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# "The Deplorable Details"

Fear and Shame in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*

Bachelor's thesis in English Literature

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**Abstract**

Fear and shame are themes which play important roles in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*. Conrad implements these themes into his tale with an idiosyncratic awareness of their impact on the characters and communities he has created. The text will consider these themes by utilising secondary literature on *Lord Jim*, as well as incorporating a recent psychological paper on shame. The themes of fear and shame manifest themselves most prominently in the character Jim; they become crucial themes which determine and dictate his character. Yet, these themes are not exclusive to Jim. Other characters within the narrative play important roles which highlight how the themes of fear and shame are presented more broadly. There is nuance to these themes, whereby shame can occur as a product of one's own psyche, as well as by what a community may define as shameful (Micheli and Castelfranchi, 713). The theme of fear which will be highlighted then becomes a fear of experiencing shame. This thesis will consider how these themes are implemented and what effect they have on the characters and communities which Conrad presents.

**Sammendrag**

Frykt og skam er temaer som spiller viktige roller i Joseph Conrads *Lord Jim*. Conrad bruker disse temaene i fortellingen sin med en idiosynkratisk bevissthet om deres innvirkning på karakterene og samfunnene han har skapt. Teksten vil vurdere disse temaene ved å bruke sekundærlitteratur om *Lord Jim*, i tillegg til å inkludere en psykologisk artikkel om skam. Temaene frykt og skam manifesterer seg mest fremtredende i karakteren Jim; de blir avgjørende temaer som bestemmer og dikterer hans karakter. Likevel er disse temaene ikke eksklusive for Jim. Andre karakterer i fortellingen spiller viktige roller som fremhever hvordan temaene frykt og skam presenteres i en bredere forstand. Det er nyanser i disse temaene, der skam kan oppstå som et produkt av ens egen psyke, så vel som av det et fellesskap kan definere som skammelig (Micheli og Castelfranchi, 711). Temaet frykt som vil bli fremhevet blir da en frykt for å oppleve skam. Denne oppgaven vil vurdere hvordan disse temaene blir vist frem, og hvilken effekt de har på karakterene og samfunnene som Conrad presenterer.

## **“The Deplorable Details”**

### **Fear and Shame in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim***

#### **Introduction**

Joseph Conrad wrote in the author’s note for *Lord Jim* that he regarded the tale as being about “the acute consciousness of lost honour” (6). This sentiment is prevalent throughout Conrad’s novel, yet *Lord Jim* evades simple definition. As the narrative reveals, even Conrad’s definition remains elusive. Taking Conrad’s complex tale as a precedent, proves that *Lord Jim* should not be dissected and labelled through such crass simplicities as that of certain subjects and themes, of which self-proclaimed authorities of literature can point to and say: “This! This is what *Lord Jim* is all about”. It affords merely superficial comprehension and denounces nuance. Not to be impertinent towards Conrad but defining *Lord Jim* as “the acute consciousness of lost honour”, is much like pointing to a wheel and proclaiming it to be a car; indeed, a crucial and necessary part, but far from a sufficient description. *Lord Jim* cannot be reduced to one defining part. The literary merit of Conrad’s tale resides not in statements which denote a monosemic interpretation. It resides in viewing the themes presented as correlating and dependent parts which constitutes the narrative as a whole. Jim is certainly the focal point of Conrad’s tale; the plot and dialogue revolve around his character and actions. However, this does not necessarily mean that *Lord Jim* is a tale primarily about Jim. The content and actions of the other characters as well as their relation towards him play a role equal to Jim. Conrad utilises Jim as a point of departure and final stop whereof he can highlight other characters, other perspectives, and other themes. Of course, one must recognize that Jim is nothing without Marlow. It is through Conrad’s known character Marlow that the reader gets access to Jim, given that Marlow is the main narrator and informer of the events in the narrative. Furthermore, the other characters of Conrad’s tale appear like the characters and creatures one meets in real life: sudden, unexplained, and whose intentions can scarcely be truly known. It is by these that the composition of Conrad’s work – his narrative(s), characters, and themes – remains important.

The construction of Conrad’s tale reveals several important factors, and it is the aim of this paper to investigate two of them: fear and shame. These themes will be investigated using Conrad’s work as well as relevant secondary literature on *Lord Jim*. This paper will also incorporate a recent psychological paper regarding shame. The discussion will, much like

Conrad's tale, be focused upon Jim and how the themes of fear and shame are crucial parts of his character. However, where necessary and relevant, other characters will be highlighted to display fear and shame. In addition, the discussion will consider how these themes are constructed as part of the communities presented in Conrad's work.

Fear and shame are intriguing themes and emotions. In the sense that they are, at one and the same time, very personal yet still can be laid claim to by the universal human experience. It becomes a problem of aspect between the social and the private. One might experience shame internally and completely private, whereby the shame appears as a result of "one's self in the role of self-evaluator" (Miceli et.al, 713). One might also experience shame as a result of learning and experiencing what a community defines as "shameful" (Miceli et.al, 713). The fear which will be highlighted in the discussion then becomes a fear in relation to shame; a fear of experiencing shame. There is nuance to these themes, and the way they are implemented into the narrative makes shame and fear reveal themselves in different degrees and in different ways. Fear and shame are therefore necessary factors of Conrad's tale whereby they play a prominent role in shaping and portraying Jim and other characters.

### **I: 'Hidden Reality'**

"O man is a god when he dreams, a beggar when he thinks".

Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion*

A preliminary consideration which requires attention is the several perspectives within Conrad's tale. The complexity of the narrative does not deny or affirm any truthful perspective. Conrad's characters are portrayed rather than explained. The only time the reader has any semblance of a reliable narrator is in the first four chapters where Conrad utilises an external and omniscient narrator. This is before the character Marlow is introduced in chapter IV and from thereon acts as the main narrator and informer of the events as presented, whereby Conrad's tale utilises a nested narrative technique. The recollection of the narrative is entirely from the perspective of Marlow, whereby reliability is annulled. The evidence for this statement resides in Marlow's shifting judgement of Jim throughout the narrative. His judgement and perspective of Jim holds no internal coherence, whereby Jim at one point may be judged by

Marlow as “one of us”, entailing a clear view and familiar radiance of Jim’s character, while at other moments Jim may be noted by Marlow as “under a cloud” when Marlow’s image of Jim distorts (Kintzele, Paul, 72). Furthermore, Marlow’s narrative is intersected by nested dialogues he has with other characters. Notably his dialogues with the French Lieutenant, Captain Brierly, the German entomologist Stein, and Gentleman Brown. The latter dialogue is incorporated into the letter to “[t]he privileged man” (p.254). The letter to “the privileged man” is penned by Marlow and encapsulates the events presented from chapter XXXVI to the final chapter (XLV). All the events in this letter have been collected and ordered from the retrospective accounts of Tamb Itam, Jewel, and Gentleman Brown’s perspectives, as well as Marlow’s own comments. As Marlow himself notes on the last accounts of Jim: “It is impossible to see him clearly – especially as it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him.” (Conrad, 256)

Additionally, Marlow’s narrative is told retrospectively. Not only being a nested narrative it is also a retrospective narrative. This is showcased by the omniscient narrator: “And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.” (Conrad, 30). On the basis of these observations, Paul Kintzele’s assertion that “*Lord Jim* continually pushes the reader to choose, to make a judgment, while at the same time it undermines the very conditions whereby a judgement would be possible” (70) is piercing into an essential consideration regarding Conrad’s tale. The perspectives are unreliable, and in many cases biased. Whereby what, and how the events are recounted cannot be ascertained beyond reasonable doubt. As Albert J. Guerard succinctly observes: “The reader must survive this experience and go through this labyrinth of evidence without the usual guide of an omniscient narrator or trustworthy author-surrogate.” (82). The narrative remains elusive and precarious. Whereby the reader and critic alike must contend with a vast array of suggestions, rather than clear cut evidence.

In response to Marlow’s implicit concern for Jim, the German entomologist Stein expresses:

‘A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns – nicht wahr? . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.’ (Conrad, 162).

This is Stein’s suggestion for how Jim ought to be (Batchelor, John, 162). Having diagnosed Jim a “romantic” (Conrad, 161), it becomes apparent that the subject of “the destructive



element” is familiar to Stein. Contrasting the sea, and the romantic’s dream: both being unpredictable in form, monotonous in matter, and pervading in manner. The contrasting illumines the dangers of the “romantic” temperament, whereby Stein’s suggestion becomes to utilise the sea, the dream, as an aid to “keep you up”, to survive one’s own temperament. However, it becomes a matter of method, whereby “inexperienced people” tend to drown -- to become overly embroiled in their dreams. It is by turns of the danger of a dream, and the proper method in dealing with it, that one can successfully utilise it in reality. This is at the centre of Jim’s tension, of whether he can realise and utilise his own shortcomings.

To understand the shame Jim experiences, one must first consider two factors: dream and reality. The two diametrically opposed notions of dream and reality serve a crucial function to situate and orientate any individual. More focused, it is the inner world and outer world which together constitute the individual’s experience. Though opposites, they are co-dependent, and under optimal conditions in equilibrium. Conrad is aware of this balance and uses *Lord Jim* to portray mental disequilibrium of dream and reality which manifests itself most prominently in Jim, who having favoured the former, consequently construes the latter. The tension of Jim’s character resides between what Jeremy Hawthorne calls his “dreams of splendid future and unpleasant realities” (37). As noted by the external narrator regarding Jim: “his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds; he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary life. They were the best part of his life, its secret truth, its hidden reality.” (Conrad, 21). Jim’s imaginary life has ascended to being the underlying truth of his reality, at least within his restricted perspective. Jim, being young and inexperienced, has occupied his identity with dreams, a measure applied naively to substitute experience. Dreams have infused and distorted Jim’s unchecked reality. The implication of this is that Jim identifies himself with an ideal. An ideal constructed by “light holiday literature” (Conrad, 11), which is attributed with heroic virtues. The split between Jim’s real self, and ideal self has been recognized by several critics (Kuehn, Robert E., 6; Raval, Suresh, 395; Van Ghent, Dorothy, 74). Jim imagines himself as a maritime hero:

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. (Conrad, 11).

Jim's ideal, however, fails to manifest itself beyond his own mind. Hawthorn's contention that "Jim's failure is a failure to relate the concrete and the abstract" (40) remains an important consideration. When called upon, Jim consequently fails to act out the actions which he has attributed to his ideal self. Jim becomes a mate on the ship: the *Patna*. Faced with the potentially deadly incident of the *Patna* sinking, Jim is struck by fear and leaps overboard in a lifeboat along with other crewmembers. Jim's leap is motivated by an instinctive fear and figuratively serves as the impetus of Jim's fall into shame. The twist of Conrad's plot is that the *Patna* does not sink and is found drifting on the ocean. Jim is then held accountable once the ship is recovered. The result of Jim's leap becomes the act from where his personal shame emerges. Miceli and Castelfranchi conceive of shame as being "concerned with a perceived discrepancy between one's actual and one's ideal self" (711). Jim's actual and ideal self are irreconcilable, and it is from this discrepancy that Jim's personal shame presents itself. Jim's "hidden reality" can no longer be sustained given the disequilibrium of dream and reality.

Beset by despair, Jim seeks some sort of refuge in Marlow to alleviate his mind from the burden of personal failure. To Marlow, Jim appears transparent and sees through his words as the: "struggles of an individual trying to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be" (Conrad, 66). The acuteness of Jim's personal failing is made apparent, where he figuratively crucifies himself for his own failings. However, the facts of the *Patna* incident are considered not sufficient by Jim to justify his actions. Raval Suresh notes a similar sentiment: "The inquiry into the Patna affair by the court has left Jim convinced that no amount of factual data could explain the psychological forces that made him jump." (402). This is however the extent of Jim's turmoil, whereby considerations other than those regarding his own failure are muted. Jim concludes regarding the affairs of his dishonourable night: "Ah! what a chance missed! My God! what a chance missed!" (Conrad, 67). Not bearing to come to terms with the reality of facts and his own mind of ideas, results in his lamentation of a "chance missed". Kintzele notes on Jim's lost opportunity that he is "thus tormented by the retrospective fantasy that he could have survived and attained a heroic status" (71). The chance afforded to him on that night might have been the opportunity to fulfil his ideal. This conclusion serves as evidence to Jim's self-centeredness considering that Jim thought that the *Patna* would sink. Within Jim's mind and words, it seems more important, and more lamentable, that he did not rise to the occasion as a "hero", compared to the fact that he left 800 passengers adrift on board a severely impaired ship. After Jim's lamentation of a chance missed, Marlow notes:

‘I could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations. He had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain. He was very far away from me who watched him across three feet of space. With every instant he was penetrating deeper into the impossible world of romantic achievements. He got to the heart of it at last!’ (Conrad, 67)

Jim understands his failure as a failure towards his ideal self, not a moral failure or failure of duty. In a sense, though Jim’s ideal is endowed with heroic and moral honour, he virtually can’t access any critical judgement of these virtues without the mediation of his ideal. He is occupied with his ideal to the extent that the very virtues which he identifies his ideal with become peripheral. Jim is ultimately not primarily concerned with honour, or moral behaviour, or a ‘standard of conduct’. Jim is first and foremost concerned with his actual self and his ideal self, whereby the aforementioned virtues are merely a byproduct of his ideal conception. Jim’s focus is on “what he had failed to obtain”: his ideal self. The “romantic” conceptualization blinds Jim, whereby the romantic element distorts the true and unpleasant realities of achieving heroic honour. Jim’s character is defined by a certain self-referentiality (Brudney, 267) which implies the shamefulness of Jim. His shame arises from himself and always relates back to himself. A necessary property of any ideal is that it can never be fully realised, it serves mainly as something to aspire towards. However, Jim’s actions do not even attempt to aspire towards the virtues he identifies his ideal with. Jim is attentively focused on himself and his own actions whereby any consideration of his lack of responsibility and conduct, somewhat paradoxically, remain absent. His actions on the Patna become an ultimate negation of what constitutes his ideal and a complete fracturing of his “hidden reality”, something which Jim struggles to come to terms with.

## II: 'Standard of Conduct'

"It is far easier to know men than to know man."

François Duc De La Rochefoucauld,  
*Sentences and Moral Maxims*

To contrast Jim's "hidden reality", the attention must be turned to Marlow's dialogue with the French Lieutenant. The French lieutenant was a crewmember on the ship which found the *Patna* drifting on the ocean without a crew. For the French lieutenant, honour is reserved for individuals who dare to subordinate fear, and shame becomes the result if one fails to do so. The French lieutenant justifies the fear that may arise: "The fear...it is always there" and "Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come" (Conrad, 113). This is a display of empathy, which is not directly aimed at Jim, but an empathy which encompasses Jim by circumstance among an indefinite number of mariners. Suresh Raval notes that "[t]he French lieutenant represents the authority of practical reason and experience, an authority that derives its power, not from an unqualified assertion of the self, but from a recognition of the self's liabilities." (Raval, 392). This is a poignant observation of the French Lieutenant, whereof Raval contrasts the French Lieutenant's authority, with Jim's established "unqualified assertion of the self". However, the liability of fear is merely a factor to be overcome. The French lieutenant invokes the importance of courage and honour:

'I contended that one may get on knowing very well that one's courage does not come of itself (*ne vient pas tout seul*). There's nothing much in that to get upset about. One truth the more ought not to make life impossible... But the honour – the honour, monsieur! . . . The honour . . . that is real – that is! And what life may be worth when" (. . .) "when the honour is gone – ah ça! par exemple – I can offer no opinion. I can offer no opinion – because – monsieur – I know nothing of it.' (Conrad, 114).

Fear and courage are elevated in the French lieutenant's conceptualization of honour, whereby they hinge upon a code of conduct (Raval, 405). Honour derives its value not only from the overcoming of fear, but also of the affirming of proper conduct through courage. These

statements remain indicative of a code of conduct which frames the community of sailors. Failure to overcome fear, failure to affirm proper conduct, is not only abhorrent in the eyes of the French lieutenant, but wholly inconceivable. It is unknowable for him, which adds to the postulate of the disgrace of lost honour. Shame presents itself from the aspect of a mariner's ethics of duty in the French Lieutenant's words. By turns of succumbing to fear and betraying the code of conduct, a negation of honour and courage, becomes such severe transgressions within the community of mariners that, if committed, are beyond the realm of culpability. By which "beyond" means that there is no redemption from such acts, and where culpability ceases to have any redemptive weight.

With the importance of honour and a code of conduct within the community of mariners, it becomes crucial to consider the court of inquiry's assessment of Jim's involvement in the Patna incident. The events in these passages showcase how Jim's leap permeates and insults the constructed code of conduct. Marlow reflects upon his own motives with regards to attending Jim's trial:

'Why I longed to go grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct, I can't explain.' (43)

Marlow admits that the affairs of the trial were merely of interest to someone who abides by the "standard of conduct". He furthermore comments that he wanted Jim to "squirm for the honour of the craft" (Conrad, 40). Initially Marlow's relationship with Jim is dictated by ethics of duty and an established social code prevalent in the community of mariners. The discrepancy between Marlow's and Jim's conceptualization of honour are severe. Marlow's conceptualization of honour hinges upon respecting one's own duty, whereof honour may arise. Jim on the other hand is concerned with what Daniel Brudney defines as "schoolyard honour" where one is attentively concerned with how one thinks one is perceived by others, rather than by any moral considerations (267). This is made evident in Marlow and Jim's first private discussions regarding the *Patna* incident, where Jim expresses a need for being understood and prepared: "It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not – not then. I don't want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain – I would like somebody to understand – somebody – one person at least! You! Why not you?"(66). Jim wants to make Marlow understand, but mutual understanding cannot be apprehended with regard to honour or a "standard of conduct". Though they do share

an agreement on the virtues entwined in honour, they differ in their motives. Marlow is conscientious to the “standard of conduct”, whereby he views it as a necessary consideration for one’s actions. Jim on the other hand is preoccupied with not only his own mode of honour, but also the need for affirmation by his peers. During the proceedings of the trial, Jim’s crewmates abandon him, leaving him as the sole defendant. Marlow describes the court proceedings, with regards to the magistrate and assessors, as merely a formality “to satisfy the law” (Conrad, 48). This “formality” is of course in referring to the facts of the case. Jim’s guilt in the case is nearly self-evident. The *Patna* had been recovered with all its passengers, and several mariners were missing. However, the court of inquiry does garner the interest of several mariners in the port where it is held. It has attracted the interest of Marlow’s peers, which Marlow infers must be “purely psychological” in “the expectation of some essential disclosure” (Conrad, 48). It is during the trial, and Jim’s reluctance to abandon it as his accomplices have, whereby a redeeming aspect of Jim presents itself. In this very un-heroic setting, Jim is able to not “leap”. The awkward phrasing is intended, given that the court of inquiry does not represent any immediate and intense physical fear, he is able to be “prepared” rather than figuratively “leap”. However, the court of inquiry does serve as a testament of public disgrace. Whereof the shame constructed by the community of mariners is concentrated into the final verdict for Jim: “certificates cancelled.” (Conrad, 123). Jim’s ideal, which he has identified with his own romantic conceptualization of honour, as well as his own need for affirmation, is decimated by the verdict. It becomes a symbol of public acknowledgement of Jim’s insubordination to the code of conduct.

Marlow encounters Captain Brierly, who is an assessor, during the inquiry. Captain Brierly is a distinguished ship captain who initially serves as Jim’s opposite. All the virtues which Jim has identified with his ideal is what Brierly has achieved. Marlow tells of Brierly:

‘He had saved lives at sea, had rescued ships in distress, had a gold chronometer presented to him by the underwriters, and a pair of binoculars with a suitable inscription from some foreign Government, in commemoration of these services.’ (Conrad, 49).

Brierly appears “consumedly bored” (Conrad, 49) by the affairs, yet it remains ambiguous what Brierly really thinks of Jim. In conversation with Marlow after the first adjournment, Brierly laments the court: “Why are we tormenting that young chap?” (Conrad, 55). He expresses to Marlow a discomfort regarding the whole affair and wishes it to be over as soon as possible. In their dialogue, Brierly’s character breaks with the description offered by Marlow, decidedly

stating regarding Jim: “let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there! By heavens! I would.” (Conrad, 55). To which Marlow plays devil’s advocate, noting the courage of Jim to face the court alone. Brierly firmly replies with enraged affection: “Courage be hanged!” (Conrad, 55). The *Patna* incident and Jim’s willingness to face the court awaken latent neuroticism within Brierly. Brierly commits suicide not long after the proceedings of the court, to which Marlow’s narrative only express ambiguous statements to the cause of Brierly’s final act:

‘No wonder Jim’s case bored him, and while I thought with something akin to fear of the immensity of his contempt for the young man under examination, he was probably holding silent inquiry into his own case. The verdict must have been of unmitigated guilt, and he took the secret of the evidence with him in that leap into the sea.’ (Conrad, 50)

The events of Brierly’s suicide are recounted in Marlow’s dialogue with the character Mr Jones, Brierly’s first mate. His final moments were spent in conscientiously doing his work as a captain before jumping into the sea. There are innumerable suggestions as to the cause of Brierly’s suicide, yet none remain completely exact or concrete. However, entertaining Marlow’s observation regarding Brierly’s “silent inquiry” is a profitable suggestion to illuminate. Marlow, Jim, the French Lieutenant and Brierly have one thing in common: they are mariners, and, in varying degrees, are aware of the code of conduct implicit in this vocation. Jim’s trial functions as an investigation into the integrity of such a code. The French Lieutenant functions as an embodiment of the code of conduct, and given the stern sentiment of his statements, there is no reconciliation for transgression. The code of conduct is presented in its most rigorous and explicit form through the French Lieutenant words. Brierly is, through the suggestions put forth in his dialogue with Marlow, still an opposite to Jim but they seem rather to be only opposite sides of the same coin. Brierly identifies to some extent with Jim (Van Ghent, 79), and the proceedings appears to have amplified an unbearable notion of himself or of his past. Jim’s transgression of the code of conduct, in which he succumbed to instinctual fear and suffers shame as a result, is heavily implied to be something which resonates deeply with Brierly. Additionally, Brierly is intensely upset by the fact that Jim does not “creep twenty feet underground”. In turn, the hypothetical notion of Brierly’s guilt put forth by Marlow, and Brierly’s subsequent suicide, serves as an affirmation of the French Lieutenant’s sentiment. Brierly, with the realisation of his life’s worth being annulled by some unknown notion, and with the potential outcome that would result if he faced it like Jim, could no longer bear the

burden of his reduced self-worth. Jim and Brierly are opposites, yet they only differ in how they are perceived by the community. The fear and shame are there in both of them, but Jim's are publicly displayed, while Brierly's are constrained in private rumination, whose only outlet is an act of extreme desperation.

An important consideration which must be attended to is Marlow's thoughts on Jim after Jim's certificates have been cancelled. Marlow says:

'[T]he idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters. He was not – if I may say so – clear to me. He was not clear. And there is a suspicion he was not clear to himself either. There were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings – a sort of sublimated, idealised selfishness.' (Conrad, 135)

Marlow is gaining an understanding of Jim, whereby he acknowledges Jim's limited self-knowledge, and his self-obsessiveness with the disgrace. However, Marlow contends that it is the "guilt alone that matters". This may be the case from Marlow's perspective, yet it is on the basis of Jim's character and actions, that it is not guilt, but rather shame which afflicts Jim. Miceli and Castelfranchi's psychological article discusses the differences and criteria for both shame and guilt. Shame, as previously mentioned is "concerned with a perceived discrepancy between one's actual and one's ideal self." (711). Guilt differs in that it is "concerned with one's responsibility for a harmful attitude or behavior." (711). The most notable difference is responsibility. Applying these parameters to the aforementioned point, it is certainly the case that from Marlow's perspective it becomes a matter of guilt. Marlow is conscientious to the standard of conduct and, if he himself were put in Jim's position, it would become a problem of responsibility and thereby guilt. For Jim however, the matter of responsibility hardly appears to him. Despite abandoning his duty and thereby negating his responsibilities as a mariner, he does not hold himself accountable for it. The court of inquiry holds Jim accountable for his actions, yet shame can occur even when the individual in question is responsible for a fault. Miceli and Castelfranchi contends that "even when a responsible fault is at stake, ashamed people do not focus on responsibility issues, but on the disappointing fact that such fault reveals their defectiveness with regard to their ideal self." (711). Therein lies the complexity of Jim's behaviour, whereby matters of responsibility are muted and the focus becomes fixed on his own "defectiveness".

As a result, fear and shame present themselves most prominently in the passages which details Jim's short-lived positions of employment succeeding the court of inquiry. Marlow



arranges for Jim to work after his certificate is cancelled. Here, Marlow's ambivalence towards Jim presents itself, where he would at the outset of the novel watch him "squirm for the honour of the craft", he now arranges employment for Jim to escape the disgrace of his insubordination. Marlow reflects: "that should I let him slip away into the darkness I would never forgive myself" (Conrad, 137). These short-lived employments are documented by accounts of colleagues, executives, and Jim, in letters to Marlow. Jim fails to maintain his employments, as the notion of his past runs concurrent to his present. That is, at each of Jim's employments where any reminder of the *Patna* incident is presented to him, makes him react by promptly resigning and leaving to find another employment. Marlow's telling recounts merely two such incidents in detail, yet he claims: "There were many others of the sort, more than I could count on the fingers of my two hands" (Conrad, 149). The first account is described in a letter to Marlow by Jim's employer, and Marlow's old friend, Mr Denver (Conrad, 142-43). He recounts Jim as being a taciturn yet conscientious and well-behaved employee. Mr Denver however employs the former second engineer of the *Patna* whereupon Jim leaves abruptly. Jim's next employment is with the company Egström and Blake, where Jim is also commented upon as being apt in his employment and "a quiet, soft-spoken chap" (Conrad, 147). Jim leaves in a familiar fashion when the incident is brought up in conversation among Jim's colleagues. One straightforward Captain in the conversation comments upon the *Patna* crew: "Skunks!' . . . It's a disgrace to human natur' – that's what it is. I would despise being seen in the same room with one of those men." (Conrad, 147). The sum of these two accounts, as well as the other innumerable incidents not expounded upon, are indicative of Jim's fear and shame. The notion of Jim's ideal as well as the retrospective view of his lost opportunity to attain to it impedes upon Jim's present. Virtually hindering him to mentally move beyond the incident; Jim's dreams and ideal have a "stranglehold" on his mind and consequently his actions. Desperate denial seems to constrain Jim, whereupon fear of being acknowledged for his involvement in the *Patna* incident is the deciding factor. This fear is a product of his shame, and though this fear being different in character to the instinctive fear he experienced before his leap, it remains an equally deciding factor. Jim's character is decided by a need to realise his ideal, it remains fixed whereby any other considerations or alternatives to handle his turmoil are virtually rejected, or rather not apparent to Jim. The shame, not consciously apprehended by Jim, equates to the inconceivable, the unknowable notion of lost honour as detailed by the French lieutenant. His fear and shame therefore become the roadblocks to his atonement, or any expiation of his wrongdoings. There is no progress for Jim as he is forcing an ideal upon himself, which having

no basis in reality, remains unfulfilled in these circumstances. The severity of his will begs the consideration that it is not Jim who is trying to approximate his ideal, but rather that the ideal which is figuratively consuming Jim (Raval, 399). The “hero” ideal and all its attributes which have so swamped Jim with youthful aspirations are now what clouds his mind; Jim’s passion has become his punishment.

Though Jim’s inability to come to terms with his reality and his mind remain prevalent throughout the narrative, he is himself not aware of this distinction. Jim’s lacking self-awareness is what drives the narrative, whereby his personal shame is the main catalyst. The lack of self-awareness is lamented by Marlow during their first discussions regarding the *Patna* incident: “he complicated matters by being so simple, too – the simplest poor devil!” (Conrad, 76). Jim’s simpleness is however merely superficial, by which the nuances and factors which determine him are registered in his unconscious, yet rarely integrated into the conscious mind. Jocelyn Baines writes of Jim: “He was one of those who instinctively react to the moral subtleties of a situation but, possessing only an average consciousness, is unable to express them” (37). The only sentiment Jim can express are his wishes to forget or atone for the whole *Patna* incident: “Some day one’s bound to come upon some sort of chance to get it all back again. Must!” (137), and hesitatingly thinking out loud to Marlow: “I always thought that if a fellow could begin with a clean slate” (Conrad, 141). This inability to express himself runs throughout the narrative. It is portrayed during Marlow’s final first-hand encounter with Jim on the island Patusan:

‘The forefoot grated on the sand, the boat floated, the wet oars flashed and dipped once, twice. Jim, at the water’s edge, raised his voice. “Tell them . . . “ he began. I signed to the men to cease rowing, and waited in wonder. Tell who? The half-submerged sun faced him; I could see its red gleam in his eyes that looked dumbly at me.... “No – nothing,” he said, and with a slight wave of his hand motioned the boat away.’ (Conrad, 253).

Jim is on the verge of relating a statement to the world which renounced Jim, to Marlow. Yet he can’t manage anything beyond “Tell them...”. Hawthorne’s observation that: “Jim’s inability to engage in a real dialogue (...), leaves him as isolated and as much in the grip of illusions at the end of the novel as he was at the beginning.” (46), reveals the consequences of Jim’s character and his obsessive submission to his own ideal and dreams.

Marlow’s dialogue with the German entomologist Stein serves a crucial function in portraying Jim and the elusiveness of his character. Stein, an old entomologist and trader has

had his own past of romantic pursuits much like Jim. Marlow reflects upon Stein's past during their encounter:

'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 there-fore 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 poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames. When at last I broke the silence it was to express the opinion that no one could be more romantic than himself.' (Conrad, 163)

Marlow's reflections here tell of his own perspective on Jim by implication. This implication is shown when Marlow says in the next paragraph: "We avoided pronouncing Jim's name as though we had tried to keep flesh and blood out of our discussion, or he were nothing but an erring spirit, a suffering and nameless shade." (Conrad, 163). Stein had not faltered in his pursuit of his ideas; Jim has. Jim has been on the precipice of achieving his heroic fantasy, and in turn succumbed to the antithesis of his own ideal. The result being public ostracization, and in turn an intense shame which has manifested itself in desperate denial, bitter acquiescence, and short-lived peripatetic behaviour. The implied manner of Marlow's reflections becomes more apparent as he moves away from referring only to Stein and moves his interest toward "the great plain on which men wander". The imagery Marlow constructs tells of the dangerous nature of pursuing romantic endeavours and "generous ideas" which are surrounded by "an abyss of flames". Marlow is ambivalent towards Jim, whereby any "right" answer or solution to Jim's predicament remains elusive.

Their discussion is filled with several comments upon Jim's character, most noteworthy is Stein's perspective. Using a butterfly as a comparison to man, Stein suggests:

'This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so....' He moved his hand up, then down.... "He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil – and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow – so fine as he can never be.... In a dream....' (Conrad, 161-62)

Stein has diagnosed Jim “a romantic”. Jim suffers from an established delusion, and in proper romantic sensibility, Stein argues that one must “to the destructive element submit” (Conrad, 162). One must submit to one’s own romantic temperament. However, Stein suggests this with acute awareness of the human’s innate incapability for a comfortable life. Stein diagnoses the fleeting temperament of the mind brought on by time, whereby who one is today is incommensurable with who one was yesterday. This diagnose is poignant to Jim, considering his disparate actions throughout the narrative. The only thing which withstands the fleetingness of time in Jim’s character is his fixation on his ideal. Jim assumes that if his ideal self can be realised, and achieve a “clean slate”, he will transform himself from “a devil” into “a saint”, or rather from a coward to a hero. Stein however, familiar with the dangers of the romantic temperament, foreshadows Jim’s fate with a touch of soberness notwithstanding, or perhaps precisely because of, his own romantic past: “so fine as he can never be”. Jim’s personal shame is what drives him towards his goal. His motive, the discrepancy between his ideal self and actual self, becomes a false premise, from which he concludes that he must aspire towards the unattainable ideal, rather than reducing, and thereby breaking, the conception of his ideal self. A dream is not reality. Yet, Jim fervently wills himself to become something which neither him, nor anyone, can ever be.

### III: ‘Original Sin’

“But surely, O idea of mine,  
you alone essential to my days,  
beloved cause of endless suffering,  
you’ll be undone by death along with me”

Giacomo Leopardi,  
“The Dominant Idea”, *Canti*

Conrad’s tale has been regarded as divided (J. Guerrard, 93), in the sense that there is a clear distinction between what may be referred to as the first “Patna” section and the latter “Patusan” section. The dividing of the narrative appears to grant Jim redemption in the “patusan” section. In the “Patna” section, Jim’s ideal is shattered and lost by his insubordination

to the code of conduct. In the “Patusan” section however, Jim’s ideal is given a community and a setting in which it can be realised. Dorothy Van Gent postulates that Patusan is the “clean slate” which Jim has been searching for (73). Initially it seems as if he becomes the hero he has always dreamt of by gaining the respect and trust of Doramin’s tribe after defeating their enemy Sherif in battle. Jim also becomes romantically involved with Jewel, the daughter of the vindictive Cornelius who wishes Jim to be removed from the island. Jim’s self referentiality is commented upon by Marlow: “he seemed to love the land and the people with a sort of fierce egoism, with a contemptuous tenderness.” (Conrad, 188). This “fierce egoism” is indicative and related to his disregard of the passengers on the *Patna*. Jim’s primary concern in the different situations he finds himself in is in what way it garners himself. Despite this initial appearance of Jim finally realising his ideal, it remains that Jim’s past is still affecting his present. The notion of his past has deformed Jim, in the sense that his character remains defined by his failure to subordinate fear, and the shame which subsequently inflicted him. His past is why he continues to fixate on his ideal, whereby Raval’s contention that: “Patusan is merely a dream-world where the ideal has its full sway for Jim”. (403), becomes essential to this section.

The island of Patusan and its community differs from the community of duty-bound mariners, in the sense that there is no standard of conduct in the same manner. Additionally, it is a remote and isolated island, where none of its native inhabitants are aware of the *Patna* incident. These factors become ideal for Jim’s complex shame, as there are initially no external reminders of his past. Daniel Schwarz notes that “Patusan...represents a kind of permanent vacation that relieves us from the “home” world which define and limits us.” (445). Jim’s “home” (the community of mariners) has indeed judged and labelled Jim. The absence of these factors affords Jim to realise and relish in his ideal.

However, it is upon the arrival of the character Brown whereupon Jim receives an external reminder of his past. Brown is a pirate, and completely barren of any morals or code of conduct; he leads a “lawless life” (Conrad, 265). Brown and his gang enter Patusan in search of food where they enter into a conflict with Doramin’s tribe, the tribe which Jim has become a member of. This results in Jim and Brown’s standoff where they are to negotiate an ending to the conflict. This passage is recounted to Marlow by Brown eight months after the fact (Conrad, 260). It is during this passage where Jim is reminded of his past, which occurs by pure coincidence. Brown, unknowing of Jim’s past, asks Jim: “[W]hat is it you’ve found her that is so d---d precious?” and “what did *you* come for?” (Conrad, 287). It is by these questions where Jim is forced to reflect upon his motives for settling in Patusan. Jim’s past has inadvertently

presented itself to him, whereby it forces him to reconsider his social position in the Patusan community. Jim's dream of a romantic ideal has been fulfilled in Patusan, but the motives for his arrival were the ever-looming fear of being recognised and shamed for his actions on the *Patna*. Jim has only temporarily achieved an illusory sense of redemption and atonement for his shame. Patusan has made it possible for Jim to live and act without any discrepancy between his actual self and ideal self, yet a "clean slate" never really is as clean as one would imagine. Not dealing with the problem of shame, he has instead sought out and constructed a reality which conforms to his dreams, rather than constructing a dream which conforms to his reality. The shame, not being resolved but rather denied, becomes apparent to Jim by Brown's questioning.

The fear and shame, which Jim has attempted to distance himself from, appears to him again in Brown's words:

'Have we met to tell each other the story of our lives?' I asked him. 'Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don't want to hear. Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine. I've lived – and so did you, though you talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth. Well – it is dirty. I haven't got any wings. I am here because I was afraid once in my life. Want to know what of? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it – if it's any good to you. I won't ask you what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings. That's your luck and this is mine' (Conrad, 287-88).

It is in this statement where "Jim recognizes a mirror image in gentleman Brown" (Schwarz, 448) and that "the social fabric he has woven on Patusan collapses" (Schwarz, 448). The parallels between Jim and Brown's past appear equal to Jim (Brudney, 271). They have both experienced a deciding moment of fear, which has defined them in the world outside of Patusan. Jim reacts by offering mercy and a "clean slate" to Brown by allowing him and his gang to leave peacefully. Jim affords Brown this second chance, much like the "clean slate" he believed himself worthy of during the inquiry into the *Patna* incident. This is what will eventually become his downfall. For Jim, Brown appears equal, but they differ in the sense that Jim is a person who has done something wrong and fails to see the whole context of his dreams and reality, while Brown serves the role of the stereotypical "evil villain", who is driven by sadism and an absolute disregard for any community's established order. Brudney notes that Jim's "failure of judgment with respect to Brown flows from his systematic incapacity to see things

as they are". (269). Jim can't see things as they are because of the notion of his past shame, the lack of critical judgement (Brudney, 270), as well as the pathos instilled in him by Brown's statement. Jim attempts to reconcile his own past, and the fear and shame therein, by redeeming Brown. This however results in Brown and his gang, with guidance from the vindictive Cornelius, killing several Bugis (members of Doramin's tribe) upon their departure. One of the deceased is Dain Waris, a good friend of Jim, and the tribe leader Doramin's son. Brown subsequently escapes, and Jim finds himself responsible for his lapse of judgement.

Upon receiving the news of Dain Waris's death, Jim offers his life to Doramin as retribution. Marlow infers: "Then Jim understood. He had retreated from one world, for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruins upon his head." (Conrad 307). It is here that one may argue that Jim overcomes his past and achieves atonement (Baines, 43-44). He realises the folly of his lapse of judgement and by turn of what may be deemed an "honourable" (Batchelor, 169-170) suicide, lets himself be killed by Doramin. Yet, the past is not undone, merely muted, remaining a deciding and crippling factor for Jim's present. He has been able to deny fear and shame, but he has not resolved them. Compared to his former obsession with fear and shame, his present denial of them only amplifies the self-destructive acts. When Jim is informed of Dain Waris's death, he does not hesitate to confront Doramin and his fate. Jim states firmly and egotistically (and somewhat farcically): "[n]othing can touch me" (Conrad, 310), in response to Jewel's attempts to dissuade him from facing Doramin. Furthermore, upon his death, his "schoolyard honour" (Brudney, 267) is still prevalent. Marlow writes: "They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead." (Conrad, 312). In comparison to the inquiry, he can now appear before his judgement with proudness, but only if he is observed and affirmed. His final act appears to be a redemptive one, only in so far that it is viewed in relation to his past. However, since his present motives are affected by an anchoring in the past, Jim's death becomes merely an end characterized by an extreme realization of repressed and transmuted emotion. Whereby the fear and shame he has experienced becomes inverted yet ultimately unchanged and unatoned for.

Jim is by the end of the narrative a tragic character, whereby the questions and answers to common dichotomies (defeat – victory, redemption – damnation) are vague. On the level of conscious intention on the part of Jim, there remains no answer. Jim is unaware, and unable to reconcile his dream and reality, whereby the state of his perspective makes him unable to assess the conditions he is subject to. Certainly, Jim believes he redeems himself because of the

responsibility he feels toward the Bugis: "I am responsible for every life in the land" (Conrad, 297). However, conscious intention requires an awareness of the grander picture. Jim is not aware; he is consumed by his dream of an ideal self. Jewel, Jim's newfound love on Patusan, laments Jim's "suicide" to Marlow, to which Marlow reflects: "She had said he had been driven away from her by a dream, – and there was no answer one could make her – there seemed to be no forgiveness for such a transgression." (Conrad, 263). Yet again, Jim has transgressed a boundary, much like the transgression of the standard of conduct put forth by the French Lieutenant. In the "Patna" section, fear and shame defined Jim's actions, whereby his actions were dictated by them. Failing to resolve fear and shame, he has rather denied and repressed them. His motive remains fixed upon realising his ideal self. Patusan serves as a terminal lucidity for his ideal self, whereby his consummation into realising his dream of an ideal self, like the terminal patient who recovers shortly before they pass, is eradicated by the destructive element's relentless self-realisation. The destructive element, the dream, the relentless attempts to realise his ideal self, is Jim's only way of dealing with the discrepancy of his self and ideal self. His ideal self can only be realised in constructed circumstances, and therefore becomes nothing more than highly defined fiction.

To illumine Jim's death on the level of suggestion put forth by Marlow's narrative, Samuel Beckett's definition of tragedy becomes relevant:

Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organised by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'soci malorum,' the sin of having been born. (49)

Within the context of Conrad's tale, and Jim's character, the expiation of "the sin of having been born", initially seems somewhat irrelevant. However, as John Batchelor has observed, if one considers other works in Conrad's oeuvre, one will find the epigraph to *An Outcast of the Islands* relevant: "indeed, man's original sin is to be born" (Batchelor, 175). With this, one must reconsider Stein's contention: "A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea." Jim's "sin" becomes not that he was born, but that he subsequently fell into his dream. To synthesise, the conclusion to Jim's tragic ending is that he has expiated his most destructive afflictions, his dream, his ideal self, by means of our eventual common condition. There is no justice or redemption in the conventional sense, merely a fatalistic end. Jim has by the end of



the narrative expiated his entire being, whereby the discrepancy between his actual self and ideal self becomes a void consideration.

### **Conclusion**

The figurative lacerations brought forth by the themes of fear and shame serve as important factors in the compound of Conrad's tale. They serve as tools to the craftsman, whereby they become important considerations for interpretation and discourse regarding *Lord Jim*. Broadly considered, the impact of fear and shame in *Lord Jim* are indicative of Conrad's nuanced perception of the seemingly immutable traits of certain individuals, and certain communities. Jim's character is dictated by them in his private "discrepancy" as well as by the weight they carry within his own community. Jim, however, is not the singular subject exposed to the travails of fear and shame amongst a group of acclimatized shallow creatures. He is merely "another"; another character who must deal with a selected set of adversities which are not exclusive, but rather relentlessly inclusive. Adversities are universal, yet it is how Jim deals with them, which makes his character the point of interest in Conrad's tale.

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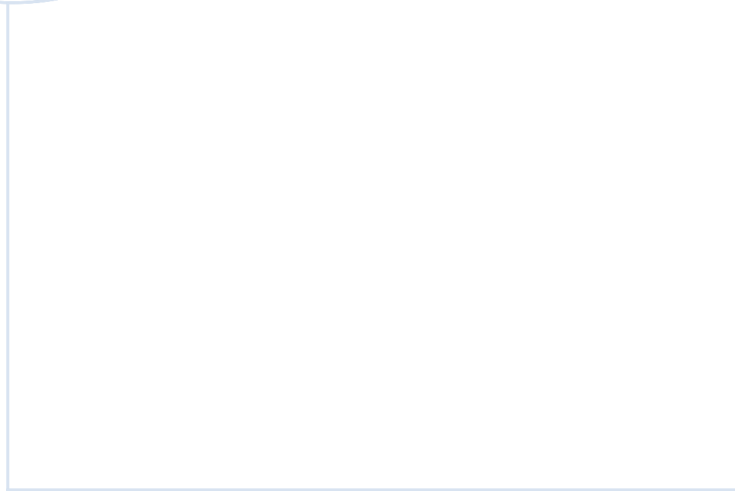
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