

The Subaltern Speaks: Ambiguity of Empire in Conrad's "Karain: A Memory"

Crystal A. O'Neal
Georgia State University

Benita Parry, in her introduction to *Conrad and Imperialism*, remarks, "Conrad in his 'colonial fictions' did not presume to speak for the colonial peoples nor did he address them" (1). This, of course, is not wholly true. She forgets two Conrad stories: "Karain: A Memory" and "The Lagoon," both crucial moments when Conrad does speak for and address the natives. He also uses "Karain" to dissolve the distinct lines between East and West, colonised and coloniser, by creating a dichotomous identity for Karain, an identity similar to what we see in more contemporary postcolonial works by writers such as Derek Walcott and Aimé Césaire. The frame of the narration gives predominance to the voice of Karain, who is not only allowed to speak his mind, but also enabled to do so thoroughly. Arguably, he only speaks through the filter of Conrad's imperialist narrator; however, Conrad uses Karain's ability to speak to break down some of the barriers between native and Westerner.

These boundaries also create a problem within the text on which contemporary postcolonial theory can shed some light. In his essay "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," Homi Bhabha maintains that contemporary cultural critics "all recognize that the problem of the cultural emerges only at the signifiatory boundaries of cultures, where means and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated" (206). In other words, in order to examine cultural problems of "difference" and "diversity," we must look at the boundaries between cultures. It is at the boundary, at the point at which two (or more) cultures meet, where cultural differences can be seen; however, Bhabha also makes it clear that these boundaries are also where most problems arise. Inevitably, there will be misunderstandings of means, values, and signs. The crux of Bhabha's argument is that there exists what he calls a Third Space in which we can look at Ourselves and Others in order to overcome some of these problems. Bhabha contends that "it is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (208). Here we see a space where we can step outside the boundaries built up by culture and language in order to explore more fully cultural difference and diversity.

First, we must look at “Karain” as a representation of this space between two cultures—British and Malay. Conrad very clearly sets this up physically for his readers in the form of the water between the Englishmen’s boat and Karain’s tribal community on land. Each is given its own space within the context of the story, and, more importantly, Conrad sets up a space of interaction between these cultures. Karain seeks to understand and overcome the difference between himself and his English friends; the Englishmen seek to understand the same kinds of differences between themselves and Karain. Each wishes to don the signs and values of the other during their conversations. However, we must remember that this story is really about Karain. In truth, it is *his* story—his memory and his history. It is about giving him a voice that can transcend the cultural boundaries between Britain and Malaysia. I would like to examine how Conrad allows his characters to enter this space of hybridity in which Karain’s voice can transcend a purely Western framework, since in this space, according to Bhabha, there is no “pure” culture, nor is there one that is privileged. Conrad seeks to turn on its head the Eurocentric notion of native as utterly Other which bears no relation to the Englishmen’s civilized sense of humanity. Though Conrad does not present this hybrid space perfectly—the narrative of Karain’s story is “imperfectly” retold (Conrad 33)—he does move toward an understanding that Bhabha believes is possible within the Third Space, bringing his readers with him into a Conradian Third Space where Self and Other can be, if nothing else, understood.

Because the majority of the text is Karain’s story, we can aptly rephrase Gayatri Spivak’s well-known question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” to something more along the lines of, “When the Subaltern Speaks, Can It Be Understood?”¹ In “Karain,” we are presented with a Malay chief with whom a group of Englishmen trade guns. Conrad gives the main voice of the narrative piece to what might typically be seen as the marginalised Other. Spivak maintains that “Full class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level. [. . .] It is a contestatory *replacement* as well as *appropriation* (a *supplementation*) of something that is ‘artificial’ to begin with” (72). In other words, the agency that can be given is not a transformation, but works towards replacing and appropriating the hegemonic ideology. Spivak, like Bhabha, sees that this privileged ideology is artificial at best. While Spivak argues that Western language-space cannot be a space where the actual subaltern subject can speak, I maintain that Bhabha’s Third Space allows Conrad a way around this. Because there is no absolutely privileged culture in the Third Space, Karain’s voice is able to assert its own agency through appropriation and

¹ I want to emphasise the passive voice here because the subject is a changing entity. It is not only the British, but also the Malay, and anyone stepping into the Third Space where “understanding” is established.

replacement—and it can work on both sides of the cultural boundary Conrad has established.

On the surface, we might take this gesture as predominately anti-colonial, and in some ways Conrad is anti-colonial. But does Conrad's ability to move Karain and the Englishmen into the Third Space really raise him above the colonisers? Is Conrad, as Bruce Johnson maintains, "far from thinking Karain [is] merely a superstitious native," using the narrative structure "to bring Karain and the Englishmen together in the same illusion-haunted human predicament" (13)? According to Johnson, Karain and the Englishmen each have moments in which they experience the same feelings, but, with Karain, "guilt can be overcome by passing a cultural or racial barrier" (16). Johnson himself places the similarities of these feelings inside a dominant Western framework, implying that in order for Karain to be seen as being in a "human predicament," he must completely cross the cultural boundary. However, it seems more probable that Conrad views the human predicament outside of the rigid assumptions of each culture; in other words, this connection occurs within the intermediary Third Space.

In the Conradian Third Space, some very interesting things happen. There develops an almost symbiotic relationship for each side as the characters enter this space and engage in an understanding of differences. Both Karain and the Englishmen begin to take on aspects of one another as their relationship develops. However, this can only be seen if we examine each side on its own. Otherwise we would have no markers to show us the working of appropriation and replacement within the Third Space. In other words, we cannot see hybridity for what it is until we have its separate parts for comparison. Because his readers may have doubts about it, Conrad must first give Karain agency within his own "native" cultural sphere. The more universal voice will become heard on all sides when the movement through the Third Space has occurred. The very heart of the story shows the interdependent relationship between Karain and the Englishmen. The smugglers, as representatives of Western colonialism, require the Malay natives to provide them with income by purchasing guns from them. On a larger scale, Westerners required the native populations to provide them with ivory, gems, and a number of other riches from the colonised nations. Karain, as representative of the colonised people, gets his strength from his seeming oppressors, as we will see toward the end of the tale when this strength is represented in Queen Victoria, the figurehead of the Empire itself. Thus we begin to see what develops after the colonised and colonisers cross into and through an intermediary space of understanding.

We must remember that the narrator of the story is English, and we are seeing the native through the only terms he can understand at this initial moment, i.e. those of his own culture. Looking at Karain in this manner, we can begin to see the desire to connect and understand, but he is not quite capable of this. Karain does not quite have a foothold in the place in which he will eventually be able to speak for himself. Therefore,

in the beginning, Karain is described to us in Western, theatrical terms. His land is a stage, and Karain is the leading actor.

His smallest acts were prepared and unexpected, his speeches grave, his sentences ominous like hints and complicated like arabesques. He was treated with a solemn respect accorded in the irreverent West only to the monarchs of the stage, and he accepted the profound homage with a sustained dignity seen nowhere else but behind the footlights and in the condensed falseness of some grossly tragic situation. (16)

This illusion of theatrics forces a gap between Karain and the Englishmen. In his glory among his people, he is not “real”—he is only an actor playing a role. While there is respect for Karain here, he continues to lack a true voice. Here there is only the voice of an actor, and the stage on which he plays his part is continuously read in terms of Western ideology.

However, this image of Karain among his people is contrasted with the Karain of the evening who sits and speaks with the Englishmen. This Karain loses the accoutrements of the stage and becomes a simple gentleman, almost thinking himself as among his own “real” kind. This is evidenced when our narrator relays, “[a]t night we treated him in a free and easy manner, which just stopped short of slapping him on the back, for there are liberties one must not take with a Malay. He said himself that on such occasions he was only a private gentleman coming to see other gentlemen whom he supposed as well born as himself” (20). It is important to notice here that while the men do drink with Karain and talk with him as if he were just another Englishman, they never view him as a complete equal. They are aware that there are “liberties one must not take with a Malay,” and they are careful not to cross that line. While this might be seen as their desire not to offend him as a king by assuming a more informal manner with Karain, Conrad has written “with a Malay” as opposed to indicating Karain’s royal status. Because he leaves it simply at “Malay,” we can deduce that there are certain liberties that one must not take with any Malay. The informality of the occasion has already been indicated by the “free and easy manner” in which the Englishmen treat Karain. Although this may undermine what should be happening in the Third Space, the fact remains that the discussion is now open. They have begun to move beyond their differences in order to converse with their Malay friend.

Karain, during these conversations with his friends, always inquires about the Queen. “He could never know enough of the Monarch of whom he spoke with wonder and chivalrous respect—with a kind of affectionate awe!” (20). He often referred to Queen Victoria as “Great, Invincible, Pious, and Fortunate” (20-21). Karain’s undying respect for Queen Victoria is evident throughout the text. We become aware that Karain’s obsession with the Queen is directly related to the notion that there is a correlation between the Queen and his mother, a woman who “who ruled a small Bugis state” (20). This correlation begins to blur the boundaries between the two cultures by suggesting a relationship between the Queen of the expansive British Empire and a native woman ruling a small region

of Malaysia. Here, Karain begins to enter into the Third Space, appropriating British signs and values for his own. Karain makes the first step, and he will bring the Englishmen with him. Interestingly, it is in this Third Space where cultural boundaries are the most blurred that Conrad is able to both subvert and uphold colonial ideology so that we, as readers, may begin to question Empire itself. Conrad wants us each to step into the blurred space with Karain and the Englishmen to see that each culture is able to obtain its own voice. Hybridity, by its nature, allows the two seemingly paradoxical elements to coexist.

When Karain comes to speak with the Englishmen to relay his tale, Conrad sets up for his readers a moment when colonial rhetoric dissipates. As the colonial rhetoric is removed, the Englishmen begin to enter with Karain into the blurred space between the cultural boundaries.

There are those who say that a native will not speak to a white man. Error. No man will speak to his master; but to a wanderer and a friend, to him who does not come to teach or to rule, to him who asks for nothing and accepts all things, words are spoken by the camp-fires, in the shared solitude of the sea, in riverside villages, in resting-places surrounded by forests – words are spoken that take no account of race or colour. One heart speaks – another one listens; and the earth, the sea, the sky, the passing wind and the stirring leaf, hear also the futile tale of the burden of life. (32)

Here Conrad breaks down the cultural differences between the native and the Westerner. We are left to imagine only friends who talk to one another about the universal “burden[s] of life.” This textual moment supports Bhabha’s contention that:

The reason a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation – the place of utterance – is crossed by the difference of writing or écriture. This has less to do with what anthropologists might describe as varying attitudes to symbolic systems within different cultures than with the structure of symbolic representation – not the content of the symbol or its “social function,” but the structure of symbolization. It is this “difference” in language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent. (207)

We can replace Bhabha’s emphasis on writing with speaking since speech is also language; essentially these differences can be overcome within the Third Space. Therefore, we see Conrad taking measures to ensure understanding on all sides within the intermediary space. Karain here can set up a place from which to project his own autonomous voice. Racial lines fade away for us to listen to Karain, who is only one heart speaking. Karain, at this time, is no longer the noble savage and, although it will focus on the supernatural, his tale can be (and will be) boiled down to represent problems that we all face as humans.

Christopher GoGwilt, in his essay “The Charm of Empire,” points out that the “humanist, anti-imperialist stance [in “Karain”] is undercut [. . .] by the tale’s context within the historical unrest surrounding colonial control of Indonesia and the Philippines, and imperial hegemony over all of Southeast Asia” (79). Even as we listen, we are continuously reminded

that Karain *is* a Malay, not a Western adventurer. Conrad is as caught up in imperialism as his readers are, but he tries, at least, to bring about an understanding and a reconciliation between East and West. Wieslaw Krajka reminds us of Conrad's own experiences in the service of the British Merchant Navy: "In Conrad's time, crews on English ships formed multinational communities. [. . .] Ethnic differences and identities were not pronounced in them" (245). Perhaps it is this past experience that leads Conrad into seeing the native in a different light than other imperialists. These experiences could be at the root of his own internal split over how one should regard colonial peoples. While he respects the Empire (because he was, after all, a part of it as a coloniser), he also wants to point out that the British are not so different from the Malay. But one must be wary when reading Conrad. What he gives with one hand, he takes away with another.

As we read the preceding humanist passage, laying out the equality of Karain wherein we have blissful understanding on all sides, we cannot forget the image of the Karain who joins his English friends on their boat before he is to relay the tale of his "history."

Suddenly Karain appeared in the doorway of the cabin. His bare breast and his face glistened in the light; his sarong, soaked, clung about his legs; he had his sheathed kriss in his left hand; and wisps of wet hair, escaping from under his red kerchief, stuck over his eyes and down his cheeks. He stepped in with a headlong stride and looking over his shoulder like a man pursued. (28)

This is not the same man we are introduced to in the beginning of the story. Frightened and hysterical, Karain seeks to rid himself of the ghost that is now haunting him. He is "savage" because he is distanced from a Western framework.

Even when Karain is witnessed among his people, he is not described with such intensity in terms of this savage nature. If Conrad's goal is to bridge the gap created by cultural boundaries, why does he recreate for us the notion of difference? The answer will ultimately lie at the end of the story when the smugglers return to England. At this moment, however, Conrad is simply reasserting that Karain and the Englishmen are not the same. Karain is *not* Western, and even when we reenter Third Space, we are not to see him as Western. At the same time, the Englishmen are also not Malay. For reconciliation to occur in the Third Space, there must be concessions and appropriations made on both sides. Bhabha's hybridity is not limited to only the Other, but it affects all who enter into this space. Thus Conrad must, for his reader's sake and for the sake of his characters, revert back to the cultural differences in order to clearly demonstrate what happens when we pass into Third Space and are able to hear Karain speak with his own autonomous Malay voice. Johnson well understands the importance of pointing out the differences immediately preceding the phase of understanding:

one could wish that Conrad would begin to see some important differences between East and West, for if there are none, the utility of the exotic frame is called into question. Does it really make any difference that Karain wears a sarong rather than a business suit? In this story the answer is probably “yes.” Without the apparent differences between native and white man, their actual affinity could not be so effectively rendered. (16)

Conrad must juxtapose the image of the native that his imperialist readers would recognise as such with the image of the more human version of Karain. In *Third Space*, Karain’s identity is both Malay and a part of Empire, but so are Conrad’s readers’ identities. As Bhabha points out, “a willingness to descend into that alien territory [Third Space] [. . .] may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*-national culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (209, original emphasis). In “Karain,” both Karain and the Englishmen are willing to descend into that territory; they are willing to allow the boundaries between them to break and ultimately they gain an understanding of both cultures.

There has been some contention about Conrad’s stance on imperialism within “Karain.” GoGwilt maintains that “the tale’s framework demands an answer to the question of whether the outer narrative appropriates the tale within the tale, using Karain’s experiences to fit an imperial idea, or whether the inner tale subverts that narrative frame, exposing an imperialistic plot” (80). In other words, can Karain’s tale be a representation of his own autonomous voice? We recall that, according to Benita Parry, Conrad does not speak to or for the native; however, it seems apparent that he does allow Karain’s voice to speak during his tale. Is it enough, though, to let Karain speak—to let him provide his own history to his English listeners? For GoGwilt, this is where ambiguity lies on Conrad’s part. GoGwilt continues his contention by explaining to us, “What makes ‘Karain’ important for discussions of imperialist discourse in general is that the story works to ensure the undecidability of this question” (80). Even though Conrad allows Karain and his English listeners to step inside the Third Space of blurred boundaries, he may be doing so in a neutral manner. His objectivity may be what provokes ambiguity of imperialist rhetoric within “Karain.” Thus, Conrad is seen to pose a problem, and to bring his readers and his characters into the hybrid space of understanding in order to allow each to come to his or her own conclusions, i.e. to choose whether or not he or she will truly hear Karain speak. At the same time, we are reminded, even by Karain, that the Empire is not all bad. Again, by both subverting and upholding imperialist discourse, Conrad encourages a multiplicity of meanings to be gleaned from his text.

In many ways, the tale sets Karain up as a Homeric hero. His journey is of epic proportions, reminiscent of Odysseus’s journey, full of adventure, wandering, and suspense. David Adams maintains, in his essay

“Remorse and Power,” that the central problem of the story “is represented by an epic image borrowed from Book XI of *The Odyssey*” (728). He refers, of course, to the Hades episode, and he is correct in his analogy. Additionally, it is essentially Karain’s history, another marker of the epic. Wray Herbert points out that Conrad has “describe[d] the birth of the hero, as an archetypal symbol, in the human mind” (226). That hero, symbolic as he is, ultimately represents Western ideology. Thus we are reminded of GoGwilt’s question about Conrad’s ambiguity. How can Karain’s voice be autonomous if it is filtered through a predominantly Western framework? On the other hand, the superstitious hauntings and hallucinations throughout Karain’s tale are often seen as the Otherness invoked by his story. But they are, in truth, no more far-fetched than the ones we see in Odysseus’s wanderings. This, perhaps, is Conrad’s point, as we see in the response to the tale:

I thought of his wanderings, of that obscure Odyssey of revenge, of all the men that wander amongst illusions; of the illusions as restless as men; of the illusions faithful, faithless; of the illusions that give joy, that give sorrow, that give pain, that give peace; of the invincible illusions that can make life and death appear serene, inspiring, tormented or ignoble. (43).

These illusions are what bind humanity together for the narrator. These are things which are not relegated only to the native state of mind. They are universal, and in their universality, we begin to reconcile the differences with Karain, the Malay, and see him as Karain, the Man. In this response, we see the breakdown of cultural boundaries, because while we have entered the Third Space, Karain and his listeners have taken on the task of appropriating the signs and symbols of the other’s culture. This universal idea of illusions and ghosts is repeated by Hollis, who remarks to his comrades, “‘Everyone of us, you’ll admit, has been haunted by some woman . . . And . . . as to friends . . . dropped by the way . . . Well! . . . ask yourselves . . .’” (49). He asks us to recount the ways in which we are just like Karain. If we are like Karain, then we are seeing in ourselves the hybridity of understanding his experiences.

After Karain has told his tale, he tells his White listeners: “With you I will go. To your land—to your people” (46). But they know that this can never be. Even after they have moved through the intermediary space to understand Karain, they are just as aware of their own culture and its set of values. As a savage, Karain can never be accepted into their society. Hollis, debating the issue aloud with himself, remarks, “‘Yes, take him home. [. . .] That would be one way. The ghosts there are in society, and talk affably to ladies and gentlemen, but would scorn a naked human being—like our princely friend . . . Naked . . . Flayed! I am sorry for him. Impossible—of course’” (47). That Conrad recognised the problem of the colonised nation is apparent. He, like Hollis, saw the dichotomy created in the colonised people of the Empire. Karain is neither completely native, nor is he completely Western. He is both “friend” and “Malay,” and the two identities are difficult to reconcile, even for the Englishmen.

Appropriately, Conrad simply lays out for his readers the question, rather than providing a definitive answer to the colonial problem.

The charm that Hollis gives to Karain is the predominant symbol of hybridity. When Karain is faced with his inability to return to England with his friends, he asks for the second best thing: a charm to rid himself of his ghosts. When Karain exclaims that he should go with his English friends, he remarks excessively about their unbelief. He tells them, “‘To your people, who live in unbelief; to whom day is day and night is night—nothing more, because you understand all things seen, and despise all else! To your land of unbelief where the dead do not speak, where every man is wise, and alone—and at peace’” (46). Of course Hollis corrects Karain’s image that England is only full of unbelievers, but it is important to note that the image of English unbelief is the case in Karain’s mind. Since he will be unable to leave Malaysia, he desires his friends to help him find some form of protection. He requests of his friends, “‘give me some of your strength—of your unbelief . . . A charm!’” (47). Although it is ironic to think that an unbelieving person could grant a symbol of mystical power to another, it seems less so if we consider the notion that we are again entering into Third Space where a symbol is removed from its cultural attachments. And so Hollis, in his own hybrid state, is able to find just such an item to give to Karain. He puts a string through a jubilee sixpence embossed with the image of the Queen—the ultimate figurehead of Karain’s salvation. The great coloniser herself becomes the key to Karain’s ability to bear his universal burden of illusion. Hollis, who gives him the charm, speaks in Malay as he offers Karain the coin: “‘This is the image of the Great Queen, and the most powerful thing the white men know’” (51). Karain is solemnly respectful of the graven image of Queen Victoria. Hollis continues in English to his shipmates, “‘She commands a spirit, too—the spirit of her nation; a masterful, conscientious, unscrupulous, unconquerable devil . . . that does a lot of good [. . .] at times’” (51). From Hollis’s words, a multitude of feelings about the Empire arise. These words seem to sum up Conrad’s own feelings toward Imperialism.

Additionally, this piece of Empire represents its figurehead in a medium known all too well to the imperialists—money. Hollis himself remarks, when he holds up the Jubilee sixpence, “The thing itself is of great power—money, you know” (51). However, this power may be simply illusory. The monetary element is perhaps problematic. The coin *is* a sixpence, but it is a gilt sixpence. Shortly following the Jubilee celebration, the new sixpence coin was often gilt and could pass as a half-sovereign—a coin worth far more than the value of a sixpence. Additionally, the hole through which Hollis ties the string indicates that the coin has been devalued. Rather than being a symbol of wealth, the coin might be seen as a mere bauble, trite and powerless. However, we must return to the notion of Bhabha’s Third Space. In the Conradian version of Third Space, each side is able to break these values and possible meanings

contained within the gilt Jubilee sixpence in order to appropriate the coin and replace its true value with a shared symbolic value.

However, there are some critics who see the image of the coin as only a fake and use this to show a complete mimicry of Empire. Wiesla Krajka argues that “the power of the charm is undermined, too: a sixpence may be associated with a fake, and Karain’s unbounded admiration for Queen Victoria may be viewed as mimicking Disraeli’s elevation of her as the Empress of India and the late Victorian worship of the British Empire” (255). In other words, if Karain’s charm is only a fake sovereign and his admiration for Queen Victoria is merely a farce for Conrad, then Karain will be unable to hold any power over his ghosts, and the story will be for naught. However, for Krajka, this is a relatively unimportant detail since the entirety of “Karain” is illusory, ultimately showing us that even “Western rationalism turns out to be mere pretence” (256). This, of course, is not entirely true. It is more likely that “Western rationalism” is merely a form of hybridity that takes place in the Western world among those who have experienced the other side of cultural boundaries. Furthermore, this hybrid nature is shown in the symbolism of the coin itself. Yes, it is partially illusory, since it (by itself) holds no real power over Karain’s psychological torment. But the illusion is only part of the symbolism attached to the coin. The coin remains a symbol of Karain’s strength; however, it also represents the very thing that enslaves him and is the symbol of his weakness and his movement towards the acceptance of Empire. Karain’s own duality with regard to the sixpence is only one side of the two-sided coin of Empire. Empire itself is represented on the flip-side of this coin as well. Just as Karain is haunted by the ghosts of his past misdeeds, the Queen and her Empire, Conrad reminds us, are also haunted by their past. The image of the double-sided coin is not lost on readers who understand that both sides make the whole.

When Karain has accepted the coin as his charm, his English friends watch nervously to see if the symbol has really been able to cross the cultural boundaries and become appropriated by their friend. They are overjoyed as he announces that ““He [the ghost] has departed again—forever!”” (53). Thus the symbol effectively gives Karain the necessary power he needs to bury the dead. From there, we return to the majestic image of the stage.

He left us, and seemed straightway to step into the glorious splendour of his stage, to wrap himself in the illusion of unavoidable success. For a moment he stood erect, one foot over the gangway, one hand on the hilt of his kriss, in martial pose; and, relieved from the fear of outer darkness, he held his head high, he swept a serene look over his conquered foothold on the earth. The boats far off took up the cry of greeting; a great clamour rolled on the water; the hills echoed it, and seemed to toss back at him the words invoking long life and victories. (53)

This is the same Karain readers encountered in the beginning of the story. The circular manner of Conrad’s prose suggests that Karain has been able to enter into the intermediary space to make communication possible (with

both the Englishmen and his own people since he has regained his strength) and then able to exit it, having been heard successfully and having appropriated the signs of the English to carry with him. But Karain is not the only one who experiences the hybridity of being in Third Space. For Conrad, as for Bhabha, this mediation wants, even requires, certain changes in nature for both speaker and listener.

Thus it is in the end of the tale that we are finally brought to see the double-sidedness of Bhabha's Third Space. Here, the narrator meets Jackson (one of his shipmates) in England. He is described in much the same way as Karain had been in the beginning (and end) of the story: "[Jackson] was magnificent as ever. His head was high above the crowd. His beard was gold, his face red, his eyes blue; he had a wide-brimmed hat and no collar or waistcoat; he was inspiring; he had just come home—had landed that very day!" (54). Just as Karain has appropriated Western signs, Jackson seems to have appropriated some of Karain's own cultural means. Since the narrator has been too long gone from his entrance into Third Space—too long gone from the experience of being at cultural boundaries—he has forgotten the reality held by Karain's tale. Jackson, in his hybrid state, on the other hand, understands Karain and believes his old story. It is important to have Jackson, who can be seen as the representation of Empire at the cultural boundary, assert this truth while murmuring "yes" among the images of London's street, a place far removed from Malaysia or any colonised state. "'Yes; I see it,' said Jackson, slowly. 'It is there, it pants, it runs, it rolls, it is strong and alive. It would smash you if you didn't look out; I'll be hanged if it is yet real to me as . . . as the other thing . . . say, Karain's story'" (56). The ghosts are now haunting Jackson, having followed him to London. While his friend thinks he has just been gone from home for too long, it is clear that something else is going on.

What has happened is that Jackson has begun to represent the part of Empire that is like Karain, that is ultimately hybrid. Adams maintains that Western civilisation is not so different from Karain's civilisation. He criticises the narrator of the story, arguing that:

The narrator is only half reliable, for he misleadingly opposes Karain's belief and behavior to Western civilization. One of the story's central points, demonstrated repeatedly, is that Europeans are no less superstitious and no less criminal. Like Karain, they prove to be haunted by the voices of the dead; their power, like Karain's, is not free of remorse; and their hopes for relief take a form no less mystical. (725)

Although Adams has another purpose for pointing out the similarities (i.e. he believes Karain is essentially a microcosm of the British Empire), his views nonetheless demonstrate that a reading of "Karain" ultimately shows readers the similarities between the West and the East. Adams is right to criticise the narrator because he does not choose to continuously enter into Third Space in order to dissolve cultural differences. Instead he primarily sees through a Western lens. At the time of Karain's speech, the narrator is as understanding as Hollis was or as Jackson still is. The narrator, then, represents Conrad's own conflicting views.

And so we question whether, for Conrad, the Empire will win over Karain, absorbing him into it, as it attempts to absorb all its colonies and the people within them. Karain's ability to speak, and to do so in a forthright manner, allows us to see him as more than just another marginalised, colonised Other. While he is inevitably subaltern, his connections with the Englishmen are what ultimately drive the text as a whole. Empire itself changes, becomes hybrid, just as Karain does. Thus, we must challenge Benita Parry's opening statement that Conrad does not speak for or to the colonial people. While he does not imagine that his texts will be read by the Malay, Conrad does give them a voice through Karain. His understanding of the dual nature of the colonised, effected by Empire itself, plays itself out continuously through the story. At the same time, Conrad sees a dual nature in the British Empire. Because representatives of each side of the cultural boundary are able to step into, and cross through, Third Space, a more complete understanding of each side can be achieved. In the end, the Empire really was, in Conrad's eyes, the "unconquerable devil . . . that does a lot of good . . . at times." There is a reconciliation when each side is better able to understand the cultural differences and reach a compromise in which both speakers can be heard.

Works Cited

- Bhabha, Homi K. "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. New York: Routledge, 1990. 206-209.
- Conrad, Joseph. "Karain." *Tales of Unrest*. 1898. London: Penguin, 1977.
- GoGwilt, Christopher. "The Charm of Empire: Joseph Conrad's 'Karain: A Memory.'" *Mosaic* 24 (1991): 77-91.
- Herbert, Wray C. "Conrad's Psychic Landscape: The Mythic Element in 'Karain.'" *Conradiana* 8 (1976): 225-232.
- Johnson, Bruce M. "Conrad's 'Karain' and *Lord Jim*." *Modern Language Quarterly*. 24 (1963): 13-20.
- Krajka, Wieslaw. "Making Magic as Cross-cultural Encounter: The Case of Conrad's 'Karain: A Memory.'" *Conrad, James, and Other Relations*. Eds. Keith Carabine and Owen Knowles. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. 245-259.
- Parry, Benita. *Conrad and Imperialism*. London: MacMillan P, 1983.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.