Writing *The Shadow-Line* becomes a wrestle with his own creative inertia. Like the young narrator in the text, Conrad is desperately in need of a breakthrough to complete his story.

The young captain is sometimes blessed with "fitful and deceitful" wind whose "promises of advance end in lost ground" (*SL* 69). Likewise, the deceitful progress of the writer's production gives and takes away the hope of completing his writing soon. Conrad's writing process alternated between slow advancement and prolonged stillness, a delayed process which distressed him. This is indicated metaphorically in the text: "[t]he silence which followed upon my words was almost harder to bear than the angriest uproar" (78). Despite his slow progress, Conrad's writing, like the young Captain's voyage, is still gradually approaching its end. If the condition of being suspended on the sea (and on the page) due to lack of wind (and creative block) is still not so terrible at this point, then the non-movement of both the sailing and the writing process would reach the summit soon.

The diary in the text describes the young captain's utter depression as a result of being bounded hand and foot by the windless sea and his desire to get the ship under way:

I remain on deck of course, night and day, and the nights and the days wheel over us in succession, whether long or short, who can say? All sense of time is lost in the monotony of expectation, of hope and of desire – which is only one: get the ship to the southward! Get the ship to the southward! (78)

The immobility of the ship becomes an anxiety-inducing factor for the young captain, producing complex sensations, such as expectation, desperation, desire, and disillusion. The monochromatic landscape and the becalmed barque warp the narrator's perception of time, as he himself tells us: "all sense of time is lost" (78). The sense of time that the young captain believes is lost is cultural time, represented by timepieces and calendar. John Peters comments that the passage above proves the impossibility of "culturally determined expectations of chronological time", while at the same time indicating the existence of "cyclic time" (96). To follow Peters' observation, I suggest that the young captain's experience of cyclic time arises from his heightened consciousness. To put it more precisely, the narrator's attention is completely drawn to one primary concern: to get the ship moving towards the southern part of the globe. And this desire is closely linked to the writer's desire: to get his pen moving towards the bottom of the paper.

The diary thus symbolizes a nodal point between the sailor's and the writer's desire, making it necessary to discuss its function in the text. As the writer, Conrad inserts two pieces of diary entries (with present tense) into his narrative which is predominately written in past tense. On the level of plot, these two diaries do not interrupt the rhythm of the narration. Instead, they are consistent with previously narrated events, reporting the young captain's depression when confronted with the windless situation. The above block quote is an extract of the first diary, a diary that is introduced to the narrative after the young narrator had just confessed his negligence to his crew.

What makes this diary worthy of our critical attention is its use of direct speech and present tense. Daniel Schwarz asserts that the use of the present tense in the diary serves as a technique to "dramatize two separate selves, the younger self and a mature speaker" in the text (*Conrad: The Later Fiction* 89). In doing so, the past and the present converge in the

writer's act of adding diary extracts to the text. The use of the present tense has the effect of temporal and emotional proximity to readers, which enables the narrator to transport us directly to the immediate consciousness of his younger self. Readers can thus feel the narrator's desire to get his ship under way for the sake of both saving his sick crew and relieving his sense of guilt.

More importantly, the diary itself draws attention to the act of writing. Some pages later, Conrad highlights the act of the young narrator writing the diary: “[i]t’s the only period of my life in which I attempted to keep a diary... I suppose they saved me from the crazy trick of talking to myself”. The act of writing splits the narrator at once into both a writer and a reader to prevent himself from going insane. Indeed, the diary works to temper the young Captain’s wild imagination by compelling him to take a pragmatic and controllable job – writing – and allowing him to voice out his psychological fear on the pages. In this respect, writing is, as Conrad himself indicates in the text, an act of “intimate relief” (SL 85). More precisely, it is a concrete act to order chaotic and disorderly emotions.

In a larger sense, this self-conscious way of underscoring the efficacy of writing a diary foregrounds in a symbolical way the literary practice of writing *The Shadow-Line*. The subtitle of this text – *A Confession* – echoes and coincides the immanent nature of diary keeping, that is, to show the innermost emotions and feelings. In this sense, the text works as an extended metaphor for diary that retains Conrad’s private thoughts. The diary is introduced by the writer to the reader in this fashion: “[h]ere I must give another sample of it: a few detached lines, now looking very ghostly to my own eyes, out of the part scribbled that very evening” (SL 85). The diary, written in the past, is inserted into the text by the writer in the creative present as historical evidence of his younger self’s state of depression. Conrad’s

self-conscious way of staging the diary draws attention to his act of writing, indicating his eager desire to get his writing under way as quickly as possible.

Yet, a breakthrough in both sea voyage and writing process relies on opportunity. As Conrad tells readers in his autobiographical memoir *A Personal Record*, “[s]till, in writing, as in going to sea, I had to wait my opportunity” (*PR* 30). No one knows when this opportunity will come until it comes. In the second diary, the depressed young captain addresses the reader as follows: “I have nothing to do to keep my imagination from running wild amongst the disastrous images of the worst that may befall us. What’s going to happen? Probably nothing. Or anything” (*SL* 85). Here, readers are invited to imagine the young captain’s concerns about his crew. He does not know what will befall them, an uncertainty that generates the wildest imagination.

The uncertainty above implicitly points out the writer’s anxieties too, given that he does not know where his writing will lead him. This is aptly reflected in a complaint to his friend: “I find it difficult to work in this war atmosphere. ... One tries to put anxiety aside, but it will creep in and paralyse the pen all at once” (*CL* 5: 459). John Stape and Allan Simmons have analysed many reasons for the writer’s “relative lack of productivity”, including wartime gloom, his “physical uselessness” because of arthritis and gout, and his “mental enervation”. They assert that the writer, like the captain in the text, was “experiencing recurring lassitude and depression” (*SL* 119).

Both Conrad and the young Captain are in want of a breeze. Near the end of the text, the young captain is blessed with the coming of the wind: “The breeze kept on freshening and blew true, true to a hair” and the wind is “rushing [them] on” (97, 99). Likewise, in late November, the writer turned to dictation for help to deal with the attack of his gout. With the assistance of typists, Conrad had his “remarkable creative breakthrough”, as Stape and

Simmons announce: “[he] [is] able to dictate some 11,7000 words, finishing more ‘writing’ in ten days than he had managed to accomplish over several months” (120). These biographical records of the writer’s writing process sketch out a pattern similar to the young captain’s experience on the sea. Both of them had to reach out to others for help and have to wait for their opportunities.

The Text as a Site Where Past and Present Conflate

The discussion above reveals that the writer’s slow creative process can be detected in the non-movement of the young captain’s sea voyage. As historical evidence shows, the endless delays in Conrad’s writing of *The Shadow-Line* generate unpleasurable emotions, which culminate in depression. This painful psychical state in the creative present has an immense impact on Conrad’s act of recounting his first command, leading him to unconsciously alter the landscape of his past experiences. More specifically, *The Shadow-Line* not only registers Conrad’s first command as a captain, but also encodes within itself the depression and anxiety that stem from his act of writing this story. It is in this sense that the past and the present converge in the narrative of *The Shadow-Line*. In the discussion that follows, I will proceed to examine how Conrad’s affective particulars in the creative present transform the way in which the narrator narrates past events in an unconscious manner from two perspectives: how Conrad’s emotional state of depression makes his younger seafaring self, or the young captain in the narrative, shirk from his responsibilities as a captain temporarily; and how Conrad’s emotions in his creative present dramatize Mr Burns’ disconcerting obsession with supernatural forces in the text.

As suggested earlier, the text evokes supernatural elements. Despite so many inexplicable incidents in the text, the writer claims that he never “felt the supernatural aspect” when he wrote about it in his letter to Helen Sanderson (*Selected Letters* 372). He keeps

defending his work unflinchingly, arguing that it should not to be read as a “manufactured article” where his characters are “fascinated by the mere Supernatural” (*SL* 5). In spite of the writer’s remarks, Mr Burns’ obsession with the late captain indeed evokes the effect of the supernatural and even horror. For instance, Mr Burns insists that the becalmed ship has been cursed by the former captain; he stubbornly believes that the old ruffian replaces the quinine bottles on board so that no one can go home; above all, he goes onto the deck, scolding and confronting the haunting ghost (the late captain).

This tension between the actual existence of the dramatic effects of the supernatural and the writer’s defence of his work invites readers to reconsider the voyage and the narrator’s first command. I suggest that Conrad, as he has declared in many places, did not intend to touch on supernatural elements and evoke the effect of horror. Rather, he unconsciously projected and transferred his chronic depression and anxiety into his work during his writing practice, thus underscoring and even amplifying the supernatural elements and the concomitant effect of horror. This partially explains why the writer did not feel how neurotic his chief mate looks in the process of writing the text. Instead, the writer contends that “there is nothing...from beyond the confines of this world”(6). Indeed, nothing in this text is fabricated purely from his mind. Instead, they are all produced within the realm of the writer’s experienced realities.

Yet, this experienced reality does not refer to Conrad’s captaincy three decades earlier, but rather to his mental states in the creative present. These mental states are conflated with narrated happenings in the text. Knowles notices that Conrad’s recount of his first command affords the author “a form of disguised confessional,” arguing the following:

[Conrad’s] vicarious identification with the world-weariness, existential panic and feeling of impending catastrophe of his younger self provided an outlet for

his own wartime gloom, while at the same time allowing him to share indirectly in the young captain's blessed release from paralyzed inertia into a renewed sense of vitality. (xxxii)

Given that the text was produced during the First World War, the creative process of *The Shadow-Line* served as a stage for the writer to discharge his own "wartime gloom" by mentally travelling back to his past self and imaginatively re-experiencing similar emotions (xxxii). In hindsight, "the sense of vitality" would be restored for both the writer and the young sailor. They would rise up from what Knowles terms "paralyzed inertia" (xxxii). In spite of this, "wartime gloom" rendered the writing subject "crippled," "idle," and "useless" to the extent that he "finds it difficult to work in in this war atmosphere". The anxiety "will creep in and paralyse the pen all at once" (*CL 5*: 427, 509). The inability to write due to the war and the concomitant affective disorders – his depressions and anxiety – haunted and tortured the writer, as he confessed to his friends: "the thoughts of this war sit on one's chest like a nightmare" (427).

Though Conrad's emotional condition appears unfavourable to the writing process, *The Shadow-Line* has to be completed. Yet, his negative emotions do more than delay the production process. As Jean-Paul Sartre asserts in his phenomenological study of emotions:

We can now conceive what an emotion is. It is a transformation of the world. When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic. (39-40)

Sartre's remarks suggest how emotions can transform one's material world by "magic" when one encounters unconquerable obstacles. The use of the word "magic" does not literally refer to magic itself. Instead, as I will show later, the magical act changes the structure of the world, but at the same time, does not generate an actual effect on the "deterministic process" of the external world (40).

Now, I will elucidate the transformational power of emotion in a magical way by using Sartre's own example in the book. He invites us to imagine this scenario with him: unable to "pluck a bunch of grapes" on the tree due to his height, he "mutter[s]" to himself that "they are too green", after which he leaves. By warning us that this behaviour should not be taken "at face value", Sartre discloses a deep "emotive structure" underneath. The "potentiality" of the grapes – to be picked and eaten – cannot be "actualized" by Sartre, which causes "intolerable" tension in him (67). His height determines that the goal of "plucking" the grapes is too difficult to achieve. Consequently, he "confer[s] the quality of 'too green' upon [the bunch of grapes]", which "serve[s] as a substitute for the action [he] cannot complete" (68).

This "conferring quality" action, termed by Sartre as magic, alters the relationship between oneself and the external material world by adjusting one's way of perceiving. As a result, this act of conferring the quality of being "too green" to the grapes successfully "resolve[s] the conflict and put[s] an end to the tension" (68). Yet, readers should pay attention to the fact that the actual structure of the exterior world is not altered by Sartre's transformational act. What changes is Sartre's way of perceiving the world and his concomitant behaviour in it. In other words, the grapes are still there with the potentiality of being picked and eaten, yet Sartre leaves the vineyard as he believes that the grapes are too green to be tasty. Hence, the structure of the world, rather than being dictated by

“deterministic process”, is transformed by his own magic trick of conferring the quality of being “too green” to the grapes.

The above discussion informs my reading of the text as one influenced and transformed by the writer’s emotional state during the creative process. Conrad’s process of writing the story was continuously impeded by the attack of gout, his worries about old age, and his anxiety about the First World War. All these led to his depressed mood, which made his writing difficult. To make matters worse, the “potentiality” of his writing project is not eliminated. In other words, Conrad had no other option but to continue his writing, which in turn produced unbearable anxiety and depression in the writer. This is when anxiety and depression, if one follows Sartre’s observation, begin to have a direct impact on Conrad’s creative production of *The Shadow-Line*.

The writer transforms his way of perceiving the external world when severely afflicted with depression. This can be detected in his accounts of the narrator’s sailing experience, given that the writer’s writing process shares a similar emotive structure with the narrator’s sea voyage. In the narrative, when confronted with the becalmed ship, the narrator instinctively seeks help by escaping, and by refusing to go onto the deck to stay with his sick crew. Ransome, the only healthy helper on board, becomes the last person on whom the young captain can depend. Having assisted the young captain in hauling up the mainsail, Ransome leaves to take care of other sailors, gradually disappearing into darkness. Upon witnessing his departure, the narrator relays his emotions at that time thus:

At once an uneasiness possessed me, as if some support had been withdrawn. I moved forward too, outside the circle of light, into the darkness that stood in front of me like a wall. In one stride I penetrated it. Such must have been the darkness before creation. It had closed behind me. I knew I was invisible to

the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything. He was alone, I was alone, every man was alone where he stood. And every form was gone, too, spar, sail, fittings, rails; everything was blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night. (90)

Using “smoothness” to describe the night reminds one of the texture of paper. The sailor-like Ransome looms large in the narrative as a self-restrained and rational man who performs his duties cautiously. Without his support (and his rationality), the young narrator moves forward, leaves the lightness, and penetrates into the darkness. As a result, he is indistinguishable from other people and material objects around him, as he tells readers: “I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm” (90).

In terms of the young captain’s flight from light and penetration into darkness, a return to Sartre will be helpful here. He argues how active fear – flight – magically changes our relationship with the external world:

Flight is fainting away in play; it is magical behaviour which negates the dangerous object with one’s whole body, by reversing the vectorial structure of the space we live in and suddenly creating a potential direction on the *other side*. It is a way of forgetting, of negating the danger. (67; emphasis in original)

According to this way of thinking, the young captain’s flight from lightness and hiding himself within darkness is “magical behaviour” to reverse the situation that he is in by creating for himself another potential world. For the young captain, the “magical behaviour” of flight hints at his unconscious negation of this potential possibility: his crew might die as they do not have sufficient strength to steer the ship. He imagines how the ship and its crew will be destroyed by a squall thus: “we may even get dismasted...It’s like being bound hand

and foot, preparatory to having one's throat cut" (*SL* 86). This possible potentiality of death scares the young captain and transforms his behaviour in the material world, namely, hiding himself in darkness.

Yet, if one relates the state of darkness to the writer's creative inertia, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, it would be easier to detect another layer of meaning for the young narrator's act of penetrating into darkness. This requires that one shift attention from the young captain to the writer. For the writer, the act of hiding oneself in a world of darkness functions as a symbolic gesture here: it is his retreat from the labour of writing and abandoning himself to creative inactivity. In this way, the writer believes that he is relieved of the burden of writing for a while. By drawing back into himself and screening himself within the dark wall, or in Sartre's words, "effacing" himself (69), Conrad negates and temporarily forgets the act of writing in a magical way. Therefore, the act of the young narrator's escape into darkness dramatizes in an implicit and metaphorical way the writer's passive reaction to his creative inertia.

According to historical records, when confronted with a demanding task, it is the writer's instinctive reaction to escape, or at least to ignore it. After he finished *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad was torn between the pressure of writing another work of fiction and taking another sea adventure: "I was the victim of contrary stresses which produced a state of immobility. I gave myself up to indolence. Since it was impossible for me to face both ways I had elected to face nothing" (*Life and Letters* vii). Readers find a similar pattern in this reaction. By surrendering to "indolence", the writer would not have to decide which path he should take immediately, while being free to take either of them at the same time. To some extent, the willed stride into darkness figuratively creates the same illusory impression that the writer believes he is in charge of his writing process.

The discussion above offers a new understanding of the writer's confession in the second diary entry in the text: "[n]ow I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof positive. I am shirking it. I am no good" (SL 86). As previously argued, the diary connects the narrator and the writer. Therefore, the diary is positive evidence that not only relates to the young captain who refuses to go onto the deck, but also to the writer's shirking from his writing endeavours.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the stillness is "an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention", which arouses Marlow's curiosity and drives him to perceive more (YHE 69). In contrast, silence and darkness in *The Shadow-Line* do not initiate the act of either doing or perceiving, but rather act to evoke the sensation of annihilation: "There was in [darkness] an effect of inconceivable terror and of inexpressible mystery". This "inconceivable terror" is gradually developed into "a sense of finality" and "a foretaste of annihilation" (SL 87). The effects of death and terror that haunt the ship are dramatized in such a way that readers might attribute it to the supernatural, especially when the chief mate Mr Burns keeps talking about how the late captain has cursed the ship.

Therefore, the second conferred quality from Conrad is his transformation of Mr Burns into an obsessed monster. The writer projected his own fear of writing to Mr Burns, dramatically demonizing the chief mate. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Mr Burns is referred to as Mr. B, "the one [Conrad] trusted most" (MS 20). The writer's recollection of Mr Burns in the above autobiographical memoir suggests that Mr Burns is not as crazy and obsessed as depicted in *The Shadow-Line*.³⁷ Aware of readers' curiosity about the incongruencies about Mr Burns in the text, Conrad explains in one of his letters that this character's craziness is

³⁷ For more discussion about Conrad's alteration of the character Mr Burns, please see Norman Sherry. *Conrad's Eastern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, p228-252; Owen Knowles' Introduction to Joseph Conrad. *The Shadow-Line: A Confession*. Eds. John Stape and Allan Simmons. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

perhaps “a little accentuated”. Yet, Mr Burns is not “a little accentuated,” but rather staged as a caricatured character in his diseased state (*CL* 5: 37).

I suggest that the effect of caricature on Mr Burns in the narrative projects Conrad’s emotions towards his writing of *The Shadow-Line* during the time of the First World War. The general wartime disturbance crippled Conrad’s process of writing. To make matters worse, Conrad’s elder son Borys was enlisted as a soldier to battle on the frontline in September in 1915, aggravating the writer’s anxiety and depression. The writer’s letter testifies to his fear: “now, midnight, a perfect quite reigns over the country all calm and dark. Everybody we know has lost someone... They all go. My boy’s turn will be coming presently to start off” (*CL* 5: 500). This news scared Conrad. As an artist, he could do nothing but identify with his son and the younger generation by his own weapon – his writing, a sentiment he expressed in the “Author’s Note” to the text: “before the supreme trial of a whole generation... there was a feeling of identity” (*SL* 6).

Due to this identification, Conrad’s writing is an act of not only re-living his own past experience, but also of providing a future guide for his son and other soldiers. In another letter, the writer demonstrated his willingness to imaginatively accompany Borys as far as possible: “I wanted to be with him as long as possible on the day he had to put his boyhood definitely behind him” (*CL* 5: 512). With crossing the shadow line as a major metaphor in his mind, the aged Conrad regarded finishing this story as the best way to get rid of his fear and vicariously accompany his son. Therefore, it is not surprising that this autobiographical work is dedicated to Borys and all others “who like himself [Conrad] have crossed in early youth the shadow-line of their generation with love” (*SL* 3).

In other words, the writer’s recount of his past experiences shoulders the responsibility for the younger generation. The young Conrad’s rite of passage proves the

significance of mutual support in a community. The ship symbolizes a miniature community. Conrad's younger self and his crew are thrown into a situation where they have to work together in order to survive the calmness and the storm as well. By universalizing this ordeal, Conrad attempts to highlight his philosophical idea: solidarity. When confronted with challenges, the mutual support of men is instrumental in holding them together and helping them overcome hardship.

Yet, the notion of solidarity does not exist as an abstract idea in one's mind, but instead must be tested and affirmed in actions and events. In this respect, the ordeal of *The Shadow-Line* serves as a representative incident to confirm how solidarity between crew members enables them to survive the test. Similarly, the young generation was going through the greatest trial, a period when solidarity was extremely crucial. Aware of this, Conrad did his utmost to turn his personal experience into a universal one, aiming to encourage and inspire the young who were going to cross the shadow line in their own lives. The writer proclaims that the "experience [his first command] is transposed into spiritual terms" (CL 6: 37). This process of transposition is worthy of our attention as it contributes partially to the dramatic presentation of Mr Burns.

In order to transform his experience into "spiritual" terms, the writer transfers some of the young narrator's madness and desperation to Mr Burns. When confronted with the lack of medication (due to his negligence) and the calmness, the young narrator is gradually tempted to believe in the presence of the haunting deceased captain. It seems that Mr Burns' "superstitious fancy compounded of fear and animosity" has started to influence the young captain, and his decision on where the ship should head to (SL 5). He is on the verge of psychological breakdown, as the text shows us: "[f]or myself, neither my soul was highly tempered nor my imagination properly under control. There were moments when I felt not

only that I would go mad, but that I had gone mad already". Under these circumstances, madness begins to work on the young captain. He would have steered his ship westward to "reach the mail boat track" if not for Mr Burns' warning and his own seamanship instincts.

On the contrary, Mr Burns strongly urges the young captain to stick to the original path, saying: "don't do that, sir. You mustn't for a moment give up facing that old ruffian [the late captain]", even though he is supposedly the insane one (81). Though these words appear superstitious and obsessive on the surface, they stand the test of rationality. After the captain regains his composure, he reflects that "[Mr Burns'] protest...[is] essentially quite sound", and that his own idea to steer the ship westward "could not bear a calm examination" (83).

Yet, as a narrative that has to recognize the shadow line ahead and cross it, the writer has to properly steer his writing along a premeditated path, instead of excessively depicting the younger narrator's madness. It is incumbent on the old writer to provide the young generation with hope that psychological ordeal is temporary and will vanish. As Allan Simons observes, the young captain's "professional responsibility goes hand-in-hand" with the retrospective writer's "moral responsibility" (200). The writer's "moral responsibility" necessitates that the young captain's "soul" must be "tempered" and his "imagination" must be "properly under control" (*SL* 81).

The tension between expressing the young narrator's psychological breakdown and the writer's moral responsibility has to be resolved in a new way. In short, how can Conrad evoke the sensations of the young captain's madness, but in a way that does not compromise the effects of his moral lessons? At this juncture, I suggest to return to Sartre's insight on the function of emotions. When the path of expressing the young narrator's intense sensations is

blocked, one's consciousness will seek a new way to transform the structure of the world by magical behaviour.

Given that the writer cannot directly articulate the young captain's fear and depression, he transforms the structure of the text by magically projecting the negative emotions on Mr Burns. This act of magically transforming the textual structure does not mean that the historical context of the text is changed. More specifically, as a real person who indeed received "a sever shock in his relations with his late captain", Mr Burns is not a purely manufactured character created for the projection of the young captain's negative emotions (5). Instead, he is a "predestined victim" to receive and mirror some transferred qualities from the young narrator, qualities that dramatize and caricature his craziness and obsession with the presence of the dead (56). In other words, the obsessive and demonized Mr Burns serves as a mirror to reflect the "intimate delicacies" of his relation to the young captain in terms of death and madness (5).

The conflated narrative of the young captain's felt horror and Mr Burns' behaviour culminates at the moment of the latter's bear-cutting episode. When most of his crew is stricken by tropic diseases, the young captain places his hope on medicine which he believes "will save the men, the ship, break the spell by its medicinal virtue" (72). However, tragedy happens. He suddenly finds that the quinine bottles on board have been mysteriously replaced with white powder. This "appalling discovery" makes his nerves "exasperate into an extraordinary insensibility". His mental activity plunges to the depth of insanity.

In his hurrying up to the deck, the young captain has a glimpse of Mr Burns at the doorway of his cabin:

He was sitting up in his bunk, his body looking immensely long, his head drooping a little sideways, with affected complacency. He flourished, in his

trembling hand, on the end of a forearm no thicker than a stout walking-stick, a shining pair of scissors which he tried before my very eyes to jab at his throat. (73)

The gradual and detailed portrayal of Mr Burns finally rests on the most critical moment – his (assumed) attempt to “jab at his throat” before the young captain’s eyes. Yet, it turns out that Mr Burns is “simply overtaxing his returning strength in a shaky attempt to clip off the thick growth of his red beard”. The contrast between what the young narrator imagines and what Mr Burns is actually doing calls attention to the writer’s dramatization of the latter’s craziness.

Moreover, this hallucinated scene suggests that Conrad the writer has transferred the young captain’s depression and anxiety to Mr Burns. The young captain admits that “this disclosure [of the replaced quinine bottle] was too much for [his] strength”, and admits that “the wildness of [Mr Burns’] aspect checked his mental disorder” (73). Debra Romanick argues that “had the captain merely sat there amidst the broken glass of the quinine bottles and contemplated the men’s situation...he might have used the broken glass with some justification to slit his own throat” (242). She further suggests that the thought of committing suicide is on the young captain’s mind, for he “imagines Mr. Burns to be doing it with his scissors” seconds later (243). From this perspective, this hallucinated mnemonic scene reveals that Conrad has transferred the young captain’s excess of emotional disturbance to Mr Burns.

Under extreme psychological stress, the suicidal tendency above finds its historical evidence in Conrad’s real life. During his stay in Marseille, the young sailor had attempted suicide and severely injured himself. Critical reactions to Conrad’s injuries are divided. Some critics claim that the injury was inflicted on him during a duel, while others are doubtful

about this legend. Drawing on a lot of historical facts, Zdzislaw Najder's meticulous research shows in a convincing manner that the injury indeed stemmed from attempted suicide due to "financial setbacks, sudden and insurmountable difficulties in his professional life and perhaps an unhappy love". However, either at the time of his injury, or at any time thereafter, Conrad attempted to camouflage it with a duel. Meanwhile, Nadjer also argues that when trapped by "utter despair" and a "sense of complete helplessness," Conrad would regard the idea of committing suicide as "a form of crying for help". These biographical details uncover the truth that the young Conrad was susceptible to depression. Under certain circumstances, it is likely that Conrad entertained the idea of killing himself, if the difficulties were too much for him to tackle.

A return to the young Conrad's attempted suicide helps us to ground the imagined suicide episode in *The Shadow-Line* better. The incident of Conrad's attempted suicide happened in 1878, and it was possible that the young captain in *The Shadow-Line* considered taking his own life a decade later, when he suffered a sense of helplessness during his death-haunted first command. Najder warns readers that depression "occurred frequently in Conrad's later life," but "never in such a dramatic form" as in the suicide attempt incident (66). When the periodic crisis of mental health gripped Conrad in his later life, he learned how to discharge his fear and insecurities through writing. *The Shadow-Line* dramatizes and stages the redemptive effect of keeping diaries. Debra Baldwin claims that the young captain in the diary "attempts to articulate his thoughts and fears, disciplining them out of realm of indefinite fear and onto a concrete piece of paper" (244-245). That is to say, writing can give form to strongly experienced emotions, and thus assuage excessive neural disturbances. As the young narrator puts it, writing becomes an "intimate relief" to save him from madness (SL 85).

Though Mr Burns is demonized, Conrad's personal ordeal of crossing the shadow line allows the young soldiers on the front line to imagine a promising future ahead. In this way, the recounting of Conrad's first command transcends the confines of individual remembering and is connected with historical milieu. Therefore, this text is not merely a simple narrative that records the transformation of Conrad from boyhood to adulthood, but seeks instead to identify with larger historical circumstances. Through this act of identification, Conrad imagines himself as a loyal ally to combatants on the battlefield. From this point, Allan Simons argues that "one of the pleasures of the novella lies precisely in recognizing its richness as both a fictionalized autobiography and an oblique commentary on an historical moment, both the work of an individual and the product of a culture" (228).

Conclusion

Given how *The Shadow-Line* shifts its style from Marlow's complicated narrative to the direct first-person narrative, the reader might be deceived by the text's directness in conveying Conrad's personal experience. Yet, as the text is grounded deeply in complex historical contexts, Conrad's appropriation of the direct mode of expression compels one to reconsider narrative strategy and its function in writing. This urges the reader to view the manner in which Conrad employs the medium of first person narrative to deliver his innermost emotion anew.

The key point to understanding the importance of the text lies in one's comprehending the central metaphor in this narrative: crossing the shadow line. As argued earlier, it does not restrict itself to an overt demonstration of an ordeal about how the young captain crosses a particular line on the sea and successfully lands in Singapore. It is also not a mere metaphorical expression of the young captain crossing the line of naivety to reach maturity.

As a writer who is perpetually and mercilessly haunted by the idea of verbal articulation, his text bears the indelible marks of his arduous writing process.

Indeed, reading the narrated sea journey and Conrad's writing process in a parallel way compellingly shows the reader that the text is itself a great metaphor. The young captain's depression and psychological paralysis when confronted with a becalmed ship is described as a metaphorical instance of the writer's act of writing. It was a process in which delay mercilessly tortured him. The depression and anxiety that ensue were not less suffering than that which the young captain experiences in the past sea voyage. Therefore, the text serves as a metaphor for the crossed boundary between the young captain's sea voyage and the aged writer's process of writing the text. That both journeys share a similar pattern indicates the complexity of this narrative. As the discussion shows, the emotional state of the writer in the creative present crosses the boundary and transforms the landscape of his recounted past. In doing so, the writer's recollection of his first command blurs the boundaries between the past and the present. This conflation of different tempo-spatial events, a conflation that Conrad himself might not even realize, is a clear indicator of the force of memory.

In addition, the success of this text lies partly in what Conrad himself refers to as "pleasure". In the "Author's Note" to *The Shadow-Line*, Conrad asserts that:

I remember that period of my sea life with pleasure because begun inauspiciously it turned out in the end a success from a personal point of view, leaving a tangible proof in the terms of the letter the owners of the ship wrote to me two years afterwards when I resigned my command in order to come home. (*SL* 35)

Narrative provides him with a legitimate ground to reproduce his past and artistically represent it to readers. This offers Conrad a particular freedom to control the seemingly uncontrollable, from which aesthetic pleasure springs. Distancing himself from the past, Conrad the writer is not dictated by the unexpected occurrences life brings him. He would not be startled by the sudden change, as shown in the text, that “the darkness suddenly turned into water”. Instead, he could choose a “suitable figure” in his writing to describe the sensations this sudden incident evoked in the past (91). On a larger scale, considering the unpredictability of the First World War, the pleasure of controlling and reshaping his past figuratively and symbolically affords the rememberer an opportunity to rid himself of wartime inertia, and to be actively present with the young generation on the front line by his writing.

Conclusion: The Texture of the Past

One must admit regretfully that to-day is but a scramble, that to-morrow may never come; it is only the precious yesterday that cannot be taken away from us.

(Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters*)

Joseph Conrad died in 1924 and was interred at Canterbury Cemetery. On his gravestone is inscribed an epitaph he had selected from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*: "Sleep after toyle, port after stormic seas, ease after warre, death after life does greatly please" (120). Indeed, pain and struggle constantly haunted the writer; as F. R. Leavis remarks of Conrad, "it is true to say that he died of overwork" (*Anna Karenina* 95). Yet, as Conrad's surrogate narrator Marlow puts it, creative labour was "the chance to find [himself] – [his] own reality – for himself – not for others" (72). In other words, writing was a means for Conrad to find his own reality, and also an anchor with which to reconnect with his past.

Conrad's multitextured and transformative life offers insight into why memory occupies a central concern in his works, and also why he resists an ordered patterning of the past. Because of his patriotic father, Conrad was exiled to Siberia with his family when he was four years old. Then, orphaned at the age of twelve, he entered the tutelage of his uncle. In spite of his uncle's discouragement, Conrad moved to France to pursue a life adventuring at sea. As a sailor, he travelled to different parts of the world – Malaya, Singapore, the Congo, Mauritius, Australia, India, and Indonesia. In the process, he anglicized his name from Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski to Joseph Conrad, and additionally became a British subject later in his life. At the age of thirty-seven, the master mariner abandoned his sea life, and began to write fiction in English, his third language. Reflecting upon Conrad's life journey, Nidesh Lawtoo summarises it as "chameleon-like metamorphoses" (xvii).

These striking transformations constitute a “precious yesterday”, as Conrad himself suggests in the epigraph. Yet, given how his protean life was one fraught with a myriad different memories and disconnected experiences, it was necessary, therefore, for Conrad to anchor himself among different currents of sensations and reflections. Writing, then, served as a way for Conrad to both memorialize the past, and to explore the depth of emotions brought about by his experiences. Unlike his unordered experiences, writing enabled Conrad to stabilize the fluidity of his memory, and also transfixed it into words that he could repeatedly return to. It is in this sense that writing became a means for Conrad to resurrect the past and give a shape to his multiform life. At the same time, his (successful) transformative life experiences also taught him that life was not static and linear, but always in the process of becoming, replete with chaos, arbitrariness, and unexpectedness. Aware of this, he resisted and subverted a chronological ordering of his initial experiences, seeking instead to recapture and recover the constantly changing process of memory.

Fortunately, for Conrad, the art of writing is similar to the art of sailing. Both involve careful manoeuvring of their artistic objects – the ship/words. Conrad the sailor was a potential artist and lived his sea life artistically. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad exemplifies his artistic experience of sailing with his ships: “[it has] the artistic quality of a single-handed struggle with something much greater than yourself; [it is] the laborious absorbing practice of an art whose ultimate result remains on the knees of the gods. [It is] an individual, temperamental achievement” (MS 33). His use of words such as “artistic quality” and “laborious absorbing practice of an art” evokes the sense that he is recounting the process of creating literary art, even as he is describing his maritime experience of dealing with ships. Correspondingly, Conrad the artist structures his story world by some essential maritime virtues, such as restraint, solidarity, and fidelity, setting the artistic goal of his writing as “a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe” (*The*

Nigger 17). To render the absent sea life present in his writing, Conrad travels outbound to his past, traverses the sea of uncanny sensations and life events, and returns to the present with a specific cargo of remembered details. This way, writing reproduces the bygone days, and enables Conrad to symbolically extend his previous life as a sailor.

It is not surprising, then, that in his first literary attempt, *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad sought to understand the intricate interplay between remembering and forgetting. Set in a distant island in a Southeast Asian country, the eponymous protagonist dreams of returning to the glories of Amsterdam. Likewise, the writer dreamt of returning to the glories of the ship and maritime explorations in his imagination after he had left his sea life behind. Chapter One of this thesis has shown that Almayer's task of forgetting motivates the thematic and structural unfolding of the narrative's plot. Abandoned by his daughter who is the foundation of his faith, Almayer begins an exaggerated means of forgetting her. Yet, his arduous effort to systematically efface every trace of Nina's existence dramatizes his fruitless quest, and instead highlights the unchanging and indestructible residue of lived experiences. Unlike Almayer, the writer conveys the idea that forgetting and its presumed opposite, remembering, are inseparable. As Conrad's first piece of work, *Almayer's Folly* celebrates the permanence of memory and resists polarized thinking between remembering and forgetting.

Although Almayer fails in his quest of forgetting, I suggest that the character's unsuccessful attempt succeeds for Conrad the writer, as it proposes that the act of writing functions as a commemorative act of remembering Conrad's own past. Writing suspends and delays Conrad's experienced endings – the closing of his maritime career and the death of his uncle – by giving them continued existence in his text. This offers him a chance to establish a coherent connection between his past seafaring adventures and his present writing experiments. For Conrad, the re-creation of past experiences does not mean the establishment

of a superficial connection between past and present; rather, it functions as a way to examine the past closely, and extend what Casey terms the “selfsameness” of the disappeared details into the present writing (*Remembering* 256). As such, writing allows Conrad to ruminate on his departure from the seafaring life to which he had been accustomed, and simultaneously enables him to reclaim that which might have otherwise dispersed into the abyss of oblivion via retrospective reflections. He tries out ideas on Almayer, whose failure reminds him of the significance of “look[ing] ahead in looking back” (Casey 255). In this regard, Conrad’s second career not only continues his first one, but also extends the experience of seafaring in the future.

Acknowledging that writing serves as a means for him to preserve and commemorate his past, Conrad kept writing “volume after volume” after *Almayer’s Folly* (PR 30). Yet, the process of digging into his lived experiences and transforming them into mnemonic scenes and images is a challenging process for him. It involves dynamic dialogues between the lost past and the present, and also between the elusiveness of memory and the inadequacy of language to recapture it. *Heart of Darkness* offers a clear instance of how Conrad negotiates between these conflicting ideas. Marlow’s narrative is not a transparent mirror that reflects Conrad’s traveling experience in the Congo. The narrator, as a poetic rememberer, doubts that memory can resuscitate the past in a way that redeems the loss of one’s original experience. Narrating the past is inevitably a process of selection and deletion. In this respect, narrated events are about past events, rather than the past itself. As a narrator, Marlow is aware of this. Therefore, when he endeavours to shape his complex memories into an intelligible and unified narrative, he repeatedly reminds the reader that he has missed the complexities of his initial experience. As it is, *Heart of Darkness* examines the simultaneous existence of different states of consciousness. While Marlow is aware that past experience

can be appropriated to serve present purposes, he is also conscious of how his narrative is a distortion of the past.

Given how complex Marlow's Congo trip is, his later narration is also a continuous process of understanding the initial experience. Marlow's different versions of telling the past in *Heart of Darkness* are continuous acts of interpretation. The narrator's three different readings of his lived experiences in the Congo offer us a gestalt story. Unable to decipher Kurtz's verbal expression of "The Horror! The Horror!", Marlow initially interprets it as a cry, an interpretation which he believes retains the complexity of the ivory trader's last words. When pushed to choose between telling the truth and excluding her from the brutal darkness, Marlow enables us to see that his lie to Kurtz's fiancée is an interpretative feat. In his retelling of the story on the deck of the *Nellie*, the narrator offers us an account of his past full of bodily sensations. In addition, the text also shows that Marlow's rhythm of narration is shaped by his feelings in the past. In this way, Conrad demonstrates that the same story can be comprehended, interpreted, and related in different ways, and each interpretation has the same efficacy to the interpreter in the immediate moment.

The continuous meaning-making process in *Heart of Darkness* suggests that Conrad consciously recreates his initial experience in order to better understand his past. In contrast, *The Shadow-Line* highlights how the writer unconsciously transforms the landscape of his memory. *Almayer's Folly* helps Conrad to affirm that the past can be preserved through the act of writing, while *Heart of Darkness* offers him an experimental stage to discuss the complexities of remembering and interpreting the past. In *The Shadow-Line*, the writer's present act of writing conflates with his past experiences. The young Captain has to go through the ordeal of a single-handed struggle with the inexplicable stillness of his ship,

while the writer must stand the test of solitude and creative inertia. Hence, the spatial voyage of the young captain within the text overlaps and conflates with the temporal journey of the retrospective writer outside the text.

There are two different perceptions regarding the interactive relationship between memory and narrative. The first sees narrated memory on the page as a transparent mirror of the past, while the second understands narrative as a method that constantly constructs initial experiences, and produces an illusion of the real past. Conrad's writing straddles these two different perceptions, with neither casting his narrative as a passive container of impressions and memories from the past, nor making his writing a place unmoored from lived reality. In other words, Conrad consolidates the mimetic function of memory, and renders his writing a way to preserve his past out of personal needs. On the other hand, he also challenges the notion that memory is a static storehouse of lived experience via his artistic re-creation. These two related yet distinct processes are characteristic of Conrad's writing; as Andrew Glazzard puts it: "Conrad's efforts to work memories into impressions and, through the power of imagination, to make the actual yield to the idea are...evident throughout his writing" (71). To paraphrase Glazzard's words, Conrad's writing involves a transgressive breakdown of the fact/fiction dichotomy, and compels readers to contemplate the complex interactions between memory and imagination.

Conrad's works, in many respects, demonstrate the depth and complexity of memory and its expression in narrative. Specifically, he stages a polarized view between forgetting and remembering, while using imagery and narrative style to demonstrate the untenability of this polarity. He acknowledges that writing is a commemorative act of remembering the bygone past, but also admits that re-living the past through narrative is inevitably an imaginary return to the past – that is, a past constructed by words. He promises to offer his

readers conclusive wisdom, but frustrates us by refusing to give us the last word, and by dramatizing his doubts about narrative's ability to retrieve the past. He affirms that the meaning of a particular life episode lies in that exact moment in the past, but also asserts that remembering is a constantly interpretative activity. Similarly, he adopts a conventional linear narrative structure to recount a sea voyage, but uses the linear narrative structure to reveal the complex conflation between past and present. This way, Conrad's writing affirms the protean qualities of memory, and casts memory as an extended metaphor for the sea, which is itself, according to Nicholas Meihuizen, "a fluid medium ever in flux" (62).

Furthermore, Conrad utilizes different narrative methods to underscore the multi-layered characteristics of memory. Some are more conventional, while others are less so; some are more direct, while others are indirect. In responding to the protean and multivalent qualities of memory and narrative, Conrad perceives, interprets, and recreates his lived reality in multifarious narrative techniques. From the impersonal third person point of view in *Almayer's Folly*, to his highly complex and sometimes obfuscating narrative strategies embodied by Marlow, and to the direct first-person confessional approach, Conrad demonstrates his skills in modulating narrative devices to convey the protean texture of memory.

Conrad's writing and his memories of life at sea are thus reciprocal, influencing and determining each other. Writing represents an imaginary return to the past, selecting, editing, and arranging Conrad's chaotic life materials into a piece of artistic creation, while his examined past acts as an anchor in his works, helping him to fashion a continuous self. In his letter to Kazimierz Waliszewski, , Conrad openly expresses this sentiment:

Everything about my life in the wide world can be found in my books. I never sought for a career, but possibly, aware of it. I was looking for sensations.

Now it is all over. With no connexions, contacts, or influential friends, I can nevertheless look upon the past with satisfaction. I managed somehow. (*CL* 3: 89)

As a sailor, Conrad collected and stored sensations and impressions as much as possible. When his seafaring career was over, these life sensations and reflections became the sources of his literary creation. As he confesses, “the past [has]... become one of the sources of what I may call, for want of a better word, my inspiration – for the inner force which sets the pen in motion” (*Last Essays* 109). Although making a living through writing represented new start (or adventure) for Conrad, he continuously gained satisfaction in revisiting his past through writing.

Yet, recapturing his maritime experiences in the form of writing is more than a remedy for the writer’s nostalgia. In Conrad’s rendition of the past, his focus is centred on the dynamic force that exists in an event. In other words, events on their own are not as privileged as the motives and desires that lie behind them. In defending himself as more than a simple-minded sea-tale writer, Conrad asserts:

[The sea] has been the scene but very seldom the aim of my endeavour. It is too late after all those years to try to keep back the truth, so I will confess here that when I launched my first paper-boats in days of my literary childhood I aimed at an element as restless, as dangerous, as changeable as the sea, and even more vast: – the unappeasable ocean of human life. I trust this grandiloquent image will be accepted with an indulgent simile of the kind that is accorded to the lofty ambitions of well-meaning beginners. Much time has passed since, and I can assure my readers that I have never felt more humble than I do today while I sit tracing these words, and that I see now more clearly

than ever before, that indeed those were but paper-boats, freighted with a grown-up child's dreams and launched innocently upon that terrible sea that, unlike the honest salt water of my early life, knows no hope of changing horizons but lies within the circle of an Eternal Shadow. (*Last Essays* 109-110)

The fact that Conrad regards his writing as “paper-boats” further affirms that, for him, artistic labour extends his seafaring life. He made this comment on his sea-related works in 1924, the year he died, by tracing back to his first literary labour. It is thus meaningful to examine how Conrad conceives of the relationship between his two different lives after the many decades of setting his maritime experiences down in writing. As indicated above, Conrad utilizes sea-related scenes to underscore that universal human conditions are constantly changing and possibly dangerous. Yet, in retrospect, he acknowledges that it was merely a “lofty ambition”. Indeed, unlike the young captain who can be relieved of his suffering by crossing the shadow line in *The Shadow-Line*, Conrad's efforts to penetrate the depth of human life in his sea-tales are not recognized by readers. To his despair, Conrad found that his paper-boats perpetually lie “within the circle of an Eternal Shadow” (110).

Commenting on Conrad's paper-boats and examining his artistic ideal, Richard Ambrosini writes:

The artistic ideal which impelled his first works was that fiction could bring a shift in the horizon of a reader's everyday life, by suggesting a world of possibilities alternative to actuality. In editing his earlier tales, however, the writer finds that he can see, with self-revelatory lucidity, that this was but a dream. (13)

Ambrosini lays bare Conrad's artistic pursuit and brings up the intricate relationship between fiction and life. Conrad's writing practices work to awake the reader's awareness that there exist other possible worlds outside their everyday realities. One may live one's life as a chronological journey moving forward, towards death, but it is also possible that life may be interrupted and foreclosed due to reasons such as Almayer's illusion, Marlow's scepticism, and the young captain's untested naivety.

In a sentiment that calls to mind Milan Kundera's formulation that "novelists draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility," Conrad's writing insightfully offers one alternative perspectives with which to view one's life (42). In this light, Conrad needs to be examined from what living possibilities he has discovered and presented to readers in his works, rather than from what lived realities he has replicated about his past. The real past is thus secondary to the recreated past crystalized in his words. Yet, as Ambrosini observes, Conrad realized that his literary endeavour was but a dream of a grown-up child in his later years.

In spite of this, Conrad makes us see both the visible and invisible world in a new way via his persistent effort of paper-boats. When it comes to Conrad's autobiographical works, Cedric Watts offers readers an insight that I believe renders justice to Conrad's literary pursuit:

our sense that Conrad offers a distinctively spacious imaginative realm results not only from the far-flung geographical settings and the topographical vistas of ocean, sky, and countryside, but also from our awareness that his transtextual narratives extend strongly into autobiographical reality and autobiographical image-making as well as into compressed, charged, formalized, and symbolic modes of literary fiction. (Introduction xxxi)

As Watts suggests, Conrad blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction in his narrative. Autobiographical memories are indispensable to the writer's literary creation, while his reproduction of them via narrative strategies transcends lived reality to seek reflective meaning. Thus, readers are offered a "distinctively spacious imaginative realm" which connects Conrad's two distinct lives.

In conclusion, the multi-layered exploration of the tension between received experiences and narrated memories in this dissertation acts as a signal, reminding the reader that reading Conrad is not simply about reading his works, but instead also about reading his life and understanding how his life is turned into works. In other words, Conrad needs to be approached from inside out, while at the same time, should also be researched from outside in. These textual and contextual interpretations are an integral part of Conrad studies, and are an approach that I adopt, as well as a goal I endeavour to achieve.

As a pre-modernist, Conrad's achievements in searching for the multiple ways to represent and illuminate the effects of memory anticipate some of the key research interests in contemporary academic discussions, such as autobiography studies, collective memory studies and etc., which set out to explore the delicate interplay between experience and expression, language and its limits, as well as aesthetics and ethics. By situating Conrad in a broader argument about fact and fiction, this thesis is able to provide a sort of perceptual mode in examining the ostensible opposed binary of fact and fiction, memory and imagination.

If the ways to bring about the influences of the past constantly change, and the rendering of memory has transcended the boundaries of personal life to include the life of minorities and the experiences of marginal cultures in contemporary society, Conrad's

artistic and philosophic engagement with his past offers one a departing point from which to consider more complicated issues. The basic structure of the architectural house of both cultural memory and personal memory is, at the end of the day, the power of human mind to preserve and transform.

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