

Joseph Conrad: Lord Jim

The richness of incident and cosmopolitan spirit of Conrad's writing based on perfect harmony of character, setting, narrative technique and variations of the theme have been analysed over and over again. One aspect that still seems to offer new perspectives in our attempts to fully understand and interpret Conrad's art is not restricted purely to his early modernist achievement, but it feeds also on the socio-political and historical environment and the moral-critical statements as dominant factors in the very progression and regression of the plot in *Lord Jim*.

In this paper I argue that Conrad's *Lord Jim* is a masterpiece representative of the dilemmas of the turn of the century, and there is no 'fault line' between the Patna and the Patusan sections of the novel. My intention is to prove that the Patusan section is an altered projection of a myth formulated at the very beginning of the novel, and thus it is as valuable as the other sections of the novel. I also argue that in spite of its often criticised romantic quality, or perhaps precisely by virtue of its romantic implications, the Patusan section contributes to the modernist qualities of the book. I also hope to convince those Commonwealth critics who accuse Conrad of racism, that the return to the 'primitive' world in the Patusan section is based on a different concept, it is rather an expression of the necessity of "solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts"¹ and stems from "Conrad's conviction that: there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away"² than an expression of covert racism.

In *Lord Jim* Conrad recalls and reshapes Christian mythology to chart the mental landscape of a perplexed Victorian hero. The son of Imperial Britain, the

¹The Nigger of the Narcissus, xii

²Almayer's Folly, viii

'civilised' man returns to a 'primitive' state. Patusan that can be equated with the Garden of Eden, where Jim could chieve purity, could return to primeval innocence. The question is whether he can assume and maintain this idyllic state or he is subject to decline and loses the possibility to start again. At this point I rely on Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, who identifies two proto-texts, or identi-fictions underlying the novel. The question formulated above can be comprehensively dealt with only against the more general late Victorian context. The remote countries that were ruled by the British or other European nations were not only mostly populated by people who were entirely different, but for many thinkers of the Victorian period they seemed to offer a glimpse into the past of Europeanism, 'civilisation' itself. The paradox of being prejudiced about the very roots of 'civilisation' was extremely disturbing. Yet, in the context of the European faced with his own European past in a remote country this is a paradoxical situation. The attempt is as absurd and impossible as the Time Traveller's in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, who cannot change the past of the world either in a moment projected thousands of years in the future, or when returning to the past of that future moment, which happens to be his present. Destiny, or rather history cannot be changed under the given conditions in spite of the knowledge, the understanding of the Time Traveller, even though the novel happens to be science-fiction. History cannot be reversed and the European trying to impose his modern concepts onto 'primitive' cultures is doomed to fail. It is, after all, an attempt to return to an earlier stage of historical past, his own history, and change it so as to amend his present.

Cultural assumptions regarding European 'civilisation' are simultaneously challenged and reinforced in the late nineteenth century by various writers belonging to different nations, the basis for this challenge being the value-laden ideas regarding the dialectic between the 'primitive' and 'civilised' cultures in that century. Conrad and his contemporaries, most eminently Henry James among them, are trying to understand their own selves, their country better, by travelling to other countries. This distancing process is necessary because they consider the proximity of the mother country disturbing and distorting. Even so, sometimes they find themselves faced with two unknown countries. Their efforts at understanding and bridging conceptual gaps are witness to the growth of a dynamic intellectual climate in the nineteenth century. The assumptions and scientific discoveries of the age bring about a totally different interpretation of the universe but fail to comprehensively interpret the social, cultural and political changes they have brought about. Bridging conceptual divides is a recurring question in Conrad's

writing. Certainly it is not only Conrad who recognises the difficulties of such transcultural endeavours. "Even D. H. Lawrence, who believed in the possibility of assimilating 'primitive' culture, in his essay on Melville expressed doubt that transcultural assimilation was possible or desirable: The truth of the matter is one cannot go back. Some men can: renegade. [...] There are other peoples, these savages. One does not despise them. One does not feel superior. But there is a gulf in time and being."³ For many Victorians the idea of going back had a well determined meaning, it meant to abandon the acquisitions of 'civilisation' and face the risk of degeneration. From the Congo to Borneo, from South America to Malaysia, Conrad confronted his characters with the conflicts generated by the contacts between the so called primitives and the European peoples. Conrad was himself a notable cultural émigré and his early writings express an anxiety that such cross-cultural contacts would prove dangerous to the members of each society. His Europeans are not able to maintain their cultural identities, or sometimes their 'civilised' reactions lead to disaster in the 'alien' cultures they have to face.

The dilemma formulated by Conrad regarding the regression or progression alongside with the portrayal of the 'civilising' mission in Africa, South America or Malaysia challenged some of the false portraits of the Victorian era as a too self-confident one, which: "For many of its adherents [...] was a compelling set of beliefs precisely because it seemed to express their interests clearly and rationally. It was good to be British and on the top of the world, the member of the most enlightened, progressive, civilised race in history ..."⁴ But Britain in the late Victorian period had its doubts and Conrad's works are also an expression of the late Victorian crisis of faith in cultural advancement although he is certainly not only a critic of the illusion of progress and superiority of his age. "Conrad's intentions can be best illustrated by his words: The only basis for creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so dangerous - so full of hope."⁵

Conrad's experience is based on an awareness of the plight of the perpetual border-dweller himself: "Both at sea and on land my point of view is English, from which the conclusion should not be drawn that I have become an Englishman. That is not the case. Homo duplex has in my case more than one meaning."⁶ It seems that

³Lawrence, 51-2

⁴Brantlinger, 14

⁵Conrad, Letter of 2 August 1901

⁶Najder, 240

Conrad is particularly interested in the myth of the 'civilised' man in the 'primitive' world and the agonies brought about by the imminent duality of the situation. We shouldn't forget that in Conrad's time, the 'primitive' occupied an ambiguous place as both the domain of contemporary 'savages' as well as the reminder of the past of Europe itself. Thus the Conradian hero is searching back into the most remote past for an image of himself, and the Victorian society he comes from.

Marlow, Conrad's narrator in *Lord Jim* explores the limits and limitations of the European, and implicitly British society itself, as well as the boundaries between self and society, self and culture respectively. But the 'prehistoric' world Jim jumps into fails to be entirely intelligible for him. Jim's attempt is accompanied by a double sense of dislocation in Patusan since he is the white man who 'went native', but under strain instinctively acts as a white man and ignores the dictates of the 'primitive' reality that seem to have remained for him unknown and alien. In the Patusan section mystery stands for the remoteness of the Garden of Eden for the turn of the century and it generates a predictable end for a young man starting from a pious, quiet parsonage. The collapse of the myths which had postulated the existence of God, the transcendental authority of the moral order, the privileged position of man within the natural and social scheme, has turned him into a victim of his own desires and consciousness. Jim cannot understand the present, or the ways of Imperial Britain, so he decides to surrender to the 'primitive' world of Patusan, reminiscent of the beginnings of the history of his race, which he is tempted to believe he can understand and master. The situation is full of paradoxical elements, but clearly fits into the context of Conrad's idea of the 'primitive' world and the flow of the novel. Jim steps over the edge of Colonial Britain and of his race, but does not shed his 'white' instincts. His aim is to escape the world that in spite of all its earlier promises could not acquit him of his guilt. He virtually jumps into the unknown. Marlow clearly records the situation: "Neither Stein nor I had a clear conception of what might be on the other side when we, metaphorically speaking, took him up and hove him over the wall with scant ceremony."⁷ When Jim enters Patusan, he makes a leap into the unknown. In *Lord Jim* Marlow, in his correspondence with the privileged man seems to identify 'the white man's burden' in a definite feeling of superiority. This feeling of superiority is not virtually granted to Conrad's characters and is subject to doubt in *Lord Jim* as well: "You said that 'that kind of thing' was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially your own, in whose name

⁷Lord Jim, 229

are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress [...] You said also - I call to mind - that 'giving your life up to them' (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) 'was like selling your soul to a brute.'⁸ Paradoxically, the privileged man suggests to Marlow that the white man must maintain an identification with his own race while he serves the interests of other people. The 'white man's burden' is clearly stated in the case of Jim, but self-sacrifice is not the only cause determining Jim's presence in Patusan. In Conrad's fiction the 'primitive' world is the mysterious land, where past and present meet, the 'civilised' world is tested against the 'primitive' world and this mysterious challenge seems to purport mythical overtones.

When Conrad is trying to provide a comprehensive interpretation of men and the world, character, setting, narrative technique, variations of the theme are supported by mythical implications. The plot of *Lord Jim*, for example is subject to progression and regression through the mythical reformulation of the dilemmas stemming from the socio-political and historical environment and the moral critical statements that determine Jim's career. Conrad insists on the necessity of reflecting reality without losing on artistic and moral requirements when he writes that: "The danger lies in the writer becoming the victim of his own exaggeration, losing the exact notion of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt for his purpose - as, in fact, not good enough for his emotion."⁹ In order to avoid this danger and still maintain his right to personal emotion, Conrad engages a kind of natural detachment. His detachment can be considered natural, since he remained all his life a Continental gentleman who was no doubt extremely devoted to the country that had adopted him. Conrad respects and admires the country that adopted him; nevertheless, he is in possession of a natural detachment prior to his British citizenship. His experience is illustrative of the frustrations of a smaller nation being 'civilised' by an empire convinced of its superiority. The British Empire, though its methods are different, has similar ambitions to civilise the natives populating the British Colonies. To express the 'truth itself' requires adequate technical refinement if the artist does not want to 'lose the exact notion of sincerity'. This in part could explain the complexity of his narrative filters and handling of chronology. Conrad's choice of the narrative technique allows for the integration of the objective and the subjective, of the socio-historical and the imaginative, of the modernist and the traditional in the same fictional material. It

⁸Lord Jim, 239

⁹A Personal Record, 16-7

offers solutions representative of the dilemmas of the modern English novel. The characteristic narrative distance of *Lord Jim* becomes the expression of the moral, psychological, social and historical problems that contribute to formulating the philosophical issues of the book, based on the failure of myth (The Cornwall myth of loyalty and honesty; the Victorian myth of Britain as the omnipotent and benevolent mother country governed by a will to bring the colonies up to the European level of 'civilisation'; the myth of the revisited Garden of Eden; the failure of the myths which had postulated the existence of God) and the alienation problems it causes. The disrupted chronology allows for the free handling of the concept of time, of personal and 'public' history. It certainly is not sufficient to say that Jim's story is illustrative of what happens to innocent, naive people in a world where there are at least two realities at work. This could sound like an oversimplification. In the context of Colonial Britain we have to cope with the official version - quite explicitly dealt with by Conrad - which stresses the importance and positive role played by the exponents of the 'civilised' world in the lives of the 'primitive' peoples of Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Conrad was very much aware of the pernicious effects of the alterations brought about by the otherwise - in some respects - socially and economically positive changes in these areas. It was not Conrad's intention to analyse these changes; instead he focused on the moral aspects of Victorian Britain. The story of the Patna (chapters 1-21) has the effect of extreme ethical relativism and through this, in many critics' understanding, it formulates the open-endedness of the moral dilemmas in the first part of the novel. Jim is the exponent of the officially declared principles of honesty, fidelity and humanism of Victorian Britain, and acts accordingly. He does not want to give up his ideals and is ready to face the board of inquiry. He wants to pay for his 'jump' from the Patna. But the court, the inquiry cannot put an end to his 'case.' Jim insists on the ideals his home provided him with, but the end of the first section does not offer him any valid solutions to his dilemmas. Jim is wandering from port to port hoping that he can discard his sense of guilt, regain his confidence in men and the Almighty. The first section of the novel does not formulate answers to his questions. He can only share his sense of guilt with Marlow. The meanness and cowardice of the captain and his crew, the hypocritical arrogance of the board of inquiry, the tacit acknowledging of his guilt by the white men who provide him with a job, all seem to convince him that he does not belong to that world. It also seems one of the main interests of the novel whether, in the case of Jim, self-knowledge is, or can be acquired. This approach brings about the idea that the only

alternative for Jim seems to be to search for another world. Thomas C. Moser defines Conrad's ethic in *Lord Jim* as founded on the principles of fidelity, stoic humanism, and solidarity with the community in a universe that had lost faith in the Almighty.¹⁰ Jim hopes to get access to this lost world, but outside Britain. *Lord Jim* refers to Colonial Britain, but it never reaches Britain itself, except through the narrator Marlow, and in reference to Jim's childhood and adolescence. Conrad refers to the parsonage that provides Jim with lofty ideals, and to his readings that shape him into a romantic, and even foreshadows Jim's inability to act. The Patna sailing under a white captain also stands for Britain, as does the board of inquiry. The route of the hero shows an attempt to quit the limits of 'civilisation'. This signifies an attempt to break free, to achieve independence that could allow for absolution from Jim's sense of guilt. After the Patna incident followed by the trial Jim does not hesitate to start East. He only stops in Patusan, where he seems to have found peace. As Goonetilleke puts it: "In selecting Eastern milieu, Conrad gave himself the opportunity to show people that they did not know enough about life, certainly, not as much or as deep as he did." "And Goonetilleke does not hesitate to state that: This does not relate only to matters specific to the Eastern context, but to issues important to the Western world and general issues as well."¹¹ The validity of this statement is supported by the mythical implications of the Patusan section.

The last station of Jim's search for a place, a world that could offer him the opportunity to get rid of his sense of shame and guilt and achieve stability of the self, is Patusan. Interestingly enough, he does not go home to try and find reconciliation with the 'civilised' world and himself. The distinct polarity between his dreams and the facts forces him to choose exile. Going farther East Jim follows a scenario intended to single him out. The setting supports a shift from the 'civilised' world to a 'primitive' one, a return to the Garden of Eden. Jim tries to reinstate the moral order under which man has a privileged position postulated by God. The 'civilised' world proves to be inadequate for a romantic young man. He can not handle the difference between his dreams and his abilities and finds himself perplexed in front of the incredible gap between the declared moral and ethical codes of the 'civilised' world and the hypocrisy it is imbibed with.

Jim 'revolts' against the spiritual and ethical illness of the modern world and opts for a desperate attempt to defeat it by regression to a 'primitive' world reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. For Patusan is an idyllic if not altogether ideal

¹⁰Moser, 10-49

¹¹Goonetilleke, 13

setting for Jim, where the moral principles declared seem to be applicable to everyday conduct. In *Patusan* Jim is driven by his ambition to prove mainly to himself that he is capable of good deeds, of heroic attitude, but the impossibility of the task becomes obvious as he creates a kind of state instantly from the initial trade Stein sent him there for.

Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan notes: "The 'meaning' of the (first part of the novel) is [...] constructed as the Absence of Meaning, the invalidation of the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical certainties."¹² Jim does not attempt to identify with the factual norms of the 'civilised' world; he attempts to move as far from that world as to reduce it to nothing. While he is adrift, the stations of his journey East show their meanings only to have them questioned and put aside by the young man. The gradual 'regression' from the 'civilised' world into the 'primitive' one can easily be supported simply by tracing Jim's route.

The first recognisable setting is the parsonage, Jim's home environment which "had stood there for centuries, but the trees around probably remembered the laying of the first stone. Below, the red front of the rectory gleamed with a warm tint in the midst of grass plots, flower-beds, and fir-trees, with an orchard at the back, a paved stable-yard to the left, and the sloping glass of the greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks."¹³ The setting of Jim's childhood and adolescence emanates a sense of everlasting peace and stability. Its naiveté, its decency and its faith are representative of light and order, fulfilling all the requirements of an ideal home. The second relevant setting is the ill-famed ship, the *Patna*, which is a floating coffin. Its rusty deck is a perfect stage for testing the strength or weakness of the moral principles and codes provided by Jim's home-environment. The *Patna* incident is also illustrative of the inability of the 'civilised' world to feel responsible for the 'primitive' world. It is illustrative of the vast and amoral world of imperialism. The panic of the white crew leads to the abandonment of the 'primitive' pilgrims to what they think in the moment of their escape to be sure, unavoidable death. The *Patna* that is towed by the French ship into the Eastern port 'torpedoes' the sense of superiority of the white officialities. The incident is scandalous primarily because it suggests in a sense the moral superiority of the pilgrims whom the captain referred to as 'cattle.' In the moment of crisis on the *Patna* Jim thinks of the Muslim Malay pilgrims and cuts loose the lifeboats whereas the other officers are completely indifferent to their passengers. The way the other officers try to save

¹²Erdinast-Vulcan, 35

¹³Lord Jim, 2

their skins, points up the grossness of their betrayal of their professional code and normal ethics. Jim always distinguishes himself from 'them', the other officers, but the fact remains that he jumps into their lifeboat. The cowardice and the lack of the least sense of responsibility of the captain of the Patna and his officers is disgusting, but under the conditions is acknowledged as necessary by the members of the board of inquiry. Jim cannot, does not want to avoid the trial, hoping that an honest and detailed testimony could absolve him of his sense of guilt and shame. The result is a disaster for Jim. At the official inquiry held in the police court of the Eastern port all they want to hear from him are facts. He is not given the possibility to express his thoughts, the very essence of his and their tragedy: "He stood elevated in the witness-box, with burning cheeks in a cool lofty room: the big framework of punkahs moved gently to and fro high above his head, and from below many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, white faces, out of red faces, out of faces attentive, spell-bound, as if all these people sitting in orderly rows upon narrow benches had been enslaved by the fascination of his voice."¹⁴ The 'fascination' is generated by his willingness to attend the inquiry, while virtually all the other members of the crew have vanished. But the white community feels uneasy at the idea of a white officer being judged in the presence of the 'primitive' audience. Big Brierly, the English captain on the board of inquiry even offers to bribe Jim to withdraw from the court. The 'civilised' world is not ready to take the blame for the betrayal of the moral and ethical codes of the officers, and is certainly opposed to discussing the real moral and psychological implications of the case in a courtroom crowded with members of the 'inferior' race.

D. Erdinast Vulcan claims that the trial marks the end of Jim's initial identification which was the Stevensonian adventure story and explains the 'problematic structural shift' of the novel, the much criticised transition from the story of the Patna to the story of Patusan through Jim's choice of the heroic prototext of the Patusan episode. Erdinast-Vulcan reaches the conclusion that: "By moving to Patusan, Jim becomes part of another story, as it were. This new identification, which is closely modelled on the heroic epic, offers him a new context of psychological and ethical orientation. He turns away from the individualised ethos of modernity, the 'ghostly freedom of choice', offered by the multiplicity of voices in the first part of the story, towards the heroic mythical narrative, a fictional genre which is predicated on the ethos of community."¹⁵ Jim's attitude in the courtroom,

¹⁴Lord Jim, 7

¹⁵Erdinast-Vulcan, 40

has already predicted his insistence on the authority of the moral order postulated by the existence of God. Patusan seems to be the mythological world, a world born out of Jim's desires and the 'ignorance' of its inhabitants (that is they are not contaminated by the ills of Western civilisation), where nature seems to be the expression of human existence. Patusan is dominated by a conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart; the idyllic setting literally opens up for Jim, granting him the protective shields of the hills, besides the distance from the 'civilised' world. This seems the perfect world for Jim, but he instinctively attempts to master it as if it were a world of his own creation: " On the third day after the full, the moon, as seen from the open space in front of Jim's house [...] rose exactly behind these hills, it diffused light at first throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disc [...] appeared gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated above the summits, as if escaping from the yawning grave in gentle triumph.

'Wonderful effect,' said Jim by my side. 'Worth seeing..Is it not?'

And this question was put with a note of personal pride that made me smile, as though he had a hand in regulating that unique spectacle. He had regulated so many things in Patusan! Things that would have appeared so much beyond his control as the notions of the moon and the stars!"¹⁶ The inhabitants of Patusan consider Jim to be a kind of deity and he himself seems to accept this mythical version of himself.

Many critics considered the story of Patusan (chapters 24-45) a failure. F. R. Leavis dismisses *Lord Jim*, saying that it: "does not deserve the position of pre-eminence among Conrad's works often assigned to it, because, as he puts it: The presentment in *Lord Jim* in the first part of the book, the account of the inquiry and of the desertion of the Patna, the talk with the French lieutenant - these are good Conrad. But the romance that follows, though possibly offered as a continued exhibition of Jim's case, has no inevitability as that; nor does it develop or enrich the central interest, which consequently, eked out to provide the substance of a novel comes to seem decidedly thin"¹⁷ Leavis manages to identify 'the doubt' as the 'central theme of the book', but cannot see the plurality of convergent elements defining the theme of the novel. Jim's ideals are destroyed by the 'civilised' world, but he is not defeated. He is looking for a new identity and this new identity requires a different environment. This is why he attempts to move to a 'primitive' world. As we have already stated the crucial stations of Jim's tragedy are clearly

¹⁶Lord Jim, 203

¹⁷Leavis, 218

marked by Conrad's choice of the setting. On the Patna he openly betrays the norms of the seamen when 'jumping' into the lifeboat of the white officers he despises. The circumstances are complicated since after violating the seaman's, the gentleman's and public school codes he is brave. He is the only officer of the Patna not to dodge the official inquiry which is an act of moral courage. Jim tries to be different from the other officers. This attempt certainly isolates him from those who don't think too much about the Patna affair, that is the 'civilised' world.

Jim chooses a 'primitive' society in order to find the peace, calm and faith he experienced in the parental home, the setting of his initial innocence he refuses to return to. As we have already mentioned he needs a new environment to establish the centuries old harmony of man and God. He seems to recreate the world that has not lost its faith in the Almighty, but his ideological construction defined by his status as a 'civilised' man inevitably demolishes the myth he hoped to have rediscovered and recreated. He unconsciously undermines, manipulates the 'primitive' level, the reinstated myth that could bring about his recovery and allow for the heroic possibilities imminent in his character. He has to discard the Stevensonian identi-fiction, because he cannot identify with the 'civilised' world generating it. Patusan even by virtue of its geographical location separates him from the 'civilised' world. Jim wants a refuge to return to a state of innocence prior to his jump, and in Patusan he finds the very place where he can rehabilitate, regenerate his own self. Leavis is right when he states that in this part of the novel space and time are subject to typical romantic alterations. Jim's task to return to myth and re-establish the world of innocence and perfect harmony is an impossible one. But what could offer a more effective retrospection on the theme of lost honour than its repetition in a totally different social and cultural context the factors determining this loss included. This Conrad does in the form of a heroic epic contrasting past and present, individual and social, 'primitive' and 'civilised'. Jim separates himself from the 'civilised' world, hoping that being isolated from that world he could start again. A. J. Guerard describes Jim as: "a rather adolescent dreamer and 'romantic' with a strong ego-ideal, who prefers solitary reveries of heroism to the shock and bustle of active life [...] He differs from other introverted dreamers chiefly in the degree of Bovarysme; he can literally confuse reality and dreams at times [...] He tries to live his dream."¹⁸ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan questions the validity of such a 'working hypothesis' founded on the distinction between facts and ideas, truth and fiction, reality and illusion, 'real' and self-ideal. Erdinast-Vulcan dismisses this

¹⁸Guerard, 140-141

approach where: "the first term in each pair is a reflection of a desired standard, and the second is a form of deviation."¹⁹ In spite of its romantic overtones the Patusan section is strongly rooted in the historical realities of the period. After siding with the rightful Malayan chief, Doramin, against the pretender, Tunku Allang Jim reaches the position of the 'white lord'. This position is also justified by imperial realities. Joycelyn Baines states that: "There were, at the time of Conrad's service on the Vidar and earlier, a number of white men, traders and adventurers, who had established themselves in out-of-the-way places and gained influence over the local native rulers."²⁰ I tend to agree with D. Erdinast-Vulcan, who argues that in the context of the fictional material there is no 'fault-line' between the Patna and the Patusan sections. Erdinast-Vulcan states that the shift is the result of: "the willed effort of the character to enter another story, as it were, to construct his identity and find a new ethical orientation in a different textual sphere."²¹ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan introduces the concept of 'identi-fiction' to denote a literary text or genre on which a fictional character construes his or her identity. The term is designed to indicate the distinction between the generic model which reflects the intentions of the author, and a text or a genre which serves as a point of reference for the characters themselves in the definition of their identity and the management of their lives. This approach also seems to support Conrad's choice of narrative filters or lenses when reporting Jim's story.

The horizontal shift of the Patna section is joined by a vertical one in the Patusan section. The 'civilised' man's authority over his own fate acquired through knowledge is replaced by the 'primitive' man's acceptance of the authority of the Creator. Jim's moving East brings about the possibility of the return of God. Britain is abandoned when Jim moves East. The text, the word does change in the Patusan section. Benita Parry notes that: "Patusan [...] is primarily a metaphysical landscape."²² "Tony Tanner finds that: "The people of Patusan exist as if under an enchanter's wand ... they are not human beings, but creatures of a fairy tale, fixed in their symbolic postures."²³ The above quotations properly suggest the shift in tone towards a romantic and mystical perception of the world, but certainly are not sufficient as far as the historical, social and cultural implications of the Patusan section are concerned. Jim does leap into the unknown, appropriating the

¹⁹Erdinast Vulcan, 37

²⁰Baines, 253

²¹Erdinast-Vulcan, 37

²²Parry, 96

²³Tanner, 40

mythological world of the Garden of Eden to his status, but his life is solidly anchored in the everyday social life and activity of the 'primitives' as well as in the crisis that grows to threaten life in this remote land. He settles the problem of the old fool's divorce and the problem of the rotten turtles' eggs and he assumes the responsibility of settling the problem of the white adventurers threatening the country. The duality propagated by the desire to return to myth and Jim's insistence on his 'civilised' status is clearly maintained by Conrad. Nevertheless, he seems more efficient, by virtue of his education than the Malaysians and this determines the population of Patusan consider his efficiency as something miraculous. Conrad analyses convincingly how they, because of their 'backwardness', accept themselves to be racially inferior. Indeed they regard Jim as a kind of deity and Dain Waris, their leader mortal. Jim does not really project himself into the position of God, but is longing for the peace and faith that can only be experienced in a world governed by the Almighty. The posture he creates for himself is that of the unquestioned representative of harmony and the modern concept of law and order, the modern man revisiting the Garden of Eden. By virtue of his extraction he is a naive coloniser experiencing the present of the 'primitives' as his past, and is in search for a solution that could allow for the rehabilitation of all his lost dreams in a context seriously affected by his status in that world. Jim clearly insists on his authority over that world. The instinctive drive to rule the 'primitive' world is illustrative of a traditional British attitude that has been widely acknowledged since Robinson Crusoe's solution to the problem entered literary conscience. Jim sympathises with Dain Waris the able leader of the people of Patusan. He feels indebted to Jewel and virtually falls in love with the girl of mixed Malayan-European parentage. Perhaps this delicate interaction between a Malayan and a European is most illustrative of the imminent difficulties when the exponents of the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' world meet. Jim, in spite of being projected in a mythical world, is not capable of escaping, abandoning his imperialist prejudices and reactions. Conrad clearly states this displacement of the European in Patusan when he makes Marlow state, in the instant he gets to know Jewel, that she has an 'amusing' way of speaking English, and a 'clipping boyish' intonation. Jim only realises that he is in love with her when it is too late. Jewel's affection and Malayan background determines her to overvalue him. That this affection was partly governed by the fatalistic admiration of a member of a subject race for a member of a ruling race becomes obvious when, although she tried to save him, after his death she undervalues him with the similarly fatalistic prejudice of her tribe. The change of attitude on her part also

suggests that the moral codes of the 'primitive' world do not allow for amendments based on affection. In Patusan conduct determines personal and public affection, the failure to meet the expectations of the heroic posture automatically brings about the effect of being punished. The moral rules governing Patusan are not falsified even for the sake of a 'Tuan'. There is no hope for them to bridge the gap between two races, two cultures even in a fictionally mythological milieu. Neither of the two prototexts can dissolve 'the acute consciousness of lost honour' of the individual, the crisis of the modern world at the turn of the century, modern Britain included. Still, this more general context provides Jim with nearly mythical power and determines him to accept the consequences of the moral verdict postulated by the 'primitive' world: he willingly accepts death, although he would have the possibility to escape.

The difference between the official version of reality and the factual state of affairs makes Jim not only a victim of his own deficient self, but also that of a world whose basic principles are constantly falsified. Jim is then on the one hand one of those whose insistence on honour and the ideal moral codes is in opposition with the beliefs and conduct of the perverse falsifiers of these principles. On the other hand he projects his ego against a heroic background that exceeds his abilities and thus becomes the archetype of the tragic hero in search of his own identity in a world that he perceives as being hostile to its own declared ideals and thus implicitly to him. Jim's acts prove clearly destructive in spite of his intentions. The Patna incident creates a deep sense of guilt in Jim, but as we have already stated, he does not start back home to recover. Conrad and Marlow, the two governing narrative voices of the novel, have created a different trajectory for him. At this point D. Erdinast-Vulcan's already mentioned interpretation of the sources of Jim's choice proves relevant. Jim's perception of Patusan as a land of myth onto which he can impose his heroic imagination allows him to achieve a new identity. Jim illustrates a momentary return of the 'civilised' world to the state of innocence, a world born out of man's desires and 'ignorance' that was defined by identification with nature and God. The fact that nature is threatening in the Patna section, while in the Patusan section it seems to invest Jim with supernatural power is illustrative of the difference between the modern and the mythical modes of discourse that seem to support the idea of return to myth. But myth is challenged by reality, the messengers of the outer world arrive to Patusan. Jim's deep seated instincts of a white man did not disappear. His confusion when faced with the situation is clearly stated. Jim's instincts don't let him remember comprehensively enough the wrongs the 'civilised' world did to him. He seems to have forgotten that the 'civilised' world

provided him with lofty ideals that proved insufficient at sea, and in the name of the same ideals denied him any possibility to really defend himself at his trial. The Patusan section seemed to absolve Jim of his predictable fate of a man who no matter how hard he tries is doomed to fail, first because of his inability to act, second because of his naive insistence on a set of moral codes of the 'civilised' world that are not entirely valid if they are valid at all. Jim's choice of exile was one imposed on him, his retreat in good order towards the rising sun (and not towards his father's house in Britain) seems inevitable as: "the fact followed him casually and inevitably (the fact refers to Jim's jump from the Patna) [...] and his keen perception of the Inevitable drove him away for good from seaports and white man,"²⁴ because he needed purity, a state of innocence that 'civilisation' could not provide. Still it certainly would be inaccurate to say that 'primitive' is equated exclusively with purity and innocence, while 'civilisation' stands for meanness and the evil only. The pain of the 'homo duplex' is purporter of the anxieties caused by ambiguity, anguish and exasperation caused by the impossibility to reconcile the antagonisms of the world as it is. The myth of innocence can only be interpreted through value judgement, and this value judgement belongs to Jim, the son of the British Empire.

Jim is looking for a: "totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon" in Patusan, which allowed him to leave his "earthly failings behind."²⁵ Jim's constant moving East has clearly shown that he lost faith of the 'civilised' world and in the white man's judgement and moral principles. Thus, although Marlow repeatedly declares him 'one of us', it is impossible for him to return. The situation is paradoxical and it clearly predicts Jim's destiny. As L. Kolakowski states in his *Presence of Myth* it is only through a mythical arrangement of our universe - meaningful narrative order - that we can overcome its essential randomness and indifference. The allusion to the Old Testament in the Patusan chapters has been noted by critics and Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan convincingly argues that as Patusan is Jim's Garden of Eden one should be suspicious about the existence of a serpent in the garden. "Erdinast-Vulcan arrives at the conclusion that: The real serpent in Jim's Garden of Eden is his own weakness, the wavering of his faith in his own fiction. [...] In Patusan he tried to cast off his role of Cain, after having enacted the archetypal punishment, and to regain the wholeness of Adam. Paradoxically, his sympathetic identification with Brown and his inability to kill

²⁴Lord Jim, 2

²⁵Lord Jim, 218

him or let him die will bring about the death of Dain Waris, his adopted brother, and the collapse of the heroic code."²⁶ When trying to state the significance of the story we must remember that it is Cain who is the forefather of civilisation. Civilisation is, therefore, Cain's estate by extension. The intrusion of civilisation into the mythical world of Patusan destroys the possibility of Jim's total identification with Adam or Abel and proves fatal for him.

Although Jim's choice of Patusan shows that he seems able to be an alternative Adam or Abel, it is Stein who grants him the possibility, the chance to escape out from 'civilisation' and ignore its discontents. This means in turn that Jim needs the exponents and the accessories of the modern world to gain rebirth in Patusan, although in his understanding this rebirth creates of him the man without history, the prehistoric man if you want. "Marlow himself describes Jim as: the heir of a shadowy and mighty tradition"²⁷, [...] a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old."²⁸ The authority of 'civilisation' over Jim does not cease. The only, and impossible, alternative for Jim would be to maintain the status he managed to gain in Patusan. But Conrad is too much aware of the fact that identification with an adoptive culture and myth has its limits.

Jim manages to achieve most of his dreams in Patusan, but he never manages to discard his instincts of a white man, his history. The Stevensonian adventure paralyses him; the Biblical pattern gives him back his dreams, but leaves him a lonely character, isolated from his race but still dependent on his roots. While Jim is in pursuit of his dreams and searching for self-knowledge he does not give himself the chance of identifying with the people whom he decidedly serves either. He does not let himself be assimilated by the 'primitive' culture he is supposed to rule, just as he refused to side with the hypocritical exponents of the 'civilised' world aboard the *Patna* or the Eastern ports he visited after the *Patna* incident. Jim remains a prisoner of his sense of being a white man, a victim of his own consciousness: he identifies with Brown through his guilt and decides to free him in the name of honour. He does not perceive the darkness of Brown's heart, but is evidently anxious that some misunderstanding should occur, 'ending perhaps in collision and bloodshed', stating that he is responsible for every life in the land. This seems to me to be the repetition of the 'felt honour' aboard the *Patna*, when he felt he was responsible for every life

²⁶Erdinast-Vulcan, 45

²⁷Lord Jim, 244

²⁸Lord Jim, 256

aboard the steamer, the pilgrims included. Jim's illusion is repeatedly unqualified, for the material fact is that he has allowed a brigand to slaughter Dain Waris and his party, and that he has left the village open to ravage (just as he abandoned the Patna against his own will.) His decision brought about the consequences of Cain's deed. Jim sacrifices his own myth and faith in his responsibility to the community. The massacre of Dain Waris and his people, who have blindly trusted him, marks the: "failure of a potent charm"²⁹ and Jim has to pay with his life to reinstate the power of his word. Because: "Those people had trusted him implicitly. Him alone!"³⁰ The mythical power does eventually recoil on him: he has to perish.

If Jim's end formulates the ambiguities of the modern world, the two identifications, the Stevensonian and the Biblical-mythical one follow the oppositional pattern of the traditional and the modern, of the 'civilised' and the 'primitive', stating the impossibility of a return to the initial state of innocence. The proto-texts and the setting clearly define a willed detachment from the Western world representative of 'civilisation'. Conrad's vision as a novelist, as Virginia Woolf observed: "is both complex and specialised; complex because behind his characters and apart from them must stand something stable to which he relates them; specialised because since he is a single person with one sensibility the aspects of life in which he can believe with conviction are strictly limited. [...] and Conrad's *Lord Jim* as most of his books has: the air of telling us something very old and perfectly true."³¹

The plurality of possible readings stems from overwhelming complexity of the novel. This complexity of the convergent themes calls for an equally overwhelming narrative diversity.

It is Marlow the narrator-character who provides the concrete detail of felt life as he is the sensitive investigator who proves not only a psychological observer, but also one of Jim's friends, sympathy implied. Starting with the fourth chapter Marlow, becomes the dominant narrative voice, although we do not really know where Conrad starts and Marlow ends. In *Lord Jim* Marlow's narrative authority is repeatedly destabilised by the fact that he often relies on details provided by the other characters. "As Padmini Mongia puts it in 'Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad': The novel's complex narrative structure serves to deflect attention away from the plot and towards the process whereby we do or do not apprehend

²⁹ *Lord Jim*, 256

³⁰ *Lord Jim*, 268

³¹ Woolf, 308

meaning."³² As we have already seen, the first three chapters belong to Conrad. Chapter four introduces Marlow and establishes him as the only authority on the subject. The final chapters comprise Marlow's letter addressed to the Privileged man.

The omniscient narrator of the first three chapters is not devoid of irony. Conrad provides us with the very reasons why Jim was sent to a training-ship for officers of the mercantile marine, in spite of his obvious inability for the task: "The living (at the parsonage) had belonged to the family for generations; but Jim was one of five sons ..."³³ The parsonage cannot provide for the fifth son of the extended family. This aspect passes unnoticed in the course of the novel. The omniscient narrator shows no intention to interview Jim. He strictly sticks to facts even when foreshadowing the tragic events in Jim's career. A comprehensive approach to these events is Marlow's task.

The premises of Marlow's status as a compulsive narrator of Jim's story are also grounded in the opposition between the participant and the non-participant points of view challenging each other in chapter four. The omniscient narrator's presentation in the first three chapters was as devoid of sympathy as was the attitude of the judges during the trial. Marlow discards the official insistence on facts and the insufficient, irrelevant meanings facts can provide.

Even the non-participant point of view adopted by Conrad in the fourth chapter accepts, indirectly though, the insufficiency of the tribunal's insistence on facts. "They wanted facts. Facts. They demanded facts from him as if facts could explain anything.[...] The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible ... they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. He was anxious to make this clear."³⁴

Marlow is seemingly the only person attending the trial who is aware of Jim's hopeless difficulty. The right to describe the momentum creating the visible conflict that is Jim's jump is passed on to Marlow by Conrad because he seems to be the only person who can describe Jim's jump in all its complexity. Marlow is not only interested in how things happened but also in the reason determining Jim's act and its spiritual consequences. Once facts are dropped, the difference between 'them'

³² Padmini, 174

³³ Lord Jim, 3

³⁴ Lord Jim, 18-9

and 'us' can be comprehensively explored. Marlow's point of view by virtue of his sympathy has the potential of explaining Jim's choice of exile.

Then we can clearly state that the structure of the narrative starts to be shaped by Marlow in chapter four and he remains the governing authority for the rest of the novel. He is interrupted by the privileged man in chapter thirty-six, when in his (Marlow's) letter he remembers one of their earlier conversations. The epistolary form suits Marlow perfectly, because the last word on Jim remains his, and it is he who can postulate the final moral verdict. Marlow insists on Jim's isolation, acknowledging opposition to the privileged man's former statement about Jim's selling his 'soul to a brute.' (The statement is meant to qualify Jim's dedication to bring wealth and happiness to all mankind irrespective of race.) The letter form clearly limits the chances of any external interference and so Marlow can state again his perception of the themes underlying the novel. Marlow, who readily formulated the first layer of the theme by proving that Jim is 'one of us' and not one of them, had projected Jim against the dreams of heroism which Jim clearly did not have the ability to match. It was Marlow who sensed Jim's finding a totally new world in Patusan which allowed him to try again. Marlow's investigation also touched upon the opposition between Jim's ideals and the fast-fading power of Colonial Britain's official ideology. Thus, although he is declaredly 'one of us', it is impossible for him to return. In Patusan Marlow senses Jim's return to the mythological tradition and the everlasting quality of that tradition. Marlow is also invested with the capacity to translate Jim's status as a border-dweller, for example when he speaks about his 'contemptuous tenderness.'

It is through Marlow that Conrad discloses both the dilemmas that regard Jim's integrity and those of the 'civilised' world at the turn of the century. Thus Marlow becomes the interpreter of the personal and the public themes of the novel and the authoritative mediator between late Victorian realities and the author, Conrad and his material and Jim and his imagination.

As we have seen, the complexity of *Lord Jim* is overwhelming. The richness of the sometimes overlapping narrative voices (Conrad, Marlow, Stein, Brierly, Jim) can be maintained through a consistent, stable narrative frame. The governing narrative voices are Conrad in the first three and a half chapters and Marlow for the remaining chapters. This distinction does not match the partition of the novel into the two main sections or 'stories', that is the Patna story and the Patusan story. This is possible because Conrad's explicit authorial voice is preparatory of the two 'stories' just like Marlow's letter is a conclusion to both sections. The omniscient

narrator opens up the discussion on tradition and modernity, and the 'epistolary' part relating Jim's end formulates the ambiguities of the modern world. Jim manages to regain his faith in the traditional ideal of heroism and providence, he acquires the moral strength to pay the ultimate price for his mistaken decision. Yet the novel's final message seems to me paradoxical because Conrad who was never at home in the world formulates one of the questions to which he knows the answer all too well. Through Jim's death he also tells us that it is impossible for the modern man to regain absolute faith in the Almighty and through it the privileged position of innocence.

Lord Jim then is a masterpiece illustrative of the overwhelming diversity of the dilemmas of the turn of the century. The novel is built on the paradoxical principle of regression and progression visible at both the narrative level and the level of the myths underlying the plot. The presence of myth and the narrative technique allow for discussion regarding the relationship between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' world based on the opposition of tradition and modernity avoiding the danger of even a shade of racism. The multiplicity of the themes (both public and personal) formulated by the novel is given coherence through a consistent narrative technique inclusive of disrupted chronology and masterly employed shifts of the narrative point of view.

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