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Review of *Conrad and Nature: Essays*, edited by Lissa Schneider-Rebozo, Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, and John G. Peters; pp. v + 328. New York: Routledge, 2019. \$140.00 (hardback); \$49.46 (ebook).

As the methodologies of ecocriticism and the environmental humanities continue to advance, what effect might they have on the fate of single-author studies? On the one hand, the precept to “always ecologize” seems to demand that we conceptualize authors and their work in the context of wide, interconnected webs of relation, far more dispersed than any single individual. On the other hand, the “bio” in biographical criticism describes an entity fully legible from an ecological perspective – every author an organism, every text a coproduction of the organism and its environment.

The editors of *Conrad and Nature*, perhaps wisely, make no claim for the single-author approach within the critical methodology they showcase; instead, their rationale for the volume, described in the book’s introduction, is to reimagine Conrad studies for the twenty-first century. Conrad’s body of work undoubtedly offers a rich subject for environmental analysis. For readers who make their way through the collection, Conrad will emerge as one of the great observers of the nineteenth-century natural world and how it transformed under the devastating forces of imperialism and global capitalism. The breadth of his engagements with sea and with land, and with many different parts of the world, is on remarkable display in the articles gathered here.

The first essay collection to focus on nature and environment in the work of Conrad, the volume includes thirteen new essays as well as excerpts from four older, classic works of Conrad scholarship. The approach highlights a remarkable contrast in the way nature and the environment were discussed in literary criticism of the 1980s, 1990s, and even the 2000s – when it was still possible to use the word “nature” without quotation marks – as opposed to the conceptual frameworks that underpin the volume’s newer essays. In one of the reprinted essays, for example, Geoffrey Galt Harpham writes that in Conrad’s *Nostramo* (1904), “nature is a setting” and “human beings emerge fully distinct from their natural context” (305). This way of thinking the human-natural relation seems utterly alien from the vantage points of the Anthropocene and climate change, and perhaps more to the point, it now seems utterly alien to the world Conrad inhabited as well. Our current situation of ecological vulnerability allows us to see features of these texts that were less visible a few decades ago, in the flush of neoliberal surplus. Conrad’s portrayal of the natural world has long been central to Conrad criticism, as the inclusion of these older essays shows, but the very different presuppositions we now bring to such analysis mean that much reconsideration remains to be done.

The volume is arranged conceptually with sections on “Conrad and the Anthropocene,” “Conrad’s Atmospherics,” “Conrad, Ethics and Ecology,” “Nature, Empire and Commerce,” and “Earlier Commentary.” The authors of the newer essays have various ambitions and motivations, with some wanting to make an original contribution to ecocritical concepts and methods, others wanting to trace Conrad’s developmental trajectory as a writer of the natural world. As is to be expected in such a large collection, some chapters are more successful than others, but one will learn from the volume as a whole a great deal about Conrad and about the many different natures he inhabited and wrote about.

After a short introduction, the volume begins with a showstopping essay by Jesse Oak Taylor on *Heart of Darkness* (1899;1902), “Wilderness After Nature: Conrad, Empire, and the Anthropocene,” an essay that aims at nothing less than to salvage the concept of “wilderness” for

the Anthropocene. The wilderness concept, as Taylor explains, has long been rejected for its associations with settler environmentalism, memorably discussed, for example, in William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1995). "What is the 'wilderness' that finds Kurtz out early?" Taylor's essay asks (21). Not nature untrammelled or untouched by humanity, but rather "the contact zone between the metropolitan economy and the resource base on which it feeds" (21). By redefining "wilderness" in terms of "novel ecosystems" – the "distinctive habitats brought into being through human action and ecological disturbance" (22) – Taylor theorizes an Anthropocene wilderness, offering, along the way, a dazzling reading of *Heart of Darkness*, one that emphasizes the novel's primary "ecological lesson" that "invasion is never the end of the story" (26). Wilderness persists "after the end of nature" (26) in ways that Conrad's novel was presciently attuned to, and in this way *Heart of Darkness* captures the "radically, irreducibly, inhuman world" we inhabit, where "human influence does not equate to human control" (27).

Taylor's essay is followed by another excellent chapter, "Conrad in the Anthropocene: Steps to an Ecology of Catastrophe" by Nidesh Lawtoo. This essay focuses on "Typhoon" (1902) and other Conradian sea writings that feature depictions of catastrophe – depictions that "reframe human agency against the wider ecology of (non)human actions" (44) and reframe catastrophe as "the spiraling interplay between human and nonhuman systemic pathologies" (50). Conrad dramatizes in these seafaring texts, Lawtoo argues, the dilemma of making ethical choices within an ecology of catastrophe, a dilemma becoming all too familiar today.

Another standout essay is Brendan Kavanagh's "The 'Breaking-Up' of the Monsoon and *Lord Jim*'s Atmospherics." This carefully documented and well-organized chapter delves into nineteenth-century understandings of meteorological dynamics in the Indian subcontinent and theories about their relation to global climate dynamics. Questions of scale and of the "nature" of natural disasters come to the fore, as Kavanagh describes Victorian attempts to connect Indian famines to the earth's natural systems and to preserve assumptions of an equilibrium at work in these unruly systems. The depiction of atmospheric disturbance in *Lord Jim* (1900), Kavanagh says, contributes to the late-nineteenth-century displacement of an anthropocentric notion of "human habitation in a balanced cosmos" (125).

The two final essays in the volume's newer contributions likewise count among its strongest: Samuel Perks's "'He Can't Throw Any of His Coal-Dust in My Eyes': Adventurers and Entrepreneurs in *Victory*'s Coal Empire" and Mark D. Larabee's "Guano, Globalization, and Ecosystem Change in *Lord Jim*," both of which position Conrad's fiction in the industrialized resource routes of nineteenth-century empire. Perks's chapter discusses *Victory* (1915), "one of Conrad's keenly coal-conscious novels" (252), and the way it ironically undermines the genre of the adventure romance and the figure of the adventurer in a coal-driven world ecology. Larabee focuses more narrowly on the guano island episode in *Lord Jim*, but helps us read that episode in the context of an underdiscussed chapter in Victorian ecological imperialism: the rise and fall of guano. Guano, a highly effective fertilizer formed from accumulated bird excrement, was rapaciously mined from far-flung isles to supercharge Europe's tired nineteenth-century soils, but then it was gone – all too quickly. With its guano episode, *Lord Jim* "render[s] visible both ecosystem changes and shifts in resource networks" (282), illuminating a key ecological-imperial context.

Capacious as this volume is, there are regrettable absences. Especially given the inclusion of Johanna M. Smith's brilliant essay "'Too Beautiful Altogether': Ideologies of Gender and Empire in *Heart of Darkness*" (1996) in the "Earlier Commentary" section of the book, I wished

for more attention to gender and feminist criticism among the volume's newer contributions. Re-reading Smith's essay, one can easily imagine a feminist critic revisiting Smith's major concerns, such as the ideology of separate spheres and how it fostered a market for imperial commodities, through the lens and language of contemporary ecocriticism. The volume would have been well served, too, by a timeline of Conrad's career or a bibliography on Conrad and the environment, for overall the editorial apparatus is thin. And yet there are many important essays in this worthy collection, which features, too, a range of contributors from early career researchers to more established voices. As a volume it will be enormously useful to Conrad scholars, scholars of empire and postcolonial studies, and scholars of nineteenth-century environments – ranging from the wilderness, to the sea, to the exhausted guano mines of remote Peruvian islands.

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