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Lord Jim

JOSEPH CONRAD



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LORD JIM

A Tale

Joseph Conrad

Introduction and Notes by

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藏书章

*'It is certain my Observation gains infinitely
the moment another soul will believe in it.'*



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LORD JIM

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

The pivotal moment in *Lord Jim* occurs when the protagonist, the disgraced first officer of the *Patna* recounts how he leapt from what he believed to be a sinking ship, abandoning its passengers. Jim tells Marlow, a middle-aged British merchant seaman who is narrating the tale at this point, ‘I had jumped . . . It seems’ (p. 70). The grammatical construction of Jim’s confession is significant. It suggests a dislocation of consciousness at the very moment of action. He describes his action – ‘the leap’ – in the pluperfect tense, located in the distant past of his memory, while the use of the intransitive ‘seems’ introduces present equivocation, suggesting a sense of ambiguity about his knowledge of, responsibility for, and reluctance to ‘own’, his deed. The phrase in many ways represents the crux of the story as a whole, as a retrospective engagement with a single action. In spite of its complex narratorial and temporal dislocations, its confusing twists of plot and subplot, *Lord Jim* is, at its most basic level, a story of one man’s failure to live up to a self-imposed moral ideal.

The central problem of Jim's 'jump' derives from Joseph Conrad's adaptation of a real-life incident.¹ 'Conrad's first career as a seaman had taken him to Singapore in 1883. Also residing there at the time was Augustine Podmore Williams, a young sailor who had been involved in a notorious maritime scandal in 1880. It is possible that Conrad either met Williams, or heard, through naval gossip, of the affair of the *Jeddah*, a pilgrim-ship travelling from Singapore to Jeddah (like the *Patna*, it was carrying several hundred Muslim passengers). The ship had been deserted by its officers when it encountered bad weather, the hull began to leak and the passengers refused to man the pumps. Williams, the young first mate, took charge of the lifeboats, enabling him to escape along with Captain Clark and his wife. On reaching Aden, they reported the sinking of the *Jeddah* and the loss of the lives of all its passengers. In fact, it transpired that there were no casualties, as became clear when the ship was towed, leaking but intact, into Aden the following day. An official inquiry was held, the captain's certificate was suspended, and Williams received a reprimand. Unlike Jim, however, Williams endured the scandal, returning to Singapore, where he married a Eurasian girl and died in 1916, a relatively prosperous and respected individual (Sherry, pp. 77-86).

The obvious resemblances to Jim's story are, however, far less important than the differences. In Conrad's novel, Jim alone appears before the inquiry, and, unlike Williams, who eventually resumes a normal life, Jim lives under a self-imposed cloud, taking to an itinerant existence, craving anonymity, yet obsessively seeking a chance to prove himself. Furthermore, the narrative preoccupation with Jim's 'betrayal' and his psychological obsession with the moment at which he jumped ship distinguishes the novel from the many tales of imperialist adventure so popular with contemporary readers in 1900. *Lord Jim* was initially serialised in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1899-1900) - a context more often associated with jingoistic accounts of conquest in exotic lands than with the exploration of identity and disillusionment with romance. In fact, Jim's Patusan adventures in the second half of the novel conform most closely to the pattern of the adventure tradition, and this section of the novel shows Conrad's debt to James Brooke (1803-68), the explorer-adventurer of South-East Asia, and to Henry Keppel's *Expedition to Borneo* (1846). Yet, as Linda Hughes and Michael Lund have observed in their discussion of the serialisation of *Lord Jim*,

¹ Sherry, pp. 61-4. For full details of this and other references turn to the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction.

it is the narrative's constant return to the moral issue of Jim's jump that makes of this tale an early example of modernist writing, rather than the chronologically plot-driven narrative of 'boy's own' adventure and the imperialist ethos (Hughes and Lund, pp. 243-5).

Moreover, Conrad's narrative strategy, in which he shifts the narrative viewpoint several times, destabilises the notion of an overarching narratorial authority. The story is disseminated by three different 'voices'. A third-person 'omniscient' narrator opens the tale from Chapters 1 to 4; Chapters 5 to 35 constitute Marlow's dramatised account, told to a group of seamen during an after-dinner gathering; thirdly, Marlow's written testimony completes the novel, commencing in Chapter 36. This section is ostensibly conveyed in documents, sent two years after the late-night talk by Marlow to one of his listeners, a 'privileged reader', as Marlow calls him, who has shown particular interest in the tale. The use of mixed narrative perspectives denies the reader the comforting security of a guiding voice that delivers a single, secure interpretation. It also problematises any sense of a unified relationship between text and reader, suggesting a far more experimental work than those favoured by the readers of popular Victorian adventure yarns, such as those by G. A. Henty or Captain Marryat.

Yet Conrad's Jim takes inspiration from the fictionalised accounts of his early reading, the 'light literature' of the adventure stories he absorbed during his childhood in England. He dreams of becoming 'an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book' (p. 5). He is highly romantic and idealistic; at the same time he has been brought up within firm moral parameters of Christian duty (it is significant that Jim is the son of a parson – after Jim's death an unanswered letter from his father is found on his person, showing the extent to which he was both attached to, and evasive of his origins). But Conrad, as in *Heart of Darkness*, shows the gap between extreme forms of idealism and the necessity of responding to real situations in life. By shaping his narrative around the moment of Jim's leap, Conrad exploits the source material to explore the moral and epistemological ambiguities suggested by Williams's story. Conrad's Jim is unable to face the humiliation of public disgrace. He does claim, "I must go on" (in the manner of the real-life Williams), but Conrad anticipates Beckett's undermining of romantic transcendence by presenting a bleaker sense of disillusionment with Jim's romantic quest.

A series of repetitions and recurrences, all referring to a 'leap' of some kind, populate the text, constantly returning the reader's attention to the moment of Jim's indecision and his moral isolation. Thus Jim's

action assumes an emblematic function that unifies the novel to some extent, and it is worth exploring in detail the effects of Conrad's innovative development of this largely figurative moment. The first reference to the 'jump' in Chapter 1 is proleptic – in spite of Jim's romantic aspirations, and his commitment to a life at sea, the third-person narrator tells us that Jim has discovered little of the glamorous life he has read about in books. During his early training as a seaman we learn of his first failure to accommodate his self-image as 'hero': he literally fails to jump, fails to gain access to the lifeboat on a rescue mission. Other references to 'jumping' function more obliquely as an indirect anticipation of Jim's failure. Conrad's ironic presentation of different sorts of failure emerge, initially in the second engineer's description of 'the jump' as a means of self-regulation: "If I thought I was drunk I would jump overboard" (p. 17). Then Marlow shows how the chief engineer is himself suffering from *delirium tremens*. In his delusional state in the hospital in Singapore he 'made one leap for dear life' (p. 32).

These references are later mirrored in the novel by Jim's 'disgraceful' jump from the *Patna*, and again in Chapter 15, when Marlow, having invited Jim to his lodgings, talks of Jim's fragile psychological state during the inquiry. He fears that Jim may take his own life: 'If I spoke, would that motionless and suffering youth leap into the obscurity – clutch at the straw?' (p. 109). But Jim does not leap off Marlow's verandah. By varying the context and narratorial perspective between the first two sections of the book, Conrad exploits the notion of 'leaping' in such a way that it functions in the text as a signifier denoting both moral responsibility and moral evasion, physical and psychological failure, and, as such, something that accrues both active and passive force. The 'jump' represents the idea of both conscious and unconscious action throughout the text.

A further perspective on Jim's 'jump' occurs in the inclusion of the incident of Brierly's suicide in Chapter 6. This event is structurally important for three reasons: first, for its reflection of the impact of Jim's story on others; second, for its reflection on Marlow's position as narrator; and third, again proleptically, for its anticipation of Jim's final act. Brierly is one of the assessors at the inquiry who believes that Jim, like the other members of the crew, should have avoided public humiliation by not appearing for the trial: "Why eat all that dirt?" (p. 42) he exclaims. But then we learn that Brierly inexplicably committed suicide when he himself 'jumped overboard at sea barely a week after the end of the inquiry' (p. 37), for a reason never fully

explained to the reader. It is important that we know about Brierly's jump *before* we know about Jim's. Conrad uses prolepsis here not only to generate anticipation in the reader, but to prompt us to read Jim's action against the worrying ambivalence of Brierly's suicide, since Brierly is described as a man of action, a hero – the very paradigm of the type Jim himself would have liked to become.

Marlow's introduction of Brierly in Chapter 6 is striking in its initially clipped and unadorned presentation of the facts: 'his self-satisfaction presented to me and to the world a surface as hard as granite. He committed suicide very soon after' (p. 37). The disjunctive statements anticipate the fundamental ambivalence that will structure Marlow's narration of Jim's moral dilemma. Marlow registers a gap between surface appearances – the image of the truly British 'one of us' – and the realities of moral isolation, of failure to live up to a self-imposed ideal. Something about the cruel exposure of Jim's weakness had clearly prompted Brierly to repeat the 'jump'. (Brierly otherwise behaves much more like a character from imperial romance – worthy of the more typical fictional offerings of *Blackwood's*.) Marlow, like the reader, is baffled and his view destabilised. Yet his recounting of the Brierly incident anticipates the way in which he, as story-teller, will be drawn to explore Jim's identity, the moral, psychological and ethical dimensions of his story, to show up the inadequacies of public images or public quests for 'the facts' (p. 18) of a case. Moreover, it shows how the story acts upon the psychology of the story-teller. As he speaks of his struggle for narrative control, Marlow repeats the frustration he had registered in *Heart of Darkness* with the failure of language: '... try as I may for the success of this yarn I am missing innumerable shades – these were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words' (p. 60). We are thus persuaded to become active rather than passive readers, encouraged to enter Marlow's space as narrator, to grapple with the gaps in Marlow's narrative, and to see the way in which the text is becoming as much Marlow's story of 'how to know' as Jim's narrative of 'how to live'.²

Thus the idea of a 'jump' also suggests figuratively the fundamental distinction in perspective between the third-person narrator and Marlow's view, which commences in Chapter 5. The third-person narrator possesses a limited and schematic viewpoint. He satirises Jim, remarking sarcastically on his 'soft spot' when he is lured into a life of

2 The narrative strategy here reminds us of Henry James's observation that Conrad gloried in a 'gap' ('The Younger Generation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1914)

ease on the *Patna*, finding a fascination for the white seamen of the East in their 'appearance of doing so well on such a small allowance of danger and toil' (p. 9). For the third-person narrator there is little moral ambivalence in Jim's case – he is simply a day-dreamer whose mettle had never really been tested. But from the moment of his first encounter with Jim, Marlow remains troubled by the possibilities residing behind the image: 'He had no business to look so sound' (p. 26). His very first view initiates the hesitations and linguistic discontinuities that characterise Marlow's narrative throughout: 'I thought to myself – Well, if this sort can go wrong like that . . .' (p. 26). The very fact that Jim possessed 'the right kind of looks' (p. 29), appeared as 'one of us' (Author's Note, p. xxiv; p. 28; p. 59), undermines Marlow's own belief in 'codes of honour' and forces him 'to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood'. In short, Marlow admits, 'He swayed me' (p. 59).³

Between Marlow's initial view of Jim in Chapter 5 and his relation of Jim's testimony of the jump at the end of Chapter 9 the narrative register shifts. Marlow generates through his imaginative and sympathetic reconstruction of Jim's actual experience a profound empathy in the reader for Jim's extreme sense of moral isolation and the terrible reversal of values he endures. Marlow achieves this partly by invoking the dramatic effects of a generic shift from low comedy to high tragedy. He recounts at second hand Jim's version of the farce unfolding on board the *Patna* once the ship has been hit. It is pitch dark, Jim feels utterly isolated from the other members of the contemptible crew conspiring to abandon its passengers. The black comedy is initiated as the skipper and his cronies struggle to release the lifeboat (the captain is too fat to hoist it aloft). Then, once it is in the water, they despise Jim for his failure to join them, while they desperately call to George, the acting third engineer, to jump, not realising that he has recently died of a heart attack at Jim's feet. The tragedy, on the other hand, is exacerbated by the competing pressures on Jim – from the Muslim passengers demanding water, from the disloyal crew demanding his help, from his own indecision about how to act appropriately. Marlow's account reveals 'the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment' (Preface, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, p. xlii), so that we begin to see why he sympathises with Jim's dislocation of consciousness at the point of crisis. Jim cannot recall the moment of action – only the equivocation preceding it and the terrible burden of guilt following it.

3 See also Hillis Miller, p. 27.

The leap itself ('"as if I had jumped into a well – into an everlasting deep hole"' [p. 70]) remains forever unresolved in Jim's memory and in Marlow's imagination. It is only at the end of this chapter that the reader begins to recognise how, from that moment, for Jim, there was no going back. Thus Conrad expands the limited moral viewpoint of the first four chapters to fulfil his promise of the Preface to the *Nigger of the Narcissus* 'to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see!' (p. xlii). Conrad presents the complex psychological impact of an extreme situation upon the fragile sensibility of a youth with 'the faculty of swift and forestalling vision' (p. 61), distinguishing his tale further from its source, exploring the wider moral and ethical dimensions of the framework provided by Williams's story.⁴

Yet, overwhelmingly, Jim 'must go on' in order to be saved. At the same time, Conrad undercuts the notion of Christian redemption by characterising Jim's 'jump' to save his own life as an epistemological issue, as well as a moral one. If Jim had, in Chapter 9, confessed that '"I had jumped . . . It seems"', in Chapter 11 Marlow now shows another retrospective temporal shift in Jim's narration. Here Marlow represents a moment of extreme psychological uncertainty by suggesting typographically Jim's halting speech patterns, his evasions and his failure at first to repeat the utterance in which he had initially confessed to the actual jump:

'"Suppose I had not – I mean to say, suppose I had stuck to the ship? Well. How much longer? Say a minute – half a minute. Come. In thirty seconds, as it seemed certain then, I would have been overboard; and do you think I would not have laid hold of the first thing that came my way – oar, life-buoy, grating – anything? Wouldn't you?"

'"And be saved," I interjected.

'"I would have meant to be," he retorted. "And that's more than I meant when I" . . . he shivered as if about to swallow some nauseous drug . . . "jumped," he pronounced with a convulsive effort . . .'

[p. 82]

Following on from 'the confession' of Chapter 9, Marlow and Jim are continuing to tease out the events of the fateful night. The play on the

4 The shift in narrative perspective from third person to dramatised narrator explains to some extent Conrad's need to expand into novel form what was initially conceived as a short story – a unified narratorial viewpoint may have better suited the original conception.

word 'saved' is obvious, with its Christian connotations – but as Jim discloses more of his experience of the events on the *Patna*, he makes a distinction between what he had related in Chapter 9, that is, what 'seems' now to him to have happened, and what 'seemed' *certain* then. Jim also projects a conditional past that at once suggests an alternative future in which he will yet be 'saved' (the irony lies in the fact that ultimately Jim will be the only one to die – all the passengers survived). Marlow's narration represents the temporal gap in Jim's understanding of his actions, and it also emphasises the way in which degrees of moral judgement may be tempered by access to subjective and objective viewpoints. Marlow's reading of Jim's situation is of course affected by Jim's retelling of an experience that 'seems' not to involve a straightforward *moral* decision at all, but one which engages more closely with a sense of dislocation, or suspension of consciousness. The tragic moment derives from the intersection of Jim's extreme sense of subjectivity with a highly objective social structure (the inquiry, public opinion) that demands a more or less schematic interpretation of moral codes. We now see why Conrad used different narratorial perspectives. The method was essential for exploring the dilemma of consciousness represented by Jim's leap. Yet it is not only Jim's dilemma at stake here, but also Marlow's. One of the reasons that Marlow is so moved by the issue of Jim's leap is that it raises enormous problems for his own interpretation of fixed moral standards (in a world without God). And while there has long been a critical argument condemning the second part of the book (the Patusan adventures) as inferior, Conrad nevertheless exploits the generic possibilities of the adventure yarn and the love story with Jewel to provide us with further perspectives on the central epistemological problem engendered by Jim's jump.

Indeed, Jim makes the second literal 'jump' of his life as he leaps over the stockade to save the people of Patusan from Sherif Ali in Chapter 25. This moment has been preceded by Marlow's account of the interim period of Jim's restlessness, a 'probationary' period for his final 'test' when the past seemed to catch up with him wherever he went. Marlow had finally introduced him to his friend Stein, the German owner of a trading post in a remote settlement in north-west Sumatra. Stein gives Jim his second chance – to start again as his manager in Patusan. This time Jim successfully 'jumps', grasping this new opportunity. He gains the respect of the native population, the local ruler Doramin and his son Dain Waris, and settles with a Eurasian woman, Jewel. He seems at last to be adopting the role of protector, virtual ruler of Patusan, fulfilling his self-image, his dream of heroism, until he

makes one further tactical mistake. This final episode coincides with another narratorial 'leap', as it is contained in a written document, sent by Marlow, two years after the occasion of his after-dinner talk, to a single 'privileged' listener. Marlow tells how Jim's error lay in trusting the corrupt 'Gentleman Brown', a roving buccaneer who murders Doramin's beloved son. Again Jim's equivocation hovers over the text – why does he give Gentleman Brown, in an ironic parallel with Stein's gesture towards Jim, a second chance? The question remains: does Brown's power to probe Jim's motives, to unnerve him, provoke in him a psychological identification with his own case? This final episode once more casts doubt on Jim's (self-) image of perfection, since he has pledged his own life to save all members of the Patusan community.

If the 'jump' is central to the text of *Lord Jim*, another kind of jump, relating to Conrad as author, is indicated by the autobiographical elements of the story. As a Polish *émigré*, who had settled in England after a career at sea, Conrad had also made an extraordinary 'leap' when he began writing for a living, in English, his third language. Indeed, he described his departure from Poland as 'a standing jump' (*A Personal Record*, p. 121). His first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, was published in 1895 and, although he achieved little economic success until the publication of *Chance* in 1913, by 1900 he had established for himself something of a reputation as a man of English letters who, influenced by the French realist writing of Flaubert and Maupassant, was engaged in his own individual experimentation with narrative method and psychological presentation. *Lord Jim* builds on and develops the impressionist techniques and the proto-modernist representation of epistemological problems explored in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), 'Youth' and *Heart of Darkness* (both initially serialised in *Blackwood's*, but published together in book form in 1902). *Lord Jim* witnesses Conrad's most complex and most modern development so far of the device of a dramatised narrator, Marlow, initiated in 'Youth' and *Heart of Darkness*.

Yet the presentation of Jim's heroic quest, his struggle for redemption, his ongoing moral crisis and his obsession with issues of loyalty and betrayal resides as much in the romanticism of Conrad's Polish roots as in the influence of experimental writing in turn-of-the-century Western Europe. The earliest extant material relating to the composition of *Lord Jim* (written between 1896 and the spring of 1898) appears in a leather-bound album originally belonging to his maternal grandmother, Teofila Bobrowska. This was a twenty-eight-page fragment entitled 'Tuan Jim: A Sketch' (roughly corresponding to the first three chapters of the finished novel), pencilled in the book

beside some poems thought to be in his mother's hand. This manuscript, now held in the Houghton Library at Harvard, bears an intriguing reminder of Conrad's origins (he was born of Polish parents in the Russian dominated Ukraine in 1857), and indicates that part of the creation of this novel began with the memories of the Poland of his childhood. Teofila's album suggests a number of biographical and textual associations. Bobrowska had contributed to Conrad's upbringing after the early loss of both his parents, who actively resisted Russian hegemony. His mother, Ewa Bobrowska, was an avid letter writer and translator; his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was himself a literary figure dedicated to the preservation of Poland's national identity, and he had encouraged Conrad in his early reading of the great Polish Romantic dramatists Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809-49). In this context, the presentation of both Jim's and Stein's characters as romantics derives something from Conrad's Polish background. It is significant that Stein *understands* Jim as a romantic in a way that no one else does. He empathises fully with Jim's sense of betrayal, isolation, his dislocations of consciousness, his pursuit of a futile romantic quest, his compulsion to strive, and yet to fail. Conrad's narrative preoccupations are steeped in the romanticism of his literary forebears as much as they anticipate the high modernist scepticism of the twentieth century.

Polish romanticism was strongly indebted to German philosophical thought (primarily through Goethe and Schiller), and the impact of Marlow's conversations with Stein, as well as those with Jim, reminds us of Schlegel's emphasis on 'dialogue' as a means of changing the readers' or viewers' position as intellectual or moral beings. Critics have noted that Stein's career has been modelled partly on that of Alfred Russell Wallace, the naturalist who collected butterflies and beetles in the Malay Archipelago, and partly on that of a Dr Bernstein, a German-born collector of tropical species, whom Wallace encountered whilst travelling. Yet it is no accident that Stein's outlook really makes him a German philosopher. His attitude to Jim's romanticism is even reminiscent of the German influence on Polish Romantic drama. Stein is the artist-seer in the manner of the Polish romantic visionary (like Mickiewicz himself);⁵ his quest for empiricist knowledge and his idealist study of perfect form is always accompanied by an emphasis on

⁵ Mickiewicz's work encompasses a vision of Poland as a 'chosen nation', led by a poet-seer. Resonances of the romantic sense of 'vision' can be heard in Conrad's Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897).

the need for the exercise of the imagination. In Chapter 34 Marlow describes one of his last views of the wild and sweeping landscapes of Patusan: 'The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls, and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movements in the world seemed to come to an end' (p. 201). Marlow's self-perception as an isolated figure in a vast expanse of an apocalyptic landscape or seascape are suggestive of both the transcendentalism of Caspar David Friedrich, and of the Messianism inherited from Mickiewicz that had stimulated his father Apollo's writing and his political position at the time of the 1863 rising in Warsaw.⁶

Yet Conrad is primarily a sceptic – and his scepticism was partly born of his own experience of isolation, his dislocation from the homeland when he went to sea in 1874, of his disillusionment with the failed 'romantic' quest of his nationalist father, which had resulted in the family's exile to northern Russia, precipitating the death of his mother in 1865. With the death of his father in 1869, Conrad became an orphan at the age of twelve, but the romantic impulses of his early reading of Polish texts, of Mickiewicz and Słowacki in particular, endure in *Lord Jim* – especially in Jim's overriding moral crises and in his struggle for redemption. In Słowacki's play *Kordian* (1834), for example, the incident in which the doctor discusses the protagonist Kordian's failure to act at a fundamental moment of Polish history provides a persuasive model for Jim's discussions of 'the leap' with Marlow (Gillon, p. 92).

While Conrad structures the narrative around a preoccupation with a single action, he also sustains the earlier promise of his literary manifesto, 'before all, to make you *see*!' by emphasising the actual and metaphorical resonances of vision. The use of mixed narrative modes draws attention to the unreliability of any single perspective – the third-person narrator thinks that Jim is basically weak, but he also shows the reader a way of 'reading Jim' according to traditional Victorian mores. His tone is detached, yet suggestive of contemporary colonialist and intellectual perspectives. For example, his image of the flood in his presentation of the pilgrims filling the *Patna* reflects a quasi-Nietzschean fear of mob mentality. Marlow's view of Jim, on the other hand, is highly subjective, and he is 'fated never to see him clearly' (p. 151). The 'privileged reader' takes the blunt, racist view of the Victorian imperial-

6 For discussions of Apollo's politics, see Najder, *A Chronicle*, pp. 15–20; Carabine, *The Life and the Art*; and Jones, pp. 51–2.

ist in suggesting that nothing good can come of mixing with 'the other' from a colonialist perspective. We also gain access throughout the narrative to a plethora of alternative views: the French lieutenant's, Jewel's, Stein's, Gentleman Brown's and so on. But Conrad also explores the act of seeing in a literal sense – using the images of impressionist (or perhaps Turner-esque) landscapes with their muffled, murky outlines, their juxtaposition of passages of light and darkness, to express the difficulties of clear understanding. Conrad explores the issue of disillusionment, but also the effects of delusion. The episode in Chapter 5, describing the chief engineer's surreal vision of pink toads in the hospital, in turn throws light on the extremity of Jim's vision of himself (after all, Marlow refers to his final gesture as one of 'supreme egoism'). Conrad undermines the enabling power of vision in a romantic or transcendentalist sense by offering a sceptical reading of traditional codes of visual representation. Marlow's last view of Jim in Patusan, 'a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world . . . And, suddenly, I lost him . . .' (p. 210), is of a white figure disappearing into the horizon of a framed seascape which, represented as it is here by the dramatic ellipses and gaps in the text, leaves the viewer uncertain about the identity of the object in view.

Conrad also exploits iconographic traditions in his engagement with those popular literary modes most familiar to readers of British fiction. Jim is the model of the white male hero/adventurer of Rider Haggard or Captain Marryat (but just under six feet – so slightly imperfect). Jewel suggests at times a ghostly Eurasian counterpart of the 'woman in white' of Victorian gothic. But Conrad manipulates the love plot in order to furnish the discussion with a critique of readers' generic expectations. His bleak and sceptical view of romance disqualifies any successful marriage plot as a suitable closure for the novel. Unlike A. P. Williams, Jim fails to sustain domestic harmony at the end of his 'adventure'. Yet the romance plot is important, providing again an additional perspective on Jim's narrative. Conrad's presentation of Jewel's somewhat attenuated role draws attention to an important alternative view of Jim, one that is never naturalised within the textual strategies of Marlow's narration, and one that arguably remains unresolved at the end of his narrative.

Conrad devotes some compelling passages to outlining the pathos of Jewel's situation, as well as presenting her unfailing courage. In Chapter 39, Marlow has been told that in Jim's absence during the crisis with Gentleman Brown, she 'stood up by the side of Jim's empty chair at the head of the long table and made a warlike impassioned speech' (p. 227).

Jewel also initiates a profound response in Marlow himself, undermining his sense of self-possession as he listens to her account of how her mother died weeping, abandoned by her father and how she was abused by her stepfather, the corrupt Cornelius. Marlow observes that as she spoke, 'There came upon me, as though I had felt myself losing my footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of the unknown depths' (p. 195). The inclusion of Jewel's story is important in the closing chapters of the novel for the way in which it reflects on Marlow's crisis of interpretation, while providing a proleptic view of the outcome (she too will probably die weeping). But it also presents alternative, female forms of heroism in this discussion of predominantly masculinist romance. Marlow's narratorial sympathy does finally fall on the side of Jim's actions – yet once again the cumulative effect of multiple perspectives on Jim throughout the novel contributes to our sense of his unreliability, an effect that is strengthened by the evasiveness of the closure. Jewel's ardent defence of her position in respect of the white men of the novel – "you always leave us – for your own ends" (p. 217) – is well founded. Jim may believe that he finally confronts his 'lost honour', but her comment exposes his death as a flight of a different kind. Even Stein's patronising dismissal of her jealousy of Jim falters ("Why you do not understand?" [p. 219]), given that Jewel is literally abandoned. Jim's adherence to his codes of honour finally overrides his sense of loyalty to her when he decides to commit virtual 'suicide' by walking to certain death at the hand of Doramin. The presentation of her anguish, her inability to forgive him and her wasted life provides a convincing reason for viewing his final action as ultimately futile in his rejection of the feminine, just as the notion of his 'self-sacrifice', with its allusions to the Christ-figure, shows up the impossibility of any finite human subject managing this role of 'guarantor' of other people's lives (as Marlow had declared to Jewel, despairing in his inability to communicate to her the pathos of Jim's extreme romanticism, "Nobody, nobody is good enough" [p. 199]). The closure is uneasy. Both Jewel and Stein are finally reduced in stature by Jim's death. Stein's position is itself ironised as he joins Jewel as her fading 'partner' in a debased 'comic' closure – yet its bathos ruefully testifies to the seductive power of Jim's 'romantic' excess.

Conrad uses the Patusan adventures to suggest an alternative reading of heroism – by introducing the female perspective on the romance plot. But this section of the novel also offers an important framing device through which Conrad represents metaphorically Jim's exclusion from the world of the reader. On one level, the shift in narration in