

## **The Lone Exile in Conrad's *Lord Jim***

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### **Abstract**

*"When your ship fails you, your whole world seems to fail you; the world that made you, restrained you, took care of you. It is as if the souls of men floating on an abyss and in touch with immensity had been set free for any excess of heroism, absurdity, or abomination," said Marlow in Lord Jim. The fateful abandonment of the ship Patna shattered Jim's reputation as a seaman. In Marlow, the narrator's eyes, Jim remained 'one of us' - the brother we would love to have, the youth we would love to have been - despite his apparent failing when disaster struck. The heroic and conscientious decision to face the trial plunged Jim to moral wilderness. His public profile became sullied by the legal fact-finding and the stricture of shared code simply could not admit the fear and courage in the youth. The enforced silence shadowed every move Jim made henceforth so he forwent his second chance time after time. This paper seeks to present Joseph Conrad's take on the tension between intrinsic perfectionism decreed by moral code and the human being's dubious ability to act on the exalted idealism. This paper will argue that Conrad beautifully construed Jim's dignified silence by creating scenes full of viewpoints, judgments, noises and despair. The classic themes of fall and suffering find their expression in this elongated novel that sits gloriously alongside Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Almayer's Folly.*

**Keywords:** Shame, Silence, Journey, Heroism, Exile

### **Introduction**

Marlow's last view of Jim, on the coast of Patusan, is a white figure standing "at the heart of a vast enigma" (Conrad 1968, p. 204). Departed from Patusan, it seems that Marlow is not to greet goodbye to a man who is attired in glory, but to bid farewell to a man who is gradually devoured by the immense yet invisible darkness. Reading Marlow's "apocalypse later" observation of Jim as a gloss to the apparent redemption Jim has achieved in Patusan, the irony and poignancy cannot be more blunt: Jim's romantic quest for heroism and later, his futile search for a second chance become, eventually, a quest that drives him towards the ineffable darkness.

Tormented by guilt, like Razumov in *Under Western Eyes*, Jim's relentless pursuit of redemption craves a starless sky, where he can entertain his accidental audience with the splendour and the glamour of perpetual fireworks whilst banishing his biographical misfortunes. As he cut off the past in himself, his enclosure is soundproof and isolation complete.

*Lord Jim* begins with a valiant attempt to reconstruct the past. Jim, the protagonist of the novel, is first introduced to us by an anonymous narrator as a fallen man whose past is sealed and whose incognito, which has "as many holes as a sieve", conceals not "a personality but a fact" (Conrad 1968, p. 4). When his well-kept past is accidentally exposed, Jim would withdraw expeditiously from the seaport where he happens to stay at the time and go to another like a fugitive. Indeed, he "retreat[s] in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact follow[s] him casually and inevitably". Although Jim is portrayed as a man caught in the grip of fate, the components of his tormented existence remain unknown until a few chapters later when the fateful episode of the *Patna* comes to light. On board as a chief mate to the *Patna*, an ill-fated pilgrim ship with eight hundred passengers en route to their Holy land, Jim deserts the ship when it was in danger of submergence. Violating every ethical and moral code for a seaman and as a human and afterwards refusing to flee from a public trial, which results in the revocation of his certificate, leaves Jim a social outcast. In a desperate bid to atone for the wrong he had committed and prove his worthiness to the world that has witnessed his dramatic fall from grace, Jim begins a spiritual pilgrimage in search of a second chance to recover his lost honour. However, every step Jim made is under watchful eyes of the other, who is to test, judge, condemn or redeem him.

From the foregoing, two seemingly incompatible pictures of Jim emerge from the storyline: the man who fancies himself to rise to every occasion, and the man who, despite his aspiration, is hopelessly flawed. In this contradiction lies the essence of Jim's eternal predicament: he sets out to be *crème de la crème*, but to his surprise and great dismay, he is defective and he has the misfortune to have his imperfections magnified. It is this unbridgeable gap that provides the key to approach the bewildering paradoxes that characterise Jim's existence: insisting on viewing life's prospect through the prism of his own illusion, Jim pursues his dreams of heroism relentlessly and with little concern about the reality. Like Almayer in *Almayer's Folly*, who unwittingly becomes the victim of his "strong and active imagination", Jim ends up paying a hefty price for his persistent fantasy.

To apprehend Jim's fantasy in all its dimensions, we have to delve into his upbringing. Born into a country parsonage, Jim is nurtured with the ethical ideas his father believes in. "Virtue is one all over the world", says the vicar, "and there is only one faith, one conceivable conduct of life, one manner of dying" (Conrad 1968, p. 207). The father who encourages Jim to "resolve fixedly never, through any possible motives, do anything which you believe to be wrong" cultivates in Jim an inflexible mindset of moralism (Conrad 1968, p. 208). Such an inheritance later grows to be a cornerstone to his value system. After "a course of light holiday literature" (Joseph Conrad 1968, p. 4), Jim's imagination is captured by the romantic tales involving sailing; he thus declares an interest in seeking a career at sea. Blending ethics with the code of duty and responsibility, the chosen profession presents an ideal stage for Jim to perform his self-indulgent qualities on. The marriage of idealised heroism, which Jim acquires from "light literature", and superlative morality, instilled in him by his religious upbringing, contributes to the making of Jim's haughty self-image. A moralist by nature and an impeccable hero by subjective illusion, Jim believes that he stands on higher ground than others and is truly infallible.

However, Jim's single-minded illusion is shattered by his leap from the *Patna*; such a disgraceful action not only sheds his self-aggrandising image to pieces, more importantly, it impels Jim to face up to his own fallibility. Although Jim tries to excuse his behaviour by blaming it on fellow officers calling to him from the lifeboat – "it was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over" (Conrad 1968, p. 76), as he explains to Marlow – he cannot escape from the fact and the consequence of the jump. Leaping onto the lifeboat, Jim breaks the ethical code and, crucially, as an individual whose existence rests utterly upon a heroic self-image, such an action smashes his thinly protected self-regard. Unable to rationalise his betrayal at the *Patna*, the jump becomes the catalyst for the collapse of Jim's world, a prelude to its disintegration. "There is no way out or round or through" (Wells, 2006); for Jim, the age of innocence is over. In the face of such a catastrophe, it is comprehensible that Jim, tormented by his wounded ego, interprets his physical descent from the *Patna* as a free fall from heaven to hell: "There was no going back. It was as if I had jumped into a well – into an everlasting deep hole" (Conrad 1968, p. 68). In their metaphorical likeness, Tony Tanner (1991) applies Jim's physical alighting from the *Patna* to the biblical Fall.

Indeed, after the leap, Jim becomes Adam, “the man without history” (Erdinast-Vulcan 1991, p. 43). The fallen thus would embark on a lonely journey laden with doubts and endless self-examinations. As an attempt to comb through Jim’s predicament and thus understand his resultant self-imposed exile, Conrad deploys two forms of inquiries: the official interrogation that takes place in the court of the law, and the unofficial one, led by Marlow, in the court of conscience. More precisely, designed to preach the value of codes of conduct, the intention of the former is, technically speaking, to define and also to condemn the superficial “what” of Jim’s failure. In its function to be the arbiter of right and wrong, the court of law is transformed into a theatre where a moral play could be performed. The latter, with Marlow as its sympathetic arbitrator and Jim its unfortunate offender, seeks to resolve the fundamental “why” of human frailty.

Judged against the inflexible standard of his own adopted code, Jim’s failing is irredeemable and he an unmitigated disaster. Reflecting upon his desertion of duty, like Razumov in *Under Western Eyes*, Jim is kept restless by a bruised conscience. Prior to the official inquiry, which gives Jim an opportunity for expressing repentance, Jim “had spoken to no one, but had held silent, incoherent, and endless converse with himself, like a prisoner alone in his cell or like a wayfarer lost in a wilderness” (Conrad 1968, p. 20). The public inquiry into the *Patna* is staged to exercise the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct, demanding confession and retribution from the offender. In the court of law, Jim offers himself up to honour the communal need to redress the wrongdoing. The court of law provides Jim with a chance to demonstrate his commitment to the common code and pay his due respect to the authorities; nevertheless, in his insistence on standing trial, Jim literally invites the public to scrutinise the code of conduct for seamen.

In an attempt to preserve the ethical conduct from the public exposure, Brierly, one of the judges who sit on Jim’s trial, offers Jim a chance to “clear out” before the official inquiry takes place. “If he went away, all this would stop at once” (Conrad 1968, p. 41), Brierly explains to Marlow. When the proposal is turned down by Marlow, with anguish, Brierly specifies another solution to Jim’s predicament “Well, then, let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there! By heaven! I would”. Widely respected as the pillar of the society that exemplifies the strict codes of conduct, Brierly represents the barometer of public opinion. His remarks on Jim presumably echo the collective verdict. Brierly embodies the invisible “eyes of others” as described by the French lieutenant. In essence, the internalised apprehension of opprobrium constitutes a compass for moral behaviour. No one can run, and no one can hide. But whilst the society requires mutual responsibility and solidarity to glue the elements together, the courses of individual actions all have unique trajectories and consequences. However, in his blissful ignorance hitherto, Brierly does not hesitate to cast the first stone that seals Jim’s fate.

Effectively, the experience of standing trial over the *Patna* incident actualises Jim’s fear of being a moral outcast as he sits on the receiving end of collective wrath. Such a traumatic event can serve as a cathartic happening for both the society at large and the offender. Jim might well be entitled to feel that he has “paid back” the moral community with public humiliation. Unfortunately, his pride, his egotistical self-image would not allow him off the hook after such a gesture. By carrying with him the scar of moral disgrace, ironically, Jim appears to reclaim the idealistic ground in that he exceeds the society’s expectation of the outcast. He has certainly earned Marlow’s sympathy, through whose progressive narration, readers probe into the Jim’s innermost thoughts, seeking an understanding of the fundamental “why” of Jim’s shattered heroism.

Filtered through the lenses of social and ethical code, Marlow becomes positive that “the inquiry was a severe punishment to that Jim, and that his facing it – practically of his own free will – was a redeeming feature in his abominable case” (Conrad 1968, p. 42). In his willingness to bare his shame in public, Jim demonstrates no shortage of ethical aspirations. Consequently, despite all his flaws, Marlow awards Jim moral acquittal, insisting that “the real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind, and from that point of view [Jim] was no mean traitor” (Conrad 1968, p. 95). Marlow’s leniency towards Jim is obvious; perhaps, to Marlow’s mind, the desertion of duty for a seaman is all too human.

Consciously or unconsciously, Marlow’s detailed depiction of Jim’s battle for moral redemption shapes Jim in the mode of a prototypical spiritual hero. As his narration of Jim unfolds, Marlow invites us to observe Jim’s metamorphosis from a romantic idealist into a wounded wanderer who, despite his gallant efforts in redeeming himself, has no hope of evading his past. In an attempt to find a practical solution to Jim’s predicament, Marlow seeks advice from Stein, the man whom he believes to be as idealistic as Jim.

Stein is renowned for his study of Entomology: he collects beetles. Stein's understanding in human nature can thus be translated into the two species he collects: the beautiful creature of butterfly that embodies idealism which man forever pursues, and the mundane beetle that symbolises man's aptness for survival (Tanner, 1991; Panagopoulos, 1998). Observing the spectacle of life from his study where "the might of nature and the seductive corruption of men" cannot obtrude, Stein, oracle-like, articulates his world-view through his famed collection of butterflies and beetles (Conrad 1968, p. 27). Unlike flawless creatures such as butterfly, man, though he may be "amazing", is not "a masterpiece" (Conrad 1968, p. 127). Whilst in Stein's opinion that "a man that is born falls into a dream like a man falls into the sea" and "[i]f he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns" (Conrad 1968, p. 130), he nevertheless believes that romantic dreams to be a sustaining power in life.

Stein holds the view that both the quest for the ideal and the complacent acceptance of the real are potentially destructive, but that one must immerse oneself in the destructive element if one is truly to live. Whatever the result of a dream may bring, it invariably reveals the fundamental discrepancy between illusion and reality. A veteran dreamer like Stein recognises the appalling incongruity of life – that man's dreams may not be attainable, and yet he must forever dream (Stevenson, 1992). Such a tension is certainly not helped by the flawed nature of mankind, the way we typically live, as Marlow describes it: "It's extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it's just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome" (Conrad 1968, p. 87). As for Jim, since he has already decided to dedicate his life entirely to the course of romantic heroism, the practical solution to his dilemma is therefore not "how to get cured" from this decision but, as Stein puts it, "how to live" accordingly, no matter where this romantic heroism leads him. The remedy Stein prescribes is for Jim to follow his romantic yet unpractical dream of heroism: "The way is to the destructive element submit yourself" (Conrad 1968, p. 130), says Stein, and "To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream".

Regarding the question of "how to live", obviously, Jim has pledged his allegiance to romantic heroism. Indeed, the event of *Patna* haunts Jim not because he was forced to confront his inferior qualities as a seaman, but because he had been waiting for the opportunity to prove his superiority. All Jim believes he needs was a second chance to fulfil his ambitions. As an admirer, Stein offers Jim exactly that – the chance to recapture his dream of heroism, to redeem himself, both as an individual and as a member of the community (Panagopoulos, 1998). Jim is, therefore, sent to Patusan, after wandering from port to port, and being chased everywhere by the echoes of a past which he dares not face. Thus in the second part of the novel, we are going to witness Jim's rise and fall in Patusan.

By being catapulted out of the European community acquainted with his disgrace and immersing himself in the remote settlement of Patusan, Jim leaves "his earthly failings behind him and what sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon" (Conrad 1968, p. 133). Embraced by thirty miles of the tropical forest, Patusan is one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth. Once Jim gets into such a place, "it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed" (Conrad 1968, 142). Without the long-standing protocols and orderly political structures of civilisation that he had left behind, yet brimming with the raw materials for him to impose moral standards which fulfil his own identity, Patusan is an ideal place for Jim's second chance (Schwarz, 1980). In this secluded haven appointed by Stein and Marlow, Jim rebuilds his life and reinstates his already crushed romantic idealism. The legend of the second chance is then re-enacted by Jim, as he carries forward his heroic dream beneath the surface of his disgrace.

He wins the battle over Sherif Ali and defeats Rajah Allang's dictatorial regime by forming an alliance with Doramin, the Bugis leader of Celebes. "Loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero" (Conrad 1968, p. 106), Jim is to become Tuan Jim, the one whose authority and honour are never questioned. This hard-earned title is an indication of Jim's success in his second chance, but more profoundly, it confirms his heroic self-identity. After years of restless wandering in search of atonement and self-fulfilment, in the remote settlement of Patusan, it seems that Jim finally redeems himself, realising his idealism and becoming, "in his own eyes the equal of the impeccable men who never fall out of ranks" (Conrad 1968, p. 239). Jim, who was once a moral cripple, triumphantly transforms himself into a saviour figure, a lawgiver, a standard bearer, and more ironically, a moral cornerstone upon which the native community of Patusan is to base its hero-worship (Haugh, 1992). In the light of his legendary achievement in Patusan, Marlow reckons that Jim "seem[s] to have come very near at last to mastering his fate".

Indeed, with the moral victory Jim achieves in Patusan, which contributes to the reinstatement of his romantic self-image, it seems that chasm between Jim's illusions and realities finally ceases to exist, and his inner and outer worlds at last come to a unity. However, in a true Conradian fashion, the arrival of a craved-for moral victory often proves to be transient and illusory. Indeed, Jim's dreams do seem to have come to true in Patusan, albeit they prove to be short-lived. As Jim styles himself in his latest incarnation, acquiring a new name and carving out a new identity, the idealism he deludes himself with needs only the tiniest pebble to rob off its gloss.

The dilemmas to the new existence Jim conducts in Patusan is that, even though he seems to have redeemed himself by becoming Lord Jim, he "still carries the dark knowledge of his own fallible humanity within" (Stevenson, 1992). His effort to share his criminal past with Jewel can thus be viewed as an effort to bridge his past outside of Patusan and his present. The fact that Jewel refuses to accept the knowledge that Jim is "not good enough", first from Jim himself and later from Marlow, indicates not just the amount of respect Jim has earned but also the depth of his predicament. Once he has moulded himself in the shape of a romantic hero and his audience has refused to admit anything less, as Richard Stevenson (1992) suggests, he is "left with the delicate task of maintaining what he himself acknowledges to be an illusion". On such an image, Jim has gambled his second life. He has no way out, and he cannot negotiate his exit. So, at the pinnacle of his reputation, with the arrival of Gentleman Brown, Jim is to suffer another cruel trick of destiny.

It is Jim's disgrace that impels him to sympathise with Gentleman Brown, a deserter and gun smuggler who comes to Patusan. There are some obvious resemblances between Jim and Brown. Both men are white, adventurous sailors who find themselves confined in a territory far away from home. Yet the most significant similarity between them is the crucial fact that they are both expelled – voluntarily in Jim's circumstances, compulsorily in Brown's case – by the same world. Band of brothers, they come to identify with each other, as might be expected, by virtue of blood, profession and shared guilt. But on closer inspection, despite their noticeable likeness, they in fact represent two sides of humanity, "standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind" (Conrad 1968, p. 232). More precisely, while Jim is personified as the butterfly in Stein's assortment for virtues he is gifted with, Brown's criminal past makes him an incarnation of the beetles that Stein also collects. The contrast between them cannot be exaggerated.

When Marlow refers to Jim repeatedly as "one of us", he recognises in Jim the fellowship of a society that is governed by the concepts of honour and fidelity, yet making allowance for the intrinsic flaws of humanity. Brown, however, undermines Marlow's term of confidence by implying that the solidarity between him and Jim is based solely upon "common experience of guilt and secret knowledge" (Conrad 1968, p. 235). The meeting between them is thus highly charged with tension. While Brown recounts his criminal past in the hope of confirming the brotherhood between himself and Jim, his narration, ironically, reminds Jim of the reason for his solitude. In Brown's recital of his shameful history, Jim is obliged to revisit his own tormented progress from virtuous to shameful, and his beautifully reinstated self-image is therefore compromised.

The conversation Brown exchanges with Jim thus begins with an insinuation about the dark path they both have trekked upon. They are no angels, but condemned outcasts who are forced to seek breathing-space outside the community of their own: "I won't ask you what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings. That's your luck ..." (Conrad 1968, p. 233). Brown's words point to the fine line that differentiates Jim and himself, the good-intentioned self-exile and the condemned desperado (Gurko, 1965). Brown presents the perspective that there is no inherent divide between the good and the evil, and people are the passive effects of events that have been thrust upon them. By such a rationale, no one needs to accept responsibilities when things go wrong. Everything is down to luck. Those poor, luckless souls are merely the scapegoats lynched by society in order to maintain a façade of orderliness.

Reasoning as such not only excuses Brown's wrongdoings, it also provides an escape route for Jim, a tailored-made bridge that alleviates his anxieties of a possible home-coming. With his ideal image of himself deeply rooted in idealistic imagination, Jim has little resistance to Brown's apparent embrace. Under the attractive mask of brotherhood, Gentleman Brown opens up the prospect of a confessional conversation, a conversation that has been eluding Jim. In return, by offering Brown a second chance, an exit from Patusan, Jim believes that he has given the fallen brother something that he himself was fortunately granted by Marlow and Stein: an opportunity for redemption, a real bond of brotherhood.

Taken at the face value, Jim's decision of sparing Brown appears to honour the kinship Brown intends him to accept. By permitting Brown a safe exit, Jim's moral integrity thus remains intact (Gurko, 1965). Yet it is actually his intention to resume the ruptured link between himself and the "home world" from which he is banished and to which he has always longed to return. Jim, an exilic son, believes that "home" is finally within reach. When the news of Dain Waris' death arrives, Jim realises that he has once again missed his chance and this time, by unwittingly sending Dain Waris, a subordinate and a friend, to his death, he is to cast into the role of Cain, the prototypical sinner and wanderer. Cornered, humiliated and lost, Jim proffers his own life to compensate for a fatal error of judgment. His sojourn in Patusan therefore comes to an abrupt end. Having "retreated from one world for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruin upon his head" (Conrad 1968, p. 248), Jim knows only one way to take up his responsibility. The long trail of evasion, the trade-off between time and distance, on which he relies so much for a breathing space, no longer seems viable. Jim "had decided to defy the disaster in the only way it occurred to him such a disaster could be defied" (Conrad 1968, p. 248). By stepping out and taking up the responsibility of other people's lives, Jim surrenders himself to the scaffold. The rope, a la Nietzsche, has stretched too far. And Jim slips one time too many. So he must expire. Such is his moral obligation towards the people of Patusan, who had entrusted their faith in his leadership.

Admittedly, Jim's decision in offering his own life is the ultimate gesture of atonement and provides a moment of self-transfiguration consistent with his heroic fantasy. The scene itself is moving, but enormously theatrical. Even in a dire situation as such, the courage Jim exhibits amounts to a performance. Jim's "moment of beauty", his "proud and unflinching glance" from right and left, argues Stevenson, is "preserved and becomes a legend in the collective memory of his audience, but he himself must cease to exist in the process" (Stevenson 1992, 234). If Jim's confrontation with Doramin is Christ-like in his recognition of human fallibility, it must also be remembered that it might also be an action derived from the flamboyant heroism of the light literature that he is described as reading at the outset. Nevertheless, by offering himself up, Jim is to become a martyr to his own cult of heroism. But what is inside his apparently indestructible beliefs? Is it the sweet hope of home-coming, as described by Marlow?

We return to face our superiors, our kindred, our friends – those whom we obey, and those who we love; but even they who have neither, the most free, lonely, irresponsible and bereft of ties, - even those for whom home holds no dear face, no familiar voice, - even they have to meet the spirit that dwells within the land, under its sky, in its air, in its valleys, and on its rises, in its fields, in its waters and its trees – a mute friend, judge, and inspirer. Say what you like, to get its joy, to breathe its peace, to face its truth, one must return with a clear consciousness ... But the fact remains that you must touch your reward with clean hands, lest it turn to dead leaves, to thorns, in your grasp (Conrad 1968, pp. 135-136). Can Jim ever plausibly clean his hands? He must quietly wonder what his father would be thinking.

Marlow closes his recollection of Jim's epic journey towards destruction with the verdict:

He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side (Conrad 1968, p. 253).

Like a bashful Eastern bride, the chance to win eminence did come, although indirectly, to Jim, even as again Jim's false idealism delivers him to a crushing defeat. Like Gatsby, Jim "had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it" (Fitzgerald, 1992). But he did not know that "it was already behind him". Unlike *Heart of Darkness*, we are not consoled with a story of moral victory in *Lord Jim*. Jim remains at the end veiled and inscrutable, and the novel closes in an interrogative voice: "Is he satisfied – quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us – and have I not stood up once, like an evoked host, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all?" (Conrad 1968, p. 253) Proud, heroic, yet obviously flawed, Jim appeals not only to the bright side of humanity, but also to the dark, "to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge" (Conrad 1968, p. 57).

He is “one of us” by Marlow’s definition. But does Jim define himself as “one of these”? Despite the extraordinary journey he commences in order to achieve eminence, after all, he is “merely the human being”. To the end he is faithful only to his ideal image of himself. He is indeed deeply flawed – overtly narcissistic in his self-regard and quite ready to forgive himself (Berthoud, 1978). Ironically, it is in his desperation to open a meaningful conversation with someone he believes to be on the same boat that eventually brings his final downfall. Imprisoned by his enforced silence, he is dying to talk.

In his “Author’s Note” to *Lord Jim*, Conrad paints a picture of his hero with reference to human solidarity:

My Jim is not a type of wide commonness. But I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He is not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by – appealing – significant – under a cloud – perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was “one of us”.

Implied in this authorial statement is that, despite the fact that Jim is “under a cloud”, he is very much “one of us” and, accordingly, should not be seen and treated as an outsider. This perfectly silent creature keeps his profound reticence because he has sinned and is therefore in no position to defend himself. As an attempt to converse with Jim, Conrad sets up Marlow to ponder, to query, to surmise and to summarise, as he did with Kurtz. This humanistic sympathiser guides the readers through the protagonist’s difficulties, and in the process, to recognise the chance encounters and the irreversible forces that test his mettle. Bestowed with all the essential ingredients of a moral tragedy, *Lord Jim* is a modern allegory of man’s struggle at the crossroads of self-belief, absurdity, exile and redemption. Jim may have never arrived at his promised land, the land where he would have made his lasting fame and glory. But in choosing to follow through his dreams and eventually dying for the pursuit, it is his journey of silent defiance and heroic quest that Conrad lays out as the true making of Lord Jim.

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