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Stephen Crane as a Source for Conrad's Jim

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JN THE AUTHOR'S NOTE to *Lord Jim*, written some sixteen years after the novel's first appearance, Joseph Conrad said of his hero: "One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by – appealing – significant – under a cloud – perfectly silent." ¹

Biographers and critics have tended to give little credence to Conrad's self-admitted sources. Thus Ian Watt, commenting on Conrad's "surprising assertions" about the source for his character Almayer: "The offhandedly preposterous exaggeration is characteristic of Conrad . . . [who] often attributed the initial impetus for a novel to a passing glimpse of someone or to a casual encounter."² Watt proposes four less preposterous sources for Jim, beginning with one Augustine Podmore Williams. In 1923, a year before Conrad's death, a letter appeared in a London newspaper suggesting that *Lord Jim* might have been based on an incident which had occurred in 1880 involving the pilgrim ship *Jeddah*. While it was not unheard of for those old, heavily laden vessels to be abandoned by their crews in times of distress, the *Jeddah* affair attained great notoriety partly because the abandoned ship and its nearly one thousand passengers did not sink after all, and partly because her crew was British and, it was generally felt, should have behaved more honorably. Williams was the first mate on the *Jeddah*, as Jim was on the *Patna*, and there is certainly enough similarity between their stories to justify calling him a source, although Conrad never directly confirmed it.

Conrad may even have set eyes on Williams in Singapore in 1885 or 1887. In the quotation above he mentions seeing Jim's form pass by in "an Eastern roadstead." A roadstead is an area offshore where ships lie at anchor outside the harbor. It is in such an area that ship chandlers' water clerks visit the ships. Williams was such a "ship-runner," as was Jim. In "Tuan Jim: A Sketch," Conrad wrote, "the captains of the ships in the roadsteads called him Jim" (Norton *LJ*, 283). Later that sentence was modified and the term omitted.

Norman Sherry, attempting to prove that Conrad actually met Williams in Singapore and then modeled Jim closely on the *Jeddah*'s mate, asked descendants of A. P. Williams to match up their memories with Conrad's descriptions of Jim and Jim's early life. Not surprisingly, he received letters from daughters and nieces affirming that Williams, like Jim, had been the son of a parson, one of five boys, had blue eyes, often wore white,³ and had approximately the same height, build, and temperament. Despite his efforts, Sherry leaves us with the problem of why Conrad, who changed nearly every detail and circumstance of the *Jeddah* incident to fit his own purposes (in fact, it was a wildly chaotic event), and who completely altered the actions and fate of A. P. Williams in creating Jim (Williams actually was thrown overboard by pilgrims furious at being abandoned in a stormy sea, then shot and wounded), would have gone to the trouble of

matching Jim's early life in every detail with that of the *Jeddah's* mate. Even had he met Williams, it is unlikely that Conrad, a young seaman at the time, would have dared question his notorious elder about the details of his family life, especially as Conrad in the mid-1880s was not yet an author and apparently had no plans to become one. He did not begin writing until 1889 and only turned to *Lord Jim* nearly two decades after the *Jeddah* episode.

Watt's second source for Jim is Jim Lingard, the son of William Lingard, who is considered the model for Captain Tom Lingard of *Almayer's Folly*. Jim Lingard, who could have been known as Tuan Jim, was married to a Sea Dyak woman. Watt feels she may have been the model for Jewel, Jim's woman in the Patusan part of the novel. The third source for Jim and his exploits on Patusan can be found, Watt suggests, in the books of travel and historical accounts of adventures read by Conrad. The fourth source was Conrad himself who, like Jim on the *Patna*, once had the misfortune to be incapacitated by a falling spar and was obliged to ride out a terrible storm in his cabin, glad enough not to have to go up on deck but suffering pangs of conscience all the same at his own disinclination to help out.⁴

Watt feels that there are really two Jims – the Jim of the *Patna*, based upon Williams and Conrad himself, and the Jim of Patusan, based on Jim Lingard and fictional heroes. An author may make use of many sources in writing such a complex novel, and there can be no denying that Watt's are reasonable choices.

Nevertheless, none of these sources accounts for that special element in the story, the affection that Marlow – and Conrad – felt for young Jim. This sentiment runs through the entire novel, binding the two parts into a whole. One might also ask why, after conceiving his story as a simple sketch about an abandoned pilgrim ship, Conrad let it evolve into a lengthy and complex two-part novel. It is clear that whatever the author's original intentions concerning the *Jeddah* incident, and his musings about her officers' actions, they were soon outgrown, left behind. What had occurred to cause this change? My purpose is to show that there was another and more immediate source for Jim, one whose existence may provide us with answers to these questions and many more.

II

The argument that follows is based entirely upon circumstantial evidence, just as are – in the absence of confirmation by the author – suggestions that A. P. Williams, Jim Lingard, and others were Conrad's sources for Jim. I do not wish to refute other speculations, only to complement them as cogently as possible. There is one biographical fact essential to an understanding of the following thesis: that Joseph Conrad's mother died of pulmonary tuberculosis when he was seven.

Not all writers, but some, write out of an inner compulsion they do not necessarily

understand. Certainly Conrad did so during the sea-tale phases of his literary career. One might call it, aptly enough in his case, the Ancient Mariner syndrome, a need to tell and retell a “ghastly tale” of “woeful agony” embodying some terrible personal guilt in order to be at least temporarily free of it. Judging from his sea stories, Conrad’s “ghastly tale” was the story of his mother’s death and his infant fears and guilts surrounding her death.

It is common knowledge today that children often feel personal responsibility for the death or divorce of their parents, and that these guilts may affect their entire lives. Numerous examples of Conrad’s anxieties over his mother’s death appear in his sea stories, one of the most outstanding of these being the “death,” by a slow-burning, consuming fire in her hold, of the old ship *Judea* in the story “Youth.” Another curious sign of this personal trauma may be seen in Conrad’s repeated use of the number thirty-two, his mother’s age at the time of her death. Thus in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* “the thirty-second day out of Bombay began inauspiciously. In the morning a sea smashed one of the galley doors.”⁵ It was the first blow of the gale, the onset of the “labor,” that would lay the *Narcissus* on her side, preparatory to the “birth” of James Wait through a hole in his cabin bulkhead. (Significantly, perhaps, it was the galley, the source of nourishment on board a ship, that was threatened first.) In *Lord Jim*, Captain Brierly, thirty-two years old, sets the course for his ship before committing suicide: “‘Thirty-two miles more as she goes,’ says he, ‘and then we shall be clear. . . . Thirty-two miles more on this course and then you are safe.’” (*LJ*, 37).

It may also be significant in this respect that Conrad, without any apparent motivation, quite suddenly began his writing career in the autumn of 1889 – just when he was turning thirty-two years of age. The reason for stressing the connection between this author’s inner psychological anxieties and his writing will become clear later in this essay. It will be seen how this same psychological phenomenon virtually took possession of Conrad’s entire life and being during one of the more crucial phases of his literary career, while he was writing *Lord Jim*.

III

In November 1895 a novel was published in England which was to have a tremendous impact upon one of its readers. The reader’s name was Joseph Conrad and the novel was *The Red Badge of Courage*. My purpose being to show that Stephen Crane himself was an important source for *Lord Jim*, a moment may profitably be spent contemplating just why and how his book had such an impact on Conrad.

The first “why” must, of course, be that Conrad identified deeply with something in the novel. An author himself, he was able to identify not only with the hero of the book, Henry Fleming, but with the young author who had created the youthful soldier who considered himself “an unknown quantity,” who “told himself that he was not

formed for a soldier . . . and mused seriously upon the radical differences between himself and [his comrades].”⁶ It was a story that could have been written about a seaman named Joseph Conrad, that might have been written by him, one that he would yet attempt to write himself – only more completely, in subtler terms, in greater depth – out of his own imagination and experience. Indeed, before the end of the century Conrad had written several works that probably received much of their impetus and inspiration from *The Red Badge of Courage*, most notably *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* “Youth,” and *Lord Jim*. Critics of the day were quick to see stylistic influences of Crane’s novel on *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* W. L. Courtney, in his review in *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 1897, wrote:

Mr. Joseph Conrad has chosen Mr. Stephen Crane for his example, and has determined to do for the sea and the sailor what his predecessor had done for war and warriors. The style, though a good deal better than Mr. Crane’s, has the same jerky and spasmodic quality; while a spirit of faithful and minute description – even to the verge of the wearisome – is common to both. If we open any page of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* we are told with infinite detail what each one was doing, what the ship was doing, and what sky and sea were doing. (Norton *NN*, 216)

A closer reading of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* brings to light similarities other than those of style, deeper than impressionistic detail. Crane’s description of Jim Conklin’s death, which is arresting and moving to even a casual reader, must positively have stunned Conrad. For here was described the “woeful agony” of his childhood – birth and death locked together in terrible conflict.

Finally, the chest of the doomed soldier began to heave with a strained motion. It increased in violence until it was as if an animal was within and was kicking and tumbling furiously to be free. (*RB*, 49)

He was invaded by a creeping strangeness that slowly enveloped him. For a moment the tremor of his legs caused him to dance a sort of hideous hornpipe. His arms beat wildly about his head in expression of implike enthusiasm. (*RB*, 50)

Jim Conklin’s death scene may have prepared the way for a memorable moment in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* when the dying James Wait is trapped inside his cabin in the overturned ship. Here again death is trapped within life, struggling to get free, to be born. (Note that while both Crane and Conrad used the same first name for these men, Crane used the diminutive “Jim” whereas Conrad seems to have meticulously and deferentially avoided copying Crane, calling his protagonist “James” and “Jimmy.” Later, of course, Conrad would return to the name Jim, using it in a very grand way.) The crew hears Jimmy

bang[ing] with hands and feet. . . . trying madly to get out through that opening one inch wide and three inches long. [The men struggle to break through to him. At last one gets hold.] “Pull at my legs! ...

Pull! . . . Catch hold of his hair . . . pull straight up.” . . . Suddenly Jimmy’s head and shoulders appeared . . . and he squirmed up with such precipitation that he seemed positively to escape from our hands like a bladder full of gas. . . . he wouldn’t even as much as clutch at our necks . . . his arms and legs swung jointless and pliable; his head rolled about. (*NN*, 41, 43, 44)

The story “Youth,” significantly the first entrance on the literary stage of Marlow, Conrad’s alter ego, contains something of *The Red Badge of Courage*, most notably the title itself – which seems to echo the oft-repeated denomination “the youth” of Crane’s novel – and the young man’s desire to achieve manhood. But more curious than this is an example of Conrad’s close personal identification with the author of *The Red Badge of Courage* – before they ever met – in Conrad’s unfinished novel, *The Sisters*. This strange piece of writing, a sort of self-conscious pilgrimage of Conrad’s creative soul, begun and abandoned in 1896, is, according to Frederick R. Karl, about an “artist-hero . . . a typical *fin de siècle* disillusioned idealist . . . [who] draws back instinctively from personal contacts and seeks salvation in the pursuit of immortal masterpieces.”⁷ Conrad, who like Crane had difficulty naming his characters (a problem sometimes affecting authors whose own personalities are deeply enmeshed in their subject matter), called his hero “Stephen.” Interestingly, even the name “Henry” surfaces briefly in the fragment. Parts of the work seem almost a parody of Henry Fleming’s search for selfhood, with lines like these abounding:

Stephen, unwinking, looked on – smiled at Immensity.

On the slope hung a village, scattered white huts, with high, ragged, thatched roofs under which small unequal windows twinkled, like small eyes of a band of deformed and humorous dwarfs winking under high caps cavalierly aslant.⁸

But while *The Red Badge of Courage* affected many of Conrad’s early writings, Crane’s greatest impact was on *Lord Jim*. By the time Conrad wrote *Lord Jim* he and Crane were friends. As will be shown in Section V of this essay, not only echoes of Crane’s literary works but the American author himself entered into and played an immortal role in Conrad’s greatest and most enigmatic novel.

IV

The story of *The Red Badge of Courage* concerns the efforts of a youth to achieve an ideal of manhood, although his initial war experiences involve displays of cowardice rather than manly courage: “Directly he began to speed toward the rear in great leaps. His rifle and cap were gone. His unbuttoned coat bulged in the wind. . . . On his face was all the horror of those things which he imagined” (*RB*, 36). Fortunately for Henry Fleming, darkness and circumstance hide his cowardice until, through an act of heroism,

he appears to attain his goal. Like Henry Fleming at the front, Jim on the *Patna* also flees before imagined terrors. As Marlow tells us: [Jim] was not afraid. . . . He was not afraid of death perhaps, but I'll tell you what, he was afraid of the emergency. His confounded imagination had evoked for him all the horrors of panic" (*LJ*, 54).

Both Crane and Conrad, men with complex, literary minds, seem to have felt hampered in their attempts to achieve their ideal of manhood by that otherwise praiseworthy quality, imagination. Moreover, it made them feel like outsiders, "mental outcasts," – indeed, like writers. Five times in two dozen lines of "Tuan Jim," Conrad wrote, "Imagination the enemy of man the father of all terrors" (Norton *LJ*, 286). At some point in his life, Father Imagination had turned upon Conrad/Jim, the same Jim who, since he was " 'so high' – 'quite a little chap' . . . had been preparing himself for all the difficulties that can beset one on land and water. . . . He had been elaborating dangers and defences, expecting the worst, rehearsing his best" (*LJ*, 58). Henry Fleming, too, had once been on better terms with his imagination. He had "dreamed of battles all his life – of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles. He had imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess" (*RB*, 7). But something had gone awry and both authors were trying in these two books to come to grips with the problem of imagination and its role in fear. Both managed to find at least a literary solution, although the problem Conrad was dealing with (and Crane perhaps too) was only an intellectual symptom of a much deeper distress.

Conrad's awareness that the true theme of *Lord Jim* might not really concern courage after all begins to surface during Marlow's conversation with the French lieutenant, the man who remained aboard the damaged *Patna* for thirty hours while she was being towed to port. In one sense, Marlow's attempt to define courage is as pitiful an effort as that made by Henry Fleming when he attempts to determine whether his soldier companions are as frightened as he; unfortunately for both men, the answers they seek are locked up in the psyches of individuals who lack the imagination to express them. Nevertheless, talking with the Frenchman, Conrad/Marlow does make an important discovery: that courage, insofar as it is related to honor, is nothing more than a convention of civilization and something of a sham. Taking Jim's cowardly action out of the darkness (something Crane did not attempt to do with Henry Fleming) and shining the light of day on it, Conrad discovered that a man of imagination, like Jim, may fail the test of courage in which a man of honor, who lacks both intelligence and imagination – that is, the French lieutenant – may succeed. Thus heroism, seen in daylight, is as unsubstantial, as ephemeral, as Henry Fleming's cowardice unseen in darkness. Being ephemeral, it is trivial; being trivial, it is not a worthy theme. Conrad made one last attempt to hold onto his theme, but it slipped through his grasp: " 'Very well,' [Marlow] said, with a disconcerted smile, 'but couldn't it [dishonor, cowardice] reduce itself to not being found out?' " Replies the Frenchman, "This, monsieur, is too fine for me – much above me – I don't think about it" (*LJ*, 90, 91).

With this reply even Crane's "solution" had failed Conrad and the novel was in deep trouble. In fact, it had been in trouble from the beginning. All along, the conflict between the story Conrad thought or hoped he was writing – another *Red Badge of Courage* – and the one he was really writing, was affecting the story line. But now, at least, Conrad correctly sensed that Jim was suffering not from some literary tragic flaw which was becoming more and more incomprehensible and unreal to him, but from guilt. As Marlow says a short time later:

“Still, the idea obtrudes itself that he made so much of his disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters. 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. “ (*LJ*, 107)

The problem remaining was: Guilt about what? Guilt at having abandoned the *Patna*? Guilt over lost honor? Nothing, alas, so simple. Jim's guilt – and Conrad for all his efforts was never able to grasp this intellectually – came from the fact that the *Patna* had abandoned him.

For here, once again, the ship had become Conrad's dying mother. When Jim goes below to check whether there has been any damage following the collision with some unseen, submerged object, and puts his hand to the engine-room bulkhead, it is as if he were putting his hand upon part of a living person, a person in imminent danger of suffering some terrible hemorrhage.

“Dash it all! I tell you it bulged. . . . The thing stirred and jumped off like something alive while I was looking at it. . . . I expected to see the iron open out as I stood there and the rush of water going over them as they lay. . . . What could I do – what?” (*LJ*, 52)

Marlow redescribes the moment for us better than Jim has been able to:

“I can easily picture him to myself in the peopled gloom of the cavernous place, with the light of the bulk-lamp falling on a small portion of the bulkhead that had the weight of the ocean on the other side, and the breathing of unconscious sleepers in his ears. I can see him glaring at the iron, startled by the falling rust, overburdened by the knowledge of an imminent death. . . . He told me that his first impulse was to shout and straightaway make all those people leap out of their sleep into terror; but such an overwhelming sense of his helplessness came over him that he was not able to produce a sound. . . . The engines having been stopped at that time, the steam was blowing off. Its deep rumble made the whole night vibrate like a bass string. The ship trembled to it.” (*LJ*, 52)

Marlow's image describes as well the inside of a human being, the peopled womb, the diseased lungs, the troubled breathing of a dying woman. Jim's emotions are similar to those a person might experience while watching someone he loves die – fear, anger, helplessness, and a complete inability to speak a word in protest. But why was this happening? Why was Conrad's straightforward tale being inexorably subverted by

psychological pressures? Was something going on in his life just then that was making him lose control of his narrative, and did it, by chance, involve Stephen Crane?

These questions will be answered later, but note that in this scene from *Lord Jim* something remarkable happens: it is no longer Jim abandoning the *Patna*; it is the ship-mother abandoning him. At this moment the story Conrad is trying to tell turns upside down and the theme of courage becomes impossible for the author to justify or sustain. What has happened becomes clear a short time later when Marlow describes Jim's mood while in the lifeboat after leaving the *Patna*: "When your ship fails you, your whole world seems to fail you; the world that made you, restrained you, took care of you. . . . there are as many shipwrecks as there are men" (*LJ*, 74).

That Jim never became "clear" to Conrad/Marlow is partly because even when Conrad began to suspect that another theme was emerging, he was unable to deal with it. This is not surprising, for he was attempting to fit the more common concept of guilt – guilt that is generally associated with a criminal act or a human failing – to a very special case. The *Patna* being a mother symbol, Jim's relationship to her was far more complex than simply that of a first mate to his command, which, to be honored, required only adherence to training and procedures. No wonder Conrad was never quite able to understand what was eating at Jim, or what Jim could do, short of giving up his life, to atone for an act which, on the story level, was nothing but a "victimless crime" involving only a momentary failure of the relatively trivial convention of honor.

Apropos of Crane's literary influence on *Lord Jim*, a word about the name of Conrad's hero. Jim Conklin was not the only character named Jim that Conrad would have come across in Crane's works before beginning his novel. Crane had already used the name in two other major works: Jimmy was Maggie's brother, and in the grim story "The Monster," the name of the child saved from fire by the Negro, Henry, was Jimmy. While it is possible that Conrad took the name Jim from Jim Lingard, whom he may have met, it is also possible he "caught" the name Jim from Stephen Crane, just as for *The Sisters* he may have "caught" the names Stephen and Henry, and for *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* James (Jimmy) Wait. For two authors who had a difficult time finding names for their characters, they certainly made do with what they had.

And lastly, when speaking of sources for literary characters, one should understand that to a writer a "source" may be a filter, a shield, a slightly distorted mirror through which the author dares to look at some aspect of himself. A source may also act as a catalyst in that it removes the main barrier to the writing of a story – the author's fear of self-discovery. In the case of *Lord Jim*, the protagonist-to-be was so much a projection of the author at his most vulnerable that Conrad may have put off his writing of it for some years, until conditions were such that he could deal with it. A. P. Williams was not the right catalyst, not the right shield. His actions had been curious, intellectually provocative, but they did not strike a deep chord in Conrad. Not even the original story itself would do for the inner tale he had to tell, and for this reason Conrad had to

change the circumstances of the wildly chaotic pilgrim-ship incident into a calm, controlled experiment with ideal laboratory conditions in order to examine his own deepest fears. Then one day an event took place that made conditions propitious. The experiment could now proceed, the story now be written.

V

Joseph Conrad and Stephen Crane met for the first time on 15 October 1897 in London. Crane, in England following the success there of *The Red Badge of Courage*, had asked to meet the author of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, "which was then appearing in serial form. Conrad, who considered the younger man (Crane was then twenty-six and Conrad nearly forty) his "senior" as an author, was deeply flattered. Years later he would write that upon reading *The Red Badge of Courage* he had felt "Here's a man who may understand [*The Nigger*] – if he ever sees the book."⁹

As soon as Conrad had obtained the proofs of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* in novel form, he sent them to Crane. He was not disappointed in the latter's enthusiastic reaction. On 16 November 1897 Conrad wrote back:

If I've hit you with the death of Jimmy I don't care if I don't hit another man. . . . When I feel depressed about it I say to myself "Crane likes the damned thing" – and am greatly consoled. What your appreciation is to me I renounce to explain. (Norton *NN*, 184)

That these dissimilar individuals, both writers, hit it off so well in person is remarkable. Yet a strong friendship did begin that October day between the sophisticated, expatriate Pole and the ex-patriate American, blue-eyed son of a Methodist pastor, fourteenth child in a family of seven surviving boys¹⁰ and two girls. It was a friendship that only Crane's death, less than three years later, would bring to an end. The closeness between the two was obvious in Edward Garnett's description of Conrad:

There were two natures interwoven . . . one, feminine, affectionate, responsive, clear-eyed; the other, masculine, formidably critical, fiercely ironical, dominating, intransigent. . . . he would boil over suddenly while attempting to conceal his violent distaste; and the person who had awakened this mood would go away and circulate some alarming legend about his intractability.

Conrad's moods of gay tenderness could be quite seductive. On the few occasions that I saw him with Stephen Crane he was delightfully sunny, and bantered "poor Steve" in the gentlest, most affectionate style, while the latter sat silent, Indian-like, turning inquiring eyes under his chiseled brow, now and then jumping up suddenly and confiding some new project with intensely electric feeling. . . . And Conrad's skeptical answers were couched in the tenderest, most reluctant tone. I can still hear the shades of Crane's poignant friendliness in his cry "Joseph!" And Conrad's delight in Crane's personality glowed in the shining warmth of his brown eyes. ¹¹

Conrad's own affectionate descriptions of his young friend seem to find parallels in Marlow's observations of young Jim. Out of context, it is often difficult to determine whether Conrad was writing about Crane or Jim.

"these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open, bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair . . . this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness." (*LJ*, 48)

I had already sensed the man's intense earnestness underlying his quiet surface. Every time he raised his eyes that secret quality (for his voice was careless) of his soul was betrayed in a clear flash. Most of the true Stephen Crane was in his eyes . . . though it was apparent also in his other features, as for instance in the structure of his forehead, the deep solid arches under the fair eyebrows. (Conrad's introd. to Beer's *Stephen Crane*, 6)

"To watch his face was like watching a darkening sky before a clap of thunder, shade upon shade imperceptibly coming on, the gloom growing mysteriously intense in the calm of maturing violence." (*LJ*, 44)

On a certain occasion . . . I said to him, "Stevie, you brood like a distant thunder-cloud." He had retired early to the other end of the room, and from there had sent out, now and then, a few words, more like the heavy drops of rain that precede the storm than growls of thunder. Poor Crane if he could look black enough at times, never thundered; though I have no doubt he could have been dangerous if he had liked. (Introd., *SC*, 8)

Conrad and Crane, both living in the English countryside, often exchanged visits. Conrad related how on occasion he would be in the same room with Crane while the latter worked at his daily writing stint.

I would take a book and settle myself at the other end of the same table, with my back to him; and for two hours or so not a sound would be heard in that room. . . . He would have covered three of his large sheets with his regular, legible, perfectly controlled, handwriting. (Introd., *SC*, 27)

This image of an intense, self-conscious writer like Conrad sitting and reading a book within the creative field of another working author is arresting. There is a kind of mirror reflection of these extraordinary moments in *Lord Jim*. As Marlow recounts:

"I steered [Jim] into my bedroom, and sat down at once to write letters. This was the only place in the world . . . where he could have it out with himself without being bothered by the rest of the universe. The damned thing – as he had expressed it – had not made him invisible, but I behaved exactly as though he were. No sooner in my chair I bent over my writing desk like a medieval scribe, and, but for the movement of the hand holding the pen, remained anxiously quiet. . . . I wrote and wrote. . . . At times I stole a sidelong glance. He was rooted to the spot, but convulsive shudders ran down his back. . . . He was fighting, he was fighting. . . . and though, when the scratching of my pen stopped for a moment, there was complete silence and stillness in the room." (*LJ*, 104-5)

After writing the sketch “Tuan Jim”¹² in May 1898, Conrad put aside the pilgrimage story for several months during which he worked on other major writing projects in a frenzy of activity. It was not until July 1899 that he sent his publisher the first five chapters of *Lord Jim*. During those months many things had happened in the lives of Stephen and Cora Crane.

In the spring of 1898, a few months after the two writers first met, the Spanish-American war broke out in Cuba. Crane, a war correspondent by profession, was desperate to get to Cuba, afraid the war might end before he could raise the money for sea passage. It is a well-known story how on a cloudy afternoon he and Conrad went rushing about London together trying to find someone who would lend Crane the necessary sixty pounds. Finally it occurred to Conrad to introduce Crane to William Blackwood and Sons, where he was able to borrow fifty pounds against a guarantee put up by Conrad (introd., *SC*, 32).

Stephen left for Cuba in April 1898 and did not return to England until the following January. During the months he was out of the country, Conrad laid aside his plans to write *Lord Jim*. Nevertheless, the story was not dormant; during Crane’s absence circumstances occurred which would weave the relationship between Conrad and Crane, and Crane and Jim, ever deeper into the fabric of the novel.

Instead of returning from Cuba immediately after the war, Crane dropped out of sight in Havana, leaving Cora penniless, hounded by creditors, and perfectly frantic. While he stayed on in Cuba, writing stories and articles and having a love affair, Cora wrote to Crane’s literary agent, publishers, and friends, pleading with them to help her find and bring back Stephen, whom she feared dead or very ill.

Conrad was constantly in touch with Cora during this time. While “utterly in the dark” regarding Crane’s circumstances, he tried to find money to enable him to return. Conrad must have wondered at his American friend’s irresponsible behavior, but while sympathizing with Cora he never condemned Stephen. Later he would echo this bizarre episode in *Lord Jim*. In the Patusan part of the novel, Jewel, Jim’s woman, becomes obsessed with the idea that Jim will leave her. She seeks reassurance from poor Marlow, who is at a loss as to how to relieve her anxiety.

“It was a wonderful experience. She mistrusted his very slumbers – and she seemed to think I could tell her why! Thus a poor mortal seduced by the charm of an apparition might have tried to wring from another ghost the tremendous secret of the claim the other world holds over a disembodied soul astray amongst the passions of this earth. . . . Women find their inspiration in the stress of moments that for us are merely awful, absurd, or futile.” (*LJ*, 192)

Although Stephen Crane returned to England and to Cora, and although Jim did not abandon Patusan or Jewel, it was not long after these events that both did at last leave their women, through death.

When Crane returned from Cuba he was physically very altered, suffering from

malaria and tuberculosis. It was the beginning of the end for the young writer, who would die eighteen months later at the age of twenty-nine. Years later, Conrad wrote of his personal feelings of guilt in the matter of helping Crane get to Cuba:

I feel as though that afternoon I had led him by the hand to his doom. But, indeed, I was only the blind agent of the fate that had him in her grip. Nothing could have held him back. He was ready to swim the ocean. (Introd., *SC*, 32-33)

While Conrad may have understood intellectually that he was not to blame for what had happened to Crane, his persisting childhood guilt over the death of his mother – and of his father, who died of tuberculosis when Conrad was eleven – may have deepened his sense of responsibility for the fatal illness of his friend. One can understand therefore why his original intentions concerning *Lord Jim*, intentions modeled in part upon the theme of courage in *The Red Badge of Courage*, became subverted, after Crane became fatally ill, by the theme of guilt and abandonment. Once again someone Conrad loved was dying; once again he felt responsible for the death and was helpless to do anything about it.

It was during a long, extravagant house party organized by Cora for Stephen at the turn of the century that Crane suffered a severe lung hemorrhage, signaling to his friends that his days were numbered. A week after this terrible episode, on January 7, Conrad sent chapter 18 of *Lord Jim* to his publisher. Presumably he then sat down and wrote chapter 19, the chapter in which the novel goes into its second part, when Conrad/Marlow suddenly decides to send Jim away to the island of Patusan.

Conrad had helped his friend find money to take him to war-torn Cuba, where his health deteriorated. Just as Conrad had introduced Crane to Blackwood, who advanced money for the trip to Cuba, so, in *Lord Jim*, Marlow introduces Jim to Stein, a merchant-cum-entomologist, who arranges Jim's passage to the war-torn island of Patusan, where he eventually dies. This echo in *Lord Jim* of the real-life event is nothing less than an eloquent and anguished attestation of Conrad's true feelings regarding his role in Stephen Crane's death.

It is startling to consider that on 25 November 1899, less than two weeks before Conrad began chapter 19 of his forty-five-chapter novel, he was telling his publisher that the "Story" would "be finished of course this year" (Norton *LJ*, 297). Conrad was not only unable to finish it, he was about to begin an entirely new phase of the novel without apparently knowing it, a phase with which he was not at all happy. As he wrote in a letter dated 14 February 1900, "My head is full (too full) of Jim's end but when it comes to putting it down black on white the brain wanders. When I start 10 days will be enough to finish the thing" (Norton *LJ*, 300). Instead of ten days, completing the novel took him another five months.

No one has suggested a good reason for Conrad turning what had originally started out as a short story into a lengthy novel. But it is possible that the progress and

outcome of the story – Jim’s very fate – had become inextricably involved with the fate of Stephen Crane. Had Crane recovered from his illness, would Jim have died? Could Conrad possibly have ended the novel sooner, abandoning Crane to his fate? Conrad had become caught up in a terrible contest with death; subconsciously he may have felt that as long as Jim lived, Stephen Crane would not die. For, just as Conrad held himself responsible for the deaths of his parents, and blamed himself for the fatal illness of his young friend, so might he have felt responsible for – *and capable of* – keeping Stephen Crane alive.

If so, in this fight against death his pen had been commandeered by forces beyond his imagination and control. Intellectually he wanted to finish *Lord Jim*; emotionally he could not. On 12 April he wrote to Blackwood:

I . . . assure you that *Lord Jim* has an end. . . . and I am now trying to write it out. . . . A dog’s life! . . . I am . . . in such a state of mind about the story – so inextricably mixed up with it in my daily life – that I feel unequal to doing the cutting myself. (Norton *LJ*, 301)

As Frederick Karl puts it, “Remarkable to us is how still, almost deathlike, the rest of Conrad’s life became as Jim took over his hours and weeks. . . . Everything almost literally stopped for Conrad except production of copy.”¹³

It was a “contest” that would last six months. On 16 May Joseph Conrad traveled to Dover on the English coast for a last visit with his dying friend. Crane was in a hotel there awaiting sea passage to Germany, acquiescing to Cora’s frantic hope of saving his life through a change of climate.

“It is the end, Jess,” Conrad said to his wife. “He knows it is all useless.” . . . Stephen before the open window had turned his pillowed head to stare at the sails of a cutter yacht gliding across the sea, “like a dim shadow against the grey sky, and that was the last glimpse Conrad had of him.”¹⁴

Crane died a few weeks later. It was now time to bring *Lord Jim* to a conclusion, but first Conrad sent Marlow to Patusan to see Jim for the last time. After this scene Marlow ceases to be the narrator, though the novel continues for several more chapters. Marlow describes his last moments with Jim, who has accompanied him to the coast on the first stage of his journey back:

“He was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back, the sea at his feet, the opportunity by his side – still veiled. What do you say? Was it still veiled? I don’t know. For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma. The twilight was ebbing fast from the sky above his head, the strip of sand had sunk already under his feet, he himself appeared no bigger than a child – then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world. . . . And, suddenly, I lost him. . . .” With these words Marlow had ended his narrative. . . . (*LJ*, 204)

A month after Stephen Crane died, Conrad sent his family away to London and worked through the night. With the sunrise he wrote the final words to the story of *Lord Jim*. It is likely that he never knew what forces had guided his pen.

New York City

¹ *Lord Jim*, ed. Thomas Moser, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 2. Subsequent citations to this edition in the text are indicated by *LJ*; hereafter, we have distinguished between quotations from the text of *Lord Jim* and the supplementary material in the Norton edition by adding “Norton” to citations from the latter.

² *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 34.

³ The color white is a recurring symbol in Conrad’s writings, and it is doubtful that the sight of A. P. Williams’s clothing would have produced such a profound effect on the author as to cause this. In the first pages of Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly*, Almayer recalls himself twenty years earlier “clad all in white and modest looking.” Norman Sherry, *Conrad’s Eastern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966), ch. 4, offers no evidence confirming the relatives’ claims. He does provide a few photographs whose contents are highly speculative (and in which Williams was not wearing white). The significance of other particulars in this description will be considered later in this essay.

⁴ Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 266-68.

⁵ *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* ed. Robert Kimbrough, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 32. Further citations in the text to this edition are indicated by *NN*; again, we have distinguished between quotations from the text of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and supplementary material in the Norton edition by adding “Norton” to citations from the latter.

⁶ Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, E. Hudson Long, and revised by Donald Pizer, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 18; hereafter cited in the text as *RB*.

⁷ *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 364.

⁸ Joseph Conrad, *The Sisters*, introd. Ford Madox Ford (New York: Crosby Gaige, 1928), p.28.

⁹ Conrad, introd., *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters*, by Thomas Beer (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1923), p. 4; hereafter cited in the text as *Introd., SC*.

¹⁰ I have already remarked that Norman Sherry’s case for A. P. Williams as the prototype for Jim includes the information that he was blue-eyed, the son of a parson, and one of a large number of boys in his family.

¹¹ Garnett, introd., *Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924*, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928), pp. 10, 11-12

¹² One fascinating, if highly speculative, reason for “Lord” replacing “Tuan” might relate to the fact that in the month Conrad came up with the title “Lord” Jim (May 1898) Stephen Crane was offered Brede Manor as a residence. “Manor” naturally suggests “Lord,” and there was some banter along these lines between Crane and his friends in July 1898. See Charles Michelson, introd., *“The Open Boat” and Other Tales, Vol. 12 of The Work of Stephen Crane*, ed. Wilson Follett (New York: Knopf, 1926), pp. xvi-xvii.

¹³ Karl, *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 495, 500.

¹⁴ R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Biography* (New York: Braziller, 1968), p. 511.