

MARLOW'S PSYCHOLOGY AND HIS TWO NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVES IN *LORD JIM*

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Abstract: By considering Marlow's psychology as a character, this paper aims at explaining the specific way in which the difference in texture between Marlow's oral and written narratives in *Lord Jim* arises. Marlow's oral narrative is characterized by conflicting statements that he makes about Jim's case, which has been commonly regarded as reflecting his vacillation. However, the text also allows us to see some of Marlow's contradictions as his conscious or unconscious obfuscation deriving from his uneasy conscience about his own growing aloofness from Jim, an issue which is a rarely addressed aspect of the Marlow-Jim relationship. While in his oral narrative Marlow remains in a state of limbo as to his attitude towards Jim's case, chiefly because of its incompleteness, in his written narrative he possesses the knowledge of Jim's end. Marlow's psychological subtleties involved in this situational difference necessarily affect the texture of his narrative. In the comparatively simple and linear nature of Marlow's main written narrative, we can discern signs of the implicit teleology of his narrative project—namely to represent Jim's end as the realization of his long-time romantic dream and thereby to salvage his own conscience. The fact that the tone of Marlow's main written narrative is complicated by the uncertainty expressed in the framing devices—his explanatory letter and the final three paragraphs of the novel—can be interpreted as reflecting his troubled awareness of a possibility of its misrepresentation.

Keywords: *Lord Jim*, Marlow's psychology, discrete perspectives, Marlow's oral and written narratives, aloofness, obfuscation, compunction, Marlow-Jim relationship, limbo, teleology, framing devices, misrepresentation

INTRODUCTION

In discussing the structure of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, critics have offered roughly two different schemas. One emphasizes the “structural rift” between the section that deals with the *Patna* incident and its aftermath, on the one hand, and the one relating Jim's new life in Patusan, on the other hand (Fincham 58). Fredric Jameson, for instance, notes that “a qualitative shift and diminution of narrative intensity” are observed as we move to the latter section of the novel (195). The other schema pays more attention to the narrative transition from Marlow's oral narration to his letters to the “privileged man,” and foregrounds the qualitative difference between these two

narratives.¹ John Batchelor describes this transition as involving “a shift from moral relativity to moral ‘flatness’ in the novel’s dramatic organization” (141); Michael Greaney similarly argues that the narrative transition is “implicated in the disappointing moral and narratological simplifications of the novel’s second phase” (80).

Although the first schema has the virtue of addressing the issue of the genre—the apparent qualitative gap between the modernist innovations in the *Patna* section and the attributes of adventure romance in the Patusani one²—its flaw becomes clear when we look at Chapters 24 to 35, which come between the beginning of the Patusan section and the transition to Marlow’s written narrative. As long as the Patusan section, is delivered through Marlow’s oral narration, it abounds in complexities, such as non-chronological narrative structure, nearly as much as the *Patna* section. To be more precise, Jameson’s observation about the “diminution of narrative intensity” holds true only after Marlow’s written narrative begins. When focusing on the texture of narrative, the schema stressing the distinction between Marlow’s two narratives is more relevant.

On the other hand, it seems that not enough attention has been paid to the specific way in which the qualitative divergence between Marlow’s oral and written narratives arises. In this paper, by scrutinizing Marlow’s psychology as a character, I will examine how the difference between Marlow’s two narratives—and the tonal heterogeneity within the written one—are created. Although criticism over the past few decades has offered a number of new and inspiring insights into the politico-ideological dimensions of the novel (cf. fn. 8), a critical understanding of Marlow’s psychology involved in his relationship with Jim seems to have remained largely unrevised since before the advent of the theory.

A few recent studies have been devoted to the scrutiny of Marlow’s psychology as a character, but their arguments differs from mine. Bernard J. Paris’s discussion in *Conrad’s Charlie Marlow: A New Approach to “Heart of Darkness” and Lord Jim* (2005), though notable as a full exploration of the psychology of Marlow as a mimetic character (Paris invokes Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg’s taxonomy in *The Nature of Narrative*), shares with the majority of critics the notion that Marlow’s conflicting statements about Jim simply reflect his vacillation, the premise which I intend to complicate in this article. In her *Tracing the Aesthetic Principles in Conrad’s Novels* (2008), Yael Levin points out the possibility of Marlow’s “scruples” (47) and “evasions” being “psychologically motivated” (38), and attributes them to his disloyalty in disseminating and appropriating Jim’s unfortunate story, which he once agreed to consign to oblivion. Although her psychological reading is insightful,

¹ There exists, of course, another narrative transition between third-person narration in the first four chapters of the novel and Marlow’s oral narration that follows. Although the anonymous third-person narrator’s role in the novel is significant because he serves to relativise Marlow’s perspective, for lack of space this paper confines itself to examining Marlow’s oral and written narratives only.

² The apparent affinity between the Patusan section and adventure romance as such tends not to be seen as a flaw of the novel today because recently critics have noted a strategic use of the elements of romance in the book. Robert Hampson, for example, points out “the systematic overturning of romance conventions in the first part of the novel,” which “means that the romance world of Patusan has already been ruled out as a possible reality” (2000: 129).

my argument will demonstrate that Marlow's growing aloofness from Jim is a more convincing source of his "scruples." To prove that I will resort to a close analysis of Marlow's gradual withdrawal from his commitment to his protégé and the way he narrates it. My discussion will pay particular attention to the frequently overlooked fact that his oral and written narratives are respectively governed by two discrete perspectives conditioned by different levels of information that Marlow has about Jim's fate.³ In Section 1 I will deal with Marlow's oral narrative and consider the contradictory statements he makes about Jim. An attempt will be made at complicating the common critical assumption, which emphasizes Marlow's oscillation, by focusing on the narratological implications of the transition in Marlow's attitude towards Jim, not fully addressed by the critics. Section 2 will focus on the way Marlow's knowledge of Jim's end affects his attitude towards Jim's case and thereby transforms the texture of his narrative in his letters.

1. MARLOW'S ORAL NARRATIVE

The way Jim reacts to the aftermath of his disgraceful conduct in the *Patna* incident is an intriguing mixture of stoicism and failure to face his own character flaw. On the one hand, he is determined to confront his adversity in his own way. While the other white officers of the *Patna* who are responsible for the incident run away from the official inquiry, Jim chooses to face it despite Marlow's and Brierly's discouragement. After the trial, in which Jim's certificate is annulled, Chester, a seedy acquaintance of Marlow's, insinuates that Jim has been over-reacting, the view which later Marlow partly corroborates: "Perhaps he did take it too much to heart" (133). Following the lead of Stein, who diagnoses Jim as a romantic, Marlow observes that the latter is tormented by "the reproach of his romantic conscience" (253). On the other hand, Jim fails to fully recognize his sheer inability to act as expected of him as well as his moral responsibility in the incident; instead, he regards the event as a missed opportunity which could have enabled him to live up to his romantic self-image inspired by the "light holiday literature" that he read when he was young (7). While retelling the incident to Marlow, Jim exclaims: "Ah! what a chance missed! My God! what a chance missed!" (65), which outrages the narrator: "Ah, he was an imaginative beggar! [...] He had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain. He was very far away from me who watched him across three feet of space" (66).

Hence Marlow's attitude towards Jim is highly ambivalent, which constitutes one of the foremost features of *Lord Jim*. Marlow consistently mentions Jim's unreadability. He summarizes his impression of Jim after the latter's account of the *Patna* incident as follows:

³ Although the plurality of Marlow's oral narrative is to be noted—he talks about Jim "many times, in distant parts of the world"—here I do not consider other potential versions of his narrative and regard his oral narrative as singular (27).

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. (60)

In relating Jim's departure for Patusan, Marlow remarks with a sort of resignation: "I am fated never to see him clearly" (185). As if at the mercy of Jim's incomprehensibility, from the earliest stage of their relationship, through Jim's eastward escape, to Marlow's visit to Patusan, Marlow's oral narrative continually wavers between sympathy with Jim's young earnestness and moral objection to his failure to confront his misconduct.

Marlow's attitude towards Jim is further complicated by his recognition that Jim is "one of us," a European officer and gentleman.⁴ When during his account of the moments just before his leap from the *Patna*, Jim presses Marlow with a question: "What would you have done?" the latter remarks:

There could be no mistake: I was being bullied now, and it behoved me to make no sign lest by a gesture or a word I should be drawn into a fatal admission about myself which would have had some bearing on the case. I was not disposed to take any risk of that sort. (83)

Shortly afterwards he admits: "I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me—me!—of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour" (101). This acknowledgment that Jim's misconduct in the *Patna* incident is a test for his own morality and that of the community to which they both belong, combined with his wish to defend the youth, who reminds him of his younger self,⁵ contributes to his conflicting attitudes towards Jim's case.

One of the implications of Marlow's ambivalent feelings towards Jim is his dubious evaluation of Jim's new life in Patusan. This is most evident in the opening two paragraphs of Chapter 16, where Marlow's narrative suddenly leaps to a proleptic depiction of Jim's situation in Patusan. The chapter begins with a remarkably bright tone: "The time was coming when I should see him loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been a stuff of a hero" (134). Then Marlow proceeds to describe his last view of Jim there: he was "in a strong light, dominating, and yet in complete accord with his surroundings—with the life of the forests and with the life of men" (134).

This positive atmosphere contrasts with the previous chapter which relates Jim's suffering in Marlow's room after the delivery of the judgment. However, doubts and uncertainty soon creep into his narration: "I own that I was impressed, but I must admit to myself that after all this is not the lasting impression [...] I cannot fix before

⁴ The phrase "one of us," which is persistently repeated in the text, has long been an object of the critics' discussion, and its political implications have been pointed out by many. Katherine Isobel Baxter, for instance, remarks that "us" tacitly suggests the "common or garden white middle class male of the late nineteenth century" (38).

⁵ When Jim rejects Marlow and Brierly's encouragement to evade the inquiry, Marlow remarks: "he believed where I had already ceased to doubt" (118).

my eye the image of his safety” (134-5). He even confesses thereafter that at times he feels he should have accepted Chester's offer to employ Jim in his dubious project as a custodian of coolies on a guano island. Given that Marlow knows about the fate of the ship that Jim would have boarded—most probably wrecked in a hurricane—this is a rather shocking remark: “I don't mean to say that I regret my action, nor will I pretend that I can't sleep o' nights in consequence; still the idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters” (135). Marlow's words voice his moral objection to Jim's failure to recognize the exact nature of his misdeed in the *Patna* case for disgrace concerns social self-image while guilt is about ethics. This is why Marlow is later uncertain about “the fabulous value of the bargain,” namely the propriety of his decision to give Jim another opportunity in Patusan (190). This tonal change from a bright proleptic depiction of Jim, through Marlow's faint misgivings, to the expression of his moral objection to the protagonist at the beginning of Chapter 16 vividly illustrates the narrator's wavering attitude towards him and his new life in Patusan.

Baxter points out that the affirmative depiction of Marlow's last view of Jim at the opening of the chapter clashes with his later account of the same scene at the end of Chapter 35: “In the later passage the light is running out and Jim, whilst catching what light is left, is diminutive rather than ‘dominating’ [...] This differentiation from his darkening surroundings fails to imply the ‘complete accord’ of Marlow's former vision” (45). Those contradictory statements in Marlow's oral narrative—“if at one point Marlow seems to assert one thing, soon he asserts another”—are a major of the bewilderment that the readers of *Lord Jim* experience (Raval 48). Cedric Watts, for instance, remarks that he first found the novel's intricacy “infuriating” (11). The puzzling ambiguity of Jim's character and Marlow's attitude towards him has indeed been at the center of critical discussion of the novel.⁶ Apart from radically deconstructive readings that flourished a few decades ago,⁷ the most prevalent and straightforward reading is to regard them simply as a reflection of Marlow's oscillation. Every now and then Marlow talks about the sheer difficulty of verbalizing his experience with Jim. In his account of Stein and his arrangement to send Jim to Patusan in Chapter 21, Marlow states: “[m]y last words about Jim shall be few. I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the

⁶ In “Conrad's ‘Serried Circle of Facts’ in *Lord Jim*” (2011), Reuben Sanchez provides a helpful categorization of the ways in which critics have attempted to come to terms with the novel's ambiguity (65-7). Similarly, in “‘I Affirm Nothing.’: *Lord Jim* and the Uses of Textual Recalcitrance” (2008), James Phelan proposes a hermeneutic spectrum for *Lord Jim*: placing the novel between Hillis Miller's deconstructive reading in *Fiction and Repetition* (1982) and Ralph Rader's argument that “the novel is determinate but built on a principle of ‘unambiguous ambiguity’” (41).

⁷ For instance, in *Fiction and Repetition* (1982) Miller emphasises the indeterminacy that lies “in the multiplicity of possible incompatible explanations given by the novel and in the lack of evidence justifying a choice of one over the others” (40). Although his focus on repetition and simultaneity insightfully captures the readers' difficulty in putting the various conflicting elements into a chronological cause-result order, his poststructuralist emphasis on indeterminacy makes it impossible for him to fully recognize the elements- that go hand in hand with the temporal progress of the story, such as Marlow's attitudinal transition, which I will argue for.

hearing” (172). He makes a similar remark later while relating Jim’s “success” in Patusan:⁸

Immense! No doubt it was immense; the seal of success upon his word, the conquered ground for the sole of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement. All this, as I’ve warned you, gets dwarfed in the telling. I can’t with mere words convey to you the impression of his total and utter isolation. (207-8)

Thus we can safely assume that the complexities and subtleties of what he personally perceives in Jim’s case make Marlow keep oscillating between conflicting stances, which is how a majority of critics see the matter. Paris, for instance, observes that “Marlow’s ambivalences create vacillation and doubt throughout the oral portion of his narrative” (152). The following statement, which appears just after Marlow’s conversation with Jewell in which she vents her distrust on him, appears to perfectly substantiate this reading: “I cannot say what I believed—indeed I don’t know to this day, and never shall probably” (244). Indeed, it could be argued that one of the novel’s major attractions is the way Marlow’s oscillation engages the readers and invites them to join in his “epistemological quest,” his arduous attempt to understand Jim’s case (Schwarz, 1980: 77).⁹

However, I would argue that *Lord Jim* leaves room for another reading, which complicates this common interpretation. To examine it, I propose to focus on the subtle shift in Marlow’s attitude towards Jim throughout their relationship. In Chapter 5, in a comparatively lucid manner, Marlow explains what led him to concern himself with the *Patna* case: he hoped to find “some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse” for Jim, which would enable him to vanquish “the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct” (41). Marlow’s confession is indeed often quoted as one of the most vivid articulations of the novel’s central motif. It is noteworthy, however, that the possibility of Jim’s redemption—and the concomitant reinstatement of Marlow’s moral belief—soon ceases to be the chief motive of Marlow’s involvement with Jim.

Before becoming acquainted with the protagonist, Marlow was asked by Brierly to coax Jim into escaping from the inquiry. He declined to do so mainly because he felt insulted by Brierly’s condescending manner of speaking, but also because he believed that Jim’s choice not to escape from the trial was admirable: “I became positive in my mind that the inquiry was a severe punishment to that Jim, and that his

⁸ Recent critics have discussed the problematic aspects of Jim’s “success” in Patusan and Marlow’s representation of it, particularly from postcolonial perspectives. Cf. Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers* (1983), pp. 76-98; Natalie Melas, “Brides of Opportunity: Figures of Women and Colonial Territory in *Lord Jim*” (1989); Padmini Mongia, “Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*” (1992); Terry Collits, *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire* (2005): pp. 124-140. Although due to its limited scope, this article does not address the political implications of Marlow’s narrative, it is to be noted that, in considering Marlow’s narrative behavior, his Orientalist slant is no less important than his psychological subtleties involved in his relationship with Jim.

⁹ Daniel Schwarz, for example, argues: “[j]ust as Marlow is engaged in a moral odyssey as he repeats the journeys of Jim’s physical odyssey, so the reader takes part in an odyssey of judgment in which she or he is presented with an abundance of evidence and opinions” (2001: 93).

facing it—practically of his own will—was a redeeming feature in his abominable case” (55). Marlow’s phrase “redeeming feature,” demonstrates that he seems to be seriously thinking of Jim’s redemption here. However, after he hears Jim’s account of the *Patna* incident, he offers Jim the very plan of escape that he had so confidently dismissed in his interview with Brierly. This suggests that upon recognizing the indefensible aspects of Jim’s misconduct and his response to it, the narrator gives up his initial hope for Jim’s redemption.

He acts in a similar way towards the end of Chapter 15, when he brings Jim to his room after the sentence, and looking at his “convulsive shudders” (132) as the latter apparently struggles for breath, Marlow is moved to make the following statement: “To bury him would have been such an easy kindness! It would have been so much in accordance with the wisdom of life, which consists in putting out of sight all the reminders of our folly, of our weakness, of our mortality” (133). His words spell Marlow’s sympathetic identification with Jim and his humane reluctance to abandon him: “[t]here was nothing but myself between him and the dark ocean. I had a sense of responsibility” (133). Yet, when we look at Marlow’s eventual decision to send Jim to Patusan, it is evident that he ends up putting into practice the very “wisdom of life” he once dismissed because of his sympathy with Jim.¹⁰ In both cases Marlow’s frustration leads him to carrying out what he previously declared as being against his conscience.

Distancing ourselves from the puzzling chronology and the conflicting pronouncements in Marlow’s oral narrative and focusing on what he actually does, we can extract a story line which has rarely been addressed by critics: as he moves through the stages of his relationship with Jim, Marlow gradually distances himself from him, withdraws from his role as Jim’s protector, which he once undertook, and eventually abandons him psychologically, if not practically, for that matter. After Jim’s recounting of the incident, in which Marlow’s hope for Jim’s redemption is shaken, he slowly begins to feel burdened by his role as Jim’s guardian since Jim is continually on the run after the scandal and keeps quitting his jobs. By the time Jim engages in a violent scuffle with the Siamese officer in Chapter 19, which might spell his ruin, as “he would lose his name of an inoffensive, if aggravating, fool, and acquire that of a common loafer,” Marlow has come to think of how to get rid of him (153). In fact, when with Stein they decide to send Jim to Patusan, he openly admits, although not without diffidence: “I was about to go home for a time; and it may be I desired, more than I was aware of myself, to dispose of him—to dispose of him, you understand—before I left” (169). A little later he confesses rather bluntly: “[a]t the moment I merely wished to achieve his disappearance” (176).

In the Patusan section, Marlow’s attitude towards Jim, “the sinner,” is rather cold (253). By his recurrent observation that Jim is a captive of Patusan and its people, Marlow calls attention to the fact that Jim cannot live in the outside world. Even while looking at the youth’s achievements in the new place, the narrator does not think of Jim’s “fearlessness,” to which the latter attributes his success in Patusan

¹⁰ Marlow admits the absurdity of appointing Jim to be a trading-clerk in “a place where there was no trade” (180).

(190). Marlow's account of his last day there contains a vivid description of his psychological distance from Jim. When the latter confesses that the memory of the *Patna* incident still torments him by making him feel isolated from his people, Marlow's reaction is described as follows: "[t]hat's what he said to me on my last day with him. I did not let a murmur escape from me: I felt he was going to say more, and come no nearer to the root of the matter" (233).

Marlow's detached diagnosis of Jim's blindness to "the root of the matter" for his new experiences in Patusan is arguably harsher than any other comment the narrator makes about Jim in the text. To Jim's "[a]fter all what has [the *Patna* incident] proved? Nothing. I suppose you don't think so [...]," uttered in anticipation of some sort of comfort, as we are told, Marlow merely "made a protesting murmur" (233). Although the narrator's consciousness is hardly given a voice here, a series of markedly non-verbal behaviors on Marlow's part produces an impression that he has given up on his trust in Jim's ability to face his problem. Marlow's coldness towards Jim has largely been underrated in Conrad criticism. Ian Watt, for example, attributes it, firstly, to Conrad's intention to avoid sentimentality (314), and, secondly, to Marlow's extremely reserved character (335). However, in the light of my research, these readings prove far too optimistic.

Even though Marlow's growing aloofness from Jim is indubitable in itself, it constitutes only one aspect of his complex attitude towards Jim. As can be seen from their last conversation towards the end of Chapter 35, where Marlow is "profoundly humbled" by Jim's expression of affection and turns his "burning face" away from him, he partly retains his emotional ties with Jim to the end (255). However, my reading of the relationship between Jim and Marlow considerably differs from the usual one, which emphasizes Marlow's personal sympathy for Jim.

The "human friendship" between the two has been stressed by major Conrad critics (Lothe 173). Watt calls it "rewarding and touching" as well as exhibiting "emotional warmth" (337). Some critics argue for Marlow's attitudinal transition, whose direction, however, is exactly opposite to the one foregrounded here. Jacques Berthoud, for example, asserts that Marlow's attitude shifts from moral judgment to imaginative sympathy (66), while Arnold E. Davidson similarly argues that as the novel progresses, "Jim becomes more Marlow's protégé than the object of his dispassionate investigation" (9).

However, by focusing on the earlier stages of the Marlow-Jim relationship than does my discussion, those critics seem to underestimate the later phase, when Marlow starts to feel burdened by Jim and decides to "dispose of" him (169). My emphasis here is on the somewhat inconspicuous story line of Marlow's negative attitudinal transition, which becomes apparent while examining the narratological implications of Marlow's psychological subtleties. This allows us to complicate the traditional critical view on Marlow's oscillation and shed new light on the nature of his oral narrative.

It can hardly escape the reader's attention that Marlow has an uneasy conscience about sending Jim to Patusan: "we, metaphorically speaking, took him up and hove him over the wall with scant ceremony" (176). The "inexplicable pain" he feels when

Jim shows gratitude for his arrangements for him in Patusan proves the point in case (177). The following passage records Marlow's reaction when he hears about Jim's success in Patusan and the great trust the people there place in him: "I observed quickly that he had found that out in the end. I had been sure of it, I added. He shook his head. 'Were you?' He pressed my arm lightly above the elbow. 'Well, then—you were right'" (189).

Considering the fact that in deciding to send Jim to Patusan, Marlow "merely wished to achieve [Jim's] disappearance," we cannot but close our eye to his declaration that he "had been sure of" Jim's success (176). When he offers no comment to Jim's "[w]ere you?", he indeed seems to feel uncomfortable about it. Marlow's generalizations about conscience and human solidarity in Chapter 21 are also noteworthy in this context. As he mentions his plan to go back home, he starts to reflect on the importance of a clear conscience:

There are the girls we love, the men we look up to, the tenderness, the friendships, the opportunities, the pleasures! But the fact remains that you must touch your reward with clean hands, lest it turn to dead leaves, to thorns, in your grasp. (170)

A little later he shows pity for "the stragglers" like Jim, who are denied ties with other people because of their sense of guilt (171). Impressive as it is, this eloquent monologue sounds slightly suspect for the reason that it comes soon after Marlow's decision to "dispose of" Jim (169). We can only infer here that Marlow's meditation about guiltlessness, which he thinks makes him different from Jim, the "straggler," is in part induced by his pangs of conscience about sending Jim to Patusan. The differentiation Marlow makes between Jim and himself here is, ironically, undermined by the fact that Marlow's hands, which let go of Jim for rather selfish reasons, are not exactly clean, either. Indeed, the fact that Marlow talks about Jim "many times, in distant parts of the world," and "at length, in detail" too, suggests that his entire oral narrative is controlled by his attempts to come to terms with his compunction about the way he withdrew from his commitment to his protégé (27). Thus Marlow's oral narrative is marked by his scruples about his growing aloofness from Jim, as well as by a blend of sympathy with and moral objection to him. This recognition enables us to see the contradictions in Marlow's oral narrative in a different light: as obfuscation caused—or more precisely necessitated—by his uneasy conscience about his withdrawal, rather than mere oscillation.

Some critics have hinted at Marlow's unreliability as a narrator from a psychological perspective. Miller, for example, observes that "there is something suspect in Marlow's enterprise of interpretation [...] If so much is at stake for himself, he is likely to find what he wants to find" (29). Levin, as mentioned in the Introduction, focuses on Marlow's "scruples" over his betrayal of Jim in his appropriation and dissemination of Jim's story and points out the narrator's "psychologically motivated evasions" (47, 38). None of those critics, however, foregrounds Marlow's compunction about his psychological abandonment of Jim, or connects it to the baffling nature of his oral narrative.

Moreover, Marlow's conflicting statements about Jim all throughout his oral narrative, together with its disrupted chronologies, serve to obscure the story line of Marlow's withdrawal from his commitment to Jim, which he feels rather uncomfortable about, and make the readers (and his audience) relatively inattentive to it. For example, when Marlow talks about "a moment of real and profound intimacy" with Jim at the end of Chapter 23, where "the sort of formality that had been always present in [their] intercourse vanished from [their] speech," we tend to overlook the fact that this is largely made possible by Jim's departure for Patusan, which is to permanently relieve Marlow from his long-time burden (184). Thus, the fact that relatively little critical attention has been paid to Marlow's growing aloofness from Jim can partly be attributed to the obfuscating effect of the tonal as well as chronological intricacies of his oral narrative. A consideration of Marlow's uneasiness about his changing attitude towards Jim, and of his psychological need for salving his conscience, allows us to interpret the contradictions involved in Marlow's oral narrative as strategic.

In examining this strategy we are also addressing the issue of the tension between Marlow's perspective at the moment of narration and in the real time of the narrated events—a tension that each first-person narrative essentially entails. Although the fluid chronologies of his narrative serve to make the readers oblivious to the fact, Marlow's oral narrative is homogeneously governed by one and the same perspective hovering between his last view of Jim in Patusan and his later hearing about the tragic events. This means that Marlow's description of the events narrated as well as the accounts of his own internal states may be marred by manipulation.

With regard to Marlow's oral narrative, the tension between the narrating and narrated perspectives is made even more tricky because what the third-person narrator describes at the beginning of Chapter 36 as the "incompleteness" of Jim's case suggests that Marlow's feelings towards the subject of his narrative have remained 'undigested' (257). He is far from being absolutely certain of Jim's success in Patusan, as follows from his unsettling conversation with Jewell on his last day in Patusan. When he faces her mistrust of Jim and himself, his "exorcism" fails, for he is unable to vanquish the "spectre" of his own doubt about the permanence of Jim's success (242, 243). A conviction as to Jim's achievement of his romantic dream, which could have salvaged his conscience, is denied to Marlow. On the other hand, his moral objection to Jim also remains unaddressed as long as Jim's apparent success in Patusan continues, with no challenge to his deficiencies, no matter how precarious that success might seem to be otherwise. The "incompleteness" of Jim's story puts Marlow, as it were, in a state of limbo, regarding his attitude towards what he is narrating. This allows his 'undigested' feelings to permeate his entire oral narrative, making it hard to understand in static terms.

An obvious difficulty lies in assessing the proportion of Marlow's contradictions which can be seen as obfuscation to those that are a simple vacillation, as well as determining how self-conscious Marlow is in his act of obfuscation. Overemphasis on Marlow's deliberate obfuscation might lead to a reductive reading of his narrative, which would detract from the novel's ambiguity. Instead of running such risks by

further pursuing those ultimately unanswerable questions, in the subsequent section of my article I will turn to Marlow's letters to the "privileged man" to demonstrate that the narratological implications of Marlow's unease about his growing aloofness from Jim shed light on the qualitative difference between Marlow's oral and written narratives. Particular attention will be paid to the way in which the dissolution of Marlow's limbo, which is brought about by his gaining knowledge of Jim's eventual death, changes the texture of his narrative.

2. MARLOW'S LETTERS TO THE "PRIVILEGED MAN"

Marlow's written narrative, which occupies the last ten chapters of the novel, can be subdivided into three parts: Marlow's explanatory letter to the Jim (Chapters 36 and 37), his main letter relating Jim's death (Chapters 38-45), and the final three paragraphs of the novel, which are separated from the rest of the letter by an asterisk. The effect of Marlow's main written narrative being framed between the other two is significant, but before considering it thoroughly, I will examine the texture of the main narrative, which differs from Marlow's oral narrative substantially.

In considering Marlow's written narrative, it is important to remember that this part is governed by a perspective which is totally different from the one governing his oral narrative. In this part, unlike in his oral narrative, Marlow is already familiar with—Jim's eventual fate, which obviously affects his feelings about Jim's case. It is rather evident that Jim's death largely resolves his moral objections to him: the tragic event, which Marlow calls "an unavoidable consequence," could be seen as a sort of punishment for the romantic's failure to face up to his past misdeed (261). On the other hand, Jim's quasi-suicidal death also provides Marlow with an opportunity to salve his own conscience by representing Jim's end as glorious. By constructing the story in which Jim finally realizes his long-time dream to achieve the romantic heroism of the "light holiday literature," Marlow minimizes his pangs of conscience, which come from a recognition that he is not in the least responsible for Jim's ruin (7). We might even assume that, in a way, Marlow welcomes his opportunity to narrativize Jim's end.¹¹

The signs of Marlow's narrative being affected by these unarticulated—or rather, unacknowledged—psychological subtleties can be discerned in the relatively straightforward quality of Marlow's narration in his main letter to the "privileged man." His written narrative is far more linear than the oral one: he simply introduces Brown's life, describes his intrusion into Patusan, and his eventual confrontation with Jim, which is followed by an account of Jim's end. Marlow's narrative here is unswervingly oriented towards the final representation of Jim's romantic death, even to the extent that it seems to be teleological.

¹¹ Marlow acknowledges his role as the organizer of the story: "I put it down here for you as though I had been an eyewitness. My information was fragmentary, but I've fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture" (262).

Marlow's treatment of Brown provides an example of how the narrator's attitude might be dictated by his narrative end. Brown is one of a number of caricatured villains that people Conrad's fiction, i.e., Mr. Jones in *Victory*, and the handleless Frenchman in "Because of the Dollars" being other cases in point. Jameson regards him as a mere incarnation of *ressentiment* (257-8). Indeed, the villain who assumes "a strange vengeful attitude towards his own past, and a blind belief in the righteousness of his will against all mankind" in effect of "an outburst of sombre and violent grief" over the dead body of his lover, who offered him an opportunity to reclaim his life, can appear somewhat ludicrous (283, 270). Notwithstanding, the impression we get from the text is that Marlow takes Brown seriously. He hardly applies to Brown the degree of ironic criticism that he exhibits in his intercourse with Jim; on the contrary, we can even discern Marlow's attempt to elevate the status of Brown's villainous deeds. He describes the confrontation between Jim and Brown as "the deadliest kind of duel on which Fate looked on with her cold-eyed knowledge of the end," calling Brown and his subordinates "the emissaries with whom the world [Jim] had renounced was pursuing him in his retreat" (294): "It was not a vulgar and treacherous massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution—a demonstration of some obscure and awful attribute of our nature which, I am afraid, is not so very far under the surface as we like to think" (309).

Although we can barely recognize Brown's voice intruding upon Marlow's diction, the narrator certainly emphasizes the dramatic impact of Brown's criminal act, which indirectly leads to enhancing the glory of Jim's heroic end, as opposed to a possible alternative of Marlow representing Jim's final act against the backdrop of a casual act of sadistic violence. The discernment that Marlow displays in his uncritical acceptance—and somewhat questionable glamorization—of Brown's massacre seems to indicate his intention to construct Jim's death around a heroic narrative. In his *Conrad's Endings*, Davidson provides a detailed discussion of Marlow's unbelievable lack of criticism of Jim's problematic handling of Brown and the native villagers, from a perspective which is closer to my psychological rather than a political reading of the novel (7-30; cf. fn. 8). Although it is beyond the limited scope of this paper to fully address the controversial issue of how we are to judge Jim's decision to let Brown and his men escape,¹² it is to be noted here that Marlow's uncritical attitudes towards Jim and Brown derive from his narrative agenda of attempting to represent Jim's end as glorious.

More importantly, in his depiction of the scene after Jim is informed about Dain Waris's death and Tamb' Itam warns Jim against a possible retaliation from the villagers, Marlow writes:

Then Jim understood. He had retreated from one world, for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruins upon his head. It was not safe for his servant to go out amongst his own people! *I believe that* in that very moment

¹² For a recent discussion of the complexity involved in the decision Jim has to make in relation to Brown, see Hampson, "'Not Certain of Him': First and Last Sight in *Lord Jim*" in *One of Us: Studi Inglesi e Conradiani Offerti a Mario Curreli* (2009), pp. 47-8.

he had decided to defy the disaster in the only way it occurred to him such a disaster could be defied. (312; emphasis added)

Considering that this is one of those circumstances in the novel in which Marlow possesses the least access to Jim's internal state (this part is based on what he hears from Tamb' Itam, who, unlike Dain Waris, who understands Jim with "a European mind," is not supposed to be able to penetrate his master's consciousness) the first two sentences should be read as Marlow's interpretation (200). The interpretative nature of the final sentence of the quotation is even more explicit. Through his admission: "all I know is that without a word he came out of his room and sat before the long table," Marlow presents his own understanding of Jim's consciousness quite assertively despite considerable uncertainty occasioned by a scarcity of information¹³ (312).

Marlow's highly interpretative narration continues after Jim's dismissal of Jewel and Tamb' Itam's proposal to defend themselves: "[i]t was then, *I believe*, he tried to write—to somebody—and gave it up" (312; emphasis added). In depicting Jim's rejection of Jewel's encouragement to fight, he observes that: "with the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit seemed to rise above the ruins of his existence" (313). Marlow realizes that he lacks information, so he makes qualifications for these statements: "[w]hat thoughts passed through his head—what memories? Who can tell" (312), or "whether he had any hope—what he expected, what he imagined—it is impossible to say" (313). Nevertheless, Marlow's interpretative descriptions of Jim here are so steadfastly oriented towards the final representation of Jim's end as romantic that those qualifications seem to count for little, if anything at all.

In contrast to his oral narrative, in which Marlow's 'undigested' feelings towards Jim's case cause a certain obscurity in the direction of the narrative's progress, Marlow's main written narrative, by virtue of the implicit teleology of his narrative project, is marked by clarity and straightforwardness. This is why some critics (cf. Introduction) see Marlow's written narrative as simplified and therefore less engaging than his oral one. However, we need to consider here the framing devices between which Marlow's main letter is placed: his explanatory letter and the final three paragraphs of the novel. Marlow's explanatory letter, especially in Chapter 36, whose texture is closer to his oral narrative than to his main letter, is informed by his uncertainty about the meaning of Jim's end. We can see this in his musing after his conversation with the "privileged man": "The question is whether at the last [Jim] had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress. I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce—after you've read" (259). Unsure about how to interpret Jim's end, Marlow's doubts extend to "the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words" (259).

We can read the final three paragraphs of the novel in a similar way. This part has been commonly thought to typify the novel's ambiguity. Batchelor observes: "each

¹³ In a similar vein, Davidson critically points out Marlow's dogmatic attempt to "wrest out of Jim's reaction to his defeat some victory for the defeated man," although I do not entirely agree with the critic in that we can unambiguously regard Jim's end as a "defeat" (24).

positive in Marlow's summing-up is carefully undermined by a negative, leaving the reader to judge" (158). From a post-structuralist perspective, Suresh Raval claims that those final paragraphs exhibit an intense ambivalence, which "seems to show the inadequacy of language" (46). However, bearing the fact of Marlow's narratorial self-consciousness in mind, we can discern that as the paragraphs progress, a faint hint of doubt in his monologue gradually undermines the optimism of the very narrative that he has just presented. In the first paragraph he thus foregrounds the "excessively romantic" aspect of Jim's final act: "[n]ot in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success!" (318). Marlow describes Jim's "success" by employing the phrase "a proud and unflinching glance" (317), the detail which appears in Jim's legend that survives amongst the villagers: "it may well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side" (318). The second paragraph, beginning with the contrastive conjunction "but," puts Jewel—the woman Jim abandoned against his pledge—into the focus of his musing: "[h]e goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (318). Given Marlow's emphasis on Jim's "success" in the previous paragraph, the question that follows: "[i]s he satisfied—quite, now, I wonder?" and the answer Marlow gives to it: "[w]e ought to know. He is one of us," may sound rhetorical (318).

At the same time, although the ambiguity is considerable, we might be able to detect Marlow's misgivings in the following rhetorical question: "have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy?" (318). His doubt seems even greater when he asks: "[w]as I so very wrong after all?" (318). This impression is substantiated by the final paragraph describing Jewel's miserable condition in effect of abandonment. Marlow starts the paragraph with a rhetorical question: "[w]ho knows?", as if giving up on the contradictory impressions he has about the meaning of Jim's deed (318). He then depicts Jewel's "soundless, inert life in Stein's house," the paragraph—and the novel—ending on a somewhat somber note, with a description of Stein, who "has aged greatly of late" (318). Clearly, the glory of Jim's final act, which is marked in the first paragraph, ceases to exist by the final one, which focuses on Jewel's misery and Stein's decline. Even though the second paragraph is fairly ambiguous, Marlow's subtle uncommunicativeness in the final one implies the waning of his certainty about Jim's "success," which is to say that after Marlow finishes his narrative about Jim's heroic end, the doubts about the legitimacy of the very story seem to crop up in his mind.

A comparatively straightforward impression that Marlow's main written narrative gives is thus complicated by the framing narrative devices, which exhibit almost the same degree of uncertainty as his oral narrative. However, when we think of the circular manner in which the linear and somewhat teleological main written narrative is presented to the reader, only to be questioned by its framing devices, it would be simplistic to see it merely as a continuation of the same kind and degree of vacillation as Marlow shows in his oral narrative. Whereas Marlow oscillates between sympathy with and moral objections to Jim *all throughout* his oral narrative, in his written nar-

rative (the framing devices), he wavers between his wish to believe his own story about Jim's achievement of his romantic dream (which might salve his conscience) and his uncomfortable awareness of the possibility of his having misrepresented Jim's story. The tonal heterogeneity within Marlow's written narrative can thus be better understood when seen as reflecting his inner conflict. Although Marlow's narrative is never free from vacillation, his oral and written narratives considerably differ from each other in terms of its nature and ubiquity, the fact which, together with the contrast between Marlow's psychologically motivated obfuscation in his oral narrative and the teleological straightforwardness of his main written narrative, explains the difference in texture between the two narratives.

CONCLUSION

In the discussion above I have focused on Marlow's psychological subtleties involved in his increasing distance from Jim, and considered their narratological implications, paying particular attention to the discreteness between Marlow's two perspectives, which, respectively, govern his oral and written narratives. An examination of the nature of Marlow's psychological unreliability as a narrator allows us to reconsider not only his relationship with Jim but also the essence of his entire narrative, which is conditioned by it.

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