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## **“A Pinch of Romance in the Commercial Kitchen”**

### **Tropes of transformation in *Lord Jim***

This paper argues that the theme of colonial trade has been both suppressed and used as narratologically vital material in Conrad's story. The analysis focuses mainly on the second, for many aesthetically flawed part of the novel, and demonstrates that the “free and wandering” Patusan tale is a logical and inevitable reproduction of the commercial dynamics from where Jim departed with the cancellation of his certificate. This reproductive process is shown to have an impact on both the plot and the language of the novel. Jim's behaviour in Patusan is determined by various exchange mechanisms, during which his objective is to be recognized as a blameless man in return for his political services to the local native community. Linguagewise, the tropes of the conversion and transformation (implicit in any process of trade), psychological renewal, or ethical improvement, are identified as symbol and allegory. It is through the interplay between these two rhetorical figures that Conrad exposes colonial dominance, forced trade and the limitations of personal reformation.

The theme of contractuality receives a representation in Conrad's fourth novel, *Lord Jim*, only comparable to *Nostromo* in its complexity. In the latter, the exploration of deals and exchanges is carried out with regard to community formation, and marks, in its historical scope, a transition from archetypal forms of giving and taking to modern trade. Jim's story progresses in the reverse direction and returns, through the young hero's seeming abandonment of contemporary Western values and attitudes, to a mixture of tribal and piratical transactual practices. By mediating the main events through Marlow and attaching much narrative interest to the figures of Stein and several native characters, the text maintains a large, interculturally based scope of investigation. At the same time, Jim as a character is not as fleeting a phenomenon as *Nostromo*. Though his

figure is systematically distanced and hardly any direct psychological details are given, the narrative focus hardly ever departs from him. This combination of broad social mapping and a consistent, close concentration on the central figure allows the author to treat the issue of contractuality on a variety of levels which include the possibility of an ethical approach (Jim has violated a moral code when he abandoned the sleeping pilgrims on board the *Patna*), an institutional aspect (this act has also violated the code of conduct specifically established for members of the British merchant marine), a racial problematic (Jim turns out to be unfaithful both to his white and to his aboriginal communities) and a sexual subplot (as predicted, he eventually abandons Jewel).

These are, of course, not the only contexts in which the text can be read. Conrad's narrative language and a proliferation of thematic issues with their respective imageries lead to a certain obliteration of the otherwise powerful substructure of exchange. Many critical works demonstrate how the novel's moral, psychological or stylistic concerns are strategically orchestrated at the expense of a clandestine, and by definition commerce-oriented colonial theme. For their authors, the presentations of capitalism take place in an "impressionistic,"<sup>1</sup> those of imperialism in a "romantic,"<sup>2</sup> and those of racism in a "latent"<sup>3</sup> manner. Whereas most of these authors discuss the effects of colonization in more general terms of linguistic and ideological incongruities, their attention consistently reverts to direct or indirect representations of trade. Mark Conroy, for example, appropriately claims that the "[The] commercial skein is . . . woven in *Lord Jim*, but in a peculiar way: as something to be defined, ignored, willed out of existence."<sup>4</sup> Jameson's statement that certain "strategies of containment" transform the underlying realities of the story into style and therefore "narrative commodity"<sup>5</sup> stems from the assumption that the ultimate reality to form the text was the processes of commodification and industrialization Conrad experienced. In an essay on dialogism, Gail Fincham suggests the means by which the "commercial skein" is exorcised. His statement that "the 'real' world of the Brit-

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1. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 208.

2. Padmini Mongia, "Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad's *Lord Jim*," *Studies in the Novel* 24 (1992), p. 179.

3. Gail Fincham, "The Dialogism of *Lord Jim*," *The Conradian* 22:1 (1997), p. 77.

4. Mark Conroy, *Modernism and Authority: Strategies of Legitimation in Flaubert and Conrad* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 107.

5. Jameson, p. 213.

ish merchant marine and of trade and commerce on the one hand, and the fictional or dream-world of heroic self-fulfillment on the other” establish “narratologically incompatible but socially supporting contexts”<sup>6</sup> treats, if briefly, the relevance of a romantic plot and rhetoric for the suppressed presence of colonial trade. In the following paper, I will continue to examine the co-existence of the two paradigms and discuss the role of exchange in *Lord Jim* as formative narrative dynamism in the text.

One of the first things the reader can observe about the textual coexistence of the two “socially supporting” paradigms is their rhetorical complementarity. The figures of “romance” and “commerce” are consistently placed within the same context, and as a result, both the first narrator and Marlow’s most romantic propositions are pervaded by a business-oriented vocabulary. Jim’s problems arise with his failure to receive his “reward” (50) for his competent work. Being physically as well as mentally elevated by the foretop, he often “looked down with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers,” but what he sees is the sobering reality of “factory chimneys . . . against a grimy sky” (47). His “inner *worth*” (50) remains an open question, and the hours just before the catastrophe on board the *Patna* give him the deceptive sense of “everlasting *security*,” where even the beaming moon reminds him of “a bar of *gold*” (55). Logically, it will be a board of “*assessors*” (84) who find him guilty after his desertion. His new identity as water-clerk continues to feed upon the same duality of uniqueness and repeatability: he is simultaneously described as “beautiful” and “scarce,” and as a model work force who is “*worth* to his employer a lot of *money*” (46). Though his occupation is “[in]capable of being *invested* with a spark of glamour” (153), his “fidelity” and “unselfish devotion” raise him to the level of a romantic businessman, who will enter the secluded world of Patusan via a “*transaction* perfectly valid and regular” (225). Having solidified his position in the new territory, he relates the moments when he felt he was “capable of anything” to the ones when he realized he was “equal to his fortune” (248). Even when surveying the “peace of the evening” and the “everlasting life of the forests” (225–26) in moments of “immobility” (224), Jim will look “with an *owner’s* eye,” (225) and consider “the fabulous *value* of the *bargain*” (226). For the defiant hero, to overcome fear is a form of “*enterprise* you rush into while you dream” (276). His love for Cornelius’s daughter has led him call her “Jewel,” “in the sense of a precious *gem*” (248), and as he is aware how much he “*owe[s]* to her”

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6. Fincham, p. 74.

(248), the couple is reported to “*exchange vows*” (273) about the impossibility of Jim’s return.<sup>7</sup>

The close co-existence of the two imageries and their occurrence in practically all registers of the text assigns a special significance to Marlow and Jim’s simultaneous characterization as “romantic[s]” and traders. It suggests that the economic dimension involves much more than the high number of explicit transactional motifs. The fact that the “commercial skein” is transcoded into the realm of language shows that it is to be “defined” exactly at the points where it is (thematically or otherwise) “ignored” or “willed out of existence.” As the following examples will reveal, the combination of the two textual aspects is usually associated with an almost cannibalistic need for incorporation and containment. When, exactly at the beginning of his transition to the Patusan section, Marlow talks about Stein’s use of “a pinch of romance [in the] commercial kitchen” (204), he finds a metaphor of seasoning, admixing and altering to aptly express the coalescence of two, fundamentally different imageries and substructures. The spice motif is appropriate. It is this condiment, rather than anything else, which has the capacity of changing the overall nature of a given dish. A pinch of romance will make Stein’s “fattening dishes” more acceptable, and the combination suggests a difference between unseasoned food as representing forceful acquisition, and dishes of some of culinary sophistication as representing a similarly imperial intrusion with a civilizatory pretext behind it. The narrative positioning of the cooking metaphor gives support to this distinction. The sentence is preceded by an image of butterfly-hunting which, just like the colonial presence, is just as much derivable from a form of idealism as from the then unrestricted exploitation of natural resources. Correspondingly, the sentence after the “pinch of romance” part reverts to the worlds of *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* to claim, ironically, that artificial light was carried into the wilderness “for the sake of better morality and – and – well – the greater profit too.” This is Marlow’s hesitation, but only one paragraph later, his listeners are also encouraged to be wary of any, suspiciously harmonious tasting colonial dish. In a famous, often-discussed passage, Patusan is described as a place of “fissure,” “cleavage,” as a “ravine,” and a “chasm” (205). Although the narrative figure of unrelatedness has, convincingly, been shown to stand for Jim’s split personal-

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7. All italics in this paragraph are mine.

ity,<sup>8</sup> its proximity to the corresponding tension between the surprising ingredients of Stein's recipe invites attention to the way romance and commerce shape the text of *Lord Jim* in concert.

### **Symbolism and colonial presence**

Buttressed by more references to actual trading than any other Conradian narrative, the novel is also rich in business-related words with hardly any relevance for directly represented commerce. Such items belong as much to Jim as to Marlow, who, for example, compares the return to the “disembodied, eternal, and unchangeable spirit” of his native England to the act of “going to render an account” (206). Here and elsewhere, romantic phraseology is filtered through Conrad's special vision on giving, taking, and being entangled in some ubiquitous financial metaphor. The significance of the vision may be dismissed by simply putting it down to the author's predilection for tropes that inhibited both the English language and his own lived experiences, yet it is precisely the interpretive act of identifying these words and phrases as metaphors that will result in a better understanding of *Lord Jim*. In other words, the high number of metaphorical constructions that bind the worlds of “romance” and “commerce” is more meaningful if approached through their internal logic. This is the logic of interchangeability, which I will try to demonstrate through the following passage about Jim, fresh owner of Patusan.

And there I was with him, high in the sunshine on the top of that historical hill of his. He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like 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, that have emerged from the gloom. I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic. Perhaps this is the real cause of my interest in his fate. (238)

The concept of interchangeability has formed this passage in a variety of ways. First, it presents and discusses instances of identification which involves a flow of presence between two positions. Marlow resorts to a diction that exercises its appeal for identification through its rhythmic syntax and avoidance of proper

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8. Dorothy Van Ghent, “On Lord Jim,” in Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*. A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Norman Sherry and Thomas Moser (New York: W. W. Norton and Company), p. 383.

names. It is dictated partly by Marlow's own nostalgia, partly by his familiarity with the "light holiday literature" (47) that nurtured Jim's imagination. The effect of such narratives on the youth is obvious inasmuch as it provides the attractively deceptive, Lacanian dimension of his self-perception. Second, Jim is a figure of interchangeability because he stands for the values and organization of a given community. Notwithstanding all the strength associated with him, power is clearly not his personal attribute. His domineering figure is passively "set up on a pedestal" simply to "represent" the might of his native civilization, and even his virtues are alluded to, ironically but appropriately, only as a possibility in the word "perhaps." Third, the pronounced replaceability or interchangeability of his figure is supported by a statement about how such representations can come into being. Marlow identifies the "symbolic" aspect of Jim's existence as the "real cause of [his] *interest*" (my italics), and where the word "symbolic" – itself a form of "poetic interchange"<sup>9</sup> that consists in the equivalence of "image" and "concept"<sup>10</sup> – refers to the way the hero encapsulates the essence of Western civilization, the financial connotation of the term "interest" provides the heroic dimension with its motivating background. Therefore Jim is at his most romantic when he is at his most colonial. His figure is associated not only with a sense of replaceability inherent in exotic "holiday literature," but with the sense of interchangeability that is implicit in any process of commodification, sales or financial conversion.

The relevance of this conceptual background is that it presents linguistic representations and commercial presence as natural, unproblematic events and attempts, at the same time, to express colonial superiority with an equally straight face. As the passage just quoted and most other symbolical-metaphorical utterances are indicative of white man's intrusion into non-white societies, they exemplify what Abdul R. JanMohamed calls "imaginary"<sup>11</sup> or "manichean"<sup>12</sup> texts. Such narratives tend to achieve, in the true symbolist fash-

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9. Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 10.

10. J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 941.

11. Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in *"Race," Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 84.

12. JanMohamed, p. 90.

ion, a sense of homogeneity by “coalesc[ing] the signifier with the signified,”<sup>13</sup> but not for the sake of a Baudelairean poetic-spiritual adventure in hidden correspondences. Even at its most profound form, the portrayal of the “magical essence” of a given region is supposed to declare that “there can be no meeting ground, no identity, between the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity” of a given exotic territory, because the “opposition between the self and the native” is “non-dialectical, fixed.”<sup>14</sup> Hence the particular immobility of the above passage. The lure of territorial conquest and appealing subject positions is offered, but only for the colonizer, only on the special ground of a “pedestal.” The writer of this text is, of course, not Conrad – or not entirely. It is Marlow and Jim who co-author the “imaginary,” i.e. colonial texture of the overall narrative, and the further the narration drifts from what may be conceived as the taciturn young hero’s primary text (a flattering narrative about himself, or, in Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan’s words, his “identification”<sup>15</sup>), the more ironically and critically exposed this body of representations become. So when Marlow claims that Jim appeared to him “symbolic,” the word can designate not only the fact that he saw him as standing for something else, but also that he sees him as someone absorbed in a particular self-centred and narcissistic vision.

The earlier cited passage about Jim’s proud presence on “that historical hill of his” reveals two more characteristics of the narrators’ symbolizing tendency. Both have implications for the interaction of romance and commerce. Here as elsewhere in the novel, Conrad associates metaphorical equations with a spatial organization that is hardly balanced or all-encompassing, but carries a suppressive quality. Symbolization happens in an oppressive space. First, a consistent spatial interest is maintained, because the “miracles of co-presence”<sup>16</sup> result in “non-temporal, non-sectarian, non-geographic and non-material”<sup>17</sup> expression which can therefore serve as isolated Jim’s remedy for an event that took place in a given location, at a definite point of time and was then condemned by a specific community. In harmony with the official inquiry’s need for “some essen-

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13. JanMohamed, p. 84.

14. JanMohamed, p. 84.

15. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 40.

16. Murray Krieger, “‘A Waking Dream’: The Symbolic Alternative to Allegory,” in *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 4.

17. Balakian, p. 10.

tial disclosure" (111), he can expect the "root of the matter" (268) to acquit him. As Paul de Man puts it, in the "world of the symbol" the "relationship [between substance and its representation] is one of simultaneity"<sup>18</sup> and this is precisely what he needs. "[T]he deceptive spatialization of elements" offer him "the romantic reassertion of his (momentary) power to overwhelm his temporal destiny." Through the articulation of his moral crisis in spatial terms he, Marlow and Marlow's listeners can continue to believe in the permanence and unity of his self. "I jumped; but . . . [i]t was their doing" (134), goes the errant white man's defensive utterances, whose purpose is to suggest a still unblemished layer of his self, which even the deepest rift between action and intention will not shake. Though admittedly influenced by fellow officers with whom he originally refused to associate, this segment of his self is presumed to be still intact, temporarily invisible, and capable of carrying the potentials for the recuperation of the whole personality. Correspondingly, much of early definitive Conrad criticism has attempted to establish Jim's real self. Dorothy Van Ghent's<sup>19</sup> association of the latent features of Jim's personality with its natural ambiance is the discursive reinforcement of the narrators' postulation of facades that simultaneously intimate and distort hidden essences. Albert J. Guerard elaborates on representations of the "real Jim"<sup>20</sup> through a traditional metaphor of self-identity, the hero's hatlessness, to embrace a similar concept of the text. So does Gustav Morf who, seeing Jim as a projection of Conrad himself, emphasizes the link between what is "eminently autobiographical and symbolical"<sup>21</sup> in the novel.

This rhetorical tendency is supplemented by Conrad's preference for figural elements to express vertical repression and forceful penetration. This is the movement that Marlow elects to land his protégé in Patusan: "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" (212, my italics). With the initial difficulties overcome on the other side, Jim "was received, *in a manner of speaking, into the heart of community*" (233, my italics). Such explicit statements communicate with less metaphorical, neverthe-

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18. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 207.

19. Van Ghent, pp. 376–389.

20. Albert J. Guerard, "Lord Jim," in Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Norman Sherry and Thomas Moser (New York: W.W. Norton and Company), p. 397.

21. Gustav Morf, "Lord Jim," in Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Norman Sherry and Thomas Moser (New York: W.W. Norton and Company), p. 365.



less equally potent images of weight, dominance and suppression. They include mentions of Jim's physical strength ("he looked generally fit to demolish a wall" 95), his invulnerability ("the image of his safety" 172), and the exposure of his defiant whiteness to darkness ("white from head to foot . . . persistently visible in the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet" 291), or conversely, to the tropical sun ("in a strong light, dominating" 172). To compensate for his jump off the ship and thereby for the loss of his professional worth in the Western world, Jim daringly jumps off the stockade in Patusan to successfully, if only provisionally, recreate his social standing. Accordingly, the beginning and the ending of the Patusan story are framed by images of penetration and descent. Having been received (as Conrad warns, strictly metaphorically) "into the heart of community," Jim will depart from his hosts with a "shot . . . through the chest" (351).

Such instances of the relatedness of symbolic phrases to asymmetrical and oppressive configurations support JanMohamed's claim that "the 'imaginary' text[s] are structured by . . . aggression."<sup>22</sup> Though these examples were not, on an immediate sentence level, related to the world of trade, they – together with the earlier cited instances of the complementarity between romance and commerce – suggest that symbolism in Conrad's colonial romance is deployed for reasons of its ideological congeniality with a particular, forceful form of commerce. The basic communicative process in the novel centres on the expected subjugation of the natives and the colonizer's personal reward, and for this reason, its rhetorical representation tends to operate through words and tropes that achieve, on an aesthetic level, the comparable effect of suppression and dominance. In his discussion of the manichean character of colonial texts, JanMohamed himself uses the economic concept of "exchange-value" to explain that the "imperialist is not fixated on specific images or stereotypes of the Other but rather on the affective benefits proffered by the manichean" trope which, "with its highly efficient exchange mechanism, permits various kinds of rapid transformations."<sup>23</sup> In view of the strong symbolism of *Lord Jim*, it is no accident that the text is, both thematically and structurally, heavily shaped by practices of forced trade.

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22. JanMohamed, p. 84.

23. JanMohamed, p. 87.

### **Jim as trader**

A typical “romancing” passage from Chapter 22 positions, through its anticipatory function, the romantic character of Jim as a trading figure.

The conquest of love, honour, men’s confidence – the pride of it, the power of it, are fit materials for a heroic tale; only our minds are struck by the externals of such a success, and to Jim’s successes there were no externals. Thirty miles of forest shut it off from the sight of an indifferent world, and the noise of the white surf along the coast overpowered the voice of fame. The stream of civilisation, as if divided on a headland a hundred miles north of Patusan, branches east and south-east, leaving its plains and valleys, its old trees and its old mankind, neglected and isolated, such as an insignificant and crumbling islet between the two branches of a mighty, devouring stream. You find the name of the country pretty often in collections of old voyages. The seventeenth-century traders went there for pepper, because the passion for pepper seemed to burn like a flame of love in the breast of Dutch and English adventurers about the time of James the First. Where wouldn’t they go for pepper! For a bag of pepper they would cut each other’s throats without hesitation, and would forswear their souls, of which they were so careful otherwise: the bizarre obstinacy of that desire made them defy death in a thousand shapes – the unknown seas, the loathsome and strange diseases; wounds, captivity, hunger, pestilence, and despair. It made them great! By heavens! It made them heroic; and it made them pathetic too in their craving for trade with the inflexible death levying its toll on young and old. It seems impossible to believe that mere greed could hold men to such a steadfastness of purpose, to such a blind persistence in endeavour and sacrifice. And indeed those who adventured their persons and lives risked all they had for a slender reward. They left their bones to lie bleaching on distant shores, so that wealth might flow to the living at home. To us, their less tried successors, they appear magnified, not as agents of trade, but as instruments of recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future. They were wonderful; and it must be owned they were ready for the wonderful. They recorded it complacently in their sufferings, in the aspect of the seas, in the customs of strange nations, in the glory of splendid rulers. (209–10)

Though retrospective in historical terms, the wording as well as the position of the passage is in accordance with the urgency and relevance of the commercial theme in the novel’s present time. It supports, in a romantic and generalizing

sweep, what Marlow suspected, adequately, about the lost innocence of the seemingly paradisiacal Patusan: “once before” it “had been used as a grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune” (204). Although the immediate context of the statement appears to refer to Stein’s private life, the German collector’s identity as a “merchant,” and the earlier claim that the place was known only to very few “in the mercantile world” makes it clear that this transgression in question is not limited to personal affairs, rather, it has to do with the transactions conducted in the area.

But the real interest of the above passage is not so much the positioning of Patusan in the arena of imperial commerce, but the intimate attaching of Jim himself to the same realm. Conrad’s designation of him as a character embodying and enacting the institution of forced trade may not be immediately available, for his general gentility, lack of financial interest, and his occupation of a “trading post where there was no trade” (216) are difficult to equate with the savagery and greed of the seventeenth-century traders. Yet, as earlier, a sense of equivalence is suggested through tropical correspondences between the imperial pirates and Tuan Jim. The likeness is first intimated by the underlying similarity of the two situations. Both are distanced as raw materials for their respective representations, where Jim, “as unflinching as a hero in a book” is still under the spell of his youthful readings and the old traders also appear by now as characters from certain “heroic tales.” Though the former’s life is initially “barren of adventure” (50), he and the real “adventurer” of earlier times conduct and end their lives under comparable circumstances. There is no change, for example, in the dangers inherent in their missions. Patusan, where “utter insecurity for life and property was the normal condition” (210) is metaphorically the same location as where “inflexible death [was] levying its toll on young and old.” As Jim’s main complaint is that the “reward [of the daily task] eluded him” (50), so his predecessors had to be content with but a “slender reward.” The question of compensation is mooted, but only indirectly in both cases. As the “magnificent vagueness in . . . expectations,” a “beautiful greed of [mere] adventures” and the “subjugation” to an “illusion . . . wide of reality” (137) are the real motors of such mercantile enterprises in the fictional present, it seems “impossible to believe that mere greed could hold” Jim’s professional ancestors “to such a steadfastness of purpose, to such a blind persistence in endeavour and sacrifice.”

Whereas these correspondences are limited to the congeniality of trade now and then in general, several verbs and adjectives indicate that the agent in the

modern version is, on a metaphorical level, Jim himself. In the claims that the first explorers of Patusan were “great,” that their calling made them “appear magnified” for posterity, the reader can easily recognize the young ruler’s repeatedly stated height, physical strength, and desired greatness of soul. His colonial intrusion into the jungle is a matter of “impulsive unreflective desertion [to] the unknown” (212), and the same quality of obsessed spontaneity is recognized in the description of how the first white intruders were “pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future” (210). Yet in both cases, it is a dream governed by Thanatos. The dreamers leave their “bleaching” bones behind, therefore their condensed whiteness will anticipate all the light, the “white speck” (291) that often stands for Jim’s figure in the novel. Moreover, Marlow claims the two parties to have been equally unaware of the limitations of their projects. Where Jim believed he could start with a “clean slate” (179) because his “destiny [was] not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock” (179), his predecessors also failed to recognize that one day they would appear to their “less tried successors . . . as instruments of a recorded destiny.”

How the “chequered intercourse” (210) between the early traders and the local population went exactly is not related, but the images of passion and throat-cutting suggest a precise enough idea. The colonial savagery is, as usual, distanced and transposed into a romance told by Marlow. But even his refined sensibilities reveal – against his own bias, as it were – that forceful interaction continues. Although he registers that “glory has departed” and “the country seems to drop gradually out of the trade” (210), his projection of Jim into those bygone days reinforces the sense of colonial domination. With the ensuing mention of an “uncertain and beggarly revenue extorted from a miserable population” by the “imbecile youth” of a Sultan, Jim’s figure assumes even more of the ever-present trader’s qualities. For his new position as Tuan Jim is in fact a replica of the poor ruler’s. It emerges as the result of his toppling of the Sultan’s satellites, the incomprehensibility of many of his actions is congenial with the monarch’s mental isolation, and finally, in Jim’s self-appointed relative Gentleman Brown one can recognize a structural analogy of the many uncles so eager to appropriate their nephew’s acquisitions.

But what is Jim’s version of an “uncertain and beggarly revenue” in a place where, once again, “there was no trade” (212)? Obviously it is nothing as substantial as pepper. In accordance with the other parts of the novel, the recurring

business terminology and the featuring of diverse social services and awards cast, quite unmistakably, idealist Jim in the classical merchant role. He becomes a trader not only as Stein's agent or a former representative of the British merchant marine, but also as a private individual who is desperate to *redeem* his one-time folly of jumping ship. When explaining why he opted to face all legal consequences of his desertion of the *Patna*, he claims that the "proper thing" was to "wait for another chance" (140) and "something in the nature of an opportunity" (190). Marlow defines this as a possibility superior to "mere . . . opportunities to earn his bread" (190), yet the difference between material and immaterial, financial and non-financial collapses, because the opportunity which haunts Jim's imagination is one where he is acknowledged as a blameless man in return for quite real, practical and political services to the native Patusan community. The successful and cultivated Stein sends his protégé to Patusan because he himself "had a notion of paying off . . . [an] old debt he had never forgotten" (212). The young adventurer himself realizes that his descent into the non-white world was just the "chance he had been dreaming of" (212), even though the new location was first but a "refuge at the cost of danger" (212). His obsession with the concept of opportunity will attend on all his actions. In pre-capitalist Patusan, "a magnificent chance" (220) "ran by his side" (228), but the very figurality of the statement evokes, undesirably, the time when he worked as "runner" (181) with the piratical purpose of "nab[bing] a ship for the firm" (185) of Egström & Blake. Alternately and in accordance with an ancient transactional model, opportunity sat "veiled by his side like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master" (222–23).

The imbalance inherent in this last image is informative of what kind of trader Jim, product of the "mercantile marine" (47), eventually becomes. A seemingly natural ally of the Bugis who "had been extremely anxious to pay off old scores" (244) themselves, he will unwittingly but not accidentally abuse this people's "unbounded confidence" (245) in him and end up, instead of "mastering his fate" (245), mastering the Bugis. The location appears to have been prepared for the process. The Malay population, where the "majority" were "slaves and humble dependents" (211), fails to recognize that the white warlord is in fact a more refined and exotic version of the Rajah Allang who has forced them into slavery. The Rajah, whose cultivation of commerce was "indistinguishable from the commonest forms of robbery" (233), "pretended to be the only trader in his country" (232) and had people "killed or tortured for the crime of trading with

anybody else but himself" (232). The idea of monopoly as well as its particular articulation will be echoed when Marlow's conservative listener identifies Jim as someone who had "no dealings but with himself" (293). But the Rajah is not the only corresponding figure of abusive power to place the newcomer in an unflattering context. On Jim's first appearance, the instincts of the Patusan natives serves them right even if they are technically inaccurate about the white adventurer's national identity. "Were the Dutch coming to take the country?" (229), they ask, and the "revolver of the Navy pattern" (211) resting in Jim's lap renders their error insignificant. He has the gun, he will seize control of the locals' lives and, eventually, embrace a job of armed supervisor analogous to the indignantly refused position on Chester's guano island.<sup>24</sup> Favourable as his initial economic and political achievements are, his ultimate goal is not the natives' welfare, but what he has irretrievably lost in his European ambience, the "recognition from the Other."<sup>25</sup> The exotic, non-white territory of Patusan is a particularly apt field for this restoration process. Jim's skills and power enable him to "compel the Other's recognition" (85), a fact that JanMohamed appropriately sees as "amount[ing] to the European's narcissistic self-recognition."<sup>26</sup>

There are now sufficient examples to claim that the novel's symbolism and the depicted practices of forced colonial trade are structurally congenial, and both are to be conceived of in terms of "fullness." In a rhetorical sense, "fullness" means a "full utterance" (208), which has the linguistic power to seamlessly and exclusively signify some hidden essence, whereas the commercial sense of the word designates the forceful imposition of economic monopolies on a non-Western population. Conrad's narrative is characterized by a singularly high degree of interplay between the two aspects of plenitude. Whether reflecting on how the story can be related or how political-commercial positions can be established, Marlow's and Jim's discourses are informed by a ready blurring of boundaries between disparate entities. But this eradication of limits is not the result of a successful cultural synthesis or complete embracement of the myth of primitivism. Rather, it is produced by a conscious mental and ideological effort. In Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's words, "Jim cannot fully surrender himself to the terms of his own fiction" in the exotic land where the "poetic or metaphoric is the

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24. Conroy, p. 109.

25. JanMohamed, p. 85.

26. JanMohamed, p. 85.

culturally ascendant language,” as a result of which his “heroic virtues” cannot become “immanent and immutable qualities.”<sup>27</sup> The same is true for Marlow. As another combined storyteller and trader, he alternately reduces and safeguards the distance between elements that originally stand apart in his inventory of literary materials. Apart from his consistent reliance on rhetorical figures to achieve effects of homogeneity and coalescence, he imposes himself, with a notably long narrative, on a non-questioning audience<sup>28</sup> and forcefully incorporates Jim into his own ranks and files as being “one of us.”

The disparity between formal figures of penetration, oneness and homogeneous inclusion on the one hand, and ideological difference between whites and non-whites on the other, has decisive bearing on the result of Jim’s enterprise. Although his “proud and unflinching glance” in the moment of dying makes Marlow conclude that perhaps “he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side,” the wording is strictly hypothetical, where Jim’s “extraordinary success” (351) with the communal disaster in the background is, if not charged with much irony, at most sadly private. In the eyes of the Patusan natives Jim has certainly failed, and the reasons for his failure are inherent in the linguistic aspect of his essentially colonial project.

For it is remarkable that Jim, not particularly harassed by legal or material consequences, is bent upon offering his political services to eliminate a case which has by then no other existence than verbal. Powerless in the situation where water was leaking into the *Patna*, he does now his utmost to prevent the story of his desertion from leaking out. The monopolistic manner in which the Tuan acts among his subjects is in fact a replica of the seamlessness with which he tries to repress the verbal dissemination of an “irrepressible” (154) story. Yet the “demon . . . whispering advice” (329) to Brown reveals all but poorly concealed points of leakage, and a “profound and terrifying logic” in the “last events” (295) discloses Jim’s paradoxical ideal of linguistic and political services.

This ideal is paradoxical because it is governed by two contradictory impulses. Driven by a Lacanian, masterful fixation on his self-image, Jim can only create an alternative world by transposing his narcissism into the realm of political and economic institutions. His redistribution of the market and establishment of colonial supremacy are imperialistic variants of his need to extort

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27. Erdinast-Vulcan, p. 43.

28. Aaron Fogel, *Coercion To Speak: Conrad's Poetics of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 19.

personal acknowledgment from the Other. But by expecting “unbounded confidence” (245) and admiration for all the benefits that issue from his rule, the logic in Jim’s self-saving and self-transforming strategy reaches a point of impasse. For it is through the intended suppression of repetition that he, against his own will and interest, invites repetition. This unwanted situation arises in three distinct phases. First, the white visitor is presented as a remarkably silent man in his new environment. His silence stands for his reluctance to reveal his true identity, and Doramin’s shrewd wife quickly diagnoses that he is running away from something. A man of actions rather than words, he launches his partly real, partly fictional commercial project with great efficiency. Remorseful, he is interested in the structural setup for a spiritual reform and conversion, but only to the extent to which an economic-secular system of convertibility allows him to improve. Though the scheme actually liberates the Bugis, the breaking of the Rajah’s trading monopoly is only a spin-off, for the ultimately sought-for acquisition is the native’s trust. In the second phase, the silent man develops into an initiator and sustainer of what Aaron Fogel calls a typical Conradian “forced dialogue.”<sup>29</sup> His Western “democratic vision” (112) makes him offer favourable enough rates of exchange to the local population, yet it soon turns out that his interest in the interchangeability and free interaction of words and acts is limited. Having placed himself outside Western discourses, he is eager to ward off the intrusion of the spontaneous verbal interaction (or free exchange of words) that would logically accompany his project of a free market. In other words, he is interested in the concept of interchangeability, but only on his own terms.

As this process of exclusion and suppression becomes more than a mere wish and results in turmoil of political activity to have his own personal debt “paid off,” his political and commercial practice will inevitably recoil on him. Upon the pressing invitation implicitly issued by Jim’s personal reproduction of imperial domination, the appearance of Gentleman Brown & Co. is hardly an accident. Brown was “distinguished . . . from his brother ruffians” (303) by the scale and the support of his operations. His aristocratic family background, his crew of runaway whalers and the casual mention of how, in his heyday, his murderous enterprises were “financed on the quiet by a most respectable firm of copra merchants” (303) render him a nightmarish visitation from colonizing countries in power. Having suggested the likeness of Jim and the ancient traders of romantic tales at an earlier point, Conrad adds Brown to the same pedigree:

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29. Aaron Fogel, p. 12.



where the first white adventurers “would cut each other’s throats without hesitation” “[f]or a bag of pepper” (209), the “latter-day buccaneer” (303) will bully the world (304) for a “bag of silver dollars” (305).

### **Allegory and the limitations of the symbolic-colonial vision**

A closer look at Jim’s idea of interchangeability may be helpful in the understanding of his ultimate failure. As argued, his and Marlow’s concept of transposable equals was grounded in two fields, that of symbolic correspondences and that of commercial activities. Both models were placed in the service of suppressing free interaction. In terms of trade it meant the establishment of colonial monopolies, whereas in terms of narrative discourse it meant the dominance of an essentially immobile, spatially organized imagery that was supposed to freeze in linguistic subversion, irony and unwanted correspondences or repetition. It seems only appropriate then to discuss the final disaster in terms of the disintegration or untenability of these linguistic and economic models. To do so, one must identify those points of “leakage,” both in the text and in Jim’s attitude, which allowed the fearfully reminding, i.e. repetitive aspect of Gentleman Brown’s psychological welfare to go into action.

Such an episode is to be found at an early stage of the narrative. Marlow owes his acquaintance with Jim to the yellow dog scene, an epitome of the uncontrollable slippage and repetitiveness in meaning which will later spoil the much-awaited compensatory opportunities in Patusan. Having heard the exclamation “Look at that wretched cur” (94) in the crowd coming out of the courtroom, both Jim and Marlow try to remain in control of the situation in a mistaken manner. Just as the basic misunderstanding stems from a confusion of a denotative utterance with a metaphorical one, the two men’s angry exchange exceeds, against their will, the limits of their intended meanings. Marlow’s protest “Some mistake” (95) and his eventual pointing out the adequacy of the objected sentence provide an unintentional reminder of Jim’s own mistake on board the *Patna* and the rightness of those Malay seamen (colloquially as yellow as the dog) who stayed. Jim’s response to the situation too has echoes for the rest of the story. With his verbal and behavioural violence, he conducts an ironic interrogation of the same tropical quality that was characterized, as demonstrated earlier, by dominance and towering imposition of symbolic representations in the novel. This time it is he on whom a figural equation is ostensibly

imposed, and when he counters the insult by using comparable force, he, to all intents and purposes, demonstrates the close links that the symbolizing-monopolizing perspective in the Patusan section has been shown to have with colonial aggression.

This is a process that none of the parties involved deliberately meant. For this reason, the scene becomes an implicit self-reflexive gesture on a mode of expression determined by the impossibility to stay not only within an intended meaning, but also within the set of signs that have been used up to that point. Laverne Nishihara's appropriate structural insight according to which "Conrad's art is grounded in the choice of limits"<sup>30</sup> also holds true for the semantic ranges of words and sentences as used by the characters. While the two men are repeating, reminding and anticipating each other and themselves, the narrator places a seemingly unrelated conversation in the background of the courtroom, and makes the newly acquainted figures unwittingly borrow elements from what they overhear. Marlow catches the words "Well – buffalo – stick – in the greatness of my fear" (95), and the incoherent fragments make curious sense and address several elements of both the ongoing debate and Jim's quandary. The word "well" communicates with Jim's hesitation before the planned assault on Marlow and with his professional competence; "buffalo" recalls his description only a few lines earlier as someone who "looked generally fit to demolish a wall"; a "stick" is something over which the *Patna* went "crawling" like a snake (63), and "the greatness of fear" phrase designates, from a most unexpected corner, why Jim jumped the ship. Where conscious linguistic efforts failed, an almost uncanny sense of repetition<sup>31</sup> prevails and casts Jim, seemingly so unique, as a product of repetition himself. Throughout the novel, the intended and the actually emerging meanings will remain in a problematic relationship. A constant overflow of signification destabilizes the autonomy of the two speaking subjects and creates a parody of the forcefulness that elsewhere in the novel appears as – and is intended to be – a guarantee of sufficiently contained meaning. Marlow's conclusion that "The power of sentences has nothing to do with their sense or logic of construction" (98–99) will hold true for the rest of the unfolding story, since in its total effect, the Patusan section reads as another ill-advised response to a preceding situation.

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30. Laverne Nishihara, "The fetters of that strange freedom': Boundary as Regulating Technique in *Lord Jim*," *Conradiana* 28:1 (1996), p. 63.

31. Nishihara's article offers a detailed list of examples of unwanted repetition.

For all these reasons, the yellow-dog episode turns into the opposite of the later predominant symbolic perspective, and becomes, by its anticipatory character, an epitome of the novel's allegorical strain. The comically radical separation of the word "cur" from its denotation will be repeated when Jim, whose competence is widely recognized, will continue, compulsively, to measure the value of his current actions against the eternal background of the desertion incident. The same, strictly private matching of disparate, only structurally analogous elements is taking place in the sense that Jim's social world – whose esteem is so vital for him – is either unaware of the model ship clerk's former disgrace, or does not find it relevant. Egström from Blake & Egström, for instance, is long ignorant of his employee's identity with that of the *Patna's* ill-famed former mate, only to exclaim upon the discovery: "And who the devil cares about that?" (186). The truth will out, but in a most unpredictable way. One of the proleptic functions of the yellow dog scene is the exposition of the clash between intended, controllable meaning ("You spoke to him, but you meant me to hear," 96), and a degree of overflowing and irresistible signification ("an oriental voice . . . expostulating . . . against a charge of falsehood," 97). The uncontrollable chain of linguistic effects that is launched by this episode is best termed allegorical. For in accordance with the etymology of the word, it is this trope that relates the concept of speech in the "assembly or market" (*agoreuein*) and its inversion by the prefix "other" (*allos*).<sup>32</sup> Therefore the accidental first encounter that enables Marlow to tell Jim's story at all is reported as punctuated by exclamations about a moneylender's case from the assembly in the courtroom. Moreover, part of Jim's confusion about the social esteem accorded to him is rooted in his troubled sense of space and directions. Whereas the belief in interchangeability and replaceability makes him rely on a concept of the (real as well as figural) *market as a place* (i.e. a self-contained, limited and controllable area), the passage anticipates the finally triumphant concept of *market as an institution*<sup>33</sup> which, unlimited to a particular place, accommodates a "murmur of voices" (94), feeds on past utterances and has the capacity of flashing through various narrative levels.

The pivotal position of the scene is suggested by the fact the final disaster in the novel is in fact an emblematic return to the theme of control over linguistic

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32. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 2.

33. For this distinction, see Karl Polanyi's *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi*.

and spatial processes. Influenced by manipulative words, Jim enters a pact with Brown because the trader in him still believes that the terms of exchange he can dictate will, in an idealistic way, reify and thereby re-establish “common blood” (329) with the distant community of white Westerners. Though he never puts it in actual words, he envisages, i.e. specifies the departing route of the other party. It is a restrictive act, which corresponds both to his imposing political presence in Patusan and to his policy of delimiting and controlling possible meanings, as seen in the “cur” episode. Brown’s vengeance could only be carried out by his deviation from the prescribed route, and this transgression, in all its unpredictability, corresponds to the deviating, aleatory character of human interaction in general in the novel. In other words, Dain’s party is ambushed on account of a certain overflow of information and non-coincidence of intended meanings (Cornelius too is killed) that is first unfolded by the yellow dog episode, and extends to several other examples, such as Jim’s mistaken answer to the call “George” (124) or Jewel’s mistaken identity as an actual gem.

Throughout the novel, Jim’s eagerness to match word, authority, meaning and signification will continue to be systematically countered by an elastic and resistant interplay of meaning-generating elements. The arising misconceptions follow a rough pattern of asymmetry. The first false suggestion is issued by some unidentified member of the local community (“the [cur-calling] stranger managed to get down the steps and disappeared” 94–95), then it solidifies into a temporarily unshakable belief (“people had trusted [Tuan Jim] implicitly” 241), and when the ironies to expose its absurdity begin to work in Marlow’s free indirect discourse (“The white man had obtained [the jewel] partly by the exercise of his wonderful strength and partly by cunning” 249), the fundamental dialogism of the novel and Marlow’s self-admitted uncertainties and ideological biases question the attainability of any conclusion. The significance of the repeated pattern of semantic slippage lies not so much in its comedy, but rather, in the fact that it encapsulates the rift between meaning and intention that characterizes the novel as a whole. In a strictly technical sense, the separation corresponds to Quintilian’s definition of allegory which “says one thing and means another.”<sup>34</sup> In addition to the basic rift in the trope, the emphatic uncontrollability of the rhetorical process calls for a more recent perspective to locate the allegorical strain of the text. Paul de Man’s definition has forceful and accurate structural reverberations for the texture of *Lord Jim*:

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34. Fletcher, p. 2.

it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority.<sup>35</sup>

For all the sensory plenitude and narrative immediacy of its description, the indispensable and plot-generating *Patna* episode never really exists in any other mode than as a previous sign. It poses a hermeneutical challenge to the assessing board, Marlow and his audience, and it becomes a code and a horizon against which Jim will measure the value of all his subsequent actions. The meaning of these acts lies in their proximity to the remembered original, where repetition is indeed, as Kierkegaard suggested, a matter of recreating not so much a past situation, but the possibility inherent in it. Jim acts in accordance with general techniques of atonement. He believes his final success to be dependent on how accurately he is able to restore the original situation of erring, and how adequately he is able to respond to the old-new challenges for a second time. Therefore Conrad proceeds to set the reparation attempts in contexts where the desired second chance offers itself in essentially the same forms that brought along the original blunder.

The first step is the recreation of a maritime hierarchy. Jim is once again first mate, and a large number of people are as dependent on him as the “human cargo” (55) was on board the *Patna*. Once the societal division is established, the unprofessional cast in Jim’s large-scale theatre must make sure they stick to their roles. For there are times when they are tempted to act otherwise. They nearly mess up their roles – and save many local lives – when the possibility of Dain Waris’s dealing with the threat posed by Brown’s visit arises. He could “settle the business off-hand” (310), but he must wait until Tuan Jim, the professional problem-solver of the Patusan social unit returns – by that time, chances for an easy solution are gone. This division of labour follows from what Jameson alternately identifies as the Weberian “rationalization”<sup>36</sup> or the Frankfurt School concept of “instrumentalization.”<sup>37</sup> Barred from action and a liberating capacity, Dain Waris is reduced to the function of a cogwheel in Jim’s self-redemptive machinery, which explains why his name “Waris” sounds like “wares.” Even

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35. De Man, p. 207.

36. Jameson, p. 220.

37. Jameson, p. 250.

Jim's final suicidal gesture of absolution carries a parody of Dain's instrumentality, because the walk back to Doramin's throne suggests, at least in structural terms, the replaceability of the dead son. Beyond the name and the plot associated with the young native, other specifics in his portrayal have a similar message. Dain is comparable to Nostromo. The representation of both "noble" characters lacks a degree of individual life, but that exactly serves Conrad's purpose. Brilliant as the two figures are, their intelligent collaboration render them subservient figures in ongoing business operations of colonial magnitude. Both are used, separated from their human self or "reified," and for this reason, they cannot but carry a purposefully sketchy allegorical aspect because "reification," as suggested by Sara Danius, "is always already an allegory."<sup>38</sup>

But as the Patusan section too is already a repetition, the presence of commerce as activity and allegorical interplay between disparate signs leaves its inefaceable mark on language, action and characterization from the very beginning of the novel. At the onset of the crisis, Jim jumped ship partly because the sleeping pilgrims meant to him no more than "a full cargo of old rags in bales" (93). Brierly's phrase choice is an apt reference to the human waste and sacrifice that accompanied the rise of early capitalism in the textile industry, so it is not without significance that one of the many synonyms for the young hero's "inner worth" (50) is "the fibre of his stuff" (50). Soon afterwards further, business-related images of transformation continue to punctuate the text. When the people boarding are referred to as "cattle" (54) by a German officer Jim does not like, a famous description of the passengers above the roaring furnace also designates the pilgrims as hardly human entities in the line of reproduction, transportation and transformation. Jim's sense of romantic superiority and dreamy self-absorption in the passage render him, nevertheless, a co-author to the remark, but as he himself was compared to a "charging bull" in the very first sentence of the narrative, his acceptance of the word "cattle" is ironic. The assault on the defenceless sleepers is in fact an assault on his own kind, but without the assailant's realizing it. Conrad's subsequent use of the buffalo imagery continues to present Jim as someone whose desired mastery over certain entities or meanings is regularly subverted by his involvement in commerce. For example soon after the derogatory "cattle" remark, the yellow dog episode is taking place

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38. Sara Danius, "In search of totality: On narrative and history in Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*," in *Redirections in Critical Theory: Truth, Self, Action, History*, ed. Bernard McGuirk (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 252.

against the background of a sporadically overheard law suit, where, as cited earlier, a woman (herself cattle-like because of her nose-ring) mentions a “buffalo” (95) when explaining her role in an assault on a *money-lender*. As cattle, bullocks and buffalo are turned either into food, transporting energy or an object of exchange, the same association of such animals and money will introduce Brown’s appearance. He visits Patusan because he hopes to “get . . . bullocks” and “some real ringing coined money” (307). Jim does promise him a bullock right before the robbers float out of Patusan. In Conrad’s artistic vision, it is the metaphoricality superimposed on the ordinary term “bullock” that explains why “[n]ot one of the many attentive listeners understood what the words meant” (338). Cornelius is exceptionally right when he claims Jim “always speaks the truth” (339). Abhorring from any sense of finality and clinging to a hope of renewability, the young ruler ultimately gives, as promised, his own *bullish* (i.e. trade-wise optimistic) self up to the aftermath of Brown’s ruthlessness.

But more important than this is that he, after jeopardizing the lives of all the “cattle” on board the *Patna*, allows his fellow beings to perish for a second time. Knowing that the desperate pirate wants a bullock, Jim, who is as eager to change and revitalize himself as his adversary, will metaphorically realize Brown’s project, and turn the victimized Doramin into a “wounded bull” (347). With his choice of this particular animal imagery, Marlow ironically adds to Jim’s “secret knowledge” which suggests that there is a “bond of . . . minds and of . . . hearts” (329) between him and Brown. As the latter needed food to regenerate himself at any price, so the young ruler had been politically possessing the chieftain as a strategically important, yet individually unregarded person for his own self-transformational project. The degradation from a romantic, “charging bull” of Doramin’s type into the freely transferable commodity of a killer “bullock” by spiritually destroying the real bull of a noble tribesman relates Jim, on a symbolic and parodistic level, to the cannibalistic forcefulness of Chester’s partner, Captain Robinson. As the old man tries to lure Jim into an unrivalled and exploitative enterprise, his suggested man-eating is placed in the same context as the motif of commercial monopoly. Several facts about the captain render him a hellish parody of Jim himself. Not only has he destroyed his peers, fell into a sort of limbo to emerge again, but he also became a legend, assumed a new name, came to be dominated by the colour white, and finally, to make the analogy even

more unmistakable, he finished the interview with Marlow with a “submissive little jump”(167).<sup>39</sup>

Hence “the fattening dishes” in Stein’s “commercial kitchen.” Whether denoting actual eating or other instances of spatial, incorporative transformation, “the corrosive effects of market relations”<sup>40</sup> establish a cannibalistic world where the desired but unavoidably illusory effacement of the self’s isolation turns into the similar limitlessness of the onslaught pulled off by the arch-colonial Gentleman Brown. Jim cannot but meet his fate because “fate” and “destiny,” two frequently used words in the novel, designate that “internal element which delimits the character’s possibilities.”<sup>41</sup> Paradoxically, this highly restrictive element is also the one to offer unlimited acts of escape and conversion: commerce. In other words, Jim’s attempts to find another “opportunity” will remain doomed because he, though obsessed with his uniqueness, will endeavour to assert his ultimate adequacy by the compensatory acts of creating a second trading monopoly and its concomitant colonial supremacy – both are already known from the profile of the merchant marine. Thus Jim, who needs another leaking ship, finds that the very notion of repeatability will prevent the gap from closing.

Moreover, the ideological collapse of the Patusan project is intimately linked to the survival of those modes of representation that have characterized the first part of the story. In a novel where imperialistically “fixed standard[s] of conduct” (80) were identified as never-changing cornerstones of social existence to be articulated in the discourse of symbolism, treachery and colonial aggression are best intimated in the allegorical language of misunderstandings and semantic overflow. Jim established his own colonial regime with characters to simultaneously fulfil economic roles and supply the missing figures for a re-enactment of his personal drama, and by doing this he has coded failure into the same mechanisms of commercial excellence that effected his rise. He continued to insist on a romantic-symbolic perspective and sense of closure. At the same time, his fondness of turning people into functions and services into fees preserved him as an unromantic figure of trader, and made him, on the brink of

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39. The title character of the short-story “Falk” is yet another example of the link Conrad saw between cannibalism and forced trade. Falk’s terrible secret is revealed because he has abused his towing monopoly.

40. Jameson, p. 220.

41. Nishihara, p. 59.



victory, vulnerable to market players more ruthless than himself. If the novel, and particularly its second part is indeed a “free and wandering tale” (“Author’s Note,” 43), then its circuitry is produced by the always intruding allegorical and commercial strain that culminates in the final massacre. If the second part is indeed a “plague spot,” then the spot image can only be the emblem of “some real ringing coined money” (307) to roll into the novel and contaminate, as befitting plague, the deepest recesses of the narrative fibre. It is in vain that Jim claims “nothing can touch [him]” (289) – the plague he cannot be immune to. As in his other fiction, Conrad memorably suggests in *Lord Jim* that coercive transactional situations be only provisionally countered by the central character’s illusions about his personal integrity.