

HANGING TOGETHER¹. NOT THE HOW BUT THE WHY: *LORD JIM* AND THE FUNCTION OF INTERTEXTUALITY²

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Abstract: This paper first examines what kind of texts Conrad cites in his novels, and how they function and goes on to ask why *Hamlet* and the Bible are so significant in *Lord Jim*. We will argue that *Hamlet* and *Lord Jim* have something in them that will not be transformed into art and that accounts, in part, for Conrad's saying that he has been "satanically ambitious" in writing this novel, which analyses the human condition, its hopes and shames, courage and cowardice, to a profound depth at the limit of language and artistic expression. The intertext, indirectly, enables Conrad to bestow a heightened rhetoric onto his protagonist, which he would otherwise have found impossible in the Modern period. Conrad frequently states his difficulty in finding language to express the reality of Jim; he also has recourse to different narrative genres – adventure, gothic, romance – to give consolation to those looking for narrative closure. The intertext of *Hamlet* and the Bible enable the reader to perceive beyond closure that there are areas of existence that cannot be expressed in words. However, whether we perceive the silence beyond the text as ineffable or unsayable must, finally, depend on the individual reader. Conrad loads Jim's presence with Christian imagery in order to show that this very young, flawed, incoherent seaman is fated to atone for sin in self-sacrifice. Society hangs together in terms of inter-dependent community, but in another sense our common fate is to "hang together" for, in a post-lapsarian world, we are all of us guilty and "under a cloud".

Keywords: Intertext, Genre, Repetition, *Hamlet*, The Bible, Intractable Language

¹ Marlow says: "We exist only in so far as we hang together" (*LJ*, p. 223), which forms part of a running metaphor that joins humanity in guilt and interdependence: we are condemned to death, and we are joined together in society. "Hanging together" and "all in the same boat" (pp. 124, 125) are examples of Conrad's technique in taking a commonplace, literal statement and wringing massive significance from it. All references, in the text, are to the Uniform Edition, using standard abbreviations.

² I am using the term "intertextuality" in a straightforward sense – the way the signs, codes and symbolic forms of one text inform another (cf. Cuddon, pp. 424, 868ff). See, for an example of the potential of intertext, Cassirer encountering Warburg's library for the first time with "stupefaction" since the books were arranged "in the manner most suitable for grasping the relations between various 'symbolic forms'" (Kermode, "Cornelius and Voltemand", p. 25n).

INTRODUCTION

The object of the inquiry “[...] was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair” (*LJ*, p. 56). So Marlow comments on the inadequate nature of the official enquiry, which sends him on his own quest; he will reiterate the notion when, on his last day in Patusan, he is “[...] once more confronted with the same question, with the unanswerable why of Jim’s fate” (p. 275). This paper will examine briefly *what* kind of texts Conrad cites; *how* the intertext occurs in some of Conrad’s novels, but will be more concerned, with *why* *Hamlet* and the Bible are so significant in *Lord Jim*. The paper will argue that Jim can never be seen clearly by Marlow, nor can Marlow ever answer the “why” of Jim’s fate, and therefore Conrad borrows from *Hamlet* because in both Shakespeare’s play and his own novel there is an approach to the reality of existence that cannot be wrenched into words. Behind *Hamlet* and Jim is the archetype of Christ, and Conrad loads his protagonist with Christian imagery, to enable the reader to perceive that beyond the loss and sacrifice of an ordinary seaman, only identified as “James So-and-so” (pp. 152, 160) in the microcosm, there is an echo of the great code of the Biblical story in the macrocosm. Marlow reiterates that Jim “was one of us”, which signifies beyond the responsible mariners to whom Marlow ostensibly refers, to include all of us who are redeemable (Marlow clearly thinks that characters like Brown, Cornelius and the crew of the *Patna* are irredeemable). The phrase “one of us” may also gesture towards the Incarnation; given lapidary expression by Blake: “Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.”³

But here we must enter a caveat: all we know of Jim and his surroundings is filtered through Marlow’s eyes and Marlow grieves for the loss of youth. Further, we need to make some fine discrimination, for some of the Christian/Divine imagery is the native view of “Tuan Jim”. They regard Jim in a similar manner to the way the natives worshipped and adored the hollow man Kurtz, in “Heart of Darkness” for “he came to them with thunder and lightning” and was very terrible (*YS*, p. 128). However, there is a sufficient pressure in Conrad’s accumulated Christian imagery to solicit the reader’s close attention. The article concludes with an analysis of Christian imagery which may lead the reader of the novel in the direction of the unsayable or the ineffable, that Conrad can only indicate by images of Nothing and Silence. Jankélévitch makes a useful distinction between the unsayable and the ineffable: “Silence mortel et divin silence, ils s’opposent l’un à l’autre comme Indicible et Ineffable”. The ineffable is rich in plenitude; the unsayable is a purely private silence.⁴ Whether we interpret Nothing and Silence beyond the text as ineffable or unsayable is going to depend on how the novel is recuperated.

The kind of texts Conrad refers to, is relatively easy to define: short, well-known passages from the Bible and the European canon are cited, almost always unsourced, and without quotation marks. Evidently, Conrad could assume his contemporary

³ Blake, “There is no natural Religion” Second Series [1788], *CW*, p. 98.

⁴ Jankélévitch, p. 75. Cf. Killeen, p. 42n, and Elissalde, p. 25.

readers shared his cultural references.⁵ For example, in “Heart of Darkness” Kurtz says “Live rightly, die, die ...” (*YS*, p. 148), which Marlow supposes may be taken from a newspaper, or speech, although it obviously forms part of the *Ars moriendi* tradition of Western Europe. In this case Conrad’s irony is apparent in the elision, in reporting Kurtz’s speech, which omits the words “holy” or “well” which would normally qualify “die” in the complete quotation.⁶ In *Under Western Eyes*, we find Razumov saying: “I know I am but a Reed. But I beg you to allow me the superiority of a thinking reed [...]” (*UWE*, p. 89).⁷ Furthermore, *Under Western Eyes* assumes that the reader has previously read *Crime and Punishment*, because Conrad’s novel is a profound response to Dostoyevsky. In *Victory*, Baron Heyst’s father, a character whose negativity is modeled on Schopenhauer, in his final words to his son says: “Look on – make no sound” (*V*, p. 175). Heyst’s rejection of the advice is what constitutes simultaneously his destruction and his victory.⁸ In *Lord Jim* Stein quotes Goethe in the original and Marlow cites Gloucester from *King Lear* (p. 180).⁹ We know that Jim carries “a half-crown complete Shakespeare” into Patusan (p. 237) but, unlike Marlow and Stein, have no evidence of his reading anything at all from his works; indeed his throwaway answer to Marlow’s question about whether he has read it: “Yes. Best thing to cheer up a fellow” (p. 237), would seem to suggest that he had never opened the book.¹⁰ Marlow makes a glancing reference to Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn”: “Truth, which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive ...” (p. 216), and there are also echoes from *David Copperfield* in the scene when the “privileged man” begins to read Marlow’s letter (chap. 36). Where Dickens transforms the sea into land, Conrad here transforms the London cityscape into images of the sea, the substitution of medium achieved by an “as though” transforming metaphor.¹¹ It is night, his rooms are very high up, in the highest flat of a lofty building¹² he looks through the

⁵ The political and social context, shared between Conrad and his contemporary readers, has recently been well examined by Hampson. For particular references to *LJ*, see pp. 152-5.

⁶ The idea is repeated in *LJ* where Marlow says that one needs a “belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and die easy!” (p. 43).

⁷ Pascal “L’homme n’est qu’un Roseau, le plus faible de la nature; mais c’est un Roseau pensant” (*Pensées*, sect. 6, n° 347-200, p. 149).

⁸ See Schopenhauer “On Noise”, pp. 159-63.

⁹ The Norton Ed. (p. 127) gives the Goethe reference to *Torquato Tasso*: I, 3, pp. 393-94, trans. Anna Swanwick [1882]: “I hold it, then, at length, within my hands, / And in a certain sense can call it mine.” Marlow cites Gloucester (p. 180): “And that’s true too” in answer to Edgar’s: “Ripeness is all.” (*King Lear*, V, 2, 9-12. Cf. Norton Ed., p. 109).

¹⁰ Najder takes a more optimistic line in writing that Jim could find in Shakespeare: “[...] an extended cult of honour, analysis of its loss, and the Homeric idea that the fear of disgrace can be greater than the fear of death” (Najder, p. 85).

¹¹ Cf. the great storm in *David Copperfield*, which causes the death of Steerforth and Ham, where Dickens transforms the sea into valleys, mountains, towers and buildings by a series of “as if” clauses, solidifying the watery element (pp. 662-9). We note that this catastrophe also takes away the life of Steerforth, another promising, but flawed young man, high up on the mast, whose ship sounds a bell (p. 667).

¹² Jim is often seen on high: “his station was in the fore-top”; “elevated in the witness-box;” “high in the sunshine on top of that historic hill [...] like a figure set up on a pedestal” (pp. 6, 28, 265).

window panes “[...] as though he were looking out of the lantern of a lighthouse”, a bell is sounding: “The slopes of the roofs glistened, the dark broken ridges succeeded each other without end like sombre, uncrested waves [...]. The spires of churches, numerous, scattered haphazard, uprose like beacons on a maze of shoals without a channel [...]” (p. 337). At the end of the next chapter¹³ the image is repeated: “The privileged man screwed up his lamp, and solitary above the billowy roofs of the town, like a light-house keeper above the sea, he turned to the pages of the story” (p. 351).

1. THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

Conrad frequently found language intractable to his purpose, and in *Lord Jim* he constantly wrestles with words in an attempt to express the truth of Jim’s reality and experience. Throughout the novel there is a constant regret that words will not allow expression of complete being. Hegel anticipates Conrad’s dilemma – actually the Modern dilemma – by about a hundred years, in his poem “Eleusis”: “the profundity of the ineffable sentiment was too sacred, / for him to value the desiccated signs.” (in Agamben, p. 8). Hegel later writes that “[...] it is just not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we *mean*” (Hegel, p. 60).¹⁴ Marlow longs for a “language of facts” (p. 340), an idea repeated in *Victory* by Heyst (V, p. 7). It seems Conrad is searching for a language that is truly performative (as Jim strives for a “meticulous precision of statement”, p. 30), the language of a master mariner “six points to starboard” or the language of God “Fiat Lux”.¹⁵ In a letter, Conrad bewails the impotence of language and his own failure: “I wanted to obtain a sort of lurid light out [sic] the very events [...]. I haven’t been strong enough to breathe the right sort of life into my clay – the revealing life”, and in the same letter says that he has been “satanically ambitious” (To Garnett, 12.11.1900. *L*, 2, p. 302). On the hopelessness of communication, Conrad’s summary statement is: “Life knows us not and we do not know life – we don’t even know our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly

¹³ Chap. 37 is an interpolation introducing Brown, informing us of Jim’s death and Jewel’s unforgiving and uncomprehending existence with Stein. We thus have foreknowledge of the what and the how of Jim’s fate, but not the why.

¹⁴ Hegel’s arguments on consciousness and the inexpressibility of “sense certainty” in language are very well analysed by Agamben (pp. 6-15).

¹⁵ Conrad writes to R.B. Cunningham Graham, 14. 1. 1898: “Semml! Pronounce the Name” (*L*, 2, p. 15). I am grateful to Gabriel Levin for the following note: Conrad is referring to Genesis 2:20: “And the man gave names [*shemot*, plural of *shem*, name] to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts.” There are many post-biblical, midrashic (homiletic) interpretations of these lines appearing in the Talmud and other Jewish texts. Walter Benjamin has a fascinating early essay (1916) which deals specifically with naming and its biblical origins, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” (in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*). But Conrad may have also been aware that religious Jews refer to God as *HaShem*, The Name, hence even today when someone asks a Jew, for example, “How are you?” he will answer, “Good, Bless the Name [*baruch HaShem*]”.

and conceit. (To R.B. Cunningham Graham, 14.1.1898. *L*, 2, p. 17). However, the reader may, perhaps, find that which the author cannot express; as Conrad suggests when he offers: “that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask” (*NN*, p. x).

In “Heart of Darkness”, the external narrator comments on the indirect, digressive quality of Marlow’s narrative method: “the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (*YS*, p. 48)¹⁶. Marlow repeatedly expresses the view that: “there are no words for the sort of things I wanted to say” (p. 124), or again when trying to explain what Jewel wanted from him: “I don’t know how to call it: the thing has no name” (p. 307). When accused of being over subtle, Marlow denies it, taking his ground on a democratic vision, which sees all men the same regardless of caste or class. In contrast Marlow finds Jim subtle – of course not verbally subtle – but subtle in his “unsound” essence. (pp. 89, 94). He looks like “one of us”, but, because he was “fabulously” innocent, Marlow finds, in trying to tell his story that: “I am missing innumerable shades – they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words” (p. 94). And “Words,” says the narrator of *Under Western Eyes*, “as is well known, are the great foes of reality” (*UWE*, p. 3). In “Heart of Darkness” Marlow, yet again, says he belongs to the world of facts (*YS*, p. 61), and gives a classic statement of the inability of words: “[...] No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence, – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live as we dream – alone [...]” (*YS*, p. 82).

As Marlow observes, Jim is “an imaginative beggar” (p. 83); he is betrayed by his reading of light literature into casting himself in the role of a hero: he dreams, in the future anterior tense, of what will have been the case, when instead of acting, he dreams of acting:

He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book. (p. 6)

The alacrity of his “swift and forestalling vision” (p. 96) is in marked contrast to his stumbling speech and gait.¹⁷ When, immediately after this reverie, the real call

¹⁶ Conrad writes to Stephen Crane that his ideas “bring only mist in which they are born and die”. And to Garnett: “All is illusion – the words written, the mind at which they are aimed, the truth they are intended to express, the hands that will hold the paper, the eyes that will glance at the lines. Every image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt – and the doubt itself is lost in an unexpected universe of incertitudes.” (*L*, 2, pp. 13-14).

¹⁷ The gulf between his racing imagination and petrified body on the Patna is perversely expressed in terms of his thoughts portrayed as cripples: Jim is “a finished artist” in forethought; while “there was a hot dance of thoughts in his head, a dance of lame, blind, mute thoughts – a whirl of awful cripples” (p. 97).

to duty and opportunity for heroism arrives, it finds him unready; struck by the reality and power of the storm, his will is paralyzed and he is incapable of action; he cannot jump into the cutter to offer aid in the collision. Later, after two years training, he was appointed “chief mate of a fine ship, without ever having been tested” (p. 10); fate in the shape of a storm intervenes to cripple him, so once again he avoids being challenged, and from that moment he is lame.¹⁸ Conrad subtly evokes Jim’s uneven tread as a physical symbol of his moral weakness which renders him incapable of facing the “[...] sinister violence of intention – that indefinable something which forces it upon the mind and the heart of a man, that this complication of accidents or these elemental furies are coming at him with a purpose of malice, with a strength beyond control, with an unbridled cruelty that means to tear out of him his hope and his fear [...]” (pp. 10-11). Later, on the *Patna*, when the third opportunity for heroism occurs, he is again unready. When he believes the ship is sinking, Jim’s duty is to save the passengers not to jump, but as he blurts out to Marlow: “I had jumped ...’ He checked himself, averted his gaze ... ‘It seems,’ he added” (p. 111); the triple delay in syntax, the pluperfect, rather than preterite tense – as though the action were not part of his own volition, are all a linguistic cloak for his dereliction of duty. However, this “jump”, like his limp, is merely a symptom of the moral flaw that made him join the *Patna* in the first place: “[...] the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence” (p. 13). Jim looks at “the smiling peace of the Eastern seas” (p. 12), and his complacency reaches its height just before the catastrophe, fulfilling the norms of classical *peripeteia*:¹⁹ “[...] as if made audacious by the invincible aspect of the peace, he felt he cared for nothing that could happen to him to the end of his days” (pp. 19-20).

Within the complex narrative of *Lord Jim*, there are several registers of language and codes of narrative, all of which point out their fictionality, and emphasise the artificiality of art. For example the narrative is partly structured around Marlow’s dialogues all of which have a pre-constructed theatrical form. Jim “confesses” to Marlow; Marlow “consults” with Stein; with the French Lieutenant he takes “a professional opinion” of Jim’s case; and, finally, he attempts an “exorcism” of Jewel’s fears. In a sense any story could be said to be about its audience and its audience’s expectations, and Conrad, somewhat condescendingly, fulfills those expectations with reference to different types and genres of narrative. The reader who expects adventure and excitement, whom Conrad disdains, but hopes will buy his books, will find his expectations partly fulfilled. Kermode has subtly developed the notion of the

¹⁸ Throughout *Lord Jim*, there is an isotopy of lameness as a sign of his moral lapse: “uneven stride”, “invisible halt in his gait” “stumping about” (p. 235), as opposed to Stein’s “unfaltering footsteps” (p. 217). The fiction is derived from fact, in *Mirror of the Sea* Conrad reports that he was injured by a spar in 1887 (*MS*, pp. 54-5, cf. Hampson, p. 14-15). In contrast to Jim, the examples of Stein, the French Lieutenant who stayed thirty hours on the *Patna* (p. 140), the two Malay helmsmen who stuck to their post on the *Patna* (p. 98), Little Bob Stanton who died trying to save a woman (pp. 150-1) and the “privileged man” (p. 338) are all described in terms of their responsibility, duty performed and trustworthiness.

¹⁹ Gk “a sudden change”, *peripeteia* is a sudden reversal of fortune, a fall from fortune to ruin; according to Aristotle it is best accompanied by *anagnorisis* (Gk “recognition”) when the tragic hero recognizes the truth (cf. Cuddon, pp. 35, 659).

prevalence of “secrets”, those items that cannot be recuperated in a “normal” sequential reading; he writes of *Under Western Eyes*, but his analysis is also relevant to *Lord Jim*. “Conrad took a high view of art and a low view of his public, which is why writing fiction seems to have been a continual source of misery to him [...]. There is one writer who labours to save the “dense” reader (one equipped, so to speak, with only Western eyes) from confusion, disappointment and worry; and another dedicated to interpretation, to secrets, though at the same time he fears them as enemies of order, sequence and message.”²⁰ The text of *Lord Jim* indicates a tragedy which Marlow cannot express, but which Conrad allows us to recuperate and determine for ourselves. The epigraph to the novel, from Novalis, suggests the necessity for such an interaction: “It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it”. Conrad’s writing demands that another soul believe in it sufficiently to recuperate it for himself. Hawthorne writes perceptively of *Under Western Eyes* “When the language teacher tells Miss Haldin that he has understood ‘all the words’ but without understanding, he is speaking for the reader as Conrad imagined him” (in Kermodé “Secrets”, p. 94, n. 12). For example, Marlow frequently asserts that Jim achieves “greatness”, and thus becomes the hero of his own adventure story. But if we probe further we perceive that Conrad inscribes doubt: doubt in the telling “or rather in the hearing” of Marlow’s narrative (p. 225), and in the absurd bathos of Jim’s “approaching greatness as genuine as any man ever achieved” (p. 244) while sitting on a tin box, cradling an empty revolver (p. 243), attended by the insulting “hullabaloo” of monkeys, who line the river at his approach. It is a commonplace that the character of Hamlet is close to his audience, in contrast, Jim merely seems close; he is subtly undercut and distanced from us by constructions like: “The time was coming when I would see him loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero” (p. 175, my underlining). Not Marlow’s, but the natives’ “legend” (they will also invest him with “supernatural powers”, p. 266), forms round Jim’s name (which we never know except that he has become “Tuan Jim”), and finally the “as though” clause which alerts us to the falsity of heroism.

In addition to the genre of heroic adventure, Conrad also borrows elements from fairy tale, Orientalism and magic genres, together with self-referencing images of Art. For example, from fairy tale, Jewel is transformed from a vibrant, blooming girl (“intense blue-black gleams of her hair”, “blushed a dusky red”), to an ice maiden: “Her white figure seemed shaped in snow; the pendent crystals of a great chandelier clicked above her head like glittering icicles” (pp. 282, 348). The grotesque captain of the Patna forces his carcass into the tiny gharri and disappears “like a witch on a broomstick” (p. 47). Jim’s face expresses shifting moods “as a magic mirror would reflect the gliding passage of unearthly shapes” (p. 154). There are aspects of Orientalism in *LJ*, derived from *Arabian Nights*, in Jim’s opportunity and fate repeatedly described as a veiled “Eastern Bride”. Allied to fairy tale, in a sinister manner, is a burlesque element of bad joke, to which Marlow listens “as if to a tale of black

²⁰ Kermodé, “Secrets and Narrative Sequence”, p. 89.

magic at work upon a corpse” (p. 109). George (acting third engineer on the *Patna*) is dead, but the appalling crew having saved themselves, keep calling to him; as Jim reports: “Eight hundred living people, and they were yelling after the one dead man to come down and be saved” (p. 110).²¹ Or again, Jim’s grotesque misinterpretation of the pilgrim who begs for a drink of water; Jim understands the cry of “Water!” as the pilgrim’s awareness of the imminent catastrophe: “Water, water! What water did he mean? What did he know?” (p. 90). Finally, there are repeated images of pictures and art, which Conrad uses to reinforce the fictionality of character and event other than Jim. Marlow says that he is certain of the others, but cannot express the reality of Jim: “They exist as if under an enchanter’s wand [...]. No magician’s wand can immobilise him under my eyes. He is one of us” (p. 330-31).²² However, Fairy Tale, Orientalism and Grotesque jokes, though they transport the reader into strange realms, are but minor elements compared to the influence of *Hamlet* and the Bible on *Lord Jim*. We will next make some biographical and structural connections before proceeding to analyse the way *Lord Jim* is influenced by *Hamlet*, the only text in the novel whose source is indicated, albeit indirectly.²³

2. HAMLET AND LORD JIM

There is an obvious connection between the plot of *Hamlet* and Conrad’s life because, in the play, a murdered father lays an injunction on an unwilling, procrastinating son. Conrad actually cites *Hamlet*, in connection with his father Apollo, and his own son Borys: “What’s Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba” (*L*, 2, p. 247).²⁴ Najda has well described the shame Conrad experienced in not following the heroic example of his parents, whose premature death was caused by ill-treatment at the hands of the Russians in punishment for their revolutionary sentiments and actions: “But when he compared his own life with that of his parents, he must have been aware of a stark contrast between their altruism and his own egocentricity” (Najder, p. 43).²⁵ The theme of neglected duty in Conrad’s life is fictionalised in *Lord Jim* and bears striking similarities to *Hamlet*. Both Hamlet and Jim have moral imperatives imposed on

²¹ “Come down and be saved” is presumably an ironic reference to the Crucifixion (Matt. 27, 40-2; Mk. 15, 30-1).

²² Marlow is presumably thinking of Prospero with world seen as a stage, and life as a dream (*Tempest*, IV, 1, 148-58). Jameson has commented acutely that Conrad reclaims “great areas of diversion and distraction by the most demanding practice of style and *écriture* alike, floating uncertainly somewhere in between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson” (Jameson, p. 206).

²³ Stein speaks of “your great poet” and cites “That is the question” (p. 213). References to *Hamlet* are to the Arden Edition, ed. Harold Jenkins, 1987; all other references to Shakespeare’s works are to the Riverside Edition, 1997.

²⁴ A common misquotation, which should read: “What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her” (II, 2, 553).

²⁵ Najder also mentions Apollo Korzeniowski’s dramatic fragment *Ojciec*, which contains themes of fidelity, fear and shame; the play also has a father figure who, *in extremis*, makes appeal to his son’s sense of honour. (Najder, p. 34).

them by codes of conduct established by previous generations.²⁶ Jim is in a similar situation to Hamlet, in that the horror of their situations cannot fully be comprehended nor expressed by them. Both Jim and Hamlet have duties to act, but are initially incapable of action. When they do act, it is to fulfill their duty, and simultaneously to ensure their sacrificial deaths: in both cases they are “ready” for their destiny. Berthoud comments that “For Stein, as for Hamlet [...] the problem of life is the problem of consciousness” because we think we are out of step with Nature. (p. 87). Marlow, however, expresses his distrust of consciousness: “Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back-door of your mind [...] (p. 43). Hamlet idolizes his absent father, as does Jim who tries to persuade Marlow that “[...] the good old rural dean was about the finest man that had ever been worried by the cares of a large family since the beginning of the world” (p. 79). This is yet another example of Conrad’s simultaneous open and closed writing: the Anthony Trollope world of large families and rural deans is seen positively by Jim, but negated by Conrad’s condescending formulation of “good old rural dean” and also in the bathos of domestic concerns juxtaposed to “the beginning of the world”. The site of “Home” with its domestic securities is negatively contrasted by Marlow to the world of adventure at sea, although, as we have seen, Conrad prompts the alert reader to suspect the genre of adventure fiction.

Lord Jim and *Hamlet* are complex narratives involving doubles and delays, which function to generate unease in the reader and spectator when they try to situate themselves within the works. In *Hamlet*, unease is achieved through the rhetorical figure of hendiadys, which confuses and doubles identity.²⁷ For Claudius, Gertrude is “Our sometime sister, now our queen” (I, 2, 8); for Hamlet she is “the Queen, your husband’s brother’s wife” (III, 4, 14); Claudius addresses Hamlet for the first time as: “my cousin Hamlet, and my son” (I, 2, 64).²⁸ However, unease within the works is counter-balanced by use of repetition which functions to bind the texts together. Hamlet is the son of King Hamlet, just as Fortinbras is the son of Fortinbras. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are as interchangeable as Cornelius and Voltemand.²⁹ In *Lord Jim*, Jewel’s mother, and grandmother have both been left, and Jewel is the third generation of native women who will be abandoned by white men (pp. 276, 313-14, 318). Jim, meanwhile, is the third in a line of adventurers to go to Patusan

²⁶ In Hamlet’s case, it is to “Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (I, 5, 25), and he swears to remember the ghost of his father (I, 5, 102-4). In Jim’s, it is to do his duty as a naval officer, and to obey his father’s precepts: “about the conduct of life and the only proper manner of dying” (p. 341). We note that the father’s “easy morality” (p. 341) has about it more than a whiff of Polonius’s sanctimonious platitudes.

²⁷ Booth writes: “In *Hamlet* the audience does not so much shift its focus as come to find its focus shifted” (p. 143). Hendiadys, Gk. “one through two”, is a figure “in which one idea is expressed by two substantives” (Cuddon, p. 375). Wright comments that Shakespeare uses hendiadys “mainly in the great plays of his middle career and most of all in *Hamlet*” (p. 168).

²⁸ Cf. Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language*, pp. 100-03, Kermode, “Cornelius and Voltemand”, pp. 52-6, and Booth, pp. 148-51.

²⁹ It is unlikely to be coincidental that the cipher Cornelius in *Hamlet*, and Conrad’s most abject character, share the same name.

carrying a ring (pp. 229-30, 264). The ring, symbol of trust, faith, and love, was given by Doramin to Stein, in exchange for a pair of pistols, originally belong to Stein's predecessor, M'Neil (p. 264), Stein gives the ring to Jim, who in turn gives it to Dain Waris. The ring is taken from Dain Waris's dead body and given back to Doramin who will execute Jim with these very pistols; at which very moment the ring falls from Doramin's lap, to land at Jim's feet – the wheel is come full circle, in what might seem an over-determined element of plot, in contrast to the modern, impressionist writing. Conrad tends to leave nothing dangling in the plot: the episodes of Bob Stanton, the French Lieutenant, Gentleman Brown, Captain Chester and many others leave no gaps in our knowledge. In marked contrast, the writing demands considerable effort on the reader's part for it is impressionistic.³⁰ Over-determined plot expressed in modern, impressionistic writing supports the idea of two types of reader envisaged by Conrad: some searching for narrative closure in an adventure story, and some, perhaps, capable of seeing the complexities beyond.

Of course, from most points of view, it seems absurd to compare Hamlet with Jim. In the first place their registers of language are completely different. For example, if we take two greetings: Hamlet to Ophelia "Nymph in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembr'd" (III, 1, 89-90), bears no relationship whatever to Jim and Jewel's normal greeting of "Hallo, girl!", "Hallo, boy!" (p. 321). We are told that Jim reads "light literature" (*LJ* p. 6)³¹ and we can well imagine the style from his "elated rattle" and "vapourings" (pp. 234, 235). "It's like something you read of in books" he says of Stein and Doramin's past adventures (233-34). Hamlet's supreme eloquence is in an altogether different register to Jim's preposterous incoherencies which Conrad exemplifies by the rhetorical figure of aposiopesis. For example, "Why! This is what I – you – I ..." he stammered" [...] (p. 184). Or again, "Slam the door!" he shouted. 'I've been waiting for that. I'll show yet ... I'll ... I'm ready for any confounded thing. ... I've been dreaming of it ... Jove! Get out of this. Jove! This is luck at last.... You wait. I'll ...'" (p. 235).³² However, it is not the purpose of this paper to compare and contrast the characters of Hamlet and Jim; it is rather to perceive a similarity in their situations – Jim an inarticulate, ordinary man (his conversation as banal, as his hand is "commonplace", p. 340), in the same situation of horror as the wonderfully articulate Danish Prince, both going to their deaths, fulfilling their fates and completing their duties, not as suicides, but as sacrifice – as Christ types.

The two scenes (one cannot avoid the theatrical overtones of these episodes) referring to *Hamlet* in *Lord Jim* are markedly similar: they both take place at night; they introduce wise old men, whose heroic past is behind them; and they occur at very

³⁰ Writing which demands what has been well described as "delayed decoding" in which significance is generated from sense impressions (Watt, pp. 175-78). The classic example, from "HD", is the way Marlow sees "little sticks" whizzing before his nose, and the appreciable delay before he can interpret this vague impression as "Arrows, by Jove!" (*YS*, 109-10).

³¹ The subtitle of *Lord Jim* is "A Tale". Seely points to the 1900, first American edition title *Lord Jim: a Romance* and usefully analyses the term "romance" the heroic variety of which Jim reads. Marlow, using Free Indirect Thought, says that Jewel and Jim came together "like knight and maiden" (p. 312).

³² Aposiopesis, Gk. "becoming silent": a figure whereby speech breaks off under the stress of strong emotion (cf. Cuddon, p. 51).

significant moments within the complex narrative structure of the novel, where the plot pauses, and Marlow analyses, with his elderly friends, what he has understood of Jim's story. Of course these narrative pauses also serve to direct the inattentive reader to the significance of events. Marlow's elderly consultants, and Marlow himself, who is virtually double Jim's age, are evidently seen in comparison to Jim, who embodies Youth – he is only twenty-three when he is packed off to Patusan (p. 155) – and whose fate is always before him, waiting as an Eastern bride (pp. 244, 416).³³ Both episodes repeat images: we are told of the old men's adventurous past, they pad about their apartments at night, and only one lamp illuminates a part of cavernous space giving an impression of chiaroscuro – the extreme contrast between light and dark. In the first scene, located in Stein's study, we find "Only one corner of the vast room, the corner in which stood his writing-desk, was strongly lighted by a shaded reading-lamp, and the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern" (p. 204). Whereas in the second scene, light from the privileged man's reading lamp "slept like a sheltered pool" (p. 338).³⁴ Stein seems inspired in the dusk (p. 214), while the privileged man is "like a lighthouse keeper" when reading Marlow's packet (p. 351). Paradoxically, it is as though bright light is deceptive, whereas access to the truth of existence is gained in shadow or at night. However, whenever such truth is found, it is tragic and cannot be faced for very long.

The first scene occurs when Marlow consults Stein about Jim's case, receiving the diagnosis: "he is romantic" (p. 212). Marlow continues the theatrical theme by deciding to "dispose" of Jim, yet again, consigning him to his fate, into the "part" which they "had tumbled him unwittingly" (p. 221). Jim is also given a role in a puppet play when Marlow likens him to a mechanical toy whose workings he does not quite understand (p. 184). Stein and Marlow between them paraphrase Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy and his earlier statement on Man, when Stein extols his butterfly: "This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature – the great artist", to which Marlow asks "And what of man?" (p.208).³⁵ Stein points to Hamlet, and simultaneously to Death, although the word is unspoken: "'There is only one remedy! One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!' [...]. 'Yes', said I, 'strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live.' He approved with his head, a little sadly as it seemed. 'Ja! Ja! In general, adapting the words of your great poet: That is the ques-

³³ Jim confesses to Marlow as "to an elder man", while his youth and appearance reminds Marlow of the light and heat of youthful illusions, which he had thought extinct (p. 128). Jim believes Marlow has the power "to bind and loose" (p. 97).

³⁴ The play with light in Conrad's work is complex and generates multiple ironies. In "Heart of Darkness", for example, Marlow interrupts his narrative to tell his audience: "'Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know....' It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another" ("Heart of Darkness", *YS*, p. 83).

³⁵ "What piece of work is a man, / how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form / and moving how express and admirable, in action / how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: / the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals" (II, 2, 304-07). Cf. "Longer Notes" to Montaigne and Pico della Mirandola, *Hamlet*, pp. 468-70.

Once again it is night,³⁸ the privileged man draws the curtains, and the narrative voice announces, elegiacally, that the man's wandering days are over and there are "No more horizons as boundless as hope". There will be no more twilights, in forests seen as temples in their solemnity, "[...] in the hot quest for the Ever-undiscovered Country over the hill, across the stream, beyond the wave. The hour was striking! No more! No more!" (p. 338, my underlining).³⁹ As he begins to read the documents in Marlow's packet, the *Hamlet* echo is repeated, as the privileged man is described "like one approaching with slow feet and alert eyes the glimpse of an undiscovered country" (p. 338). In addition to *Hamlet*, we can see that Conrad also has Keats's poetry in mind; the triple movement, achieved with three prepositions of place: "over the hill, across the stream, beyond the wave", exactly echoes the structure in the last stanza of "Ode to a Nightingale" where we find: "Past the near meadows, over the still stream, / Up the hill-side" (ll. 76-7, my underlining). And of course the Ode also contains the sound of the "Forlorn" bell (l. 71). More subtly, Conrad also refers to "Ode to Autumn" where "full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn" (l. 30), here Keats, himself, is referring to the "bourn" of the *Hamlet* soliloquy, in the sure knowledge of his own imminent, premature death. However, the really significant images are the capitalized "Ever-undiscovered Country", "boundless horizons", the echoing strike of the hour bell, and the repeated "No more! No more!" (p. 338), which hammer home the *Hamlet* source.

We have commented that both *Hamlet* and *Lord Jim* go to their deaths, finally "ready" to fulfill their duty, and confront their destiny. In the four-hour playing time of *Hamlet*, there is considerable delay before Hamlet can act. Claudius' greasy rhetoric has trowelled over the fact that he has usurped the throne by killing his brother, and within two months married his sister in law. Hamlet is left alone on stage and his first soliloquy expresses despair and potential suicide (I, 2, 129-59). His most famous soliloquy returns to the question of suicide, but rejects it:

But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all (III, 1, 78-83)

Hamlet's "native hue of resolution/ Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" (III, 1, 84-5), and he can do and "can say nothing" to his cause (II, 2, 564). He says he creates "*The Mousetrap*" (III, 2, 232) to "catch the conscience of the King" (II, 2, 601), but even when Claudius' guilt is confirmed, Hamlet still delays action, this time under the guise of not sending Claudius to Heaven since his own father has been consigned to purgatory: "That would be scann'd: / a villain kills my father, and for

³⁸ Most significant interviews in the novel occur at night: Jim visits Marlow at the Malabar (pp. 76-155), when Marlow visits Stein (pp. 204-17), and his meeting with Jewel (pp. 307-19).

³⁹ In changing the archaic "bourn" from *Hamlet* to the more modern "horizons", Conrad may be making an unusual compromise with the reader.

that / I, his sole son, do this same villain send / To heaven” (III, 3, 75-8). His final decision is, paradoxically, not to decide; he submits to fate and permits it to determine his end; finally he is ready:

Not a whit. We defy augury. There is special
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if
it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.
(V, 2, 215-18, my underlining)

In *Lord Jim* responsibility and readiness are efficiently brought into conjunction when Jim, who had admitted “It is all in being ready. I wasn’t; not – not then” (p. 81) later, self-deludingly, he says he “always believed in being prepared for the worst”, and had the life-boats “ready for instant service” (p. 98). In “the same boat” with the crew he states that he “was ready for anything” (p. 120), in his willingness to kill the captain, even if it entailed his own death. Nevertheless, he admits eventually that “all the same one is responsible” (p. 180). Finally, When Jim goes to his sacrificial death, his last words to Doramin are: “I am come ready and unarmed” (p. 415, my underlining). And, as we have already mentioned, Marlow quotes from the exchange between Gloucester and Edgar in *King Lear*, which expresses the same idea: “[...] Men must endure / Their going hence even as their coming hither, / Ripeness is all.” (V, 2, 9-11, my underlining).⁴⁰

3. WRITING BEYOND THE PALE

We have been looking at how Conrad refers to *Hamlet* in *Lord Jim*; we will next see that both texts contain particular obsessions, and then analyse certain aspects of Conrad’s writing, concentrating on the heart of Patusan, which, eventually, will lead the reader of *Lord Jim* towards the inexpressible and silence. Jim is “one of us” – a phrase repeated throughout the novel, the island to which he is exiled is called Patusan and the name is very obviously an anagram of the site of his shame, the pilgrim ship PATNA and US = PATUSAN. We are all guilty, we are all under sentence of death, and if we were treated to our deserts, none would “scape whipping” (*Hamlet*, II, 2, 525), which, in one sense, is the reason we all must “hang together”. Jim may be seen as a middle-class Hamlet, with nothing of the Prince’s nobility or eloquence, but nevertheless they are both representative, they are “one of us”, “forlorn magicians” (p. 315), doomed to die, and in their sacrifice and atonement possibly gain redemption.

T.S. Eliot wrote of *Hamlet* that it “is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art” (Eliot, p. 100). Booth has well said

⁴⁰ The revenge and sacrifice motif can also be found in *David Copperfield*, where Peggotty actually paraphrases the lines above from *Hamlet* “if my time is come ‘tis come. If ‘tan’t, I’ll bide it”, a sentiment he repeats to Pip on his return from Australia (pp. 668, 729).

“the play persists in taking its audience to the brink of intellectual terror”; he also comments on the interconnections in the play between “breeding, childbearing, death, and walking” (Booth, pp. 151, 163). Brockbank connects the play back to its origins in Sophoclean drama and cites from *Oedipus Tyrannus*: “All horrors that are wrought beneath the sun” (Brockbank, p. 181 and n.). Hughes writes that whenever Shakespeare wrote at “top intensity” he was always writing poetry about the same “particular knot of obsessions” which have a “taproot in a sexual dilemma of a particularly black and ugly sort” (Hughes, “Introduction” and “Note”, p. 181).⁴¹ We will see that in *Lord Jim* a similar nexus of images (the moon, the grave, the feminine, fathomless eyes and water) obsess Conrad.

When Conrad is writing at full stretch his prose becomes clotted with repetition, transforming metaphors, paradox, oxymoron, and intertextual references. Consider Marlow’s description of the effect of Stein’s voice, previously qualified, in contradictory terms, as “extraordinarily strong, as though away there in the dusk he had been inspired by some whisper of knowledge” (p. 214):

The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn – or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poetry of its dimness over pitfalls – over graves. His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had travelled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt. Yet for all that the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poetry of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames. (p. 215, my underlining)

The passage describes Stein’s conviction, at what some have seen as the doctrinal heart of the novel, and in almost the centre of the narrative, where he delivers his obscure message in three languages: “To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream – and so – *ewig – usque ad finem*...”⁴² The passage contains all the rhetorical figures mentioned above and in addition seems deliberately over-written. However, Marlow remembers the advice when he recites it on the occasion of his farewell to Jim (p. 334). Advice perhaps remembered because Stein, described as an occidental sage, is “one the most trustworthy men” Marlow has ever known (p. 202). Stein tells us to follow the dream since we have fallen into life as into a dream existence, like a man who has fallen into the sea. The world of dream taken from *Hamlet* is reinforced by the borrowed “perchance” (III, 1, 65). However, Stein’s reaction to “evil, great evil” with a “humorous indulgent smile”, his portrayal of life as “a funny and terrible thing”, the “swish swish” of his slippers (p. 214), and Marlow and he shamefully “sitting and talking like two boys” (p. 215), must give us pause for thought. It is

⁴¹ This early essay is a brilliant, concentrated analysis, whereas his extended work on the same subject: *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* is driven into over-prescriptive conclusions.

⁴² In addition to the echoes of the “dream” from Hamlet’s soliloquy, Conrad also refers to Prospero’s speech from *The Tempest*, “we are such stuff as dreams are made on” (IV, 1, 156-7). From the Bible, Stein quotes “*Usque ad finem*” (p. 215, I am with you always, even unto the end. Matt., 28, 20).

clear from the contradictory manner in which Marlow recuperates Stein's message, that he is hesitant to accept it: "crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn" or possibly "night"; "a charming and deceptive light", the repeated archaism "impalpable poesy" of "dimness" which draws attention to its own artificiality and "crepuscular light" all reveal his concern. More subtly, in line 4, we have a shifter "but" that does not shift, and a conjunction "and" that does not join: and it was a charming but deceptive light, would be a more logical construction, but it would fail to create the anxiety engendered by Conrad's perverse syntax. Stein is given high value in a causal, hypotactic sentence that concludes that he had lived a life without shame – a fundamental achievement in this novel. However, the hypotaxis breaks down in a series of paratactic statements that formulate a triple withdrawal: "In so far he was right. That was the way, no doubt. Yet [...]". The two short sentences, contain positive and negative elements, which cancel each other out: the positive elements of his journey through life, in that he had travelled so far on strange paths are now reused as negative elements "the way", that men wander without direction, among graves – an image proleptic of Jewel's mother's grave, where Marlow and she will later have their whispered conversation. Stein has said we must exert ourselves to make the sea, "the destructive element", support us, but in this passage Marlow translates Stein's sea metaphor into a barren plain surrounded by the fires of hell.

When Marlow and Stein break up their conversation, Stein, carrying a "two-branched candlestick", leads Marlow to his room:

We passed through empty dark rooms, escorted by gleams from the lights Stein carried. They glided along the waxed floors, sweeping here and there over the polished surface of the table, leaped upon a fragmentary curve of a piece of furniture, or flashed perpendicularly in and out of distant mirrors, while the forms of two men and the flicker of two flames could be seen for a moment stealing silently across the depths of a crystalline void. (pp. 215-16, my underlining)

The light of the candles, described with active verbs, seems more vital than the men, who are reduced to "forms" and reflections which are perhaps borrowed from Plato's parable of the cave; a location predicted by Marlow, in previously likening Stein's study to a "cavern" (p. 204). a few lines later, the images of light and stealth are repeated:

I saw it [the "imperishable reality" of Jim's existence] vividly, as though in our progress through the lofty silent rooms amongst fleeting gleams of light and the sudden revelations of human figures stealing with flickering flames within unfathomable and pellucid depths, we had approached nearer to absolute Truth, which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half-submerged, in the silent still waters of mystery (p. 216, my underlining).

The Keats reference, referred to in the Introduction to this paper, leads the reader to connect, metaphorically, the "half-submerged" Truth and Beauty, with the half-submerged hazard that almost wrecks the Patna (over which she goes "as easy as a snake crawling over a stick", p. 28); a half-submerged hazard which does in fact wreck Jim. This revealed truth is but "a hair's breadth" from a lie or an illusion (pp. 130-1, 222). The active "gleams" (with overtones of hell from "the abyss of

flames”) are here transformed back into watery images with which Stein began. The truth is a diabolical joke and reality no more than a seeming.⁴³

Where Shakespeare and Conrad have found matter that refuses to be manipulated into art, I certainly cannot heave words onto the page in their place. Their words ache at us down the years in the tremendous effort they have made to glimpse the essence of tragic reality. In the next movement of this article, we will analyse the nature of a reality in *Lord Jim* that refuses to be manipulated into art, where language breaks down and leads to silence. In “Heart of Darkness”, Marlow wrestles with death and “dream[s] the nightmare out to its end”, he remains faithful to Kurtz, because Kurtz had “summed up” the human condition, which he is himself unable to do (*YS*, pp. 149-50); Marlow’s wrestle with death in “Heart of Darkness” is transformed into a fight with fear in *Lord Jim*, which of course he loses (p. 321).

How does one kill fear, I wonder? How do you shoot a spectre through the heart, slash off its spectral head, take it by its spectral throat? It is an enterprise you rush into while you dream, and are glad to make your escape with wet hair and every limb shaking. The bullet is not run, the blade not forged, the man not born; even the winged words of truth drop at your feet like lumps of lead. You require for such a desperate encounter an enchanted and poisoned shaft dipped in a lie too subtle to be found on earth. An enterprise for a dream, my masters! (p. 316).

His defeat in the duel with fear is occasioned by his exorcism of Jewel on Patusan, when he tries to persuade her that Jim will never leave. As we have noted before, Conrad deploys a variety of tones in *Lord Jim*. The extract above is expressed in terms borrowed from Gothic Literature, which fulfills the need for excitement in a reader seeking adventure. However, in drawing attention to its gothic antecedents, the passage thus subverts its own reality for the more alert reader.

Marlow introduces Patusan to his listeners in a proleptic narrative move, before Jim has actually set out there, and two years before he, Marlow, will see it. The island is remote and native ruled; it is far distant from any Western Empire. Marlow says it is as remote as as “a star of the fifth magnitude” (p. 218); it is very much the land of the “Otherness”.⁴⁴ Conrad’s initial description of the heart of Patusan anticipates the location of Marlow’s conversation with Jewel; if Stein’s message may be seen as the doctrinal centre of the novel, the following is the geographic equivalent:

At a point on the river about forty miles from the sea, where the first houses come into view, there can be seen rising above the level of the forests the summits of two steep hills very close together, and separated by what looks like a deep fissure, the cleavage of some mighty stroke. As a matter of fact, the valley between is nothing but a narrow ravine; the appearance from the settlement is one irregularly conical hill split in two, and with the two halves leaning slightly apart. On the third day after the full, the moon, as seen from the open space in front of Jim’s house (he had a very fine house in the native style when I visited him), rose exactly behind these

⁴³ For example: “A joke hatched in hell”; an “infernal joke”, “a fiendish and appalling joke” (pp. 108, 109, 121). Marlow, happy that Jim had at last “mastered his fate”, states that “Nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans” (p. 322). However, the interpolated “now” is all a first-time reader needs to alert him to the imminent catastrophe; while in a second reading, Marlow’s expectations generate considerable dramatic irony.

⁴⁴ I have dealt with this topic previously in “A Sense of Belonging: Joseph Conrad and Otherness”.

hills, its diffused light at first throwing the two masses into intensely black relief, and then the nearly perfect disc, glowing ruddily, appeared, gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated away above the summits, as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph. (pp. 220-1, my underlining)

In this passage, the moon, floating above the sexualized, female landscape,⁴⁵ the grave, and the “as if” clause, are all images that will be repeated when Marlow encounters the grave of Jewel’s mother. The Moon, symbol of the feminine embodied by Jewel, is always associated with the grave. The story of Jim and Jewel’s love might easily be seen as a “Madame Butterfly” stereotype, but, for Marlow, the relationship is tainted by the presence of the grave:⁴⁶

Apparently it is a story very much like the others: for me, however, there is visible in its background the melancholy figure of a woman, the shadow of a cruel wisdom buried in a lonely grave, looking on wistfully, helplessly, with sealed lips. The grave itself, as I came upon it during an early morning stroll, was a rather shapeless brown mound, with an inlaid neat border of white lumps of coral at the base, and enclosed within a circular fence made of split saplings, with the bark left on. A garland of leaves and flowers was woven about the heads of the slender posts – and the flowers were fresh. (275-6, my underlining)

The “cruel wisdom”, “the melancholy figure of a woman” and “the grave” are all repeated when Marlow tries to convince Jewel that Jim will be constant, but she replies: “They always leave us [...]. The breath of sad wisdom from the grave which her piety wreathed with flowers seemed to pass in a faint sigh. [...]” (p. 309).

Marlow writes that he has assembled the pieces of Jim’s story together “to make an intelligible picture” (p. 343), but at key moments he turns away from the picture. All the characters he has described, save Jim, he is sure of: “They exist as if under an enchanter’s wand. But the figure round which all these are grouped – that one lives, and I am not certain of him. No magician’s wand can immobilise him under my eyes. He is one of us” (pp. 330-31). During his last evening on Patusan, Marlow is waylaid by Jewel, after sunset. What she wanted “[...] would be something very simple – the simplest impossibility in the world; as for instance, the exact description of the form of a cloud” (p. 307). Of course the reader, already alerted to *Hamlet*, will remember the scene where Hamlet mocks Polonius, by digressing on the impossibility of describing the shape of clouds: which may look “like a camel indeed” or “like a weasel” and in addition be “Very like a whale” (III, 2, 369-73). As Jewel’s eyes are fathomless, but in which something stirred: “as you may fancy you can detect when you plunge your gaze to the bottom of an immensely deep well” (p. 307), so faced with Jewel’s statement that, unlike her mother, she “didn’t want to die weeping”, Marlow

⁴⁵ The sexualized female landscape has been anticipated by Jim who previously said that “he would manage to find a crack to get in” (p. 234).

⁴⁶ Jim created the grave of Jewel’s mother, perhaps signifying that he cares more for a dead ideal, than a vibrant woman. We also note, in the passage above, that “On the third day” and the verb “rose” are obvious references to the Resurrection.

feels that he was “losing [his] footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of the unknown depths” (p. 312):⁴⁷

For a moment I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still – it was only for a moment: I went back into my shell directly. One *must* – don’t you know? – though I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated for a second or two beyond the pale (p. 313, my underling)

For a moment Marlow has looked, as Hamlet has looked over the battlements of Elsinore, beyond the bourn. In *Lord Jim*, gazing at reality, “beyond the pale”, Marlow perceives that codes of honour finally break down, and his deepest fear is revealed as it was almost from his first encounter with Jim: “[...] the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death – the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct” (p. 50). The nexus of native women abandoned by white men, their tears, their graves, fathomless eyes and water, the moon, all signify a tragic truth which Marlow says will prevail. However, Conrad applies traditional personification to express Marlow’s fundamental doubts: “Truth shall prevail – don’t you know *Magna est veritas et ...* Yes, when it gets a chance” (p. 320).⁴⁸ The images are repeated when Marlow overhears their greeting for the last time. He has not the courage to face them: “the playful call sounded like a moan. It was too confoundedly awful” (p. 321). Marlow has told Jewel that “nothing” can put them asunder, and he has told her that this is true because Jim is not good enough, which is exactly what Jim has told her. It is true, but she believes it a lie (pp. 317-18). In *Lord Jim* it seems that Lies and Truth are indistinguishable in extremity. Later, that same night, Marlow once more describes the same location:

[...] I saw part of the moon glittering through the bushes at the bottom of the chasm. For a moment it looked as though the smooth disc, falling from its place in the sky upon the earth, had rolled to the bottom of that precipice: its ascending movement was like a leisurely rebound; it disengaged itself from the tangle of twigs; the bare contorted limb of some tree, growing on the slope, made a black crack right across its face. It threw its level rays afar as if from a cavern, and in this mournful eclipse-like light the stumps of felled trees uprose very dark, the heavy shadows fell at my feet on all sides, my own moving shadow, and across my path the shadow of the solitary grave perpetually garlanded with flowers. (p. 322, my underlining)

The ascension of the moon, the cavern, his own moving shadow, the shadow of the grave across his path overwhelmingly denote tragic loss.⁴⁹ Loss of Youth and loss

⁴⁷ It seems that the watery depths of Jewel’s eyes, an image continued by Marlow describing the loss of his own footing in unknown depths, connects to a duality whereby the feminine is seen both as sustaining and destructive, thus qualifying Stein’s advice.

⁴⁸ As usual, Marlow’s quotation is incomplete; the full citation is: *Magna est veritas et paevallet* (I Esdras 4, 41). King James Apocrypha gives “Great is Truth, and mighty above all things.”

⁴⁹ Tragic loss is reinforced, in this context, with the word “cross” contained in the seemingly banal preposition “across”.

of Love in the images of the flowers “destined for the use of the dead alone”. Their scent is “thick and heavy like the fumes of incense”, and the lumps of white coral around the grave “shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls” (p. 322).

When, the next morning, Marlow finally leaves Patusan, he and Jim float down river and: “The empty reaches sparkled under the high sun” (p. 331). But the brightness is part of a picture i.e. it is transmuted into art – from which Marlow is turning away to return “home”. As the town of Patusan: “[...] dropped out of my sight bodily, with its colour, its design, and its meaning, like a picture created by fancy on a canvas, upon which, after long contemplation, you turn your back for the last time.” (p. 330, my underlining). As they float down the river so the shadow of parting looms ever closer, and Marlow feels elated by a prospect of the sea which is a “sign” of freedom for him, but “a sign, a call” of potential betrayal for Jewel (pp. 315, 331). However, we cannot exult with Marlow for the scene continues with an image of art, which unlike the “language of facts”, we have come to know cannot tell the truth: “[...] it was as if a great hand far away had lifted a heavy curtain, had flung open an immense portal” (p. 331). The theatrical curtain, and oversized, Latinate “portal” are in the same register as the “impalpable poesy” of Stein’s vision (p. 215) and are designed to be suspect:

I breathed deeply, I revelled in the vastness of the opened horizon, in the different atmosphere that seemed to vibrate with a toil of life, with the energy of an impeccable world. This sky and this sea were open to me. The girl was right – there was a sign, a call in them – something to which I responded with every fibre of my being. I let my eyes roam through space, like a man released from bonds who stretches his cramped limbs, runs, leaps, responds to the inspiring elation of freedom. ‘This is glorious!’ I cried, and then I looked at the sinner by my side. (pp. 331-2, my underlining)⁵⁰

Marlow has fitted “the pieces” of Jim’s story together “to make an intelligible picture” (p. 343); what emerges from the picture is loss of Youth and Hope and Love. “It’s difficult to believe he will never come. I shall never hear his voice again, nor shall I see his smooth tan-and-pink face with a white line on the forehead, and the youthful eyes darkened by excitement to a profound, unfathomable blue.” (p. 343).⁵¹ Marlow sees Jim as a symbolic figure, set 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.” However, at this very moment of perceiving Jim’s triumph, Marlow remembers his fatal flaw: “It was like a shadow in the light” (p. 265). Darkness and shadow loom menacingly even in the brightest sunshine: when their

⁵⁰ The Latinate ‘impeccable’ (without sin), is in stark contrast to the Anglo-Saxon “sinner”, though they are in the same isotopy.

⁵¹ Marlow’s description of Jim’s colouring, stalwart build and direct gaze, recalls the loss of Conrad’s seamates who perished in October 1881. He wrote to Cunninghame Graham, 4.02.1898: “‘Skimmer of the Seas’ what a pretty name! But she is gone and took a whole lot of good fellows away with her into the other world. Comme c’est vieux tout ça! In that craft I began to learn English from East Coast chaps each built as though to last forever, and coloured like a Christmas card. Tan and pink – gold hair and blue eyes with that Northern straight-away-there look!” (*L*, 2, p. 35).

journey down river ends on the shore, the sea glitters in the sunshine, but Conrad accumulates ominous images: “a solitary bird, all black”; “A ragged, sooty bunch of flimsy mat hovels”; “high piles the colour of ebony”; “A tiny black canoe”; and, on the white sand, two natives “dark-brown as if dried in smoke, with ashy patches on the skin” (p. 332). Marlow writes to his correspondent that “There is much truth – after all – in the common expression ‘under a cloud’” (p. 339), and we cannot forget, that just three pages earlier, as Marlow sails West to home and freedom, over him “a big detached cloud floated dark and still, casting a slaty shadow on the water beneath” (p. 336). The significance of this tiny detail is considerable. Jim is repeatedly seen as being “under a cloud”, but when our enquirer, Marlow, is also seen under a cloud, “the common expression” resonates to include all of us. Throughout, Marlow speaks of Jim as his young brother, and sometimes casts himself in the role of a potential Cain being asked what he “had done with my very young brother” (p. 223). The final movement of this article is an analysis of Christian symbolism in *Lord Jim* which leads, ultimately, to images of Nothing and Silence.

4. CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM AND SILENCE

That Jim, like us, is a straggler, a horrible bungler, and permanently under a cloud is not in doubt; nevertheless his physical presence is loaded with Christian imagery. From the first paragraph of the novel, and repeated throughout, Jim is “apparelled in immaculate white, from shoes to hat” (p. 3). (The narrative gaze is upward and the language register elevated). For the natives he seems to have descended from the clouds, and ascended up the river (p. 229). Marlow describes Jim “In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of his fair hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine [...]. He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence” (p. 229). These images all combine in Marlow’s last view of him as the “Light of the World”: “He was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet, the opportunity by his side – still veiled [...] he himself appeared no bigger than a child – then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world.... And, suddenly, I lost him....” (p. 336).⁵² Jim repeats, “Nothing can touch me” (p. 179 and *passim*).⁵³ Jim accepts and atones for the sin and guilt: “He hath taken it upon his own head” (p. 415; cf. *Acts*, 18, 6); he is tried “shamefully” and “more than is fair” (pp. 105, 124); Marlow “could not think of washing his hands” of Jim, (p. 200). He is often likened to “a little child”;⁵⁴ there are

⁵² “I am the light of the world he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness” (John 8, 12).

⁵³ “Nothing can touch me” also reminds us of Christ’s warning to Mary Magdalene, after the Resurrection: “Noli me tangere” (*John*, 20, 17). One of the meanings of “touch” (*OED* “touch” 6) is stain or mark, which is the same isotopy as “immaculate apparel”.

⁵⁴ By Cornelius (pp. 327, 329), as an example of not “suffering the little children”. Jim follows Marlow “as manageable as a little child” (p. 170). Stein says he is young, and Marlow calls Jim “the youngest human being now in existence” (p. 219).

echoes of the Garden of Gethsemane in “licking the dregs” to the end, “bitter enough”, “I mustn’t shirk any of it” (pp. 153-4). Jewel is like a ministering angel, “Her tenderness hovered over him like a flutter of wings”; “her two wide sleeves uprose in the dark like unfolding wings” (pp. 283, 308). We have seen that Jim’s fate and opportunity are constantly likened to a veiled, Eastern Bride, but at the end of *Lord Jim* the veil is given a further significance: the veil of temple, rent after the Crucifixion.⁵⁵ “For it may very well be that in the short moment of his proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side” (p. 416).⁵⁶ Jim is finally “ready and unarmed”, his last words to Tamb’ Itam are: “it is time to finish this”, and on “that evening the aspect of the heavens was angry and frightful”. In sympathy with the immanent tragedy, the natural world becomes apocalyptic: “The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense streaming like an open vein.” (p. 413).⁵⁷

That Conrad, through Marlow’s narrative, intends Jim to be seen to follow the pattern of Christ cannot be in doubt: but to what end? Conrad suggests that we are surrounded by dark powers, and are threatened by a malevolent providence embodied by Gentleman Brown, a “blind accomplice of the Dark Powers” (p. 354). Marlow tells us that “not one of us is safe” from these powers. “We are snared into doing things for which we get called names, and things for which we get hanged, and yet the spirit may well survive – survive the condemnations, survive the halter, by Jove!” (p. 43). But beyond this pious hope he can say nothing.

Hegel wrote that whoever would speak about the ineffable to others “would have to speak the language of angels, would have to / experience the poverty of words” (“Eleusis” in Agamben, p. 8). Conrad frequently writes about not being able to say, a silence which we have seen is connected to the moon, the grave and the feminine principle.⁵⁸ Marlow tells Jewel, repeatedly, that “Nothing” can separate Jim from her (pp. 309, 316-17, 320). Jim’s last word to Marlow is “nothing”. “‘Tell them ...’ he began [...]. Tell who? The half-submerged sun faced him; I could see its red gleam in his eyes that looked dumbly at me... ‘No – nothing’” (p. 335). In the conclusion to *Victory*, “Davidson, thoughtful, seemed to weigh the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness: ‘Nothing!’” (V, p. 412).⁵⁹ Throughout *Lord Jim* there

⁵⁵ Cf. Luke 23, 45 “And the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent”.

⁵⁶ Cf. I Cor 13, 12: “For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face”.

⁵⁷ Rev, 6, 12 “there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood”. Marlow’s Faustus cries: “See see where Christ’s blood streames in the firmament.” (I, 1432).

⁵⁸ Conrad was surely aware of the last lines of Goethe’s *Faust*: “*das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan*”; “Eternal Womanhood / Leads us above” (Goethe, Part II, p. 288). Stein’s use of “*Ewig*”, the destructive element of the sea and the moon are all aspects of the dangerous feminine, which, in Goethe, may very well “lead us above”, but in Conrad that ascent can only be achieved through death.

⁵⁹ It is possible that there is a connection to the dangerous feminine in the renaissance pun on “Nothing” that one finds in the title of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and in the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia:

Ham. That’s a fair thought to lie between maid’s legs.
Oph. What is my lord?
Ham. Nothing (III, 2, 119-21).

is constant effort to express something that Marlow finds inexpressible. He comments that he has “[...] given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth” (p. 225). Marlow sums up his written narrative of Jim: “[...] there shall be nothing more; there shall be no message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words” (p. 340). The word “Nothing”, and the impossibility of expression are connected to an image of “Silence”. Marlow tells us that he has trained “[...] youngsters enough in my time, for the service of the Red Rag, to the craft of the sea, to the craft whose whole secret could be expressed in one short sentence” (p. 44) – which of course he does not give us. The French Lieutenant “submits himself to silence” (p. 143), the pilgrims on the Patna are massed on the bridge, completely silent “as if all that multitude of lips had been sealed by a spell” (p. 137), For Stein “there are things that can never be told” (p. 214), Jim dies with his hand over his lips (p. 416), and Hamlet’s last words are: “the rest is silence” (V, 2, 358).

Conrad frequently found language intractable to his purpose; his citation of lines from *Hamlet* and the Bible, two texts he could be certain were known to his contemporary readers, allows him access to a shared value in language that could not be granted directly to his protagonist in the Modern period. *Hamlet* brings horror, resignation and victory in self-sacrifice; the biblical imagery permits the reader to perceive Jim following in the pattern of Christ. Jim is an everyman figure to whom extraordinary things happen; a man who has been tried “More than is fair” (p. 124). *Hamlet* and the Bible solicit the reader into an interpretation of plenitude in the ineffable. However, the dark powers, the ghosts, and diabolical jokes at the general absurdity of existence, permit a much darker interpretation of inexpressible emptiness. The Bible, *Hamlet* and *Lord Jim* hang together. The supremely eloquent Danish Prince, the poor incoherent straggler that is Jim, Marlow, Stein, the “privileged man”, and all of us are “under a cloud”, as we are all condemned to hang together.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ I am grateful to Françoise Palleau and John Robinson for their comments on early versions of this paper.

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