

The moral sense in lord jim by joseph conrad

Literature



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The moral sense in “ Lord Jim” by Joseph Conrad In his novel “ Lord Jim” Joseph Conrad tells the story of a ship voyaging across the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea. There are 8 hundred Muslim pilgrims who are transported to the Holy Land. The ship eventually collides with “ a floating derelict”. Terror possessed the captain - Marrow and the crew members safely abandon the ship in their life-boats. In the novel Conrad explores the moral identity of the young seaman Lord Jim, whose aspirations and actions show how torn he is between his idea of morality and reality. After being trialed and his navigation certificate taken, Jim is angry with himself, because he discovered his many moments of weaknesses and how he missed the opportunity to become a “ hero” by saving the pilgrims.

“ Jim’s moral sense is clearly outraged by his actions (Panichas 15).” He suffers from “ idyllic imagination”, he is haunted by chimeras and pursuit of illusions. Panichas (2000) describes Jim’s story as a painful process of learning the pitfalls of his imagination and his attempts to free himself from its bondage. In a vivid way, Conrad uses Jim to illustrate the moral quest for self-discovery and recovery of the moral mistakes. Jim wants to determine what his soul is, what is happening to him and whether he will emerge from the “ heart of darkness” (Panichas 15). He is in perpetual, spiritual and moral search, examining how a moment of weakness can turn into a repulsive sin and how one can start hating himself for what he did.

“ Despite the circumstances of his moral incompleteness, Jim both possesses and enacts the quality of endurance in facing the darkness in himself and in the world around him (Panichas 30).” Jim’s character is problematic, because it questions the scale of human values and to what extent they are romanticized. Most of all, Jim’s “ idealism becomes a peculiar kind of escape

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from the paradoxes and antinomies that have to be faced in what Burke calls the “ antagonist world (Panichas 29).” Conrad pictures Jim as always having the habit of detachment which decreases and neutralizes the moral meaning of his decisions and actions. This “ makes him incapable of harmonious human interrelations, let alone a redeeming humility (Panichas 30).” Thus, the moral sense of Jim is vague and incomplete and his moral virtues limited. Even when he tries to isolate himself from the imperfect and fallen people around him, he faces the unconditional reality that such separation is impossible. Jim’s fate is defined and shaped by his tragic human imperfection, by the duality between heroism and its very limitations (Panichas 30).

The death of Lord Jim shows his struggle to discover and overcome the gaps in moral values. He persists in his beliefs in the principles of honor and loyalty. From a moral perspective, throughout the novel, Lord Jim never stops to react to the charges of irresponsibility and cowardice he was charged with. He “ never ceases to strive earnestly to prove his moral worthiness (Panichas 29).” Jim’s moral sense strongly determines and drives his actions. In result his actions are contradictory and often underline he moral awareness he instills in his behavior. Throughout his journey of moral virtue, he realizes that this journey is a solitary life of hero who fulfils his moral obligations through redemption. “ Jim can never silence the indwelling moral sense which inspires and illuminates his life-journey (Panichas 30).”

George Panichas, 2000. The Moral Sense in Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim, University of Maryland, Humanitas, Volume XIII, No. 1.