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Conrad's Literary Techniques in *Lord Jim*

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Abstract

The author's craft, his style and technique, his potent symbols and the use of the point of view all created a fictive world full of promises and surprises for the readers. With skillful selections and purposeful manipulations, the author unfolds the possible meaning of a work. *Lord Jim*, the rescue and rover, his sea tales are thrilling and suffused in the aroma of romantic adventure, and struggle with the forces of nature. His actualities became clothed with romantic glamour and adventurous exaltation. Edward Albert remarks "a picture through a series of brief sense-impressions, which only reveal their full significance when they finally come together into a complete whole. Such a method makes greater demands upon the reader than the simple direct narrative, but is ideal for the kind of psychological investigation in which Conrad was interested as well as for the creation of a subtle all-pervading atmosphere which gives the story its unity". (History of English Literature 72). Typical of Conrad's work, *Lord Jim* emerges from real events to take on a life of its own. Known for his visionary yet dark, poetic prose style, Conrad negotiated among his international nautical settings

with detailed views of individual quandaries, especially moral ones. The work is laden with the ambiguities from which Conrad himself seemed to draw the only possibility of truth.

Keywords

Conrad; *Lord Jim*; Style and Technique; Narrative Style; Plot; Emotional and Thematic; Sympathy & Judgment; Characterization; Romanticism & Realism; Symbolism in *Lord Jim*.



Introduction

Conrad's literary work bridges the gap between the realist literary tradition of writers and the emergent modernist schools of writing. His works possess a symbolic resonance and layers of meaning that go beyond the level of the plot. His literary output falls mainly within the sphere of fiction. He has a style of extreme flexibility, expressiveness, and interest. He is a perfect artist. His art and technique, his methods of story-telling, characterization, Symbolism, atmosphere, setting, theme are devoted to the achievement of this aim. In his narration, nothing is superfluous. According to him, "It (style) must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the color of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music – which is the art of arts" (A Personal Record 113).

Conrad's plots are remarkable for his power of invention. Conrad incorporates things which run from the earth to heaven in his novels. In Conrad, as in all serious art, technique and theme are intricately bound together.

Broken Chronology

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad fuses varied methods of narration. In *Lord Jim*, Conrad became master of a time technique, and steadily matured in his ability to use time as simple past, as narrative and as a character, as ironic comment, and as history. In *Lord Jim*, Conrad's technique is non-chronological, zigzag, and tortuous and so difficult to follow. The narration is difficult as it requires great

effort of imagination and memory on the part of readers, but as a result of this technique, Jim stands out as one of the most rounded, three-dimensional and life-like figures in literature. *Lord Jim* is a bridge between the traditional and modern novel. It has a well-organized and well-formed structure, but there is no logical sequence of events in the Aristotelian sense. The novel begins somewhere in the middle, the story is narrated in a zigzag manner, chronological time is not followed.

Marlow as a Narrator:

Critics have objected to the use of Marlow as a narrator. Richard Curle considers him a bore. His endless comments and moral reflections irritate the readers; he obscures the finer truths about Jim. To others the device seems unrealistic, for no one can be expected to talk out such a long novel at one sitting. But Conrad himself has answered this criticism by pointing out that in actual narration, the account will not more than three-hours, and that the use of such a device has been common with story-tellers through the ages.

Nevertheless, the use of Marlow as a narrator is beneficial to the novel. Marlow is a literary device, a screen for the novelist himself, and an individual in his own right. He is the Greek chorus to comment and philosophize the content of the action. He is an idealist turned realist, and so he can view Jim's case with sympathy and understanding.

Marlow is the involved narrator, the reflecting and coloring medium, the balanced, sane, and normal individual, who represents Jim's case with sympathy and judgment, and thus ensures the maximum speculations, and assertions, his tolerance and self-effacement, the leisurely quest of his memory, the feeling he conveys of being aware, yet incapable of the extremes of human behavior—all these things bring us into the story. And because Marlow feels curiously involved with Jim, the whole problem of Jim's conduct gradually puzzles, implicates and challenges us. We become so caught up in Marlow's hovering interest and delicate probing that when he asserts that Jim is 'one of us'—meaning a western sea-man—Jim becomes, by extension, one of 'us'—the

readers. His conviction that Jim matters is contagious and we watch Jim through his eyes, not for vicarious thrills and adventures, but for the generally relevant psychological truths to be revealed.

Briefly speaking, *Lord Jim* is a great narrative-triumph of impressionism. According to Dorothy Van Ghent, in the novel, Conrad has used

...reflector within reflector, point of view within point of view, cross-chronological juxtapositions of events and impressions. Conrad's technical 'devices' in this case, represent much more than the word 'device' suggests; they represent extreme ethical scrupulosity, even anxiety, for the truth about a man is at once too immense and too delicate to sustain any failure of carefulness in the examiner. (*English Novel: Form & Function* 68)

Plot

The novel does not begin at the beginning of the story, but somewhere in the middle. The chain of events is not logical. Marlow constantly moves forward and backward in time. Flashbacks and flash-ahead are used to develop the plot, and the reader is called upon to put the pieces together in order to gain the full story of Jim. Conrad also includes a number of digressions, which direct the reader's attention away from the main story line. In addition the last chapters of the book do not follow the normal narrative of the rest of the novel. The end of Jim's story, including the climax of the plot, is revealed through letters to and documents about the protagonist Jim.

Emotional and Thematic

The novel is a closely knit-work of art, but this unity and organization are emotional and thematic, and not logical. The novelist's purpose is to render the soul of Jim. And his narration approximates to the processes and movements to the human soul. As David Daiches points out, "he has to explore the complex problems of guilt, pride self-deception, and betrayal, manipulations of chronology and time-sequence are necessary for such explorations" (*The Novel and the Modern World* 79).

The Theme of *Lord Jim*:

Lord Jim is a novel of guilt and atonement. It is the hero Lord Jim who is guilty and repents. While in the Patna, he jumps into the boat and allows the ship to sink. It is a betrayal of his own craft and the community of sailors, for on the high seas the virtues of fidelity, solidarity and duty are essential for survival. It is a betrayal of society at large which had reposed confidence in him and entrusted eight hundred of its members to his charge. It is an act of betrayal, and Jim is conscious of his cowardice and guilt.

The opportunity for atonement, the chance when he can redeem his lost honour through a noble act, comes when Stein sends him to Patusan. "On his way to Patusan, he saw his opportunity, sat veiled by his side, like an eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master" (*Lord Jim* 235). He takes full advantage of this opportunity, and by his courage, integrity and understanding, Jim creates a peaceful and flourishing community out of the chaotic, warring elements which he found at Patusan. He had gained their trust and respect and love. He could be with justice boast to Marlow: "if you ask them who is brave- who is true-who is just-who is they would trust with their lives?- they would say, Tuan Jim" (*Lord Jim* 75).

Even at Patusan he is not guilt free. The arrival of Brown reminds him of the post and makes him unhappy. He concludes that only by a great heroic deed, he can compensate for the loss of his honour. This is how he can atone. That is why he takes the murder of Dain Waris, committed by Brown upon him. He could have run away or could have fought and conquered the Bugis. But he chooses to die, and by this supreme act of martyrdom, atones for his guilt in deserting the Patna. In the words of Jocelyn Baines, "Fate and destiny are forces to be mastered and conquered. Cowardice in the face of the crucial test was contained in Jim's destiny; and only by conquering his destiny could he atone for his offence. An act of cowardice had to be expiated with the supreme act of courage, the deliberate point to meet certain death" (*Joseph Conrad-A Critical Biography*).

According to Richard Crule this novel “is a story of remorse and the effort to regain self-respect” (*Joseph Conrad-A Study*). To quote Tonny Tanner,

Lord Jim is the study of a man whose will is valiant and whose behaviour is carven, who is bravely active in his intentions and disastrously passive in his deeds, whose ideal aspirations are courageous and whose real conduct in a crisis is ignoble. He is a man who purses a glamorous dream, at the same time as he flees from an ugly fact. In him the best, and the basest of human motives are ominously interwoven. In imagination, he is hero, in actuality, he is a coward. He both upholds and betrays those lofty and exacting standards which give life its dignity and society its cohesion. He is both a martyr and a betrayer- a Christ who acts like Judas, Judas who dies like Christ. He is essentially a simple man but the problems he raises, are complex and profound, reaching right down to the roots of conduct. It is this man who stimulated Conrad to one of his major enquiries into the nature of man, the amazing range of his capabilities, and the endless inner and outer threats which he is condemned to confront. (60)

Characterization

Characterization in the novel is successful. It is psychologically real. Instead of externals, it is in the internals, the novelist is interested more. The consciousness of the hero, Jim, is shown through the narrator Marlow. The leading characters are Jim, Marlow, Jewel, Stein, Cronelius and Brown. The novelist has portrayed both good and evil characters. The novel has been made a gallery of rouges because of the portraiture of Cronelius and Brown, two great evil characters. Then there are minor characters too. Doramin and Rajah of Allang besides a number of naval officials play only minor roles.

Character of Lord Jim

Jim’s Charming Personality

Joseph Conrad, while introducing Lord Jim, says about him,

He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed apparently as much as himself as at anybody else. He was spotlessly neat, appareled in immaculate white from shoes to hat, and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler's water clerk, he was very popular. (*Lord Jim* 5)

Marlow, one of the main characters in the novel, is deeply impressed by Jim's "Blue boyish eyes looking straight into mine his artless smile, and youthful seriousness" (*Lord Jim* 15).

Calm, Thoughtful and Idealistic

Lord Jim has been represented as a well-brought up youth and his character has been moulded so as to illustrate ideals. He is gentle, modest and delicate. He intends to make his way in life by his exertions. This develops qualities of independence, self-reliance and initiative. He has studied the complete works of Shakespeare.

Jewel

Jewel was romantic mysterious, the embodiment of feminine instincts and impulses. "She was a beautiful rose blooming in the far off wilds of Malaya unknown, unseen, unhonoured" (*Lord Jim* 151). Marlow praises her beauty in the following manner,

What I remember best in the event, olive pallor of her complexion, and the intense blue-black gleams of her hair, flowing abundantly from under a small crimson cap she wore far back on her shapely head. Her moments were free, assured, and she blushed dusky red... Her manner presented a curious combination of shyness and audacity. Every pretty smile was succeeded by a look of silent,

repressed anxiety, as if put to flight by the recollection of some abiding danger. At times, she would sit down with us and with her soft cheek, dimpled by the knuckles of her little hand, she would listen to our talk; her big clear eyes would remain fastened to our lips. Her mother had taught her to read and write; she had learned a good bit of English from Jim, and she spoke it most amusingly, with her own clipping, boyish intonation. (*Lord Jim* 156)

Jewel's Passionate Love for Jim

Jewel loves Jim most sincerely and passionately. It is because of her deep love for Jim that she forewarns Jim because Cronelius has been constantly plotting against Jim. Jewel had always been keeping a watch over Jim, particularly during his sleep in the night about which Jim, however, does not know till one night Jewel comes up to Jim and wakes him up crying into his ears and putting a loaded revolver into his hand, "Get up! Get up! Get up! Can you face four men with this!" (*Lord Jim* 158).

Now Jim realized how deeply Jewel loves him only after his providential escape from death. Richard Curle's remark express their love to each other, "their love, free of conventional inhibitions, was absorbing and protective, but for her it was her whole life, for Jim it could only be a part of his life" (*Joseph Conrad-A Study*).

Lord Jim as the Great Gallery of Rouges

Conrad's novel, *Lord Jim*, has been called by critics a great gallery of rouges, because Conrad has introduced in it a number of rouges. There are the white officers of the Patna, Chester, Robins, Cornelius, and Brown. With the exception of Cornelius, they are all sea men. They are all rogues. Sea-life has made them rough rude, violent and insensitive to the gentler aspects of life. They are wicked, evil, heartless, gross and earthly; they are like obnoxious insects; they are like catacombs of beetles or are like butterflies. They are animals, "narrow shelves files with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the wall" (*Lord Jim* 238) is a befitting description of them. They are devoid of all

dignity and aspirations, intent merely on self. They are all rouges, but in one way or the other, they are sharply distinguished and differentiated. By contrast, they serve to throw into sharp relief the nobility of Jim and to illuminate the various aspects of his personality.

Chester and Robinson:

Chester is a great rouge. He is a figure of vigour, resourcefulness and endless energetic action. He is never troubled by a sickly conscience. He offers Jim a job of dubious morality and Marlow refuses on Jim's account. Chester's friend Robinson too is a rouge.

Cornelius:

Cornelius is a lazy, sluggish, dilapidated father of the girl Jim loves in Patusan. He wretchedly ill-treated his wife who died crying, and now he continues his indolent tyranny over the girl. His base nature is wonderfully intimated in adequate terms by Conrad. Just to watch the man walk is to know him for what he is.

Cornelius was creeping across in full view with an inexpressible effect of steel-thinness, of dark and secret sinking. He reminded one of everything that is unsavory. His slow, laborious walk resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle, the legs alone moving with horrid industry while the body glided evenly. (*Lord Jim* 270)

In the words of Marlow, "he is a big fool, honourable sir.... He's no more than a little child; he is like a little child- a little child" (*Lord Jim* 271). When Jim refuses to pay him money, he bent upon betraying and destroying Jim. He is a traitor to his own people, the Bugis and his treachery is the cause of the final catastrophe in the novel. He is the most depraved, heartless, mean and base, cunning and cowardly rouge of Conrad.

Brown

Gentleman Brown is most ungentlemanly. He is the most vividly drawn of Conrad's rouges. He is depraved and contemptible as Cornelius, but he is distinct in his boldness, intelligence and fearlessness. He is cruel-hearted. He

can shoot people for the sheer fun of it. He can do any treacherous thing. His human side, however is reflected in his bitter weeping over the death of the girl he loved. He hates Jim at first sight. This antipathy is instinctive, for Jim is a conscientious sinner, while Brown has no conscience at all. He has an Iago streak in him- the basic diabolical compulsion to bring everything to chaos.

Romantic Realism

Joseph Conrad is the creator of the romantic-realistic novel. According to his theory, a novel is a blend of romance and realism. A romantic glamour is cast over reality in order to make it more palatable and acceptable. The novelist transfigures reality by the power of his imagination, and thus, he makes reality romantic.

Symbolism in Lord Jim

The symbols used in Lord Jim may be broadly divided into two categories: Symbolic Characters, and Symbolic Events and situation. There are evil and wicked characters like Chester, Cornelius and Brown, who symbolize both the evil that is inherent in nature, as well as the evil within Jim himself. Marlow and Stein, on the other hand, represent the basic human values of life. Stein represents the ideal blend of idealism, reflection and contemplation and practical ability. Marlow is symbolic of practical idealism, the all-seeing eye, the penetrating mind which judges, interprets and illuminates Jim, the central personage, is the most important symbolic figure. He symbolizes the lofty idealist and dreamer in pursuit of unattainable ideals. He is a symbol of our best illusions, those exercises of the imagination which we allow to guide our behaviour, motif, conduct and desires. He represents human dignity, honour and glamour. Jim further symbolizes the erring humanity.

Beetles & Butterflies

According to Tonny Tanner, the two varieties of insects- beetles and butterflies- symbolize two types of human beings; the butterfly stands for such a man who “every time shuts his eyes; he sees himself as a very fine fellow so fine as he can never be,” (*Butterflies and Beetles: Conrad’s Two Truths* 41) a man

who lives in an imaginary world of ideals, a world of illusion, a man who hates common people as low and base. The beetles suggest, According to Tonny Tanner “ugly earth bound creatures, devoid of dignity and aspiration, intent merely on self-preservation at all costs; but gifted with a hard shell which serves them well in their unscrupulous will to live on any terms and capable of great malevolence when that life is threatened” (*Butterflies and Beetles: Conrad’s Two Truths* 42). Chester, Brown, Cornelius and the white officers of the Patna are the more important beetles in the novel. Jim is a butterfly. He is pure and he tries to escape from the beetles which cross his path, and the tragedy of his life is caused by the worst and most depraved of the beetles- Brown.

Symbolism in the Patna:

Jim’s fall from the Patna ship is symbolic of man’s fall from Paradise and his murder or martyrdom is symbolic of man’s redemption from evil or sin. The Patna-Voyage itself symbolizes life, going or rationally, calmly, and securely, until sudden an encounter with truth, sensed but not seen, destroys all order, all control, and prompts uncalculated actions and reactions. In this case, Jim is unable to control them and he jumps in the life-boat. Some critics take the submerged wreck to symbolize evil- the dark powers- which is always lying to wait to cause harm, death and destruction. Similarly, the rouges in the book symbolize evil, inherent in nature, the dark powers, as well as the various facets of the personality of Jim. The exotic and sea-background is also similarly symbolic. The image of corruption and decay used throughout the Pautsan-section symbolizes evil, as well as the approaching catastrophe.

The Symbolism of the Ring

The ring which Stein gives to Jim is also symbolic of friendship and confidence. As suggested by Tonny Tanner, “the ring has a wider religious significance” (*Butterflies and Beetles: Conrad’s Two Truths* 49). It is later given by Jim to Tamb Itam as a symbol of identification. By suggestion, Conrad indicates that Tamb Itam is an angel and Dain Waris a Christ figure. When the ring is presented by an angel to Christ, it begins to acquire symbolic meaning.

After Dain Waris's death, the ring finds its way to Doramin's lap. When he rises to execute Jim, the ring falls and rolls to Jim's feet. The ring is now a symbol which unites Dain Waris and Jim, both Christ figures, and excludes Doramin from the divine hierarchy. Doramin at that moment is making animal-like sounds, a description which insures his exclusion from a divine hierarchy. The ring also suggests spiritual perfection.

Significance of the Jump in the Life boat

In its largest implication, the jump from the Patna ship implies the fall of man. It also signifies the idealist's fall into the base real world. The lights of the Patna- the lights which would have shown Jim that the ship is not sinking, the lights which would have illuminated the implications of his conduct- they went out. And what they represent are the clues to ethical conduct which the external world gives us, those signs which prompt us to action, irresistible reminders and claims from the world of men. It is when all the lights are out, when the moral eye has nothing to focus on, when the material world is invisible and the human world is blind- it is then that Conrad wants to know how a man behaves.

Conclusion

Elliot remarks "Conrad is again a fore-runner of the twentieth century novelists in his careful creation of symbolic significance" (*Archetypal Symbolism in Lord Jim* 14). J. W. Beach has also observed, "Of the twentieth century novelists, Conrad is perhaps the first writer to make use of symbols. In *Lord Jim*, symbols are used both extensively and intensively. There are certain symbols like mist, sunshine, sea, river, light, shadow and darkness which run through the novel. His descriptions of natural scenes are mostly symbolic. They have something to do with human life whose emotional and spiritual elements are enlivened and deepened by them" (*The Twentieth Century Novel* 66).

The author's craft, his style and technique, his potent symbols and the use of the point of view all created a fictive world full of promises and surprises for the readers. With skillful selections and purposeful manipulations, the author unfolds the possible meaning of a work. *Lord Jim*, the rescue and rover, his sea

tales are thrilling and suffused in the aroma of romantic adventure, and struggle with the forces of nature. His actualities became clothed with romantic glamour and adventurous exaltation.

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