



COVER SHEET

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Joseph Conrad and Britain's Dream of Empire

by

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"...I perceived that the pilgrim ship episode was a good starting-point for a free and wandering tale; that it was an event, too, which could conceivably colour the whole `sentiment of existence' in a simple and sensitive character."

Joseph Conrad
1917
Introduction
Lord Jim

Conrad was one of the first popular writers to pierce the fog of propaganda that had grown up around the British Empire. His novels and short stories continue, to this day, to provide a counter-text to imperial triumphalism. It was with this aspect of Conrad's in mind work that I began to question the significance of the name Patna as the pilgrim ship in Lord Jim. Given my own background, as a historian of Singapore, of the opium trade, and of nineteenth century Southeast Asia, the name had a very special meaning for me. In particular, I began to wonder whether Conrad had intended some sort of symbolic link between opium and the Patna.

About twenty years ago, when I had already spent several years researching the economic history of Southeast Asia, to me, the word Patna had come to mean only one thing, opium. About that time, I met a Dutch scholar who was introduced to me as a Conrad expert and I asked him whether he thought the name of the vessel could be a reference to opium. He replied that he thought the connection was inappropriate and it seemed all he could do to keep from laughing in my face. I disagreed, pointing out that during the nineteenth century, the name of the Indian city, Patna, was for a time, virtually a brand name for a kind of British Indian opium. My Dutch friend, however, dismissed my suggestion saying that Conrad was not an anti-opium crusader and that there was little in the story to support such a notion. Finally, there was no correspondence, or other documentation from Conrad himself that would suggest such an interpretation. He maintained that the name was merely a coincidence.

Most Conrad scholars, it seems, have generally glossed over the significance of the ship's name and accepted it as simply a substitution for a real pilgrim ship known as the Jeddah, which had actually been abandoned by its European officers and crew in 1880. (Sherry, pp 309-344; LJ, p 24-5) It was a rather common thing to name a ship after an Asian city. There were hundreds of such ships in the nineteenth century, so why should we seek some significance in this one? There were also, it appears, at least one or two real ships known as the Patna in Asian waters in the late nineteenth century. One of them, a steamer, is known to have sailed into Singapore harbor on 17 January 1888, just two days before Conrad shipped out to assume command of the Otago. Norman Sherry suggests that this alone was sufficient reason for Conrad to choose the name Patna. It seems to me, however, that there should be more to it than simply that.⁽¹⁾

As Conrad pointed out in his preface, he intended the episode to color the whole novel. We should thus expect to find there most of his main themes. Conrad scholars have pointed these out as being false ambition, pride, failure and humiliation. It is thus, an important part of the novel, moreover, it seems that the name of this tragic ship should have some deeper significance. If Conrad did deliberately choose the name Patna, it seems we are justified in asking why. This part of the story has attracted the attention of a number of Conrad scholars and there is a significant critical literature on this section alone. I was ultimately drawn into this literature to see what the experts had to say on the subject of the Patna. There was, indeed, no mention of a connection between opium and the Patna, and, outside of Sherry's note, very little comment on the significance of the name itself. Conrad himself does not seem to have left any record giving the reason for his choice of names. None of the critics seemed to be concerned with the same indications or clues, that struck me as significant. On the other hand, as I continued to read Conrad scholarship, I found nothing of substance to dispute my theory. It has, moreover, been possible gather a few insights from these Conrad specialists, which offer some support for my suspicions about the meaning of Patna.

Comments on *Patna*

My argument is based on several premises. The first is that Conrad's critique of Jim, which is fact, a critique of the impulse to serve the empire, rests on the subtext that the imperial enterprise was a foolish delusion. It led good individuals to do evil, with the best of intentions, and left the worst to pursue their urges without restraint. In the end, it destroyed the former and enriched the latter. The second premise is that Conrad used Patna's association with opium to make it stand for the empire and the delusion it represented. I believe that Conrad, like anyone who spent time in the Asian tropics during the nineteenth century would have found the drug virtually ubiquitous. Conrad knew that the drug, and traffic in opium was an integral part of the imperial economy. I argue here that Conrad slyly called attention to the theme of delusion by choosing the name Patna for the vessel which provokes the action. Finally, I think that if we accept this reading of Conrad's intention, we may come to a deeper understanding of his anti-imperialist ethic.

Conrad's view of the empire as a corrupt and dishonest enterprise was not a common perception in his day. Today, many see his words as prophetic, suggesting that he understood the inherent weaknesses and evil of empire that had not yet become visible. Jacques Darras however, suggests that Conrad was correct for his own time. In his discussion of Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness, Darras points out:

There is a certain irony in the fact that Heart of Darkness has been described as prophetic by several successive generations of ethnologists and

historians, when really it was written at its appointed time in history. In this story, the political aspect of the writing is masked by the apparent conformity of the text and by this means keeps its distance from history as such. What Conrad's pen obliterates is the closed circuit of adolescent literature from which the British Empire drew and furnished its models. What dies in Lord Jim is the identifiable hero. A hero is born who does not fulfil the expectations of the works which try and annex him. What disappears with Kurtz is the noble hero and the hypothesis that the colonial quest was undertaken for the purest of reasons...Already, in these first works, the most romantic ones, the most openly exotic ones, there is a divorce between the White dream of progress and the Oriental mystique which the members of the White race, in the depths of their hearts, had promised themselves to conquer. (Darras 1982, pp 5-7)

Jim is indeed a strange kind of hero. Conrad identifies him as one who had been influenced, in his youth, by tales of light romance. One presumes there were the sort of literature with which many other young aspirants to empire grew up. In a number of passages, Conrad shows that he was not only a prisoner to these delusions, but that they almost seemed to frustrate his desire to fulfill them. The first was when Jim missed a chance to be a hero during a storm when he was on a training ship for merchant marine officers. He continued to be more of a dreamer than a doer after he took his post aboard the Patna where he not only missed his great chance to be a hero, but humiliated himself so thoroughly that the rest of his life was spent in atonement.

In a time of danger he, a ship's officer, literally jumped ship, abandoning over eight hundred people to what seemed certain death. This moral lapse set in motion the chain of events that makes up the plot. It was Jim's great crime. Ironically, the ship did not sink, but drifted along until rescued by a passing French naval vessel. Later, in an effort to redeem himself, Jim isolated himself from European society in the fictitious Malay community of Patusan where he finally did become a hero. Ironically, he was duped into giving up the life of his best friend and then gave up his own as a needless sacrifice.

A number of other scholars have called attention to the general air of "corruption" and moral lassitude connected with the Patna episode. Others have drawn attention to Conrad's inversion of a number of "romantic" images so as to give them an ironic twist. In both cases, they have seen in this episode a critique of imperialism. These suggestions led me to the idea that Conrad was suggesting that the British dream of empire was, in itself, a kind of opiate that deluded Britons and made it difficult for them to confront the fundamental evil of imperialism.

It is quite easy to see the theme of corruption. There was also something intrinsic to the white man's empire in the tropics that Conrad, and many of his European contemporaries, found both physically and morally debilitating. His attitude, on one level, may be summed up in his discussion of European sailors who, through happenstance, stayed on in the East; they were the men that Jim met in the European hospital before shipping out on the Patna:

The majority were men who, like himself, thrown there by some accident, had remained as officers of country ships. They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severe view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans. They were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea. They loved short passages, good deck-chairs, large native crews. and the distinction of being white. They shuddered at the thought of

hard work, and led precariously easy lives, always on the verge of dismissal, always on the verge of engagement, serving Chinamen, Arabs, half-castes -- would have served the devil himself had he made it easy enough....and in all they said -- in all their actions, in their looks, in their persons -- could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence. (LJ p 52)

Even the "best" were vulnerable to this corrupting influence of the tropical empire.

While virtually all Europeans in the pre-war era associated the tropics with lethargy and decay, there is also something in Conrad that resonates with other anti-imperialist commentaries about Europeans in the tropics. George Orwell's cast of characters in *Burmese Days*, who inhabited "the Club" were also the type who liked "good deck-chairs, large native crews and the distinction of being white." Conrad seemed among the first to grasp clearly the fact that the social construct of empire gave very ordinary, indeed very unworthy people the opportunity to play god. It was among this type of men, these "old stagers" that Conrad began his tale on board the ship *Patna* where Jim was the mate. The voyage may be seen as kind of ironic "Dreamtime" of the empire in which Conrad creates an atmosphere of delusion and moral atrophy. This is brought into sharp focus by Jim's humiliating failure.

Conrad was fond of taking literary cliches and giving them an ironic twist to make his points. It has been suggested that parts of the scene on the *Patna* were inspired by the writings and poetry of Herman Melville and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Conrad borrowed Coleridge's images, many of which have been thought to be inspired by Coleridge's own opium dreams. Conrad has, however, turned them on their heads. Carl Nelson has called attention to imagery which recalls Coleridge in the following passage:

A marvellous stillness pervaded the world, and the stars, together with the serenity of their rays, seemed to shed upon the earth the assurance of everlasting security. The young moon recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold, and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon. The propeller turned without a check, as though its heat had been part of the scheme of a safe universe; and on each side of the *Patna* two deep folds of water, permanent and sombre on the unwrinkled shimmer, enclosed within their straight and diverging ridges a few white swirls of foam bursting in a low hiss, a few wavelets, a few ripples, a few undulations that, left behind, agitated the surface of the sea for an instant after the passage of the ship, subsided splashing gently, calmed down at last into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly at its centre.

Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude, unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fosterlove upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face. (LJ pp 54-5)

Conrad conjures up the image of an "illusory voyage" with the insubstantial wake of the *Patna* disappearing into the all-embracing circle of the consuming water. These lines almost paraphrase "Kubla Khan" and the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The moon evokes the picture of the Mariner's voyage just before the souls of the dead crew flee their bodies with a curse for the Mariner. This moon is also a curse for Jim.

Ironically, Coleridge tells of a voyage which leads to redemption while Jim's voyage is the opposite. Nelson claims that "Conrad exhibits Jim consumed by a death of self-deception as he leaves the Patna which had been the vehicle of his delusions." (LJ, p 50)

Nelson's insight that identifies the Patna as the "vehicle of his delusion" seems to provide a sound support for the idea that the ship's name was an allusion to opium, the bringer of delusion. I would argue that Conrad seems to have offered the Patna as a symbol of the empire, of the Raj, as he saw it, at the beginning of the twentieth century. This seems an apt image, provided one had a realistic understanding of the economic and social underpinnings of the empire.

Patna and the Opium Empire

Conrad presents an image of empire that many of his contemporary Englishmen hid from themselves, and of course many continue in this delusion today. The Raj was a great and glorious thing. Britain grew rich trading in exotic but useful things. Today, the opium trade is all but forgotten. I watched a television program not long ago where an Englishman explored the "ruins" of British mansions and public buildings in contemporary Calcutta. He explained how Britain had grown wealthy exporting tea, indigo and jute from Calcutta. He never breathed a word about opium, which during the nineteenth century more than equalled the combined value of all three of those other products, and which, indeed was the single most valuable trade commodity of the entire nineteenth century.

Conrad's metaphor of the Patna is a compelling one because opium was an important, if not vital aspect of European domination in Asia. The progress of the drug epidemic that swept Asia from India, to Southeast Asia and China during the nineteenth century, was closely linked to the advance of imperialism and capitalism. While he may have been ignorant of much of the history of the region, he must have been aware of the place opium held in the commerce of his day. The early 1880s were the high point of opium shipments from British India to China and Southeast Asia. In 1880, India alone exported over 6,000 tons of opium. By contrast, the global production of all opiates in 1980 was less than 3,000 tons. (Lin, 1993) ⁽²⁾

Patna is one of India's most ancient cities. Formerly the site of Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital in the third century BC, by the nineteenth century it was the capital of Bihar state, and had long been an integral part of British holdings in India. These circumstances alone would have made it a likely choice for an exotic sounding name, but at that time, Patna meant something more. The word had a special status in the British empire. Its significance was in its connection to the opium trade. In fact, we might look upon Patna as the capital of the opium empire that the British had created.

For nearly 150 years, Patna had been virtually synonymous with the opium trade. The drug was grown in Bihar state under a government monopoly and processed at the government factory in Patna and then traded at Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong, and in every major port of Asia. ⁽³⁾ Wherever one went east of Suez, on any day he could pick up the local English-language newspaper to discover the daily quotations for the prices of "Patna," "Benares," or "Malwa" opium; whether in the market at Singapore, or at the monthly auctions in Calcutta, or at any of the major ports of South and Southeast Asia or the China coast. Patna opium was as much a part of the everyday environment of maritime commerce in the region as rice, tea, cotton, jute, indigo, pepper, gambier, copra or tin. Almost without exception, Patna opium was carried on virtually every vessel that traded at Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Whether packed in chests as

it came from Calcutta; or whether in individual balls, as taken from the chests; or whether as smokeable *chandu* packed in tubes or "pots;" whether legal or illegal (and mostly it was legal): Patna opium was as omnipresent as silver dollars and native coolies in the white man's empire.

The American merchant, William C. Hunter repeats a bit of doggerel penned by one of his countrymen in Canton during the 1830s as a parody of the Byron poem, "Know'st thou the Land:"

Know'st thou the land where the drug in its glory

With cotton and betel nut govern the day

Where Patna or Malwa's the theme of each story

The life of each anecdote, solemn or gay? (Hunter 1882, pp 111-112)

It seems fitting, if Conrad wished to make an ironic statement, that he would make Jim the mate of a ship named for an addictive drug that deprived people of their sense of duty and morality. If he wished to make a point about delusion, would he not allude to a drug that offered pipe dreams in exchange for dismal reality. One must assume that a person of Conrad's background, one conversant with the day-to-day language and usage of Asian maritime commerce, would immediately associate the word "Patna" with opium. Most agree that the book has a strong anti-imperialist message and Conrad scholars such as Jan Verleun see significance in the dreamlike quality of the "Patna" episode. It is a message that signals moral lapse, false consciousness about the grim and dirty work of empire, cloaked in light adventure novels and smug dreams of peace, order and civilization. It only seems sensible to link those themes to the very source of dreamlike delusion itself, opium.

The Patna episode can be read as a sort of parable of European imperialism. Like the empire, the tale is filled with ironies and ambiguities. Thomas Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore, and other high-minded English liberals attempted to establish systems of order and purity, to remake the world according to the rational principles of the Enlightenment and the best impulses of European civilization. They brought the gifts of free trade, economic and personal freedom, adherence to the rule of law, personal integrity and duty. They opposed slavery, feudalism, superstition, piracy and oppression. And yet, as we know, the European empires were exploitative, racist, violent and fundamentally pernicious. This reality made the dream much more than just a harmless fantasy, it was a dangerous delusion, both for the English as well as their subjects.

The British Raj, moreover, was in a great measure, itself actually dependent on opium. I would speculate that Conrad too, understood this, and that he saw the empire as the Patna, built upon opium and delusion. Like the Patna, it was already in a state of advanced decay. It was corroded and rusted from within by a kind of moral corruption and was headed for disaster, threatening to take the multitude of trusting natives along with it. When that day came, the officers could jump ship and leave the machine they had created to its own fate. Perhaps we can read Conrad's allegory in this fashion, indeed, it sounds very much like what happened in the end.

The natives on the ship too, lived with a false sense of security under the protection of the all-powerful Europeans. Beneath their white canopies on the decks, the 800 pilgrims slept, trusting Allah, the steamship and the four white men running it. Even the Malay helmsmen who steered the ship and watched Jim, the captain and the two

engineers desert the *Patna* in the face of impending disaster, even they trusted the whites implicitly. They never imagined that the whites would leave the ship out of cowardice. They all were mystified by the aspect of the ship and what it represented as an element of European power in Asia. They too were all involved in the "adventure" of imperialism, lulled by the both "corruptive influence of the brooding, dreamy atmosphere of the East..." as well as by the appearance of power.

Conrad's Anti-imperialism

Conrad was not a prisoner of the British rhetoric that justified their empire. Despite his debt to Britain and to the empire, which took him in, gave him a living, gave him a *life*, and recognized his genius, Conrad could never forget that he was also Teodor Josef Korzeniowski, the child of a country which had literally ceased to exist under imperial rule. To Conrad, as an outcast, orphaned Pole, whose father had died in the Czar's prison, whose uncles had been executed by the Czar, there were no "good" imperialists. Just as there were no good rapists. The evil was in the act itself, and the ends did not justify the means. Many of Conrad's most profound tales carry this message. This was Conrad's paradox. According to Cedric Watts:

The novel offers a general verdict on imperialism by showing that even those Europeans who, like him [Jim], attempt to be benevolently paternalistic to their subject peoples may, in the long term, do more harm than good, and it offers a general verdict on the romantic conception of personal honour by showing that the more it resembles exalted egoism, the higher may be the price that others have to pay for it. (LJ p 23)

Elsewhere, Conrad tells the painful story of his grand-uncle who followed Napoleon to Moscow in the hope of liberating his homeland from the Russians and Germans. His crushed hopes were all the more humiliating as he was forced to eat a dog in order to survive the retreat.

The devouring in a dismal forest of a luckless Lithuanian dog by my grand-uncle Nicholas B. in company of two other military and famished scarecrows, symbolised, to my childish imagination, the whole horror of the retreat from Moscow and the immorality of a conqueror's ambition. An extreme distaste for the objectionable episode has ringed the views I hold as to the character and achievements of Napoleon the Great. I need not say that these are unfavourable. It was morally reprehensible for that great captain to induce a simple-minded Polish gentleman to eat dog by raising in his breast a false hope of national independence. It has been the fate of that credulous nation to starve for upwards of a hundred years on a diet of false hopes and -- well -- dog. (Conrad 1912, p 690)

The European adventure in Asia was as ethically confused as was Jim's experience aboard the *Patna*. Deeply involved, as it was, in one of the most pernicious, yet well-organized and profitable drug trades that has ever existed, the empire was rotten at its heart. How could a system based on the trade in this product, acknowledged even then as an evil, be morally squared with the ideals of the "best" of the empire builders. Like their subjects, Europeans were caught in the sense-dulling inducements of the drug. They too, were lost on their own Lethe of moral forgetfulness. For many of them, greed for profit and power were their own drugs. Conrad distinguished himself from the other great imperialist author, Rudyard Kipling. Unlike Kipling, whom he said, wrote *about* the English, he himself wrote *for* the English.⁽⁴⁾ (Darras 1982, pp 4-5, fn 10) This is

why Conrad thought his own books were less popular among other Europeans than Kipling's. Conrad's aim was to enlighten the British about themselves, and nature of their empire. He aimed to penetrate the false consciousness of high imperial complacency.

Conrad's book is not a tract against opium. Conrad, I believe, had little sympathy for the anti-opium crusaders. Most of them were missionaries who saw no fundamental problem in the empire, as such. They simply wished to use its power to further their causes rather than those of the merchants and administrators. Conrad's approach was far more subtle. The trade as a distinct phenomenon is never confronted in Lord Jim, but the impact of opium usage on a number of Conrad's characters is evident. Conrad also mentions opium casually in a number of other novels and short stories in Asian settings, but in Lord Jim, the relationship between the delusion, the drug and imperial enterprise seems to be highlighted through the device of the "Patna."

My own somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of Conrad's "sentiment of existence" is the notion that the ship can be read as the empire. Jim, as Darras suggests, is the "identifiable hero." He is deluded by his own dreams of adventure and heroism, particularly by those "light romances" of adventure which led Jim to his fantasy in the first place. It was the dream of empire. In Conrad's eyes, it was the dream of a fool, but Jim shared it with most of his "right-thinking" countrymen. Many have seen Jim as a hero, but despite its overt nobility, his death was for nothing. Perhaps there is an existential merit in Jim's sacrifice, but it certainly had no redeeming social value. The dream of "civilizing Asia," or Africa, (or whatever) was the dream of all the proponents of the empire such as Lord Cornwallis, Thomas Stamford Raffles, Thomas H. Macaulay, James Brooke and Cecil Rhodes, and most of the other "idealists," whether they were adventurers, missionaries, administrators, merchants or mercenaries. It was most precisely Rudyard Kipling's dream that one man, sacrificing himself to teach the new-caught sullen peoples, could turn back the tide of ignorance. Jim was the "white spot," that could obliterate the darkness.

Jim was "one of us"

As the first mate aboard the floating death trap that was the Patna, Jim may be seen as the representative of the Good. He was, as Marlow, Conrad's narrator, describes him, the best kind of Englishman: "one of us." But, even here there is something ironic about this characterization.

All the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies; this frank aspect the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us. He talked soberly, with a sort of composed unreserve, and with a quiet bearing that might have been the outcome of manly self-control, of impudence, of callousness, of a colossal unconsciousness, of a gigantic deception. Who can tell! (LJ p 100)

The passage ends with an interesting twist. Was Jim a sincere, open and appealing individual, or was he simply a clever liar, or even more troubling, was his quiet bearing and manliness the result of a "colossal unconsciousness?" Conrad seems to be playing with the reader here and he gives us several possible interpretations of Jim's character. In the final analysis, his intention seems to have been for us to choose

"unconsciousness" as the fundamental problem. Jim is the English everyman, and like the rest of us, he is confused and misled in his own mind. And, perhaps that delusion was shared by most of his contemporaries.

He may also have had another audience in mind when he styled Jim as "one of us." The timing of the book is significant, Lord Jim was written between September 1899 and July 1900, the same time as the American intervention in the Philippines. Its publication shortly followed Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden" which was addressed to the "The United States and the Philippine Islands." Kipling wished to encourage Britain's American "cousins" to assume their place in the great work of European imperialism in Asia:

Take up the white man's burden --

Send forth the best ye breed --

Go, bind your sons to exile

To serve the captives' need;

To wait in heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild --

Your new-caught sullen peoples,

Half-devil and half-child (Beecroft 1956, p 444)

This sounds a lot like Jim's "dream" of his mission in Patusan. Perhaps Conrad's purpose was to warn off the Americans from imperial adventures in Asia. His tale is certainly a powerful antidote against Kipling's drug.

The imperial delusion

The romantic adventure of the Patna's voyage nearly turns into a tragedy and emerges as humiliation. Jim's dream is the source of the problem. He is shown as if in some kind of trance, or dream, or torpor; like a man who has taken a puff of opium. On the voyage aboard the Patna, the weather, the very universe seemed pervaded by a vast and profound calm. To speak of Jim being "...penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace..." (LJ p 17) conjures up the image of someone under the influence of that most soporific of drugs. "...his joints cracked with a leisurely twist of the body, in the very excess of well-being; and, as if made audacious by the invincible aspect of the peace, he felt he cared for nothing that could happen to him to the end of his days." (LJ, pp 19-20). In those peaceful days, he dreamed,

...his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face. (LJ, p 20)

Jan Verleun remarks on Jim's psychic state, "Jim's sensibilities before the Patna

incident are atrophied; he is too pleurably languid and too intoxicated with imaginary successes to dislike actively his fellow officers, that is to perceive them even with any vividness." (Verleun 1979, p 199, n6) The vile and corrupt captain, the opium soaked chief engineer and whimpering second engineer were sad company for a "gentleman" of his quality. Nevertheless, Jim could pretend he did not share the same space with them.

...those men did not belong to the world of heroic adventure; they weren't bad chaps though. Even the skipper himself...His gorge rose at the mass of panting flesh from which issued gurgling mutters, a cloudy trickle of filthy expressions; but he was too pleurably languid to dislike actively this or any other thing. The quality of these men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him; he shared the air they breathed but he was different... (LJ, p24-5)

Jim's moral senses were anesthetized. Fundamental to Jim's delusion was his failure to recognize the evil around him.

This was the period during which the young Joseph Conrad had gained his experience of maritime trade in Asia, and it was the era in which he set the tale of Jim. The romantic era of clippers, their daring captains and the Anglo-Scottish taipans had been enshrined among the myths of the empire. By the 1880s, however, their day had passed and they only survived in the romantic boys' adventure literature of Britain. Jim's "dream" was a mask for the dingy reality. Opium had ceased to be the stuff of legends and was no longer the source of super profits for the richest merchant houses. It was still the grease that lubricated the entire imperial machine and continued to be a part of the cargo of nearly every ship that plied Asian waters. These ships, however, were not dashing clippers racing across the seas under clouds of sail, but were rusty old steamers that were owned by "Arabs and Chinamen" making their tedious rounds from one steamy little river mouth to the next.

When Conrad wrote **for** the English, he took aim at their inflated sense of pride in the empire. And, by extension, at those pretensions of heroism and honor that he saw as essentially hypocritical, given the empire that he knew. His use of the Frenchman as the hero of the Patna episode is a case in point. It seems doubtful that any other English novelist would have dared present such a characterization to his audience at that particular time. The very idea of introducing an off-the-shelf French naval officer to rescue the Asian passengers whom Jim had abandoned seems something quite beyond the pale of British imperial discourse. It is difficult to imagine Kipling presenting such a situation. Conrad had no particular brief for the French, nor is this particular Frenchman shown as a great hero. He just followed orders and did his job. As such, his very ordinary nature made him the perfect foil for Britain's imperial fantasy.

Conrad sought to awaken contemporaries from their delusions, but how are we to view them? Especially, how are we to view those who promoted, perpetuated and defended the opium trade, denying to themselves and the world that there was any impropriety in the enterprise? In their dream, the empire, the Raj, was a great and glorious enterprise. It was also a global drug cartel which enslaved and destroyed millions and enriched only a few. The image of the Raj was itself a delusion created by opium. If there is to be any long-term evaluation of the Empire, the opium trade must be reckoned in the equation.

This is why it seems appropriate to use the image of Conrad's Patna as the symbol of the European empire in Asia. Whether it was British, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese or even American, the white man's domination of Asia rose and fell as a

more-or-less unified enterprise. And, before the onset of wide-scale industrialism, it was always a "drug" enterprise beginning with spices and ending with opium. In 1900, as the industrial century opened, the rusting, decrepit Patna was gliding off into the silent sea to some uncertain demise, loaded with hapless Asians engaged in their own pilgrimage, and piloted, so long as it seemed secure, by a crew of weak, deluded and unreliable fools. The idealistic Englishmen, whom Conrad admired, believed they had made something great and glorious, which would last for ages. Conrad's message was that the reality of empire was far less uplifting. The parasites of the empire, as Conrad saw them, the self-serving Europeans, the Chinese, the Arabs, the "half-castes" and the corrupt Malays were the only ones who managed to profit. On the other hand, the idealists and the "good" natives, were always doomed to failure.

This judgement seems to underlie Conrad's dismal vision of the prospects of doing good through conquest and governance of foreign peoples. It is doubtful that the British public of his day would have accepted Conrad's judgement that placed their empire in Asia, which was bringing order and progress to "Oriental savages" on the same scale as the empires of the Russians, Germans, Austrians and French in nearby Europe. So dense was their delusion that they could not imagine a similarity. Conrad's admiration of the English led him, I believe, to a much more subtle approach, but one, as Darras points out, which was always clear in its message despite what might have been missed by the eyes of the beholders.

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Endnotes

1. Sherry, 1968, p 336, notes the report of the arrival in Singapore of an 1,149 ton steamer called the Patna in the Straits Times Overland Journal, 18 January 1888.

2. The 6,000 tons that was exported from British India in 1880 was only exceeded by the amount of the drug then being produced in China itself, which Lin Man-huong estimates to have been in the neighborhood of 12,000 to 18,000 tons. (Lin, 1993)

3. Bihar was one of only two states in British India where opium was grown. The other was Benares (now Varanasi) and this opium was processed at the British factory in Gaziphur. A significant amount of opium was also produced in the princely states of western India in the region known as "Malwa." The British Indian government also collected a substantial "passage duty" on this opium when it left Bombay.

4. Conrad wrote to Henry Darvey explaining why he felt that foreigners would find more enjoyment in Kipling than in his writings, "Il parle de ses compatriotes. Moi j'écris pour eux. Donc lui peut très bien intéresser les étrangers -- pour moi, c'est bien plus difficile -- peut être impossible" (Darras, 1982, pp 4-5, fn 10)