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“This Amazing Jim-Myth” : From Mythology to Mythography in Conrad's *Lord Jim*

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Although Joseph Conrad was born in the eastern part of Europe, he was fully aware of the classical literary background of the West. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was a poet who translated, among others, Vigny, Hugo, and Shakespeare (and Jim has in his possession “a half-crown complete Shakespeare”, 143). It comes therefore as no surprise to find his novels replete with mythological references. In *Lord Jim* the mythical allusions play a particular role in that they serve as a backdrop, or even a standard, against which Jim's character, his thoughts and actions, are measured. Conrad always makes clear the fact that Jim is evolving in a fictional universe. Besides, the plot itself is made up of multiple layers of reports, both oral and written, produced by a great variety of witnesses and speakers. *Lord Jim* is also famous for its intricate narrative structure mediated by the voice of these speakers. The traditional mythological background (Biblical myths, Greek myths and Jim's dyed-in-the-wool romantic world of values) thus co-operates with the embedded narratives and rumours in a process of mythologisation, in the structuralist sense of the word “myth”, giving birth to the writing of “this amazing Jim-myth” (168).

The mythological background

The genre of *Lord Jim* – “a tale” – is very close to the form taken by a myth, and the two terms are very often used loosely as synonyms. A tale, like a myth, is characterised by its orality, is delivered through an oral performance – a “yarn”, as Conrad puts it in his note (5). A tale is also a genre with the potential to offer symbolic and allegoric explanations. Indeed, this dimension is emphasised in *Lord Jim* by the multiple parallelisms and symmetries drawn between Jim and his spectators with motifs like “in the ranks” and “one of us”. Moreover, Conrad endows carefully selected concepts with a symbolic aura through the device of capitalisation: the “Unknown” (183), the “Ever-undiscovered country” (200), the “Inconceivable” (59), the “Irrational that lurks at the bottom of every thought, sentiment, sensation, motion” (75), or “Truth” and “Beauty” (131). The plot, then, evolves “in the abstract” (7). The epigraph by Novalis – “It is certain that my conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it” – implies that a belief (a “conviction”) shared by a community of people acquires a new strength *ipso facto*. Therefore, stories tend to gain autonomy when they belong to a community, which is the case with myths. Now the texture

of *Lord Jim* incorporates a web of mythological allusions. Elements of the Biblical “prototexts” are mentioned by Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, who casts, for instance, Jim as Adam and Cornelius as the serpent (500-1). Jim’s universe is also permeated by Greek myths. His fate has been forcibly compared to that of Œdipus by Dorothy Van Ghent (Van Ghent, 229-44). Jim “burst[s] into a Homeric peal of laughter” (160) and Jewel is compared to a Sphinx (183). Jim meets with strange “Argonauts” (103), and reaches a sort of “Arcadian happiness” (106), before finding the river “Styx” (185) on his way. Another pregnant Greek myth embedded in *Lord Jim* is that of Orestes, as it appears in Æschyles’ tragic trilogy the *Oresteia*. After he murders his mother, Orestes is harrowed by guilt and goes into exile, pursued by the divinities of revenge, the Erinyes. Orestes turns into a vagabond until Athena pleads for his mercy. Jim’s Oresteian flight towards the rising sun, as he tries to escape his past, goes along with his being repeatedly designated as a “beggar” (44, 53, 227), a “vagabond” (30, 108, 167), or a “tramp” (108). Possessed with a “haunted soul” (118), he is described as “an erring spirit” (130), a “rolling stone” whose “circle of wanderings” has a diameter of “three thousand miles” (119). Like Orestes, he is forced to leave his natural element, the sea, and he becomes “a seaman in exile from the sea” (8). The sea itself is compared to the Erinyes or Furies who pursue Orestes: “these elemental furies are coming at him with a purpose of malice, with a strength beyond control, with an unbridled cruelty that means to tear out of him his hope and his fear, the pain of his fatigue and his longing for rest” (11). The tragic dimension of Jim’s fate is underlined throughout the novel: Jim falls prey to a “directing spirit of perdition” (23); Marlow perceives “the working of the implacable destiny of which we are the victims – and the tools” (190). Jim’s personal enemy is not so much a person as the disembodied Dark Powers (75, 148, 210, 242). They have “[robbed] Jim twice of his peace” and Brown is their “blind accomplice”.

Of bovarism and knights

Another thread in the mythological web is that of Romance. *Lord Jim* presents the hero’s great expectations from the outset. The narrator describes the heroic demeanour of Jim’s dreams, where he is “as unflinching as a hero in a book” (9). Jim’s story is steeped in Romanticism. He is irretrievably romantic and “that is very bad – very bad.... Very good, too”, Stein says (131). Jim is diagnosed romantic, but the diagnosis is made by Stein, who is himself extremely romantic, to the extent of choosing for his daughter the same first name as that of Flaubert’s heroine Emma Bovary (126). More precisely, Jim embodies a masculine type of Bovarism: he sees the Bugis as “people in a book” (156), and his adventures are “like

something you read of in books” (141). Marlow concedes: they are “fit materials for a heroic tale” (136). Jim is a daydreamer who “[projects himself] headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations” (53). His “imaginative head” (61) foresees “to the very last harrowing detail” the panic which is going to happen on the *Patna* if he sets the alarm. Just before he jumps, he is completely submerged by “a tumult of events and sensations which beat about him like the sea upon a rock” (68). After he has been rescued, he thinks he will be scolded like a child, but he is wrong: “So there had been no shouting. Imagination.” (83). His imagination is his malediction: “as if [...] our imagination [...] could set loose upon us the might of an overwhelming destiny” (203).

But Jim's adventures are for him a quest for redemption, a crusade to show the good of his character against the backcloth of “lost honour” (6) pitched in a medieval setting. The French Lieutenant probably belongs to the French Navy, “La Royale”, as it was still called at that time because of its die-hard nostalgia for a monarchy. In a grotesquely eloquent outburst, the French Lieutenant asserts: “But the honour – the honour, monsieur!... The honour... that is real – that is! And what life may be worth when”... [...] “when the honour is gone – ah ça! par exemple” (91).

In Jim's world, Stein is “chivalrous” (207), and Marlow, like “a medieval scribe” (104), sends Jim on a “quest” (200) where he can seek for the hypothetical Grail of his illusions, and forget the “piece of parchment” of his now cancelled certificate (105). Like a knight in Patusan, Lord Jim has to give his word “for anything and everything” (160), even when it is not necessary (“Pon my word, it's true!”, 160 ; 161). In the new “regions so well known to his imagination” (11), where love and treasure converge into one and the same person (Jewel, chapter 28), Jim is gifted with “supernatural powers” by his legend (159). On his way, he meets professional sorcerers (old Sura, 159) and witches (Doramin's wife, 164); while the “forlorn magician” (187) that is Marlow tries to practise an “exorcism” (188) on Jewel, in order to ward off her anxiety. Jim and Jewel are “like knight and maiden meeting to exchange vows amongst haunted ruins” (185). Another important element of this medieval setting is the talismanic ring transmitted from Doramin to Stein, then to Jim, then to Dain Waris, to whom it brings bad luck. If Jim's death is very romantic, the disguised suicide belongs to the aristocratic vein of *Lord Jim*. When honour is lost, there is nothing one can do any more: “Fight! What for?”, Jim answers Jewel, who entreats him to save his life, “I have no life” (242). Entangled in two worlds with their respective values – rejected by one, a stranger in the

other – Jim has a propensity for remaining passive: “his feet remained glued to the planks if his thoughts were knocking about loose in his head” (67)¹. Indeed, ironically enough, *Lord Jim* is the story of a hero who never acts but is always acted upon – this is the reason why being romantic can be “very bad too”. Marlow also makes a good diagnosis: it was “as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke” (68). “Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors” (12) is the one to blame.

Fascination plays a great role in the mythological process: if Marlow is not fatally paralysed by his “young brother” (i.e. Jim, 135), Big Briery, as A. J. Guerard says, “had recognized in Jim an unsuspected potential self. He had looked into himself for the first time” (405). And this is Jim's paralysing identification with Brown that will lead him to his death. Gentleman Brown's questions (“What made you come?”) and his words – “This is as good a jumping-off place for me as another” (227) or “[when] it came to saving one's life in the dark, we didn't care who else went – three, thirty, three hundred people” (229) – fill Jim with sad remembrances and doubts about his being better than Brown: “and there ran through the raw talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience, a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and their hearts” (229). Though Jim's claim to being good is as strong as Brown's claim to being evil, Jim is yielding little by little. Brown is Jim's other self: Jim cannot resist the evil because the evil is within himself. Hence Jim's indulgence: “They were evil-doers, but their destiny had been evil too” (233). As he endeavours to explain to Jewel, who asks if they are bad: “Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others” (234). Therefore, Jim falls under the spell of his double in the Manichean kingdom of romance. Thus, Jim stands out against a mythological backdrop which gains momentum as it develops over a “disjointed narrative” (71).

“Time out of joint”

Lord Jim is fragmented, especially on the edges: the first four chapters originate from an omniscient narrator, and there is a gap of one month with a crucial event passed over in silence between chapters 3 and 4; then Marlow takes over the narrative until the end, but in chapter 36, his oral narrative ends and is followed by a written one, the letters that are sent to

¹ “Perdu qu'il est dans un rêve plus glorieux que cette réalité, [Jim est] absent de son corps, coupé de ses réflexes, séparé de l'action” (Mayoux, 137).

the “privileged man”. The distortion of the narrative structure and of its time-frame is due to the mediation of the various narrators. Jim’s story as told by himself through Marlow dramatises the fictionalisation of a reality. In *Lord Jim*, there is such an intricacy of evidence gathered all through the years and told in the seeming disorder of Marlow’s associative trains of thought that it is compulsory to go to and fro in time. It tends to reduce its “actuality”, as Marlow says, but it increases its “extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time” (84). The construction of the novel relies heavily on the deconstruction of the chronological axis, with as many temporal units as there are times when Marlow evokes a different character. There is always the possibility for the reader to build it up again by getting hold of the data interspersed throughout the novel, as is shown by Dwight H. Purdy (384-6). *Lord Jim*’s chronology spans about fifteen years, from Jim’s apprenticeship to Marlow’s account of Jim’s downfall to the privileged man. But the events which are given a particular emphasis span six years, from the *Patna*’s departure to Jim’s death. And in these six years, three events are emphasised: the *Patna* episode and its aftermath, Jim’s arrival in Patusan and his apparent redemption (as an anticlimax in the story), and finally the Gentleman Brown episode. One could therefore reach quite a precise temporal date for the setting of each event, but this would go against the grain of Conrad’s poetic goal and spoil the process of mythologisation enacted in the novel.

Thus the narrative structure experiences moments of expansion as opposed to moments of contraction. Almost everything is announced by prolepsis, and the most spectacular aspect of this is to be seen in relation to the two parts of Jim’s life. The first prolepsis occurs on the second page of the novel, and, in a huge condensation, sums up Jim’s life from his jump (at that moment still unnamed) to his consecration in Patusan, before stopping short and, in a flashback, jolting the reader back to Jim’s origins. The prolepsis leaves the reader perplexed. Only retrospectively can s/he know that this is a prolepsis, for the device of summing up a large fraction of time (as occurs for instance at the beginning of chapter 2) is most commonly used in order to pass over events of lesser interest. But the reader is all the more intrigued as *these* events seem to demand a proper scrutiny: what is this “fact”? What is Jim’s “deplorable faculty”? And how has he become Tuan Jim?

In chapter 16, Jim’s success in Patusan is announced: “The time was coming when I would see him loved, trusted, admired, with a legend of strength and prowess” (106). So far we have been following Jim’s mishaps and pangs of conscience and we are wondering about the way

in which he can cope with his situation. The wind of change, predicted on the second page of the novel, is eagerly awaited, and even then, when the reader comes closer to the point, questions are raised: under which circumstances has he risen from the common rags of opinion to the riches of fame and adulation? The question about his redemption remains at this point unanswered.

Consequently, in the process of the story, analepses and prolepses oblige the readers to adapt and focus their former knowledge with the help of the new data that is being provided. For instance, Jim's life at the beginning of the novel is analeptically expounded: at the same time as his dreams and ambitions are told, it is revealed that when he was doing his apprenticeship (9-10), he already missed a first opportunity to behave bravely. The anecdote raises the following questions: are his efforts to be brave mere pretences? Is he not a coward at heart? Then, as Marlow offers him a chance to speak, and as the fascination that emanates from Jim through Marlow's eyes and subtle comments ever increases (61, 76, 106), the view we had of him has to be adapted.

Moreover, the novel has sudden, sometimes abrupt, accelerations and decelerations of tempo, whose purpose is to build up the dream-like quality of the tale and its disturbing unfamiliarity. The introduction of Jim in the first two pages of *Lord Jim* begins with an anonymous physical portrait. There follows a description of his job as a water-clerk and what it consists of – then the reader learns the first name of the eponymous hero for the first time. And suddenly, in less than two paragraphs, there is an accumulation of events and beliefs about Jim (8). At an extreme speed, chapters 1 to 35 are summed up in a sweeping prolepsis embracing everything from Jim's curse to Jim's success in Patusan. The nature of the curse is not known (“a fact”, Conrad could not be more unspecific); neither do we know the reason why he has to remain incognito and abandon several jobs to go “farther East” to the Malay jungle village. If one can foresee an Oresteian motif in Jim's flight, the sudden accumulation of information about him is nevertheless baffling, because most of it has no explanation: his “black ingratitude”, his “exquisite sensibility.” What is the point of such a flood of information if it is not explained a little? Jim’s sensibility can only be related to this mysterious “fact”. The parabola of his trajectory – his fall, rise and fall – therefore stands as a kind of parable of his story, as the narrator of *Youth* (1902) makes clear at the very first page of the novella: “You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence.”

The maximal acceleration of time is conveyed within the narrative by an ellipsis. This is what happens between chapters 3 and 4. While chapters 2 and 3 are in perfect continuity, chapter 4 shifts “one month or so” forwards. The aim is to delay the information about the “fact” which has not yet been tackled. Again, the reader is left in perplexity. Another particular instance of acceleration with a Flaubertian quality occurs at the beginning of chapter 2:

After two years of training he went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventures. He made many voyages. He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water: he had to bear the criticism of men, the exactions of sea, and the prosaic severity of the daily task that gives bread – but whose only reward is in the perfect love of work.
(11)²

In the longest sentence of this paragraph, Jim's ambivalence is pinpointed in the opposition of “magic” *versus* “prosaic”, and by his dreams which are put to the test of harsh reality – but not really tested, in fact, “by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man” (11).

Therefore, the sense of ominous malaise regarding Jim comes from the fits and starts with which the narrative progresses. The *Patna* episode is also told through a distortion of the actual time-frame. All in all, from the shock against the floating wreck to the unfortunate decision to “jump”, the whole episode lasts twenty-seven minutes (23). Jim in his narrative harps: “No time! No time!” (55, 57) so that the four fugitives believe they have escaped “Ju-ju-st in ti-ti-me... Brrrrr” (70). Strikingly enough, this moment is extended to a great length by Jim's acute sensitiveness from chapter 7 to chapter 12. The very epiphanic core of this is the end of chapter 9: Jim has jumped into the lifeboat, in the middle of “a pitchy blackness”, in “an everlasting hole”. The inverse climax is stressed by the silence: “a silence of the sea, of the sky merged into one indefinite immensity still as death” (71). There is a total obfuscation of the senses: “You couldn't distinguish the sea from the sky; there was nothing to see and nothing to hear. Not a glimmer, not a shape, not a sound” (71). Time seems to have stopped for a while, to remain suspended. Jim's wish for suicide (74) is in this respect to be paralleled

² Compare with Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, chapter 6, part III.

with Brierly's successful suicide attempt that takes the shape of his “gold chronometer watch carefully hung under the rail by its chain” (41). The scene conflates and conjures up the images of a hanged man, and of timeless eternity; and as the gold of the watch reminds the reader of Brierly's worth, it stands as a symbol of the vanity of all things. The whirling of time and its infernal encircling, as infernal as the ring given to Jim, prevails and hangs ominously over the narrative.

Mythemes

Intertwined in the mythological plane, juxtaposed plots reinforce Jim’s myth. Now it is opportune to recall Claude Lévi-Strauss’s conception of the myth. In *Anthropologie structurale*, he argues that a myth is not a fact but a product or, better, a process. A myth is the sum total of all its different versions. These versions are called “mythemes” by Lévi-Strauss³. Marlow’s narrative is made up of several sources which work like mythemes. These sources are quoted by him explicitly, for instance Archie Ruthvel, on the report of the four fugitives (chapter 5), Brierly and Mr Jones (chapter 6), the French lieutenant (for whom many things “have remained obscure”, 147), or Brown on Jim's downfall (chapter 37). Some characters seem to be the emanations or “avatars” (96) of Jim’s janiform personality⁴. For instance, the case of Brierly (chapter 6) takes up more specifically the motif of honour hovering about Jim. Marlow tells us about Brierly's last days through Mr Jones (chapter 6), who, in his turn, reports Brierly's behaviour and his last words before his suicide. Like Jim, there is more to Brierly than meets the eye. He is first described as “Big Brierly” (38), a very successful captain: “He had never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident, never a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust” (38). But Jim’s affair “destroys [his] confidence” (45) and he commits suicide. “Honour” is also the leitmotif of the French lieutenant (chapters 12 and 13) who tells the story of Little Bob Stanton (chapter 13). Little Bob Stanton embodies heroism – but his sole reward is death by drowning. Gentleman Brown is Lord Jim’s other face. Where Brown is but a surname, Jim is only a first name. Whereas Jim is eager to achieve greatness, Brown performs barbarous and treacherous deeds. A common trait in a myth is the presence of a totem, an animal endowed with a symbolic meaning and function. In *Lord Jim*, the animal metaphor which is given the most prominence

³ Lévi-Strauss, 235-265.

⁴ To describe the inherent duality of Conrad’s characters and plots, Cedric Watts (1984) coined the word “janiformity”, after Janus, the two-headed Roman divinity symbolizing ambiguity.

is the beetle-butterfly one, which begins explicitly when Stein the collector is introduced (chapter 20). From chapter 20 onwards, almost all the characters are to be seen through the beetle/butterfly paradigm. A butterfly is a creature of air, of elevation, of the ideal, as opposed to the beetle that crawls on the earthly mud. Between the horns of this dilemma, beetle or butterfly, stands Jim. Jim is repeatedly compared to a butterfly, and as butterflies do not want to meddle with beetles, Jim endeavours to be a creature of purity above the dirty crowd. In Patusan, “he appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence” (138). He is opposed to Cornelius who is “a loathsome insect” (171), who walks with a “slow laborious walk [that] resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle” (170). Brown also feels the difference between him and Jim : “You talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth” (227). But Jim is trapped by Brown on “the muddy bed of a creek” (226) and returns to the condition of a beetle.

Stereoscopy

Along with the ambivalence of the symbolic imagery, the numerous and at times embedded testimonies contribute to give relief to Jim's story. Marlow acknowledges : “My information was fragmentary, but I've fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture” (203). Conrad defended his style by advocating his “unconventional grouping and perspective”, which produces a fluidity “depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective⁵.” By means of various digressions, Conrad gradually reveals different facets of the events. This is what Ian Watt has called “thematic apposition⁶” and Jacques Darras “dramatic short-cuts”: “Conrad imagines subplots which he does not develop according to traditional models as counterpoint to the main action, but which he stops short or cuts off once he has made his point⁷”. Marlow's presentation of numerous side characters produces juxtapositions whose goal is to shed a corrective light, upstream and downstream in the narrative. Thus Schomberg, “an irrepressible retailer of all the scandalous gossip of the place”, provides “an adorned version of the story to any guest who cared to imbibe knowledge along with the more costly liquors” (119), whereas later on Cornelius gives “his own version of Jim's character” to Gentleman Brown (218). The effect achieved by these superimposed reports is that of a “stereoscopic

⁵ Letter to Richard Curle (July 14, 1923), in Curle, 150.

⁶ Watt, 271.

⁷ Darras, 81. See also Fernandez, 101: “La réalité semble composée de pièces rapportées cousues ensemble tant bien que mal par l'auteur, mais quel art se cache sous cet apparent désordre!”

relief⁸”, or as if Jim were seen through “a damaged kaleidoscope” (96). The reader must be continuously vigilant to make sure of a correct interpretation. We can quote Hugh Clifford speaking about “the Genius of Mr. Joseph Conrad”: “*Lord Jim* resembles nothing more nearly than some delicate piece of mosaic, of which each of the myriad tiny fragments that compose it is essential to the whole” (396). The technique entails a relativity which is constant in Conrad's work: “Such sudden corrective juxtaposition is at once the novel's characteristic way of redressing a balance of meaning and its chief way of moving us emotionally”, as A. J. Guerard puts it (408-9). But in addition to these reports, the rumours running through the narrative are another phenomenon which goes on to distort Jim's story a little bit more and to turn his predicament into a myth.

“Flying rumours”

The story about the mysterious “fact” turns into a rumour which spreads like wildfire in this region of the Pacific :

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 farther east. [...] He retreated in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact followed him casually but inevitably. Thus in the course of years he was known successively in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Penang, in Batavia – [...] even into the virgin forest (8)

His act of cowardice is all the more powerful in the imagination of the reader as it goes undescribed. Besides, Jim is deprived of his own story by the fact that it is now “public property” (29) : “The whole waterside talked of nothing else” (26). Jim firmly believes that his past will remain a secret, but it “was known to the very up-country logs on the river” (119). Only in Patusan can he find some relief. But then another rumour spreads around. The storming of the stockade endows him “with a legend of strength and prowess forming round his name as though he had been the stuff of a hero” (106). The “rumour” (166) has a distorting strength : “The popular story has it that Jim with a touch of one finger had thrown down the gate” (161). It goes so far as to transform Jewel into an actual diamond :

⁸ Fernandez, 101.

I discovered that a story was travelling slowly down the coast about a mysterious white man in Patusan who had got hold of an extraordinary gem – namely, an emerald of an enormous size, and altogether priceless. [...] The white man had obtained it, I was told, partly by the exercise of his wonderful strength and partly by cunning, from the ruler of a distant country, whence he had fled instantly, arriving in Patusan in utmost distress, but frightening the people by his extreme ferocity, which nothing seemed able to subdue. (167)

Henceforth, Jim's story has a life of its own : “Indeed this affair [...] seemed to live, with a sort of uncanny vitality, in the minds of men, on the tips of their tongues. [...] But if two men who, unknown to each other, knew of this affair met accidentally on any spot of this earth, the thing would pop up between them as sure as fate, before they parted” and would emerge “years afterwards, thousands of miles away, [...] from the remotest possible talk” (84). As a result of the blurring of the points of view, the narration takes on a kind of mythical status. All the text is to be apprehended as a whole where each part diffracts its meaning onto the others. Each narrator becomes a link in the chain of the embedded speakers which fades in the rumours. Marlow's function is that of a narrative hinge, a central prism, and a unifying memory⁹. It is through Marlow that Jim's experience is generalised, as in the “one of us” leitmotif: “[our youth] had resembled his youth” (35), “which of us here has not [...] experienced something of that feeling in his own person [...] ?” (56).

Thus, the artful layering of myths, the deconstruction of the narrative frame, the multiple speakers embodying as many mythemes, the rumours – all these phenomena contribute to turning Jim's story into a myth. There is a great consistency behind the appearance of fragmentation. The character himself is eminently “symbolic” (82) and is mythified alive : “He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom. I don't know why he should always have appeared to me symbolic. Perhaps this is the real cause of my interest in his fate” (159). The “reality of his existence” (246) is not actual but fictitious.

⁹ “[Marlow] joint Conrad à ses personnages – et il les sépare. Il met une distance qui objective cette humanité [...]. Il donne une consistance au je du narrateur, et de son effort créateur il fait une dimension supplémentaire du roman. Marlow, c'est un temps dans le roman. Bien mieux, c'est le seul temps réel. C'est le présent. *C'est la mémoire présente*” (Mayoux, 162).

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Conrad’s readership, like Marlow’s audience, agrees to become part of “the fellowship of [...] illusions” (79). Jim’s myth can be defined in Conrad’s own terms as a story that has got “beyond the writer’s control” (5) and whose “last word [...] probably shall never be said” (136).

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