

Landesmuseum Joanneum



Schloss Eggenberg



Gentleman Jim

The Part where the Pipe is Evaluated

A thick mist hung all around the boat and out into the mouth of the estuary as the sun rose, casting a reddish glow into the purple light surrounding it. The water was flat, filled with eerie potential. From the deck it was as if the thick dark water appeared to become cloud. The blurred black shapes of the factories and buildings on the far bank could just about be made out.

Gentleman Jim stepped out of the cabin, a steaming cup of tea in his hands; the brown grey liquid reflecting the sky created a microcosm. His old naval jacket still slightly damp clung around him, its familiar smell mixing with the haze drifting up from his clutching hands. The slow pitch of the boat was being countered by the creaking ropes that secured the craft to the quay. Jim moved sluggishly over to a thread-bare rug that was laid out on the small quarterdeck, sat down crossing his legs and leant back on the mizzen pole his arms dropped palms outward. He had the pose of a Buddha, preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower. He reached across to the small casket now just beside him and grabbed his pipe to pack it full of the tobacco which had become compressed due to the weight of the heavy wooden pipe that had been lying on it. Some time passed during which the thick vapour came from his mouth in quick and constant puffs, the slight wind forcing it to drift back into his face.

“What now?” he rasped suddenly in irritation, while withdrawing the tube from his mouth, “this smoking no longer soothes me. Oh my pipe! How much do I have to bear of you if all your charm is gone! Here I’ve been unconsciously toiling, not getting any pleasure furthermore smoking to windward all the while: to windward, and with such nervous whiffs, as if, like the dying whale, my final jets were the strongest and fullest of trouble. What business have I with this pipe? This thing that’s meant for serenity, to send up mild white vapours among mild white hairs, not among torn iron grey locks like mine. I’ll smoke no more” – with that he tossed the still lighted pipe clean over the side.

As it hit the water the fire hissed and the sinking pipe became no more than bubbles. Jim remembered old Sampan, his teeth blackened with betel, who had given him the pipe on the other side of the globe all those years ago; how he’d predicted the fate of that infernal device, saying it would betray him and meet a watery grave. Recalling the image of Sampan only moments later himself accidentally falling off the boat brought Jim to his feet and pointing into the water, the quizzical look on his face changed, his head rolled and from the base of his stomach came a thunderous laugh.

Gavin Turk

Eggenberger Allee 90

A-8020 Graz, Steiermark

Tel.: +43 316 58 32 64-9532

Fax: +43 316 58 32 64-9555

E-Mail: eggenberg@museum-joanneum.at

www.museum-joanneum.at