

The white man's canoe

seemed to enter the portals of a land

from which the very memory of motion

had forever departed

a twisted root of some tall tree

showed amongst the tracery of small ferns

black and dull

writhing and motionless

the darkness, mysterious and invincible

the darkness scented and poisonous

of impenetrable forests

his big, soft eyes

stared eagerly at the white man

"Tuan, will she die?"

"I fear so," said the white man, sorrowfully

the earth enfolded in the starlight peace

became a shadowy country of inhuman strife

for she is but a woman that can neither run nor fight

but she has your heart

in her weak hands

'We are cast out

and this boat is our country now

and the sea is our refuge.'

"I can see nothing," he said

"There is nothing," said the white man,

and the unveiled lagoon lay,

polished and black

in the heavy shadows at the foot of the wall of trees.

Excerpts of text from Joseph Conrad's *The Lagoon* (1897), set in
British Malaya.