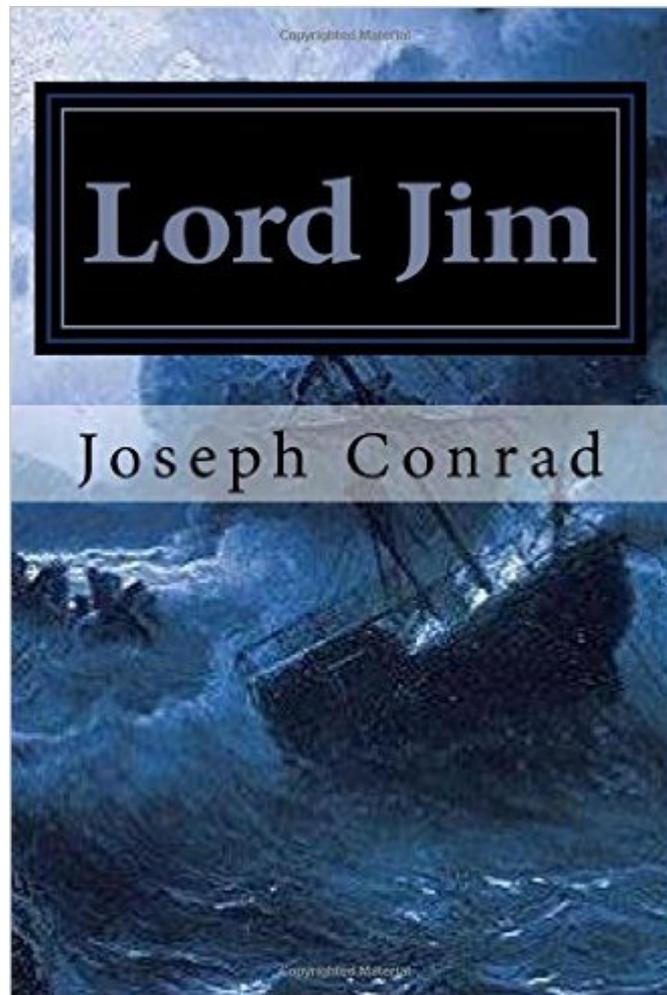


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Lord Jim



Synopsis

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ONLY. A young Englishman branded as a coward seeks personal redemption for an act of selfishness --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is one of those books that anybody who has been through high school should have been exposed (or at least exposed to the CliffNotes on the novel). I remember being assigned this book as a junior or senior and bluffing my way through without really reading it. I even got a literature degree without reading it. Finally, after many years, I felt that I should give the novel its due, and picked up a copy. The novel is the story of Jim, an overly romantic seaman, who during a moment of crisis loses his courage. He is first mate on a pilgrim ship bound for Mecca and after the ship collides with an unseen object and is in danger of sinking, he abandons ship leaving the human cargo to fend for its own. He is dogged by his guilt and spends years drifting around the East trying to find the right occasion by which he might redeem himself. Eventually he ends up in the forests of Malaysia where he becomes a god-like protector of the indigenous people and is given the title of "Lord." But no matter how successful Jim might appear to his followers, and to the omnipresent narrator of the novel, he still cannot forget his moment of weakness. Jim's self-centeredness prevents him from moving forward with his life and condemns him to a life of voluntary exile, all the time proclaiming that he is not good enough to live in the outside world. He is willing to risk all future happiness and fortune to be able to face his demons once again without losing his nerves. Ironically, it is his last "heroic" act that destroys all the good that Jim has painstakingly built up, essentially bringing chaos to his Eden like world.

This is the fifth book I have read by Conrad, and through these readings I have come to deeply appreciate his literary power and the perfection of his stories. Conrad has the skill to border about several similar subjects, without repeating himself. "Lord Jim" is truly a Shakespearean tragedy, mainly because of the Shakespearean nature of the main character. Jim is a young naval officer with high hopes of heroism and moral superiority, but when he faces his first test of courage, he miserably fails. While 800 Muslim pilgrims are asleep aboard the ship "Patna", Jim discovers that the boat is about to sink. There are not sufficient lifeboats for everybody. Should he wake them up or not? He gets paralyzed with fear and then suddenly jumps into a boat being set up by the rest of the officers. He is taken to trial and dispossessed of his working licence. Ashamed and humiliated, Jim dedicates the rest of his life to two things: escape the memory of that fateful night, and redeem himself. This agonizing quest to recover his dignity in front of his own eyes leads him to hide in a very remote point in the Malayan peninsula, where he will become the hero, the strong man, the wise protector of underdeveloped, humble and ignorant people. Jim finds not only the love of his people, but also the love of a woman who admires him and fears the day when he might leave for good. The narrator, Captain Marlow (the same of "Heart of Darkness") talks to Jim for the last time in his remote refuge, and then Jim tells him that he has redeemed himself by becoming the people's protector. Oh, but these things are never easy and Jim will face again the specter of failure.

From the vantage point of the 21st century, I often wonder about the life of a sailor in the 2nd half of the 19th century, when ports of call existed on every continent, and commercial trade conventions were long established, and far-off exotic locales were familiar places to the peripatetic seaman. How different is the local culture and life of the great seaports than those land locked communities in the heartlands, far from either river or railroad. How many wandering storytellers come to such communities with stories of extreme duress and moral complexity? What do such isolated communities know and understand of the complicated, difficult, and often imperfect ethical conundrums that confront the worldly wise and often, world weary in their wanderings across the seas. Lord Jim is a fascinating, complex psychological character study of someone who bore on his back the burden of absolute, utter disgrace, yet who longed for an opportunity to demonstrate, at least to himself, if no one else, that his one great moral failure should not define the whole of his character. And thus he remained true to himself, to the bitter end. When all his colleagues ran off to avoid standing up and being held accountable, exposed to public scrutiny, public contempt, and public ridicule, Jim alone answered for his actions to the high maritime court. And when he had made that ill-fated bargain with a human devil incarnate, Gentleman Brown, that turned out SO

badly, once again, he alone, stood up before the high judge and accepted his responsibility, and the final, inevitable decree. He could have fled, but instead, like Socrates, he saw nothing to flee to. He had acted thusly, he accepted his responsibility, and he held himself accountable to others whom had placed their faith and trust in him.

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