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Identity, the Self and the Levinasian Other in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*

Abstract

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The aim of the paper is to analyse the concepts of identity and the self in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* in relation to the thought of Emanuel Levinas. In the novel, comprehension of the other appears elusive while the search for a fixed standard of conduct, the need of which seems so burning, is often frustrated. Moreover, the external world seems malevolent, while self-knowledge is virtually unattainable. It could be claimed that only thanks to a confrontation with the Other, be it another man, the universe, or one's own self, can man establish a sense of identity. Especially the confrontation and relation with another man, the Other who, in Levinasian terms, is never fully knowable, but for whom one is primordially responsible, helps render existence meaningful and one's own nature more acceptable. This relation is charged with important ethical resonance, since the marine ethos proves misleading when deprived of any relation to the Other.

Keywords: *Lord Jim*, identity, the Other, the self, Levinas.

Introduction

Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim, A Tale* was serialised in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from 1899 to 1900 and first published in book form in 1900. Charles Marlow offers to his audience a tale in the form of an after-dinner story. The frame narrative has a double plot, which features the fate of Jim, a young British seaman, and Marlow's attempts at understanding and interpreting it in a wide perspective. Influenced by "light literature"[1] and a romantic at heart, Jim dreams of performing heroic deeds, but at a critical moment deserts what he thinks is a sinking ship – the *Patna* with a large number of Muslim pilgrims travelling to

[1] J. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, New York 1996, p. 8.

Mecca on board. The ship does not sink however, and the dereliction of duty is acutely brought to light. Unlike the rest of the white crew, who choose to escape, Jim faces an official inquiry and trial which strips him of his officer's certificate. Marlow secures him a series of posts, which he undertakes *incognito*, but all of which he abandons the moment he hears the *Patna* case mentioned: "When the fact broke through the incognito he would leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be at the time and go to another – generally further east. (…) He retreated in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact followed him casually but inevitably"[2]. Tanner comments that

> '[f]act' is to be a key word in the novel – it represents the challenge Jim can never meet, the threat he seeks to escape: his dreams can never grapple adequately with the factuality of the world. (…) there is a deep significance in the direction of his flight. It is not only away from civilisation and the rough western seas – it is also towards the rising sun, a regressive process, an effort to bury himself in the primordial peace which precedes birth and succeeds death.[3]

Finally, Jim is sent to Patusan, an almost mythical exotic land, where he becomes a local leader, gains the love of a woman and adoration of the locals. However, he never fully manages to escape from the past and finally gives his life up in a suicide after a white pirate named Brown for whose honour he had vouchsafed betrays him.

I would like to argue that in Conrad's world, where, due to a pervading sense of disinheritance, moral void and skepticism, comprehension of the other appears elusive while the search for a fixed standard of conduct, the need of which seems so burning, is often frustrated, it is only thanks to a confrontation with the Other, be it another man, the universe, or one's own self, can man establish a sense of identity. It seems that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and his conception of the Other who always retains its alterity and incomprehensibility but for whom one is primordially responsible[4], could throw some light on the epistemological uncertainties of the novel. According to Levinas, "the responsibility for others, the relationship with the non-ego, precedes any relationship of the ego with itself. The relationship with the other precedes the auto-affection of certainty, to which one always tries to reduce communication"[5]. Moreover, in a relation one becomes a hostage of the other: "It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple 'After you, sir'. The unconditionality of being hostage is not the limit case for solidarity, but the condition for all solidarity"[6]. It could be claimed that Jim's jump and suicide are due to his excessive self-preoccupation and failure to establish true links with the Other, which blurs the sense of his own identity.

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[2] Ibid., p. 8.

[3] T. Tanner, *Conrad*: Lord Jim, London 1963, p. 18.

[4] Among Levinas's works especially *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* cover these issues extensively.

[5] E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh 1998, p. 119.

[6] Ibid., p. 117.

Understanding or judgment?

Throughout the novel, Marlow reports a whole range of other people's commentaries on Jim's person and deeds in a form of a "collage of verdicts"[7], as he gropes for understanding, which seems elusive as Jim constantly remains "under a cloud"[8], in the phrase of one of the novel's most famous metaphors. Stape claims that it is a plot in which "both the youthful quester and his experienced mentor undergo change"[9] and calls the novel Conrad's "most sustained attempt to write a *Bildungsroman*"[10]. It is debatable, however, to what extent Jim – who does seem to have three major father-figures in the course of the novel: the Englishman Marlow, the French lieutenant and the German Stein – undergoes the process of education as he seems to fail to face both the confrontation with the moral demands of adulthood, and the consequences and truth about his own deeds. It could be argued that it is Marlow who learns more about Jim and about himself – he "undergoes some destabilising of his ego and beliefs the more closely he observes Jim", his "emotional commitment (…) includes identification and sympathy [and] precipitates a reappraisal of his basic principles and commitments", moreover, he seems to depend on Jim "to confirm his own sense of selfhood"[11]. Marlow's conclusions, however, are far from clear. Marlow's audience also seem at a loss when he finally ends the yarn:

> With these words Marlow had ended his narrative, and his audience had broken up forthwith, under his abstract, pensive gaze. Men drifted off the verandah in pairs or alone without loss of time, without offering a remark, as if the last image of that incomplete story, its incompleteness itself, and the very tone of the speaker, had made discussion in vain and comment impossible. Each of them seemed to carry away his own impression, to carry it away with him like a secret (…)[12].

Marlow is aware of the fact that no straightforward judgment can be passed and neither can any clear conclusion be reached: "It is impossible to see him clearly – especially that it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him (…) There shall be no more message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words"[13]. Conrad again appears to highlight that character is, in the words of Ian Watt,

> impervious to full comprehension; it [is] also nearly as intractable as circumstance, and equally unlikely to be transformed in accordance with our wishes. *Lord Jim* is not a *Bildungsroman*, and it treats character from two resolutely sceptical points of view. Conrad's presentation of Jim is sceptical in the impressionist way, because he is portrayed almost

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[7] J. Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad. The Major Phase*, Cambridge 1978, p. 66.

[8] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 246.

[9] J.H. Stape, "*Lord Jim*". *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. J.H. Stape, Cambridge 1996, p. 66.

[10] Ibid., p. 63.

[11] Ibid., p. 74.

[12] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 200.

[13] Ibid., p. 201.

> entirely through Marlow, who has no privileged knowledge of the "real" person such as an omniscient author might have claimed. Secondly, Conrad's portrayal is sceptical morally, because it does not show any large transformation of Jim's character. Jim, like everyone else, no doubt dreams of salvation, but he must settle for being seasoned[14].

Similarly to *Heart of Darkness*, the way Conrad handles the narrative in *Lord Jim* reflects the epistemological confusion of the efforts of the narrator, his audience and the readers to decipher the protagonist's story and its meaning. The text is self-reflexive, polyphonic stylistically (and therefore self-interpretative to a certain extent) and marked by "chronological insecurity and ideological indeterminacy"[15].

Imagination versus confronting the Other of the external world

Rather than seen as an accidental lapse, Jim's notorious jump seems to be presented as characteristic of his psychological and moral make-up due to the proleptic first four chapters which are narrated by an omniscient third-person authorial voice and which provide an introduction by describing Jim's physical appearance, his family background, his early training career, his "dogged self-assertion" which seemed "a necessity and [which] was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else"[16], and, most importantly, his constant day-dreaming:

> He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or, as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half-naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shell-fish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book[17].

Nowhere does the text provide any description of Jim's meaningful relations with other people. Characteristically, from the very start he seems exceedingly self-assured and far from humble: "His station was in the fore-top, and often from there he looked down, with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers"[18]. The description of his idyllic peaceful childhood and his father, the village parson ("Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions"[19]) foreshadows the implications of ignorance, thoughtlessness and indifference to the multifaceted nature of reality and the ambiguities inherent in life that are to recur in the portrayal of Jim's psychological make-up. This is especially exhibited in the episode on the training ship, when Jim for the first time failed to act in an

[14] I. Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1980, p. 34.
[15] J.H. Stape, op. cit., p. 66.
[16] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 7.
[17] Ibid., p. 9.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 8.

emergency and thus, apparently missed a chance for a heroic deed while another man played the leading part in the little drama. What he also managed to evade was self-knowledge. At first Jim felt "the pain of conscious defeat"[20] and envy of the newly-established hero of the day, but a moment later "he knew what to think of it"[21]. He

> thought it a pitiful display of vanity. The gale had ministered to a heroism as spurious as its own pretence of terror. He felt angry with the brutal tumult of earth and sky for taking him unawares and checking unfairly a generous readiness for narrow escapes. Otherwise he was rather glad he had not gone into the cutter, since a lower achievement had served the turn. He had enlarged his knowledge more than those who had done the work. When all men flinched, then – he felt sure – he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas. He knew what to think of it. Seen dispassionately, it seemed contemptible. He could detect no trace of emotion in himself, and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage[22].

The irony in the narrator-observer's account who at times (as here) seems to adopt Jim's perspective[23] only highlights the protagonist's inauspicious proneness to self-delusion and his inclination to rationalise his shortcomings. From the very beginning Jim appears to bear a grudge against the external world as an other, which takes him "unawares" and which he is not able to confront effectively. Such is the case as regards his fatal jump from the *Patna*: "He had been taken unawares – and he whispered to himself a malediction upon the waters and the firmament, upon the ship, upon the men. Everything had betrayed him! He had been tricked into that sort of high-minded resignation which prevented him lifting as much as his little finger (…)"[24]. Marlow, however, declares in a definitive tone that "[i] t is always the unexpected that happens"[25]. Characteristically, rather than reflect on his own failure to confront the situation and react accordingly, the young man perceives himself as a victim of nature and the external circumstances – even up to the point of blaming other people – as a victim of everything that could be termed not-I. This seems to coincide with his life experience. Jim, when still very young and inexperienced, became "chief mate of a fine ship, without ever having been tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff; that reveal the quality of his resistance and the secret truth of his pretences, not only to other, but also to himself"[26]. He fails the test that life makes him face and which seems a necessary step in the pursuit of self-knowledge, which together with his self-preoccupation and his refusal to accept that man should be constantly on the alert and ready for a test renders him an other not only to his comrades, or the external world, but also to himself.

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[20] Ibid., p. 10.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p. 10–11.
[23] J. Lothe, *Conrad's Narrative Method*, Oxford 1989, p. 145.
[24] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 60.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p. 11.

Another of Jim's important characteristics highlighted in the introductory part is his marked undervaluation of work and duty. Rather than reach an "effacement of the self before the work at hand"[27], which is apparently much-desired (at least by Conrad) as it allows one to tackle excessive self-preoccupation and feel the meaningfulness of one's action, Jim projects a vision of himself "that lacks any basis in reality" and which is the reason why he "finds the conditions of the world itself inadequate"[28]. Characteristic of youth and rooted in culture as such an attitude seems, Conrad emphasises that a total egotistic focus on oneself, together with overheated imagination, is "a mechanism that is capable of, even fundamentally oriented to, the engendering of mere illusion"[29]. Imagination may even be detrimental to one's alertness and ability to act at the right moment: "[t]he danger, when not seen, has the imperfect vagueness of human thought. The fear grows shadowy; and Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors, unstimulated, sinks to rest in the dullness of exhausted emotion"[30]. This is also exactly what is to happen in Jim's case when the *Patna* is damaged.

Both the atmosphere created by the passive and comfort-loving seamen Jim encounters in his youth and the susceptibility to self-forgetfulness foreshadow his failure and its dire consequences. The ubiquitous stagnation allows him to plunge into day-dreams, off-guard self-complacency, and underestimation of the power of the Other in the form of Nature: "Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering love upon the placid tenderness of a mother's face"[31]. He

> would glance at the compass, would glance around the unattainable horizon, would stretch himself till his joints cracked with a leisurely twist of the body, in the very excess of well-being; and, as if made audacious by the invincible aspect of the peace, he felt he cared for nothing that could happen to him to the end of his days. (…) At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best part of his life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with a heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself. There was nothing he could not face[32].

Jim fails to find his own reality as the only reality he seems to recognise is that of his dreams. He successfully manages to intoxicate himself with dreams of his own superiority, "his thought was contemplating his own superiority"[33], which undermines his relations with his fellow seamen – the Other at hand on a daily basis. He scorned the rest of the crew as they

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[27] J.H. Stape, op. cit., p. 70.
[28] Ibid., p. 70.
[29] Ibid., p. 71.
[30] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 11–12.
[31] Ibid., p. 15.
[32] Ibid., p. 16–17.
[33] Ibid., p. 18.

> did not belong to the world of heroic adventure (…) The quality of those men did not matter; he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him; he shared the air they breathed, but he was different… (…) The life was easy and he was too sure of himself – too sure of himself to… The line dividing his meditation from a surreptitious doze on his feet was thinner than a thread in a spider's web[34].

Jim's predisposition to dream is fuelled by light literature (in fact, Jim's self-mythologising could be perceived as a form of bovarism) but it may also be considered as part of the 19th-century romantic tradition of the supreme value of the self and the conception of the hero developed in Romanticism, "the great and lonely individual elevated above the common herd of society by the scope of his imagination, his dedication to dreams and Ideals, his contempt for the prosaic trivia of day-to-day existence"[35]. According to Ian Watt, "[o]ne of the residual legacies of the Romantic movement was a disheartened awareness of the discrepancy which the individual imagination is continually discovering between the self as it is and the self as it would like to be"[36].

The Self as the Other

In Jim's case self-preoccupation and self-idealisation appear to be associated with his lack of self-knowledge and the lack of awareness of his own weaknesses. Significantly, Marlow declares that "Jim had no dealings but with himself"[37]; his self-centredness "encourages a personal pride and self-sufficiency which leads the individual to put his primary trust in himself, instead of relying on divine grace, moral virtue, civic duty, personal feeling"[38] for another person. Seen in the light of Jim's lengthy process of indulging in day-dreaming, "Jim's eventual jump is no merely impulsive mistake, but the result of a prolonged habit of self-deception"[39], or, in Watt's words, "the outcome of a conflict rooted in his own personality"[40].

Watt explains that "Jim puzzles and annoys Marlow largely because he apparently feels no guilt at having transgressed the mariner's code; what really matters to Jim is his personal failure to live up to his ego-ideal; and what he cannot bear is to face those who think that his real character is defined by the desertion of the *Patna*"[41]. Marlow says that Jim "would give himself away; he would give himself up. I could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations. He had no leisure to regret what he had lost, he was so wholly and naturally concerned for what he had failed to obtain"[42]. Nowhere in the text is there any mention of Jim's

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[34] Ibid., p. 19–20.
[35] T. Tanner, op. cit., p. 7–8.
[36] I. Watt, op. cit., p. 324.
[37] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 201.
[38] I. Watt, op. cit., p. 353.
[39] J. Berthoud, op. cit., p. 73.
[40] I. Watt, op. cit., s. 310.
[41] Ibid., p. 343.
[42] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 53.

reflection on the gravity of his deed in relation to the hundreds of human beings he abandoned on the ship.

Jim, moreover, does not understand his own self, therefore making others understand himself seems doomed to failure, he can never communicate with them and he finds himself in a state of utter isolation: "[t]he sound of his own truthful statements confirmed his deliberate opinion that speech was of no use to him any longer"[43]. Marlow's efforts to communicate with and understand the young officer are hindered by Jim's self-delusion, self-preoccupation, just as is the communication between them: "He would be confident and depressed all in the same breath, as if some conviction of innate blamelessness had checked the truth writhing within him at every turn"[44]. This is how Marlow depicts Jim's narrative: "He was not – if I may say so – clear to me. He was not clear. And there is a suspicion he was not clear to himself either. There were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings – a sort of sublimated, idealised selfishness. He was – if you allow me to say so – very fine; very fine – and very unfortunate"[45]. Jim could identify with Rimbaud's famous statement: "Je – est un autre".Not having taken responsibility for other people (and therefore breaching the Levinasian ethics), his interpersonal relationships, as well as his self-cognition, remain flawed.

Marlow is confused by Jim's refusal to accept that his inner dreams are evasions and lies. The epigraph to the novel, "It is certain any conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it", taken from Novalis, shows that Jim desperately needs the understanding and corroboration of another soul. In Levinasian terms, he reaches out to a compassionate other, but fails to establish a meaningful relation or communication due to his self-delusion. Marlow complains that

> [h]e was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence – another possessor of his soul. There were issues beyond the competency of the court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession – to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable that had its exigencies[46].

Long for the understanding of others as Jim may, he destroys the chances for real dialogue and true communication when he attempts to use language as a tool of egotistic self-expression or as means to perpetrate his self-delusion or even escape truth.

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[43] Ibid., p. 24.
[44] Ibid., p. 51.
[45] Ibid., p. 45.
[46] Ibid. p. 107.

The necessity of the Other

Self-delusion and lack of humility are greater faults than fear or human weakness and one is especially prone to it outside community. Marlow is aware of the fact that a man left to his own devices will never fully avoid self-delusion: "I don't know how much of it he believed himself. I didn't know what he was playing up to – if he was playing up to anything at all – and I suspect he did not know either; for it is my belief that no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge"[47]. As Berthoud notices, "a competent second person is necessary to ensure that Jim's debate with himself does not degenerate into mere self-justification"[48].

This is why Conrad describes not one, but two inquiries into Jim's case. The official one is meant to investigate the betrayal of the code, while Marlow's conversation with Jim in the evening of the second day of the trial, when the more experienced man lets the young offender retell his own version of the events, is concerned with the significance of the betrayal "in the context of human life at large" and with the issue "whether anything survives the verdict of the facts"[49]. As the realist description of facts does not seem sufficient or adequate, "[p]art of Marlow's function in the unofficial inquiry is to reaffirm, when necessary, the claims of moral realism"[50]. Marlow focuses on what is hidden in Jim's story and what to him seems most important, difficult as it may appear. Ambiguously, he acknowledges that Jim's story is "mysterious" and that in its centre lies "a naked fact, about as naked and ugly as a fact can be"[51]. Marlow

> repeatedly intervenes, supports, questions, and generalises upon Jim's story. Jim's narrative, to the extent that it can be isolated from Marlow's report of it, is characterised by an intense personal involvement: it is a fervent, desperate attempt to explain what the inquiry did not allow him to. It gives a strong impression of re-experience – we get the protagonist's version of the authorial narrator's earlier description of the abandonment of the *Patna* and the surrounding events[52].

Marlow allows Jim to present his own version of the events and attempts to comment on it himself, with reference to general characteristic traits of all mankind.

Lothe claims that the 'theme' of *Lord Jim* is "Marlow's attempt (...) to explain why he concerns himself with Jim"[53]. Marlow recognises the universal appeal of Jim's ideals and the dire sense of their destruction. In Tanner's words, Jim is "our best dreams and our worst vulnerabilities"[54], just like Marlow, we are invited to identify our own traits (including faults) in him:

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[47] Ibid., p. 51.
[48] J. Berthoud, op. cit., p. 79.
[49] Ibid., p. 79.
[50] Ibid.
[51] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 25–26.
[52] J. Lothe, op. cit., p. 156.
[53] Ibid., p. 136.
[54] T. Tanner, op. cit., p. 58.

> He was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been; of the sort whose appearance claims the fellowship of those illusions you had thought gone out, extinct, cold, and which, as if rekindled at the approach of another flame, give a flutter deep, deep down somewhere, give a flutter of light… of heat!...[55].

Despite the highlighted inconclusiveness of the search for understanding, a sympathetic reflection on Jim's situation may result in self-knowledge for other people. Marlow seems to see his own reflection in Jim. In Levinasian terms, he sees his identity as a substitution for the Other. The other is known "through sympathy, as another (my)self, as the alter ego"[56]. Throughout the novel, other people, such as Stein or Captain Brierly, also identify with Jim, perceiving in him an Everyman prone to self-delusion and failure. Moreover, Jim's sense of identity and balance is shaken by his encounter in the villain Brown who claims a likeness between them.

Despite the instability of communication and understanding, it could even be claimed that at times *Lord Jim* is a tale of friendship, which is unique in Conrad's *oeuvre*[57]. Lothe explains that

> friendship is linked to human activity in Conrad. (...) it is a means of withstanding the constant threat of moral and existential isolation. Friendship is a variant on the human contact Conradian characters need in order not to succumb to the pressures of alienation, which in the author's major works is repeatedly portrayed as external and objectively present. Especially if prone to intellectual scepticism, Conrad's characters cannot cope with this alienation unless they are part of some community[58].

Words and understanding are elusive but what never loses its value is human kindness, the ability and willingness to listen to the other (exemplified by Marlow himself), and attempts at creating bonds (as when Marlow takes leave of Jim before the young man is to set out for Patusan: "There was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of some saving truth"[59]) even in the form of a smallest gesture: "The other day he [Jim] took it into his head to cross the room with no other purpose but to open a door for me; and I felt more in touch with mankind than I had been for years"[60].

In the face of the value of solidarity and friendship, Jim's leap seems to be much graver an offence than a mere dereliction of duty: "The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind, and from that point of view [Jim] was no mean traitor"[61]. Marlow is outraged by the fact that Jim, despite his sensitivity, and probably due to his self-absorption, fails to acknowledge the significance of his breach of solidarity. As Watt notes, "Jim is too concerned with his inner dreams to be much interested in the code of soli-

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[55] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 79.
[56] E. Levinas, *Time and the Other* [in:] *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand, Oxford 1989, p. 47.
[57] I. Watt, op. cit., p. 337.
[58] J. Lothe, op. cit., p. 173.
[59] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 145.
[60] Ibid., p. 113.
[61] Ibid., p. 96.

darity as it concerns collective action and public attitudes to it"[62], which is at odds with his excessive individualism, idealism and egotism. In a sense, Jim's attitude proves to be a handicap for himself, as very often societal bonds provide a framework within which to live and act purposefully or morally. According to Watt, "one had to rely on organised solidarity, on the values that men have jointly constructed over the centuries; there was no question of relying on some innate knowledge of what is truly human"[63]. Jim suffers because "[w]e exist only in so far as we hang together. He had straggled in a way; he had not hung on"[64]. Tanner notes that "Jim had wanted to be perfect and had fled from all evidence of his defects, chasing his dream. But in Marlow's wiser, more sober eyes, all men are flawed and fallible. (…) The bond and solidarity of the ranks encourage men to behave better than they can if they insist on working out their destiny alone"[65]. People seem to need the awareness of being a part of a community which is made up of weak individuals but which is often self-regulating. The French lieutenant declares that:

> you have got to live with that truth – do you see? Given a certain combination of circumstances fear is sure to come. (…) And even for those who do not believe this truth there is fear all the same – the fear of themselves. (…) Man is born a coward (*L'homme est né poultron*). It is a difficulty – *parbleu!* It would be too easy otherwise. But habit – habit – necessity – do you see? – the eye of others – *voila*. One puts up with it. And then the example of the others who are no better than yourself, and yet make good countenance…[66].

It seems that a meaningful relationship with the Other, difficult to build and even more difficult to maintain as it may be, may act as a safeguard against mistake and against a breach of the code of conduct.

Conclusion

In Levinasian terms, Jim remains an Other to himself and mismanages his relations with other people. Concentrated on himself and therefore unable to perceive his own identity in an objective light, or confront the Other of the external world, Jim seems to fail a number of tests at sea, but also in his personal life. His mistakes cost the life of his friend while his suicide appears to be a heartless breach of his bond with the woman who loves him. He dies without being understood by others, not understanding himself nor his fate. Marlow's conclusions are far from clear, as towards the end of the novel he describes Jim's case as an inaccessible and mystery. Jim himself "seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma"[67] and "passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and

[62] I. Watt, op. cit., p. 320.
[63] Ibid., p. 327.
[64] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 135.
[65] T. Tanner, op. cit., p. 49.
[66] J. Conrad, op. cit., p. 90.
[67] Ibid., p. 90.

excessively romantic"[68]. It would appear that the epistemological uncertainty and sense of incomprehension could be, at least to some extent, explained by the failure to face whatever is not-I with humility.

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[68] Ibid., p. 90.