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## Lord Jim

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***Lord Jim*** is a novel by [Joseph Conrad](#) originally published as a serial in *Blackwood's Magazine* from October 1899 to November 1900.

An early and primary event is the abandonment of a ship in distress by its crew including the young British seaman Jim. He is publicly censured for this action and the novel follows his later attempts at coming to terms with his past.

In 1998, the [Modern Library](#) ranked *Lord Jim* #85 on its list of the [100 best English-language novels of the 20th century](#).

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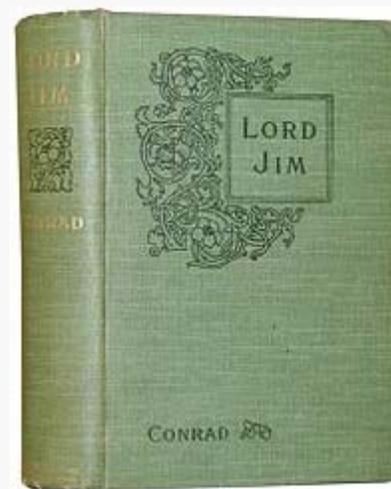
## Plot summary

[\[edit\]](#)

Jim (his surname is never disclosed), a young British seaman, becomes first mate on the *Patna*, a ship full of pilgrims travelling to [Mecca](#) for the [hajj](#). Jim joins his captain and other crew members in abandoning the ship and its passengers. A few days later, they are picked up by a British ship. However, the *Patna* and its passengers are later also saved, and the reprehensible actions of the crew are exposed. The other participants evade the judicial court of inquiry, leaving Jim to the court alone. The court strips him of his navigation command certificate for his dereliction of duty. Jim is angry with himself, both for his moment of weakness, and for missing an opportunity to be a 'hero'.

At the trial, he meets Charles Marlow, a [sea captain](#), who in spite of his initial misgivings over what

*Lord Jim*



First edition cover

Author(s)	<a href="#">Joseph Conrad</a>
Country	<a href="#">Britain</a>
Language	English
Genre(s)	<a href="#">Psychological novel</a>
Publisher	<a href="#">Blackwood</a>
Publication date	1900
Media type	Print ( <a href="#">Hardcover</a> and <a href="#">Paperback</a> )
Pages	451 p. (first edition hardcover)
ISBN	N/A
OCLC Number	<a href="#">4326282</a> 

he sees as Jim's moral unsoundness, comes to befriend him, for he is "one of us". Marlow later finds Jim work as a [ship chandler's clerk](#). Jim tries to remain incognito, but whenever the [opprobrium](#) of the *Patna* incident catches up with him, he abandons his place and moves further east.

At length, Marlow's friend Stein suggests placing Jim as his [factor](#) in *Patusan*, a remote inland settlement with a mixed [Malay](#) and [Bugis](#) population, where Jim's past can remain hidden. While living on the island he acquires the title 'Tuan' ('Lord').<sup>[1]</sup> Here, Jim wins the respect of the people and becomes their leader by relieving them from the predations of the bandit Sherif Ali and protecting them from the corrupt local Malay chief, Rajah Tunku Allang. Jim wins the love of Jewel, a woman of mixed race, and is "satisfied... nearly". The end comes a few years later, when the town is attacked by the marauder "Gentleman" Brown. Although Brown and his gang are driven off, Dain Waris, the son of the leader of the Bugis community, is slain. Jim returns to Doramin, the Bugis leader, and willingly takes a fatal bullet in the chest from him as retribution for the death of his son.

[Marlow](#) is also the narrator of three of Conrad's other works: *Heart of Darkness*, *Youth*, and *Chance*.

## Inspiration

[\[edit\]](#)

The crucial event in *Lord Jim* may have been based in part on an actual abandonment of a ship. On 17 July 1880, *S.S. Jeddah* sailed from [Singapore](#) bound for [Penang](#) and [Jeddah](#), with 778 men, 147 women and 67 children on board. The passengers were [Muslims](#) from the [Malay](#) states, traveling to [Mecca](#) for the [hajj](#) (holy pilgrimage). *Jeddah* sailed under the British flag and was crewed largely by British officers. After rough weather conditions, the *Jeddah* began taking in water. The hull sprang a large leak, the water rose rapidly, and the captain and officers abandoned the heavily listing ship. They were picked up by another vessel and taken to [Aden](#) where they told a story of violent passengers and a foundering ship. The pilgrims were left to their fate, and apparently certain death. However, on 8 August 1880 a French steamship towed *Jeddah* into Aden - the pilgrims had survived. An official inquiry followed, as it does in the novel.<sup>[2]</sup>

The second part of the novel is based in some part on the life of [James Brooke](#), the first [Rajah of Sarawak](#).<sup>[3]</sup> Brooke was an Indian-born English adventurer who in the 1840s managed to gain power and set up an independent state in [Sarawak](#), on the island of [Borneo](#). Some critics, however, think that the fictional *Patusan* is to be found not in Borneo but in [Sumatra](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

## Critical interpretation

[\[edit\]](#)

The novel is in two main parts, firstly Jim's lapse aboard the *Patna* and his consequent fall, and secondly an adventure story about Jim's rise and the tale's denouement in the fictional country of [Patusan](#), presumed a part of the [Indonesian](#) archipelago. The main themes surround young Jim's potential ("...he was one of us", says [Marlow](#), the narrator) thus sharpening the drama and tragedy of his fall, his subsequent struggle to redeem himself, and Conrad's further hints that personal character flaws will almost certainly emerge given an appropriate catalyst. Conrad, speaking through his character Stein, called Jim a [romantic](#) figure, and indeed *Lord Jim* is arguably Conrad's most romantic novel.<sup>[5]</sup>

In addition to the lyricism and beauty of Conrad's descriptive writing, the novel is remarkable for its sophisticated structure. The bulk of the novel is told in the form of a story recited by the character [Marlow](#) to a group of listeners, and the conclusion is presented in the form of a letter from Marlow. Within Marlow's narration, other characters also tell their own stories in nested dialogue. Thus, events in the novel are described from several viewpoints, and often out of chronological order.

The reader is left to form an impression of Jim's interior psychological state from these multiple external points of view. Some critics (using [deconstruction](#)) contend that this is impossible and that Jim must forever remain an enigma,<sup>[6]</sup> whereas others argue that there is an absolute reality the reader can perceive and that Jim's actions may be ethically judged.<sup>[7]</sup> Marlow remarks of the trial:

"They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" Ultimately, Jim remains mysterious, as seen through a mist: "that mist in which he loomed interesting if not very big, with floating outlines - a straggler yearning inconsolably for his humble place in the ranks... It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun." It is only through Marlow's recitation that Jim lives for us - the relationship between the two men incites Marlow to "tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality - the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion."

**Postcolonial** interpretation of the novel, while not as intensive as that of *Heart of Darkness*, points to similar themes in the two novels - its protagonist sees himself as part of a 'civilizing mission', and the story involves a 'heroic adventure' at the height of the **British Empire's** hegemony.<sup>[1]</sup> Conrad's use of a protagonist with a dubious history has been interpreted as an expression of increasing doubts with regard to the Empire's mission; literary critic **Elleke Boehmer** sees the novel, along with **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, as part of a growing suspicion that 'a primitive and demoralizing other' is present within the governing order.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Film adaptations

[edit]

The book has twice been adapted into film:

- *Lord Jim* (1925), directed by **Victor Fleming**.
- *Lord Jim* (1965), directed by **Richard Brooks** and starring **Peter O'Toole** as Lord Jim.

## Allusions and references to *Lord Jim* in other works

[edit]

- Jim's ill-fated ship, the *Patna*, is also mentioned in **Jorge Luis Borges'** short story "**The Immortal**". (Note that *Patna* becomes *Patria* with a bit of paint peeled from the "n".)
- In a Sunday **Peanuts** strip, **Lucy** sees **Snoopy** carrying around a "This Is National Dog Week" sign, and asks him several questions including "Did a dog write *Lord Jim*?" – at which Snoopy gets annoyed.
- The Disney motion picture, *Spooner*, used the story of Lord Jim as a shadow and point of comparison for the dilemmas faced by the movie's main character, Harry Spooner/Michael Norlan (played by **Robert Urich**).
- *Lord Jim* is the name of a boat, and subsequently the nickname of the boat's owner, Richard Blake, in **Penelope Fitzgerald's** Booker Prize-winning novel *Offshore*.
- Martin Levin published a review of Jimmy Carter's *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* entitled "Lord Jimmy," in the *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 27, 2007.
- The character Bat Kilgallen from the film *Only Angels Have Wings* has a story similar to Jim's.
- Author **Allan C. Weisbecker** brings up "Lord Jim" several times throughout *In Search of Captain Zero* as he compares Lord Jim to the elusive protagonist of his own book.
- Lieutenant Thomas Keefer in **Herman Wouk's** *The Caine Mutiny* compares himself to the main character in *Lord Jim*.
- In *Alien 3* the spaceship that arrives at the end of the film is named the *Patna*. This continues a tradition of naming ships in the *Alien* franchise after vessels in Conrad's works.
- In **Steven Pressfield's** *The Profession*, one of the main character's, General Jim Salter's, nation-building efforts in an African country are described in a journalist's article, referring to him as "Lord Jim"

## See also

[edit]

- *Le Monde's* 100 Books of the Century

## Notes

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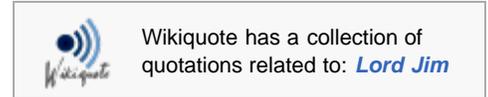
- 1 ^  <sup>***a b c***</sup> Elleke Boehmer (2005). *Colonial and postcolonial literature: migrant metaphors*. Oxford University Press. pp. 59–60. ISBN 978-0-19-925371-5.
- 2 ^ Joseph Conrad, Linda Dryden, Cathy Schlund-Vials (2009). *Lord Jim*. Penguin Group. p. ix. ISBN 978-0-451-53127-8.
- 3 ^ Conrad, Joseph; Cedric Thomas Watts (ed.). *Lord Jim*. Broadview Press. pp. 13–14, 389–402. Retrieved 2009-09-24.
- 4 ^ Hampson, *Conrad's Heterotopic Fiction* See also 1923 Curle article
- 5 ^ Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, p.346
- 6 ^ J.Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.22
- 7 ^ D. Schwartz, *The Transformation of the English Novel*, p.222

## External links

[[edit](#)]

### Sources

- Lord Jim*, text with audio and PDF
- Lord Jim* at [Project Gutenberg](#) (plain text and HTML)
- Lord Jim*, available at [Internet Archive](#) (scanned original edition books)
- Lord Jim*, available at [LibriVox](#) (audio)



### Commentary

- "Stephen Crane as a Source for Conrad's Jim", Nina Galen, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1983).
- Lord Jim*, from [SparkNotes](#)
- Lord Jim*, from [GradeSaver](#)
- Lord Jim*, by [Richard Curle](#), in *Joseph Conrad: a study* (1914).
- R.R. Reno, "Joseph Conrad's Play of Light and Shadow", [Azure](#), Spring 2011.

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Other works	<i>A Personal Record</i> · <i>Last Essays</i> ·	
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