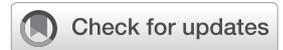


Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Stein, and the use and abuse of entomology

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Based on an implausible perception of entomology (the study of insects), George Waddington attempts to debauch the moral integrity of the character Stein in Joseph Conrad's much-discussed novel *Lord Jim*. This tarnishing is part of an overall trend to undermine the greatness of literary artworks. Waddington's accusations against Stein and the reception of his article destabilise the novel's and critics' more even-minded and largely positive perception of Stein's nature, casting doubt about the novel's morality as a whole. The present piece reads against the grain of this trend and reconsiders the critical reading of *Lord Jim* in terms of a more accurate appraisal of entomology's praxes and values, and Stein's entomology in particular. The author is a practising lepidopterist (student of butterflies and moths), which is the platform on which the piece offers its critique.

Contribution: The present article stabilises the reading of Joseph Conrad's much-discussed novel *Lord Jim*. It shows that Stein's entomology as presented by Conrad embodies an additional reason for celebrating the novel's resonance and artistic merits, which have been celebrated for more than a century, because it creates a particularly informative and compelling picture of the character with a view to his entomological studies and the values that undergird them.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad; *Lord Jim*; Stein; entomology; lepidoptery; literary valuation; James Brooke; Alfred Russel Wallace.

'Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece'.
Stein, *Lord Jim*, 1900

I would go through fire and water for insects.
J. C. Dale, letter to Revd. T. Blackmore, 1864

Introduction

For more than a century, it was widely accepted that Stein in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* is good-natured. He is neither a major character in the novel, nor is he perfect, but he plays the pivotal role of helping the protagonist, Jim, return to society. Critics viewed Stein's motivations around this as benign, and Marlow, the novel's narrator, finds Stein 'impossible to suspect', a 'wonderful man', and 'one of the most trustworthy men' he had 'ever known' (Conrad 1979:167, 177, 154). Of course, an important caveat about Marlow's confirmation of any character is well established – that it is ambiguous – but it will be demonstrated here that this does not exclude a real admiration for Stein.

Conrad based Stein on the singular 19th-century person of James Brooke (Gordan 1938:626), in his day a renowned entomologist. Conrad never met Brooke, but came to know him mainly by reading Alfred Russel Wallace's much-enjoyed 1869 tome *The Malay Archipelago: The land of the orang-utan and the bird of paradise: A narrative of travel, with studies of man and nature* (Houston 1997:44). In this work, Wallace gives a glowing account of Brooke the entomologist; and Conrad, for whom this book was favourite reading (Curle 1934:431), held Brooke in considerable esteem (Gordan 1938:615). This offers a vital clue to the reasons for Marlow's positive view of Stein, as woven into the fabric of *Lord Jim*.

Besides Brooke's enormous entomological effort, resonantly displayed in Stein, including the searching for, capturing, killing, setting, and labelling of thousands of specimens, the historical entomologist (Brooke) successfully fought pirates in Sarawak on behalf of its inhabitants, and was appointed as the white Rajah of Sarawak in gratefulness, an unprecedented event that has not been repeated since. However, he was forced to meet ruthlessness with ruthlessness to stem the tide of the pirates' control of Sarawak, and he was forced to kill some among them (Gordan 1938:614).

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These facts about Brooke's life seem to open the prospect of connecting Stein's killing of insects with the killing of men. The character would then be no more than a murderer and, in the most extreme case, he would collect Jim and kill him just as he collects and kills his insect specimens.

The allure of such a reading has been boosted by currently popular views of entomology and the insect collecting that goes along with it. Much as it has been revered over the past three to four centuries as a noble pursuit of sometimes startling knowledge, it has also been disgraced on occasion as the pastime of insane (and hopefully harmless) 'old geezers' on the one hand, or grim men or women on the other. In Robert Michael Pyle's (2006:186) words, which I cannot emulate: there is now the 'commonplace conclusion that natural history collectors are evil wastrels or, at the least, antediluvian churls'.

One thinks of the brilliant lepidopterist (student of butterflies and moths) Eleanor Glanville, a divorced single mother who had been treated with the greatest cruelty by her ex-husband. As if that was not enough, the property that she owned was taken from her by a court in 1712 on the basis that 'no one not deprived of their senses should go in pursuit of butterflyes' (Salmon 2000:107). In short, there has always lingered in the corners of a certain mind the conviction that anyone who collects insects must be an unstable danger to society.

Worse; since the latter half of the 20th-century, with its glorification of serial killers, entomology has been smeared in a new way. Its practitioners have been depicted as incessant predators who start by executing insects and move on, soon enough, to the murdering of humans. Despite himself, since he is a naturalist in his own right, John Fowles encouraged this gross sentiment in his 1963 novel *The Collector*. Numerous films and television shows have followed his outlandish portrayal of insect collectors – insect collections may also appear in these texts as indicators of humanity's dark, cruel passions. Moreover, insects as such are used in this kind of artwork to indicate the grotesque and the unspeakable.

In these ways, a mini-genre has been spawned built on conscious or inadvertent equations of insect collecting with a coldly 'scientific' motive and a method for monstrous acts. The film version of *The Collector*, released in 1965, in particular led to a series of works that established the entomologist-murderer trope. These include David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, which indulges in the horrors of serial killing and violent sexual deviance by delving down, literally, into the insect-ridden world below the surface of a suburban lawn; episode 11 in season one of the Afrikaans detective series *Die Byl*, in which the detective team traces down a butterfly-besotted serial killer by googling his interest in the Wolkberg Zulu (*Alaena margaritacea*), a critically endangered South African butterfly; the film *The Duke of Burgundy*, in which a woman who studies butterflies and moths, Cynthia, plays out a daily sadomasochistic sex game with her lover, Evelyn; a 2009 film, clumsily also titled *The Collector*, in which the serial villain is

a kind of spider who collects spiders and humans so as to torture and kill them, giving rise to a sequel, *The Collection*; in a completely different popular genre, the (in every sense) terrible song by the band The Jam, entitled *The Butterfly Collector*, in which a butterfly-collecting woman collects men by way of her worn genitalia; and, perhaps the most famous example, the serial killer Buffalo Bill's moth collecting in the film *The Silence of the Lambs*.

For the real entomologist or lepidopterist these ideas are so far removed from reality as to be incredible. There is of course the artistic licence that comes with relishing the grotesque in works that equate insect collecting with murder or deviance and, in some cases, it does become art. On the other hand, this is rude to the discipline of entomology and its practitioners, who tend to be timid or exuberant nature-loving persons and not perpetrators of a crime.

The situation has therefore been ripe for the dismantling of Stein based on his entomological activity. In 2004, George Waddington published an article entitled 'That "wonderful" man, Mr. Stein'. The scare quotes around the word 'wonderful' are meant to be caustic: for Waddington, Stein is everything but 'wonderful'. Throughout the article, the character is in fact deeply guilty of entomology. Mostly by way of a tacit agreement but also by using reduction or verbal slippage, Waddington again and again confirms an understanding with the present readership that entomologists in general, and Stein especially, are exorbitantly rational, controlling, callous, possession-obsessed, profit-hungry, and intrinsically bloodthirsty. Apparently, Stein entertains these characteristics to the point of homicide. In Waddington's words, 'Stein's obsession with labeling his specimens (including Jim) proves fatal to them' (Waddington 2004:108).

As a practising lepidopterist, one has reason to question every assumption contained in this kind of statement. For instance, the insect is killed first and then labelled, a technical point that Waddington reverses, speaking to his immediate ignorance about the study of the insects. Furthermore, a human being cannot be a specimen to an entomologist: they are the first to know the almost infinite distance between humanity and the insects. It is also not true that entomologists wish to kill insects to make labelled specimens of them. Entomologists are in this sense not hunters at all: they kill an insect to get to know more about their kingdom with a sense of compunction and even sorrow (see Pyle 2006:188), even as the pursuit and discovery of an insect certainly does provide moments of complete ecstasy. In the words of lepidopterist-novelist Vladimir Nabokov (2016), enjoyed by lepidopterists and laypersons over time:

And the highest enjoyment of timelessness – in a landscape selected at random – is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love. A sense of oneness with sun and stone. A thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern – to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humoring a lucky mortal. (p. 102)

Though he wishes to premise his debasement of Stein on entomology, Waddington continues to get facts and sensibilities such as these wrong. As will be shown here, his engagement with the matter tells of almost no understanding of the entomological field. The American lepidopterist writer Robert Michael Pyle (2006) speaks of 'an absence of shared experience' with the people whose behaviour a writer is describing (p. 187). Entomology is simply plainer in praxis than Waddington is willing to consider, while it is laden with critically important values that permeate *Lord Jim*, which values he prefers to overlook for the sake of debauching Stein's morality based on his apparently most violent entomological studies.

The argument to follow can therefore be read, no doubt, as a lepidopterist's recalcitrant and unconvinced response to Waddington's article. But more is at stake. We have become accustomed to an onslaught from within criticism on the greatness of literary art, and one way of maintaining this is to dismantle a character of whom the artwork approves or appears to approve. Perhaps inadvertently, Waddington works in this direction, and his position has already found echoes. In 2011, for instance, Williams (2011) stated that,

George Waddington even seems to consider Stein a murderer. This extreme stance is justified because on the combined advice of Marlow and Stein, Jim moves to a markedly Gothic location, the 'destructive element' of Patusan, so that he may 'creep twenty feet underground' (p. 16).

In 2013, Nic Panagopoulos (2013:80) described Waddington's dismantling as a 'usefully demythifying discussion of Stein'. Neither of these two authors underlines that Waddington's view of Stein is intrinsically woven into his mistaken view of Stein's work on the insects. What does that work say about Stein's nature – is he a murderer, as it now seems to have been fashionably agreed on?

Before one contemplates this question, consider the cost of Waddington's thesis that Stein is debased. It destabilises the long-held valuation of *Lord Jim*, and certainly also the extent to which Marlow is willing to be ironical. Although Waddington's article refrains from spelling it out in so many words, the ramification is clear: if critics, Conrad, and Marlow have been carefully but falsely endorsing Stein for more than a century whereas, in reality, he is an entomologically induced butcher, it follows that the novel and its reception are shady, and its status as a great work of art takes a moralistic blow.

Given the incessant attacks of this nature on great literature, it is little wonder that, pitifully, a bright young journalist who studied the humanities, Shaan Sachdev (2021), recently wrote: 'Eventually, our professors opted for exercises in disillusionment' (2021). One wonders what the new generation of readers must make of leaders in the field who present the great literary artworks of the past merely as so many immoral projects and their authors merely as so many ideologically driven puppets. It is against this larger backdrop that the need for a restoration of Stein's morality becomes urgently clear.

By focusing on Stein's entomology, I will read against the grain of the trend that is disillusioned by or suspicious of past literary artworks' greatness or potential greatness, in this case *Lord Jim*. The aim will be to restore his literary dignity by making a reading informed by lepidopterist practice. I posit that, ultimately, *Lord Jim's* presentation of Stein as an entomologist is an overlooked part of the worth of this artwork, which has been read, tested, and renowned for its descriptions and ambiguities by at least three generations of astute readers.

My riposte to Waddington will demonstrate that Conrad enjoys an *entomologic sense*, which I will define as an understanding of the science that views it as though from the inside, in terms of its actualities, and not from a disdainful distance that superficially doubts its legitimacy and integrity. In short, Conrad's view of entomology, hence of Stein, is well informed. Although the novelist was neither an entomological specialist nor even a natural historian, he managed to obtain the sense for himself to a remarkable degree by travelling and reading. All in all, the use of entomology in *Lord Jim*, in contrast with its abuse by Waddington, calls for discussion. The contrast between them is exemplified by Waddington's muddled notion of the '*Coleoptera* butterfly' – which offers a constructive starting point for my critique.

That ill-defined insect, the '*Coleoptera* butterfly'

The '*Coleoptera* butterfly' (Waddington 2004:100) occurs neither on the earth nor in *Lord Jim*. It could not, for the Coleoptera are the beetles, all of them, and therefore everything *but* a single butterfly. Waddington's label awkwardly supposes the existence of an all-the-beetles butterfly. He employs this unlikely chimera at more than one important node of his argument (Waddington 2004:100, 101, 102, 103, 105); some of these will be discussed in the present piece.

It may be thought that the discussion of this amounts to a moot point. What does insect taxonomy have to do with literary art? Can the objective existence of a creature such as an insect supersede the liberty of sign-making? Can the sign follow the insect? This has been in doubt for decades in linguistic and literary understanding. It is well established, though, that the real distinction between beetles and butterflies is central to the interpretation of *Lord Jim*. Tony Tanner unpacks this definitively in his 1963 article entitled 'Butterflies and beetles – Conrad's two truths'. Waddington's '*Coleoptera*¹ butterfly', may amount to a misreading not only of taxonomy, but more importantly, the novel.

Consider *Lord Jim's* actual description of the *Coleoptera* (beetles) in Stein's collection. Marlow appoints these insects in a passage that definitively, in beautiful prose, separates them from the *Lepidoptera*, butterflies and moths, in this case butterflies (Conrad 1979):

Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but in a

1. Nowadays Coleoptera is not set in italics.

sombre belt about four feet broad. Catacombs of beetles. Wooden tablets were hung above at irregular intervals. The light reached one of them, and the word *Coleoptera* written in gold letters glittered mysteriously upon a vast dimness. The glass cases containing the collection of butterflies were ranged in three long rows upon slender-legged little tables (p. 156).

The wooden tablet inscribed with the gilded word 'Coleoptera' the point where Marlow's observation of the dim beetle boxes ends, and his awareness of the butterfly collection begins. He is portraying the contrast between the beetles and the butterflies in terms of the way in which Stein arranges them in his collection. In striking contrast with the broad, uniform, sombre belt of beetle boxes or 'catacombs' raised along the walls above the floor, the butterfly cases are arranged on *delicate tables* that touch the *ground* with *slender* legs. As Tanner (1963:124) says, it is 'those slender legs we see – clean, fragile, graceful, and artistic: the appropriate furniture to set off a display of butterflies'.

There is something ominous and suspended about the beetles for Marlow, whereas butterflies present the opposite condition: life's fragile ground. Throughout the novel, Marlow (unlike coleopterists!) equates the beetles with life's horrific, cruel, and harshly survivalist aspects – the beetles' rounded shapes, tough carapaces, spiky limbs, and occasional slow movements make them ideal for symbolising these elements. He equally equates the butterflies, as indicated, with life's courageous vulnerability. For the entomologist, even the lepidopterist, this treatment of the beetles who are, after all, organisms surviving in their manner under the restrictions imposed on them by nature, is unfair – but this is not *Lord Jim's* point, and the novel, as a form of art, enjoys its freedom.

In any event, Waddington's smudging of the Coleoptera with their dense chitin shells and the Lepidoptera with their downy, exquisitely patterned, too-large wings is baffling. Since he establishes it, he is forced to sustain the conflation. He extends Marlow's coleopteran horrors to swallow the collection as a whole, strangely *including* the butterflies. He pronounces that Marlow looks at butterfly 'carcasses' and 'corpses whose beauty is decidedly morbid' (Waddington 2004:102).

Should one have to point out the differences here? Whereas the novel focuses on lifeless but attractive, hovering, breakable butterfly specimens balanced on slim table legs, Waddington insists heavy-handedly on their carcasses and corpses – what, indeed, does a butterfly 'carcass' look like, and what does it weigh? – turning Conrad's fragile nuance into a bland, Gothic revulsion of his own making. There are no references in the novel to butterflies as 'carcasses' or 'corpses', and the sentiment around them is wholly different than those words suggest. One has a case of a critic projecting onto the novel that which he wishes to see there: it says more about the critic's perception than the novel's. One has therefore inexplicably moved from feather-light insects to heavily mammalian and anthropomorphic morbidities;

entomology must be grotesquely gloomy even when it is gentle. This is just one of Waddington's distortions of Stein's entomology as presented in *Lord Jim*. It brings into focus the critic's further willingness directly to misread the novel's literary aspects when it suits his aim.

'In gewissen Sinne': Stein, possession, profit, and misreading *Lord Jim*

According to Waddington, Stein's entomology is permeated with his besotted fixation on property and profit. Again, this is embedded for Waddington in Stein's insect studies. He must possess these animals and Jim to sell them for monetary gain. Like the pepper traders who cut one another's throats for the sake of possessing the spice two centuries prior to Stein's time, he declares, Stein's adventures implicate him in an 'unsavory practice whose main motivation is profit' (Waddington 2004:99). His collection of insects is 'an empire analogous to his monopoly of Southeast Asian trade' (p. 100). It is the same as his 'mercantile empire', showing that his 'excessive collection of butterflies and beetles represents his obsessive need for ownership' (p. 100). Ultimately, the character 'accommodates Jim only to the extent that he provides labor for Stein's capitalist concerns in Southeast Asia' (p. 97).

To prove his idea that collecting insects and helping Jim are restricted for Stein to an excessive need for proceeds, Waddington importantly turns to Stein's citation, in a conversation with Marlow, of two lines from the work of his fellow German countryman, the poet Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1833) (see Conrad 1979):

So halt' ich's endlich denn in meinen Handen, Und nenn' es in gewissen Sinne mein. (p. 161)

Like the sloppy entomological label of the 'Coleoptera butterfly', one finds in response to the lines above a negligent mistranslation that suits the argument and nothing more: 'Thus then, at last, I hold it in my hands, [a]nd call it unambiguously *mine*' (2004:101). Waddington concludes that it is not 'the beauty of the butterfly, but rather possessing it that makes Stein dizzy with excitement'; he feels that Stein's citation of Goethe's couplet 'stresses his compulsion for possession'.

However, the barest reading of the play from which the couplet is taken – Goethe's 1790 *Torquato Tasso* – indubitably shows that it is riddled with ambiguity about the nature of possession. The correct translation opposes Waddington's, 'So then at length I hold it in my hand, [a]nd deem it *in a certain sense* my own' (Von Goethe 1833:24; *author's own emphasis*). In this context, the German phrase *in gewissen Sinne* has the meaning of 'somewhat', 'in a sense', 'not really', and so on – far removed, indeed, from Waddington's clarion call for its unambiguously possessive character.

In the play, a poet, Tasso, presents his patron, Alphonso, the Duke of Ferrara, with the gift of a volume of poetry that he (Tasso) composed. On receiving the gift, Alphonso pronounces

the two lines from the play as cited by Stein. Although the Duke has supported its production, he has hardly created the volume of poems. The gift at once belongs to him and not at all. The couplet therefore relates a major doubt about possession: Stein's citation of it in fact turns out to be a caveat against custody. The character's watchfulness here roundly refutes Waddington's idea that he suffers from blind, infinite, 'capitalist' greediness driven by the need for specimens. Stein does not believe in the idea of an ultimate usefulness of possession on the part of any person under any circumstances: 'Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him; *for if not, why should he want all the place?*' (Conrad 1979:159; *author's own emphasis*).

This remark, made to Marlow, portrays Stein as one who knows all too well that ownership, which can and does harbour delight and advantage, overall may amount to a necessary fallacy within the larger natural context. For him, ownership shows that humanity is to a degree unnatural, precisely because they want all of the earth for themselves. Is it not true that he here anticipates some of the most intense green concerns of the current century, that we are destroying the earth for the sake of possession, as though suffering from a collective ecological neurosis?

In another passage centred on this topic, and with a certain moving unpretentiousness and German-influenced incorrect English, Stein says these words to Marlow: 'To my small native town this my collection I shall bequeath. Something of me. The best' (Conrad 1979:156). Instead of selling his collection to an agent and eventually a museum, as was the practice, Stein naively wishes to give it away to his native town. His utterance presents his sense that it is one's place that matters and not one's status as measured by one's possessions.

It was true of James Brooke that he grew up in a small town and made money to free himself for the sake of exploring the world of nature (St John 1899:8), and the citations here show that Conrad incorporates this sensibility into Stein's character. However, to 'prove' that Stein is ill-intended about what happens to his collection, Waddington simply continues to replace 'bequeath' with 'export'. Waddington (2004:100; *author's own emphasis*) says that, 'Stein's collection of Asian butterflies and beetles is designed for *export* back to Europe'. Surely, though, the difference between bequeathing something and exporting it is as wide as the difference between a coleopteran and a lepidopteran.

By way of verbal slippage, Waddington in this way avers that Stein's wish to give a special historical gift to his humble hometown signals his preoccupation with monetary profit at the expense of others. Even 'the best' of him, which Marlow does not doubt must, for Waddington, be tainted by greed; and, if a critical verb must be changed to achieve this, apparently, so be it. Nor does Waddington have peace with Stein's perfectly entomological habit of labelling his specimens. However, at a time 'when plants and [*animals*] live in dire jeopardy', as Pyle (2006) comments:

[T]he task of tweezing out and denominating the elements of diversity is more important than ever, so that they might be known, understood, and perhaps conserved, instead of extinguished in the dark. This requires specimens. (p. 186)

This is the historical vein along which Stein's engagement with the insects, certainly including the collection and labelling of specimens, should be appreciated.

Mislabelling Stein's labels

Waddington (2004:102) accuses Stein of displaying a dangerously 'hyper-orderly' mind because he labels his insect specimens with great care. This supposedly prepares the way for his obsession to control and hence kill Jim. However, the habit of labelling specimens has little to do with a 'hyper-orderly' mind. Instead, it fits into the category of a basic requirement for scientific doing of any kind: evidence management. It is the same as the requirement for a literary scholar to cite examples from a text to substantiate their points, or the mathematics required to support an evolutionist's ideas, or the microscopic slides that underpin and validate histology. Without evidence management, scientific doing falls apart as so many opinions.

The charge that Stein is somehow culpable for scientific doing of this nature is unnecessary. The fact that entomology requires specimens and labels as evidence, in contrast with literary studies, makes no difference to this. Let there be no doubt; again, to this day, well-labelled specimens are necessary for entomological research. And let us, as literary scholars, continue to remind ourselves of William Wordsworth's (2006:574) maxim that in literary analysis, too, we 'murder to dissect' and that we read our materials on paper that used to be trees.

The main function of the entomological label is to enhance the beautifully displayed butterfly or beetle by turning it into a piece of invaluable data. The research assemblages painstakingly created over time based on the humble label 'generate and store definitive knowledge of what lives where – the most basic font of wisdom about the biological world' (Pyle 2006:187).

Its secondary function is to keep the entomologist on their toes and make their knowledge of the insects reliable, not least because, contrary to Waddington's (2004:108) feeling, classifying insects can be daunting and takes many years of devoted study to master. After all, as is commonly known, Nabokov had to give up his lepidopterist position at the Harvard Museum sorrowfully to pursue fiction.

One reason for the fact that the label is unmissable is that nature is adept at creating the most intricate patterns among kinds of butterflies that may involve playful mimicking among species, cryptic resemblances to other creatures, or tiny shades of important morphological differences – Nabokov's postmodern playing with patterns as a whole is informed by this natural fact.

The other reason, simply enough, is that the human mind tends to be forgetful and imaginative: if you did not label your specimen directly after having collected it, you are bound to make mistakes about the details even a couple of weeks later. Waddington's (2004:108) notion that insect specimens merely require 'easy categorisation' therefore again evidences an absence of having engaged with entomology before making bold assumptions about it. This is an example of a new hubris in literary studies that occasionally believes it has a superior grasp of other disciplines.

But the main purpose of the label is to make data of splendour and interest, as mentioned. It turns a collection into a database by means of which the distribution in time, place, and evolution, as well as the habits and needs of species, can be determined. This is the reason why the Natural History Museum in London is digitising its supreme and wide-ranging collection for open access, including the vital information printed on the labels: time and date of capture, locality of capture, species name (or uncertainty about this), the collector's name, and any other important information. Incidentally, the museum's collection includes the specimens collected by Wallace, whose work Conrad wove into Stein and Jim, as indicated.

The digitisation of the collection enables a study of the impact that climate change has had on insect populations over the past 200 years and facilitates a determination of future hotspots on which efforts to conserve diversity should focus (Freeborn 2015).

Such is the nature of the link between collecting, labels, critical knowledge, and conservation, and there are many examples of this. There is also a glow of satisfaction in attaching the label with its tiny script carefully to the specimen pin, a sense of caring and of infusing charm with knowledge, akin to the feeling when one places down a full stop after a good sentence.

Without collections and labels, we would hardly have enjoyed any knowledge of the insects at all. Thanks to these, we can delve sensibly into the past and future for their sake, for once – instead of ours only. At the other end of the spectrum of the insects' fate, recent research has ascertained that cars kill 2 trillion individuals annually in the Netherlands alone: the insect lover shudders as they read about this 'splatter count' (see Waterfield 2011). The real setback for insect numbers is yet another mall and its attendant parking lot – in Stein's terms, man's desire to own everything. These acts of ignorance, increasingly wilful in character and the very opposite of careful labelling and classification, are the causes of an ongoing insecticide, unpacked in two hair-raising recent monographs: *The silent earth: Averting the insect apocalypse* by Goulson (2021); and *The insect crisis: The fall of the tiny empires that run the world* by Milman (2022). For one thing,

forget about delights such as chocolates or avocados without the insects, and begin to imagine a bland and bare, non-nutritious diet at the basest levels of survival. And at a certain point, the loss of insects will lead to the collapse of the ecological systems that sustain us.

Waddington (2004) says that Stein classifies Jim by using the 'same unsympathetic method' that he 'employs to catalogue his specimens' (p. 102). I have shown that this is far from entomological truth. But does *Lord Jim* give evidence for Waddington's position? How does Marlow see Stein's classification of the insects? He is acutely aware of the character's mental engrossment with insect knowledge, of which cataloguing is an intrinsic disciplinary part, and he relates this with a fine observational sensibility. He notes Stein's 'classing and arranging specimens, corresponding with entomologists in Europe' and 'writing up a descriptive catalogue of his treasures' (Conrad 1979:158). Marlow is impressed with Stein's immersion in his specimens: 'I respected the intense, almost passionate, absorption with which he looked at a butterfly'.

Stein carefully studies his specimens and, without labels, such studying has no meaning. The real profit of entomology is in fact invaluable knowledge about insects engendered by captivation in their nature, which requires the scientific practices of collecting and cataloguing them. The joy for the entomologist is to get to know them and disperse and test their entomological knowing among colleagues.

Marlow's descriptions of Stein's entomological praxes pertinently exclude the 'unsympathetic method' ascribed to it by Waddington; nowhere does the novel suggest such a method for the alleged 'classification' of Jim, either. One's reading increasingly suggests that it is Waddington who is bent on mislabelling the labels. An important instance of this, over and above the misunderstandings outlined here, is his elision of the values that undergird Stein's entomological doing.

Wallace's headache and the cost of ignoring Stein's entomological values

Perhaps the foremost value that characterises entomological practice is either a nearly feverish or a tranquil and clear appreciation for the beauty of the insects, in welcome contrast to the popular perception of their apparent grossness. Full awareness of their beauty acts as an avenue into further values, such as prizing discovery and becoming utterly aware of nature's details. For the lepidopterist in the veld or outdoors, there is also a deeply felt personal value in practice: it is to know a 'transcendent state where butterfly, plant, and their seeker meet' (Pyle 2006:188).

In a much-cited passage, Alfred Russel Wallace unpacks his visceral response to discovering and describing the beauty of a birdwing butterfly – the latter of which one species, as will

be shown, becomes a part of the descriptions in *Lord Jim*. The birdwings can reach a wingspan of 30 cm. They usually have a dark, velvety ground colour on their upper side in which an array of bright bands or shapes are arranged in striking patterns. They are strong flyers that can be hard to find, females in particular. Now, imagine finding a brand-new species of these compelling and vivid creatures, the birdwings. In 1859, Wallace came across the most coveted prize that exists for any naturalist: a species not known to science before, in this case a birdwing butterfly of stunning attractiveness. With a real talent for description, though so different from Conrad's unsurpassed talent for this, Wallace (2015 [1869]) tells of his embodying response to the moment of his discovery:

The beauty and brilliancy of this insect are indescribable, and none but a naturalist can understand the intense excitement I experienced when I at length captured it. On taking it out of my net and opening the glorious wings, my heart began to beat violently, the blood rushed to my head, and I felt much more like fainting than I have done when in apprehension of immediate death. I had a headache the rest of the day, so great was the excitement produced by what will appear to most people a very inadequate cause. (p. 300)

The self-deprecating ecstasies that beam from this passage are preceded by an exact description of the butterfly's morphology and the physical toil that it took to collect it. Since childhood days, when I first came across the passage, I have marvelled at the fact that the discovery led, of all things, to a *day-long headache*. It made an indelible impression on me about the awe and elation that accompany the discovery of a new species, and butterfly attractiveness at large. On another occasion within *The Malay Archipelago*, Wallace (2015 [1869]) writes in similar vein:

On our way back in the heat of the day, I had the good fortune to capture three specimens of a fine Ornithoptera [birdwing], the largest, the most perfect, and the most beautiful of butterflies. *I trembled with excitement* as I took it first out of my net and found it to be in perfect condition. (p. 194 *author's own emphasis*)

Wallace's responses to the aesthetic presence of butterflies are physiological: he develops a headache; he trembles with excitement. This is directly echoed in *Lord Jim*. Stein is physically overcome and struggles to contain himself and stutters when he attempts to convey to Marlow his feelings about a special kind of butterfly that he had come across (Conrad 1979):

Marvelous! ... Look! The beauty – but that is nothing – look at the accuracy, the harmony. And so fragile! And so strong! And so exact! This is Nature – the balance of colossal forces ... the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces – this. This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature – the great artist. (p. 158)

Stein's spluttering, his bodily inability to describe the effect that butterflies have on him, is reminiscent of Wallace's physical responses to butterflies, albeit less eloquent in form. One is not surprised that, in further dialogue with Marlow about his collection, Stein says (Conrad 1979):

I captured a rare specimen myself one very fine morning. And I had a very big emotion. You can't know what it is for a collector to capture such a rare specimen. You can't know. (p. 159)

On another occasion, after he had found a special butterfly again, Stein says that he 'shook like a leaf with excitement', while his 'head went round' and his legs became 'so weak with emotion' that he had to 'sit on the ground' (Conrad 1979:161). Again, the concreteness of Stein's response echoes Wallace's headache.

Consider that in these instances, the value of humility accompanies the value of enthusiasm about butterflies' attractiveness: one's words fall short of the actuality of the butterflies. Wallace says that his birdwing is indescribable, and that his excitement cannot be understood by most people. Stein, within character, conveys the same sentiment to Marlow. He emphasises that it is impossible to convey what it is like to capture a rare specimen: he cannot make Marlow know what it is like to experience this.

Wallace's descriptions of the value that the beauty of insects holds for human welfare enter *Lord Jim* in so many words, and these words suggest a further value concomitant with the ones mentioned, that of the heightened exploration of nature's details. Wallace (2015 [1869]) describes a 'fine *Ornithoptera*' (again a birdwing):

The ground colour of this superb insect was a rich bronzy black, the lower wings delicately grained with white, and bordered by a row of large spots of the most brilliant satiny yellow. (p. 194)

Near-directly echoing this description, Marlow relays his impression of one of Stein's specimens: it has 'dark bronze wings, seven inches or more across, with exquisite white veinings and a gorgeous border of yellow spots' (Conrad 1979:156).

Conrad's, Wallace's, Marlow's, and Stein's relishing of butterfly comeliness goes beyond clichés. It is willing to face the details of nature's magnetism. An observant imagination is the result: the capacity to be enticed by nature to the extent of entertaining a charged sense of its particulars. Gorgeous rows of yellow spots matter. Beauty is not superficial: it comes in a particularised manner. One of humanity's most important standards comes into focus here. It is to break the broad laziness that accompanies clichéd descriptions of beauty again and again by paying attention to minutiae.

These are of course not the only entomological values that *Lord Jim* advocates. From a literary perspective, perhaps the most intriguing and important of these prevails in a dialogue between Marlow and Stein that centres on the differences between butterfly perfection and human imperfection. In this instance, Marlow and Stein offer an anachronistic rendezvous with current green concerns, such as displacing a flawed humanity from its hubristic perception of itself at the centre of all being and placing

other species at that centre for once. The human attempt to possess and control everything – unlike the butterfly who is content to be exactly what it is, hence its perfection – must mask, in a kind of collective neurosis, the fact that humanity awkwardly belongs within nature while at once residing outside it.

To acknowledge this, as Marlow and Stein do, is to begin to understand one's ironic place in nature. Such self-irony, surely one of literature's major values, is much needed in a world that is drunk on consumerism, as if we *should* and even *must* 'have' everything, and have it right away, without wisdom about consequences in the long term, the latter for which we appear for the moment to have lost our appetite. An understanding of the butterfly's perfection should soon put this in its place, as it does for Stein.

What is Waddington's view of these entomological values as presented in *Lord Jim*? In the main, he elides these even when they clearly jump from the pages that he cites. Consider Stein's stuttering exclamation, as quoted above, which carries a flurry of words that compete with one another in his attempt to get across to Marlow the awe-inspiring impression that butterflies make on him describing them with adjectives like: 'marvellous'; 'beauty'; 'accuracy'; 'harmony'; 'fragile'; 'strong'; 'exact'; 'balance'; 'colossal forces'; 'mighty Kosmos'; 'perfect equilibrium'; 'wonder'; 'masterpiece'; and 'artist'. To boot, Stein can only anchor his garrulous utterance with the nearly hopeless and therefore all the more striking and humble concluding word 'this'.

One is born, and one day one sees consciously for the first time a butterfly. There it is. What can one say about its existence? How will one match in words its unsurpassable actuality? After all, there it is! Stein, profoundly in his manner, concludes that it is exactly what it is, beyond description; 'this'.

Among this cascade of words, Waddington (2004:102) prefers to nit-pick only the three that fit his argument: 'accuracy'; 'equilibrium'; and 'balance'. He does so because he will be arguing that Stein's mind is fixated on control, so that he can argue that Stein controls Jim by killing him as he does his butterflies, and so forth. For him, the exclamation under examination cannot be allowed to suggest more than this. Waddington therefore ignores the other words. He does not care to consider that the miracle that butterflies exist at all in a stark cosmos is reflected in Stein's Romantically laden word 'harmony', which is filled with the values that ride on passion and feeling. The fact that nature is capable of masterful art, and perhaps the more important fact that Stein is overcome by this, is connoted by words such as 'masterpiece' and 'wonder': these are also ignored.

By reducing the utterance to the three words of his bias, Waddington enables himself to conclude that Stein's,

aesthetic and thinking is [*sic*] based on the symmetry he sees manifest in the likes of the Coleoptera butterfly; consequently, his hyper-orderly mind is ill-equipped to deal with the ambiguity of Jim's situation which extends beyond factual enquiry. (p. 102)

But is Stein 'hyper-orderly' when he makes the exclamation? Clearly this is not the case. He is orderly, as is any amateur scientist. But he is much more, as demonstrated. He is exuberant, he is curious, he is hard-working, he is ironically aware of humanity's natural shortcomings and his own, and so forth – all as reflected in his entomological interest.

By slipping in the word *Jim* where Stein in the novel uses *man*, a disingenuous reductionism, Waddington consequently argues that Stein feels that,

Jim has 'come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him' [...] and so he pins Jim into place in much the same way as he fastens the *Coleoptera* butterfly in a glass display case in his study (p. 102).

By distorting his entomological praxes and by ignoring his entomologically induced values, Waddington feels empowered to bring down the morality of one of the larger and more interesting characters on the modernist horizon in this ham-fisted way.

A final irony: Waddington's one-sidedness and the misreading of Stein's contradictory nature

One must infer that Waddington's reading of Stein's nature, as informed especially by entomology, is distinctly one-sided. Where Stein wishes to bequeath his collection to his humble hometown, Waddington insists that he will export it for the sake of his fixations on profit. Where Stein helps Jim to reintegrate with society, Waddington feels that he plots the protagonist's murder in the same way in which he supposedly indifferently collects and kills insects. Where he stumbles across his own words with enthusiasm for butterflies, Waddington can see only a preoccupation with control – and so on.

To be sure, Stein does come to Jim's aid. There is a certain roughness about his character, about which I will say one or two further words, and there is his tendency to make a deliberate plan that is akin to the scientific doing of his entomological practice. But there is also the understanding, the knowledge, and the passionate caring that arises from the same practice. Stein is indeed 'wonderful': he is a unique human being, a mixture of impulses at once scientific and Romantic, and this puts him in a position by virtue of which he is able to understand the similarly rational and passionate unpolished diamond of Jim's character.

Stein has a choice: he can concretely assist Jim, or not. He decides, in words that have frequently been cited in discussion of the novel, that Jim is 'one of us', a flawed human being worthy of belonging. Within the ambit of his powers and

resources, he acts, and invites Jim into a new life, away from his ostracised seafaring disposition, on the island of Patusan – where Jim indeed restores his reputation and shows his worth and valour, despite or in the face of the cruelties and crudeness of the place. There is, once more, no reason given in the novel to suspect that Stein helps Jim out of spite, cruelty, and a murderous impulse induced by entomology.

As though imposing his own one-sidedness on the character, Waddington ultimately holds Stein up as one-sided strawman. In a kind of double irony, this flies in the face of the renowned ambiguity that underpins Marlow's spinning of a yarn: Marlow never presents an important character in a one-sided manner. In fact, in the case of Stein, he is all too aware of the character's inner contradictions. He presents *both* sides of Stein: the good and the bad, which invalidates an interpretation that focuses on the bad only, not to mention the extreme distortion of the badness caused by Waddington's reading.

One might wish at this stage of the argument to insist that there is nothing wrong with highlighting the bad side of Stein's makeup for once; that the apparent resultant demystification is, in truth, useful. I have shown that there are limits to such a procedure. Waddington's ill-defined butterfly is a vivid instance of this. He transgresses the artistic limits and nuances that the novel compels one to consider.

But how does Waddington work his mind around Marlow's ambiguity as such, and Marlow's fine awareness of the ways in which Stein straddles his inner contradictions? He creates two gaps that appear to allow for an entry into this, and these emasculate his argument, since they are so one-sided that they override, in the rudest way, Marlow's carefully sustained and discerning 'haziness'. For Marlow can create a hazy atmosphere with the greatest precision of attention to ambiguities.

The first gap that Waddington tries to use for entering his one-sided approach is the apparent extent of Marlow's unreliability as caused by his equivocality. 'Highly acclaimed both in the text and in Conrad criticism, Stein's [*positive*] position is jeopardized', Waddington (2004:93) says in his introduction, by 'the unreliable nature of Marlow's narrative'. But Marlow's ambiguity itself does not tally with Waddington's picture of Stein as a tortured and torturing, most calculating and greedy assassin. The textures of Marlow's reflective ambivalences clash with the bold textures of Waddington's one-dimensional view of Stein. The second gap that Waddington creates for entry into his argument is that Marlow (2004:94) suffers from a peculiar inability: he is always 'failing to penetrate the surface appearance of his characters'. Given such an unflinching claim, it follows that 'Marlow's unqualified admiration for Stein proves skin-deep'. Although it is true that Marlow struggles to synthesise Jim's outer appearances and his inner states of mind, one wonders: is Marlow's view of his characters shallow, 'but skin-deep'?

I would argue, instead, that ambiguity is a tool that allows Marlow to peer more deeply into the human soul than most. He lays bare Stein's ambivalent nature, which at the very least means that he has 'penetrated' Stein beyond material appearances. Aside from various passages in which Marlow expresses his insights into Stein's nature in so many words, suggesting that he is intelligent and good-natured (Conrad 1979:154), he clearly relates that Stein is aware of his own shortcomings, and this takes 'penetration' into the other's nature. He is keenly aware, throughout the novel, that Stein cannot completely reconcile the opposites that exist within him. He shows that Stein is himself vividly aware of the shortcoming that resides in his dualities. This self-irony facilitates his (Stein's) deep understanding of the Romantic Jim, and the understanding steers his motivation for and ability to help the protagonist.

For instance, Stein pertinently notes that Jim's Romanticism is at once very bad and very good (Conrad 1979:165). This means that Stein sees in Jim the potential for harm and the potential for recovery, precisely because he is aware of a similar contradictoriness within himself. Stein's lived experience and awareness of his inner demons allow him to see Jim for who he is to a greater extent – and in these matters, Conrad seems to suggest, seeing to a greater extent, that is, the lesser of evils, as the saying goes, is the only maxim for moral freedom. Of course, Marlow can portray this so well because he is neither bound to a single 'realistic' viewpoint nor to a 'goodie-versus-baddie' mode of narration. At stake is the compelling beauty of the narrator's delicate philosophical approach. He is willing to delve into the opposites of existence to the hilt, to the point where they do not make perfect sense, the point where the fact that they do not make perfect sense becomes perfectly clear – which is one of modernist art's achievements.

Stein's self-awareness runs deep, again as made visible by Marlow's ambiguity, that is, his willingness to look at existence from more than one angle, which makes his account more comprehensive, therefore more truthful (see Brooker 1994:188; Paltin 2013:779). Stein contrasts for Marlow (2004) the perfection of butterflies and the faultiness of humans:

This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man will never on his heap of mud keep still. [...] He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil – and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow – so fine as he can never be. (p. 162)

Here is one of the moments in which Marlow shows that Stein is a crude co-narrator, which is probably one of the main reasons why Marlow views Stein as 'one of the most trustworthy men' he had 'ever known' (Conrad 1979:154). In a starker manner, therefore, Stein's contradictory humanity matches Marlow's ambiguity. Stein, too, has the courage to look at life in terms of more than a simplistic single aspect. The duality is also resident in Jim, as depicted by the novel's

overall plot and development: Jim sees himself as a very fine fellow by shutting his eyes and entering a Romanticised world of fiction and fantasy. There he could be the hero whereas, as soon as it came to reality, he acted in a cowardly manner. The key takeaway here is that idealisation causes cowardice, whereas it is better to be aware of one's dualities. This is an important part of what Stein means when he says, 'Well – I am a man, too' (Conrad 1979:162), which resonates with the idea that Jim is 'one of us'. Indeed, he 'seems to have an uncanny knowledge of the qualitative extremes of humanity: man as butterfly, man as beetle, he knows them both' (Tanner 1963:123).

All of this is distorted by Waddington's intense and carelessly partial reading of the novel. It is true that, towards the conclusion of his article, he briefly attempts to restore the complexity of Stein's character: Stein suddenly turns out to be multifaceted and compelling (Waddington 2004:107–108). But the article's bulk unswervingly depicts Stein as an insect-destroying ogre, as demonstrated: one of Pyle's 'antediluvian churls'. By the time at which he briefly entertains a subtler view of the character, as found towards the article's conclusion, then, the damage has been done.

Showing the hubris that a critic confronted with an artwork may be susceptible to, at the conclusion of 'That "wonderful" man, Mr. Stein', Waddington (2004:108) accuses *Stein* of being one-sided and narrow: he apparently suffers from 'the folly of interpreting life as if it were a series of tidy spaces'. Yet Stein will not fit into the narrow boxes of profiteering and a thirst for death into which Waddington tries to fit him, most certainly not as an entomologist who happens to reach out to Jim when he is requested to do so.

Stein makes his fullest appearance more or less in the middle of *Lord Jim* and returns in a cameo at its conclusion. Here Marlow depicts him in a more sceptical light, but Stein equally views his own life in relative terms. *Lord Jim* (Conrad 1979) concludes with these words:

Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is 'preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave...' while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies. (p. 313)

For Waddington, the sadness boils down to the 'obvious' recognition that Stein cannot be trusted: that, once more, he will ultimately have no entomological choice but to kill you (2004:107). The word 'sadly' does enjoy uncertain meanings, as is Marlow's wont. I conclude with one or two of these. Marlow and Stein underline, as shown, that a human lifetime on the planet is an imperfect phenomenon that tests the limits of nature too boldly. Awareness of the nature-related ignorance that goes along with a human lifetime has probably intensified for Stein as its end came into view, inducing sadness about the wastage incurred. But let one further meaning of the word 'sadly' not go by unnoticed, as informed by careful reading from the perspective of entomology. Simply enough, Stein will miss the butterflies.

As a 21st-century reader, one may add a further, somewhat external note about sadness, butterflies, and the novel. We have seen that birdwing butterflies play an important role in Wallace's writings and in Conrad's description of a butterfly in *Lord Jim*, right down to the details of inspiring yellow spots on its wings. Recently, it has been established that Queen Alexandra's birdwing, the largest butterfly on the earth, has been pushed to the brink of extinction by the palm oil industry (Revesz 2017). One says it despite one's own habits, but trust humanity to prefer a daily dose of foaming shampoo and soft conditioner to the million-years-old artwork, a living one to boot, of Queen Alexandra's birdwing.

This butterfly is immediately akin not only to the birdwing with the 'dark bronze wings, seven inches or more across, with exquisite white veinings and a gorgeous border of yellow spots' described by Marlow (Conrad 1979:156), but also Wallace's golden birdwing and the one that he named after James Brooke, known as Rajah Brooke's birdwing. Now, the threat of the human pressure on these creatures is tangible, whereas Conrad's entomologic sense points to an avenue that leads away from an ignorant, abusive stance towards the insects and those interested in them. That is, those for whom they are little worlds of delight rather than so many 'creepy-crawlies' contained in a basket of disposables. For the lepidopterist reader, yet another exercise in disillusionment about entomology or yet another usefully demystifying stance towards a novel pale in significance to Conrad's achievement of bringing an insect lover into ingeniously fictional view.

The actual profit of Stein's entomology is a combination of enchantment, self-ironic earthly awareness, and the brittle knowledge about insects and life earned by devotion to them right up to the end of a human lifetime on the planet. This is mirrored in Marlow's (2004) mesmerisation with Stein's close examination of a butterfly,

as though on the bronze sheen of these frail wings, in the white tracings, in the gorgeous markings, he could see other things, an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate and lifeless tissues displaying a splendour unmarred by death. (p. 158)

To my mind indubitably a great artwork, *Lord Jim* calls for the same intensity of careful attention to its lasting details. Among these, one is struck by its ability to maintain life's opposites in a precarious balance, anchored by a creature as powerfully present, absorbing, and slight as a butterfly. The novel excels at delivering a healthy spoonful of self-irony in the face of the fragility and beauty of these marvellous insects, and their ability to remain part of the natural contract in complete fullness and perfection by being and remaining exactly what they are without, as Stein rightly notes, wanting everything in the most one-sided way. Stein's intense encounter with the insects brings him to the vital insight that a grip on one's human imperfection is the fragile wall between oneself and inhumanity.

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