Conrad’s Destructive Element

Conrad's Destructive Element: The Metaphysical World-View Unifying *Lord Jim*

By

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Chapter 6 was originally published in a slightly different form as "The Yellow-Dog Incident in Conrad's *Lord Jim*," *Studies in the Novel* 3.1 (1971): 26-33, © 1971 by North Texas State University; chapter 8 was originally published in a substantially different form as "The Destructive Element and Related 'Dream' Passages in the *Lord Jim* Manuscript," *Journal of Modern Literature* 1.1 (1970):31-44, © 1970 by Temple University and reprinted by permission of Indiana University Press; and excerpts from the principal *Lord Jim* manuscript are reprinted by permission of the Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia.

PREFACE

This book on Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim* began many years ago with two articles published in 1970 and 1971—one on the "destructive element" passage, its context, and its relationship to Stein's past, and the other on the yellow-dog (or "wretched cur") incident. In each article, to strengthen the explication, I used readings from Conrad's handwritten manuscript pages owned by the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia; and I briefly related the specific subject of each article to Jim's preceding and subsequent life, thereby suggesting but not delineating a pattern of meaning or a thematic or structuring principle for the novel as a whole. After many years the present work is an attempt to delineate that pattern or principle as fully as possible through the whole novel.

In the interim, of course, much has been written on *Lord Jim*, including four book-length studies (Jan Verleun's *Patna and Patusan Perspectives*, 1979, John Batchelor's *Lord Jim*, 1988, Ross C. Murfin's *Lord Jim: After the Truth*, 1992, and John P. Anderson's *Conrad's* Lord Jim: *Psychology of the Self*, 2005) and two studies that are book-length on *Lord Jim* but part of larger works—Ian Watt's *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, 1979, and Bernard J. Paris' *Conrad's Charlie Marlow: A New Approach to "Heart of Darkness" and "Lord Jim,"* 2005. In his preface Watt states that the "complete diversity—or disarray—of contemporary opinion about what literature and its criticism is or should be, has meant that we are further than ever from anything like a consensus in our views of the basic character of Conrad's literary achievement; and this disagreement may justify an attempt to see whether a measure of critical consensus may not be promoted by a fairly detailed and literal interpretation of Conrad's main works" (Watt x). Since that time, the world of literary criticism and theory has become even more diverse—or disarrayed—and Conrad's works have been interpreted from so many different viewpoints grounded in a succession of conflicting critical theories that an extreme deconstructive view (like J. Hillis Miller's) has resulted: *Lord Jim* (and not just Jim's significance) "is incapable of being interpreted unambiguously, as a fixed pattern of meaning"; moreover, any novel by Conrad "has nothing certainly identifiable outside itself by which it might be seen. It has no visible thematic or structuring principle which

will allow the reader to find out its secret, explicate it once and for all, untie all its knots and straighten all its threads" (Miller, *Fiction* 25, 31). That this deconstructive view has survived the decline of deconstruction and is still extant is shown in a recent comment by post-colonialist critic Robert Hampson, who reaches the same conclusion by a different route: Disregarding the quarter of the novel that frames Marlow's oral narrative, he states that Marlow's repeated telling of Jim's story "does not necessarily mean that he tells the same story each time." It "implies rather a constant re-narrativising" of the story "at different times, in different places, for different audiences" and, "in theory at least, other Marlow versions of Jim's story that remain unrecorded." This suggests "the endlessness of narrative and the relativity—or even futility—of interpretation" (Hampson 141).

In the present work I adopt Watt's viewpoint rather than Miller's or Hampson's and offer another "fairly detailed and literal interpretation" of *Lord Jim*, though one that is different from Watt's (as well as from all other interpretations). I concede to Miller that three particulars in the novel are "incapable of being interpreted unambiguously": Brierly's reason(s) for committing suicide, the motive force behind Jim's assisted suicide (to surrender to his fate, free himself from it, or conquer it), and the relevance of the Novalis quotation that Conrad adopts as his epigraph. But that is a far cry from implying, as Miller does, that the novel as a whole is ambiguous. I also concede that the "secret" of the novel (if it has one) can never be explicated and that critical consensus may never be obtained. Nevertheless, still another analysis of *Lord Jim* and particularly one that emphasizes the symbolic functions of the animate beings, natural forces, and circumstances touching Jim's life can explicate parts and aspects of the novel that have not been explicated before, can untie more of its knots, straighten more of its threads, and even make visible a fixed pattern or thematic or structuring principle that not only pervades but unifies it.

This does not mean that all questions in the novel can then be answered, all mysteries solved. The unifying pattern or principle allows some questions to be unanswerable, some mysteries to be insoluble—for instance, whether the "spirit" of the universe has malevolent intention toward any particular human being or is indiscriminate, impartial, and indifferent, and (since Jim is "inscrutable") to what extent his imagination leads him to hope and expect to control the people, natural forces, and circumstances touching his life. In *Lord Jim* answers to such questions and solutions to such mysteries are unknowable, not ambiguous.

Showing that the novel is unified would counter a common, almost universal criticism of *Lord Jim*—that it generally separates into two halves, the *Patna* half and the Patusan half; or, more specifically, that it builds up to, then falls away from one climax—Jim's jump from the *Patna*—and then builds up to another climax—Jim's voluntary death in Patusan; or that the *Patna* half is an "internal" tale emphasizing ethics and psychology whereas the Patusan half is an "external" tale emphasizing adventure (an early view) or politics (a later view). Because Edward Garnett, a good friend of Conrad's, expressed the first or general criticism to him during his usual post-publication mood of humility, self-deprecation, and despair, Conrad unfortunately (and, I claim, wrongly) accepted that criticism as warranted.[1] Since then, scholarly discussions of the novel have either echoed that criticism or, by the very nature of their covering only selected parts of the novel—especially Jim's leap and Jim's death—have implicitly reflected that criticism and unfairly reinforced it. But in a sufficiently detailed explication extending over the whole novel, the Patusan episode can be shown to derive from the *Patna* episode even as the *Patna* episode derives from preceding events in Jim's life and from the precondition of his vivid and romantic imagination. Moreover, the Gentleman Brown sub-episode that ends the novel can be shown not only to complete the meaning of the Patusan episode but also itself to derive from the *Patna* episode, its preceding events, and Jim's precondition. The novel can thus be shown to be a unified whole—to support not what Conrad at a dispirited time conceded to Garnett but rather what Conrad wrote to his publisher four days after completing the novel: that it is "the development of *one* situation, only *one* really from beginning to end."[2]

The unifying pattern of meaning that I find in *Lord Jim* is not concerned with usual, current, or previous approaches to the novel—with phenomenological or reader-response criticism, Freudian or archetypal symbolism, Conrad's psychobiography, or the most recent approaches: the politics of Western colonialism, political ethics in regard to race, class, or gender, and other approaches classifiable as cultural studies or postmodern theory. Nor is that pattern concerned specifically with Conrad's psychological and spiritual ties to Poland or with the influence of or parallels to *Oedipus the King*, *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote*, Calderon's *Life Is a Dream*, Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* or *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. (And so critical works on all those approaches to the novel are not reviewed here or listed in the "Works Cited" section below.) Instead, the unifying pattern of meaning is concerned with a particular metaphysical world-view consisting summarily of the following five related parts (to which specific examples from *Lord Jim* are appended in brackets):

1. To be alive—that is, to be "in life"—is to be in an untrustworthy and precarious medium, a "destructive element," whether it is destructive of life [the third engineer's, little Bob Stanton's, Chester's], sanity [the chief engineer's], equanimity [Brierly's], reputation [Jim's], or only guardedness against exposing one's feelings [the yellow dog's effect on Jim]. But, besides its general destructiveness the element seems to have no special intention toward any particular individual. It seems to be impartial and indiscriminate.
2. Therefore, whenever destruction by the element seems imminent, *often* an individual's "steadfastness" or effort [by midshipmen on the training-ship cutter, the crew of Jim's gale-battered ship, any of the "good, stupid kind," the ambushed younger Stein] can outlast the time of seeming imminence or hold that destruction at bay until it recedes. But *sometimes* destruction occurs because steadfastness and effort do not avail. Still, they reveal the basis of the individual's character—namely, his instinct or determination to stay alive or to keep to a particular standard of conduct or to pursue a personal ideal or "dream."
3. However, at other times an individual [Jim] fails to be steadfast or exert effort against the imminent destruction by the element and thereby falls far short of his standard of conduct, personal ideal, or "dream." As it seems to him, the destructive element at those times shows intention—which would make it seem animate and conceivable as the "Dark Powers," Fate, Destiny, Chance, or the "spirit" of the universe (hereafter called merely *the Universe*). And he believes that he fails because the element shows not merely intention but *malevolent* intention to make him fail—to undermine, trick, humiliate, torment, or destroy him, whether by degrees or by calamities, subtly or harshly, ironically or directly, and to do so through the use of symbolic "agents" such as living beings [other *Patna* officers, the yellow dog, Brown, Cornelius, and, with Jim's willingness, Doramin], natural forces [gales], or circumstances [the disabling of the *Patna*, pursuit by *Patna*-affair reminders, Brown's arrival].
4. Indeed, he may fail repeatedly in different circumstances against different forms of imminent destruction by the element and believe that he fails because the element shows malevolent intention repeatedly. (In such cases, the element would be conceivable more as the demon or devil of the universe than as the "spirit.") Only through death can he escape the element or (as he may believe) conquer it. Admittedly, its seemingly malevolent intention in all those different circumstances may be only deceptive appearance resulting from coincidence and from the individual's vivid and romantic imagination, a function of his

"personality" or character. [For Marlow, the question whether the malevolent intention truly exists or is only deceptive appearance is really a "momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life," so that an answer to the question would be "momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself" (93). Marlow senses the seemingly malevolent intention in Jim's case and, moreover, is the only one to use the above animating epithets that imply intention; nevertheless, he vacillates between the two answers to the question depending on whether, at the time, his empathy with Jim or his belief in the seamen's code of conduct is stronger. Ultimately, however, though knowing the question to be unanswerable, Marlow appears to assume a compromise view that malevolent intention has worked *through* Jim's imagination and personality or together *with* them to help bring about his fate and not only in the *Patna* affair but also in Patusan. By contrast, Jim believes that his fate has been wholly determined by malevolent intention, whereas Stein does not appear to believe in it, for he uses none of the above animating epithets but only "the destructive element" and other non-animating epithets and, in the manuscript, attributes a "blind will" to Nature.]

5. When the individual's failure is extreme, widely known, and thought-provoking, his example can cause others to react to it diversely—with indignation, indifference [Chester], sympathy [the French lieutenant], or empathy [Brierly]. And in so reacting, any of the others may unintentionally expose the corresponding basis of his own character as well as a flaw in his own standard of conduct. [Each of the above three does expose them. And in Marlow's case, his reaction exposes in him an unfulfillable need not only to be certain of the absoluteness of his own standard of conduct but also empathically to find, for the other's failure, an exonerating excuse that will not cast doubt on the absoluteness of his own standard.]

In the third and fourth parts of the above metaphysical world-view, the idea of the seemingly malevolent or even demonic destructive element might be called (on the model of names for other world-hypotheses) "quasi-demono-psychism." Besides being expressed in the present work in Conrad's and my own words, the idea will also be expressed in the words of a philosopher whom Conrad read: Arthur Schopenhauer. And it will be expressed as well in the words of Thomas Hardy (whose poetry Conrad admired), James Thomson ("B.V."), and John Stuart Mill, so that Conrad's use of the idea should not identify him as strictly

Schopenhauerian.[3] The idea, it may be noted, is a variation of the age-old argument between free will and determinism.

Like the works by Watt, Paris, Verleun, Batchelor, Murfin, and Anderson, the present work extends over the whole of the novel in sufficient detail to be fully book-length. Sufficient detail, even to a seemingly exhaustive coverage of the textual "data," is desirable in order to show that a particular pattern of meaning not only pervades the novel but also is most inclusive of its data and makes that data most coherent. The rest of the critical works on *Lord Jim* lack this advantage, for, limited in length, they discuss the novel either in the condensed compass of a handbook or in a journal article, an anthology chapter, a chapter or two of a book on Conrad's novels, or in comments dispersed throughout such a book. The present work also differs from all other critical works on *Lord Jim* by quoting and using 48 variant readings from the main handwritten manuscript of the novel to clarify explication. By contrast, Watt and Batchelor use only a few such readings, and Paris, Verleun, Murfin, and Anderson use none; and although John Dozier Gordan includes many in his book *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist* (1940), he includes them rather to show the growth of the text from manuscript to published book and Conrad's artistry in transforming the one into the other.

Unfortunately, most of the main handwritten manuscript is lost, but eight of its pages are in the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, one page is in the Ashley collection in the British Library, and 359 pages (plus seven typescript pages) are in the Rosenbach Library. Together, these pages constitute about forty percent of the novel and extend from Chapters 5 to 34. A second handwritten manuscript is a 28-page narrative, entitled "Tuan Jim: A Sketch," that Conrad penciled in an album now in the Houghton Library at Harvard and then revised into the first two chapters of *Lord Jim*.[4] In my first and fifth chapters I briefly comment on this manuscript. But otherwise, it does not contain any variant readings that have been useful to me in clarifying explication, and so I have not quoted from it. The case is the same with the periodical text of the novel, published serially in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1899 to November 1900. Of the 48 variant manuscript readings that I use, the periodical text retains only two of them, substitutes what, for my purposes, are less useful variants for five others, and omits the rest. I have therefore not quoted from it.

To say that the present work extends over the whole of *Lord Jim* is not to imply that it strictly takes up the material in the same order (although overall the order is similar) or that it discusses other interpretations of the novel. It omits discussion of them because its purpose is to show the

unifying pattern of meaning and how it unifies the novel through pervasiveness, inclusiveness, and coherence and because no other interpretations, modern or postmodern, show that kind of unification. The work also omits other traditional topics—the relationship of *Lord Jim* to other Conrad novels, its composition history, historical sources, writing and revising style, and (except for a short note at the end) narrative structure.

The chapters of the work have been designed so that they can be read independently of each other and, if the reader desires, out of order. Of necessity, then, each chapter repeats some of what is in others in order to show the unity of the novel. Together, the chapters follow the unifying pattern of meaning through all its variations, and each chapter describes one or more of these variations in relation to the pattern.

In the work the unity of *Lord Jim* may be said to be emergent not only in the traditional sense—i.e., appearing only gradually as the novel proceeds and fully only with its end—but also in another sense. Since the end of the era of the New Criticism, unity has become less valued as a characteristic of literary works—less valued not only in itself but also in the evaluation of the artistic merit of the works, and valued still less as artistic merit itself becomes less valued. However, a demonstration of the unity of a work—if, indeed, it *is* unified—is still necessary to an *understanding* of it regardless of those devaluations and regardless of other approaches that have been applied to the work since the New Critical era.[5] Unfortunately, a detailed attempt to show a pattern of meaning unifying *Lord Jim* by means of pervasiveness, inclusiveness, and coherence did not fully emerge during that era, when critical conditions might have been receptive; but this fact need not imply that such a detailed attempt should not fully emerge during the present era, when critical conditions are not receptive. Such emergence is especially appropriate not only because, as recently as 2003, organic unity could still be considered an "index" or criterion of literary value (Kermode 63-64) but also because, according to a noted literary theorist, the concept of organic unity "continues to organize most of the strains of criticism that now [in 2001] dominate U.S. practice, even when . . . completely embedded in criticism's formal features and methodological procedures." As a result, organic unity becomes a relevant measure of the relationship not only of all parts of a literary work to each other and to the whole work but also of the whole work (considered as a part) to the totality that is the whole work plus at least a critical analysis of it and at most "the whole of literary criticism itself" (Poovey 432-35).

In the present era it is also not too late to delineate the particular metaphysical world-view that unifies *Lord Jim.* In a recent anthology of essays on *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century*, all essays but one dealt with the politics of Western colonialism or with political ethics in regard to race, class, or gender. And yet, invited by the editors to write a foreword to the anthology, deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller not only especially lauded the one essay (on Conrad's use of irony) that was different and thus "untimely" but also expanded on what the anthology lacked:

> If stressing Conrad's irony is untimely because it is not fashionable these days to put the tropological dimensions of literature in the foreground, what I am about to claim is even more untimely. All the essays in this book are unanimous in not taking seriously any "metaphysical" dimension of Conrad's work.

For instance, in the essays on "imperialism's ideology and its actions" in *Heart of Darkness*, "an important feature of that ideology is precisely those metaphysical elements" that the essayists "so scorn, or bypass in silence. . . . 'Metaphysical' language so permeates Marlow's discourse that no convincing way exists to explain it away" (Miller, foreword 6-7). Even more pertinent to the present work, Miller found the bypassed metaphysical dimension to be present also in *Typhoon* in the "effaced form of personifying the storm as deliberately and consciously malignant" (10) when it attacks a man (in Conrad's words) "like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him" (*Typhoon* 40). Moreover, Miller noted that all the essays except the one on irony place "Conrad's fictions within some external cultural, historical, biographical, or intellectual context. . . . The almost unanimous assumption is that extrinsic criticism is the way to go these days. Little use is made of what use to be called 'intrinsic criticism,' or 'close reading,' or 'formalist' reading" (2). Unlike Miller's past deconstructive statements quoted earlier in this preface, these recent statements of his seem encouraging. Although it may be untimely and unfashionable, a close reading of *Lord Jim* that shows a unifying metaphysical world-view may still be considered relevant and even necessary to an understanding of the novel.

A NOTE ON EDITIONS AND DOCUMENTATION

All the individual and collected hardbound editions of *Lord Jim* published over the years by Doubleday in America and Dent in England differ from each other in several substantive words and many instances of punctuation. But, except for the Dent Everyman's edition, all these editions have the same pagination—417 pages. So too has the paperbound 1983 Oxford University Press World's Classics edition, edited by John Batchelor, although, unfortunately, the 2000 reissue of this edition has different pagination. Consequently, merely for the purpose of locating in the novel those passages quoted in a critical work like the present one, the Doubleday, Dent, and 1983 Oxford editions may be considered as constituting the "edition" most available to the reader. Because of this consideration and because the 1983 Oxford is the most thoughtfully edited of all those editions, all quotations in the present work from the published novel will be from this edition.

Two other editions—the 1968 Norton Critical edition, edited by Thomas Moser, and the 1986 Penguin Classics edition, edited by Cedric Watts and Robert Hampson—have been as thoughtfully edited as the Oxford (although they are based on different copy-texts and contain different emendations), and it is only because their pagination is different from that of the most available "edition" that they have not been considered for use in the present work. Besides, the differences in substantive words and punctuation among all these editions are not crucial to my explication either of quoted passages or of the novel as a whole.

In the present work, a quotation from the published novel will normally be followed (either immediately or at the end of the sentence containing the quotation) by a parenthesis containing the number(s) of the page(s) in the 1983 Oxford edition from which the quotation is taken. A quotation not thus followed should be understood as taken from the same page(s) as the quotation immediately preceding. On the other hand, a quotation from the main handwritten *manuscript* of the novel will normally be followed, in parenthesis, by "MS," the number(s) of the manuscript page(s) from which the quotation is taken, and, when not already apparent, the page and line number of the contiguous published text in the 1983 Oxford edition, so that the reader can know where in that

text the quotation (or the deleted passage it was part of) would have been located if it had been retained in the published text.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF JIM AND THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE: FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE NOVEL TO THE *PATNA* EMERGENCY

Chapter 1 of *Lord Jim* contains themes that are developed through the whole novel. Jim comes from a boyhood environment that is deceptive as to the nature of the universe because that environment appears firm, stable, and durable. It gives security and allows righteousness and certainty. His father, a parson, possesses "certain knowledge of the Unknowable" (5), and his church is like a "rock" and has stood for centuries. The young Jim stands figuratively upon a rock of certainty and so can daringly imagine himself to be as secure and certain within the rest of the yet-to-be-traveled universe. Additionally, he is inspired by his reading of heroic exploits in light literature about seafaring and, as a result, imagines himself to be as sure in the knowledge of himself in future maritime dangers as he is presently in the safety of his father's parsonage. However, the safe parsonage and the "sea-life of light literature" (6) are deceptive environments. They do not show him the true nature of the universe: changeable, unstable, unpredictable. Instead, aided by Jim's vivid and romantic imagination, they foster the illusion in him that he has power over his life, that he is consciously self-determining, that he can do what he wills to do.

A boy who imagines himself potentially heroic and who is consequently naive is aptly likened to the image of a knight (or virgin) dressed in "immaculate white" (3). The color signifies the immaculateness of his mind—his innocence as well as the purity of his heroic intentions. White is the color of Jim's apparel, the color in which he is seen at the beginning and through most of the novel to the end, for he never surrenders the naive, heroic "sentiment of existence" (viii) that he develops as a boy.

Feeling sure about his power over himself and his environment, he can feel contempt for that which is outside himself—for those who are not he. From the very beginning, then, he must imagine himself as different and separate from other men—as better than they. Stationed as a midshipman in the fore-top of a training ship, he "looks down" with benign contempt upon the currently peaceful environment, upon the potential maritime dangers that he once read about and now dreams about, and upon other men who will not act as heroically as he will in those dangers.

During subsequent years, most of his environments do not show the true nature of the universe. But, on several occasions, he sees what appears to be this other face—the face of "the destructive element"—before it disappears once more behind the cloud of everyday normality. On those occasions, because he is part of the universe, the hidden side of his own nature as well as the hidden side of the external universe is revealed to both him and the reader. But it is Jim's tragedy that he cannot and will not recognize that side, for it belies the heroic dreams of his youth and his belief in his power.

The first time that the hidden face of the universe shows itself is in a violent gale that buffets the training ship on which Jim is a midshipman. To him—and to the reader—it seems as if the gale or nature (since the gale *is*, for the moment, all of surrounding nature) is animated with characteristics usually reserved to human life. Nature seems "fitful," "threatening," and "brutal" (7). It shows a "fierce purpose" and "furious earnestness," both of which seem "directed" at Jim. To him, it is as if nature were a conscious malevolent being personally intent upon destroying him. Yet this is only how it *seems* to him because of his vivid imagination. It is the power of his imagination that animates nature with conscious malevolent purpose, and under the shock of feeling that purpose directed against him, he becomes spellbound, paralyzed, helpless. He "stood still—as if confounded" (6). Nature "made him hold his breath in awe" (7).

Directly afterwards, nature seems bent also against a manned cutter tossing by the side of the training ship. The "spell of tide and wind . . . held her bound" just as it held Jim "bound." But by keeping stroke—by acting, exerting, striving together—the midshipman crew of the cutter "broke the spell cast upon her by the wind and tide" (8). The moral here is that exertion, which may seem useless against an omnipotent nature apparently bent against man, can sometimes be effective in evading its menace. The crew members were not aware of this moral; they strove merely because they were ordered to. They strove just as they responded to command—by instinct. Because their imagination was dormant, it could not overwhelm them with the impression that it was useless to strive

against omnipotent forces bent against them. In other words, their instinct and *lack* of imagination saved them. By contrast, Jim's power of imagination—or rather the awe, shock, and feeling of powerlessness that his imagination fostered—made him helpless. He was so overcome by these reactions that he could not respond instinctively—as the others did—to the command "Man the cutter!" His imagination kept him paralyzed until it was too late, and so he failed to exert himself effectively.

When he sees that the crew's exertion has been effective against nature's menace, he concludes not the necessity of unreasoning (and even unreasonable) exertion but rather the inefficiency and spuriousness of the menace. He underestimates the crew and its accomplishment because he feels that he overestimated nature. Both that accomplishment and nature's menace now seem "contemptible" (9) to him, and he means to be prepared thereafter to heroically outdo the former and withstand the latter. Feeling such contempt, he "brood[s] . . . apart" (8) and becomes further alienated from his fellow midshipmen.

To him it seems ironic that chance has given a heroic role to a boy in the cutter crew who *looks* completely unheroic—to a "boy with a face like a girl's" (8)—whereas he, who looks and feels like a hero, is denied the role. He thinks the boy's account of his role is a "pitiful display of vanity" (9)—and it is. Just as Jim feels certain of what his own behavior will be in a future situation, the boy feels certain that he would not have fainted "like a girl" because of a boat-hook in *his* leg, even though a "big chap" (from *appearances*, one who could withstand the pain if anyone could) did faint. And the boy's vanity serves to show Jim additionally—and thus increasingly torture him with the sight—how unworthy the boy is of the heroic role. Perhaps the moral of the situation, if Jim could realize it, is not only that appearances are false, intentions undependable, and absolute control over one's heroic actions impossible but also that nature seems to possess other human characteristics besides anger: contrariness and even irony. Nature would appear to have a more complex mental organization than comparison with a single-mindedly angry but dumb brute would imply. It would appear to be more like a subtly malevolent villain with an exquisite taste for irony and for inflicting fine degrees of hurt—for hurt is what Jim feels, though he is aware of only his anger and contempt.

Brooding apart from his fellow midshipmen, he is already beyond the first stage of alienation from his fellow men—a process first begun with his alienation from reality because of imaginative acceptance of heroic fantasy. But this alienation from men and their reality will set him apart not only in sensibility but also in significance. In losing his identity as only a man among men—as one who only serves in the ranks—he gains an

identity as someone who is unusual, memorable, significant—as someone who "exist[s]" for us (216).

The next revealing incident does not come for some years. The mask of everyday safety had dropped once more over the face of the universe following the training-ship incident, and this mask then remained, so that during Jim's first years at sea (described in Chapter 2) he "found them strangely barren of adventure" and he "knew the magic monotony of existence" (10). But he cannot appreciate or love the everyday life itself, for he is only waiting for the life to grant him an occasion of danger, an opportunity to prove his heroism. Although he rises in the ranks, he is unproved, untested, unknowing of himself.

Then what seems to him the true face of the universe shows itself for a second time—again as a violent gale. Having once been through it and sensing its menace to be either spurious or withstandable when opposed, he would be ready to oppose it. But the Universe, as if in spite, undermines his readiness and makes him physically helpless by disabling his leg with a falling spar. Apparently, the Universe always shifts in order to do the unexpected and thus catch its victim off guard. One more then, as if by a malicious trick, Jim is paralyzed and cannot take action to oppose nature and prove his heroism. He imagines that, now that he is physically helpless, he is at the mercy of the gale. That he can do nothing to oppose it—to try to save himself—frustrates him beyond endurance. And all the time, although (or because) he is confined below decks and so cannot *see* nature's menace, his powerful imagination causes that menace to be vividly present to him, so that he can think of nothing else but its hovering to destroy him. Always imminent and torturing him with suspense but never finally descending, the menace seems to be trying to torment him to the point where he should either welcome death or go mad. And at times, "indifference" toward death (11), if not a welcoming of it, comes to him with emotional exhaustion and serves as an escape for his overburdened sanity. But most of the time, his emotions and imagination are active and produce an inescapable agony of suffering from which he "desire[s] to escape at any cost." On the training ship during the gale, he experienced awe and shock, but his moment of realization was soon gone. Now, given time, he feels despair, horror, and wild fear for the first time, senses "the unintelligent brutality of an existence liable to the agony of such sensations," and experiences an uncontrollable desire to escape from that brutality. Here, "an existence" refers not merely to a seafaring life on stormy oceans but to life itself, which he now realizes is subject to such brutality.

This incident in which the face of "the destructive element" is again revealed is even more important to the pattern of meaning in the novel than

is the first such incident on the training ship because this second one is a repetition with variation, showing perhaps the beginning of a series but certainly a pattern. The comparative importance of the second incident is also shown by the fact that, when Conrad wrote his first draft of it (in the album now in the Harvard Houghton Library), he labored at unusual length over it: With revisions, it took up 71 lines or about 25% of the chapter, whereas, in the published novel, it took up only 32 lines or about 12% of the chapter. Also by contrast, the training-ship incident does not even appear in the album.[6]

A lameness caused by the accident to Jim's leg comes with his new and unendurable vision of the brutality of existence (whether local or universal) and with his desire to escape it, and so that vision and desire persist with his lameness. It is their symbol. As a "lameness," they make him despair unconsciously of ever being able to bear, let alone conquer, that brutality, and on the *Patna* they will "disable" him from stubbornly and unreasoningly withstanding it. The persistence of the lameness only shows that—though the fine weather returns and the cause of his vision and of his desire to escape has vanished—the vision and desire have now become part of him, and he will unintentionally act in accordance with them henceforth. Consciously, he still believes in his potential heroism, in the certainty that he will prove his ability to conquer even the most insuperable obstacles, given a fair chance. But unconsciously he doubts and despairs since he has sensed with horror how unfair the chances can be.

His now unconscious desire to escape is satisfied at once by circumstances. Transferred to a hospital in an Eastern port, he must lounge through the day till his leg is well. The sky is "soft" (12) and suggests "eternal serenity"; the sea suggests "infinite repose," "endless dreams," and "smiling peace." The universe here seems to be at its most benevolent, and so he is unconsciously drawn to it as his escape. The other white officers with whom he later associates in the port use life on the Eastern seas even more obviously as an escape—escape from the "home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans" (13). They too are dependent upon a fair chance—a turn of luck—to measure themselves successful. Thus dependent, they too are the equivalent of 'lame': they have a "soft spot," a "place of decay," a "determination to lounge safely through existence." And as Jim gradually but unconsciously finds "a fascination in the sight of those men," he loses his first perspective of them—a perspective which is the omniscient narrator's: they seemed "more unsubstantial than so many shadows." Jim's signing on aboard the *Patna*, which sails only Eastern seas, shows that his unconscious desire to escape has become unconscious escape and that his

fascination with the Eastern white officers has become emulation of them. And perhaps but for the tragedy that befalls him, he too would soon have become someone "unsubstantial" rather than someone who truly "exists."

His likeness to the Eastern white officers is only partial and unconscious in him, but *thematically* that likeness is established. So too, when he signs on aboard the *Patna*, his likeness to those particular white officers who are the other *Patna* officers is also established thematically.

* * *

In a similar fashion—as thematic *antitheses* to Jim, the Eastern white officers, and the other *Patna* officers—the Moslem pilgrims who are the *Patna*'s "human cargo" (16) are like the training-ship cutter crewmen in one significant aspect, though ostensibly they seem to have little in common: the pilgrims and crewmen are unthinking, unreasoning, and unimaginative. As circumstances aboard the *Patna* will show, it will be fortunate that the pilgrims are unthinking, just as it was fortunate—as their behavior during the gale showed—that the cutter crewmen were unthinking. The pilgrims too are instinctive in their response to a higher "command." "At the call of an idea" (14)—obedience to their God—they unthinkingly endure hardships and dangers, just as the cutter crewmen, out of obedience to their commander and the ideal he represents, unthinkingly endure hardships and dangers. The crewmen too are "unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief" (15). Both are among the "faithful"—and fidelity, to Marlow, is man's principal saving grace. But the spokesman for the *Patna* officers—the German captain—and the eye of the lighthouse built by "unbelievers" deride the pilgrims and their blind faith.

During the first part of the *Patna*'s voyage, the Eastern sea and sky still appear "serene," but the imagery implies an almost human—a "sinister"—intention behind the serene appearance. Nature shows no threat at all. Indeed, it seems to go to an extreme in appearing innocuous. The sea remains "still, without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle—viscous, stagnant, dead" (15-16). Perhaps nature goes to such an extreme to undermine guardedness against it, to put to sleep all readiness to withstand any sudden menace by it. The "fulgor of sunshine" kills all thought, oppresses the heart, and withers "all impulses of strength and energy." And so the entire scene and its appearance of safety become unreal. The ship becomes merely the "phantom" of a steamer drawing the "phantom" of a track upon a "lifeless" sea. "Mysteriously," forebodingly, warily, the sun seems to be skirting and observing, circling about the ship from afar and "keeping pace" with it, as if nature were planning something for it. To add to the foreboding, to the feeling of imminence, the ship is described as

"lonely" in an "immensity"; the sun flicks a scorching flame at it "from a heaven without pity"; and an "abyss," into which the days "fall" (though not yet the ship), is "for ever open" in its wake.

Although the night descends "like a benediction" to relieve the ship of the withering "fulgor of sunshine," the insidious undermining of "all impulses of strength and energy" is still accomplished—but now (in Chapter 3) by the stars and the "serenity" of their rays, which deceptively shed "upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security" (17). Appearances are "of a safe universe." On the bridge of the ship Jim is fooled by the look of security and gives himself up to it; on the decks the pilgrims also give themselves up to it and sleep. But in such relaxation from vigil they are all vulnerable to an imminent death. In sleep the pilgrims have "surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage, trusting the power of their unbelief." (Of course, the pilgrims have thus surrendered by merely boarding the ship, and their sleep is an emphatic image of this surrender.) But the wisdom, courage, and power of the white men will be shown to be undependable, and the pilgrims will be shown to be close to death by drowning. Asleep, they are, for the moment, only figuratively close to death—not merely because sleep is "death's brother" (18) but because the throat of a sleeper is described as bared and stretched "as if offering itself to the knife" and another sleeper is described as "covered from head to foot, like a corpse, with a piece of white sheeting." Other imagery too forebodes calamity. Above the stillness floats the "exhalation of a troubled dream," and beneath it (in the engine room of the ship) "metallic clangs" burst out—a "harsh scrape," a "violent slam" (19). Sounds "full of fierce anger" explode "brutally" from the depths of the ship but seemingly from the depths of the sea, from the heart of the universe. Yet those on the bridge and the decks, lulled into trust by the surface stillness—by the "great calm of the waters" and the "serenity of the sky"—are undisturbed.

Especially Jim is duped and lulled into trust. Feeling secure, he dreams of heroic possibilities—as he has always dreamt when in secure environments. Ironically, the false visions—and not the true menace they obscure—are for him the "secret truth" and "hidden reality" of life (20). His eyes, filled with those visions, do not see the imminent danger to the ship—for the obstruction that will cripple the *Patna*, lying half submerged or just below the surface of the sea, could perhaps be seen literally if only his eyesight were concentrated upon the sea directly ahead of the ship. (The text implies such a possibility as well as its ultimate indeterminability and unknowability.) But his eyes are either "roaming about the line of the horizon" to "gaze hungrily into the unattainable" (19) or else staring ahead "perfunctorily" (20) while his inner sight is on heroic visions. When he

does occasionally look away, it is not to peer into the menacing depths of the sea itself but only to glance at the compass or the navigation chart, which, despite its depth figures, represents only the placid-appearing surface of the sea: "The sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea presented a shiny surface . . . , a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters." And likewise, "when he happened to glance back he saw the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart"; he did not see an "abyss for ever open in the wake of the ship" (16).

Here in Chapter 3 the universal implications of the *Patna*'s voyage become most apparent. The ship's course is described as the "path of souls towards the holy place, the promise of salvation, the reward of eternal life" (20). The description is literally precise since the Moslem pilgrims on board are headed for Mecca. But the description is also figuratively precise as the path of *all* souls to the end or culmination of life. And so, the *Patna*'s voyage becomes symbolically the voyage of all humanity through life, and life becomes a pilgrimage in a double sense. In turn, the description throws its universal implications not only forward—to the image in which the ship is compared to "a crowded planet" (22)—but also backward—upon the image of the westering sun "keeping pace in his revolutions with the progress of the pilgrimage" (16), for the daily course of the sun represents the course of life itself.

The imagery of foreboding—of the approaching menace of the Universe—continues up to the collision. The last ten minutes of Jim's watch on the bridge are "like a gun that hangs fire" (24). When the moon sinks below the horizon, "the eternity beyond the sky" seems "to come down nearer to the earth" (21). The ship is like "a crowded planet speeding through the dark spaces of ether behind the swarm of suns" (22); and so, figuratively (as planet) but literally too (as ship) the *Patna* is "in the appalling and calm solitudes awaiting the breath of future creations," the moment when the Universe acts.

When the Universe finally does act, it does so surreptitiously, with the least disturbance of physical phenomena. Both Jim and the captain are thrown forward by an invisible force—figuratively speaking, by the unseen hand of "the destructive element." They are "amazed" at the "undisturbed level of the sea" (26), for the force should have a cause visible on the surface of reality, visible to sight. But that surface shows nothing, and so instinctively they look for a cause invisible, metaphysical, beyond the surface of reality: they look "upwards at the stars." Instinctively and significantly they sense nothing less than the instability of the whole universe and the abrogation of natural law—the checking of the earth in her course: "suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud, appeared

formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction."

Then the "voice" of "the destructive element" is heard, and just as its form was invisible, so its voice is almost inaudible. It is hidden, muffled, a "faint noise as of thunder, of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration." Though produced on the outside of the hull, it is "as if the thunder had growled deep down in the water": symbolically it comes from the heart of the universe.

Up to this point in the novel (the end of Chapter 3) and through Chapter 4, the omniscient narrator tells the story directly. But then he introduces Marlow into the story, and from that point to the end of Chapter 35, Marlow tells the story. Of course, he was not present on the *Patna* to witness what was happening to the ship, but in Chapters 7 through the beginning of 12 he tells the rest of that story as he heard it from Jim. Together, they can infer what probably happened: The ship's bowplate was stove in, presumably by a submerged floating wreck; the rest of the ship's hull then scraped over the wreck, producing the sound of muffled thunder; and the sea now pressed against, bulged, and seemed about to break the rusty collision bulkhead behind the bowplate. As the ship's second engineer exclaimed, "[t]hat rotten bulkhead'll give way in a minute, and the damned thing will go down under us like a lump of lead" (30). But not only was the ship in imminent danger of sinking. As Jim and the other officers soon realized, because the few lifeboats on board had room for only a fraction of the number of people on board, the sinking would also bring about, for everyone, the most horrible though useless struggle to survive and the torture of drawn-out death throes. Because of his imagination Jim especially could envision this imminent chaos—"all the horrors of panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams, boats swamped—all the appalling incidents of a disaster at sea he had ever heard of" (88). He would be "floundering in a sea whitened awfully by the desperate struggles of human beings, clamorous with the distress of cries for help" (86). And, as the ship's chief engineer reminded him, he would not "get the ghost of a show when all that lot of brutes is in the water" (103), for, if he tried to reach any of the yet-unswamped boats, their overcrowded occupants would "batter your head for you from these boats." Finally, exhausted in the water, he would experience "the grasp of the abyss, the struggle without hope, the starlight closing over his head for ever like the vault of a tomb—the revolt of his young life—the black end" (96). In other words, Jim envisioned the chaos of eight hundred human beings including himself turned into vicious, desperate animals fighting each other savagely in the water for the limited room in seven boats—the people in the water trying to push in among those in the overloaded and

overcrowded boats, those in the boats trying to beat back those in the water, and the weight and violent motion of the struggle finally swamping and sinking the boats, leaving all to struggle in the water until they drowned from exhaustion. It is a vision of the "pit," of degeneration from humanity into savage brutality, and thus a vision of the hidden nature of the universe, a vision of "the destructive element" at its worst.

Although this chaos did not, in the end, occur, there were four ironic anticipations or foreboding "samples" of it. The first was an incident in which a pilgrim begged Jim for water aboard the stricken *Patna*. Ironically, the pilgrim clung to Jim "like a drowning man" (90), which he might soon have become. The only word of his entreaty that Jim understood was "water," and so Jim immediately suspected according to his fears—that the pilgrim knew about the imminence of the ship's sinking. He was about to shout, and if he did so, the other pilgrims would awaken and realize the danger, and general panic would ensue. To prevent all this, Jim began to struggle with the pilgrim—an act meant to delay, but ironically it prefigured, the impending general struggle for survival when the panic should begin: "I hauled off with my free arm and slung the lamp in his face." And when the pilgrim "tried to shout," Jim "half throttled him." At the last moment, however, Jim realized that the pilgrim only wanted water to drink, and so Jim gave him his water bottle. The beginning violence ended, and the danger of alarm was, for the moment, averted. Again, a symbolic threat of the Universe vanished, although its other and far greater threat was still present. (Later, hearing Jim relate the incident and sensing its foreboding and symbolic nature, Marlow notes "a creepy sensation all down my backbone; there was something peculiar in all this" [91].)

A second ironic anticipation or foreboding "sample" of the impending chaos was the frantic activity among the officers (excluding Jim) as they struggled to launch a lifeboat for themselves before the ship should begin to sink and the pilgrims awaken: "They tramped, they wheezed, they shoved, they cursed the boat, the ship, each other" (91-92). They "were tumbling against each other and sweating desperately . . ." (95). And when they accidentally jammed tight a bolt that fastened the boat to the deck, they went

> out of the remnants of their minds over the deadly nature of that accident. It must have been a pretty sight, the fierce industry of these beggars . . . fighting against time for the freeing of that boat, grovelling on all-fours, standing up in despair, tugging, pushing, snarling at each other venomously, ready to kill, ready to weep, and only kept from flying at each other's throats by the fear of death . . . . (96)

A third anticipation of the chaos was the officers' beginning to fight with Jim as he came onto the bridge. In the dark they mistook him for an alarmed pilgrim; and so the chief engineer struck at him with a boat stretcher, Jim flung him into the second engineer, the captain came at Jim "head down, growling like a wild beast" (91), and Jim drew back his fist. The impending blow, heavy falling body, and resulting fight might have resounded loudly enough to wake the pilgrims, and then unlimited violence might have broken out. But at the last moment the captain recognized Jim and stopped short. The fight ended abruptly, and so this anticipation of the greater chaos did not bring it about prematurely.

A fourth anticipation of the chaos was the officers' threatened fight with Jim afterwards in the launched boat. Indeed, the whole time in which he stood in the boat with a heavy tiller in his hand, prepared to batter any officer who came at him out of the darkness to throw him overboard, was a token of the chaos ready to engulf the *Patna* —and, in their mistaken belief, *already* engulfing it: The disappearance of the ship's lights signified to them that the ship had already sunk, and Jim thought that he heard the shouts and screams of the struggling and drowning. Ready to fight the other officers, he felt that,

> [a]fter the ship's lights had gone, anything might have happened in that boat—anything in the world. . . . It was just dark enough, too. We were like men walled up quick in a roomy grave. No concern with anything on earth. . . . Nothing mattered. . . . No fear, no law, no sounds, no eyes. . . . (120)

Marlow too senses over the lives in the boat

> the shadow of madness. . . . [Y]our whole world seems to fail you; the world that made you, restrained you, taken care of you. It is as if the souls of men . . . had been set free for any excess of . . . abomination. . . . Trust a boat on the high seas to bring out the Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, emotion. (121)

But in the end the "madness" did not erupt in the boat or on the ship, and again a symbolic threat of the Universe vanished.