

Conrad, Goethe and Stein: The Romantic Fate in Lord Jim

PAUL KIRSCHNER

WHEN Stein, that wise merchant and entomologist who serves as court of last appeal in *Lord Jim*, tells how he captured a rare butterfly which had eluded him for years, he sums up his emotion "in the words of the poet":

"So halt'ch's endlich denn in meinen Händen
Und nenn' es in gewissem Sinne mein."¹

("And so at last I hold it in my hands
And call it in a certain sense my own.")

Far from being mere borrowed cultural feathers, these lines from Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*² put Conrad's novel in fresh perspective by linking it with a great European literary figure and a perennial theme in German literature.

The lines are spoken by Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara, upon receiving Tasso's masterpiece *Jerusalem Delivered* from the poet's own hands. Both in Goethe's drama and in Stein's anecdote the words acquire a deep tinge of irony. Although Tasso attributes his masterpiece to the poetic gift conferred upon him by Nature, he insists that the poem belongs to his protector, Alfonso, "in every sense" (I, iii, 398). But the Duke's tenure is soon disputed when Tasso, mistrusting everyone, demands his poem back in order to perfect it, and even accuses the court of enticing his sole possession away from him. Ownership of the masterpiece ultimately eludes artist and patron alike. Similarly, Stein makes it clear that the sense in which he possessed his butterfly, "this masterpiece of Nature — the great Artist" (p. 208), was so limited as to be illusory. He goes on to recall that on the day of the capture he had all his heart could desire: youth, friendship, woman's love, a child,

"and even what I had once dreamed in my sleep had come into my hand, too!"

"He struck a match, which flared violently. His thoughtful placid face twitched once.

'Friend, wife, child,' he said, slowly, gazing at the small flame — 'phoo!' The match was blown out." (p. 211)

For Marlow, this dramatic reminder of ephemerality casts a shadow over Stein's energetic prescription to "follow the dream":

"The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn — or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls — over graves." (p. 215)

The world-pessimism and even the language of this crucial scene echo the Princess's cry in *Tasso*:

Fair indeed is the world! To and fro over its expanse moves so much that is good. Alas, that always it seems to retreat just a step beyond us and entice our anxious longing step by step unto our very graves! So seldom do human beings ever find what seems to have been meant for them; so seldom can they ever keep what their lucky hands once grasped! (III, ii, 1900-08)

There are many such correspondences in thought, feeling, and tone in the two works; but what makes Stein's citation significant is the fundamental closeness in theme. *Tasso* examines what Goethe called "the disproportion of talent to life": the artist's seeming illness or immaturity before the demands of ordinary relationships and practical action. If we legitimately assume that "talent" presupposes imagination, we are at the heart of *Lord Jim*.

Tasso's illness takes the form of suspiciousness verging on paranoia, which Alfonso attributes to the poet's unhealthy habit of solitude. Adopting medical language, Alfonso says he would prefer to seek a quick cure on the advice of a reliable physician. And in fact he proceeds somewhat like a psychotherapist, trying to strengthen Tasso's self-confidence and reason away his misapprehensions, so that on completing his poem Tasso will be "initiated into life" (I, ii, 292). But Tasso knows that it is only through imagination that he can

speak of valor with authority; he therefore dreams of a glorious union of poets and heroes, desiring above all to be accepted by Antonio, the Secretary of State, a man of action and practical experience in public affairs. Ironically, Tasso's own nature hinders such friendship. When Antonio is cool towards his poetic achievement Tasso takes offence and challenges the older man to a duel, incurring a social disgrace which he immediately magnifies out of all proportion. He sees himself treated like a criminal, a captive awaiting judgement, and provokes Antonio to ask exasperatedly, "Where are the boy's ravings taking him? In what colors does he paint his destiny and merit?" (II, v, 1599-1600). Even Tasso seems conscious of his childish behaviour. "The Prince is punishing me like a schoolboy," he protests, and asks the Countess Leonore if she thinks him so like a child that such a mishap could seriously upset him (IV, ii, 2274-78). Later he accuses Antonio of trying to "reduce me to a child" (IV, v, 2754-55), and asks theatrically, "Hasn't this man's arrival destroyed my destiny in a single hour? Hasn't it upturned the edifice of my happiness from its deepest foundations?" (IV, v, 2780-83). Tasso cannot see that his happiness had no foundation, because his quick spirit, as Antonio observes, "swings from one extreme to the other" (V, v, 3361).

Conrad's romantic young seaman is a more attractive figure than Goethe's hypersensitive court poet. Whereas Tasso is ungrateful, Jim embarrasses by his gratitude; whereas Tasso takes perverse pleasure in hating those who wish him well, Jim errs magnanimously in trusting a man who desires his destruction. Yet for all that, a family likeness is unmistakable. Medical analogies are used both by Alfonso and by Marlow, who compares his conference with Stein to "a medical consultation" (p. 212), with its diagnosis and prescription for cure. Stein's diagnosis of Jim, moreover, follows the rhetorical pattern of Antonio's analysis of Tasso: both proceed from similar philosophical speculation to corresponding psychological conclusions. Antonio begins by remarking that Man, given greater freedom by Nature to choose his food, eats and drinks intemperately, and

afterwards blames his illnesses on Nature and Fate. He then applies this general observation to Tasso's particular case: "It is certain that an intemperate life, just as it gives us wild, oppressive dreams, will at last make us dream in broad daylight. What else is his suspicion but a dream?" (V, i, 2918-21). Stein, after speculating on Man's anomalous place in Nature, first contrasts human restlessness with the butterfly's repose and then focusses on Jim with his axiom: "A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea" (p. 214). Antonio's description of Tasso fits Jim perfectly: "He sinks into himself as if the world were all within his heart and he were all-sufficient to himself within his world; and everything around him disappears for him" (III, iv, 2119-22). As with Tasso, there are frequent references to Jim's childishness or boyishness (pp. 180, 234 *et passim*). But above all, there is the egocentrism and self-exalting imagination which brings both would-be heroes to grief and exasperates those who try to help them. Antonio is provoked to exclaim: "How lightly this youth bears heavy burdens and shakes off faults like dust from a garment!" (II, iv, 1487-88). Jim, although he never forgets his disgrace, never admits his fault; and Marlow at one point finds that he is "thoroughly sick of him" (p. 235).

There are other parallels. When Antonio proposes a rest cure Tasso replies as Jim might have done, had he Tasso's gifts: "I am healthy when I can give myself to my own industry; and so, my own hard work will make me well again" (V, ii, 3063-65). But Alfonso is sceptical:

All that you think and do leads you deep within yourself. Around us lie many abysses dug by destiny, but the deepest is here within our hearts, and to hurl ourselves into it is delightful. (V, ii, 3072-76).

Stein prescribes for Jim along the lines Tasso suggests (the "industry" here resembling dream-work) and Marlow reacts with pessimism similar to Alfonso's:

"Yet for all that the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the centre, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames." (p. 215)

Alfonso's pessimism is again echoed when, after Jim's meeting with Brown, Marlow observes that "events move fast without a check, flowing from the very hearts of men like a stream from a dark source" (p. 389). Although Jim achieves genuine greatness by embracing his destiny, he does so by what in practical terms amounts to suicide. Tasso's reply to Alfonso again seems appropriate:

Forbid the silkworm to spin, while it spins on to its own death. It will evolve its precious web from its innermost self and will not cease until it has sealed itself in its own coffin. (V, ii, 3083-87).

Goethe's drama, however, ends more optimistically than Conrad's novel. When Tasso embraces the Princess only to be repulsed and then humiliated by the entrance of Alfonso and Antonio, he at first accuses the Princess herself of conspiring against him. But at last he begins to see that he is the author of his own exile; and when Antonio exhorts him, "Know what you are!" (V, v, 3420) Tasso finds his identity and strength as a poet: "One thing alone remains: tears have been given us by Nature . . . and to me, above all else, she left melody and speech in pain . . . while man in his torment grows dumb, a god gave me the power to tell how I suffer" (V, v, 3426-33). In Goethe's concluding nautical metaphor Tasso embraces Antonio, "the rock on which he was about to founder" (V, v, 3454).

Conrad charts a diametrically opposite course for Jim, who refuses to the end to "see things exactly as they are", as the amoral pragmatist Chester advises (p. 162). Instead, when his dream-world collapses he submits to the "destructive element" (p. 214) in its ultimate form: death on his own romantic terms. The triumph of the romantic idea becomes a triumph over the will to live, as if the optimism of "the poet" cited by Stein were being tempered by the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in which Conrad found satisfaction.⁴ But Jim, in his romantic expiation, also casts off Jewel, whose trust in him gave his life meaning; when she begs him to fight or flee he makes the same egoistic reply he made to her malevolent father Cornelius: "Nothing can touch me!" (pp. 413 & 293). Marlow, by contrast, is "immensely touched" (p. 309) by

Jewel's fear of losing Jim; he earlier remarks that Jim is aware of his position "with an intensity that made him touching: . . . I happened to be handy and I happened to be touched" (p. 223). The contrast between Jim's and Marlow's use of the word seems a deliberate irony.

A motif corresponding to Jim's desertion of Jewel may be seen in *Tasso*, where the Princess tries to dissuade Tasso from his perilous project of going to Naples. Earlier, she had foreseen that the poet would leave her:

. . . You [men] strive for distant possessions, and your striving must be violent. You dare to act for eternity, whereas we [women] want only a single, near, limited possession on this earth, and desire that it may remain faithful to us. Of no man's heart can we be sure, no matter how warmly it once surrendered to us. (II, i, 1024-31)

Jewel's resigned words to Marlow, "He has left me . . . you always leave us — for your own ends", while her eyes seek "the shape of a man torn out of her arms by the strength of a dream" (pp. 348 & 349), echo this sempiternal theme.

For this sin against life, however, not Jim but Stein is left to answer. "Some day she *shall* understand," Stein affirms of Jewel, but Marlow asks searchingly, "Will *you* explain?" (p. 350). It is no mere trick of rhetoric that Stein's diagnosis sounds in Marlow's ears during the tragic denouement, or that the novel ends with a tired gesture by the played-out student of Nature. For if no one, as Marlow observes, could be more romantic than Stein himself it follows that if Stein, who is also supremely practical, cannot find a way for the romantic to live, then no one can. In a sense Conrad faces the issue more squarely in *Lord Jim* than Goethe does in *Tasso*. "One thing alone" remains for Tasso: poetry. But Jim has no such convenient alternative. When Marlow calls him a "finished artist" (p. 96) in his power of evocation there may be a conscious recognition by Conrad of the artist theme, but it is in the world of practical human affairs that Jim must sink or swim. Stein's prescription — "One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!" (p. 212) — is not for poets only, but for all mankind; it challenges the "destructive element" not by simple exhortation but by immersion in action to objectify the inner world: a kind of homeopathy of the soul.

But if moral judgement on Jim is finally suspended, the philosophical verdict on Stein's intervention is clear. The attempt to "cure" the romantic by allowing him to lord it over a world of his own making not only fails but engenders new suffering. Stein may not have faltered on his own path, but Marlow attributes this partly to a physical courage that is "like a natural function of the body — say good digestion, for instance — completely unconscious of itself" (p. 203). If Stein's wisdom finally depends on a caprice of nature it can hardly provide a reliable formula for controlling the unconscious.

The absurdity is foreshadowed by verbal associations. After blowing out his illustrative match, Stein sighs and turns back to his butterflies:

"The frail and beautiful wings quivered faintly, as if his breath had for an instant called back to life that gorgeous object of his dreams.

'The work,' he began, suddenly, pointing to the scattered slips, and in his usual gentle and cheery tone, 'is making great progress. I have been this rare specimen describing. . . .'" (p. 211)

The "gorgeous object" of Stein's dreams recalls the "gorgeous virility" (p. 20) of Jim's heroic imaginings on the *Patna*. And later, when Marlow mentions Brierly's proposal that Jim creep underground and stay there, Stein looks attentively at Marlow as though he were a "rare insect" before remarking, "This could be done, too" (p. 219). An analogy has been drawn between Jim and one of Stein's butterflies,⁵ but it is more accurate to say that Stein approaches Jim's dreams in the same spirit in which he has sought to possess his own, and with comparable results. Jewel goes on leading a "soundless, inert life" (p. 416) in Stein's house after Jim's death, recalling the spurious animation of the dead butterflies. When Stein waves farewell to his collection he seems to be relinquishing the great illusion that life may finally be understood through the descriptive, systematizing operations of the intellect; or that a dream may be possessed in any real sense by the dreamer.

In making Stein the "eminently suitable person" (p. 203) for Marlow to consult, and in having Stein cite *Tasso*, Conrad implicitly acknowledged an eminently Goethean and a

traditional German theme: the tempting abyss between the gift of imagination and the ordinary demands and consolations of life.⁶ It is curious, in fact, that in citing his national poet Stein should refer to *Tasso* and not to a far more influential work, *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, to which *Lord Jim* is even closer in imagery, theme, structure, and motifs. In both novels external nature is used extensively to reflect the ambiguity of the romantic character and to disclose in it the seeds of self-annihilation. "Nature alone forms the great artist" (p. 277)⁷ cries Werther; but long before he succumbs to the "eternal monotony" (p. 482) of his melancholy relationship with Lotte his once rapturous feeling for living nature becomes a torment. He remembers when

from the cliffs I would survey the fertile valley beyond the river as far as those hills, and see everything around me sprouting and springing forth; when I saw those mountains clad from their feet to their summits with tall, thickly growing trees, and all those valleys shaded in their various windings by the loveliest woods, and the gentle stream glided there among whispering reeds and mirrored the dear clouds. . . . Ah, in those days how often did I long, as on the wings of a crane flying thither above me, for the shore of the boundless sea, to drink from the foaming cup of the Infinite that swelling, living bliss, to feel in my mind's limited power a drop of the supreme happiness of that Being which creates everything in and through itself. (pp. 314-15)

Now he sees only the horror of transitoriness:

Something like a curtain has drawn aside from before my soul, and the scene of boundless life is transforming itself into the abyss of an eternally open grave . . . The consuming force which lies hidden in all Nature, and which has created nothing that does not destroy its neighbour and itself, undermines my heart, so that I reel in fearful anguish! Heaven and Earth, and all the forces stirring around me! I see nothing but a forever devouring, forever cud-chewing monster. (p. 316)

In *Lord Jim* these two sides of the romantic vision seem fused in the ambiguous panorama of Patusan as Jim, high on the hilltop where he won his victory, recounts his exploit to Marlow "with a smile on his lips and a sparkle in his boyish eyes":

". . . below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, sombre under the sunshine, rolling like the sea, with glints of

winding rivers, the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel." (pp. 264-65)

In one moment, elation, grandeur, vastness, sunshine; in the next, gloom, monotony, a devouring abyss, emptiness like a wall: in *Lord Jim* as in *Werther* the two visions are seen as complementary.

Moonlight is similarly used in both works to evoke the abyss beneath the romantic view of things. Waiting for Lotte on a terrace, Werther watches the sunset, then walks along a favourite avenue of trees, "one of the most romantic spots that I have ever seen created by Art". The avenue grows darker, "until at last everything ends in a small enclosed place". Lotte and Albert arrive as the moon rises behind the hills, and the three approach and enter the "dark bower". In this tomb-like structure Lotte

called our attention to the beautiful effect of the moonlight which illuminated the whole terrace before us at the end of the walls of beech-trees, a magnificent sight all the more striking because a deep twilight enclosed us all around. We were silent, and after a while she began, "I never go walking in the moonlight without the thought of my departed ones occurring to me, without having the feeling of death and the future come over me." (pp. 320-21)

In Patusan Marlow and Jim watch the "nearly perfect" disc of the moon rise from behind the fissured hill, "gliding upwards between the sides of the chasm, till it floated away above the summits, as if escaping from a yawning grave in gentle triumph. 'Wonderful effect,' said Jim by my side. 'Worth seeing. Is it not?'" (pp. 220-21). Jim's personal pride in this aesthetic effect, as though he had had a hand in regulating it (p. 221), gives him a touch of the artist; mainly it establishes the moon as a symbol of the rehabilitation of Jim's romantic self-idea⁸ (although the rehabilitation, like the moon's disc, is not quite complete). Marlow's description is under the spell of Jim's vision; but later the image in Marlow's memory alters; the moon is merely "an ascending

spirit out of a grave," its sheen "cold and pale, like the ghost of dead sunlight". Marlow questions the romantic idea by his rational critique of the moonlight:

"It is to our sunshine, which — say what you like — is all we have to live by, what the echo is to the sound: misleading and confusing . . . It robs all forms of matter — which, after all, is our domain — of their substance, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone." (pp. 245-46)

At this point, Jim still looks to Marlow "as though nothing — not even the occult power of moonlight — could rob him of his reality" (p. 246). But by the time Marlow is ready to leave Patusan, nothing on earth seems less real to him than Jim's plans, energy, and enthusiasm; when the moon rises again it is disfigured by a tree-limb and shines with a "mournful, eclipse-like light", throwing across Marlow's path "the shadow of the solitary grave [Jewel's mother's] perpetually garlanded with flowers" that seem "destined for the use of the dead alone" (p. 322). As in *Werther*, the moonlight, despite its initial beautiful "effect", ends by giving reality only to the shadow of death.

The structural parallels are also significant. Both Jim and Werther vainly endeavour to climb out of their tormenting dream into practical life: Jim in a succession of obscure jobs from which he is driven by reminders of the *Patna* affair; Werther in embassy service, where he is disgusted by the pedantry of the ambassador and the pettiness of court intrigue, and finally is driven by a social humiliation to resign his post. Werther's final sufferings are narrated in a section called "Editor to Reader", with a distancing effect comparable to that of Marlow's letter to the "privileged reader".

More striking is the decisive role in both works of sympathetic identification with a transgressor. Shortly before his first meeting with Lotte, Werther takes a lively interest in a peasant lad in love with the widow who employs him: the sight of the youth's tender yearning puts Werther himself in a languishing mood. Later the peasant is dismissed from the widow's service when, carried away by his passion, he tries to

possess her by force; Werther hears his story from the boy's own lips and is deeply moved. Finally, just when his own feelings for Lotte are becoming impossible to contain, Werther learns that the dismissed peasant has murdered the man hired to replace him. Werther pleads passionately with the steward and Albert in the youth's favour, and when he is rebuked for taking an assassin under his protection he even asks the steward to turn a blind eye if the prisoner should be helped to escape. But the steward repeats sternly, "No, he cannot be saved!" and Werther's total identification with the peasant — and quite possibly the crystallization of his own suicidal intentions — becomes explicit in a note he writes the same day: "You cannot be saved, unfortunate man! I see plainly that we cannot be saved!" (p. 480). Such identification is the lifeblood of *Lord Jim*⁹; it works in Marlow and Captain Brierly in different ways with regard to Jim, and more spectacularly it precipitates the tragedy in Patusan when Jim pleads with the Malays for the life of Brown, who with inspired cunning has come over Jim with insinuations of "common blood", "common experience", and "common guilt" (p. 387).

The parallel goes farther. By establishing Werther's identification with the languishing peasant *before* the first meeting with Lotte, Goethe indicates that far from being an unlucky victim of fate Werther is acting out a pre-existent romantic idea. (Lotte divines this when she tells Werther that it is her very inaccessibility he finds attractive, and that he is courting his own destruction.) In *Lord Jim* the situation is analogous, except that a romantic idea first has to be found for the bankrupt romantic by a philosophical mind with an all-round grasp of the problem. It is Stein who provides the "opportunity": images of Patusan begin to crowd upon Marlow's narrative even before Jim has been dispatched there, as though arising directly out of the conference with Stein; in fact, Jim's subsequent career can be seen as a metaphorical testing of Stein's wisdom in Marlow's consciousness. It has been sufficiently pointed out that "Heart of Darkness" is less about Kurtz than about Marlow, who

plumbs the depths of his own soul vicariously through Kurtz. More analogous recognition is needed that in *Lord Jim* Marlow is not merely feeling and soliciting sympathy for Jim, but, with Stein's help, is coming to recognize and accept a part of his own nature.¹⁰ (Significantly, he says that he is consulting Stein "about Jim's difficulties as well as my own" (p. 203).) It may be no coincidence that the remote district of Patusan, about which Stein knows more than anyone else, seems to bear Stein's hallmark in the river winding through it "like an immense letter S of beaten silver" (p. 260).

Perhaps most suggestive of all is the way the pistol motif is used in both novels. Soon after meeting Lotte and her husband, Werther sees Albert's pistols and asks if he can borrow them for a journey. When Albert explains that, as a precaution, they are kept unloaded, Werther shows contempt for such prudence by impulsively placing the mouth of one pistol to his forehead, above his right eye. This gesture leads to an argument in which Werther recklessly compares suicide to great and noble actions. Sixteen months later Werther sends his servant to Albert with the same request for the loan of his pistols, and, on obtaining them, shoots himself above the right eye — the very spot upon which he once placed the pistol muzzle in a movement of impatience at Albert's pedestrian caution. The closing of the circle again emphasizes the identity of romantic character and romantic fate, removing the cause of Werther's suicide from any external situation and rooting it in his own imagination. In *Lord Jim* the romantic destiny is, in this sense, no different; but since Jim is unconscious of his own nature it is Stein and Marlow who unwittingly prefigure his end as Stein tries to answer his own question, "How to be?":

'I will tell you! For that, too, there is only one way.'

"With a hasty swish swish of his slippers he loomed up in the ring of faint light, and suddenly appeared in the bright circle of the lamps. His extended hand aimed at my breast like a pistol; his deep-set eyes seemed to pierce through me, but his twitching lips uttered no word, and the austere exaltation of a certitude seen in the dusk vanished from his face." (p. 214).

Fragments of this image appear, distorted and recomposed as

befits a dream, as Jim comes up and stands not in lamplight but in the light of torches; Doramin stares with a "ferocious glitter" in his little eyes; he raises his arm and shoots Jim through the chest with a pistol; Jim, without a sound, sends right and left a "proud and unflinching glance", then, "with his hand over his lips", falls dead (pp. 415-16). Furthermore, the pistol Doramin uses is one of the pair given him by Stein in an exchange of presents, Doramin's gift being the silver ring which Stein passed on to Jim: the romantic "credential" (p. 233) which opened the door to his success in Patusan but later bore witness to his responsibility for disaster. The circle is closed: just as to Jim's successes "there were no externals" (p. 226), so the consummation of the romantic impulse is shown here, as in *Werther*, to be inherent in its inception. Behind the ring Stein gives to Jim are the pistols Stein gave to Doramin, which bring to Jim an ideal death.

An even finer pattern of immanent justice may be seen in the pistols, which originate outside Patusan, in the world of practical action where Stein has excelled and Jim failed. The cool and competent use of pistols is repeatedly shown to be foreign to Jim's nature. When Marlow offers him a revolver and cartridges on his departure for Patusan, Jim takes the revolver but forgets the cartridges. This apparent scatterbrainedness is in keeping with Jim's genius; it actually saves his life on his arrival in the world prescribed for him, for as he admits, on his first contact with the natives he was "too startled to be quite cool" (p. 245) and might have shot somebody, which would have been the end of him. His one striking success with a pistol (when he surprises his would-be assassins and kills one of them), far from contradicting the pattern, reinforces it. Jim has to be roused from sleep, given his revolver, and told to use it, by Jewel; in contrast to Stein who, when ambushed, played dead and held his fire, telling himself, "This wants a little management" (p. 209), Jim holds *his* fire in vengeful elation, for the pleasure of saying to himself, "That's a dead man!" (p. 301). It is ironically apt that Jim should meet his own death at the hands of a Malay chief in a similar fit of passion, wielding, however, not a kriss but

that practical talisman of the world which pronounced Jim "not good enough" (p. 318).

Of course, whereas in *Werther* the fatal circle is closed by the romantic himself, in *Lord Jim*, owing to the absence of introspectiveness in the hero and the different nature of his dream, the forces at work within him must be expressed not by emotional outpourings but indirectly, through symbolic descriptions, dramatic action, and innumerable unconscious ironies of speech and gesture. (Take, for instance, Jim's stammered gratitude to Marlow: "He would be shot if he could see to what he owed . . ." (p. 230) or Jim's remark that to leave Patusan would be "harder than dying" (p. 247), or Marlow's words on offering Jim the revolver: "It may help you to remain", immediately followed by Marlow's — but not Jim's — perception of "what grim meaning" (p. 237) the words could bear.) Yet if Conrad's methods are necessarily more complex, allusive, and expressionistic, *Werther* can still be seen as a prototype, providing many imaginative precedents for the understanding and presentation of romantic character in *Lord Jim*. Although a direct influence would be hard to demonstrate, an underlying and pervasive one seems safe to assume: it is, after all, hard to believe that a writer widely versed in Polish, French, and English literature, and knowing enough of Goethe to cite *Tasso* with deep relevance, would have been unacquainted with the work that made Goethe famous and reverberated throughout Europe.

If this is so, it may be a measure of Conrad's literary tact that Stein quotes from the lesser-known *Tasso*, in which the final accent is on rational optimism and the poet is "cured" by a last-minute, spontaneous reconciliation with the man of action; for Marlow has come to Stein for practical help, and Stein at this point believes he can give it.

Stein fails; but offsetting his failure is the epigraph to *Lord Jim* taken from Goethe's countryman and contemporary, the romantic mystic, Novalis: "It is certain that my Conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it."¹¹ It is worth noting that Conrad here used the translation by Carlyle, who applied Novalis's sentiment to the gratitude of Mahomet for his wife's belief in him as the Prophet, adding

that "of all the kindnesses she had done him, this of believing the earnest struggling word he now spoke was the greatest."¹² Such kindness is shown to Jim by Marlow, Stein, and the Malays; and Jim's death detracts nothing from its value. But a wider meaning of the epigraph is implicit in the same passage by Carlyle: "To *know*; to get at the truth of anything, is ever a mystic act — of which the best Logics can but babble on the surface. 'Is not Belief the true god-announcing Miracle?' says Novalis."¹³ Curiously, this second citation from Novalis brings out the true sense of the fragment from which Conrad drew his epigraph, and which reads in full:

It is certain that an opinion gains a great deal as soon as I know that someone, somewhere, is convinced of its truth. The reason, of course, must not immediately strike the eye. Authority carries weight, for it makes an opinion mystical and alluring. Mysteries are the armature, the condensers of the faculty of divination, of cognition.¹⁴

In this light, Conrad's epigraph might stand as the reply of romantic mysticism to rational intellect, in which Stein, however romantic at heart, ultimately places his faith, as did Goethe. For both Stein and Werther life resembles a dream. But whereas Werther finds within himself only obscure desires rather than action and realities (pp. 388-89), Stein transcends the contradiction, recognizing the interdependence of dream and action, and becoming both a "hero of action" and a "hero of the intellect"¹⁵: his extraordinary stature in the novel is summed up in Marlow's comment, "Simply to hear what he would have to say would have been a relief" (p. 207). He stands, in other words, as far above Werther as did Werther's creator; and the counterpoised citations from *Tasso* and Novalis make it possible to see in *Lord Jim* a challenge to "the poet" on his own ground. At the very least, the lines from *Tasso* suggest that Goethe was one of the great writers who helped to shape Conrad's imagination, and that the real tragic hero of *Lord Jim* may be not Jim himself, whom Marlow suspects of "a colossal unconsciousness" (p. 78), but Stein — a figure cast in the Goethean mould who universalizes Jim's case and grapples with Nature — "the balance of colossal forces" (p. 208) — in almost complete awareness of the might of his adversary.

NOTES

- ¹*Lord Jim*, p. 211 and *Torquato Tasso*, I, iii, 393-94. All page references to *Lord Jim* are to the Sun-Dial Edition (Garden City: Doubleday, 1920) and the Collected Edition (London: Dent, 1961). References to *Tasso* are to the *Gedenkenausgabe der Werke, Briefe, und Gespräche*, Vol. 6, Artemis-Verlag, Zürich, 1954. I am indebted to the recent verse translation by Charles E. Passage (New York: Frederick Unger, 1966) for the rendering of the lines quoted by Stein, and for some phrases; mainly, however, I have given my own prose translations.
- ²Thomas Moser mentions the source, without comment, in his edition of *Lord Jim* (New York: Norton, 1968).
- ³H. Düntzer & F.G. Herder, *Herders Reise nach Italien*, Giessen, 1859, p. 296.
- ⁴See John Galsworthy, "Reminiscences of Conrad", in *Castles in Spain & Other Screeds* (London: Heinemann, 1927), p. 91.
- ⁵Tony Tanner, "Butterflies and Beetles — Conrad's Two Truths", *Chicago Review*, Winter-Spring 1963, 123-24. H.S. Epstein seems nearer the truth when he notes the identification of the butterfly as a symbol of Jim's romantic dream ("*Lord Jim* as a Tragic Action", *Studies in the Novel*, Summer 1973, 229.)
- ⁶Erich Heller cites *Tasso* as one of the first stages in the tradition of what he calls "the artist as an exile from reality" (*Kafka*, London, Fontana/Collins, 1974, pp. 120 & 64 *et seq.*). Maurice Beebe, in *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: the Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York: NYU Press, 1964), makes an extended attempt to assimilate Axel Heyst in *Victory* to the artist-hero, but surprisingly makes no mention at all of *Lord Jim*. However, Conrad criticism may now be moving towards including *Lord Jim* in this tradition; cf. D.R. Schwarz's interesting remarks: "Conrad perceived Jim as having an artist's imagination" and "Jim discovers that he cannot permanently wish himself outside the processes of life" ("The Journey to Patusan: the Education of Jim and Marlow in Conrad's *Lord Jim*", *Studies in the Novel*, Fall 1972, pp. 445 & 446).
- ⁷All page references are to the *Gedenkenausgabe*, Vol. 4, 1953. The translations are my own.
- ⁸Cf. Dorothy Van Ghent, who sees "the rebounding moon" as a "figure of the ego-ideal" ("On *Lord Jim*", in *The English Novel: Form and Function*. New York: Rinehart, 1953, pp. 236-37).
- ⁹Citing only Dostoyevsky's novels as exceptions, Albert Guerard has called *Lord Jim* "perhaps the first major novel solidly built on a true intuitive understanding of sympathetic identification as a psychic process . . . which may operate both consciously and less than consciously" (*Conrad the Novelist*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1965, p. 147).
- ¹⁰Originally, Conrad regarded "Heart of Darkness" as "a foil" for *Lord Jim* (*Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*. Durham: Duke U.P., 1958, p. 94).
- ¹¹The Collected Edition, possibly aiming at closer translation, has slightly altered the original epigraph to read "any conviction", thereby obscuring Conrad's source.

¹²*The Works of Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History.* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1897), p. 58.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁴*Novalis Schriften*, ed. L. Tieck & Fr. Schlegel, Paris, 1840, p. 271 (my translation). Whether Conrad read Novalis is conjectural. However, a French translation by Maeterlinck of the *Fragments* appeared in Brussels in 1895, and many of Novalis's aphorisms might have made admirable epigraphs to *Lord Jim*, e.g., "All illusion is as essential to truth as is the body to the soul", or "He who regards life as something other than an illusion that destroys itself is still life's prisoner."

¹⁵Dorothy Van Ghent, "On *Lord Jim*, p. 242.