

## ALMAYER'S FOLLY AND LORD JIM: A STUDY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONRAD'S IMAGERY

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### I

Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, exhibits many of the stylistic characteristics of later works, such as *The Rescue*, and it may be contrasted with novels of his most productive period, such as *Lord Jim*, in its simple, unambiguous use of imagery. The purpose of this study is to explore the differences between *Almayer's Folly* and *Lord Jim* and to suggest thereby a development in Conrad's style and method as an imagist.

Frederick Karl has called *Almayer's Folly* a *fin de siècle* novel, noting that it resembles the work of the early Yeats, Dowson, Arthur Symons, and the Pre-Raphaelites in its language, tone, and mannerisms. The chief images are related to languor of character, language, and setting. Languor is apparent in such images as the "smell of decaying blossoms," the "acrid smoke from the cooking fires," the "clear blue sky," the "light puffs [of breeze] playing capriciously," and the "faint rustle of trees," all of which tell of the relaxed dormancy of a hot afternoon beneath a sweltering sun, "the sensuous retreat into sluggishness and apathy." Moreover, there is a use of the language of despair which can be found in some of the work of Conrad's contemporaries, notably James Thomson, John Davidson, and A. E. Housman. This type of image comes to fruition in "Heart of Darkness," in which "a personal malaise became objective and gained epic proportions." In *Almayer's Folly* it supplements the languor of the jungle, but it is "essentially a city image, a civilized image transferred to an exotic setting." Basically the image is used by the author to emphasize the emotions of the chief character, as is apparent in the passage in which Almayer enters the neglected office in order to start a blaze which will destroy the entire house (pp. 200-01).<sup>1</sup> The description of the desolation inside the room correlates with his despair; it is the language of desolation and exhaustion.<sup>2</sup>

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There is indeed a parallel between Conrad's use of this type of image and that of Housman and the other *fin de siècle* poets mentioned by Karl, although one is inclined to doubt that it is "essentially a city image, a civilized image transferred to an exotic setting." Civilized it is, but not necessarily urban, and hence quite suited to Conrad's purpose.

Consider, for example, Housman's "Lent Lily," where images such as "thorn and bramble," "hollow ground," and "windflower chilly" mingle with those of death to give the poem a tone of despondency, in spite of a surface gaiety suggested by young girls who go maying. As in many of the Shropshire poems, these images are rural, although not exotic. Conrad's imagery in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* establishes similar tones, but with less economy.

Conrad refers indirectly to the question of exotic settings and imagery in his "Preface" to *Almayer's Folly*. He is answering the disapproval of the lady who said that tales which prey on strange people and prowl in far-off countries, under the shade of palms, in the unsheltered glare of sunbeaten beaches, are "decivilized." Conrad replies in this manner:

The picture of life, there as here, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints. Only in the cruel serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours, in the steady light, seem crude and without shadow. Nevertheless it is the same picture (p. vii).

In short, the imagery of *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, "Heart of Darkness," and *Lord Jim* is no different in kind from that of *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, or *Nostramo*—it is neither civilized nor "decivilized," urban nor rural, in the sense that one type of imagery invades the province of another, or that one finds "images of the city" in the jungle of Sambir. The images are similar in the responses they evoke, not in their setting.

What is immediately apparent in *Almayer's Folly*, as in *An Outcast of the Islands*, is that there is a disturbing lack of subtlety, a trite conventionality, in Conrad's use of imagery. There is a direct correlation of imagery to mood and tone, and the same image is used again and again, with monotonous regularity, to establish the same mood or tone. Furthermore, imagery seldom establishes more than one emotion for any of the characters. In the novels of his most productive period Conrad rose above such obvious methods.

This simplicity of design is apparent in the development of Almayer's cupidity and subsequent despondency. We are introduced to him as he stands on his verandah at sunset. He looks fixedly at the river. The sinking sun "spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of Pantai, and Almayer's thoughts were often busy with gold. . ." (p. 3). As Karl has pointed

out, much of the imagery in this novel is associated with memory,<sup>3</sup> and this passage has to do, in a sense, with memory, for Almayer looks backward to the time when he was persuaded by Lingard that his fortune would be made if he would only accept the old man's proposition and marry the adopted Malay girl. But this passage does more than bring forth memories. It employs what one may call the "conditioning" image. The golden tinge of the sunset not only evokes in Almayer dreams of wealth but also suggests to the reader the cupidity which in part brings about Almayer's downfall. But there is no recurrence of the image in more subtle ways to suggest more complicated aspects of character or theme. In this connection, it should be pointed out that the gold image is used in exactly the same manner in the "flashback" when the reader is made acquainted with Almayer's background. As Lingard makes his amazing proposal that the young man marry his adopted daughter, Almayer's mind is conditioned partially by the appearance of the sea at the time: ". . . the smooth black surface of the sea with a great bar of gold laid on it by the rising moon" (p. 11).

In the sunset scene cited above the novelist wishes to make clear to the reader that Almayer's hopes for wealth and prestige have gone a-glimmering, so the image shifts abruptly from a pleasant sunset and the memory of a calm sea lighted by a moon which leaves a bar of gold on its surface to the short twilight of the tropics which gives way to "impenetrable gloom."

Only the fire of dry branches lit outside the stockade of the Rajah's compound called fitfully into view the ragged trunks of the surrounding trees, putting a stain of glowing red halfway across the river where the drifting logs were hurrying toward the sea through the impenetrable gloom (p. 11).

It could be argued here that the "stain of glowing red" image prefigures coming dire events, and this may have been Conrad's intent; but if so he failed to maintain this design, as he did, for example, in *The Secret Agent*. There is no recurring prefigurative pattern or cluster of images which establish a future tone. The tone that is established is immediate, and the imagery, therefore, is operative only in an immediate sense.

One may cite other images which are used in this directly associative manner. The run-down condition of Almayer's dwelling reflects always the degradation of his character and is used only when this degradation is being presented. The frequent use of atmospheric conditions to reflect emotions furnishes another example. Thus when Nina is anxiously awaiting the return of Dain and is deeply hurt by her father's slighting reference to Malays as being inferior racially, her disturbed emotional state is emphasized by the violence of a thunderstorm (p. 19). A particularly noteworthy illustration of the direct correlation of imagery and theme is

the description of the atmospheric conditions prevalent in scenes involving Almayer on the one hand and Nina and Dain on the other. Almayer is most often seen at night or under conditions which are gloomy or depressing. His despair is paralleled by the gloom of his surroundings, and the latter both contributes to and emphasizes his despondency. Early in the novel his despairing mood is associated with the steady rain and the lowering sky of the monsoon season. Such association is consistent, so that in the final scene, where he comes to fetch Nina and Dain to prevent their departure, his coming is heralded by threatening weather: "Over their heads a film of dark, thread-like clouds, looking like immense cobwebs drifting under the stars, darkened the sky with the presage of the coming thunderstorm" (p. 175). There follows the harrowing episode in which the decadent white trader attempts to persuade his half-caste daughter to remain with him instead of following her Malay lover.

The passage cited above also illustrates the difference in Conrad's treatment of the love of the two young people and the despair of Almayer. If it is argued that their love is associated with breaking dawns and floating clouds because Conrad could not write easily of sexual passion and hence resorted to description of natural scenery as a kind of surrogate, it can also be argued that his use of light imagery in his presentation of this love affair is an apt contrast to that of gloom used in presenting the desolate character of Almayer. When he writes of the love of Dain and Nina the imagery is that of diffused light, whereas on the few occasions when Almayer is seen in light, it is in the glare of a blinding noonday sun, or in the "steely light" of the moon, which brings out clearly every object on the wrecked verandah on which Almayer is sleeping a drunken sleep. There is either a blinding quality or an eeriness about the light surrounding him.

Conversely there is a naturalness, if violence, about the imagery associated with Nina and Dain. On their first meeting alone the two young people drift in their canoe on a calm, quiet river, without a breath of air to disturb the peace.

Earth, river, and sky were wrapped up in a deep sleep from which it seemed there would be no waking. All the seething life and movement of tropical nature seemed concentrated in the ardent eyes, in the tumultuously beating hearts of the two beings drifting in the canoe, under the white canopy of mist, over the smooth surface of the river (pp. 69-70).

Suddenly the image shifts to that of breaking day. Golden rays shoot upward behind the curtain of trees, the mist breaks into torn pieces, the surface of the river is wrinkled and sparkles in the light, and white birds wheel and scream overhead. There is a violence about this description of daybreak which is intended to depict symbolically the culmination of sexual passion of the two lovers. Subsequent passages also associate the

love of Dain and Nina with light. Dain's reply to Nina's question as to whether he will be long away from her is an example: "Long! . . . Would a man willingly remain long in a dark place? When I am not near you, Nina, I am like a man that is blind. What is life to me without light?" (p. 72). Nina reflects on the scene in which her love was born, seeing it in terms of breaking day (p. 147), and Dain refers to Nina as the "light of his life" (p. 172).

Concomitant with this light imagery, there are images of the jungle, of creepers and plants which strive to rise above the decay of the forest to the blue sky, just as Dain and Nina attempt to leave behind the decay and corruption of Sambir and the desolation of the trading post to flee to the bright green, cultivated fields and clear running streams of his homeland.

Here, as in *An Outcast of the Islands*, the question of racial prejudice reflects Conrad's attempt to develop an ironic theme. Almayer, who is proud of his white heritage, despises the Malays and rears his half-caste daughter as a white woman; but Nina repudiates her white background in favor of life with her Malay lover. As has been noted, their love is associated with light, while the derelict Almayer is associated with darkness, gloom, monsoon storms, the eerie, steely light of the moon, or the blinding light of a sweltering noonday sun. But the irony is fleeting and is not sustained as a principle in the development of the theme; and the imagery, therefore, with few exceptions is only immediately evocative.

Subsidiary passages illustrate the direct, unambiguous use of imagery in the novel. In each instance when the mangled corpse of the Malay is mentioned, the sun casts a blood-red glow over the surrounding area; Mrs. Almayer's ethnic background is substantiated with such descriptions as that of her "clawlike" hand and her primitive squatting position as she gloats over the money (here a symbol of civilization) which she has obtained by the simple expedient of selling her only daughter to Dain Maroola; and Babalatchi's ambivalent role as political adviser, yet servant to Lakamba is suggested by his crouching position as he talks to the Rajah on the one hand, and the splendor of his attire as he comes on a diplomatic mission to Almayer on the other.

At best, however, *Almayer's Folly* merely illustrates Conrad's intense interest in imagery. It does not provide an example of the use of imagery as a structural device or as a means of sustaining tone. Flashes of brilliance can be found in the instances where it serves to enhance the irony of character and situation (as in those cited above), but Conrad had not at this time learned the method of sustained irony exhibited in *The Secret Agent* or "Heart of Darkness."

If one were to trace the development of Conrad's imagery through the novels and short stories written between *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *Lord*

*Jim* (1900), he would find interesting uses of it as a structural device in *An Outcast of the Islands*; but *Lord Jim* is the best example of the novelist's employment of visual imagery in character portrayal. Since that is its chief function in *Almayer's Folly* as well, we shall proceed to an analysis of *Lord Jim* in order to determine what changes Conrad wrought in his method between the writing of the two works.

## II

"One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by—appealing—significant—under a cloud—perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek words for his meaning. He was 'one of us'" (p. ix). In this statement can be found, I believe, a suggestion of how Conrad treats the character Lord Jim. The crux of the presentation lies in the words "He was 'one of us.'" It is important to see Jim as man—not man in an abstract or even fictional sense—but man as he lives and breathes in everyday life. The surroundings in which the narrator first sees him are commonplace; an Eastern roadstead is exotic only to those who have never seen one. Certainly to men who sail those Eastern seas and put in at those seaports—to men like Jim and Marlow and Conrad—there is something ordinary, even monotonous, about an Eastern roadstead. Jim has to be seen first in such commonplace surroundings because he is "one of us."

And because he is "one of us" he is appealing. No one is more interesting than a man who shares ordinary emotions—hope, fear, ambition, pride—with this fellowman, yet who, for some unknown reason, seems to be "under a cloud." Such a man is more challenging as a subject for a narrative than one who, by the nature of his acts and thoughts, proves himself to be extraordinary in some way. Conrad's heroes are almost always of the former type, and if they cease to share in the commonality of life about them, as do Kurtz and Nostromo, it is because they choose to "kick themselves loose of the earth," not because they are isolated by an act of providence. Indeed this self-imposed isolation is a recurrent theme in Conrad's works. It is central in *Nostromo*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *The Rover*, *Victory*, and many of the short stories. Lord Jim has this type of appeal, for he is isolated, but in no way extraordinary. Thus, the name which his followers on Patusan bestow upon him is ironical, for if Jim is a Tuan, it is not because of any innate unusual quality in his make-up, but simply because he chooses to isolate himself from a world in which he is "one of us" and has by force of human will become a leader of an almost leaderless people. The irony is also emphasized by Jim's objection to being called "George" by the officers in the boat after the abandonment of the *Patna*.



But because of his isolation he is "under a cloud," which makes him all the more appealing to the literary artist. It was Conrad's duty to find words to explain him, to make him appear to the reader as "one of us," even though he had chosen to set himself apart from mankind by retreating to a forsaken peninsula in an already isolated part of the world. To represent Jim sympathetically, Conrad must use words that express the gloom in which he moved, a gloom or cloud that enveloped him alone, even though he is an ordinary man ("an inch, perhaps two, under six feet") who is first seen in commonplace surroundings. But he must be presented in enough light to illuminate these human qualities; they must not be obscured by the cloud under which he walked. The decision "to seek fit words for his meaning," therefore, involved the author in a task that was contradictory from the outset: against a background of obscurity, of gloom, of cloudiness, stands a man like other men; and it is only his own misconception of man's destiny on earth which places him in an atmosphere of opaqueness. To find words to express both the brightness and obscurity of Jim's personality (and to express both sides of the character with all the sympathy of which he was capable) was Conrad's task and obligation in writing Lord Jim's story.

In order to present these two aspects of Jim's personality it was necessary for Conrad to blend the abstract with the actual. In many respects, indeed in most respects, Jim's character is as open as the Golden Gate, but the motives which drive him to his tragic destiny are obscure, and the author sees him fleetingly "through the mist." In order to make this palpable, the physical setting of the narrative is described in terms of light and shadows, fog and sunshine, daylight and dusk, or even darkness. Thus the protagonist often stands out clearly against the background of his surroundings. The lone figure in a white suit outlined against the growing dusk enveloping Patusan, seen by Marlow as the latter puts out to sea (p. 336), is a case in point. At other times Jim is seen fleetingly and seems about to slip away forever into obscurity. On these occasions he is glimpsed dimly through the dusk or shadows which surround him. This point may be illustrated by the episode in which Jim visits Marlow's room (pp. 176-77). As the latter sits at his writing, the young visitor stands in the open doorway looking out into the night. He is both literally and symbolically standing on the edge of an immense darkness; his personality, as well as his physical being, is only half perceived. This commingling of psychological character with physical setting was the challenge which Conrad implied when he wrote of seeking words to express Jim's meaning.

The episode of the rescue in the account of Jim's early training illustrates Conrad's method of presentation as well as the personality of his chief character. The incident occurs at dusk on a winter's day. There is a storm,

and the gale is so intense that traffic on the river is stopped. The rain lashes the river and the ships riding at anchor; and in the flashes of lightning, in the intermittent sheets of driven rain and spray, the pitching of the small craft moored along the bank and at the docks can be seen. Everything is heaving and tossing in this upheaval of nature. There seems to be a fierce purpose in the gale which is lashing the river, ships, and shore with such intensity; and it appears to Jim that the ferocity is directed at him. Suddenly the cry "man the cutter" is heard over the tumult of the storm. There has been an accident, and the boys of the training ship rush to the rescue. Jim, not from want of courage, but from an inexplicable inability to act in circumstances of this kind, literally misses the boat. After the incident, he feels that he has learned more than those who were successful in getting in the cutter. He felt that he would stand firm when all men flinched (pp. 7-9).

The significance of this passage is that it introduces Jim in the type of surroundings which best illustrate his character. He loved the rough and tumble life of the sea, having been exposed to it in the pages of light literature. His idea of sea-life, however, was a romanticized dream in which he visualized himself weathering fierce storms such as this and rescuing people from sinking ships. He was "always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book" (p. 6). The incident is also meaningful in another sense: the reasons for Jim's inability to act under these circumstances are only partially understood and are as dimly perceived as the ships, shore, and boats which are seen intermittently through the breaks in the mist. This is part of the complexity of his character, and it foretells the event which is to change the course of his life. This physical setting in which the protagonist's first opportunity and failure takes place, therefore, illustrates the ambiguity of his nature. As Marlow says:

I don't pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog—bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one's curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading. That's how I summed him up to myself after he left me late in the evening (p. 76).

These images involving shifting fog, rents in mist through which one sees only dimly, and moonlight and shadow permeate the novel; and it is significant that the only incident in which Jim's actions are clearly discernible are those which take place in the court room. All we know of Jim is that he did jump from the stricken *Patna* to the deck of the boat. The surface aspects of this event, presented in the light of day and in the light of the court of inquiry, are as clear as the sunlight which floods the town.



But the reason behind the act, the ambiguous nature of the man who committed it, is still as obscure as the dark night on which it occurred, and remains so. Hence he tells his story to Marlow and Marlow relates most of it to his own audience in the darkness of a night that is penetrated here and there by the glow from a cigar end or the feeble gleam of a candle.

There are several occasions on which Marlow chooses to emphasize the fact that he sees Jim through rents in a fog. There is, for example, the time when the latter is telling him of the incidents which followed the abandonment of the *Patna*. Jim does not jump in broad daylight, and the fact that his ignominious desertion occurs after the sun has set and all is dark aboard the vessel symbolizes this dark and incomprehensible side of his nature. Jim insists that after the desertion, while the four men were in the boat, he would have gone back to see about the ship, to beg that he be taken aboard, if there had been enough light by which to see the *Patna* clearly. But she was obscured by one of those quick and blinding squalls which sweep over small sections of the tropical seas, obliterating everything while they last. Had there been enough light, Jim insists he would have swum back to the very spot. "Why this impulse?" asks Marlow:

Do you see the significance? Why back to the very spot? Why not drown alongside—if he meant drowning? Why back to the very spot, to see—as if his imagination had to be soothed by the assurance that all was over before death could bring relief? I defy any one of you to offer another explanation. It was one of those bizarre and exciting glimpses through the fog. It was an extraordinary disclosure (pp. 113-114).

Dorothy Van Ghent has called attention to the image of the split conical hill on Patusan, which suggests Jim's spiritual cleavage, and the moon rising behind it, which symbolizes a "figure of the ego-ideal" with its "illusionariness, and the solitude implied by illusion."<sup>4</sup> Illusion and "illusionariness" characterize Jim, for it is his pursuit of his dream which causes him to be a shadowy figure. This pursuit of the unreal also results in his "spiritual cleavage" and sets him apart from mankind—but only in his own mind. The incident of the rescue emphasizes the fact that Jim viewed his destiny on earth as different from that of mankind. He saw himself as a hero, saving people from untimely deaths and performing deeds of valor with ease and intelligence—but always alone. Hence he misses the boat at his first opportunity to engage in a joint human effort. He jumps from the bridge of the *Patna* when another opportunity to distinguish himself occurs, but he refuses to identify himself with others who also jump.

Yet can we say that Jim is cowardly? It must be remembered that he alone stays to face the court of inquiry. It would have been simpler to

run away and less embarrassing for all concerned. Even Captain Brierly, who up to this time had been a model of nautical propriety but now is forced into empathy with Jim, offers to bribe him into leaving, saying that he should crawl twenty feet underground and stay there. Why then does he remain? The answer is suggested in Marlow's frequent reference to him as being "under a cloud," as being dimly seen "through the rent in the mist," in describing him as standing on the edge of a vast darkness. For it is this admixture of the cowardly and the courageous in Jim which makes him an ambiguous figure—and hence a human one.

Jim is placed between two extremes. On the one hand he refuses to identify himself with the Captain, Chief Engineer, and Second Mate of the *Patna*, and rightly so; he is not "one of them." He is repulsed by their frenetic and stupid efforts to save themselves when they learn that the forward bulkhead is likely to give way. He watches them contemptuously and does not assist in their futile efforts to free the boat. After he has jumped ("it seems"), he has nothing more to do with them, even though they are at close quarters in the boat. He is equally repulsed by the condition of the engineer as the latter lies in the hospital, the victim of delirium tremens. As the four of them make their way to report the loss of the *Patna*, he walks apart; and, of the surviving officers, he alone remains to face the hearing.

Nor can he be identified with the French lieutenant who stays aboard the stricken *Patna* for thirty hours with no other perturbation than that he has no wine to drink with his meal. The Frenchman's act is one of bravery, it is true, but his type of courage is not one that is common to mankind. Brave men in masses stormed the beaches at Normandy and Salerno and landed on the barrenness of Eniwetok and Iwo Jima; but they had company in their misery and their concern was for other matters than the want of a bottle of wine with a meal. Furthermore we may assume that some of them shirked one or more of their responsibilities. The point here is that one may be brave and courageous when there are masses of his fellows watching him and acting in conjunction with him but he may shirk responsibility if he feels that he is alone and that his act will not be detected, although he may feel remorse afterwards. But the French lieutenant's bravery is of a solitary nature, almost a reaction, a reflex; he does not experience ordinary human fears and emotions. Obviously Jim is not "one of them."

If we characterize Jim in this way, we see that he is an ordinary human being. He is disgusted with cowardice, yet he fails in his great opportunity. His condition is like that which Arthur Koestler describes as the Jewish condition: "Jews were not an accident of race, but simply man's condition carried to its extreme. . . . They were so exasperatingly and abnormally

human."<sup>5</sup> So with Jim. Few men are faced with the decision with which Jim is faced. Yet, as Albert Guerard has pointed out, everyone has jumped from the bridge of his own particular *Patna* or shot his own particular Albatross.<sup>6</sup> Jim would have been outside the common pale of humanity if he had assisted the ne'er-do-wells in their efforts to free the boat, or if he had brought the ship in with no fear for his personal safety, or if he had fled from the hearing. By choosing to ignore their pleas for help, by succumbing to an impulse to jump, by remaining to face the hearing, he asserts his humanity. Thus the non-reflective motivation which causes him to jump is more human than that which causes the French lieutenant to remain with the ship.

Yet Jim is described to us at the outset as being "under a cloud" and his shadowiness results from his dreaminess. Hence his own action in jumping from the *Patna* is incomprehensible to him: "I had jumped . . . It seems" (p. 111). He does not realize that this craven act, if not common, is not unhuman. He is told by Marlow and others that he is not extraordinary in either bravery or cowardice, but he never accepts this fact. This, it seems to me, is the meaning of Stein's speech about the "destructive element," and it is in this important passage that we find another explanation of Jim's character.

I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough. . . .

Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns—*nicht wahr?* . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up (pp. 213-214).

Stein's remarks must be considered first in the setting in which he utters them. The imagery of light and shadows in the scene supports the theme of his remarks. Marlow, by his own admission, understands Stein only partially. As Stein discusses his views with Marlow, the latter sees that the German has moved forward through life without faltering, without regret. Thus this part of the man is illuminated, just as his face is illuminated by the lamp. But Marlow cannot generalize on Stein's remarks; and thus Stein is partially in shadow, as is symbolized by the shadows in the room into which and out of which he walks, now clearly seen, now looming large as a dark shadow of a man against the wall.

Furthermore, Stein's "destructive element" speech must be considered in conjunction with the imagery of the incident immediately preceding it. Marlow is explaining to his listeners something of Stein's background. Stein, a Bavarian, had taken part in the Revolution of 1848. Afterwards

he made his way by a circuitous route through Tripoli and the East to the Celebes, where he became associated with a Scotch trader, eventually inheriting his benefactor's wealth and prestige. He married the sister of a young rajah. It was after her death and the death of his child that he left that part of the world and became the successful trader he was when Marlow knew him.

Upon this occasion of Marlow's visit to Stein, the latter relates an incident which occurred during his married life. Embroiled as he is in political intrigue, he is beset by enemies on every side. One morning in response to an urgent summons, he leaves his home to ride a distance of nine or ten miles to the residence of the young rajah, his brother-in-law. On the way he is attacked by seven men, three of whom he kills. "And then I sit alone on my horse with the clean earth smiling at me, and there are the bodies of three men lying on the ground." Suddenly he sees a rare specimen of a butterfly which he has been seeking for many years. He loses it, moves forward slowly, and sees it resting on a small heap of dirt ten feet away. Stein captures the specimen and almost collapses in his joy. His extreme pleasure is expressed best in two lines of German verse:

So halt' ich's endlich denn in meinen Händen,  
Und nenn' es in gewissem Sinne mein (pp. 210-211).

At this point in Stein's narrative Marlow interrupts to say why he has come (to ask the trader about Jim), and Stein makes his important observation about submitting oneself to the destructive element.

Life, Stein indicates, gives on the one hand and takes away on the other: to preserve life he has to kill; to capture the butterfly he must destroy its life. Furthermore, all of this takes place in the midst of "beauty that must die." He sits on his horse after killing three men, "with the clean earth smiling at me," while the bodies of the men lie on the clean earth. He finds the beautiful specimen resting on a heap of dirt. As he talks to Marlow in his study the wings of the beautiful butterfly move faintly, as if in mock parody of the life it once enjoyed. Stein is now engaged in describing it minutely, rather than in enjoying its beauty. As Robert Frost says in "West-Running Brook," something runs down in sending up something else, and

It is this backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,  
The tribute of the current to the source.  
It is from this in nature we are from.  
It is most us.

This is the "destructive element," and Jim's tragedy is not that he jumped from the bridge of the *Patna* and left 800 pilgrims to what he considered

to be certain death by drowning; it is that he failed to submit himself to this element, which is life itself. Stein does not excuse Jim for his enormous error, but he does indicate that the young man should accept his fate. Stein captured his dream—once—as symbolized by the butterfly, and he was able at that time to say with the poet that he could “call it, *in a certain sense*, mine”; but, as he says to Marlow, “do you know how many opportunities I let escape; how many dreams I had lost that had come in my way?” (p. 217). If his life is a success, it is because he succeeded where Jim failed; he learned to submit himself to the “destructive element” and to capture his butterfly on a heap of dirt.<sup>7</sup>

The imagery of the novel supports this point of view. Frequent recurrence of images of fog, mist, moonlight, shadow, rents in the mist through which one catches fleeting glimpses, and so on substantiate the shifting, unreal quality of Jim's dream, just as, in Miss Van Ghent's penetrating observation, the two conical peaks on Patusan symbolize the cleavage in his spiritual nature. These images also help to establish the fact that this man and all men are complex and can be understood only imperfectly, as if seen through the rents in the mist. So it is that Jim is most often described as he stands in shadow on the edge of an immense darkness. Marlow does not know why Jim should always appear to him as symbolic, and in the narrator's account of the “Jim-myth” on Patusan, the protagonist appears unreal, wraith-like.

Jim's motivation for allowing Brown to depart has been questioned, as has his decision to take Dain Waris's death “upon his head.” Guerard, confirming Morf's earlier analysis of Jim's attitude toward Brown, suggests that Jim in some way identifies himself with the invader, in that he sees in Brown some of the evil of his own nature.<sup>8</sup> There is certainly much in favor of this interpretation when we consider that Jim's guilt bore upon him so heavily that he considered it necessary to give his life in vain expiation. But his decision to let Brown go seems to be based on an ethnic identification, as well. In describing Jim's life on Patusan, Marlow emphasizes the fact that Dain Waris “was still one of *them*, while Jim was one of *us*” (p. 361).

By repeatedly calling attention to Jim's isolation on Patusan, Marlow identifies him with Western Man. Thus, in spite of “the seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the soles of his feet, the blind trust of men . . .” Marlow cannot “with mere words convey to you the impression of his total and utter isolation” (p. 272). When Jim remarks that Marlow could not get the people on Patusan to believe that the former “wouldn't like to have [Jim] aboard your own ship,” Marlow replies, “My dear chap, . . . you shall always remain for them an insoluble mystery” (p. 306). As Marlow sails away from Patusan, leaving Jim and the



two natives (whose duskiness he has contrasted with Jim's fairness and the immaculate whiteness of his decor) standing on the shore, they "vanished on the dark background long before I had lost sight of their protector" (p. 336).

Furthermore, Jim will not lead a force to defeat Brown, if that should be the decision of the council; he leaves this to Dain Waris. In spite of this attitude, however, he insists that he is one of the people of Patusan, and that "their welfare was his welfare, their losses his losses, their mourning his mourning" (p. 392). Thus his relations with the citizenry of Patusan are ambiguous, and the ambiguity of the phrase "one of us" is again apparent. However close his ties may be to his adopted people and country, the fact of his identity weighs heavily on him in making the final decision concerning Brown.

Moreover, the imagery in the concluding episodes of *Lord Jim* supports this theme. Jim's fairness and the immaculate whiteness of his clothing are contrasted with the duskiness of his followers on Patusan. It is true that Jewel's dress stands out brilliantly white in the gloom in the scene where Jim makes his decision to remain on Patusan rather than to make his escape to his own world. But this image serves to emphasize Jim's ambivalent attitude. Disappointed with his life among his own people, he sees hope in life on Patusan; and the question of ethnic identity is, at this point, not important to him. The fact that he failed to maintain this open attitude is also part of his tragedy. Much as he wants to be "one of them," he identifies himself with Brown, partly because he found in the pirate an echo of the evil in himself, as Guerard and Morf suggest, and partly because Brown is, in spite of his isolation in evil, one of Jim's own kind. Hence the Tuan excuses him by saying that if he is evil, it is because he has had evil done to him and that "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others" (p. 394).

There are, finally, two interesting images at the close of the novel which also emphasize the tragedy. The final futile act in Jim's career occurs at sundown, and the scene is described in images of blood, much like those in *The Secret Agent* and other of Conrad's more violent novels. "The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the tree-tops, and the forest below had a black and forbidding face" (p. 413). The blood imagery here both prefigures Jim's death and symbolizes his tragedy, and it supports the mood of anger which pervades the final scene.

As Jim approaches Doramin, the old man rises painfully from his chair, and the silver ring which he had received as a talisman drops to the ground and rolls to rest against the young man's foot. The hospitality which had been extended in the beginning is thus revoked.



And Jim "passes away under a cloud," as he had lived under a cloud. Marlow suggests the irony of his narrative by saying that "Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he [Jim] have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success." In his final act Jim answers the call of his "exalted egoism," just as Kurtz recognizes in his last moments his own "exalted degradation"; and they are, in a sense, kindred spirits, in that it is supreme egoism which has brought about their downfall and which rests deep in the hearts of all men. This, it seems to me, is what Marlow means when he says in concluding his narrative of Jim's life, that "we ought to know" whether Jim is satisfied now, because he is "one of us." That is, in order to penetrate the mystery of Jim—and even to Marlow, who knew him best, he sometimes appears real and at other times "passes from my eyes like a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of the earth" (p. 416)—we must penetrate the mystery of man himself, and we can, of course, only understand as much of man as is revealed to us by ourselves, for each man is also "one of us" and hence "under a cloud."

Thus, *Lord Jim* exhibits a more sophisticated and hence more interesting use of imagery than the early novels, of which *Almayer's Folly* is representative. Whereas the tonal structure of the latter is based largely on a one-to-one relationship of image to mood, with a single image being used again and again to establish the same tone, there is throughout *Lord Jim* a complex arrangement of image patterns which suggest the ambiguities and ambivalences that inform the narrative. In *Lord Jim* Conrad developed his use of imagery to the fullest extent, and the novels of this period stand out as superior to his early work, not so much in choice of plot and character as in method.

## NOTES

1. All quotations from *Almayer's Folly* and *Lord Jim* are taken from *The Works of Joseph Conrad* (London, 1925), 20 vols.
2. Frederick R. Karl, *A Guide to Joseph Conrad* (London, 1960), pp. 92-96.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
4. Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel* (New York, 1953), pp. 236-37.
5. Arthur Koestler, *Thieves in the Night* (New York, 1946), p. 355.
6. Albert Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 127.
7. Cf. Guerard's suggestion (*ibid.*, p. 165-66) that man collapses if he tries to escape or transcend an "idealized conception of self, an ego-ideal," which he is born ready to create, instead of accepting this ideal and trying to make it "viable" through action.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51. Guerard here disavows his early conviction that Jim allowed Brown to depart because he "was unwilling to shed a white man's blood" and because Brown (the first outside visitor on Patusan) brought a reminder of the *Patna*. "These are indeed possible related or additional motives for Jim's refusal to fight." This ethnic identification seems to me to be a primary motivation for his action.