AND NOT ONE JUMPS: THE WOMEN IN CONRAD'S NOVELS

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By

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Abstract

There is more than one misperception about Joseph Conrad and women: He wrote novels that contain no female characters. He was a misogynist who, when he included female characters wrote about them in a misogynistic way. When he created women characters they were not true to life, but either one-dimensional or highly idealized. These untruths need to be dispelled. They help to perpetuate a reputation that is unfounded and unjust.

Conrad did not include women in many of his short stories. However, his novels contain many female characters, and their portrayals reveal that Conrad's reputation as a man who disliked women has no solid foundation. Conrad's letters and biographies show that Conrad's opinion of women was often more than positive. He based much of his thinking on his memories of his mother, a woman admired by many for her tireless energy and commitment to the cause of Polish independence. Female characters who share his mother's many fine qualities appear over and over in his longer fiction. However, although these female characters display lively intelligence, profound insight, courage, endurance, and other strengths, they also display flaws that humanize them and make them seem real to us.

Conrad shows his true opinion of women in ways that go beyond portraying them in positive ways He defies conventional literary forms and archetypes that perpetuate expectations for women in patriarchal societies. His subversion of inscribed codes of

behaviour for women reveals that Conrad viewed women as capable of being and doing far more than traditional literature indicates. Because he moves away from conventional forms and portrayals, Conrad is free to allow his female characters a voice by which he is able to comment critically on the way patriarchal, especially imperialist, societies operate. A point common to all his commentaries is that patriarchal societies are severely flawed because the men who run them are self-serving and often corrupt. For Conrad, women are more highly principled than men. If society is to focus on the betterment of its people, it must include women as leaders at all levels.

This thesis will show that Joseph Conrad was not a misogynist writer, but a writer who has been misrepresented as one.

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Abbreviations

All references to Conrad's works have been incorporated into the text and abbreviated according to the following key:

AF	*Almayer's Folly*
AG	*The Arrow of Gold*
C	*Chance*
HD	*Heart of Darkness*
LJ	*Lord Jim*
N	*Nostromo*
OI	*An Outcast of the Island*
TR	*The Rescue*
R	*The Rover*
S	*Suspense*
SA	*The Secret Agent*
UWE	*Under Western Eyes*
V	*Victory*

Introduction

Joseph Conrad wrote from within a patriarchal society; although many women in Conrad's time wrote novels, few women wrote criticism about them. Criticism was male-centred and consequently male characters were more frequently studied and analysed, even in those works of Conrad that contain significant female characters. Moreover, the exotic locales of Conrad's early novels firmly established him as a writer of sea stories and adventure tales, genres populated by and popular with men. Conrad, however, wrote little fiction that did not contain female characters.

It is fair to say that until recently few Conrad scholars and critics have looked closely at Conrad's female characters. Andrew Michael Roberts recounts reading a 1993 plot summary of Conrad's *Lord Jim* "which contained no mention of Jewel ... a woman whose life is carefully placed by Conrad within a ... history of colonial displacement"(vi). However, although much of the commentary on Conrad's women is sparse, it indicates that not all the critics held the same opinion of Conrad's female characters. Thomas Moser and Alfred Guerard perceive misogyny in Conrad's novels. Bernard Meyer's psychoanalytical interpretation of Conrad's work portrays the writer as a misogynist frightened of predatory females. Susan Brodie feels that because Conrad idealises his female characters, he does not create realistic women characters (69). Neville Newhouse views Conrad's description of women as "a serious failure of communication" because of Conrad's propensity to invest "femininity with an aura of sacred distance" (74). Some critics accuse Conrad of perpetuating conventional stereotypes. Frederick Karl, for example, describes Conrad's portrayals of virtuous

women as clichéd and "disastrous" (902). Still others champion Conrad's treatment of women. Both Jeremy Hawthorn and Peter Hyland argue that Conrad criticized patriarchal ideology by exposing its injurious effects on women. Generally, however, Conrad has been perceived as a writer who does not "do" women well.

In this study I maintain that Conrad does do women well and that what appears to many critics to be misogyny is actually parody or satire. This dissertation will involve close, critical analysis of Conrad's major novels. In it I will argue that the significant female roles in these novels undermine inscribed literary traditions of female portraiture and become vehicles through which Conrad critically investigates the patriarchal cultures he had experienced. In each of these cultures Conrad reveals that it is women, not men, who demonstrate qualities of heroism to which men aspire. To accomplish these ends Conrad employs a variety of techniques and strategies: he affords female characters substantial presence within his fictional works; he dramatizes complex, fully-rounded women whose delineation both parallels and stands in contrast to the characterization of his major male characters; he allows the female point of view access to the traditional patriarchal discourse; and he subverts customary female roles through parody of the genres associated with and guilty of the perpetuation of such roles.

In the sections of the Introduction that immediately follow I will discuss what some critics have written about Conrad's portrayal of female characters in general and how some of those critics and biographers have unfairly established Conrad's reputation as a misogynist. I will then argue against this view of Conrad the man by exploring his letters to the women and men who made up his circle of friends and associates, and the relationship

he shared with his wife, Jessie Conrad. It may nevertheless be argued that Conrad, although not misogynistic in life, was a misogynist in the portrayal of women in his work. I will counter this argument in the chapters, following the Introduction, in which I discuss the individual novels. In the next section of the Introduction I will deal with the influence of Poland on Conrad's characterization of women; both his mother and the portrayals of mothers in Polish literature play an important role in Conrad's writing. Lastly, I will discuss how the novel of sensation and the imperial romance novel, and the ways in which they portrayed female characters, were both used and resisted throughout Conrad's writing career. An important element to consider in this last portion of the Introduction will be the reliability of Marlow's opinion of women, especially in light of the identification of Conrad with Marlow in the eyes of many readers and critics.

In Chapter One I will discuss the three early Malay novels, *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *An Outcast of the Island* (1896), and *Lord Jim* (1900), and the way in which Conrad comments upon the policies of a patriarchal, imperialist society by allowing the female characters in these novels a voice to describe the difficulties of their domestic lives. As early as his first novel, Conrad uses irony to undermine literary conventions, particularly those of the imperial romance novel, that perpetuate traditional views of women and their roles in a patriarchal, imperialist society. In Chapters Two and Three I will turn to five novels of Conrad's middle phase: *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), *Chance* (1913) and *Victory* (1915). In these novels Conrad continues to provide female characters the opportunity to comment on their lives in paternalistic

societies. In *Nostromo,* the character Emilia Gould voices Conrad's concern about the continued growth of imperialism's drive for and focus on "material interests" in South America; in *The Secret Agent,* Winnie Verloc represents the repressed anger and violence of women in society who, despite sacrifice and hard work, remain oppressed and powerless; in *Under Western Eyes,* Conrad uses his female characters to criticize the machinations of men who run a corrupt political system. *Chance* and *Victory* are novels that have provoked a great deal of critical controversy and are considered by some critics to be evidence of Conrad's decline as a novelist. I do not enter into discussion of the literary merits of these novels. However, I argue that in them Conrad experiments with traditional genre forms and conventions in order to continue to undermine inscribed expectations for women.

In Chapter Four I will consider Conrad's last three completed novels: *The Arrow of Gold* (1919), *The Rescue* (1920), *The Rover* (1923), and *Suspense* (1925), an incomplete novel published posthumously. In each novel Conrad continues to allow the major female characters a voice in critical discussions of society and to undermine literary conventions that inscribe traditional roles for women. I will discuss the way in which Conrad, in all phases of his novel-writing, casts his ironic eye on the behaviour of the major male characters and contrasts their weaknesses with the strengths of the women who surround them.

Conrad and the Critics

The earliest critical responses to Conrad's women were generally positive, as seen in

a review by H.G. Wells (Thorburn 5-7). The portrayals of Nina and her mother in *Almayer's Folly* were praised for their exoticism and for their insight into the perspective of Eastern women. William Blackwood, who had published Conrad's early work in *Blackwood's Magazine,* envisaged in Conrad a future Rudyard Kipling or Robert Louis Stevenson. However, the publication of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) -- a story with no female characters -- and the fact that Conrad preferred a more educated reader than Kipling or Stevenson addressed, necessitated a strategic substitution of target audience, and Conrad was promoted as a writer of fiction appealing to discriminating intellectuals. Conrad's work, which was marketed in single volumes and aimed at the literati, sold poorly, but the wide readership of the fiction serialized in magazines and surrounded by advertisements for "manly" products such as tobacco and work-boots, established Conrad's reputation as an ocean-going author of sea tales and adventure stories narrated from within a discourse aimed at the male reader (Jones 6-12). With the entrenchment of this reputation grew the impression that women played only minor roles in Conrad's writing, not only as characters within the novels, but also as his reading audience. In 1960, Graham Hough argued that Conrad's novels do not appeal to women:

> In my experience very few women really enjoy Conrad, and this is not only because the feminine sensibility so often ceases to function at the mere mention of a topsail halyard, but because the characteristic concerns and occupations of the woman's world play such a very small part in Conrad's work. (214)

Hough's view that Conrad's writing was not interested in or interesting to women reflects the general opinion of Conrad's time that Conrad, both the man and the author, was

anti-female.

One critic who feels that Conrad is a misogynist writer is Bernard C. Meyer, who compares Conrad's delineation of female characters to his relationship with his wife and other women with whom he was associated:

> [Conrad's] conduct toward [his wife, Jessie] often suggested that he regarded her as bearing as great a potential for destruction as do his fictional women. ... his underlying general distrust of all women emerged and he reviled her as if she were a witch. But even aside from such moments, his general bearing ... often mirrored the same discomfort and restless irritability which his fictional heroes display when caught in the menacing and deadly web of a woman's embrace. (289)

Meyer claims that Conrad's work after 1910 portrays two opposing types of women: the devils who are "vile and dirty creatures, bereft of true human feelings, conscience, or scruple" and the saints, who are good, pure and worthy of worship (238). He argues that the women in Conrad reveal little "convincing evidence of sexual arousal [and] ... are frigid and several of them make no secret of their aversion toward sexuality altogether" (277). Meyer's analysis of Conrad's fictional women is ultimately reductive and often distorts specific contexts, content, or characterisation in the various works to support his argument. Meyer extrapolates only those biographic details which suit his purpose, suppressing evidence – which I discuss later – that indicates that Jessie was well-loved and appreciated by her husband.

Major early critics have claimed that Conrad is unable to portray effectively either women or sexuality. For example, Thomas Moser calls male-female relationships Conrad's

"uncongenial subject" (50) and criticizes Conrad's later novels, such as *Chance* and *Victory*, as inferior to the works of his middle years. He writes of "Conrad's inability to understand women [and] his tendency to sentimentalize female characterizations" (137). Moser describes Conrad's misogyny as "irrepressible" and argues that Conrad succeeds with women only as long as they remain weak, helpless objects of pity: "Conrad's moral sense, demanding that his characters act upon their own volition, conflicts with his misogyny. Women in action, woman as the competitor of man, is insufferable. Thus, Conrad's sympathy for the homeless waif vanishes as soon as she makes a gesture of self-assertion" (157–60). Moser is equally critical of Conrad's earlier portrayals of women, describing the Malay heroine Nina as conventional in looks, wooden in dialogue and devoid of "moral and psychological interest" (52).

Albert Guerard agrees with Moser's claim that sexual attraction was Conrad's "least congenial subject" and describes Conrad as clumsy and evasive in dramatizing it. Guerard's most serious criticism of Conrad's female characters focuses on the later novels. Guerard argues that the portrayals of the oppressed and dependent women in these novels are sentimental and aimed only to please readers of "lowbrow" popular fiction; however, early Conrad heroines fare no better. Here woman and sex are implicitly dangerous and often dramatized in images such as "a fecund destroying jungle or ... thick grass" (54). Guerard dismisses Conrad's women when they are presented as vulnerable; however, he also rejects them when they acquire strength. Guerard writes that Conrad's female characters are "women to be pitied, protected, saved -- though now and then they seem alarmingly able to

take care of themselves" (257–61). Jocelyn Baines generally concurs with Guerard's and Moser's appraisals. Although he describes Natalia Haldin as an effective portrayal of a woman, he thinks that Edith Travers and Rita de Lastaola are cast from a stereotyped mould, the "unawakened or frigid woman who deals in counterfeit emotions" (393).

More recently, Edward Said has charged Conrad with the commodification of women in *Heart of Darkness, Nostromo* and *The Rescue.* Said argues that Conrad's imagination was fuelled for writing by substances such as Kurtz's ivory, Gould's silver, Lingard's gold, and by the sailing ships and "the women that drew men to chance and romance " (106). Peter Hayes states that a central theme in much of Conrad's work is the problem of tyranny in both public and private life. Conrad felt that women, benign by nature, were incapable of the aggressive behaviour necessary to combat those men capable of tyranny in the unrestrained pursuit of their appetites. However, men capable of perceiving and valuing the natural qualities of women will not become tyrants. Moreover, Conrad felt that the admiration of women gives men a reason to resist tyranny "and to protect women, as the morality and values that women embody are opposite to the selfish desires and moral emptiness of a tyrant" (104). Andrew Roberts suggests a complex and ambiguous relationship between Marlow, Conrad, and Conrad's male readers. All are grappling with their perception of women by undergoing a process of self-investigation leading to freedom from patriarchal thinking. At the same time, however, Marlow continually states views that draw the male reader back to the appeal of male superiority that is part of patriarchal ideology (v –x).

Because of Conrad's reputation for misogyny, one might suppose that female critics of Conrad might be uniformly condemnatory of his female characters; however, female critics are, in fact, divided in their assessment of Conrad's treatment of women in his novels. One group believes that Conrad's women perpetuate behaviour inscribed in literary convention (Heilbrun 147; Oates 84). Padmini Mongia perceives in Conrad's fiction a reluctance to abandon conventional archetypal female roles. Her application of a classic eighteenth-century gothic template to the Patusan portion of *Lord Jim* reveals many of the characteristics associated with the genre: " [h]elpless women in need of rescue, threatening masculine figures, a dead-undead mother, and the terrors associated with enclosing [feminine] spaces" (89). Like other *fin de siècle* writers such as H. Rider Haggard, Conrad, experiencing male anxiety over the loss of opportunities for heroic adventures, affords his protagonist the occasion to escape the "enclosing space" either through heroic action or the noble action of suicide. Female characters, however, are extended no opportunity to subvert the pattern; they are doomed to "repeat the trajectory" of the lives of their mothers and other female characters (1-7).

Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan also argues that women are never developed into significant characters in Conrad's work: "ornamentally passive and destined to victimization or ominously elementary and potentially destructive, the Woman – capitalized, singularized, depersonalized like a force of nature ... becomes, in a sense, a metaphysical principle, the principle of the Feminine" (153). Like Moser and Guerard, Erdinast-Vulcan believes that Conrad's late works reveal intellectual atrophy. The later novels exhibit a "generic

schizophrenia"; they conform to the characteristics of the romance but feature a protagonist unequal to the requisite archetypal tasks. Erdinast-Vulcan theorizes that the failure of the later novels is not a result of Conrad's discomfort with the "uncongenial subject but of his choice to write a debased form of discourse, that is, a novel for women. This decision sets loose in Conrad a pathological fear of losing his 'masculine' self. Although he wrote of wishing to please female readers, Conrad's misogyny forced him to weave fabrications rather than face the truth that he had sunk to the level of writing romance novels (170-71).

Nina Pelican Straus feels Conrad is guilty of perpetuating a "man's world" by employing strategies that exclude women from his novels and create a division between men and women whereby women are kept ignorant and, therefore, powerless. She argues that there exists in Conrad's fiction a shared male secret knowledge which, in order to survive, necessitates the exclusion of female characters and readers, just as the Intended is excluded from knowing in *Heart of Darkness.* Conrad uses Marlow to create a world "distinctly split into male and female realms – the first harboring the possibility of 'truth' and the second dedicated to the maintenance of delusion" (69). First, Conrad supplies Marlow with a story "concerned with a kind of mainstream male experience associated with traditional Western high art" (79). Then, by granting Marlow a circle of male listeners, Conrad prevents the possibility of women being a part of that circle -- even as readers of the tale. For, although Marlow speaks about women within the novella, there is no indication that women are part of the population of those who must "hang together." Truth, therefore, in any novel narrated by Marlow, "is directed at and intended for men only". Women are

kept in their excluded place (171-73).

On the other hand, Rita Bode suggests that *Heart of Darkness* contains a subtext that empowers women. Although Marlow views women as inhabiting a separate female space, this space becomes the dominant one due to a "powerful female network that takes charge and assumes control over the novella's events" (21). Although the female characters never meet, and are unaware of each other's existence, the connections among them are so forceful that the women grow beyond the confines of Marlow's limited image of womankind. While some links are metaphorical and some emerge through Kurtz's relationships, Marlow too makes connections. However, he always refuses to acknowledge or investigate the implications of the connections that he himself brings to the reader's attention. There is, therefore, a disparity between Marlow's dismissal and disparagement of women and his unconscious fear of them. Bode feels that Conrad consciously intends a strong female presence in the work, while unconsciously he struggles with this female presence as Marlow himself does.

Susan Lundvall Brodie feels that Conrad is often guilty of traditional idealisation in his portraits of women. The tendency, however, is offset -- and the portrayals made fully rounded -- by his obvious awareness of the difficulties of women's lives. Brodie also perceives in Conrad's characterization of the sexes an antithesis based in nature between masculine and feminine: "In Conrad's art, as in life, there is a subtle shifting movement between these two aspects of our nature, and it is this movement ... that produces both a system of checks and balances and an inescapable feeling for life's ambiguities" (144).

While feminine idealism, as exemplified by Natalia Haldin, is genuinely altruistic, its masculine counterpart, as reflected in Jim, exhibits the self-centred, self-important egoism of Conrad's self-deluded, romantic heroes. The idealism of women devotes itself to the betterment of society, not personal gain. While Conrad uses irony to undermine masculine idealism, he sees in the idealism of women the kind of "guiding light" necessary to transcend selfishness and self-destruction (143).

There are also female critics who examine the portrayal of women as an aspect of Conrad's criticism of imperialism and perceive this criticism as a statement against male domination in patriarchal societies. For example, Mongia believes that Conrad perpetuates conventional archetypal female roles, but also believes that Conrad allows, in the narrative of his novels, voices that represent the female point of view (174). Ruth Nadelhaft argues against critical opinion that Conrad is a writer who does not "do" women well. In Nadelhaft's view, women are central to Conrad's vision as a political and moral novelist. She argues that it is through the piercing evaluation of female characters that Conrad comments on patriarchal societies. Nadelhaft claims that Conrad's portrayals of female characters are "tautly imagined and described, full-fledged characterizations complete with the ambiguity of Conrad's traditionally ambiguous men" (151). The stylistic and structural elements common to much of Conrad's development of male characters are often employed in the presentation of female characters. For example, many of Conrad's women are projected through their doubles, and are thereby given a moral and intellectual complexity that has traditionally been the privilege of male characters central to the novels' cores (160).

Nadelhaft focuses on Conrad's use of female characters to criticise the ways in which colonialism and imperialism are oppressive and exploitative. I believe that Conrad goes beyond this by undermining traditional literary conventions that perpetuated patriarchal views of female behaviour and by creating in his novels female characters who demonstrate qualities of heroism to which the male characters can only aspire.

Conrad and Women

In this study I define what a misogynist writer is, based on the views of the critics cited above and those of Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* (1969), where she offers an analysis of the writing of three authors whom she considers misogynists: D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer. A misogynist writer is one whose disdain for women is reflected in portrayals of women that support patriarchal views of female inferiority and the right of male dominance over women. The misogynist writer exhibits little empathy with or sympathy for women or their lives; consequently, he seldom allows women a voice or a point of view. He objectifies women and creates poorly developed female characters who perpetuate literary archetypes that inscribe patriarchal dominance. The misogynist author allows female characters in his writing to be used, abused and blamed by male characters; however, he offers no critical commentary on the negative treatment perpetrated by male characters against women.

Conrad's reputation as a misogynist writer may stem from misperceptions, spread early in his writing career, of Conrad's views of women. Much of what is written about

Conrad's early years as a writer paints him as a man awkward and uncomfortable with women. The reasons for this reputation are not difficult to understand. At a very early age he suffered the loss of his mother and grandmother; in his youth he experienced few relationships with women; and, from the age of sixteen, when he left Poland to begin a life at sea, Conrad was surrounded by the male crew-members of the ships on which he made his early career. An oft-quoted story recounts Henry James's reaction to Lady Ottoline Morrell's interest in meeting Conrad. James recommended that she reconsider in light of Conrad's inexperience with "civilized" woman. James assumed that any women known by a sea-going man must be exotic savages or those of "ill-repute" (Jones 6). However, letters by which Conrad maintained an ongoing communication with several women reflect his enjoyment of female company. In his letters to women Conrad expressed his delight at their visits to his home, his concern for their problems and interests, and his encouragement of their achievements, both domestic and literary.

Throughout his life Conrad wrote to and received letters from a variety of women. With Marguerite Poradowska, a well-established author and his aunt through marriage -- and often cited as the true love of his early years -- Conrad continued a dialogue based on their mutual love of literature and forays into writing (Morf 69). Their correspondence indicates Conrad's admiration for Poradowska's intelligence and learning and his trust in her understanding of his ambitions. He read and praised her work. In many of their letters they explore the psychology of isolation and despair that Conrad so effectively expressed in his novels. In a letter dated 1 April, 1895, Conrad writes to Poradowska:

> I am answering immediately because I am very worried. You are

> evidently sick at heart from having overworked your body. Thus, your disgust and discouragement. I suffer with you, for I know nothing crueller than the deep despair that makes you suffer. One is so alone. What can I say? Nothing but words of true affection. Your letter has absolutely staggered me. I tell you myself that your novel is good -- that the plan and the idea are excellent. In my missing letter, I spoke to you of *Marylka.* I told you how striking the wedding scene is. And I spoke also of the calm ending, a tranquil promise of peace. It is very pretty, very pretty. But the next book will be splendid. I feel it. I am certain. Courage. You have there a magnificent diamond mine ... Think of me who love you well, who suffer and rejoice with you. (*Letters* I, 208)

Poradowska proved an especially important correspondent for Conrad after the deaths of Alexander, Conrad's uncle and Marguerite's husband, and later, of Conrad's uncle and guardian, Tadeusz Bobrowski.

Poradowska may have been a significant influence on Conrad's portrayal of women. Their friendship was grounded in their reciprocal interest in writing. Conrad, at one point, suggested a collaboration over, and later a translation of, *Almayer's Folly.* Although a collaborative effort never occurred, Poradowska did translate both "The Lagoon" (1898) and "An Outpost of Progress" (1898). In December 1894, Conrad shared with her his opinion of the portrayal of women in Poland's literary history: " I think that only women have true courage ... have more character than men" (*Letters* I, 191). Susan Jones calls Poradowska Conrad's first literary mentor and argues that her influence informed much of his creative development and provided the imaginative impetus for his style, themes and characters: the interior and exterior presentation of Nina Almayer, the use of the orphan waif as the narrative centre, the danger of excessive devotion as reflected in Flora de Baral, and the sometimes "overblown" description for which Conrad is often censured (87-90).

Most important to a study of the often pilloried later novels is the impact of Poradowska's *Demoiselle Micia* (1889), a work in which she sceptically presents familial and domestic structures (Jones 95). Meyer, Baines and Guerard perceive Marguerite Poradowska's role in Conrad's life merely as that of a substitute mother figure or an older *femme fatale*. Their failure to perceive Poradowska's role as a literary counsellor forced her to the periphery to which so many critics have consigned the women characters in Conrad's writing. However, as Jones points out:

> Her specific impact on Conrad then resurfaced in his later career. As he confronted issues of gender and genre in the late fiction, he once again alluded to the intricate interplay of voices in the letters to Poradowska, as well as to the methods and conventions of her romances to create his individual responses to the romantic genre, and to address the problematic issue of representing the female consciousness. (98)

Conrad's correspondence with women was not limited to his letters to Marguerite Poradowska. An exploration of other letters to women reflects little evidence of misogyny. Gabriela Cunningham Graham was highly respected by Conrad, despite the "liberal" political views she shared with her husband, R. B. Cunningham Graham, a close friend of Conrad's Active in the women's rights movement in Spain, Gabriela Cunningham Graham was a biographer and essayist whose writing Conrad often commented upon in the most laudatory terms. In February 1899 he congratulated her on "Family Portraits" and the creation of the "beauty of the profound and tender idea which illuminated ... all the faces portrayed, [and] the sad eyes of the dead with the flame of a gentle pity and a penetrating sympathy" (*Letters*, II 171). Such correspondence was not an anomaly. Two letters of

February 1896 addressed to Constance Garnett, whose translation of Turgenev Conrad admired, indicate his concern for the health of her husband and reiterate the depth of affection and friendship which he and Jessie Conrad felt for both Constance and her husband, Edward, the reader for Unwin to whom Conrad submitted the manuscript of *Almayer's Folly* (*Letters* I, lxiii). Conrad's correspondence with women indicates more than simply the fact that he wrote letters to them. It indicates that he found women's thoughts and ideas interesting and significant

In a letter to Helen Sanderson dated 26 February, 1899, Conrad confesses his desire to father a daughter: "I can't help feeling she would have resembled me more and would have been perhaps easier to understand" (*Letters* II, 173). It is interesting to note the way this sentiment has been used to solidify Conrad's reputation for misogyny. In his psychoanalytic study of Conrad's work, Bernard Meyer cites the above statement as an indication of Conrad's need to perceive women as "angel-like" and "hence, more like what he himself strove to be" (194). Meyer assumes Conrad's discomfort with women who do not exemplify "sugar and spice and everything nice", and disdain for female behaviour that reflected "rats and snails and puppy dog tails". Certainly this explains Meyer's reading of independent and robust Conrad heroines such as Rita de Lastaola, whom Meyer describes as "plainly frigid" because she refuses the romantic advances of both M. George and his rival (311). Rita is not frigid; she is a woman who does not allow men to pressure her into relationships in which she has no interest.

However, it is not only Conrad's letters to women that help to provide a fuller sense

of his opinion of women and of his characterization of them in his novels. In a letter to Edward Garnett dated November 1906, Conrad criticizes Garnett's portrayal of Grace Elwood, the major female character in *The Breaking Point,* referring to the implausibility and inconsistency of her submissiveness: "But why this enslaved state? What keeps her chained so?" (*Letters* III, 376). John Galsworthy, one of Conrad's best friends, is noted for his support of women's rights (Sternlicht 51), and is lauded for his fine portrayal of female characters (Frechet 136; Srivastava 83). In March 1911 Conrad congratulated his friend Galsworthy on his portrayals of women in his novel *The Patrician (*1911). Conrad notes that each of the women is "exquisite" in her delineation and judges as excellent Galsworthy's artistic portrayal of them (*Letters* IV, 425). Conrad's analysis of *The Patrician*'s female characters suggests that he felt them significant to the story and not merely secondary to the novel's male characters. Conrad's criticism also indicates that he feels that writers should provide the women in their work the same degree of careful characterization that they afford male characters.

Although his private letters reveal a man who respects women and their achievements, perhaps the most notable evidence of this attitude was expressed publicly in a letter to *The Times* on June 15, 1910, in which Conrad indicated his support for women's right to vote. Although Conrad resisted ideology, he was not anti-feminist in his views of women's suffrage and agreed with the principles proposed in the Women's Suffrage Bill. His only concern with the bill was his fear that it might not be passed by a Parliament with little inclination toward equality.

What Conrad's letters illuminate most clearly is his relationship with his wife, Jessie, who married Conrad when she was a twenty-three year old typist. Jessie Conrad has been the focal point of the biographical arguments for her husband's alleged misogyny. Much weight has been assigned to a letter to Karol Zagorski in which Conrad announces his upcoming marriage and describes his fiancée:

> At the same time, I announce solemnly ... that I am getting married. No one can be more surprised at it than myself. However, I am not frightened at all, for as you know, I am accustomed to an adventurous life and to facing terrible danger. Moreover, I have to avow that my betrothed does not give the impression of being at all dangerous. Jessie is her name. ... She is small, not at all [a] striking-looking person (to tell the truth alas – rather plain!) who nevertheless is very dear to me. (*Letters* I, 265).

Meyer's and Guerard's interpretation of "small" and "plain" is that Conrad married Jessie less for reasons of love than for her abilities as a typist of his manuscripts. Conrad's equation of marital life with dangerous adventure suggests irony. Pictures of Jessie at twenty-three belie the description of her as "rather plain".

Meyer contends that from its inception, Conrad's relationship with Jessie involved hostility toward her. Certainly several of Conrad's actions during the couple's courtship and early days of marriage provide support for such an allegation. Conrad disappeared for three days after his proposal. On their wedding night he insisted that Jessie address the marriage announcements before they went to bed (117). On the channel crossing to Brittany, Conrad the seafaring man was seasick (118). However, a fair and full reading of Conrad's life reveals that illness, especially gout, plagued Conrad throughout his life, especially in times of anxiety. Meyer himself gives several examples of Conrad's avoidance tactics and writes

that "[t]ypically his gout flared up in times of emotional crisis" (244). Nevertheless, it is Meyer's negative view of Conrad's marriage that predominates both in biographies and works of literary criticism.

Many of the allegations about Conrad's supposed hatred of women stem from an apparent sense of outrage at Conrad's choice of mate. Baines writes that Conrad married Jessie on the rebound from Marguerite Poradowska. Baines notes Jessie's obesity (171), and John Batchelor notes her inability to engage her husband as an intellectual equal (59). Disparaging remarks about Jessie came especially from the coterie of writers who made up Conrad's circle. Lady Ottoline Morell described Jessie as a "good and reposeful mattress for this hypersensitive, nerve-wracked man" (Jones 6), and Virginia Woolf referred to Jessie as "Conrad's lump of a wife" (Meyer 187).

In actual fact, Conrad's letters fly in the face of allegations of his misogyny and of theories that Conrad's fiction reproduces his horror of domesticity and female entrapment. Over and over Conrad refers to Jessie as "my dear girl", fully acknowledges that his temperament makes their domestic life difficult, and expresses his concern about and admiration for her (*Letters* I, 270). He wrote to his friend Richard Meldrum that, being such a baby himself, Conrad too needed a nurse (*Letters* II, 241). In March 1907, while the Conrads were vacationing in Montpellier and their son Borys was extremely ill, Conrad wrote to John Galsworthy describing Jessie as heroic in her efforts to minister to the needs of the family: "Jessie is wholly admirable sharing herself between the two boys with the utmost serenity. She does everything for both. Borys who had always been so considerate is

very exacting now. Nothing is right, good, or even possible unless his mother is there" (*Letters* III, 416). In correspondence with William Rothenstein later that year he reiterates this anecdote, praising Jessie for always being "calm [,] serene, equable ... and apparently never tired though cruelly crippled by her leg which is not in good condition by any means" (*Letters* III, 444). Jessie's crippling injury after a fall in London was a constant worry to Conrad; every operation held the hope of recovery but also the worry of further complications. In correspondence with John Galsworthy he expresses fully the severity of her state and her attitude about upcoming surgery: "Poor Jessie is not only willing but almost eager ... the only person she is thinking of in this connection being myself" (*Letters* IV, 376).

Conrad displayed a heightened awareness of his own sensibilities, but an often boorish blindness to the sensitivity of others – both male and female. Jessie's biographies of Conrad paint a picture that strikes one as typical of those who endure life with a creative genius. In *Joseph Conrad and His Circle* (1935) she recounts that on the occasion of leaving behind a favourite book, Conrad insisted that Jessie, who was in the final days of her second pregnancy, journey by train to fetch it (118). Jessie describes her husband as a man "who needed either sympathetic indulgence or tolerant disregard" (228), and who, despite his mercurial temperament, was a loving and appreciative husband (233). Conrad's insight into his dependence on Jessie is evident in a letter she includes in her biography. In the letter, written while Conrad was visiting the United States, he shares the events of a successful reading of *Victory:*

> I had a talk and pieces of reading ... After the applause from the

> audience, which stood up when I appeared, had ceased, I had a moment of positive anguish. Then I took out the watch you had given me and laid it on the table, made one mighty effort and began to speak. That watch was the greatest comfort to me. Something of you. I timed myself by it all along .... (248)

Jessie Conrad's life with her husband was at times very difficult; however, Joseph Conrad was a difficult man for almost everyone, male or female, who knew him. When his loyal friend Edward Garnett expressed a minor criticism of *Under Western Eyes,* Conrad became furious and wrote "I don't expect you will believe me. You are so russianized ... that you don't know the truth when you see it – unless it smells of cabbage soup" (*Letters* IV, 488 - 89). Richard Curle describes behaviour that today would probably be diagnosed as evidence of manic depressive illness. Conrad exhibited paroxysms of fury but also boisterous humour. Curle writes that Conrad's "irony was sometimes savage ... [but] often clement in its pity" (31). The sculptor Jacob Epstein found Conrad nervous, irritable, brooding and noted his frequent outbursts of rage and restlessness (Meyers 63–65). He was given to bouts of extreme self-dramatization, and yet was a man who covered his fears and bitter memories with a series of masks . The interpretation of Conrad as a misogynist may be inaccurate and unfair, but many descriptions of the writer make it clear why he was a difficult man for everyone in his circle: "Conrad quitted ... Poland carrying within his sailor's kit those very attributes which he hoped to shake off – a ready susceptibility to physical ailment, a disposition to recurring melancholy, a nervous distrust of human closeness, and a vague and fluctuating conception of who or what he really was" (Meyers 287).

Conrad and the Influence of Poland and its Literary Heritage

A significant part of who and what Conrad was resulted from his Polish heritage and the literature that expressed his country's moral beliefs and political spirit. However, biographers such as Zdzislaw Najder, Cedric Watts and Jeffrey Meyers have focused on the influence of Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, and his writing, almost to the exclusion of the influence of his mother, Ewa, and other female family members. The females in Conrad's life in Poland and in the literature of his country played an important role in his portrayal of women.

Conrad's father was himself a poet, a writer of political pamphlets, and a translator of Victor Hugo. Korzeniowski's political activism resulted in the family's exile to northern Russia. Korzeniowski died when Conrad was twelve, after which Conrad's uncle Tadeusz Babrowski became his guardian. Babrowski's disapproval of Korzeniowski's political activism and romantic inclinations is revealed over and over again in his letters to his young ward (Batchelor 13-14). Numerous critical interpretations present Conrad's morally flawed heroes as informed by the inner struggle Conrad endured as he negotiated a path between a proclivity to a romanticism he may have inherited from his father and the practicality preached by his uncle. One critic suggests that Conrad's romanticizing impulse also finds a basis in the chivalric underpinnings of the *noblesse oblige* borne by the *szlachta*, the landowning nobility to which both the Korzeniowski and Babrowski families belonged (Thorburn 15). However, the Korseniowski and Babrowski women also influenced Conrad's view of women and his writing.

Conrad's background provides evidence of his familiarity, from a very young age, with women who were clever, informed, and spirited. Moreover, his retrospective responses to these women indicate his admiration of their capabilities and strengths. The real women in Conrad's life, in combination with the fictional women in his country's literature, inform the female characters in his novels. For one thing, Conrad's view of women and his portrayal of female characters in his novels are influenced by his admiration for his mother's strength of character. Ewa Korzeniowska died of tuberculosis when Conrad was seven and the family was in exile. Her death was partly a result of the devotion with which she cared for her sick son in the face of her own poor health. Ford Madox Ford writes that Conrad described his mother as beautiful, quiet, but spirited (76). It is not difficult to discern in the following passage from *A Personal Record* (1924) a foreshadowing of Conrad heroines, Emilia Gould and Natalia Haldin:

> Amongst [those in the Korzeniowski house in Warsaw] I remember my mother, a more familiar figure than the others, dressed in the black of the national mourning worn in defiance of ferocious police regulation. I have also preserved from that particular time the awe of her mysterious gravity which, indeed, was by no means smileless For I remember her smiles, too. Perhaps for me she could always find a smile. She was younger then, certainly not thirty yet. She died four years later in exile. (xiv)

In his memoirs, Conrad refers again to his mother's black dress of mourning for Poland and to the calm gestures that present an image of statue-like repose. Jones argues that the memory of Ewa Korzeniowska's integrity is the basis of Conrad's portrait of Emilia Gould and that Ewa's physical demeanour is revealed in the "statuesque poses so often

associated with the female characters of [Conrad]'s novels", and that her bravery and self-sacrifice in exile account for "cameo roles"of significant impact:

> Mrs Verloc's mother, Mrs de Barral, Mrs Haldin, sustain an unflinching poise in the face of Conrad's predominantly sceptical mode of presentation, offering the only measure of moral certitude within his narratives of pessimism and doubt. Conrad' shadowy memories of his mother may have suggested a model for the self-sacrificing mother-figures of [his] fiction. (41-43)

Ewa's courage, mirrored in such Conrad heroines as Aissa, Jewel, Lena, Flora and Rita, is reflected in supportive letters to her husband. In these letters she expressed confidence and self-reliance despite ongoing periods of separation and anxiety (46). Conrad told Ford that "the Polish national spirit had been kept alive by such women as his mother" (Ford 76-77).

Other Babrowski women also affected Conrad's portrayal of women. Conrad's aunts and his grandmother, Teofila Babrowska, are described by family members and friends as "proud, intelligent, open-minded , warm-hearted" (Jones 40). Conrad's grandmother played a significant role in raising Conrad after he was orphaned by his father's death. Conrad described the relationship between his grandmother and his aunts as an "extraordinary sister-cult" from which he benefited enormously (*Letters* II, 245).

The women in Conrad's family were role models for the women in his writing. However, the women depicted in Polish literature also influenced his creation of female characters. Moreover, a study of the portrayal of female women in Polish literature undermines the criticism that Conrad is guilty of idealizing his female characters. Traditionally, Polish literature both reflects and ironises the idealization of motherhood that

permeated the country's culture, theology and nationalism. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was revered less for her chastity than for her nurturing qualities and her representation of noble suffering; through a series of transformations in hymns and poems, she becomes the Mother of Poland (Jones 45) and a kind of "warrior princess" similar to France's Joan of Arc. Although Conrad wrote in the English and not the Polish tradition, the literature of his childhood could not help but have some influence on his writing. However, he undermines any propensity for idealization by drawing from real women elements for his portraits of women in his novels. Conrad's female characters frequently transcend one-dimensional portrayals, like Thackery's portrait of Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair* (1848), that ignore the gap between how women are perceived in literature and what they are capable of being and doing in life. Therefore, although several of Conrad's female characters may be described in sculptural terms, not all his female characters are passive or iconic (Jones 49). Flora de Barral in *Chance* and Lena in *Victory* may appear initially as images of waif-like vulnerability, but they emerge as steely in their resolve and courage. In *The Arrow of Gold*, although the men in Rita's life perceive her as the epitome of female beauty, she refuses to play such a role and maintains her independence and high-spirited ways. There is a similarly wide gap between appearance and reality in Conrad heroes such as Jim, Martin Decoud, Nostromo, Charles Gould, and the others who eventually betray themselves or those around them. In Conrad's novels the reality often is that women are more than what men perceive them to be.

Although Polish literature reveals many idealizations of the self-sacrificing heroine,

it also expresses discomfort with such idealization. The position of women in Polish romance, based on their position in chivalric tradition, is the focus of critique in works such as *Un-divine Comedy* (1864) by the Polish Romantic writer Zygmunt Krasinksi. In *Un-divine Comedy* a woman who is devoted to her husband is betrayed and abandoned by him and subsequently sinks into insanity (Jones 55). A similar method of critiquing patriarchal society by means of the roles and portraiture of female characters is evident in Conrad's work throughout his career. Through Nina and Aissa, Conrad attacks imperialism; through Emilia Gould he criticizes the obsession with materialism so prevalent in capitalist societies; through Winnie Verloc and Natalia Haldin he criticizes political machinations. In each case, the reader is made to see how the immorality of the "male" world of business and politics eventually reaches and destroys home and family. Jones argues that Conrad's ironic perspective aligns with the Polish tradition of experimenting with the romantic genre and parodying works of high romanticism -- often within the work itself. She writes that Juliusz Slowacki's drama *Niepoprawni* (1866) provides a parody of romantic self-sacrifice and is a work that Conrad would have read in his youth, and that would have provided a model for the caricatured revolutionaries in *The Secret Agent* (57-58). Conrad's rendering of female characters reflects both the Polish women of his youth and the portrayal of women in his country's literature. Added to these influences is the impact of what was occurring in England at the *fin de siècle,* a period of anxiety and change in both society and the literature that reflected it.

Conrad and the Influence of England

Conrad was also greatly influenced by the literature of England, his new home. While at sea Conrad read and was affected by British "sensation" novels popular at the time. Many of them were written by women authors such as Mary Braddon and Margaret Maria Woods (Jones 92-6). Often reflecting the influence of Gothic horror and Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1861), these "sensation" novels had their own generic conventions: the exploration of hidden identities, a preoccupation with inherited madness, the suggestion of incestuous or homosexual relationships, theatricality and melodramatic excess, domestic settings with oppressive or imprisoning framing devices or enclosures such as walled gardens, and the use of portraits in the unfolding of plot (Jones 195-96). The sensationalism of the genre influenced Conrad's writing, but he undermined the genre's conventions with his characteristic irony.

In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter writes that the novel of sensation was a "novel-with-a-secret" that reflected the secrecy which was a way of life for many women. However, the secrets within the novels also represented the hatred felt, but hidden, by women for their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters: "These women novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction to suit their own imaginative impulses, by expressing a wide range of suppressed female emotions, and by tapping and satisfying fantasies of protest and escape" (Showalter 158-59). However, although written by women, some of these novels continued to privilege the traditional status of men and to perpetuate stereotypical views of the threatening nature

of the feminine (Jones 200). Elements of the novel of sensation in Conrad's novels may be seen in the gloomy, domestic setting of a "sensational" murder by a London housewife in *The Secret Agent,* the multiple frames of *Chance,* the sexual ambivalence of Jones and Ricardo in *Victory*, the horror of Arlette's "blood drinking" in *The Rover*, the numerous portraits of Rita in *The Arrow of Gold,* and the hint of an incestuous relationship between Adele and Cosmo in *Suspense*. At times, Conrad appears to go beyond merely parodying elements of the novel of sensation. He employs its conventions to comment on the conditions in patriarchal society that engender in women the need to fantasize "protest and escape". Conrad also moves beyond the flat characterization of the genre's heroine in order to portray women characters who are complex and fully-rounded.

Although Conrad was not a misogynistic writer, he began writing at a time when his new home, England, was experiencing a heightened sexual anxiety resulting from what Elaine Showalter, in *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), calls "sexual crises and apocalypse"(3). Oscar Wilde's trial and conviction fed the concern that England was falling into moral turpitude, the Suffragist movement was growing in size and strength, and the divisions of sexual identity and traditional codes of gender behaviour were changing (3-4). The government passed laws such as the Married Women's Property Act (1882) and the Guardianship of Infants Act (1886) that improved the legal status of women, and women were fighting for entry into institutions of higher education, such as Oxford and Cambridge. The "New Woman" novels and the issues presented in the drama of the period contributed to the debates raging about women's rights. These debates led to the eventual achievement of the

vote for women in 1918 (Roberts 2). Showalter describes the *fin de siècle* as a period when women perceived men as bellicose defenders of an indefensible order; men perceived women as alien and exhibited their hostility and resentment (Showalter, *Anarchy* 7).

The breakdown of traditionally encoded sexual roles resulted in an anti-feminist backlash and a push for the re-establishment of male supremacy. In England, men organized anti-suffrage groups and valorized the image of robust masculinity through competitive sport. Although men's clubs were not a new phenomenon, men now cloistered themselves in "Clubland", a network of clubs that provided alternatives to domesticity. In literature the anti-feminist attitude was coupled with the argument that the rise of women writers had led to an emasculation of the British novel (Showalter, *Anarchy* 12-17). Many male writers complained about fiction by such writers as Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell and Hardy, especially its focus on the domestic, the urban, and the terrible living conditions of England's poor. They wanted to focus on locations to which they could escape from the "fog-bound Victorian cities ... the urban poverty of London's Tom-all-Alones, and the dreary mills of Manchester" (White 63). Consequently, many male authors explored new literary forms in which they could express rigorous manly action and re-inscribe the conventions of gendered behaviour. The desire for such literary forms, coupled with the opportunities afforded young men willing to explore opportunities in Britain's vast empire, led to the growth of a new kind of adventure story aimed at boys and men, the imperial romance.

Conrad both followed and subverted the conventions of the imperial romance. The

genre combined travel narrative, adventure fiction and the quest romance. The adventure and romantic quest components allowed the reader an escape from the monotony of the ordinary, and the travel component supplied the context of a sensual Eden where flora and fauna were lush, exotic, and tinged with the scent of danger (White 40-44). The landscape in such fiction was rendered in language connoting male sexual exploration: "virgin track" and "the unpenetrated forest" (White 62). Conrad's travels informed his writing with the exotic language that created images of far-off places with strange names and unusual topography. Conrad employed vocabulary such as campongs, praus and punkahs, sarangs, sarongs and tindals and such names as Babalatchi and Syed Abdulla bin Selim (White 105). However, there were elements of the imperial romance he both resisted and abhorred. Mongia discusses the feminization of the topography of the imperial adventure, "which offers an opportunity for the valorization of the white male adventurer as he dominates the colonized female body" (5). Conrad undermines "feminization of the topography" by not allowing his hero to succeed in his quest; Almayer, Willems and Jim lose in their attempts to become heroes. Moreover, although Conrad read Buchan and Kipling, and admired the work of Louis Becke, he despised the work of H. Rider Haggard whose portrayals of women exemplify the conventions of the imperial romance. White argues that Conrad was familiar with the imperial romance genre but worked to avoid what he perceived to be its weaknesses: platitudes, one dimensional characters, and moralizing. Consequently, he challenged "many of the convention's assumptions, affording and necessitating new ways of writing the genre"(106-07).

Although Conrad often presents the exotic settings of imperial romance, he subverts form; the portayal of his female characters plays a significant role in this subversion. Linda Dryden points out that the imperial romance novels

> revel in the exploits of virile heroes, while reducing women to ugly "native" witches, or sultry beauties whose sexuality threatens the hero's manliness. But the hero, an example of perfect breeding and public school education, resists the temptation of miscegenation and is rewarded with humble words of praise from admiring "natives". ... [They] focus on heroes anxious for thrilling adventure in tropical locations where they prove their manliness, assert English racial superiority, and plunder the land of its riches. (3-4)

The imperial romance tended to preserve rigid gender stereotypes of both male and female behaviour through its perpetuation of the sensibilities of medieval England's code of chivalric behaviour. The novels, popular reading with boys in England's public schools, helped to indoctrinate male students with the picture of the ideal English gentleman as a combination of saint, knight, and imperial warrior. The heroes of these romances exhibited intelligence, emotional restraint, physical prowess, bravery, sportsmanship, dignity, honesty, dedication, loyalty, and exemplary character in all situations (Dryden 20–23). Even a superficial reading of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Island* reveals Conrad's subversion of the genre's conventional rendering of the hero -- as does the naming of Gentleman Brown in *Lord Jim* and Gentleman Jones in *Victory*. Neither Brown nor Jones demonstrate the behaviour expected of an English gentleman. As discussed in the chapters that follow, Almayer, Willems and Jim are self-deluded cowards caught up in the dream promised by the imperial romance but morally incapable of attaining it. Moreover, the same

propensity for self-delusion is exhibited in the male protagonists of all Conrad's major novels. Gould, Nostromo, Decoud, Verloc, Rasumov, Anthony, Heyst, Lingard and George all fall victim to Conrad's biting irony by falling victim themselves to the type of dream, either chivalric or material, promised by the imperial romance. Conrad's women never exhibit what Ian Watt, in his analysis of Jaspar Almayer, calls "the lifelong schizophrenic division between [the hero's] inner picture of himself and what he actually is and does ... [the] continuously accelerating process of protecting his ego ideal by insulating it from reality" (57).

Conrad's undermining of the genre plays a significant role in his treatment of women. The chivalry inherent in the imperial romance paid deference to women but also established gender behaviour wherein the "lady" was unequal to the "knight". The expectation for British women of white skin was that they be sexually chaste, obedient, dutiful, physically passive and devoted to home and hearth; because women were considered to be naturally emotional rather than rational little was expected of them in terms of thought (Dryden 20–21). However, from Nina Almayer to Arlette, Conrad's heroines break the pattern of conventional "ladylike" behaviour perpetuated by the genre's portrayal of women. Provided with characterizations that are fully-rounded and multi-faceted, Conrad's major female characters display many -- and often, more -- of the traits and attitudes which the imperial romance tried to indoctrinate in its male reading audience. Aissa's courage, Jewel's loyalty, Emilia Gould's intelligence, Winnie Verloc's and her mother's selflessness, Natalia Haldin's integrity, and Flora de Barral's determination are

qualities exhibited by few of the Conradian heroes whose stories constitute much of their novels' narrative space. Conrad's women are realists who less frequently than their male counterparts become entangled in self-delusion; nor do they "jump", as Jim does, to avoid their responsibilities. As one strategy for undermining the imperial romance and the gender roles it inscribes Conrad affords his heroines complexity of character. Later in his career, he employs the same method to subvert the conventions of the modern romance and its portrayal of women. Conrad's subversion of the imperial romance genre and its codes is achieved partly through his presentation of his female characters; and it is to the women in his novels that he entrusts the points of view through which he criticises the institutions and attitudes of patriarchal societies. One such attitude was that exhibited by colonial and imperialist powers towards the people whose lands these powers occupied.

Britain's imperialism drove her burgeoning wealth, but it also raised fears of colonial rebellion and racial mingling through intermarriage and crossbreeding (Showalter, *Anarchy* 5). The imperial romance not only entrenched gender behaviour stereotypes, it also played a prominent role in supporting the British assumption of racial superiority and the concomitant right to mine the colonies for their material riches while sowing their culture with the seeds of British morality:

> Empire was proof of English moral and racial superiority over all the races in the world. It was vital to English self-esteem that the colonized nations be seen as being administered by men who exhibited the wholesome Christian manliness and physical strength and purity that it was assumed characterized the English race at home and abroad. (Dryden 29)

Supporting the belief in English racial and moral superiority were the tenets of social

Darwinism. Darwin's doctrine of natural selection was interpreted to support the belief that the colonists, most of whom performed administrative duties and came from English public schools, were imbued with the "gentlemanly" qualities discussed above. As a result, these colonial administrators were deemed physically and morally "fit", and thus, the empire continued to flourish. British imperialism and its efficiency, therefore, proved the racial superiority of the English people (Dryden 31).

However, as Hunt Hawkins points out, male colonists often had psychological as well as economic motives for emigrating to the colonies. Some of these men suffered from feelings of inferiority and were unsuccessful in their native land. Flight to the colonies provided career opportunities and financial recompense, but more importantly, unmerited situations of dominance. Isolation from the native people was necessary in order to maintain the separation and purity of what the colonists considered the superior race. While this perception of superiority gratified their need for self-esteem, the isolation often led to the colonists' psychological instability and moral disintegration (73).

Conrad reveals the dishonesty of the imperial romance and its portrayal of native women, especially those who became involved in, or were the products of, inter-racial marriage. The imperial romance helped to entrench the view that the natives were under-developed, savage, and in need of the fatherly care provided by colonial administration. The other side to Anglo-Saxon superiority was the implied inferiority and degeneration of the people indigenous to the colonized lands. In fiction, the portrayals of natives fell into two distinct camps: the grateful savage who co-operated with and revered the white man and the

atavistic savage who refused to capitulate and become civilized (Dryden 37). Any action that threatened the racial purity of the British in colonial outposts was cause for concern. Consequently, the heroes of imperial romances never give in to the temptation of fleshly pleasure with the sexually voracious dark-skinned native beauties (Dryden 48). Male protagonists remained chaste until their return to England, where similarly chaste "English roses" who exemplified the moral and racial superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant awaited them. Interracial marriage was viewed as an act of disloyalty to nation, empire and race. Conrad shows that, in actuality, white male colonists often entered inter-racial relationships for their own gain and with little affection or respect for the wives whom they often abused and blamed for their own inadequacies.

Conrad manipulates and subverts the conventions of the imperial romance by granting native men and women a point of view in the discourse. White superiority fails the test when Almayer is out-manoeuvred by the cunning of his Malay wife. Aissa exhibits more "manly" behaviour than Willems, and Jim proves less politically astute than Jewel and the native leaders for whom he tries to be a hero. A close reading of Conrad's early novels reveals the role female characters play in voicing his critique of the imperialism that he experienced first hand during his time in the merchant marine. Through the dialogue of the novel's native women, Conrad unveils the ugly truth behind the myth of a colonial utopia based on European patriarchal institutions and attitudes. In later novels he again turns to women to reveal the same disturbing realities of life in Europe and South America. Conrad's unusual life as a world traveller from Poland, a land under political oppression,

provided "specific inflections" to his ideas of masculinity and femininity. These, coupled with his position as an outsider in his new home, provided him with a "powerful awareness of alienation, isolation and powerlessness, an awareness on which he draws for his depiction of strong ...women" (Roberts 3).

Conrad, Modernism, and Marlow

Conrad is a modernist writer. Like Joyce, Conrad experimented with new forms that would render contemporary disorder and reveal multiple perspectives. He breaks up narrative continuity and departs from the standard way of representing characters. In his later novels, especially in those written after *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad employs new strategies to undermine conventional portrayals of women in literature. These strategies have influenced the way many critics think about Conrad's development as a writer. Moser and Erdinast-Vulcan think there is a decline in Conrad's authorial power in the novels written after *Under Western Eyes.* They also feel there is a direct relationship between Conrad's decline of authorial power and his misogyny. In their view Conrad felt that women were inferior and, therefore, would not read his "intellectually rigorous" earlier novels. Consequently, when he wrote with a female reader in mind, the novels were of inferior quality. What provokes especial criticism are Conrad's statements that he created *Chance* particularly to reach a female audience. In an April 1913 letter to Pinker he wrote that *Chance* was " the sort of thing that may have a chance with the public. All of it about a girl and with a steady run of references to women in general ... it ought to go down" (Jones

102.) Critics who fault Conrad's late novels blame his desire for financial remuneration after years of receiving critical acclaim but little money. These critics reveal misogynist thinking themselves when they contend that Conrad "dumbed-down" his writing in order to engage women readers. What this censure ignores is Conrad's assertion that, although he tried to interest women, he did not feel that women required a form or style of writing created especially for them. In a 1912 letter he wrote:

> I don't believe that women have to be written for specially as if they were infants. Women as far as I have been able to judge have a grasp of and are interested in all the facts of life. I am not speaking of mere dolls of course. Such exists – even in a democracy – just as dummy men exist. But any woman with a heart and a mind knows very well that she is an active partner in the great adventure of humanity on this earth and feels an interest in all its episodes accordingly. (*Letters*, IV 387)

Much of the criticism of *Chance* also turns a blind eye to the novel's complex modernist treatment of chronology and its multiple viewpoints offered by multiple narrators.

Another modernist trait is the unreliable narrator, used to emphasize the indeterminacy of narrative perspective. Marlow, an unreliable narrator, has played a role inConrad's reputation as a misogynist writer. Marlow certainly does not endear himself to female readers or encourage them to take up other Conrad novels. Lawrence Davies points this out when he asks about Marlow:

> Why then did Conrad slip Marlow's leash? Why spoil what might have been a literary *glasnost*, a diplomatic initiative towards a group of readers long-lost or never before persuaded by accrediting a sexual war-monger? When Marlow isn't playing the hawk, he sounds like the most cynical of diplomats from the *ancien regime*. (77)

Although the Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* is often reputed a reliable narrator (Davies 75–88), his misogyny in *Chance*, detailed in Chapter 3, is so excessive as to make his judgements frequently absurd. This excess suggests that Conrad distances himself from Marlow; in fact, Marlow's statements are not meant to persuade the reader to accept Marlow's point of view. Conrad used Marlow as a narrator four times because he wished to "delineate a certain continuity" (Klein 147). One aspect of this continuity is the untrustworthiness of Marlow's perceptions. Because of Marlow's evasion and verbiage in *Chance*, the reader must provide his or her own analyses of character and moral judgment, and this is quite different from the reader's experience in *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* (Schwartz 46). Clearly the reader of *Chance* is not meant to take Marlow seriously, and this brings into question his reliability in earlier works. A discerning reader questions the wisdom of trusting the younger Marlow's statements about women when the older Marlow has obviously gained so little wisdom or insight. In *Chance*, as in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow appears only half aware of the "process of discovery and assessment of his own prejudices and misinterpretations" (Davies 100).

It may be that Marlow's views need not coincide with Conrad's for him to be a reliable narrator. However, the question of his reliability as a narrator is significant to my argument about Conrad's supposed misogyny. Many readers think that the author and the narrator are the same person. Marlow acts as the narrator in three of Conrad's works containing female characters, and in each he offers opinions that reveal his misogynistic sentiments. It is not difficult to see a link between Marlow's statements about women and

the prevailing opinion that Conrad was a misogynist.

Conrad provides evidence of Marlow's unreliability even earlier than *Heart of Darkness*. An ironic reading of "Youth" can be supported by the context of Conrad's original plan for publication, which was to group three Marlow stories together: "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and "Jim". "Youth" would present the mettle, enthusiasm and idealism of the adventure genre, and "Heart of Darkness" and "Jim" would act as foils, depicting the darker side to the imperial romance. However, "Jim" went beyond a short story to become a full-length novel, and "The End of the Tether" was written and included in the volume instead. Contemporary readers of "Youth" did not notice Conrad's undercutting of adventure conventions and read the story without perceiving the distance between Marlow's idealized conception of himself and his actual endeavours (White 170–71). However, with its scepticism and its critique of imperialist assumptions, *Heart of Darkness*, now considered a novella, is open to an ironic reading which reveals Marlow as another self-deluded Conrad male character whose fatuous statements about women are consistent throughout the works in which he appears.

Marlow disparages women. He claims that they live in a world of their own and are out of touch with truth, yet he is blind to the truth of his own situation: he has had to resort to using an elderly aunt resourceful enough to employ her "connections" to find him quick and gainful work in the world of economic enterprise. He mocks his aunt for believing the newspapers' "humbug" about his future employment, and yet he is ignorant of the truth about imperialism until he experiences it. He also disparages his aunt for exaggerating his

merits (*HD* 76), but does nothing to disabuse the brickmaker of his misconception that Marlow has influence in Europe (*HD* 94). Marlow's misperceptions are frequent: he mistakes Russian script for coded writing (*HD* 108), arrows for flying sticks, and the shaft of a spear for a walking cane (*HD* 116-118). Marlow mistakenly judges as heroic a megalomaniac who gives in to his basest desires before experiencing a convenient -- and suspect -- pre-death epiphany, lies by omission in order to maintain Kurtz's reputation and lies directly to the Intended that Kurtz's last words were her name. (*HD* 148). When Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended, the fabrication is not intended to keep women "out of it", but to protect Marlow from facing the truth of his ingenuous belief in the dream of romance, and his complicity in perpetuating imperialism and the racist practices that it fuels. Marlow's opinion that women are unable to deal with truth and the ugliness of the world is seeded by his unconscious fear that women, like his elderly aunt who proved more capable than he, might run the world more effectively without the help of self-deluded men like himself.

A discriminating reader who has made the acquaintance of a gullible younger Marlow and a mature Marlow still only partially aware of his own prejudices and misinterpretations cannot be faulted for mistrusting the reliability of those narrators who play a role in the other novels. Up to the end of his career, Conrad's interest is to show the modernist view that each of us sees reality according to our individual needs (Schwartz 166). In *Chance*, Marlow needs to interpret Flora as a docile Cinderella waiting for strong male arms to rescue her; in *Victory*, Captain Davidson needs to translate Lena's death as the

fulfilment of a convention which portrays women as sacrificial lambs on the altar of love; in *The Arrow of Gold,* Monsieur George, an unreliable narrator, is a young man trying to play the hero in a self-created myth of romantic adventure; he needs to perceive Rita as sharing his passion and love; and, in *The Rescue*, Tom Lingard needs to believe that Edith Travers will become part of his dream of colonial romance. Conrad uses the modernist convention of the unreliable, self-deluded narrator to establish the point that the conventions of gender inscribed in literature and social mythology do not reflect real women but the vision of what many men want women to be.

Conrad, already sceptical by nature, was influenced in his later novels by a Nietzschean view of reality as indeterminate and of all truths as merely interpretations of the indeterminate (Erdinast-Vulcan 182). Conrad wrote *Chance, Victory*, and *The Arrow of Gold* as a modernist, and as a proto-deconstructionist, always conscious of the absence of any single truth. Like Dostoevsky, Conrad did not believe there could be an objective authorial representation of reality: "The mode of representation is entirely subjected to the consciousness of the protagonists themselves, and reality becomes a projection of the hero's perception" (Erdinast-Vulcan 86-88). The truth of each story is relevant to each narrator and to each character who is given a point of view in the discourse. Jones suggests that Conrad's scepticism led him to undermine the illusion of the possibility of gaining knowledge from looking into a situation from outside it or from only one perspective: " Far from possessing the object enframed, that which is seen constantly eludes the Conradian narrator or protagonist" (182).

In *Chance*, Conrad was venturing into a new type of narrative technique by approaching the novel from an "absence of authorially-approved direction" (Davies 84). Conrad presents a variety of perspectives, no one of which is meant to represent the views of the author himself. Davies attributes the undermining of judgement by absolute standards to the presence in the novels of multiple moral perspectives that characterize a significant feature of what feminists term "female" writing and thinking. Some feminst plot and story-telling is web-like, moves in a repetitive circular motion and forestalls conclusion (84-85). Conrad was experimenting with new narrative techniques, not only in terms of disallowing the authority of the narrator, but also in breaking down the conventions which signal certain generic modes. Conrad's late novels adhere to conventions that lead the reader to assume that the novel is a romance; however, the conventions are undermined and "violated" by "transgressions of the generic code" (Erdinast-Vulcan 188). An example of such transgressions occurs when the chivalric hero-knight proves ineffectual or the "damsel-in-distress" proves more capable than her appearance leads the reader to believe she will be. It is by means of these "transgressions" that Conrad allows his reader to see women as individuals and not literary types. This study of Conrad will reveal a writer who "does" women well. From the beginning of Conrad's writing career female characters were important in his novels and played significant roles. Throughout his career, he continued to employ strategies to redirect and broaden the focus of his exploration of the lives of women living in patriarchal societies and affected by the attitudes and behaviours of the members of those societies.

Chapter 1

THE EARLY NOVELS

1895 - 1900

Conrad's earliest writing in English reveals his sympathetic attitude toward women. In his first three novels Conrad uses female characters to criticise white patriarchal institutions by undermining the conventions of the imperial romance, a genre that helped to promulgate imperialist and colonialist ideologies. The imperial romance, a form of the adventure story, was the "energizing myth of empire" (Schellinger 6). The heroes of the stories are intrepid and recklessly seek danger in fearsome, exotic landscapes such as jungles, caves, grottoes and underground rivers. Native women, seldom fully developed characters, represent the dangers that the landscape holds for the hero. For example, in *She* (1887), a popular imperial romance by H. Rider Haggard, Queen Ayesha represents the sensuous, seductive beauty lurking in the 'dark continent'. Holly, the narrator, describes her as an alluring "ghost-like apparition" with a "snake-like grace". Her loveliness, however, fills Holly with fear, makes his hair stand on end, and his blood run cold (108-09). Queen Ayesha never develops beyond an abstract or a stock character.

The geographical expansion of the British Empire is mirrored in the extended territories that furnish the exotic settings of the imperial romance. In these stories the hero's challenges are epistemological as well as physical; often the male protagonist must battle mental derangement. The imperial romance celebrates risk and domestic and social irresponsibility. For example, imprisonment and escape are often corresponding obsessions

for the hero, especially escape from the sexual power of women. The stories inspired military and mercantile action and furnished the British public with the myth of national virtues and values. The imperial romance was devoted to empire boosting and played a part in the justification of what Britain believed was its national destiny (Schellinger 6 – 9).

The native women in Conrad's first three novels provide a vehicle by which he dissects European manners, morals and imperialist presumption. The lives of native women oppressed by white men exemplify the conditions of life under imperialism, a form of domination perpetuated mostly by white patriarchal societies. Conrad creates native female characters in order to dramatize the racism, oppression and injustice at the heart of imperialism. He also undermines the imperial romance convention by which native women are presented as one-dimensional characters by creating native female characters who often surpass the white male protagonist in intelligence and courage. The women's strengths are reinforced by the contrasting weaknesses of the male characters, many of who are self-deluded dreamers. He also challenges the imperial romance's conventions by allowing his female characters opportunities to criticize a patriarchal system that forces them into traditional roles and behaviour. Throughout the novels Conrad uses irony to ridicule patriarchal belief in male superiority and to maintain a critical distance from male characters that espouse the inferiority of women; the views of Almayer, Willems, and Marlow are not Conrad's views.

***Almayer's Folly* (1895)**

Conrad subverts the conventions of the adventure and imperial romance genres with his descriptions of Nina Almayer, a woman who does more than represent the destructive forces of nature or assume the archetypal role of the dangerous dark-skinned native beauty found in many adventure novels. Nina is an astute young woman, ambitious and courageous enough to risk journeying to a new life in a land and with people she does not know. Conrad creates a description of Nina by choosing details that provide a portrait that is realistic and that reflects Nina's mixed race heritage:

> She was tall for a half-caste, with the correct profile of the father, modified and strengthened by the squareness of the lower part of the face inherited from her material ancestors – the Sulu pirates. Her firm mouth, with the lips slightly parted and disclosing a gleam of white teeth, put a vague suggestion of ferocity into the impatient expression of her features. And yet her dark and perfect eyes had all the tender softness of expression common to Malay women but with a gleam of superior intelligence. (*AF* 17)

At other times, Conrad employs the genre's conventions, but uses irony to undermine them. The passage below is similar to many descriptions of native women found in the imperial romance:

> [Nina] drew back her head and fastened her eyes on his in one of those long looks that are a woman's most terrible weapons; a look that is more stirring than the closest touch, and more dangerous than the thrust of a dagger, because it also whips the soul out of the body, but leaves the body alive and helpless, to be swayed here and there by the capricious tempests of passion and desire. (*AF* 139)

Vernon Young claims that this passage portrays Nina as a *femme fatale* and reveals

Conrad's "stubborn and overdressed misogyny" (100-01). Young misinterprets Conrad's purpose as he follows the conventional representation of the beautiful native woman but also pokes fun at it and at men who "weaken at the knees" in the presence of beautiful women. Nina's "long [look]" as she enters the hut is not the enticing gaze of an evil seductress and Conrad's choice of "terrible [weapon]" does not suggest criticism of women's use of their sexual power over men. Conrad is commenting on the weakness of men in the face of their own sexual passion for women. If a man's good looks stir passion in women to a degree that women are weakened by that passion, the man cannot be faulted for that weakness. Similarly, if men fall victim to the "capricious tempests of passion and desire" stirred in them by women, it is men, not women, who are at fault. In my view, it is men, not women, who, in this passage, are the subject of authorial comment.

The passage cited above also takes into account Nina's lover's point of view at a time when he is experiencing tension between sexual insecurity and sexual desire. Dain is anxious to escape the island with Nina but fears that she may have betrayed him by choosing to remain behind with her father; at the same time his passion for her increases with each passing minute. As he waits for Nina, Dain reveals the emotional tumult he is experiencing:

> Why was she so late? ... It was very wonderful – such small hands, such soft little palms that knew how to touch his cheek with a feel lighter than the fanning of a butterfly's wing. Would she come? He forced himself to lie still ... He turned this way and that; at last, quivering with the effort, he lay on his back, and saw her face among the stars looking down on him. (*AF* 138).

The passage is not an example of Conrad's misogynist writing, as is sometimes claimed, but a description of Dain's reaction to Nina's appearance; it reflects Dain's relief at Nina's arrival, but also a measure of resentment at the effects produced in him by her absence and his desire for her.

Authorial comment also undermines the belief, embedded in the imperial romance, of the benefits of imperialism for colonized peoples. Conrad allows Nina to be a voice for half-caste women; through Nina, Conrad comments on the impact on mixed-race children of a system of imperialism that makes them outsiders to both worlds that constitute their cultural background. The novel "thoroughly develops [a] pattern of the scheming of nations, races or individuals against each other; the law of the jungle prevails among men" (Watts 73). Although Nina's love for Dain is true, her use of her beauty and sex to free herself from the prison of life with Almayer is motivated by nothing less than good sense Like Lena in *Victory*, she is a young woman who perceives and accepts the harsh circumstances of her life, and then acts to surmount them. As a half-caste, Nina is well-placed to experience the prejudice and hypocrisy of white men and to comment on the lives of whites and natives. She reflects on the ways by which both races in Sambir go about their business:

> It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godowns or on the muddy river banks; whether they reached after much of little; ... whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of Christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness of natures as innocent of culture in their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same

> manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes.
> (*AF* 38)

Although Nina has contempt for the greed of the world she perceives the endless poverty to which she will be sentenced if she continues life with the feckless, self-deluded Almayer. She also understands the increasingly difficult role she plays as a buffer between her parents: "For years she had stood between her mother and her father ... and she dreamed dreams of her own with the persistent absorption of a captive thinking of liberty within the walls of his prison cell" (*AF* 69). Consequently, Nina acts to remedy a situation in which she knows her father will prove not only ineffectual but obstructive. Almayer dreams about glory for Nina, but the vision is foolish and self-serving. It is based on success in Europe and Amsterdam, which, in turn, is based on wealth and distinction for him, not for his daughter. Since Almayer is unable to face the fact of Nina's mixed heritage and the problems that it will pose, his dream is riddled with implausibility

Although Almayer is deluded, Nina is not. In his attempt to dissuade her from leaving with Dain, he uses the argument that Dain's people are racially inferior to her (*AF* 144). Nina makes it clear to him that her mixed-race background means she will never be fully accepted by white society: "'I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask me why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay'" (*AF* 144). While living with the Vinck family Nina experiences the racism and prejudice of white Europeans and their practices of exclusion and discrimination. However, she also finds racism in her own home. As Almayer continues to resist her

decision to leave with Dain, Nina explains why she has chosen to leave her birthplace: "'When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a refuge for my heart ... Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life?'" (*AF* 155) Nina understands that she will experience racism wherever she goes in the white European community. However, she is astute enough to understand that her mother's Malay world provides opportunities that her father's world will not.

Conrad's choice to return Nina to the world of her Malay kinsmen rather than the world of white Europeans reflects the author's criticism of imperialism's implied cultural superiority. The choice also allows Conrad to reveal Nina's intelligence and pragmatism. Nina is aware of the effect of her beauty on men (*AF* 28). When the opportunity arises to use this beauty to escape her father's home, Nina proves fast-thinking and clever. She hears from Ali that a rich, important Malay soldier is speaking with her father and she refuses to leave when her mother instructs her to do so. Even an angry scuffle with her mother and the obvious irritation of her father do not prevent Nina from listening to the conversation long enough to conclude that the visitor is a better-class Malay. She glances at the whole group, but her eyes quickly find the young chief. However, Nina first notices signs of his wealth, not details of his manly beauty. She understands that if she is to escape poverty through marriage, a man's money is more useful than a man's good looks. Conrad portrays Nina as a woman who faces life without illusions.

The impact of Dain's wealth upon Nina is meticulously detailed. Juxtaposed to the

"crude light" of the room are the "gold embroidery" of his silk jacket, the 'thousand sparkling rays on the jewelled hilt of his kriss," the "precious stones of [his] many rings," and the "brilliantly dyed fringes" of his sword's hilt. Only later does she notice his "breadth of shoulder," "face full of determination," " [t]he squareness of lower jaw," and the "full red lips" (*AF* 47). The description of the impact on Nina of Dain's wealth illustrates the honesty of Conrad's portrayal of her. He eschews romanticism and presents Nina as a poor woman who falls in love with a man, but whose love is partially formed by her desire to improve the financial circumstances of her life.

Conrad's portrayal of Nina is strengthened by its consistency. She remains practical in her outlook toward her relationship with Dain. When she arrives at their secret meeting place in preparation to leave the island, Dain falls "at her feet with a shout of joy ... murmuring disjointed words of gratitude and love" (*AF* 139). Nina, however, remains more rational than emotional. Her cool-headed reaction to his passion indicates that Nina is not blind to Dain's faults and weaknesses. She realizes that she will be more powerful in the marriage:

> Her mother was right. The man was her slave ... she felt a great pitying tenderness for that man ... She lifted her eyes and looked sadly at the southern heavens under which lay the path of their lives – her own, and that man's at her feet. Did he not say himself that she was the light of his life? She would be his light and his wisdom ... she would be his greatness and his strength. (*AF* 139)

Nina learns what her father fails to comprehend. She takes action to better her life in the present rather than merely dream about good fortune that the future may bring.

Almayer's refusal to try to understand Nina's reasons for leaving indicates his closed mind, but also represents the closed nature of the white imperialist world of racism and intolerance. Conrad had originally planned to create Almayer as a half-caste. His decision to transform the model for Almayer from a half-caste to a European is, therefore, significant in reinforcing his criticism of imperialism. Also, by dramatizing the conflict of loyalties that Nina experiences, Conrad establishes Nina's strength and complexity of character. Her physical proximity to her mother's world should make returning to that world easier, but her mixed-racial background also positions Nina close to the world of her father (Bongie 169). Although she understands that Almayer is morally weak and that his love for her is selfish (*AF* 154), Nina loves her father and feels anguish at the thought of him mourning her loss. Only her mother's forcefulness prevents Nina from returning to the house to see Almayer one last time (*AF* 122). Conrad emphasizes Nina's compassion by dramatizing her father's lack of insight and empathy. When Almayer threatens never to forgive her for leaving "she hugged to her breast the lamentable remnants of that affection with the unscrupulous greediness of women who cling desperately to the very scraps and rags of love" (*AF* 156). However, Almayer remains incapable of understanding her reasons for leaving and echoes King Lear in his bitter selfishness: "'I would rather have strangled you with my own hands'" (*AF* 154).

Conrad strengthens his critique of imperialism by affording Nina the opportunity to escape Sambir, a Malay community negatively influenced by white imperialism. By returning Nina to Dain's world Conrad attempts to make right an imperialist wrong: "The

effort to return to origins constitutes an attempt to erase the 'present' and to impose an originary moment" (Walton 95-97). Nina represents a way out of an ideological impasse created by the changes brought to the Malay world by white imperialism. Nina reflects Sambir of the novel's present because she reflects the country's two dominant cultures, Malay and white:

> As the product of an interracial marriage, she is the amalgamation of two worlds, and she is an interesting figure precisely because she is neither one nor the other. In her figure, both of her parents' origins are combined, just as they are, at this point, in the culture. ... [S]he is different from them, since she is both colonized and colonizer. ... Nina's character points to a means that disrupts that of Almayer and Mrs. Almayer, for she does not attempt to order but to re-interpret and to co-create. (Walton 97)

In *Almayer's Folly,* Almayer represents the modernist world and his wife and daughter the mythic world of pre-colonial Malaya. Conrad's discomfort with the scepticism of modernist views sent him, aesthetically, into the world of myth and its epistemological certainty (Erdinast-Vulcan 79). Nina's return to the world of pre-colonial Malaya strengthens Conrad's criticism of the imperialism that he had seen first-hand. His creative choice to let Nina follow her mother's advice and enter Dain's world also reveals not only Conrad's respect for the culture of the Malay before the advent of Europeans and their modernist attitudes and behaviour, but also his respect for women's ability to face life without illusions.

Conrad uses Nina to dramatize the pragmatism of women whose lives are adversely affected by men capable of dreaming about, but never attaining, the glory and heroism

inscribed in genres such as the adventure and imperial romance genres. Nina's analysis of her situation in Almayer's house, her clear-headed view of her future with Dain, and her departure for a new life contrast the foolish dreaming of her father and the empty vainglory of Tom Lingard. Nadelhaft feels that "Nina's true heritage from her mother is her calculation, her self-knowledge, and her ability to assess her situation and her lover with detachment and rueful accuracy" (25). Nina differs from her father in the courage she exhibits when facing uncertainty. As she becomes more enraptured with her mother's stories of savage glories and barbarous fights, Nina feels herself throwing off the ways of white culture; however, although she perceives her transformation as analogous to standing at the end of a deep and unknown abyss, she is not frightened by the prospect of changes she cannot predict (O'Connor 228 –29). Nina's relationship with Dain is based on a commitment of love, but it also provides an opportunity for both personal growth and social betterment. Nina finds not only a way out of poverty, but the chance of a significant role to fulfill by means of the power she gains by marrying Dain (Brodie 146). Nina exemplifies Conrad's view that one of women's strengths is their ability to reflect upon life and to face its truths without giving in to the lure of illusion.

Conrad reinforces his critique of imperialism by creating a second female character who acts as a voice for native women living under a system of imperialism. Nina represents half-caste women; her mother represents native women who marry white male colonists. Many critics ignore, or are unaware of, Mrs. Almayer's role in Conrad's criticism of imperialist powers. These critics perpetuate Conrad's reputation as a misogynist when they

perceive Mrs. Almayer merely as a hateful Malayan wife who browbeats and torments her husband (Baines 148; Land 72). Even the novel itself describes her as "shrill" and "savage". However, a careful reading of her role in the novel proves that, just as he later does for Mrs. Verloc in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad carefully builds a defense for Mrs. Almayer's actions and attitudes. In this defense Conrad reveals a critical eye for the stupidity and arrogance of imperialist powers whose feelings of racial superiority have been used to justify their exploitation of foreign lands and their people. Morf writes that the strong anti-colonialism running through the novels of the Malay Peninsula results from Conrad's bitterness over the partitioning of his native Poland:

> Conrad was interested in the humanity of the Malays, as people who had their own culture, language, and moral code but were considered "savages" and denied [the chance] to work out their collective destiny. Feeling that they were treated by colonial powers as Poland had been treated by three so-called civilized nations, he was wont to project onto the Malays the feelings of the Polish people. (140–41)

Conrad portrays Almayer's wife as a snarling, hateful harridan to reveal the effects on native women of the cruel actions perpetrated against them by white men. Mrs. Almayer was a proud Malay princess who took part in combat on the seas. While she is still a child, white men enter her life and take control. Her parents are murdered by white men; at fourteen she is separated from her community and sent by Tom Lingard to a convent run by nuns to whose religion she does not subscribe. Lingard regards her as piece of property and gives her to Almayer, a selfish, shiftless, white dreamer who marries her on the promise of wealth and who "while swearing fidelity ... was concocting plans to get rid" of her (*AF*

22). Mrs. Almayer's young daughter is taken away from her and sent to live in Singapore with a white family whose members are strangers to both her and the child. These events suggest that the author's characterization of Mrs. Almayer is sympathetic. Guerard describes Mrs. Almayer as a "snarling native" who provides interest in the novel by her "reversion to barbarism" (71-72). However, analyzing the passages describing Almayer's wife reinforces the sympathetic reading of her character and explains Conrad's repetitive use of the term "savage" in connection with her.

Conrad's use of the term "savage" to describe Mrs. Almayer is not racist or misogynist; it suggests the hypocrisy of imperialism and the erroneous thinking behind its perceived moral superiority. Soon after the birth of their daughter, Mrs. Almayer treats her husband "with a savage contempt expressed by sulky silence, only occasionally varied by a flood of savage invective". She burns the family's furniture and tears down the curtains in "unreasoning hate of [white] civilization so intense that Almayer is cowed by [her] outbursts of savage nature" (*AF* 24-25). Many of the descriptions of Mrs. Almayer offer Almayer's point of view of his wife's "savage" fury. However, Conrad suggests that Almayer is the "*savage*". Almayer's first reaction to the proposed marriage reveals his savage nature: "He had a vague idea of shutting her up somewhere, anywhere out of his gorgeous future. Easy enough to dispose of a Malay woman, a slave, after all, to his Eastern mind, convent or no convent, ceremony or no ceremony"(*AF* 13). Conrad comments on the cupidity and narcissism so strongly developed in Almayer that they prevent his understanding of, or empathy for, his wife's situation.

Conrad gives Almayer's wife the opportunity to recount the incident and express the difficulties of domestic life for native women experiencing racism and paternalism in an imperialist society:

> "When the terrible old man took you away from me you were little, you remember – "
> "It was a long time ago," murmured Nina. "I remember," went on Mrs. Almayer, fiercely. "I wanted to look at your face again. He said no! I heard you cry and jumped into the river. You were his daughter then; you are my daughter now." (*AF* 122)

Almayer's description of his wife as a "savage tigress deprived of her young" (*AF* 25) indicates his emotional detachment from the woman who bore his child. The scene of a weeping Mrs. Almayer being dragged away by her hair as she tries to retrieve her screaming daughter reinforces our impression of Almayer's savagery and the brutality of the white colonists he represents. Conrad's critique reveals a system that is intolerant and inhumane.

It must be noted at this point, that there are different authorial tones in the novel. Conrad's typical, ironic detachment is present only in sections dealing with Almayer and not in the passages dealing with Almayer's wife. Conrad's frequent use of the word "savage" results in the misconception that he shares the racist thinking of some of his characters. The word has several connotations "ranging from fierce, wild, untamed to unselfconscious, unspoilt, uninhibited" (Krenn 19). Moreover, it is through his corrosive irony that Conrad exposes any valorization of European life and language. The narrator reflects a positive emphasis on 'savagery' that unveils Conrad's desire to maintain what Bongie calls the "Old Imperialism" of adventure, exploration and discovery, as opposed to

the "New Imperialism" of exploitation (124-25).

Through Mrs. Almayer, Conrad comments on imperialism and the perceived superiority of men in patriarchal societies. Conrad carefully establishes with the reader an understanding of and empathy for Mrs. Almayer's sneering attitude toward her foolish husband. Almayer feels himself so fated for and worthy of wealth -- by virtue of his sex and white skin -- that he should not have to work for it:

> the indolent ease of life – for which he felt himself so well fitted – his ships, his warehouses, his merchandise ... and crowning all, in the far future gleamed ... the big mansion in Amsterdam ... where, made king amongst men by old Lingard's money, he would pass the evening of his days in inexpressible splendour. (*AF* 12)

He displays contempt for his wife and the Malays with whom he associates, and yet he remains blind to the ways in which he is constantly out-maneuvered by the same businessmen to whom he feels racially superior: "Almayer went on struggling desperately, but with a feebleness of purpose depriving him of all chance of surviving against men so unscrupulous and resolute as his rivals the Arabs" (*AF* 24). The reader experiences Mrs. Almayer's disdain for a self-deluded and ethically-stunted man who displays no evidence of self-analysis or introspection. Almayer never examines his own actions and attitudes in the light of his situation: "He remembered it all, and he remembered his feelings of mad exultation the thought of that fortune thrown into his hands. He was no fool then, and he was no fool now. Circumstances had been against him; the fortune was gone, but hope remained" (*AF* 13).

Mrs. Almayer's scorn for her husband is also understandable in light of her own courage and intelligence. Like her daughter and so many of Conrad's female characters, she accepts the circumstances of her situation but recognizes and takes advantage of opportunities to better her life. When Nina returns to Sambir, Mrs. Almayer establishes an alignment with her daughter against her husband by breaking down Nina's European acculturation: "'Forget their words ... they speak lies ... forget their friendship and their contempt'" (*AF* 123). When Dain appears she convinces Nina to leave Sambir and enter into marriage with him. When Dain, pursued by the Dutch authorities, returns to the village, it is Mrs. Almayer's clever plan that helps the two escape. Knowing her husband will vehemently oppose the relationship, Mrs. Almayer brokers the marriage in secret and, predicting the impossibility of life with Almayer after Nina's marriage, makes the financial profit necessary to leave Almayer's home (*AF* 57). As Nadelhaft points out, Conrad's women are seldom "portrayed as passive victims ... [they resist] capture and easy classification ... [and] devise patterns of evasion and revenge" (22).

Although Conrad portrays Mrs. Almayer as a sympathetic character, it is significant that he also portrays her as flawed. He paints an unsentimental portrait of a woman whose rage and impotence make her shrill and harsh but who, nonetheless, evokes compassion in the reader. Some readers may find the bartering of Nina distasteful. However, Mrs. Almayer knows that marriage to Dain will improve the circumstances of Nina's life. Mrs. Almayer also realizes that she too must escape the penury of life with Almayer and find her own means of survival. Moreover, Mrs. Almayer has learned from her oppressors. She

herself has been the subject of a humiliating financial deal in which she was handed over "free of charge" by a man who considered her his property to a man she hates. Mrs. Almayer represents the material exploitation suffered by her people at the hand of imperialist powers. Conrad also portrays Mrs. Almayer's motives as other than self-serving. She gains money but loses once again a daughter whom she truly loves. As Nina prepares to leave,

> Mrs. Almayer, laying her hand on her daughter's arm, tried in vain to look close into the girl's averted face. When she attempted to speak her first words were lost in a stifled sob that sounded strangely coming from that woman who, of all human passions, seemed to know only those of anger and hate. (*AF* 121)

The scene is certainly poignantly rendered, as is the scene of Nina's final departure:

> Mrs. Almayer rose with a deep sigh, while two tears wandered slowly down her withered cheeks. She wiped them off quickly with a wisp of her grey hair, as if ashamed of herself, but could not stifle another loud sigh, for her heart was heavy and she suffered much, being unused to tender emotions. (*AF* 125)

The emotions she harbours for her daughter motivate Mrs. Almayer's plan to have Nina leave with Dain. She is determined to see her daughter escape the poverty and drudgery that constitute life with Almayer:

> "You are going away to be a great Ranee ... and if you be wise you shall have much power that will endure many days, and even last into your old age. What have I been? A slave all my life, and I have cooked rice for a man who had no courage and no wisdom". (*AF* 121)

Conrad comments on the self-serving nature of imperialism by repeatedly contrasting the behaviour of Nina's parents to reinforce Mrs. Almayer's characterization as a loving and generous mother. Nina's mother's concern for her daughter differs from Almayer's selfish, wailed plea that Nina forsake Dain and return to her father's home: "'Do you know what you are doing? Do you know what is waiting for you if you follow that man? ... Do you know that you shall be at first his plaything and then a scorned slave, a drudge, and a servant of some new fancy of that man?'" (*AF*144). Almayer is unable to understand the situation beyond his own loss and feeling of betrayal. Despite Nina's attempts to explain her departure and describe her feelings for Dain, Almayer continues to display his selfishness and the shabby racism that permeates his sensibilities toward his wife and child, but to which he nevertheless remains blind:

> "I cannot ... It would be too great a disgrace. I am a white man." He broke down completely there, and went on tearfully, "I am a white man, and of good family," he repeated, weeping bitterly. "It would be a disgrace ... all over this island, ... the only white man on the east coast. No, it cannot be ... white men finding my daughter with this Malay. My daughter!" (*AF* 149)

Only a reader as obtuse as Almayer himself could fail to feel scorn for Almayer. Nadelhaft argues many of Conrad's male characters are "self-deluded ... [and] cannot imagine the complexity of others, such as the calculating and thoughtful women who observe and analyse men's behaviour from behind curtains, veils, and shutters" (25). Conrad uses the woman behind "curtains veils, and shutters" in order to express his views of the patriarchal

and the imperialist systems that privilege men.

***An Outcast of the Islands* (1896)**

In his second novel Conrad continues to undermine the conventions of the imperial romance by presenting sympathetic and complex portrayals of native female characters. Aissa, the major female character in *An Outcast of the Islands,* is a woman of remarkable strength of character. However, early discussions of Aissa reveal that many of Conrad's critics have been influenced by the imperial romance's portrayal of native women as sensuous, seductive predators of the white men whose mission was to civilize the "dark continents". Because she often appears wrapped in blossoms Aissa is said to be the incarnation of erotic power and to represent the danger of nature, especially of the forest and jungle, which harbour death and are equated with woman (Gerard 81; Moser 56; Rousseau 54; Stapes xix). Wieslaw Krajka writes:

> Surrounded by a hostile jungle and the Malays, Willems lives with his mistress Aissa in a little clearing. However, she is not his support but rather a metaphorical foe, an embodiment and extension of the vegetation endangering him. [Aissa represents] the unavoidable end of his life ... [that] will be caused by being absorbed by the exuberant, indestructible, and aggressive vegetation. (22)

Rebecca Stott argues that since woman is European man's primary Other, Aissa , as a native woman, fulfills a triple representation of "otherness". She is unknowable as female, as non-European, and as a symbol of the landscape's "shadowy embrace which refuses to yield meaning" (43). Paul Wiley suggests that Aissa is an Eve figure, in what is "a grand parody,

accompanied by the requisite cosmic sound effect, of the myth of Creation, Fall, and Judgment"(39). Conrad simply transfers the themes of *Paradise Lost* to a tropical setting.

However, my contention is that Conrad uses Aissa to parody the portrayal of native women in the imperial romance and thereby to undermine the conventions of the genre. The passage that describes Willems' first meeting with Aissa is overblown and florid and hints strongly of irony on Conrad's part. Aissa's figure is tall and graceful. Her long, shining, black hair -- often symbolic of wanton behaviour in a woman -- cascades provocatively over her shoulders and firm naked arms. Her lips are full, red and slightly parted; her eyes are described as large, dark, liquid pools. She emerges from behind a curtain of branches, tendrils and leaves. At his first sighting of her Willems is drawn by her beauty:

> He looked at the woman. Through the checkered light between them she appeared to him with the impalpable distinctness of a dream ...an apparition behind a transparent veil ... A shadow passed over Willems' face. He put his hand over his lips as if to keep back the words that wanted to come out ... in the face of doubt, of danger, of fear, of destruction itself. "You are beautiful," he whispered. (*OI* 70-71)

Conrad uses his portrayal of Aissa to comment on imperialism and to undermine the racism and the gendered behaviour described in the imperial romance genre. He challenges the conventions of the imperial romance by allowing Aissa to possess many of the attributes and exhibit the behaviour that the genre's heroes exemplified for white men working in the colonies. Consequently, Aissa's actions also undermine many of the traditional expectations

of female behaviour that fiction has often inscribed. The contrast between Aissa and Willems, the novel's white male protagonist, reinforces the idea that Aissa exemplifies the strength of women in paternalist societies, and reveals Conrad's criticism of imperialism's implied moral supremacy,

It is Aissa and not Willems who exhibits courage, strength and composure, traits highly touted by the genre's white heroes. Babalatchi describes her as a "'[w]oman in body, but in heart a man. She knows no fear and no shame'"(*OI 49)*. Aissa has fought battles at her father's side, survived her courageous brothers, escaped her enemies, and "with a steadfast heart" negotiated a dangerous journey to safety. Babalatchi also recounts an incident after a battle when Aissa was sitting on the high after-deck, her father's blackened and bleeding head in her lap, [looking] up with fearless eyes (*OI* 49 - 53). Aissa is so courageous that her reputation has grown to mythic proportion:

> The story of that escape lives in the hearts of brave men even to this day. They talk of Babalatchi and of the strong woman who carried her blind father through the surf under the fire of the warships from the north ... They talk of the fight, of the fearless woman ... The chief, the woman, and another one who became great. (*OI* 54-55)

The contrast between Willems' and Aissa's lives reinforces her attributes. She exhibits bravery in military action. He beats his wife, bullies his diminutive brother-in-law, ignores his child and embezzles money from his employer (*OI* 9-11).

Conrad also allows Aissa the kind of physical strength exhibited by heroes in adventure novels. When Omar attempts to murder Willems, Aissa not only prevents the

stabbing, she carries the apparently lifeless body into the hut (*OI* 151). Her strength is such that Willems is frightened by it: "[H]e was struck with the frightful thought that she preferred to kill her father all by herself" (*OI* 151). Aissa subsequently throws Omar's kriss at Willems' feet, a gesture indicating that she has no need of a "manly" weapon (Moser 56).

A convention of the imperial romance is that the white male protagonists in the genre always keep their wits about them. An important attribute of manly behaviour was composure in the face of danger. However, Willems, the novel's hero, is often in a state of blind panic. He reacts to Aissa's presence with tremors and trembling. His "fancy seemed to be driven by her moving figure, rippled in a hot wave round his body and scorched his face in a burning touch"; his thoughts are "disordered, shapeless, stunning" (*OI* 68-70). On the other hand, Aissa "keeps her wits about her" and remains composed in the face of danger. Although she is alone and unprotected she does not experience alarm or panic upon encountering Willems. She tosses her hair, a gesture suggesting confidence, and approaches Willems deliberately and without fear. Despite potential danger Aissa remains composed: "Her lips were firm and composed in a graceful curve, but the distended nostrils, the upward poise of the half-averted head, gave to her whole person the expression of a wild and resentful defiance" (*OI* 68-71). Conrad's choice of diction to describe Aissa emphasizes that she is worthy of the language often used to denote heroism. While Willems only dreams of being a hero, Aissa's actions prove her one.

Through Aissa, Conrad also points out the injustice of double standards for men and women, much like present-day advocates of women's rights (Krenn 63). Aissa bristles at

Lingard's command that because she is a woman she must remain silent: "'I have faced the heartless sea, held on my lap the heads of those who died raving from thirst, and from the cold hands took the paddle and worked so that those with me did not know that one man more was dead. I did all this. What more have you done? That was my life. What has been yours?'" (*OI* 246)

Conrad uses inverted symbolism to further challenge the conventions in the imperial romance novel. Aissa's and Willems' first meeting is replete with symbols representing female sexuality. However, Conrad also describes Aissa in terms of male sexuality. Phallic symbols, such as thorns and tall, straight trees are described in detailing the pathway to her home. The stream, usually a symbol of the female, is described as a "bright sword-blade", a symbol of penetration. Other allusions to penetration are found in the look which Aissa "dart[s]" at Willems and which "penetrate[s]" him. Aissa's look is "hard, keen, and narrow, like the gleam of sharp steel"; her smile is described as "the first ray of light," a symbol for the male life force (*OI* 68 - 71). Hawkins notes that Willems is unable to tolerate the "look" by which Aissa turns him into an object of examination (76). The "look" positions Willems at the receiving end of both what is morally the "male gaze" and the process of "Othering", thereby inverting a situation traditionally experienced by women. Gendered conventions are reversed again when Aissa, not Willems, makes the first sexual advance in their courtship (*OI* 77).

Conrad's decision to present Aissa as more sexually aggressive than Willems seems to fall into the imperialist romance's convention of the native woman as dangerous and

seductive. However, Conrad presents Willems as imagining himself the seducer in order to poke fun at men who perceive themselves as the aggressors in their sexual relationships with women. Willems thinks that his words of love break down Aissa, his female prey and gradually tame her. But, when Aissa indicates her readiness to have sex with Willems, he does not react as the aggressor. Instead, Willems is overcome with alarm: "he flung her hand away brutally, like something burning, and sat motionless, his head fallen forward, staring on the ground and catching his breath in painful gasps" (*OI* 77). The scene reveals Willems' lack of masculinity (Moser 56), but it also indicates that Conrad is making fun of men who think that, when it comes to sex, they are the pursuers, not the pursued. Aissa's actions reinforce Conrad's purpose. "[Willems'] impulse of fear and apparent horror did not dismay her in the least ... while he sat in the tremor of that contact, she ran off with a startling fleetness and disappeared in a peal of clear laughter" (*OI* 78). However, Conrad is also parodying a common imperial romance trope in the scene where, after an enforced three-day absence from Aissa, Willems bites himself to "forget in that pain the fire that burns [his heart]" (*OI* 91). A motif that often appeared in the imperial romance was the colonist who had "gone native" often marrying a native wife and then degenerating into alcoholism and drug addiction (Ruppel 55). Willems returns to Aissa in a state of such heightened sensibility that Conrad's use of irony to undermine the trope is obvious: "the noble exile appeared with a disturbed mien ... his turban was half unrolled, and the end trailed behind him ... he breathed quickly" (*OI* 105).

Aissa's role in the novel involves more than taking part in a parody. She is a voice

for native women, and through her Conrad comments on imperialism and its effects on their lives: "In this novel, women speak to the reader in a number of different modes: in their own voices [and] through the narrator's voice" (Nadelhaft 29). Aissa dramatizes the respect many native women feel for their culture and their determination to carry on its traditions. Despite Willems' vehement protests, Aissa strictly adheres to the rules of propriety for Muslim women (Krenn 65) and refuses to give up the custom of covering her face in the presence of men (*OI* 128). By spurning Willems' demand that she give up the veil, Aissa reveals her firm resolution to maintain her identity. Maintaining the veil also serves as an act of defiance. The veil refuses the transparency demanded by the colonial gaze: "[b]y presenting only a tiny orifice for the eye, the feminine returned gaze (like the eye of a camera) dispossesses the colonial eye of its mastery" (Alloula 123). She mourns Omar's death by beating her breast and tearing her hair, as is traditional (*OI* 228).

Aissa's use of sex to control Willems is emblematic of the way nations under colonial rule must be tactical in their relations with imperialist powers. The colonized nations have what the imperialist nations want but the colonies' people live in fear of the imperialist nations' power. Although Willems views the courtship as "the gradual taming of that woman by the words of his love," Aissa remains in control of the process, and it is she who decides when the relationship will be consummated (*OI* 76). Aissa twice removes herself to force Willems into Babalatchi's political scheming. When Aissa returns after a three-day absence, Willems tears off her face-veil and tramples it. As he exhausts his fury, she watches him with a "faint smile of patient curiosity", then faces him, "hands on hips" in

a tantalizing way. Willems is a large man capable of taking Aissa by force. She cleverly manages Willems by granting him her sexual favours while making it clear that she does so by choice:

> "What am I to say to a man who has been away three days from me? Three!"she repeated, holding up playfully three fingers before Willems' eyes. He snatched at the hand, but she was on her guard and whisked it behind her back. "No!" she said. "I cannot be caught. But I will come. I am coming because I like. Do not move. Do not touch me with your mighty hand, O child!" (*OI* 140)

Aissa dramatizes the resentment colonized people often feel toward imperialist powers. She constantly questions Babalatchi's strategems and tries to predict his and Abdullah's political maneuverings (*OI* 247). She uses her insight into Willems' character to assist Babalatchi with his scheme to destroy Lingard. She leaves the hut she shares with Willems and willingly enters Lakamba's campong knowing that her absence will drive Willems into betraying his mentor (*OI* 105). After the betrayal she argues with Willems about raising the Dutch flag over Sambir (*OI* 180). As a punishment for his continual entreaties to flee Sambir with him, Aissa denies Willems her sexual favours a second time (*OI* 156). She delights in the humiliation of Almayer, trussed up and lying in "the chair like a log" (*OI* 184) and at the prospect of killing Lingard and avenging the deaths of her people:

> Again she gave [Lingard] the look that was like a stab, not of anger but of desire; of the intense, overpowering desire to see in, to see through, to understand everything; every thought, emotion, purpose, every impulse, every hesitation inside that man; inside that white-clad foreign being who looked at her, who spoke to her, who breathed before her like any other man, but bigger, redder, white-haired and mysterious. (*OI* 247)

Aissa's relationship with Lingard is extremely significant in the novel. It is the challenge and confrontation she offers Lingard that carries the critique of patriarchal Western values: "The masculine and closed universe in which Lingard commands and controls suffers irreversible damage at the angry entry of Aissa" (Nadelhaft 32).

Conrad's criticism of the masculine and closed world of imperialism is most strongly exemplified in the relationship between Aissa and Willems. Despite her hatred of imperialism Aissa is interested in learning about the imperialists' world: "'What is that land ... of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us – who are not white?'" (*OI* 144). Aissa is empathetic and strives to understand others. As Willems becomes increasingly unhappy

> [s]he shared his torment in the poignant wonder, in the acute longing, in the despairing inability to understand the cause of his anger and of his repulsion; the hate of his looks; the mystery of his silence; the menace of his rare words – of those words in the speech of white people that were thrown at her with rage, with contempt. (*OI* 333)

Aissa realizes that she does not understand Willems, but continues trying.

On the other hand, Willems, like the imperialist powers he represents, exhibits little interest in anything except his own needs and desires (*OI* 6). He perceives himself to be worthy of greatness but is incapable of insight and, therefore, when things go wrong, he sees himself as acted upon and, therefore, blameless: "Aissa did it all ... And when I think of all my life, of my past, of all my future, of my intelligence, of my work, there is nothing left

but she, the cause of my ruin" (*OI* 274). Conrad reveals his contempt for imperialist nations that show no interest in understanding or appreciating the culture of those people whose resources they have appropriated in order to ensure their own economic growth. Like Willems, they take no blame for their actions and show no concern for the damage they cause. Conrad adds another level to his criticism of imperialism by portraying Willems as a vile racist, blind to his limited abilities and flawed morality:

> He was carried away by the flood of hate, disgust and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race; for the brown skins; for the hearts false like the seas, blacker than night. This feeling of repulsion overmastered his reason in a clear conviction of the impossibility of him to live with her people. (*OI* 152)

Throughout the novel Aissa is described as "primitive". It is important to understand that Conrad has not chosen this word as a pejorative. Krenn convincingly argues that the words "savage" and "primitive" in connection with Aissa have nothing negative in their connotation:

> Most frequently, however, and in nearly all instances when [they are] applied to Aissa, the word[s] [mean] a total absence of the physical and mental changes that result from exposure to and assimilation of civilizing influences ... 'Savage' as used by Conrad has less to do with racial differences than with character, and more often than not, it is intended to reveal the speaker as much as the person to whom the word is applied (65)

From the beginning Conrad gives Willems, as he does Lingard and Almayer, "the recognizable signs of late-Victorian self-righteousness and misogynistic self-indulgence" (Nadelhaft 28). Discerning readers judge Willems' perception of others as flawed and

sharply limited.

Conrad persuasively portrays Aissa as a woman who falls in love with an enemy because of his good looks and the challenge he presents. Willems is "bigger and stronger" and his voice is deeper than the men of Aissa's race. Although she hates his European heritage he represents its strength and power: "From the short contact with the whites in the crashing collapse of her old life, there remained with her the imposing idea of irresistible power and of ruthless strength. She had found a man of their race – and with all their qualities" (*OI* 333). Aissa empathizes with Willems' outcast state, for she too has experienced homelessness and isolation (*OI* 48–52). Like other Conrad women, Aissa proves the cliché that 'love is blind'. She tries to ignore Willems' weaknesses by making up " a story of a man great amongst his own people, valorous and unfortunate; an undaunted fugitive dreaming of vengeance against his enemies" (*OI* 75). She tells herself that what Willems feels for her is love, although she suspects it is only short-lived sexual desire (*OI* 338).

Conrad creates Aissa not as a cartoon super-heroine but as a remarkable woman who, like many other remarkable women, chooses to love a very inferior sort of man. Despite her flaws, Aissa is far superior to the men who control the world around her. In her portrayal Conrad effectively undermines many traditional notions about women that are embedded in society's thinking and perpetuated by literary conventions. He reinforces his challenge to these literary conventions by creating a second female character to highlight the weakness of the white men who represent the shabby racism behind imperialist power.

Joanna Willems plays a small but important part in *An Outcast of the Islands*. Joanna also acts as a voice for native women and a vehicle by which Conrad comments on imperialism. However, unlike Aissa, who is a princess and a warrior, Joanna is more typical of the native women married to white colonists. Joanna is traded into marriage with Willems by Hudig, who promises Willems financial gain (*OI* 34). The marriage is emblematic of how colonizers from the West felt about the East: the area itself was less than desirable but it offered resources and opportunities that could make them rich. Joanna also represents marginalized women who marry white men but are never accepted into their husbands' world. Because they have married outside their own world these women live on the fringes of two worlds, thereby doubly victimized by imperialism and colonization.

Joanna's life with Willems represents the lives of many native women in her situation. Willems tyrannizes her "good-humouredly" and beats her physically (*OI* 3). She never complains because he quickly put down her sole attempt at "rebellion" (*OI* 9) with a greater beating. After spending hours vaunting his glory to the men at his club, Willems arrives home late at night, wakes Joanna up, forces her to listen to drunken ramblings about his greatness, and dismisses her contemptuously: "Go to bed, dummy" (*OI* 9). As Nadelhaft states, Joanna's physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her white European husband reflects "the domestic violence that was so characteristic of British households" and, therefore, exemplifies "the barbarism at the heart of the imperial model" (29).

Willems' contempt for Joanna reflects the racism intrinsic to the imperialism he represents. Her life seems a series of humiliating experiences. Joanna indicates that after

their marriage Willems rejected her displays of affection (*OI* 28). Willems associates her people, even those young native women who are "slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired [and] mov[e] languidly," with garbage and decay and considers them unclean: "They were a numerous and an unclean crowd, living in ruined bamboo surrounded by neglected compounds ... They were a half-caste, lazy lot, and he saw them as they were – ragged, lean, unwashed" (*OI* 4). The disdain he exhibits for Joanna also stems from his feeling of racial superiority:

> She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained, and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back. His gaze travelled upward from bow to bow, noticing those that hung on by a thread, but it did not go beyond her chin. (*OI* 25)

Joanna's reaction to the news of Willems' dismissal from Hudig's firm reveals the degree to which Willems oppresses and abuses her:

> "You boasted while I suffered and said nothing. What has become of your greatness; of our greatness – you were always speaking about? Now I am going to live on the charity of your master. Yes. That is true ... And you can go somewhere else and starve. So! Ah! I can breathe now! This house is mine". (*OI* 28)

Conrad's portrayal of Joanna indicates more than the abuse endured by women in her situation. After Willems leaves, Joanna eventually searches for and finds him in Sambir, remorsefully blames herself for the breakdown of the marriage, and pleads with Willems to take her back. Krenn rightfully feels that Joanna's remorse may be the result of

Lingard's moralizing interference, but her remorse also stems from factors that initially made marriage to a white appear desirable: "Willems' aberrations do not annul the qualities that make him superior in her eyes – as in his own – and on Joanna's scale of values the security and status that comes with being the wife of a European outweigh the abuse and humiliations" she suffers (Krenn 62). Krenn's ideas are convincing; however, there are other factors to consider. Although Joanna is afforded some security with Hudig, her circumstances stand in the way of remarriage and a step-father for her child. Her concern for her son is touchingly portrayed as she sits, "thinking tearfully of nothing at all, looking with swimming eyes at her little son – at the big headed, pasty-faced sickly Louis Willems" (*OI* 301). Joanna's status as a half-cast woman prevents easy acceptance into either the society of the white colonials or of the Malay. Joanna, like Aissa, is an outcast and consequently may see in Willems' status a chance to rebuild their marriage. The difficult situation of the half-caste is described as:

> the sad problem ... of the white man's own making ... the most distressing aspect of white control in the east – the creation a group of people rejected by all men, of a group forced to exist in a vacuum in a land demanding orbital connections, a group without any place whatsoever. (Lee 124)

It is through the relationship of Joanna and her husband that Conrad reveals how imperialist nations fail to see the native peoples as individuals and as victims of imperialist exploitation. Willems' treatment of Joanna and their child and his shocked reaction to her ferocity indicates that he considers Joanna merely an appendage of himself, not a person with an identity of her own. Joanna makes it clear that her ideas about Willems do not

match his: "'Oh! You great man! ... Oh! You great man! ... You are less than dirt, you that have wiped your feet on me. I have waited for this. I am not afraid now. I do not want you'" (*OI* 27). Conrad includes women's individuality as one of the novel's issues by challenging the white man's sense of himself and of the order of the world. Aissa illustrates this issue when she rails at Lingard for trying to exclude her because she is a woman (*OI* 246). "The mode of hierarchy suggests not only an order of being but a world in which the wife and child are extensions, projections, of the male husband and father" (Nadelhaft 29).

Joanna's and Willems' relationship reinforces Conrad's criticism of imperialism's blindness to the destructive nature of its exploitation of colonized peoples. Willems has destroyed his marriage but takes no blame for his actions and shows no concern for the damage he has caused his wife and child. When Almayer urges Willems to return to his family, Willems responds self-righteousnessly: "'Let hers be the sin of that separation; of the sacred bond broken'" (*OI* 38). Months later, when Joanna goes to Willems, full of remorse and begging forgiveness, he blames her for being part of the general scheme of his misfortunes. He meets her attempt to explain her actions with an "aspect of unforgiving rectitude, of virtuous severity, of merciless justice". When Joanna apologizes to him for believing stories about his infidelity, Willems responds, with severe indignation, "'It's a damned lie!'" However, seconds before, "[h]e wanted to preserve before his wife the lofty purity of his character. He thought: She does not know. Almayer held his tongue about Aissa. But if she finds out I am lost ... She mustn't find out'" (*OI* 344 – 50).

Conrad undermines conventional portrayals of native women in the imperial romance by choosing to create in Joanna a female character who is plausible because of her weaknesses. Joanna is a courageous woman who, at first, bravely refuses to follow her abusive and cowardly husband. Almayer fears her ferocity, comparing her to a "wildcat" always ready to rush up and claw his eyes out with her nails (*OI* 205-06). Joanna certainly displays courage in leaving the security afforded by Hudig (*OI* 189), in her determination to visit the compound (*OI* 206), and in her eventual night-time journey with two questionable strangers to the island where Willems lives (*OI* 314). She ventures to rescue Willems and attacks her rival, the formidable Aissa (*OI* 359). However, Joanna loses her courage at the frightening aspect of a future of loneliness and isolation and becomes fearful of living her life without a husband. Consequently, she must find a strategy to rationalize her acceptance of that which she abhors. Therefore, Joanna transforms Willems into a hero and casts herself and her family as the villains:

> the blind night ... saw nothing, but could hear the fretful whimpering of the child, the creak of the bedstead, Joanna's deep sighs as she turned over, sleepless in the confused conviction of the wickedness, thinking of that man masterful, fair-haired, and strong – a man hard perhaps, but her husband; her clever and handsome husband to whom she had acted so cruelly on the advice of bad people, of her own people; and of her poor, dear, deceived mother. (*O I* 302)

Joanna's self-delusion is bitterly ironic in light of the fact that it enables her to return to a man whose own self-delusion has made her life so hard and unhappy.

In creating Joanna, Conrad provides native women a voice by which he criticizes

imperialism and its inherent racism and undermines traditional views of male superiority.

***Lord Jim* (1900)**

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad's critique of the imperial romance becomes explicit. He uses the major female character, Jewel, to poke fun at the genre and the romantic male dreamers who are products of the genre. Jim's success as an adventurer is due less to his qualities and actions than to Jewel's.

Jim's sojourn in Patusan reveals how Conrad continues to undermine the conventions of the adventure and imperial romance novels through his portrayal of women characters. Some critics feel that Jewel is another of Conrad's female characters who represents the jungle and its sexual dangers. For example, Jeffrey Berman relates Jewel to the *Patna*, implying that she, like the ship, will eventually lead to Jim's dishonour:

> Jewel comes from the same stuff as Patusan; she is organically related to the fecundity of the earth as the eight hundred passengers of the *Patna* are linked to the life-giving water beneath them. The name 'Jewel', Freud notes, is a noteworthy symbol of the female genitalia, and she is bedecked with the flowers which reinforce her feminine nature. (76)

For Berman, Jewel is ultimately harmful to Jim; Berman compares her head and eyes to those of a reptile and suggests that the manner in which she flashes her teeth illustrates her predatory nature (78-79). However, Jewel does not harm Jim; she saves him and makes possible much of his success. Like Aissa in *An Outast of the Islands*, Jewel exhibits the traits traditionally associated with and deemed necessary for the heroism

exemplified by the protagonists in the genre that Conrad undermines.

Jewel does not appear in the first section of the novel. However, in this section Conrad carefully establishes the effects that books such as the imperial romance have had on Jim's ideas about the adventure hero and his desire to become one. Jim is a romantic and dreams of being a hero like those in the adventure novels that he read in his youth. His choice of vocation as an officer of the mercantile marine is the result of a "course of light literature" (*LJ* 5). During his training he often becomes lost in thought, envisioning a life at sea as described in such books:

> "On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through surf with a line; ... He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book". (*LJ* 6)

Conrad devotes most of the first chapter to the rich imaginings of Jim's dream of leading the exciting life of an adventure hero who never flinches in the face of danger.

Marlow perceives Jim as a hero and describes Jim's story as a "heroic tale" of "honour", "confidence", "pride" and "power"; he states that Jim's ability to lead and administer Patusan came to him "like keen scent to a well-bred hound"(*LJ* 226). Jim finds approbation in Patusan partly because of his good looks and the status that his sex and nationality afford him. Although Marlow describes Jim as a hero, Conrad views Jim as rather foolish and seems to be poking fun at him. The description of Jim's arrival in

Patusan is humorous rather than heroic. Jim does not sail into Patusan under the sails of a tall ship as a true hero might. He arrives sitting in a tin box in a leaky canoe in which floats a half cocoa-nut. Instead of coming in with pistols blazing, he clutches an unloaded revolver. Instead of a fanfare of trumpets, there is a "troop of monkeys who ... made an insulting hullabaloo" (*LJ* 243-44). Conrad is telling the reader that many men are like Jim. They try to live their lives as though they were romantic heroes in fiction and subscribe to traditional literary conventions of manliness. However, in *Lord Jim*, it is Jewel who exhibits attributes and behaviour to which romantics like Jim only aspire.

Loyalty and a steadfast maintenance of "the bond" are requisite qualities for an adventure hero. A true hero never breaks a promise to others or shirks his duty. Jim, however, is neither loyal nor steadfast. His jump from the *Patna*, a ship containing hundreds of trapped pilgrims, is a betrayal of duty. In contrast, Jewel is steadfast in performing her duties. She provides care and companionship for her mother and is vigilant in protecting her from Cornelius' bullying and abuse: "Through her whole life the wife of the unspeakable Cornelius had no other companion, confidant and friend but her daughter" (*LJ* 276). After her mother's death, Jewel faithfully maintains her mother's grave. Mongia suggests that Jewel is like the heroine in a Gothic romance. Her inability to separate from her mother and establish her own identify forces her into stasis; thus, like her mother, she is destined to be abandoned by Jim just as her mother had been abandoned by Stein. (4). Mongia's theory ignores the evidence that Jewel is very much a woman of courage and action. As her mother lay dying, Jewel fulfilled her mother's last request by placing herself

against the door to prevent Cornelius, enraged and intimidating, from gaining entry into her mother's room (*LJ* 313).

Jewel is also steadfast in her concern for Jim's safety (*LJ* 283). Without Jewel's protection, Jim might not have survived long enough to affect the political situation of Patusan. Jewel spends much of her time guarding Jim against the dangers that constantly surround him (Klein 150). When Cornelius schemes to get rid of Jim, Jewel stands guard throughout the night to assure Jim's safety (*LJ* 292). While Sherif Ali's men hide in readiness to murder Jim, Jewel puts his interests first and exhorts him to leave her in order to seek safety with Doramin. Marlow states that "[Jewel] was unselfish when she urged Jim to leave her, and even to leave the country. It was his danger that was foremost in her thoughts" (*LJ* 311). Knowing that Jim's fatigue might result in faulty judgment, Jewel exhorts him not to enter immediately into negotiations with Gentleman Brown (*LJ* 394). Jewel stays committed to Jim despite his costly mistake of allowing an armed Brown to leave Patusan . Jim shows that he cares little about the bond she has forged with him and states that he has no reason to care about impending death at Doramin's hands. Jewel still urges Jim to protect himself from harm. Even his final rejection of their relationship cannot undermine her resolve to remain loyal to a man who does not reciprocate the steadfast devotion she exhibits:

> "'Will you fight?'" she cried. 'There is nothing to fight for', he said; 'nothing is long'... 'Will you fly?' she cried again ... 'For the last time,' she cried menacingly, 'will you defend yourself?'... Tamb'Itan saw her lean forward where she stood, open her arms, and run at him swiftly. She flung herself upon his breast, and clasped him round the neck. 'Ah!

But I shall hold thee thus,' she cried." (*LJ* 412-413)

Jim's refusal to fight is a double betrayal. Jewel is Jim's lover, but she also represents Patusan and its people. They believe Jim is their saviour. Jewel's loyalty to Jim underscores her allegiance to her people and his betrayal of them. She exhorts Jim to fight Doramin because she loves Jim and wants him to act to protect himself. However, she also hopes to see proof of Jim's ability to promote and maintain peace in the settlement. Jewel exemplifies "the covenant" that Jim has now broken twice. He breaks faith with the community of mankind when he jumps from the *Patna* (Parry 85) and again when he refuses to fight on Patusan. Jim's actions are more than evidence of professional misconduct. Much of Jim's history in the novel consists of his longing for a chance to become the noble, ethically sound hero of much literature and history; however, it is Jewel and not Jim who displays the commitment and fidelity essential to such a role.

An important quality for the protagonist in any adventure or imperialist romance is physical bravery. Conrad gives Jewel great courage and highlights this quality by contrasting her actions with those of Jim. Although he experiences success in his foray against Sherif Ali, Jim often exhibits cowardice. There may be many reasons for Jim's eventual jump from the *Patna*, but a lack of bravery cannot be ignored. He provides no assistance in preventing Cornelius' verbal assaults on Jewel (*LJ* 298). Gentleman Brown's statement that he would never desert his men may create an empathetic response from Jim, but Jim's decision to let Brown's boat leave suggests a lack of courage. Jim's history of failure in heroic action may explain his determination to go to Doramin, and reflect a

preference for imprisonment, or even death, over another failed attempt at such action.

In contrast to Jim, Jewel never suffers the paralysis of will that characterizes many of Conrad's romantic heroes. She successfully stands fast against Cornelius. When Gentleman Brown attacks Patusan, Jewel directs the women and children into the fort and proves herself a very efficient and high-spirited commander. She is ready to jump into a quick, direct reprisal and supports Dain Waris's desire to strike back at Brown immediately (*LJ* 361-62). Jewel supervises the distribution of ammunition (*LJ* 364), and food (*LJ* 390) and joins the chiefs and fighting men on the bank where preparations for battle are being made. When she hears that Dain is dead, she immediately realizes the danger from Doramin's men but also the advantage of her own position: "She clapped her hands, and her first words were, 'Shut the gates.' ... The girl stood in the middle of the courtyard while the others ran about. 'Doramin' she cried ...'But we have all the power in Patusan'" (*LJ* 407). When she labels Jim false for his betrayal, Jewel's natural inclination to act courageously may explain the bitter disappointment she expresses at his decision not to fight (*LJ* 350).

Jim's refusal to flee Patusan with Jewel may be an attempt to uphold the European code of honor (Watt 89). As Watt explains the code held the ideal of public conduct as an absolute, exalting it above all others, domestic or private. Maintaining the code often resulted in excessive personal pride and self-sufficiency. Those upholding the code trust their own views as more reliable and important than moral virtue, civic duty and relationships with others. However, Jewel proves herself honourable, without being self-

satisfied or self-serving. Her pride is for her people and her country, and her concern is for their safety and the safety of the man she loves. Moser describes Jewel as the archetypal damsel whose distress allows the protagonist an opportunity for chivalrous adventure (84). Mongia likens Jewel to the heroine in a Gothic romance, entrapped within Patusan, a feminized space analogous to a medieval castle, and forced into passivity by the conventions of the genre (9). Neither critic seems to notice that Conrad undermines these conventional female roles by creating in Jewel an intrepid woman of action who exhibits "extraordinary martial ardour"(*LJ* 362).

Jewel is perceptive and politically astute while Jim is a politically naïve dreamer. Although Jim gains a reputation of god-like proportion and the natives ascribe supernatural powers to him, his success is, as pointed out, dependent to a great degree on Jewel. The fact that Jim accepts this mythical version of himself without the slightest self-consciousness reflects a grave lack of insight and perceptivity. Watt persuasively argues that the novel's Patusan portion suggests fable, fairy tale, and medieval romance, and that Jim views Jewel as a persecuted maiden whose hand he wins as a reward for delivering her people from the oppression of the nefarious Sherif Ali (92). A narrative dissonance occurs in the novel when Jim jumps from the *Patna,* leaving the "spiritual and ethical malaise of modernity, and enters into Patusan and a "mythical mode of discourse". Jim, like so many other Conradian heroes constructs his identity in a literary context, perceiving himself a hero in an imaginary story (Erdinast-Vulcan 37). However, it is Jewel's pragmatism and political acumen that, to a large extent, account for Jim's reputation for heroism.

Conrad's decision to portray Jewel as pragmatic and politically astute and Jim as a politically naïve dreamer is an attempt to mock or show as false the colonial administrators' belief that they were racially superior to native peoples and were rightfully fulfilling their duty by spreading British imperialism. Jewel's role in Conrad's criticism may be threefold. She represents the intelligence of women and of people oppressed by imperialist powers, and she may act as a warning to imperialist powers that oppressed people are not blind to the weakness of their oppressors. Like many of Conrad's women, Jewel is a pragmatist who acts to survive in the real world. On Patusan, despite the various warring political factions, Jim is often oblivious to the peril about him. Jewel, however, perceives that Jim is "a pre-destined victim of dangers" (*L J* 310). Jewel has to warn him about the spying and machination of the cunning and devious Cornelius (*LJ* 292). Marlow, who is usually loyal to Jim, complains of his "absurd carelessness" (*LJ* 285) in ignoring the threat Cornelius poses. When Jewel warns Jim about the planned murder attempt by Sherif Ali's men, he becomes angry at what he perceives as deception on Jewel's part. Again Marlow alludes to Jim's rather stupid naïvete in this affair:

> "Jim tells me he experienced a sense of deception ... He assures me he was angry with the girl for deceiving him ... 'Do you know,' he commented, profoundly, 'I rather think I was not quite myself for whole weeks on end about that time.' 'Oh, yes. You were though,' I couldn't help contradicting". (*L J* 298)

Jewel devises a successful plan to save Jim and then is perceptive enough to realize that Jim has to be told how to defend himself: "[Jim] has raised his weapon as the door flew

open, but now his arm fell. 'Fire! Defend yourself,' the girl outside cried in an agonizing voice". Yet Jim describes himself as being "absolutely necessary" for Patusan's well- being (*LJ* 301-04). After Jim relates the details of how Jewel's actions have saved him, he demonstrates his dim-wittedness when he slaps his chest and brags to Marlow: "'Yes! ... I believe I am equal to all my luck'" (*LJ* 305). Jim has lived on Patusan for two years, yet when Gentleman Brown's men slay Dain Waris, Jim does not seem to discern fully the danger of his position. Jim's failure in Patusan was avoidable; had he followed the course of action initially advised by Jewel and Dain Waris, Brown and his men would have quickly been eliminated. It is Jewel who must advise Jim to ready his defenses against Doramin (*LJ* 409). Once again, Jim proves ineffectual without Jewel's assistance.

Like the women in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Jewel dramatizes Conrad's commentary on the insecurity and injustice in the lives of native and half-caste women who become sexually involved with white men. Conrad reveals the importance of women's voices by affording Jewel the ability to express her ideas well and to use her oratorical skills in a way that is dramatic and fascinating. Marlow's description of their talks together contains details such as her voice's "soft, passionate tones," the "sudden breathless pause," the "vehement whisper" and the "appealing movement of [her] white arms" (*LJ* 308). She reads and writes and displays a talent for language when she quickly learns English. Jewel's description of the horrors of her mother's life with Cornelius has a profound effect on Marlow: "It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of

danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell" (*LJ* 313). Marlow's words are evidence that Jewel's story casts a light on the oppressiveness of the lives of the women of Patusan. As Nadelhaft points out, Jewel's past represents the underside of the behaviour of civilized men and is, therefore, alien and incomprehensible to men who choose to flee from the knowledge of that reality: "Jewel epitomizes the combination of particular and abstract knowledge which terrifies Marlow because it seems to demand an immediate ethic of compassion and individually expressed love not for 'civilization' ... but for the individual who suffers. One is *related* to the suffering individual"(55).

In *Lord Jim,* Conrad reveals how imperialist powers and patriarchal societies choose to ignore the impact of their practices on the lives of women. Jewel's story makes Marlow realize that her world is unknown to him. He fears knowing her perspective because it explodes the hypocrisy of masculine ethical responsibility. Jewel tells the story about her last minutes with Jim so movingly that Marlow is clearly affected by her words: "I haven't the heart to set down here such glimpses as she had given me of the hour or more she passed in there wrestling with him for the possession of her happiness" (*LJ* 410). Jewel's speech about Jim's decision to leave her reflects both her insight and the ability to articulate her thoughts about his character:

> "'He could see my face, hear my voice, hear my grief! When I used to sit at his feet, with my cheek against his knee and his hand on my head, the curse of cruelty and madness was already within him, waiting for the day ... he was made blind and deaf and without pity, as you all are ... He fled as if driven by some accursed thing he had heard or seen in his sleep.'" (*LJ* 349)

Jewel displays a facility with language, but is discerning enough not to be taken in by rhetoric. Marlow's attempt to convince Jewel of Jim's loyalty renders him frustrated and helpless. Marlow represents the propaganda and lies spread by the imperialist powers to convince their critics and the native peoples of the benefits of imperialist practice. Mongia suggests that, in *Lord Jim,* Marlow's narrative authority is undermined by the suggestion that Conrad "means us to respond to ... numerous frames as alternative view points" (174). While Jim's view is obscured by his romanticism, and Marlow's judgment is marred by his misjudgment of Jim's motives and character, Jewel's accurate perceptions offer the reader the truth about imperialism and the racist, patriarchal ideology in which it is founded.

Jewel feels strongly that eventually Jim will return to his white world. Her situation is analogous to those of other native women in Conrad's novels, such as Nina Almayer in *Almayer's Folly* and Aissa in *An Outcast of the Islands.* In these novels the Conradian heroes, like Jim, mark their compromise, "an easy option of removal to a less stringent world, by association with a woman belonging to the world or party they have newly chosen" (Land 86-88). Jewel may intuitively comprehend what Benita Parry views as Jim's need, not for approval from the Malays, but "confirmation of his redemption ... from his peers back home" (90). Although Jim seldom seems to assimilate the advice given him by the men in his life, Jewel learns from the experience of the women in hers. She worries that Marlow may entice Jim to depart Patusan, leaving her once again to cope with the abusive Cornelius. Although Marlow feels her insecurity is a "craving", and cannot understand why Jewel "should not have made for herself a shelter of inexpugnable peace out of [Jim's]

honest affection" (*LJ* 313), her experience of the ways of white men has made her wary of their fidelity. Moser perceives Jewel as changing from the stereotypical ingenue of romantic fiction into "an extremely effective, utterly pitiless judge of Jim's moral conduct" (84). Moser is correct; however, what he does not take into account is Jewel's insight into the ultimately self-serving motives of white men who enter into a relationship like Jim's and Jewel's. She understands that Jim's loyalty will prove no stronger than theirs:

> "'Other men have sworn the same thing ... My father did.' She paused to draw an inaudible breath. Her father, too ... These were the things she knew! At once I said, 'Ah, but his is not like that.' ... after a time the strange, still whisper wandering dreamily in the air stole into my ears. 'Why is he different? Is he better?'" (*LJ* 314)

As Nadelhaft points out, Marlow dissimulates when he belittles Jewel's insecurity over Jim's steadfastness and her "intuition of the world":

> There is a word that Marlow could say, as he well knows, which could change Jim's life. He could answer affirmatively when Jim asks whether, even now, Marlow would care to have Jim carrying out his orders aboard ship ... Jewel is entirely correct in her sense of the power Marlow has over Jim and thus over her life. (56)

The doomed nature of Jim and Jewel's relationship is a colonialist trope found in such imperial romances as Kipling's "Lisbeth" and "Georgie Peorgie" and would be immediately recognized by Conrad's contemporary readers (Ruppel 54). These readers would perceive Marlow's assertions that Jim is loyal as less than honest. Based on the evidence of Jewel's keen perceptiveness, her "intuition of the world" is clear and accurate.

Jim's refusal to fight Doramin may result from a need to find redemption from his guilt over Dain Waris' death; nevertheless, his own needs and desires are stronger than anything he feels for Jewel. He exemplifies imperialist powers that take and use what they need to sustain the economic growth that feeds their greed, and then move on.

Once again Conrad eschews idealism or sentimentality and creates an honest portrayal of a remarkable woman who falls in love with a man of many limitations. Marlow describes Jim as a figure bordering on the divine, dressed in "immaculate white from shoes to hat" (*LJ* 3). Royal Rousseau suggests that Jim has an attractiveness which "seems to suggest to others the best part of their own character"(87). Jewel, therefore, mistakenly projects onto Jim the very qualities that make her such a strong individual. Like Aissa, Jewel chooses not to comprehend that no matter how great her lover appears in her world he is a defector from another world which has a destructive claim upon him (Land 88). Yet her fear of Jim's departure is clearly based on her understanding of his moral weakness: "She owned, as I had put it to her, his heart. She had that and everything else – if she could only believe it" (*LJ* 317). The predisposition of so many of Conrad's women to love foolishly proves that he portrays them as true to life. "Love makes fools of us all" is a cliché not merely because it is so widely spoken, but because it is so universally applicable. Jewel and Aissa are realized as female characters with many fine qualities who, nevertheless, reveal a common human failing.

Jewel's actions prove her attributes, but her appearance and name seem to reinforce her attributes and also Conrad's intent for the novel to undermine the conventions of the

imperial romance. *Lord Jim* begins with a description of Jim as "an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, [and] powerfully built" (*LJ* 3). On the other hand, Marlow makes many references to Jewel's diminutive size and her little face with its delicate features. Frequently these details occur when Jewel is involved in dangerous actions, thereby throwing her courage into greater relief (*LJ* 303). Conrad's irony is at work when he creates a large man eclipsed by the actions of a tiny woman. Marlow often refers to Jewel as "the girl" and often draws attention to her youth; she is "childlike" with a soft-dimpled cheeks (*LJ* 283). Marlow also describes Jim as "boyish" (*LJ* 278); however, this word seems to allude to Jim's rather puerile credulity and self-centeredness. He points out that Jewel is petite, but also that "[s]he feared nothing" (*LJ* 308). Jewel represents nations that, despite their small size, are not frightened of fighting to maintain their freedom and culture.

Some readers may feel that Marlow perceives Jewel's role in his male-centred society as so inconsequential that he can refer to her as "the girl" and not identify her as an individual. Nadelhaft, for example, attacks not Conrad but Marlow for wishing "to deny to women their reality and tenure in the real world of white men" (56). However, Conrad may intend "the girl" to represent all women, thereby intimating that women in general share Jewel's steadfastness, her intelligence and her courage. Moreover, the name "Jewel" does not signify either the objectification of women or the equation of women with wealth and possession. Marlow states: "Jim called her by a word that means precious, in the sense of a precious gem" (*LJ* 277). However, "jewel" denotes not just costly or expensive, but also valued, esteemed, and beloved.

Marlow's tale of the "astonishing rumour" of the emerald supports this interpretation of Jewel's name. The emerald is more than a simple symbol of Jewel's beauty, and the story is not merely a re-telling of Jim's adventures. The legend's male is a "vagabond", a "rascal" and a "scoundrel" (*LJ* 279). Although his strength is "wonderful", he is undisciplined and unruly, creating fear in the people because of his "extreme ferocity". The gem, however, is reportedly "extraordinary", "fabulous", and "priceless". It is an object belonging to the white man but preserved by being concealed about the person of a woman. However, the story's jewel, initially tangible, is transformed. The legend ends with the statement, "There could be not doubt she wore the white man's jewel concealed upon her bosom" (*LJ* 278-81). The qualities intrinsic to the jewel have clearly been transferred to the woman, and it is she who is extraordinary, fabulous, and priceless. The woman in the tale is obviously Jewel, and the legend is well known because her qualities are so formidable.

Conrad provides several parallels between Jewel and Doramin's wife. Both women are described as small, and just as Jim's height affords him a degree of status and respect among the Bugis of Patusan, so too does Doramin's bulk: "[Doramin's wife] was light, delicate, spare, quick ... he, facing her, [was] immense and heavy, like a figure of a man roughly fashioned of stone" (*LJ* 260). While each of the men is regarded as a political and military leader, each woman is portrayed as playing a significant role in the administration and direction of the settlement (*LJ* 259). Just as Jewel attends to Jim's safety, Doramin's wife sees to his needs when he escapes into the compound: "[She] was issuing a shrill order to her girls ... They put [Jim] into an immense bed – her state bed – and she ran in and out

wiping her eyes to give [him] pats on the back" (*LJ* 255). She also attends to the security of her people, spending each afternoon "gazing steadily through a wide opening in the wall which gave an extensive view of the settlement and the river" (*LJ* 257).

Doramin's wife is very astute. Although Jim has gained the trust of her husband and an almost god-like reputation in the settlement, Doramin's wife alone seems to sense that Jim is escaping from a past that haunts him. She intuitively links his fugitive status to his isolation and severed familial bonds: "[W]hy was it that he so young had wandered from his home, coming so far, through so many dangers?" (*LJ* 275) She asks Marlow questions that suggest Jim may be incapable of loyalty, even in relationships where a bond may be considered ineluctable: "Had he no household ... no kinsmen in his own country? Had he no old mother, who would always remember his face?" (*LJ* 275). Her immediate comprehension that something about Jim does not ring true illustrates how the novel's female characters, like so many other Conradian women, are often better judges of character than the men around them. Marlow, who represents the world of imperialism, may avoid learning any further "damning" information about Jim from a desire not to face the truth about Western colonial expansion and its methods of oppression for economic and political gain.

Another similarity in the novel's female characters is that neither is named. Doramin's wife is always referred to as such; Jewel may be Stein's "Emma" and is called "Jewel" by Jim, but her real name is never revealed. Just as Jewel has been left nameless in order to represent all women, so has Doramin's wife. Conrad, however, creates her as more

Jewel's attractive appearance and her mixed racial background make her easily accepted by Conrad's readers. The description of Doramin's wife emphasizes her foreignness to these readers: "She had a round, nut-brown, soft face, all fine wrinkles, large bright red lips (she chewed betel assiduously), and screwed-up, winking, benevolent eyes" (*LJ* 255). Doramin's wife provides a voice for women who are the silent victims of the "othering" perpetrated against them by racist, patriarchal states. And once again Conrad creates native women through whom he challenges traditional views of male superiority.

Chapter 2

THE MAJOR PHASE I

1904 – 1911

In my analysis of Conrad's first three novels I discussed how Conrad uses the female characters to exemplify the oppression and injustice women experience in life under the imperialism in those areas of the eastern world that Conrad had visited during his career in the merchant marine. In this portion of the dissertation I will discuss how Conrad criticizes the domination by males in white patriarchal societies in other locations: South America in *Nostromo*, England in *The Secret Agent*, and Russia in *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad continues to reveal the patronizing attitude of men deluded by their dreams of chivalry and romance, by juxtaposing them with women who show not only the heroic qualities men dream of achieving but also a compassion for the human condition and an engagement in helping others rise above it. Once again the novels' women surpass the men in perception, honesty, integrity, and commitment; their voices and actions battle the patriarchal systems that attempt to maintain the status quo perpetuated by traditional ideas of male superiority and female behaviour. Conrad's authorial distance and his characteristic irony, especially in *The Secret Agent*, highlight his derision for the political and economic machinations of the men who run governments and the "material interests" that ultimately control many of them.

Nostromo (1904)

Commentary on *Nostromo* often suggests that Conrad's misogyny reveals itself in his portrayal of Emilia Gould, the major female character. Emilia is a woman who performs many good deeds. However, Baines, states that Emilia sinks "her personality in the ideal of service", but accuses her nevertheless of "scepticism, and brazen self-interest" (306). Stephen Land feels that there is a level of self-serving hypocrisy lurking behind her good works. Land views Emilia merely as a female counterpart to her imperialist husband, Charles, sharing his early ambitions: "Emilia is ... the female reflection of his ideals, who lives at the heart of his sphere of operations" (112-13). Similarly, Rebecca Carpenter suggests that Emilia is a gentler, milder imperialist whose "charitable actions provide a perfect cover for Charles Gould's imperial ... exploitation" (85). Irving Howe agrees that Mrs. Gould is not truly humanitarian and that "the rhythms of Costaguana are alien to her racial conventions" and, therefore, she cannot transcend those conventions (110). Likewise, Elaine Jordan interprets Emilia's refusal to hear Nostromo's deathbed confession as proof that she does not want to face the issues of class or political difference (7).

However, in *Nostromo*, a novel with four male protagonists, Emilia Gould emerges as a complex, fully rounded female with more strength of character than the men who surround her. Through Emilia, Conrad reveals his esteem for the ability of women to eschew the comfort of illusion and accept the harsh reality of life in a society run by men whose main concerns are the attainment of wealth and power. Emilia accepts the truth but

is not defeated by it By creating Emilia as an outsider in Costaguana, Conrad allows her to see better the weaknesses and failings of the colonial system. As she grows from naïveté to knowledge of the truth of imperialism, she provides Conrad a vehicle by which he points out the flaws inherent in imperialism's rhetoric and practices. Emilia's work to better the living conditions of the victims of imperialism reveals what Conrad thinks should be implemented to assist the poor and underdeveloped countries of the world. Conrad modeled Emilia after two women whom he respected and admired: his mother, Ewa Korzeniowska, and Gabrielle Cunningham Graham, the wife of one of his dearest friends. Gabrielle was an intrepid, spirited woman who accompanied her husband on a wide variety of adventurous journeys. Ewa was remembered by her family as tender, steel-willed, devoted to her family, and politically astute (Nadelhaft 21-22). In Emilia, Conrad reveals the irony of Marlow's contention in *The Heart of Darkess* that "the women should be out of it" (*HD* 121).

Conrad employs Emilia to comment upon the rapacious nature of imperialism, and its drive to increase profits at the expense of the countries it exploits. Through her, Conrad expresses critical statements about the politics and greed of Latin American leaders and the ways in which they allow their countries to be exploited by the United States. Conrad provides Emilia with a sharp-edged ability to observe and speak the truth about men whose self-serving political machinations prove disastrous for the countries from whose resources and people they profit. Charles Gould judges Holroyd's religious endowments as "munificence"; Emilia, however, perceives the mercantile nature of the millionaire's generosity and his lack of true Christian brotherhood:

> "Mr. Holroyd's sense of religion was shocked and disgusted at the tawdriness of the dressed-up saints in the cathedral -- the worship, he called it of wood and tinsel. But it seemed to me that he looked upon his own God as sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches. That's a sort of idolatry. He told me he endowed churches every year, Charley." (*N* 51)

Emilia is sympathetic to, and alarmed at, the physical and political deficiencies of the country's leader, Don Vincente Ribiera. She gives an astute appraisal of the man that resonates with foreboding for the stability of the country: "Mrs. Gould ... looking at ... this man of delicate and melancholy mind, physically almost a cripple coming out of his retirement into a dangerous strife ... was made uneasy. He was more pathetic than promising, this first civilian chief of the state" (*N* 85). Emilia also thoroughly grasps the hypocrisy behind the perfidious intrigues of Costaguana's self-styled political saviours. She judges their schemes as "puerile and bloodthirsty game[s] of murder and rapine played with terrible earnestness by depraved children" (*N* 36).

Conrad criticizes men for the indifference they exhibit to the damage they cause in their desire to succeed. Conrad reinforces Emilia's astuteness by contrasting it with her husband's avoidance of the truth of his role in the development of the mine. Rather than engage Emilia in discussing the validity of her statement, he dismisses it as a lack of sensitivity on her part to his feelings of patriotism. Charles replies only that he himself was born in Costaguana. After meeting Holroyd and the other partners in the mine, Emilia quickly discerns that their interests are questionable: "'Ah yes! The religion of silver and iron ... I heard those men talk among themselves. Can it be they really wish to become, for

an immense consideration, drawers of water and hewers of wood to all the countries and nations of the earth?'" To this her husband answers that men "'must work to some end'"(*N* 52). Charles's reluctance to discuss his wife's views stems from his desire to avoid facing the evidence of the blatant materialism that lies behind his and Holroyd's interest in the Concession. As Land points out, there, is a "subtle bond of confidence between Gould and Holroyd ... which ... underlines their alliance and personal similarity" (113). Gould's reluctance to debate Emilia's impressions also suggests an inability on his part to formulate and express arguments to successfully counter her keen insight. Throughout the novel, Emilia makes critical remarks about the political games men play when vying for the wealth the mine will produce. These comments undermine assertions by critics such as Rieselbach that Emilia remains blind to her husband's true motives in re-opening the Concession and "that the whole project of reclaiming the mine was, from the outset, an illusion ... [based on] love" (19).

Emilia's insight into the men who play the games of politics suggests that Conrad perceives that women possess the acumen necessary to succeed on the political stage. Emilia is politically astute but she also has qualities requisite for the kind of public leadership that plays a beneficial role in the lives of a country's citizens. In a novel in which most male characters are morally bankrupt and entrenched in self-delusion, she acts as the novel's moral compass. Emilia is highly principled and has the courage to speak against what she feels is wrong, and to maintain her commitments to others. She expresses her frustration at the passive acceptance by Costaguana's citizens of governmental corruption

and brutality, and she bravely speaks out in defense of the poor whose desperation drives them to crime. She chastises Don Pepe: "'[I]f it had not been for the lawless tyranny of your government ... many an outlaw now with Hernandez would be living peaceably and happy by the honest work of his hands'" (*N* 79). When Martin Decoud insults her husband (*N* 127), and later casts aspersions on the integrity of Nostromo, she does not hesitate to speak out: "'Viola, the Garibaldino, with whom [Nostromo] has lived for some years, calls him 'the incorruptible'" (*N* 159). She obtains from Sir John a promise that "the house occupied by Georgio Vasari should not be interfered with" (*N* 89) and, after the death of Teresa, takes Linda and Giselle into her own home. During the revolution Emilia opens her home to and assists the wounded (*N* 167). Because of Emilia's compassion for, and empathy with, the people, Decoud appeals to her in order to gain support for his plan of separation: "'Think also of your hospital, of your schools, of your ailing mothers and feeble old men, of all the population which you and your husband have brought into the rocky gore of San Tomé. Are you not responsible to your conscience for all these people?'" (*N* 155-56) Through Emilia's actions Conrad reveals his view that "the power and the authenticity of women as political agents is ... considerable" (Nadelhaft 95).

Good civic leaders care about and communicate with all of a country's citizens. In Sulaco, Emilia models building relationships based on the inclusion of all classes. In contrast, Martin Decoud shows contempt for the people of Costaguana and Charles Gould remains uncommunicative and unapproachable. According to Ursula Lord, Charles embodies the "conceit and aloofness" that constitute the picture of members of the British

foreign service who came to believe that this attitude was a result of "forcible contact with a people living on a lower plane" (238-39). Emilia, however, forms relationships with all classes of citizenry in Sulaco. Sir John extricates himself "from high places for the sake of sitting near Mrs. Gould" (*N* 85); Captain Mitchell confides in her (*N* 88); Don Jose Avellanos consults her over the contents of Hernandez's petition (*N* 106); General Barrios admires her for having "more sense in her little bridle hand than all the other women of Sulaco" (*N* 117). Father Roman respects her for "her earnest interest in the concerns" of the people and, despite her "heretical" beliefs, calls her "wonderful and angelic" (*N* 287). Dr. Monygham comments on her concern for all others: "She thinks of the Viola children; she thinks of me, of the wounded, of the miners; she always thinks of everybody who is poor and miserable" (*N* 273). Although Monygham's love for Emilia may cause the reader to suspect bias in his comments about her, Dr. Monygham is best qualified to appreciate Emilia precisely because he has no illusions about the novel's characters (Erdinast-Vulcan 82).

Emilia also provides Conrad a voice by which to point out the destructive exploitation of natural resources by imperialist powers and countries whose leaders willingly sacrifice these resources for their own gain. Her desire for improved economic conditions for the poor and miserable does not prevent her from discerning a disturbing truth about changes in Constaguana that have resulted from the reopening of the mine. Her initial faith that the mine will result in economic stability and justice for the citizens of Costaguana is tempered by her understanding of an impending diminution. In words that

are almost prophetic about contemporary environmental issues, such as the destruction of South American rain forests, Emilia voices her concern to Sir John about the spoliation and destruction that will occur as a consequence of progress: "'My husband wanted the railroad ... All this brings nearer the sort of future we desire for the country ... But I will confess ... I felt something of a shock ... even here there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve'" (*N* 86). As Claire Rosenfield suggests, the "thread of a slender waterfall" in the initial landscape surrounding the mine is a "symbol of regeneration ... the symbol of rebirth has simply been corrupted" by the mechanization that is part of the working of the Concession (51-52). Emilia's painting of the waterfall is symbolic of her fears for Costaguana in the hands of politicians and industrialists who will destroy it for the sake of "material interests". Nalelhaft feels that, in this novel, "where in some sense all behaviour and all consequences are in some sense political" (93), Emilia's recognition that "for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future" is a "crystallization of the concept that politics must be *responsible*" (93).

Conrad partly modeled Emilia after his mother and the portrayal reveals his respect for women's ability to negotiate a balance between political skepticism and public activism. In Emilia Conrad provides the reader with a picture of the kind of actions that prove beneficial for the people of all nations. Emilia sees the hardships in the lives of the poor and works ceaselessly for improvement: "[S]he sets up the human community, the sense of human solidarity in understanding and warmth and kindness" (Stallman 213). Accompanying Charles on his trips up the mountain, she causes a stir among the natives for

traveling, as they do, "on foot up the mountain paths" (*N* 73). After she spends two months in the mountains, Don Pepe nicknames her "the never-tired señora" (*N* 64). Indeed, she is described as almost supervising or overseeing the construction of the mining community: "[she] had seen it all from the beginning: the clearing of the wilderness, the making of the road, the cutting of new paths up the cliff-face ... For weeks together she had lived on the spot" (*N* 77). Erdinast-Vulcan suggests that Conrad idealizes Emilia by turning her into an icon, the incarnation of the town's Madonna with the blue robes. However, Conrad undermines any degree of idealization by revealing Emilia's own perception of her defeat before the ongoing process in Costaguana of materialism and the worship of the mine and its silver (92). Emilia understands the truth of her husband's collusion with imperialist interests, yet continues to assist the citizens of Sulaco to improve their lot. Berman suggests that, "Unlike her husband, Emilia Gould embodies the more precious wealth found in Sulaco, the humanistic treasure of love and imaginative sympathy. The innate differences between material and spiritual values create the incompatibility of [the Goulds'] marriage" (90).

Conrad comments on how the male sense of entitlement inherent in patriarchal societies is dangerous and damaging and he contrasts Emilia's behaviour in Costaguana with that of the men. Many of them are sympathetic, fully developed characters; however, Conrad also portrays them as self-aggrandizing poseurs using ideology to justify their self-interested obsession with power, politics, and wealth. For example, despite the employment it provides the country's people, Gould threatens to blow up the Concession rather than see

it taken over by the government of Pedro Montero. Decoud, always posing as a cynical dilettante, is determined to win Antonia's affections and, therefore, publishes a newspaper for which he exhibits sneering contempt. Similarly, Nostromo risks his life in the lighter full of silver in order to perpetuate his reputation as a man of courage and incorruptibility. Pedrito Montero leads soldiers to their death in order to enjoy power "supremely in every way" (*N* 278). Likewise, Sotillo tortures and kills Hirsch. While the male characters in the novel involve themselves in destructive machinations and "puerile, bloodthirsty game[s]", Emilia exemplifies the strength of women who face the difficulty of life's injustices and work to change them. She reveals the author's respect for and admiration of such women. Another testament to her is the high esteem of Dr. Monygham, one of the more cynical of the novel's numerous dramatized narrators. Land argues that Monygham's cynicism is the result of "his insight into suffering and an expression of contempt for those who ignore it" (126). It is, therefore, natural that he should turn to Emilia, the only character of uncompromising humanity in the story, and one who shares his concern for the basic welfare of the common people.

In his portrayal of Emilia, Conrad proves false the criticism that he does not "do" women well. He effectively portrays Emilia's development from a youthful idealist to a woman who, although disillusioned, maintains her ability to love and her desire to help others. She also voices Conrad's criticism of men who place more importance on goals than on family, and of governments and imperialist nations who maintain an emotional distance from the human suffering caused by their policies and practices. Emilia enters

Costaguana as a young bride, infatuated with her new husband and inculcated with his professed idealism. As Knapp Hay points out, Charles does not "hoodwink his bride; she fools herself, loving Gould" (184). However, although Emilia remains smitten with Charles, her perspicacity is such that she soon discerns and fears more than just his intentions for and obsession with the mine. Attempting to communicate her anxieties, Emilia expresses regret at their not having left the mine alone. Her view of the mine as a force of evil is evident in her reiteration of Don Pepe's allusion to the story of the Expulsion from Eden: "'We have disturbed a good many snakes in that paradise, Charley, haven't we?'" (*N* 149). Despair over the mine eventually evolves into alarm as Emilia confronts Charles's escalating preoccupation with the Concession:

> It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver bricks erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. (*N* 158)

However, she becomes concerned over more than the mine and her marriage, as she perceives in Charles not just an obsession with "material interests" but a dangerous predisposition to cold calculation. Emilia's alarm is evident when, having mistakenly been informed that the silver had been lost and Decoud and Nostromo drowned, Charles silently ponders his proposed letter to Holroyd:

> Mrs. Gould watched his abstraction with dread. It was a domestic and frightful phenomenon for her like a thunder cloud passing over the sun. Charles Gould's fits of

> abstraction depicted the energetic concentration of a will haunted by a fixed idea. A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head? The eyes of Mrs. Gould, watching her husband's profile, filled with tears again. (*N* 272)

Beautifully integrated here are both the clear-headed reflections and the emotional tumult of a woman who fears for the man she loves. Conrad does not idealize Emilia. He develops her character from a young idealist to a woman who learns the ugly truth about the way men and nations exploit others for their own gain, and then flatter themselves by labeling their actions altruistic. As Albert Guerard writes, "*Nostromo* seems ... to distinguish between the self-deluding ...victim of his own illusions and the genuine clear-headed idealist; between, say, Charles Gould and his wife" (192).

Conrad's decision to have Emilia remain in love with her husband does not diminish her integrity, but instead reinforces the believability of her character. Fictional heroines such as Jane Eyre may harbour principles lofty enough to lift them to the high moral ground where they then turn their backs on the men they love, but real women in Conrad's day usually chose a course of compromise and acceptance. Emilia is loyal to Charles because she is a woman of high principles. However, Conrad humanizes Emilia by giving her good reason for her ongoing attraction to Gould. Throughout the novel details give testament to Charles's good looks. Described as "spare and tall, with a flaming moustache and neat chin, clear blue eyes, auburn hair and a thin, fresh red face", Charles knew "how to sit a horse" and "rode like a centaur" (*N* 35-36). The sexual connotation that resonates in Conrad's

choice of simile is reinforced by the symbols employed in detailing the Goulds' courtship. After learning of his father's death Charles arrives grasping "a thick oaken cudgel," a symbol which is clearly phallic; he contemplates a "cracked marble urn", a Freudian symbol for the female; Emilia lets drop her parasol, an action symbolic of her "fall" away from virginity; "her delight in him ... found a pinnacle from which to soar up into the skies" (*N* 43-45).

Conrad allows Gould's sexual appeal to affect Emilia even as she begins to speculate on the decisions and events which constitute both the mine's progress and the country's decline into political chaos. The narrator often interrupts the Goulds' conversations about problematic issues with details of Charles' physical appearance and Emilia's reaction to his appearance:

> "What do *you* feel about it, Charley?"
>
> Then, surprised at her husband's silence, she raised her eyes ... He had done with the spurs, and twisting his moustache with both hands, horizontally, he contemplated her from the height of his long legs ... The consciousness of being thus contemplated pleased Mrs. Gould. (*N* 51)

Conrad reveals that Emilia's strong convictions are not always so resolute that they can overcome Gould's sexual appeal. After he dismisses her misgivings about Holroyd, Emilia surveys Charles "from head to foot," noticing his "riding breeches, leather leggings ... and those great flaming moustaches" ... [and] this combination was gratifying to Mrs. Gould's taste" (*N* 52). In a manner most human and true to life, Emilia puts aside principle, allows her heart to rule her head, and then rationalizes the action: "'How thin the poor boy is!' she

thought. 'He overworks himself.' But there was no denying that his fine-drawn, keen red face, and his whole, long-limbed, lank person had an air of breeding and distinction. And Mrs. Gould relented" (*N* 52). Conrad's decision to expose this element of acquiescence in Emilia's character undermines the arguments that Emilia is a "secular saint" (Knapp Hay 184). Conrad portrays Emilia as growing disappointed in and disillusioned with her husband, and yet still in love with him. If Conrad had chosen to idealize Emilia, she might have pointed out to Charles the error of his ways and given him the ultimatum of "the mine or me." Or, she might have believed him flawless and maintained steadfast faith in his decisions and actions. Instead, Emilia acts like many women who continue to love their husbands despite their disappointment in them.

Emilia's increasing disillusionment with Charles' behaviour and ambitions for the mine reveals the destructive repercussions for those who value wealth more than family and love. On a larger scale, Conrad's commentary is aimed at political leaders who exploit their countries' resources and people to satisfy their own greed. However, Conrad also reveals that the political corruption that destroys a country is mirrored in domestic breakdown. Having lost both parents, Conrad was in a position to comment on the importance of family. Although she loves Charles, Emilia's disappointment in his actions results in a changed view of their relationship and a reserve on her part. After her attendance at the embarkation of Barrios's soldiers and a discussion of the Goulds' role in the fighting, Emilia's despair at her husband's views is reflected in a smile that "remained a shade too long upon her lips" and by her desire to take leave of him. Perhaps sensing her disapproval, Charles walks

quickly to her, "seizing her hands [he] bent down, pressing them both to his lips" (*N 149*). Emilia's love for Gould remains evident, but the evidence of her new aloofness is unmistakable:

> Before he straightened himself up again to his full height, she had disengaged only to smooth his cheek with a light touch, as if he were a little boy. "Try to get some rest for a couple of hours," she murmured, with a glance at a hammock stretched in a distant part of the room. (*N* 149)

Emilia further distances herself from Charles when, after Sulaco has separated from Costaguana and the mine is once more in full operation, she ponders her life and her relationship with him. She describes him as "incorrigible" for two reasons: his devotion to the mine and in his "determined service to... material interests" (*N* 373). Following the pattern described above, details of Gould's physical appearance, "the grey hairs on his temples," enter her reflections. There is, however, a difference in Emilia's attitude when she now refers to Charles as "Poor boy". Here, Emilia's meaning is ironic: she no longer feels concerned over his long days of hard work. Instead, she calls him "Poor boy" because, although Charles has become obsessed with the mine's silver, he remains blind to the obsession and its consequences. On another occasion, she receives word that Charles will spend another night at the mine. Emilia quickly accepts the fact that she will be spending another night without her husband. This time, however, she immediately turns her thoughts to Dr. Monygham and reveals that her warm feelings for him stem from the very qualities that Charles does not possess:

> People believed him scornful and soured. The truth of his

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> People believed him scornful and soured. The truth of his

> nature consisted in his capacity for passion and in the sensitiveness of his temperament. What he lacked was the polished callousness of men of the world, the callousness from which springs an easy tolerance for oneself and others, the tolerance wide as poles asunder from true sympathy and human compassion. This want of callousness accounted for his sardonic turn of mind and his biting speeches. (*N* 372)

Through Emilia, Conrad comments on the psychological make-up of men driven to obtain wealth and power by all means, including human suffering and human loss. After Charles has successfully negotiated for the mine, Emilia notices both her husband's boyishness and his gray hair; the incongruity reflects her awareness that Gould has not developed a sense of social consciousness. Like a child, he sees the world only as meeting his needs. She calls Charles "perfect" because his limited view of the world, a world that does not include love for her, has allowed him to excel in maintaining the success and security of the Concession: "[The mine] was a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication ... It was not his fault" (*N* 373). Emilia has learned the truth about Charles and men like him: they are incapable of love and compassion for others. Emilia's understanding of this truth explains her response to Giselle's weeping at Nostromo's death (*N* 401-02). Aware of their similar situations and able to empathize with Giselle's grief, Emilia advises Giselle that eventually the treasure would have counted more with Nostromo than she. To Giselle's protestations that Nostromo loved her, Emilia replies cynically that she too has been loved. When Nostromo tries to tell her the location of the stolen silver, she refuses to listen. Robert Penn Warren feels that "[s]ymbolically, this is [Emilia's] moment of vision, her repudiation of the logic

of material interests" (223). However, Emilia also refuses because, like women in real life, she wishes to punish her husband for choosing the mine and its concomitant politics over their relationship. Also, knowing that Gould will never be more than a "dear boy", Emilia understands and accepts the truth that he cares for the mine more than for her and that theirs will be a childless marriage: "She had hoped for a long, long time, that perhaps ... But no! There were to be no more" (*N* 373). Therefore, Charles now takes on the role of Emilia's child, and having taken part in "puerile and bloodthirsty game[s]" must be punished; it is the role of a loving parent to do so. The strength of Emilia's character derives from her continued love for Gould, despite full awareness of the truth about his character, and their relationship.

It is important at this point to consider Rieselbach's criticism that Conrad harbours a "low opinion of women's intelligence" (25). She cites as proof, the narrator's statement in *Nostromo* that "a woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency; she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation -- interestingly barren and without importance" (*N* 48-49). Rieselbach assumes that the narrator echoes the author's sentiments; however, a close examination of the content and context of this statement indicates no such denigration.

Previous to these remarks, several pages of the chapter have been assigned to the description of the Goulds' courtship. Quickly established -- even before his father's death and his own marriage -- are hints of Charles's false illusions about and obsession with the mine. He has "fallen under [its] spell"; "it was another form of enchantment"; into its

"magic formula there entered hope, vigour and self-confidence" (*N* 43). Charles repeatedly remarks that, in his rantings against the mine, his father has been mistaken and "takes a wrong view of that San Tomé business" (*N* 44). With news of his father's death Charles makes an almost immediate decision to return to the Concession and, subsequently, the rationalization necessary for that decision: "He resolved firmly to make his disobedience as thorough (by way of atonement) as it well could be. The mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster, its working must be made a serious and moral success. He owed it to the dead man's memory" (*N* 48)

Just a few lines later, the narrator states that Mrs. Gould enjoyed "an eager intelligence" but that her mind was not "masculine". Clearly it is the masculine mind and not the feminine mind that is the butt of Conrad's well-known irony. Conrad suggests throughout the novel that it is the masculine mind, not the feminine mind, that exhibits a predilection for illusion and self-deception. Each of the four major male characters falls victim to his own masculine mind. Gould's benevolence, Decoud's cold incredulity, Nostromo's so-called integrity and Monygham's scepticism all prove inadequate to one degree or another. The narrator's opinion that a woman with a masculine mind is not "of superior efficiency" is also tinged with irony. The destructive results of the political machinations of the men in the novel certainly undermine a literal interpretation of this view. Gould destroys his marriage, Decoud takes his own life, Nostromo sullies his morality and dies ignobly, and is indirectly responsible for the horrific torture and eventual death of Hirsch.

Finally, the notion that a woman with a masculine mind is "interestingly *barren*" (my italics) is disproved throughout the novel. Emilia is very knowledgeable about Costaguana's civil affairs and history. She impresses Sir John with the information that Sulaco was the location of the "'highest ecclesiastical court for two viceroyalties'" (*N* 27) and is so politically astute that Martin Decoud approaches her first with his plan for separation: "'You know the country well enough not to be shocked by what I say, Mrs. Gould'" (*N* 155). Conrad has created Emilia as a woman able to articulate profound and accurate reflections concerning the people who inhabit her social and political worlds.

Perhaps the strongest testament to Emilia's many positive qualities is the author's attitude toward her. The novel is replete with pretentious male characters, all of whom come under Conrad's sardonic gaze: although Emilia finds Gould's moustache attractive, Conrad's constant references to it suggest that Charles is a type of archetypal villain; Decoud, the great skeptic, is described as having "faltered in his affection of amused superiority before [an] insignificant chit of a schoolgirl" (*N* 112); the pompous Captain Mitchell lifts his coffee cup "with an expression as though making ready to hear a sermon in church" (*N* 344); the great military leader, Sotillo, springs from his hiding place and, "[h]is spurs having become entangled in a perfect welter of ponchos he nearly pitched on his head and did not recover his balance till the middle of the room" (*N* 318). But Emilia is untouched by ironic authorial commentary. Not even Decoud's sardonic comments regarding English idealism are aimed at Emilia. His sarcasm focuses on the hypocrisy behind a form of imperialism that Charles exemplifies: materialism and greed masquerading

as economic benevolence.

In *Nostromo*, Conrad strengthens his commentary on the need for patriarchal societies to include women as players in the arena of civil leadership. He creates in Emilia a woman who works hard to assist the poor despite her understanding of and scepticism about the politics of Sulaco. Also, in Antonia Avellanos, Conrad creates a woman who, like Emilia Gould, is intelligent, knowledgeable, perceptive, and has interests and abilities that go beyond the domestic. However, she is a woman whose passion for politics is more intellectual than it is grounded in public work. Conrad also creates Antonia to undermine the traditional expectations of female behaviour that are often inscribed in literature.

Conrad portrays Antonia as wanting and capable of more than what traditional patriarchal societies expect of their women. Atypical of most Costaguanan women of her age, she eschews the ritual of traditional courtship and early marriage in order to follow her own interests:

> Antonia could hold her own in a discussion with two or three men at a time. Obviously she was not the girl to be content with peeping through a barred window at a cloaked figure of a lover ensconced in a doorway opposite -- which is the correct form of Costaguana courtship. (*N* 102)

She is fully cognizant of, and very concerned with, her country's history and governance and shares her father's passion for politics. However, Antonia's views about politics are her own; she is not merely a mirror image of her father, for she is more skeptical and therefore much less a romantic (Verleun 54). Martin Decoud tells her: "'You know everything.

You read all the correspondence, you write all the papers -- all those state papers that are inspired here, in this room, in blind deference to a theory of political purity'" (*Nostromo* 130). Antonio's family has suffered great personal, political and economic loss (*N* 112), but she does not seek marriage as an escape from the impoverishment of her home. She refuses Martin Decoud's repeated proposal of marriage. Instead, she prefers to assist her father with his writing and his political plans for Costaguana, and takes an active part in the discussions about Sulaco's separation from the rest of Costaguana (*N* 171).

Antonia is insightful and able to quickly "sum up the measure of a man". At only sixteen, she was perceptive enough to see through the posturing of a twenty-year old Martin Decoud and to chastise him for being supercilious and aimless (*N* 120). Eight years later, she remains equally discerning. When Decoud alludes to, but does not name, the exploiters of Costaguana's workers, Antonia openly displays her disgust at what she perceives as his cowardly censure of her belief in the Gould Concession: "Mrs. Gould said, 'Oh, this is unjust!' And Antonia interjected, 'Don't answer him, Emilia. He is attacking me'" (*N* 125). When she teases Decoud's hypocritical mocking of Nostromo's desire to be perceived as heroic, Decoud's response indicates how razor-sharp Antonia's discernment is: "Decoud had often felt his familiar habit of ironic thought fall shattered against Antonia's gravity. She irritated him as if she, too, had suffered from that inexplicable feminine obtuseness which stands so often between a man and a woman of the more ordinary sort" (*N* 137). Antonia challenges Decoud's ironic statement because she is insightful enough to know they are the tiresome and spurious thoughts of a *poseur*. A woman who can penetrate a

man's long cultivated veneer of false cynicism is certainly not obtuse. Furthermore, Antonia is not a woman "of the more ordinary sort"; she is intelligent, well educated, and involved in matters far removed from those in which "ordinary" women of Costaguana are forced, by the traditional expectations of their role, to find themselves.

Although Antonia's character is not as fully developed as Emilia's, Conrad affords Antonia enough complexity to make her true to life. Antonia is perceived as high-minded and serious (*N* 100), but not above taking advantage of her beauty to entice men. In the scene where Barrios is taking his leave of Emilia and Antonia,

> Antonia raised negligently her hand holding an open fan, as if to shade from the sun her head, wrapped in a light lace shawl. The clear gleam of her blue eyes gliding behind the black fringe of eyelashes paused for a moment upon her father, then travelled further to the figure of [Decoud, who] ... directly he saw himself noticed ... approached quietly and put his elbow over the door of the landau. (169)

This scene shows Antonia using both physical attractiveness and calculation to overcome the feigned detachment that Martin Decoud so often affects (Verleun 64). Antonia vacillates between desiring Martin's attention and rejecting his love when offered. Conrad portrays Emelia as similar to many women who pursue intellectual challenge. These women often experience a struggle between their heart and their head. Antonia is attracted to Decoud, but is in love with political ideas and concepts. Conrad reveals her struggle to choose between the man and the abstract during Decoud's courtship of her while at the Gould home. Decoud declares his affections, but Antonia initially remains silent, and does not look at him (*N* 126). He declares himself a patriot, and she responds to him "*not*

unkindly" [my italics], a phrase that indicates reserve, not passion, on her part. When he complains of the intellectual and physical dangers that may await him in his role as a political journalist, Antonia undermines his concerns by indicating that journalistic success must first be achieved. Perhaps hoping to move Antonia through guilt, he then portrays himself as a man whose political involvement for her sake has put his life in jeopardy: "'The most forlorn hope in the most forlorn army on earth would have been safer than that for which you made me stay here. When you make war you may retreat, but not when you spend your time in inciting poor ignorant fools to kill and to die.'" Antonia rejoins, "'Martin, you will make me cry'" (*N 129*-30). Decoud correctly interprets this reply as a sign that he has moved Antonia to tears through his involvement in political action. Throughout the speech Antonia does not glance at Decoud, but remains staring at her family home, with its "chipped pilasters [and] broken cornices" (*N* 130). There she sees and is moved by evidence of the sacrifice, courage and patriotism of her father, a man for whom politics has been a lifelong passion.

Conrad's portrayal of Antonia is complex. After she learns of Martin Decoud's death she goes into deep mourning (*N* 248) for the same man whose marriage proposals she had rejected. Although she was often sceptical towards the living Decoud, Antonia starts to romanticize and heroize the dead Decoud. She joins the bandit, Hernandez, basing her decision on the belief that this is what Martin would have wanted (*N* 254). She convinces herself that a new revolution to re-annex the rest of Costaguana to Sulaco "was from the first poor Martin's intention" (*N* 365). Later, she has a marble medallion carved and

dedicated to Martin's memory (*N* 342). However, what may appear Antonia's contradictory behaviour is merely human nature. Like many heroes throughout history, Decoud dies in the right circumstances and at the right time. Accompanying Nostromo in the lighter was an act of patriotism and courage and sure to favourably impress the politically concerned Antonia. Decoud's failure to return and recommence his role as cynical sophisticate results in his remaining forever a hero in Antonia's memory. His alleged political martyrdom blinds the discerning eye Antonia cast on Decoud while he was alive. Antonia's decision never to marry may be more the result of her continued admiration for political heroism than ongoing loyalty to the man.

Conrad creates Antonia to mirror Emilia in exemplifying how women should play important roles in public life. Conrad presents women as intelligent and capable, and as caring more for the achievement of a country's well-being than for personal power and gain. Peter Hayes argues that Conrad views women in terms of a philosophical negotiation between the Platonic concept of tyranny and the Nietzschean assertion that God is dead. Conrad believes tyrannical men act out their dreams by unleashing desires which other members of society restrain. It is by means of faith that men can keep their various appetites in check. Once God and faith are dead, nothing can hold back the drive to power at all cost. However, through their relationships with women men come to recognize the best parts of female nature, sympathy and love, and other attributes dramatized in Conrad's portraits of Emilia and Antonia: "Their peculiar intelligence and sympathy give Antonia and Emilia Gould their exalted status apart from the political world, yet make them essential to

the creation of a new state. They serve as a necessary spur to action against a tyranny fundamentally opposed to the values they embody" (Hayes 104-05).

The Secret Agent (1907)

In a letter to Ambrose J. Barker, a reader who sent him a pamphlet titled *The Greenwich Mystery* (1923), on which *The Secret Agent* is based, Conrad described his fourth novel as "in intention, the history of Winnie Verloc" (Knapp Hay 228). Winnie Verloc is a London housewife who plunges a knife into her husband, Adolf Verloc, in an act not merely of domestic violence, but of defiance against a system that perpetuates social injustice against women, the poor, and the weak.

Many critics feel that Conrad's portrayal of Winnie reveals his mistrust of and lack of sympathy for women. Baines feels that Conrad portrays Winnie in a very negative manner. Not only does Winnie deliberately ignore her husband's nefarious activities, she also exhibits a "ruthless streak which enables her to carry out her thoroughly reprehensible deception of Mr. Verloc" (337). Although Jeffrey Berman feels that Conrad initially situates Winnie away from the shabby corruption of the police, politicians and secret agents, Conrad soon allows her to degenerate into a murderess, who demonstrates neither remorse nor guilt. Conrad then continues to debase Winnie: her blind animal fear of the gallows reduces her hitherto human stature into a sub-human existence; she grovels before the worthless Ossipon; and she is abandoned by the author, at the end of the novel (125 -27). Guerard claims that Conrad's misogyny is revealed in Ossipon's reactions to Winnie upon

relations" (39). Many of the critics who consider *The Secret Agent* as one of Conrad's major works do so for reasons that ignore the importance of Winnie's story to the novel. However, as he does in *Nostromo,* Conrad reveals that the political corruption and social inequities of patriarchal societies are reflected in the breakdown of individual family relationships. As Nadelhaft states, "Only when we read this text ... as part of Conrad's long analysis of the centrality of domestic relationships to the success or failure of political and moral systems, do we read it properly" (100).

Winnie's philosphy that things "bear little looking into" reflects her grasp of the conditions of life for those not privileged by power and wealth. She understands the stratification of England's class system, and the way in which it determines the quality of life of the nation's citizens. For example, she reveals her insight into the injustice of society when she informs Stevie that the police "'are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have'". Winnie does not "pretend to [a] depth of insight" enough to explain "a bad world" because she understands the futility of deeper inquiry. Having experienced the truth of Stevie's statement that it is a "'[b]ad world for poor people,'" Winnie understands that "looking into" life for poor people is fruitless, for no amount of investigation will change the conditions in which poor people live: "'Nobody can help that'" (*SA* 124-25). Finding an explanation for the evil of the world will not improve life for those who suffer the evil. Winnie does not believe life warrants reflection or scrutiny because reflection and scrutiny alone will not lead to change. She limits the range of inquiry into life both because it will not bear scrutiny and because scrutiny ultimately

proves dangerous (Fogel 174-75). The examination of a world which unearths little more than onerous, wearisome duty hardly inspires a yearning for further exploration of that world.

Winnie's story provides Conrad a vehicle by which to comment on the life of drudgery experienced by poor women in patriarchal societies. Winnie's memories of her youth reveal the thin and dreary life of the daughter of a poor widowed mother who keeps a boarding house:

> It was a crushing memory, an exhausting vision of countless breakfast trays carried up and down innumerable stairs, of endless haggling over pence, of the endless drudgery of sweeping, dusting, cleaning, from basement to attics; while the impotent mother, staggering on swollen legs, cooked in a grimy kitchen. (*SA* 176)

Conrad strengthens his commentary on the lives of poor women with his portrayal of the charwoman, Mrs. Neale, who is always trying to extort money from Stevie. Although Winnie intervenes and puts a stop to Mrs. Neale's begging, she understands the reasons behind it and is sympathetic: "'Of course, what is she to do to keep up? If I were like Mrs. Neale I expect I wouldn't act any different'" (*SA* 134).

Conrad also examines the way in which poverty forces women to sacrifice their independence and self-actualization. When a young woman, Winnie, cognizant of her family's plight, refuses her young suitor. Conrad effectively illustrates her strength of character by allowing Winnie to describe with great poignancy the difficulty she experienced in turning away the young man who, despite strong parental objections,

continued to reciprocate her affections:

> "[H]is father threatened to kick him out ... if he made such a fool of himself as to marry a girl with a crippled mother and a crazy idiot of a boy on her hands. But he would hang about me, till one evening I found the courage to slam the door in his face." (*SA* 201)

Winnie's self-actualization could have been achieved only if she had abandoned her family for the sake of freedom from the burdens it imposed. The reasons for Winnie's sacrifice to marriage are clearly evident: unable on her own to provide a home for her physically disabled mother and a safe haven for her mentally challenged brother, she rejects the man she loves for wedded life with Verloc, who offers financial security. As Winnie explains to Ossipon later in the novel: "'Could I've gone on the streets? ... What was I to do with mother and that poor boy, eh? ... [Verloc] seemed good-natured, he was freehanded, he had money, he never said anything'" (*SA* 201). Her compassion, especially for Stevie, cannot be denied. Conrad emphasizes the fulfillment of her promise to protect her helpless brother by her husband's cowardly act of using him to carry out a dangerous act of terrorism.

Conrad also employs contrast to highlight the selfless nature of Winnie's decision to sacrifice love and emotional fulfillment to marry Verloc. Winnie was an attractive young woman. Her hair was extremely neat, glossy and artistically arranged; her figure was full and rounded and her complexion clear. She conversed in an appropriate and lively way with her mother's lodgers, exhibited an "equitable amiability" and enjoyed the attentions of

one serious beau (*SA* 3). Verloc's manner and appearance stand in sharp contrast to Winnie's. He displayed a "steady-eyed impudence which seem[s] to hold back the threat of some abominable menace." Much of the description of Verloc's appearance reveals his obesity, his slovenly appearance and his sloth. He is "burly in a fat-pig style," and looks as though he had "wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed". He sits at meals wearing his hat and overcoat and seldom rises before noon (*SA* 2-8). Councillor Wurmt calls him "very corpulent," and Vladimir threatens to fire him because he is too fat and a lazy fellow: "'You -- a member of the starving proletariat -- never!'" (*SA* 12-14).

Winnie's story reveals the way patriarchal societies, in which wives are powerless and financially dependent on their husbands, force women into the constant humiliation of having to inveigle for what they need. Women in Winnie's situation must constantly minister to their husbands, and please and placate them, in order to cadge favours. For example, Winnie feels she must constantly anticipate the difficulties that her brother might cause. Consequently, she feels she must always cadge sympathy from Verloc in order to secure a safe haven for Stevie. Also, she must appeal to Verloc's natural indolence in her attempts to smooth over the problems that result from Stevie's often erratic behaviour. Having been inculcated with the belief that Mr. Verloc is "good", Stevie is eager to please him; and Verloc is most willing to take advantage of any opportunity to remain inert: "Mr. Verloc's intercourse with Stevie was limited to the casual mutter of a morning, after breakfast, `My boots', and even that was more a communication at large of a need rather than a direct order or request" (*SA* 39). Winnie constantly makes reference to Stevie's

ability to work hard and his desire to assist Verloc: "'You could do anything with that boy, Adolf ... he would go through fire for you'" (*SA* 133). Sadly, the appeal to her husband's sloth works only too well, and Stevie dies doing the work that Verloc would rather not do himself.

In his description of Winnie's youth Conrad implicitly comments on the abuse perpetrated by men on women and children. The violent husband and father who terrorizes the childhood of Winnie and Stevie, testifies to the brutality of a society that experienced a level of domestic abuse both known and tolerated as a regular feature of British life. As Martin Ray describes it, *The Secret Agent* is Dickensian in its exposure of the hypocrisy of Victorian society, in which dangerous vices are hidden beneath layers of bourgeois niceties (75). Winnie and Stevie's childhood is full of physical violence and anguish, but her actions reveal that despite her youth she had the courage to fight back. Although no more than a child herself, Winnie takes up the battle to protect Stevie from her angry, brutal father:

> [S]he had the vision of the blows intercepted (often with her own head), of a door held desperately shut against a man's rage (not for very long); of a poker once thrown (not very far), which stilled that particular storm into the dumb and awful silence which follows a thunder-clap. (*SA* 176)

The bravery she displays in safeguarding her brother reinforces Winnie as a character for whom the reader feels great sympathy. She is one of Conrad's greatest characters, "a lower-class figure whose pathos is not bathos and is entirely justified by her experience" (Fogel 176).

Conrad emphasizes Winnie's compassion and courage by contrasting her actions with those of the novel's male characters. The cell of anarchists around Verloc, all of whom envision themselves as revolutionaries determined to overthrow capitalism, show little of Winnie's bravery or concern for the victims of poverty and injustice. Yundt is a "posturing ... moribund veteran of dynamite ... [who] never in his life raised personally as much as a little finger against the social edifice." Michaelis espouses the "doom of capitalism" yet lives as the pampered, parasitic darling of a wealthy, aristocratic patroness. Ossipon can hardly be considered a revolutionary concerned about the plight of the poor and powerless; he reveals a lack of compassion for humanity when he describes Stevie as a degenerate (*SA* 32-34). Although Conrad caricatures the revolutionaries, the hypocrisy of these advocates for the downtrodden is obvious when compared to Winnie's actions in caring and battling for those who cannot defend themselves. In a novel about anarchists and revolutionaries, Winnie is the only character who actually revolts against the injustice of society. As Nadelhaft points out, "Winnie is the true anarchist in the novel, for she has learned to have no faith in systems of social organizations, all of which have ignored her or let her down" (99).

Winnie is one of Conrad's most complex female characters, and Conrad positions her as an equal in the circle of the novel's male characters in terms of her significance to the novel's structure. Norman N. Holland argues that the informing principle that provides the novel with its shape and logic is "the unsuspected". The reader senses throughout the book that each character has a "doubleness" or a secret self. The Professor, for example, is

withered and frail, but also explosive and dangerous (54). In general the anarchists' resolve is vitiated by endless discussions of theory and, therefore, they never put their plans into action. Winnie is described as having "unfathomable reserve"; however, she is a woman of spirit and passion, and she alone has the courage to act. When she thrusts the knife into Verloc, she reveals the secret self that has been cultivated by years of suppressed fury over the injustice dealt her by virtue of her gender and social class.

In her determination to see justice done, Winnie demonstrates a boldness that many may consider heroic. Within minutes of the departure of the police officials, and despite the numbing shock of their news, Winnie understands what her husband does not: Verloc will receive no punishment for the horrifying death of her brother. Both the Assistant Commissioner and Inspector Heat have visited and left the shop without leading Verloc away bound or shackled. The Assistant Commissioner forgoes seeking justice in order to keep peace in his house, and Inspector Heat out of pique over Michaelis. For many readers, there is a sense of moral satisfaction at Verloc's death, and an admiration for Winnie, a woman with enough courage to execute rough justice on the exploiter of an innocent and good-hearted young man. Winnie fulfils the responsibility that both officers of the law, powerful men in society, fail to uphold: "'Nothing. He did nothing. He went away. The police were on that man's side'" (*SA* 203).

Conrad's decision to portray a woman who kills her husband as a sympathetic character suggests that he understood how societal forces can push women to acts of desperation. Like a good defense lawyer, Conrad lays the groundwork to justify Winnie's

act of violence. There are several other factors that precipitate Winnie's murdering Verloc, and an examination of these factors reveals Conrad's further commentary on the conditions of women who must endure marriage to men who are thoughtless and self-absorbed. For example, despite several years of living with Winnie and Stevie, Verloc has no insight into the love and protectiveness that Winnie feels for her brother. While explaining the circumstances of Stevie's death, Verloc is woeful and self-pitying, and displays blundering insensitivity:

> "It's lucky for you that I am not so easily put out ... by your dead-and-dumb sulks. I am fond of you. But don't you go too far ... And I can't let you go out to-night, galloping off to your mother with some crazy tale of other about me. I won't have it. Don't you make any mistake about it; if you will have it that I killed the boy, then you've killed him as much as I". (*SA* 187)

Her knowledge that Stevie is dead results in Winnie's desperate wish to destroy any impediment that stands in the way of her freedom from her intolerable union with Verloc: "At that precise moment Mrs. Verloc began to look upon herself as released from all earthly ties. She had her freedom. ... She was a free woman" (*SA* 183). Minutes before Winnie feels herself a free woman Conrad creates an analogy between Winnie and the charwoman, Mrs. Neale, by presenting Winnie in the posture of a slave kneeling before the door with her ear to the keyhole (Fogel 181). The juxtaposition between this scene and the repetition of "freedom" emphasizes the repressed emotions let loose by Winnie's desperate action. As Claire Rosenfield states, relieved of her protecting maternal role, Winnie is no longer the nourishing mother and, without a husband, she lets go of the "feminine, the repressed"

(111). Only a reader as insensitive as Verloc would experience difficulty understanding the motive behind Winnie's action: Winnie is the victim of selfish and unscrupulous men (Rieselbach 42).

Conrad performs a masterful job of creating a female character driven to violence, and of dramatizing a case for her defense. A close examination of the passage leading up to Verloc's murder demonstrates Conrad's skill in expressing his empathy with Winnie, and in eliciting a compassionate response from the reader. Details of Winnie's appearance and actions forecast an eruption of the tumultuous emotions that she has suppressed under her veneer of "fathomless reserve":

> The palms of her hands were pressed convulsively to her face, with the tips of her fingers contracted against the forehead, as though the skin had been a mask which she was ready to tear off violently. The perfect immobility of her pose expressed the agitation of rage and despair, all the potential violence of tragic passions. (*SA* 154)

But, despite her anguish during Verloc's recounting of Stevie's death, Winnie appears to remain composed and rational, even as she tells Verloc, "'I never want to look at you as long as I live'" (*SA* 170). The reader's sympathy with Winnie is strengthened when Verloc cries out, "'Do be reasonable, Winnie.'" The reader feels that, under the circumstances, Winnie is surprisingly reasonable and calm. However, her husband's selfish whimpering irritates and alienates the reader, who eventually feels revulsion at Verloc's obliviousness to his role in Stevie's death: "A great discouragement, the result of fatigue, came upon Mr. Verloc. He had had a very full day, and his nerves had been tried to the utmost. After a

month of maddening worry, … the storm-tossed spirit of Mr. Verloc longed for repose" (*SA* 175).

Conrad uses irony to emphasize Verloc's insensitivity and the callous disregard with which he views Winnie's feelings. Verloc tells Winnnie, "'What's done can't be undone,'" and then trivializes her loss and her grief by telling her, "'You go to bed now. What you want is a good cry'" (*SA* 175). Conrad's criticism of those who ignore or dismiss the suffering of women is revealed in the narrative passage that follows: "This opinion had nothing to recommend it but the general consent of mankind. It is universally understood that, as if it were nothing more substantial than vapour floating in the sky, every emotion of a woman is bound to end in a shower" (*SA*175).

At this point in the series of events leading to Verloc's stabbing, Conrad describes Winnie's gruesome memories of a terror-ridden childhood spent protecting her defenseless brother, and brings the reader to understand why Winnie has displayed "a temperament … maternal and violent …[when] stripped of its philosophical reserve" (*SA* 176). Winnie comes to the appalling recognition that, by encouraging a relationship between Verloc and Stevie, she has played an inadvertent role in the death of her brother for whom "[s]he had battled … even against herself." By perpetuating the illusion that the two "'[m]ight have been father and son,'" she created the opportunity for Verloc to take her "'boy away from [her] to murder him'" (*SA* 177-79). Winnie's self-loathing over her foolish credulity is equaled only by the antipathy she feels toward Stevie's killer.

Verloc's selfishness now drives Winnie to murder him. With an egoism that is

breathtaking, he blames Winnie for Stevie's death while, at the same time, he initiates a campaign for the enjoyment of his conjugal rights. He admits that he is "too fond" of her and reveals that it will not be long before he is with her in their bed. His voice is "husky" and "domestic" (*SA* 182-87). Conrad now provides the reader with the details Winnie imagines as she envisions Stevie's broken body: "A park -- smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone, all spouting up together ... They had to gather him up with the shovel ... a rainlike fall of mangled limbs, the decapitated head" (*SA* 189). Winnie's vision of Stevie's death breaks when she suddenly hears Verloc, who, "with the accent of marital authority" calls out to her with the "note of wooing" (*SA* 190). For Winnie -- and for the reader -- the mere suggestion of sexual desire on Verloc's part at this point is disgusting and perverse. A reader with any degree of empathy feels the revulsion and horror Winnie experiences in the moment before she plunges the knife into her husband.

Conrad's commentary on the lives of poor women in classist, patriarchal societies reveals that many women are eager to slip free of the roles that society prescribes for them in marriage. Martin Ray argues that Conrad provides Winnie an unwarranted "Dickensian dignity by granting her the title 'Widow Verloc' within minutes of the murder of her husband" (70). Conrad may also grant her the term to underscore the difference between the lack of status women suffer in domestic situations while their husbands are alive, and the public status that the term confers on women after their husbands die. However, also Conrad uses the title "widow" ironically, in order to underscore the sense of freedom that many women experience after the death of their oppressive husbands. The word "widow"

connotes grieving and loss, but Winnie does not mourn Verloc. The grief Winnie experiences results from the loss of Stevie, but also from the loss of self. Like many other poor women, she has sacrificed her past by giving up love and happiness. She now feels that despite her new freedom, she has no further purpose in life. Winnie is widowed not just because her husband is dead, but also because she sees a dead past behind her, and a dead future before her.

After Verloc's death, Conrad focuses his critique on male-dominated cultures that place women in untenable positions of poverty and oppression, and then refuse to listen to their pleas for assistance. Instead of feeling sympathy for Winnie's plight, Ossipon gazes at her through the scientific framework of Lombroso's theory of degenerative physiognomy: "the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself -- of a murdering type. He gazed at her and invoked Lombroso, as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint. He gazed scientifically. He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears. ... Not a doubt remained ... a murdering type" (*SA 216*). Ossipon is not interested in understanding why Winnie killed her husband. Unlike Winnie, who throughout her life shows great courage, he is not willing to fight for the defenseless. Rebecca Stott points this out when she argues that Ossipon's reaction to Winnie reveals an instinctive need to distance himself from Winnie's situation, and to translate "his fear and dread into scientific discourse in order to ensure his control and moral supremacy" (50).

Winnie's conversation with Ossipon reveals the fear that women experience when their behaviour does not match the expectations that patriarchal societies demand. Conrad

uses the fourteen-foot drop of the gallows to symbolize patriarchal society's view that women who do not follow traditional rules of appropriate behaviour are fallen. For Winnie, the fourteen-foot drop of the gallows resonates with the connotation of the fallen woman, whose virtue has been sullied by questionable sexual behaviour. She is horrified at the thought of death by hanging (*SA* 194-97). Winnie reveals that she has always been circumspect in her behavior. Throughout her conversation with Ossipon she repeatedly refers to herself as a woman of propriety. When he remarks on her aloofness to earlier indications of his passion for her, she answers: "'What did you expect? ... I was a respectable women'" (*SA* 200). Although Winnie did not love her husband, she felt she was a good wife because in her marriage her conduct was that of a respectable woman. As Helen Funk Rieselbach states, Winnie's distance and reserve with Verloc are necessary components of the respectability of marriage:

> emphasis on the Verlocs' "respectability", and on the fact that their "accord" was founded on silence ... implies that all outwardly respectable and seemingly harmonious households are founded on mutual understanding, and that respectability inevitably covers "a secret profession and the commerce of shady wares." (53)

Conrad comments on the ways in which male-dominated societies force women to follow strictly prescribed rules at all stages of their lives. Winnie was "the respectable girl of the Belgravian mansion" (*SA* 210) and, therefore, never allowed herself to appear too animated in front of the gentlemen lodgers (*SA* 41). Traditionally, long, loose hair has symbolized a loose woman; Winnie's hair, always described as very neat, connotes both

decorousness and decency. The air of "unfathomable indifference" (*SA* 2) she exhibits in front of shop customers seems to be a façade constructed to suppress the discomfort and embarrassment she experiences selling its cheap, pornographic wares. Winnie's early years may have been fraught with unsolicited advances from men. The anxieties experienced by an attractive, chaste young woman living in a boarding house filled with males are alluded to when she imagines the scene of her hanging:

> There, within four high walls [of the jail], as if into a pit, at dawn of the day, the murderer was brought out to be executed ... With her eyes staring on the floor, her nostrils quivering with anguish and shame, she imagined herself all alone amongst a lot of strange gentlemen in silk hats who were calmly proceeding about the business of hanging her. (*SA* 195)

Conrad uses the gallows to represent more than the plight of the fallen woman in patriarchal societies. The gallows also symbolize the distrust and contempt that the poor and powerless feel toward the institutions that are supposed to guarantee law, order, and justice. Winnie feels deep antipathy towards the men who ignored their duty to bring Verloc to justice. Winnie's preference to take her death into her own hands rather than capitulate to "men's justice" is completely understandable (*SA* 195).

It may seem that, by turning to Ossipon, Winnie undermines her avowed respectability. However, her behaviour reinforces Conrad's commentary on the double standard that imbues patriarchal societies. Although Ossipon admits that Winnie "had never responded to his glances by the slightest sign of encouragement," (*SA* 198) her detachment

does not rule out a sexual attraction to him. The narrator provides clues to this attraction by repeatedly describing Ossipon as "robust", and by pointing out Winnie's failure to mention Ossipon when discussing Verloc's colleagues: "Of the robust Ossipon, in whose presence she always felt uneasy behind an attitude of stony reserve, she said nothing" (*SA* 42). Conrad's decision to re-introduce Ossipon into the plot immediately after the murder allows two very natural responses on Winnie's part: to pursue her attraction for Ossipon, and to use him in her desperate need for the protection that, in her society, only a man could provide: "The voice of Mrs. Verloc rose subdued, pleading, piteously: 'Don't let them have me, Tom! Take me out of the country. I'll work for you. I'll slave for you. I've no one in the world ... Who would look after me if you don't! ... I won't ask you to marry me,' she breathed out in shamefaced accents'" (*SA* 210). Conrad's choice of "shamefaced accents" poignantly expresses the humiliation of an inherently good woman trapped in a situation so wretched that her only hope lies in her own abasement.

Conrad reinforces his commentary on the humiliation women experience in patriarchal societies when he reverses Winnie's original situation from that of a poverty-stricken girl who marries for economic security to that of a woman who uses money to buy another kind of security, Ossipon's assistance and loyalty: "'I have the money. I have enough money. Tom! Let us go from here'" (*SA* 204). Winnie's increasing anxiety renders her pitiful before Ossipon: "'Tom, you can't throw me off now ... Not unless you crush my head under your heel. I won't leave you.'" Winnie's debasement is reinforced when Conrad employs irony to highlight Ossipon's emotional detachment: "Mrs. Verloc waited in

silence the good pleasure of her saviour, deriving comfort from his reflective silence" (*SA* 212). Conrad again uses irony to underscore the situation of women who, according to the dictates of their society, must put their faith in men who are undependable and self-serving. Shortly before Ossipon leaps from the train, Winnie shouts out, "'I will live all my days for you, Tom'" (*SA* 217).

Winnie's death reveals Conrad's sensitivity to the difficulties for women living in societies that turn a blind eye to the injustices perpetrated against them. Once Ossipon deserts her, Winnie is destitute and her suicide is inevitable. Conrad devotes a good portion of the novel to Winnie's eventual death. By allowing Winnie to vacillate between committing suicide and saving herself, he develops her as a sympathetic female character who fully reflects the paradoxical and contradictory nature of human behaviour. It is Winnie's human responses and actions that Eloise Knapp Hay feels undermine criticism that Conrad is insensitive to human misery:

> ... Conrad's [novel] is profoundly disturbing. It is the nonpolitical Winnie ... who makes the difference. In her unphilosophical way, Winnie is "one of us" and as a result *The Secret Agent*, ... is to me a more disturbing book than ... *The Possessed*, which presents no such compellingly normal victim. (Knapp Hay 239)

The novel's ending reinforces Conrad's sensitivity to the misery women must often endure. Winnie's death acts as a warning to those who perpetuate injustice and oppression against women. Although her death is reported rather insignificantly in a newspaper as that of an unidentified woman, the event is very significant for Ossipon. He is bothered by the

news enough to have begun a slide into alcoholism (*SA* 223). Like Verloc, Winnie does not come to trial; however, she does take a part in the course of justice. She delivers retribution to Verloc and metes out a well-deserved punishment to a second betrayer.

The Secret Agent is a novel of investigation and exposure that Norman Holland describes as analogous to fishing. The murky depths of London's moral depravity are described in terms of a damp, greasy, slimy bog. The Assistant Commissioner is intent on catching a "sprat", Sir Ethelred is concerned with his Fisheries Bill, and Winnie is eventually thrown back into the sea (56-57). Winnie plays an important role in the novel's investigation, for although she states "that things do not stand much looking into," she brings to light the significant fact that when women's hard work, sacrifice and compassion prove futile, their reaction is symbolic of the potentially seismic backlash of their collective political capabilities.

A character who also plays a small but significant role in *The Secret Agent* is Winnie Verloc's mother. In a letter of October 1907, Conrad congratulates his friend Garnett on his perceptive review of *The Secret Agent*: "I am no end proud to see you've spotted my poor old woman. You've got a fiendishly penetrating eye for one's most secret intentions. She *is* the heroine" (*Letters,* III 487). These statements reveal Conrad's intention to dramatize the plight of a woman who, imprisoned by poverty, sacrifices her own comfort in order to assure the security of her children. The obvious parallel between the mother and daughter is that each woman gives up her happiness to ensure a home for Stevie. Winnie performs this by marrying Verloc, while her mother, sensing future conflict over the economic burden of

two extra mouths to feed, removes herself from the comfort of her home with Winnie and takes residence in an almshouse for the old and poor (*SA* 110). Like Winnie, she is unsung but heroic in her concern for the well-being of the weak and defenseless. Martin Ray points out that all of the men in the novel are distinguished by varying degrees of self-interest, vanity, and outrageous egoism. The women, however, are so self-denying that the reader does not even learn the family name (82). In the case of Winnie's mother, the reader never learns even her first name.

Conrad, however, does not create Winnie's mother merely as the embodiment of female selflessness. She represents Stevie's assertion that life is hard for poor people. Conrad reveals his commentary not only by means of her actions, but by way of her description. Winnie's mother has a "venerable placidity conferred upon her outward person by her triple chin, the floating ampleness of her ancient form, and the impotent conditions of her legs" (*SA* 110). Her ample proportions represent the large number of people who live in poverty and its concomitant conditions of disease, ignorance, and oppression. Her crippled legs symbolize the powerlessness of the poor to ameliorate their state in the world. On the surface, this group appears apathetic and passive. However, eventually, like Winnie, they may let loose years of suppressed rage in the form of violent action.

Under Western Eyes (1911)

In his fifth novel Conrad offers his criticism of the corruption that thrives within paternalistic societies in his portrayal of three women, each of whom reveals a passion for

politics and a concern for pubic good. Ford Madox Ford wrote that Conrad often commented on the part that women played in maintaining the feeling of patriotism in Poland, where many men took to drunkenness, lechery or listlessness after the abortive revolution of 1862. Conrad claimed that the women alone "ought to be paid the compliment of having a vote" (54). By offering fully-developed characterizations of women who are politically informed and courageous in speech and action, Conrad again undermines the code of gendered behaviour inscribed in much of the fiction of patriarchal societies: "The first theme [of *Under Western Eyes]* is ... political struggle ... The second is the question of feminism, the woman's role in the larger conflict" (Land 163).

Conrad does not introduce the novel's female characters in the first section of the novel. The omission has the effect of setting the moral conditions that lead to the cynicism that informs every level of political and social life in societies where women are excluded from political power. The corruption that flourishes in patriarchal systems is suggested by the narrator's statement about reconstructing the diary of Razumov, the novel's male protagonist: "the task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form the précis of a strange human document, but the rendering -- I perceive it now clearly -- of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface". (*UWE* 49-50). While a university student in Russia, Razumov lives a life without women. Consequently, the frame of reference through which Razumov perceives his identity is male-centred. This frame of reference is also egocentric, for Razumov has grown up without any form of familial relationship. The absence of parents has driven Razumov to perceive Russia as both mother

and father (*UWE* 10). However, there is little of mother in the "Mother Russia" of Razumov's life, whereas representations of patriarchy, and its concomitant attributes abound. Conrad reveals the moral corruption often characteristic of patriarchal institutions with the information that Rasumov's biological father, Prince K, a once powerful political figure, did not marry Razumov's mother, the daughter of a highly placed church priest. Prince K has never entered his son's life. Although Razumov's father provides him financial security, the only other indication of paternal connection Razumov experiences is the pressure on his arm "like a secret sign" (*UWE* 11) of a stranger he meets at his attorney's office. When he goes to Prince K for advice (*UWE* 31), and then decides to betray Haldin, Razumov helps to safeguard and perpetuate the type of autocratic rule synonymous with many patriarchal governments.

In the first part of the novel, almost every character with whom Razumov associates is male and representative of some aspect of Russia's traditional paternalist political system. Prince K represents the privilege and political power of the upper echelons of a patriarchal autocracy. General T and Councillor Mikulin symbolize the repression and injustice that support it. The approach to the General's home is filled with Cossacks, sentries, gendarmes and orderlies, all symbols of martial strength. He has an air of jovial, careless cruelty; his statue, "Flight of Youth," identifies him as a predator. The General brooks no variance in political thought: he detests and vows to destroy rebels with their "subversive minds," and "brutes" who "deny God Himself" (*UWE* 32 -38). Mikulin, the extractor of confessions, wears a signet ring -- emblematic of his violent role -- a massive gold band set with a blood-

red stone (*UWE* 65). The dishonesty and self-indulgence of the wealthy middle class is defined by Madcap Kostia, who regularly steals from his father in order to drink and brawl (*UWE* 58). Ziemianitch exemplifies the lowest rung in the hierarchy, the poor and the powerless. He is, however, a feckless sot who stands in sharp contrast to the elderly beggar woman who, having spent her money on bread, symbolizes responsibility and nurturing (*UWE* 21-22). Conrad reinforces the symbolism of responsibility and nurturing with another female character, the German shopkeeper whose store contains loaves, sausages, and onions (*UWE* 40).

Conrad strengthens his criticism of Russia's moral bankruptcy by giving Haldin political goals similar to the novel's three major female characters: freedom from oppression and a more equitable division of power and wealth. However, Haldin's political actions are very different from those of the novel's women. He may espouse equality for Russia's people, but his thinking is male-centred. He excludes women in his political statements and patronizes his sister. He perceives her as dependent on, and identified through, her relationships with men: "'Not a bad little girl -- my sister. She has the most trustful eyes of any human being that ever walked this earth. She will marry well, I hope. She may have children -- sons, perhaps'" (*UWE* 13-18). Haldin is an assassin (*UWE* 13). He espouses the overthrow of autocratic power, but his violent action reflects his own desire to enjoy power and instill fear in others (*UWE* 16). Furthermore, authorial irony undermines any supposed nobility in Haldin's character. Although he speaks of his terrorism as weary work and states that he will not live idle, he seldom attended classes and

is described as "not one of the industrious set" (*UWE* 46). He irresponsibly and selfishly involves Razumov in a potentially dangerous situation, and yet spouts self-aggrandizing rhetoric, portraying himself as both the victim and the martyr: "'Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained, thinking men like you. Well, we have made the sacrifice of our lives ... Men like me are rare'" (*UWE* 69). Yet, Haldin is not a perceptive judge of character. He calls the drunken Ziemianitch a "bright spirit" and is oblivious to Razumov's true feelings about the position in which Haldin has placed him.

Conrad's presentation of Haldin's mother reinforces his commentary about the effects on women of Russia's patriarchal society. There is no doubt that Mrs. Haldin idealizes her son. She tells the narrator that Haldin "had a brilliant intellect, a most noble unselfish nature, and ... was the oracle of his comrades" (*UWE* 74), and alludes to Christ-like qualities when she speaks of him as "a leader of apostles among whom there may be a Judas" (Wiley 119). Despite her criticism of her country's politics, Mrs. Haldin is the product of a paternalistic society that places men at the centre of its culture: "Mrs. Haldin, at the son's wish, would have set fire to her house and emigrated to the moon without any sign of surprise or apprehension" (*UWE* 73).

Razumov's rationalization of his betrayal of Haldin reveals Conrad's criticism of the corruption that is prevalent in male-driven Russian society. Razumov's language reflects the male-centred thinking and the obsession with power symptomatic of patriarchal systems. Razumov feels that idealists like Haldin are childish and need "the stick [and] the stern hand" of their masters (*UWE* 24). Razumov has forty million brothers, and the "fearful

thrashing" given to Ziemianitch indicates the "pathetically severe necessity of brotherly love". Tough men are needed in order to preserve "absolute power" and "the tool [of revolutionary power]" must be made ready for "the man -- for the great autocrat of the future". Razumov believes in this autocrat because he feels that the logic of history made him unavoidable (*UWE* 27). As he continues to construct the scaffolding of his rationalization Razumov increasingly exhibits the male tendency to willful self-delusion already familiar in Almayer, Willems, Gould, Decoud, and Verloc. Like them, he cannot reflect on his actions with honesty and gain true insight into his motives: "'Not one of them [in the crowd] is capable of feeling and thinking as deeply as I can. How many of them could accomplish an act of conscience?'" (*UWE* 29). Razumov's behaviour becomes more violent. He beats Ziemianitch (*UWE* 24), and is tempted to "squeeze the breath" out of Haldin's body. His suppression of "a burst of Mephistophelean laughter" clearly signals latent evil attempting to manifest itself. Conrad's effectively establishes the need for women to be included and actively involved in all aspects of society by providing a picture of the political and moral corruption of Russia's patriarchal political system.

Conrad reveals his support of women's inclusion in political power through his choice of narrator. The character of the narrator is significant. J.I.M. Stewart suggests that the narrator is a stereotype of English fiction, the poor but morally upright, fair and trustworthy gentleman whose perceptions the reader will accept: "The narrator possesses these qualities, he is trusted and esteemed by such characters of unimpaired moral perception as he makes contact with, and we are, therefore, prepared to accept his verdicts

and evaluations" (191). On the other hand, Nadelhaft argues that the narrator's Western upbringing, with its aversion to deep feelings and its tendency to split emotion and intellect, makes the narrator unfit for "the power and subtlety of women's thoughts and behaviour" (102). However, Nadelhaft does not consider that, although the narrator often comments on his lack of astuteness, especially of things Russian, he displays a predisposition for inclusion. The narrator represents men who listen to what women have to say. His role as a teacher of languages exemplifies a willingness to listen to a variety of voices representing a diversity of cultures and thoughts. He provides the open-mindedness necessary to recount Razumov's journey to Geneva and his experience of the various attitudes and alternative philosophies of women. Razumov's journey reveals the contrast in Conrad's portrayals of the two sexes. This contrast effectively illustrates the intelligence, courage, honesty, and compassion women can bring to institutions whose traditional focus has been the achievement and maintenance of power.

In describing Razumov's journey, Conrad centers Peter Ivanovitch between the male characters in Russia and the female characters in Geneva. Conrad purposely places Ivanovitch in the middle of the journey to act as a bridge between two ideologies about women: the traditional theory that women are inferior to men and the feminist theories of Conrad's time. Ivanovitch exemplifies men who espouse support for women's causes but are nevertheless sexist in their treatment of women. Conrad uses Peter Ivanovitch to comment on the hypocritical posturing of such men, but also to reveal his feelings about feminist ideology. Morf writes that Conrad was skeptical of the redemptive power of any

political or economic ideology and hated any form of autocracy (191). Although Conrad respected women and supported women's rights he was opposed to feminist ideology in any form.

Ivanovitch supports the "cult of the woman" (*UWE* 90) because two women assisted him during his long and arduous escape from a Russian prison, the events of which he recounts in a best selling autobiography. However, he reveals his true view of women by writing a story that perpetuates the stereotype of the frail but brave little beauty who sees the innate goodness at the heart of the ugly beast and takes pity on him (*UWE* 87-89). Ivanovitch preaches "woman's spiritual superiority" and the "insight of her feminine compassion" (*UWE* 88-89), but his self-serving treatment of women reveals his hypocrisy. Tekla very perceptively points out the imprisoning, rather than liberating nature of Ivanovitch's cult movement when she warns Razumov against bringing Natalia to Chateau Borel: "'Don't you understand that Peter Ivanovitch must direct, inspire, influence? It is the breath of his life. There can never be too many disciples. He can't bear thinking of anyone escaping him. And a woman, too! There is nothing to be done without women'" (*UWE* 168). Conrad's contempt for Ivanovitch and Madame de S is not aimed at women but at those who spout theory based on justice and equality for women and then demonstrate far different feelings by their actions. As Maureen Fries argues, Peter Ivanovitch is not a feminist, but Conrad, having created female characters who are the "industrial, mental, political, social and sexual equals of men" is, a feminist who does not merely subscribe to ideology (66).

The narrator's portrayal of Ivanovitch carries several references to the fugitive's bestiality and size. These references may indicate his concern for Natalia over Ivanovitch's sexual assertiveness (Rielselbach 69). However, Conrad's presentation of Ivanovitch suggests that he is making fun of the great feminist:

> "He towered before [Natalia], enormous, deferential, cropped as close as a convict; and his big pinkish poll evoked for me the vision of a wild head with matted locks peering through parted bushes, glimpses of naked, tawny limbs slinking behind the masses of sodden foliage under a cloud of flies and mosquitoes. It was an involuntary tribute to the vigour of his writing." (*UWE* 92)

Conrad also uses Ivanovitch to suggest the danger of ideology. Ivanovitch makes remarks to Natalia that could put her in potentially harmful situations: "'Do you know what I want, Natalia Victorovna', he uttered solemnly. 'I want you to be a fanatic ... Faith alone won't do'" (*UWE* 93). His dictatorial ways with, and his willful mistreatment of Tekla (*UWE* 106), also suggest that his role is to represent both domestic and political autocrats.

Conrad's portrayal of Madame de S and the description of her home, Chateau Borel, reinforce his opinion of ideology. Madame de S's poverty and the dust and cobwebs in the corners of her crumbling home suggest that the principles of her political ideas are old and weak (*UWE* 104-06). Conrad reveals her ideology's false promises and spurious concepts by creating Madame de S as a "painted, bedizened, dead-faced, glassy-eyed Egeria" (*UWE* 115). Moreover, she is like Peter Ivanovitch; the motives behind her revolutionary zeal are entirely self-serving: "'I have been shamefully robbed ... *Voleurs! Voleurs! Vol* ...'"

(*UWE* 154-58). The narrator suggests his distaste for Madame de S in the statement, "I welcomed the convictions that [Natalia] would never know Madame de S" (*UWE* 117). Conrad creates Madame de S as a caricature: "her rigidity was frightful, like the rigor of a corpse galvanized into harsh speech and glittering stare by the force of murderous hate" (*UWE* 158). Descriptions such as this make Madame de S physically repulsive, a fact which helps the reader to dislike her politics. Conrad manipulates the reader's sympathy in order to illustrate "how ideology, in practice, is conditioned by personality" (Laskowsky 182). He feels that a feminism that exalts a false idea of womanhood is "unattractive and inherently dangerous as ... self-deluded romanticism" (Nadelhaft 103). Conrad's portrayals of Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S suggest that women's strengths do not require them to follow dogmatic principles.

Natalia Hardin dramatizes the actions of an intelligent, highly principled woman who knows her own mind and is not taken in by ideology or exploited by those who attempt to foist an ideology on others. Through Natalia, Conrad offers commentary on the beneficial role women can play in political life, and he again undermines the code of gendered behaviour inscribed in much of the fiction of patriarchal societies. Baines feels that Natalia is Conrad's most effective portrait of a woman: "a noble, intensely idealistic girl, an identical type to Antonia Avellanos" (362). However, Natalia is also similar to Emilia Gould. She evolves from political idealism to political disillusion, but maintains her ability to love and her desire to help others. Natalia represents the spirit of Conrad's mother, Ewelina, whose youthful lightness and joy was overshadowed by the despotism of

Russian rule (Morf 191). Adam Gillon feels Natalia is Conrad's favourite female character, for it is her words he chooses as the novel's epigraph: "I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch a piece of bread ..." (137).

Natalia Haldin expresses Conrad's distrust of political theory and ideology. She represents a young woman of Russia's educated middle class and is much more than the "little girl" described by her brother. Although her brother seldom attended classes, Natalia has achieved "a diploma of a Superior School for Women," begun a "course of reading the best English authors," and "thirsted after knowledge" (*UWE* 74). She is politically discerning and reveals considerable knowledge of the pervasive oppression of the Russian people and the ideology of those who wish to overcome it by revolution. She reveals not only knowledge of various world governments, but also a talent for philosophical analysis and criticism. She rejects much of the political systems of England, France and North America:

> "'The whole world is inconceivable to the strict logic of ideas. And yet the world exists to our senses, and we exist in it. There must be a necessity superior to our conceptions. It is a very ... false thing to belong to a majority. We Russians shall find some better form of national freedom than an artificial conflict of parties -- which is wrong because it is a conflict and contemptible because it is artificial.'" (*UWE* 77)

She also has little patience with the ideological ranting of Peter Ivanovitch. Despite his intimidating size, Natalia admonishes him for his false assumptions and unwarranted criticism:

> "'How can you expect me to leave [my mother] to herself?'

> 'That is putting it in a very crude way', he protested in his great effortless voice. Miss Haldin did not wait for the vibration to die out. 'And run about visiting amongst a lot of strange people. The idea is distasteful for me.'" (UWE 92)

Natalia reveals Conrad's view that women have great strength of character and should, therefore, be included in political systems if governments are to act responsibly and with compassion. She is perceptive and insightful and exemplifies the ability of women to understand and empathize with others. Natalia surmises the truth that her brother had not given into despair after the assassination but had planned to escape by going abroad (*UWE* 99). She knows intuitively that he "'may have been betrayed by some false friend or simply by some cowardly creature'" (*UWE* 85). When she meets Razumov, Natalia immediately recognizes him as "a man who has suffered more from his thoughts than from evil fortune" (*UWE* 120). She understands the implications for the poor and oppressed of Russia when she receives information about the suicide of Haldin's betrayer: "A man of the people! Oh, our poor people!'" (*UWE* 233).

Natalia's honesty stands up in sharp contrast to the hypocrisy of men like Peter Ivanovitch and her brother. After her introduction to Razumov she admits to finding him attractive and to her fear of handling the experience badly: "She had behaved unworthily, like an emotional French girl. A manifestation of that kind could not be welcomed by a man of stern, self-contained character" (*UWE* 122). Natalia reveals an aversion to even mild deception: "'If mother ... were to wake up in my absence ... she would perhaps question me. She seems to miss me more, you know, of late. She would want to know what

129). Later, when Mrs. Haldin's illness makes her acutely sensitive to changes in her daughter's routine, Natalia admits to feelings of inadequacy and to the error of keeping her mother uninformed about Razumov's presence in Geneva: "'It's all my fault; I suppose I cannot play a part ... I am weak and cannot see what I ought to do'" (*UWE* 226-27).

Conrad believes in the ability of women to model the moral strength for which men should strive. Moral strength should turn men away from the conventional behaviour expected of and exhibited by men in patriarchal societies. Razumov reveals his admiration for Natalia during their final meeting. He is taken with the "harmony of feature, of lines, of glances, of voice" that constitute Natalia's beauty. Razumov, however, seems more fascinated with her honesty and innocence. Although Razumov idealizes Natalia, and sees in her everything that he is not, her behaviour proves that what he says about her is true:

> "'Of you [Haldin] said that you had trustful eyes. And why I have not been able to forget that phrase I don't know. It means that there is in you no guile, no deception, no falsehood, no suspicion, -- nothing in your heart that could give you a conception of a living, acting, speaking lie if ever it came in your way.'"(*UWE* 345)

Razumov recognizes Natalia as the symbol of a transcendent value of truth (Cave 244-45). Her honesty brings Razumov to redeem himself when he confesses his betrayal of Haldin and overcomes his pride (Johnson 166-67). The moral values that Natalia embodies contrast the selfish desires and moral emptiness exhibited by the men in Razumov's life. Razumov's love for Natalia brings him to hypersensitive awareness of the desolate, solitary

existence that, until now, he has successfully intellectualized but not felt. Later, Razumov expresses this realization when he says to Natalia: "'Do you know why I came to you? It is simply because there is no one anywhere in the whole great world I could go to. Do you understand what I say? No one to go to. Do you conceive the desolation of the thought-- no one -- to -- go -- to?'" (*UWE* 248). Razumov says this and yet he knows that he can go, and has gone, to Prince K. Clearly he senses in the women he has met an integrity missing in his father and in a country whose national patron is "the old Father of Lies" (*UWE* 246). Razumov's situation, so poignantly illustrative of the need for individual connection with women, reinforces the necessity of including the female voice in all levels of society's institutions and structures

Natalia maintains her idealism and altruism in spite of the disillusion that results from the betrayal of her brother at the hands of Razumov, a man she grows to love. Upon returning to Russia she shares "her compassionate labours between the horrors of overcrowded jails, and the heart-rending misery of bereaved homes" (*UWE* 265).). Her return to Russia reveals her commitment to helping Russia's poor and oppressed, for her brother's political actions are sure to make her subject to suspicion by the police. Sophia Antonovna's remarks suggest that Natalia is involved not only in assisting the poor, but also in some form of effort with the revolutionists: "'[Natalia] has a faithful soul, an undaunted spirit and an indefatigable body', the woman revolutionist summed it all up, with a touch of enthusiasm" (*UWE* 265). As Land suggests, Natalia represents "the path of reconciliation which is the selfless equivalent to Razumov's somewhat egocentric detachment" (161).

which is the selfless equivalent to Razumov's somewhat egocentric detachment" (161). Natalia represents the upper middle-class woman who has a passion for political change, but who has not been directly involved in revolutionary action. Conrad also presents female characters who have been directly involved in revolutionary activity

Like Natalia, Tekla comes from a middle-class family; however, Tekla has lived and worked with political activists. Tekla is secretary to Peter Ivanovitch and acts as a vehicle by which Conrad continues to provide an incisive commentary on political and social hypocrisy. Tekla represents the exploited woman in patriarchal societies (Fries 56). As secretary to Peter Ivanovitch, Tekla is able to reveal that the great male feminist is a sham. Ivanovitch's demands on women are abusive and despotic. In order not to distract him while taking dictation, Tekla must sit perfectly motionless for hours, often in extremely low temperatures, while he hurls verbal abuse at her: "'He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot. He would roar, 'Look down on the paper!'" While subject to Ivanovitch's spontaneous and willful tantrums, Tekla is paid a pittance and housed in conditions close to poverty: "Her black silk blouse was old and even frayed in places; the black serge skirt was short and shabby" (*UWE* 105-06). A remark by the narrator reveals Conrad's view that, perhaps, all men are potential tyrants and need to change their ways: "'Great men have their surprising peculiarities', I observed inanely. 'Exactly like men who are not great. But that sort of thing cannot be kept up forever'" (*UWE* 119). Tekla suggests the weakness of Ivanovitch's feminist ideology by bringing the reader to question the feminist Ivanovitch's

intelligence and creative powers. The slightest movement sends his thoughts into flight and he gropes "for words as if he were in the dark as to what he mean[s] to say" (*UWE* 106-07). She confesses that her former life with Russia's poor was "'infinitely less killing than the task of sitting for hours at a table in a cold study to take the books of Peter Ivanovitch from dictation'" (*UWE* 110). Tekla's knowledge of Ivanovitch's true nature brings her to issue Razumov a command about Natalia: "'Don't you bring that girl here [to Chateau Borel]'" (*UWE* 164). Furthermore, Tekla perceives the truth of Ivanovitch's relationship with Madame de S and their courting of political thinkers and *émigrés*. Her insight is summed up in the description of her role as "master of ceremonies" (*UWE* 106). Her confession to Razumov that she enjoys little respect or courtesy at Chateau Borel is touching: "'I have been starving for, I won't say kindness, but just for a little civility, for I don't know how long'" (*UWE* 165).

Tekla reinforces Conrad's belief that women have both political acumen and great moral strength, and must, therefore, be part of political institutions that place the welfare of their citizens before the acquisition of power and wealth. Like Natalia, Tekla has a passion for politics and is politically astute. However, Tekla has acquired her knowledge of politics "in the trenches", having experienced life among the oppressed and poverty-stricken She concludes that the horrors of the downtrodden are caused by governments that are morally corrupt and self-serving. The daughter of a middle-class civil servant, Tekla understands that the upper echelons of government or society are not interested in assisting the poor: "'Not a single charitable word was to be heard in our home from year's end to year's end; there was

nothing but talk of vile office intrigues, and of promotion and of salaries'" (*UWE* 107). Tekla's passion for political reform brings her to live in squalor, ministering to the needs of a fellow revolutionist. Her attachment is symptomatic of the selfless ardour of a woman (or man) in love with a partner with whom she shares an ideological vision: "'My poor Andrei called me [Tekla]. I was so devoted to him. He lived in wretchedness and suffering, and died in misery'" (*UWE* 167). Tekla becomes actively involved in the revolutionary movement and, with little regard for her own safety, smuggles political documents from country to country for its leaders (*UWE* 111). She provides an intelligent analysis of the way in which governments are often irrelevant for the poorest in society: "'The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant people want with a Ministry of Finances?'" (*UWE* 108) Tekla stays in the Chateau Borel because she knows the suspicious and retributive nature of the revolutionists: "[T]he mere fact of leaving the great man abruptly would make her a suspect. She could expect no support or countenance from anyone" (*UWE* 167).

Tekla reveals Conrad's view that the domestic situation many women suffer reflects the inequity of a culture's political and economic systems. Like the old man in Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection,* Tekla and the old man share an aversion to being named because a person's name is an important outward symbol of their identification with society. Tekla chooses to go by a name that is not her own in order to represent her rejection of the corrupt patriarchal society in which she lives. (Patterson 169). Her comments contain sharp criticism of patriarchal societies, and she refuses to marry and thereby perpetuate a

paternalistic system that produces social inequity: "'The mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder'" (*UWE* 108). Instead, Tekla flees her parents' home and enters the world of the lower classes where she suffers their deprivations and degradations (*UWE* 109). Conrad's understanding of the domestic situation of women seems to be subtle and as knowledgeable as that of feminist analyses of our own time. In a culture dominated by material interests "marriage contributes to those interests as it provides an idealized retreat for the man who daily reenters the world of business and competition" (Nadelhaft 87).

Tekla's portrayal provides Conrad a means by which to comment on women's ability to combine political interest, moral strength and altruism. Not only does she assist the young lithographer-revolutionist tortured by military police, Tekla exhibits the deepest empathy with and understanding of human frailty. She reveals the lithographer's betrayal of his fellow revolutionaries, but refrains from laying blame:

> "'But you do not know the most terrible part of that man's misery. Listen. It seems that they ill-used him so atrociously that, at last, his firmness gave way, and he did let out some information. Poor soul, the flesh is weak you know. What it was he did not tell me. There was a crushed spirit in that mangled body.'" (*UWE* 110)

Tekla shows great courage by going to Razumov's aid in Geneva, and when she takes him, deaf and crippled, back to Russia, where she "tend[s] him unweariedly with the pure joy of unselfish devotion" (*UWE* 266). She is a familiar Dostoevski figure of compassion (Guerard 246), and may be the mother Razumov never had (Rieselbach 82). Although her

martyrs to men, Conrad undermines that stereotype by affording Tekla contradictory characteristics. She seems a frightened slave "scuttling about and wincing under the careless cruelty of Peter Ivanovitch" (*UWE* 107), and yet she lives on the periphery of revolutionary action. In addition, Tekla's commitment to Razumov is not entirely selfless. Assisting Razumov removes her from the indigence and intimidation that she experiences at the Chateau Borel and places her in a more significant role. Tekla, too, has avoided the cynicism that informs the politics and society of autocratic systems. Although Tekla has suffered abuse at the hands of many, her idealism survives to a degree that she continues to try to alleviate the anguish of others. Therefore, she looks to her own needs, by looking after Razumov's: "There was nothing in that task to become disillusioned about" (*UWE* 266). Although Tekla works on the periphery of the revolutionists, Sophia Antonovna is a woman who is a highly effective and respected revolutionary leader.

Sophia Antonovna is the third major female character in the novel through whom Conrad offers commentary on the beneficial role women can play in political life. Her actions undermine the code of gendered behaviour inscribed in much of the literature of patriarchal societies. Sophia Antonovna, the novel's most committed, yet selfless, revolutionary embodies Conrad's belief that women are often more faithful to a cause and more committed to achieving their ends than men. By her refusal of sterile hate, she reveals both her moral absolutism and her compassion for others (Johnson 162-67).

Sophia Antonovna's respect as a revolutionary derives from an understanding of politics that is both theoretical and based on experience. She fully understands the inequity

politics that is both theoretical and based on experience. She fully understands the inequity inherent in patriarchal politics and the method by which paternalistic structures support each other: "'I could not go to the Church, where the priests of the system exhorted such unconsidered vermin as I to resignation'" (*UWE* 186). When Razumov asks if she believes in the devil, she replies that "'there are plenty of men worse than devils to make a hell of this earth'" (*UWE* 199). Despite the description of Sophia Antonovna as a seasoned destructive revolutionist, and although Conrad held strong anti-revolutionary views (Moser 36), one senses authorial respect for her. Conrad gives her authority even when dealing with dangerous, fractious male characters such as Necator (*UWE* 190). As Guerard points out, Conrad views Sophia Antonovna with the same sort of affection he normally accords durable old soldiers (246).

Sophia Antonovna exemplifies Conrad's belief that women are astute judges of politics and personal character. Years of observation have honed her natural perception so that Razumov describes her as "a dangerous adversary" (*UWE* 181). In conversations with her, Razumov attempts sarcasm to camouflage his discomfort; however, "he could see that she had detected [this] with those steady, brilliant black eyes". Sophia Antonovna immediately perceives that Razumov does not like the revolutionaries who make their home in Geneva and that he is a man who suffers. She also seems to suspect his proclaimed belief in their political principles: "'What are you flinging your very heart against? Or perhaps you are only playing a part'" (*UWE* 172-78). Because of her exposure to and experience with both established and revolutionary male-dominated politics, Conrad grants Sophia

self-pity; they are "so impressionable and self-conscious". To her they are "fastidious, full of self-love and afraid of trifles" and "ridiculously pitiful in [their] aptitude to cherish childish allusions down to the very grave" (*UWE* 171-74). Her low opinion of men is reinforced by her lack of sexual interest in them.

Conrad portrays Sophia Antonovna as a moral compass for political action that exemplifies the guidance a firm but loving mother provides her children. Sophia Antonovna is emblematic of the mother that is missing in Mother Russia. As Rieselbach argues, the novel's recurring image of Russia as a dead mother is striking (and poignant) when we remember that Conrad's mother died a victim of the cold and heartless Russian weather (62). Her peers highly respect Sophia Antonova because of the honesty of her speech and actions: "the respected, trusted, and influential Sophia Antonovna, whose word had such a weight in the 'active' sections of every party ... was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution" (*UWE* 185). Sophia is severely honest with Razumov. She tells him that his sardonic manner is irritating and unacceptable: "'Leave off railing ... Remember, Razumov ... that women, children, and revolutionists hate irony, which is the negation of all saving instincts, of all faith, of all devotion, of all action. Don't rail!'" (*UWE* 197). She also accuses Razumov of taking things personally and of being sexually overly delicate in his squeamishness over the affair between Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S. Sophia often seems like a mother scolding her child. According to Nadelhaft, Sophia's significance in the novel is in part due to her maturity and is communicated through

significance in the novel is in part due to her maturity and is communicated through Razumov's awareness that his emotional fragility results from having had no mother:

> [T]he deprivation of mothering has left him a precariously balanced and divided person ... The narrative consistently reveals the fragmentary nature of male personality. Sophia Antonovna illustrates a degree of mature and personal integration which is compelling ... because she retains her intuitive awareness of human personality at the same time that she expresses theoretical political arguments. (105)

Although Rasumov tells himself with a sternness of thought that mothers do not matter, when he meets Natalia and her mother he experiences "something like enviousness, as if a privilege denied to him alone of all the men that had ever passed through this world" (*UWE* 239).

Sophia Antonovna represents Conrad's belief that without the human compassion exemplified by women, political reform will sink into a tragic impasse and paralysis. Despite her rather severe honesty, Sophia Antonovna has a sympathetic nature. Conrad reveals this when, after references to the Mephistophelean appearance of her "inquiring glance", she is described as "evil-less un-devilish" (*UWE* 230). Natalia experiences Sophia's compassion at their first meeting, where the older woman extends her condolences for Haldin's death. After Natalia finishes a rather naïvely utopian speech about forgetting despots and murderers, the worldly revolutionist gently states, "'It is good for you to believe in love'" (*UWE* 233). When Razumov displays his contempt for Peter Ivanovitch's sacrificial devotion to Madame de S, Sophia chides him for his lack of compassion for both

parties:

> "'Oh, you squeamish, masculine creature. Sick! Makes him sick. And what do you know of the truth of it? There is no looking into the secrets of the heart ... In life, you see, there is not much choice. You have either to rot or to burn. And there is not one of us [women], painted or unpainted, that would not rather burn.'" (*UWE* 177)

She reveals her own compassion when she is the first to forgive Rasumov for his betrayal of the revolutionists'cause.

Sophia Antonovna also possesses a degree of idealism that prevents the cynicism that perpetuates the corruption of patriarchal societies and the lassitude that allows their existence. She never reveals an ambition for power that might interfere with her commitment to social welfare. She describes to Razumov the correspondence she has received about Haldin and makes an analogy between Haldin and Jesus: "'He brought comforting words of home into their misery. He came irregularly, but he came very often, and ... sometimes he spent a night in the house sleeping, they thought, in a stable which opened upon the inner yard. Note that, Razumov! In a stable'" (*UWE* 193). Her ongoing political battle has not rendered her insensitive to the personal wars which rage within human beings. Her explanation for Razumov's betrayal and confession reveals her insight into and compassion for even those who are her political enemies:

> "'It was just when he believed himself safe, and more -- infinitely more --, when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he first discovered ... the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignominy of the existence before him. There's character in such a discovery.'" (*UWE* 266)

Natalie Hardin, Tekla, and Sophia Antonovna reveal Conrad's respect for, and faith in, the ability of women to prove themselves models for the type of leader who puts the public good before political power and personal interest. Conrad feels that women should not be 'out of it'. Instead, they should be at the head of governments and other public institutions.

Chapter 3

THE MAJOR PHASE II

1913 - 1915

In *Chance* and *Victory* Conrad creates complex, fully-rounded characterizations of the women in the stories; he allows the female characters a voice to express a point of view different from those that represent conventional patriarchal thinking; he portrays women fighting against gendered ideas about female attitudes and behaviour; he juxtaposes their strengths and heroism with the weaknesses of the male protagonists; he maintains an ironic stance and authorial distance to separate himself from the views of male characters who embrace the false notion of their superiority over women. In both novels Conrad moves away from undermining the conventions of the imperial romance and the adventure story and focuses on breaking down the traditional literary patterns of the novel based on the romance story in which the knight in shining army saves the damsel in distress. Although this type of story, like the imperial romance, is mired in the chivalric thinking that inscribes gendered roles and behaviour, Conrad's earlier focus on exotic locations, and his criticism of imperialism, give way to a critique of the male proclivity to see women as needing male protection. In both novels Conrad inverts the patterns of the myth by creating female characters whose waif-like appearance belies their steely determination to survive in a world difficult for the very men who perceive themselves as Prince Charmings coming to the rescue.

Chance (1913)

Chance is the novel that first brought Conrad public acclaim and financial success. In fact, over thirteen thousand copies were purchased in Great Britain alone (Watts 114). The novel's theme of love appealed largely to women, and Conrad himself felt that female readers would be pleased with the book. Its title helped its popularity because it was less forbidding than others; also, the novel caught the female eye because of the picture of a young woman on the jacket (Baines 382-83). Moser feels that Conrad's misogyny is particularly evident in *Chance.* He feels that Conrad sentimentalizes Flora, the major female character and that Conrad prefers his women characters as weak, helpless and pitiable (157-60). Guerard agrees that Conrad's female characters are "women to be pitied, protected, saved" (257–61) as does Baines (393). Moser and the others fail to see the strength and resilience that Flora exhibits.

In fact, Conrad resists the archetype of a poor, helpless waif who is rescued by a Prince Charming and whisked away to a life, if not of happiness forever, at least to one of security and ease. Conrad's portrayal of Flora de Baral provides a vehicle by which he challenges gender expectations inscribed in literary conventions that prevent women from gaining true independence and self-actualization. Conrad also employs Flora to comment on the propensity of men to find victimization attractive in women because it affords an opportunity for chivalrous action, or the satisfying impression of having performed such action.

Conrad comments on men who find waiflike fragility in women appealing by portraying Marlow as such a man. While out walking, Marlow is startled by the sight of Flora's skirt hem floating over the edge of a very steep drop into a quarry and calls to her to be careful. When Marlow gently chides her about her carelessness, Flora responds, "'I don't see why I shouldn't be as reckless as I please'" (*C* 46-47). Initially, Marlow is appalled at what he feels is the rude brusqueness of Flora's reply. However, when Flora takes on the appearance of a helpless young thing Marlow's opinion of her changes:

> "She retorted that once one was dead, what horrid people thought of one did not matter. It was said with infinite contempt, but something like a suppressed quaver in the voice made me look at her again. I perceived then that her thick eyelashes were wet ... She look unhappy. And -- I don't know how to say it -- well -- it suited her. The clouded brow, the pained mouth, the vague fixed glance. A victim! And this characteristic aspect made her attractive". (*C* 80)

Later, when he sees Flora in London, Marlow again reveals his susceptibility to Flora's appearance of feminine fragility. On meeting Flora in London, Marlow comments on her "transparent vitality" and the "faintest possible rosy tinge" on her cheeks. What he finds especially appealing is her diminutive stature: "Slight and even angular in her modest black dress, she was an appealing and -- yes -- she was a desirable little figure". He is unable to resist her in the role of frail, female victim. As she describes to him her second attempt at suicide, Marlow reacts strongly to Flora's appearance:

> "An almost imperceptible alternation in her bearing; a slight droop of her head perhaps -- a mere nothing -- made her look more demure than ever ... I won't deny that these words spoken from under the brim of her hat ... gave me a thrill; for

> indeed I had never doubted her sincerity. It could never have been a make-believe despair." (*C*182)

At this point in the novel Marlow's attitude towards Flora changes from sardonic to sympathetic and protective. Earlier on, he was often bemused at the idea that her situation might be dangerous. While the Fynes worry about Flora's disappearance, Marlow mutters sarcastically that "[n]obody ever got up at six o'clock in the morning to commit suicide." However, after her flight from the Fynes, he states that Flora has been ill-used by the world and treated so dishonourably that the brusqueness, which he had previously found rude, "'was not her fault'" (*C* 200). Later in London, when Marlow notices "three dismal, sodden loafers" looking at Flora's "slender figure [and] her white face under the roses of her hat," he finds the scene unbearable (*C* 209).

Although Marlow finds Flora's waiflike appearance charming, many of his comments about women are anti-female. Because Marlow is the novel's narrator it is important to understand that his misogynistic statements do not reflect Conrad's views about women. As Purdy suggests, Marlow's misogynist speeches are so preposterous that "Conrad laughs at Marlow just as Marlow laughs at the Fynes" (88). Marlow's expressions are so outrageous that they divest him of objective authority and remind the reader of his "fictionality" (Erdinast-Vulcan 158). Nadelhaft suggests that, despite the parallels between Marlow's life and Conrad's, Marlow's remarks are so sneering and excessive that, "*Chance* might represent Conrad's separation from Marlow in a final form" (112).

Conrad also uses Marlow to undermine literary conventions. Conrad does this by

parodying the romance genre through a form of self-reflexivity. Marlow plays a game of textuality by persistently referring to the events as part of a story and attempting to apply generic labels to them. Conrad himself takes part in this game of textuality by naming sections of the novel. One is titled "The Damsel" and the other "The Knight" (Erdinast-Vulcan 158). Andrew Michael Roberts argues that, ironically, Marlow's role as listener places him in the role of passive onlooker that constitutes the conventional gendered literary behaviour of a waif-like heroine like Flora -- whom he so often mocks (90-91)

In his portrayal of Flora, Conrad undermines conventional literary presentations of the helpless female waif by breaking the archetypal pattern. Flora's behaviour and character are not congruent with her physical description. It would be difficult for most readers not to perceive Flora as waif-like. Conrad pulls out all the stops of Dickensian sentimentality in Marlow's description of Flora's early childhood. Flora is the only child of a distant, irresponsible father and a neglected, lonely mother who, despite her shabby treatment, "was good to the poor and always ready for a chat with any of the humble folks." The bathos of the description below suggests Conrad is making fun of conventional depictions in Victorian fiction of the background of innocent, beleaguered orphans like Oliver Twist and Jane Eyre:

> "The village people would see [the mother] through the railings wandering under the trees with her little girl, lost in her strange surroundings. Nobody came near her. And there she died as some faithful and delicate animals die -- from neglect, absolutely from neglect, rather unexpectedly and without any fuss". (*C* 69)

J.W. Johnson suggests that in *Chance,* Conrad deliberately places Flora in company with such Victorian heroines as Amelia Sedley, Lucie Manette, Eleanor Harding, and Mary Garth (369). Jeffrey Berman agrees that Conrad was influenced by his light reading and used *Chance* and other similar writings to "rebel against the tradition of popular literature" (158).

Flora's physical description reinforces the illusion of her youthful fragility Conrad completes the archetypal picture by placing her under the care of a cold, malevolent governess (*C* 82). In her flight from the governess, Flora is described as "a little figure swathed in a holland pinafore up to the chin" (*C* 111). The florid rhetoric in the passage detailing Flora's emotional state when she arrives at the Fynes provides further evidence that Conrad uses Flora to poke fun at literary conventions. In much of Victorian fiction, young women of refined sensibilities swoon in situations of distress. A knowledgeable reader might mistake the following passage for one describing Catherine Earnshaw as narrated by Nelly Dean.

> "After a period of immobility in the arms of Mrs. Fyne, the girl, who had not said a word, tore herself out from that slightly rigid embrace. She struggled dumbly between them, they did not know why, soundless and ghastly, till she sank exhausted on a couch ... She was as if gone speechless and insane. She lay on her back, her face white like a piece of paper, her dark eyes staring at the ceiling, her awful immobility broken by sudden shivering fits with a loud chattering of teeth in the shadowy silence of the room". (*C* 112-13)

Conrad presents Flora's final meeting with her governess as emotionally traumatic

but his choice of detail and diction intimate a parody of two female types: the wicked stepmother and the daughter loyal to her fallen father. As a type of cruel stepmother, the governess is portrayed as having an "emanation of evil from her eyes". She has "Medusa's head with serpentine locks set mysteriously" on her shoulders. The juxtaposition of goodness and evil is obvious. Flora is described as a "frail and passive vessel" into whom the governess pours the poison of "the accumulated resentment, the infinite hatred of ... unrelieved ... passionate bitter years, of restraint, the iron, admirably mannered restraint at every moment, in a never-failing correctness of speech, glances, movements, smiles [and] gestures" (*C* 104-07). Flora remains inert throughout the ordeal, until fictional convention calls for her to spring from her emotional stupor, indignant and feisty at any word cast against her father:

> "It seemed that poor Flora had to know all the possible phrases of that sort of anguish, beginning with instinctive panic, through the bewildered stage, the frozen stage and the stage of blanched apprehension, down to the instinctive prudence of extreme terror -- the stillness of the mouse. But when she heard herself called the child of a cheat and a swindler, the very monstrous unexpectedness of this caused in her a revulsion towards letting herself go. She screamed out suddenly, 'You mustn't speak like this of Papa!'" (*C* 108)

Flora is haunted by the governess' speech and almost driven mad by the aspersions against de Barral's reputation. Once again Conrad's florid rhetoric indicates parodic intention:

> "'But how can I forget? She called my father a cheat and a swindler! Do tell me, Mrs. Fyne, that it isn't true. It can't be true. How can it be true?' She sat up in bed with a sudden wild motion as if to jump out and flee from the sounds of the words ... Mrs. Fyne restrained her, soothed her, soothed her,

> induced her at last to lay her head on her pillow again ... 'That awful woman told me that all the world would call papa these awful names. Is it possible? Is it possible?'" (*C* 123)

When Flora runs from her cousin's home to the Fynes, only references to her father's wishes persuade her to return: "'And a father's a father, no matter what a mess he's got himself into. You ain't going to throw over your own father -- are you?'" (*C* 146). Flora's most extravagant display of filial devotion is her decision to marry Anthony, supposedly to provide a home for her revered "Papa".

Conrad resists literary convention and challenges the patriarchal belief that women are the weaker sex. He reveals Flora's strength in her cunning and actions. Although several characters in the novel take credit for saving Flora, she exhibits a fine capacity for looking after herself. Flora is astute in understanding that, for some people, the need to take on the role of a saviour is very strong. She perceives this need in the Fynes, well-intentioned people who spend hours with their eyes glued to Flora's front door, anxiously awaiting the emergence of 'the victim': "[Fyne] confessed to me naïvely that he was excited as if watching some action on the stage" (*C* 103). Because the Fynes are two of the few people she knows in Brighton, it is natural that Flora should flee to their residence. However, it must be noted that Flora's final destination may have been less her choice than Mrs. Fyne's assumption, and her husband's intervention. The passage seems to depict a kidnapping more than a rescue:

> "'Here', cried Mrs. Fyne; 'she's coming here! Run John! Run!' Fyne bounded out of the room ... He was in time. He was at the door before she reached it in her blind course. She

> did not recognize him; perhaps she did not see him. He caught her by the arm as she ran past, and, very sensibly, without trying to check her, simply darted in with her and up the stairs, causing no end of consternation amongst the people in his way." (*C* 111-12)

Flora may have had no intention of running to the Fynes, but she quickly ascertains that their home will provide both shelter and sympathy.

Flora's desire for the Fynes' continued support and assistance is revealed in the poignancy and aggressive persuasiveness of her retelling the story of her governess' departure:

> "She had talked a long time, uninterrupted by Mrs. Fyne, child-like enough in her wonder and pain, pausing now and then to interject the pitiful query: 'It was cruel of her. Wasn't it cruel, Mrs. Fyne?' ... That was it! The [governess] was mad. 'Oh! Mrs. Fyne, don't tell me that she wasn't mad. If you had only seen her face ...'". (*C* 122)

Flora's other stories reveal the same poignant quality. However, Flora's stories also reveal her determination to live in circumstances similar to those to which she is accustomed. After her father's bankruptcy Flora is offered shelter by de Barral's cousin, a man proud of the hard work that has resulted in his success. The family is morally upstanding and prepared to be kind to Flora. However, Conrad foreshadows Flora's failure to remain with the family by alluding to the snobbish superiority the Victorian upper-middle class felt toward the lower-middle class when Flora's cousin calls her "Florrie" (*C* 116-17). It is not long before Flora runs away from her new home. In a scene reminiscent of Jane Eyre's flight from Rochester, Flora walks bareheaded through cold drizzle "without stopping,

without drawing breath, if only for a sob" (*C* 143). After running back to the Fynes, Flora utters a litany of complaints that reaffirm the Fynes' impression that the family offering Flora a home and shelter is vile and odious:

> "After the trial her position became still worse. On the least occasion and even for no occasions at all she was scolded, or else taunted with her dependence. The pious girl lectured her on her defects, the romping girl teased her with contemptuous references to her accomplishments, and was always trying to pick insensate quarrels with her about some 'fellow' or other. The mother backed up her girls invariably, adding her own silly, wounding remarks". (*C* 142)

Although the circumstances may allude to Cinderella, Flora's retelling of the situation is reminiscent of *Vanity Fair's* Becky Sharpe.

Flora's final return from her cousin's home is no flight. She is escorted back by a young man happy to be rid of her. His story reveals Flora as bad-tempered and resistant to work. Mrs. Fyne's claim that she had to "use some force to drag [Flora] in" (*C* 152) may be true. However, one suspects Flora of again playing the role of victim in order to allow Mrs. Fyne the opportunity to again play saviour: "'Don't conclude, though, that I think she was playing a comedy then, because after struggling at first she ended by remaining. She gave up very suddenly. She collapsed in our arms, mine and the maid's who came running in response to my calls!'" (*C* 153). Because she has astute insight into the Fynes' need to see themselves as Good Samaritans, Flora presents herself as defenseless and downtrodden. By maintaining this relationship, Flora very effectively establishes the Fynes' home as a safe harbour to which she returns on several occasions.

Many of literature's orphan waifs, such as *Mansfield Park's* (1814) Fanny Price, exemplify the ideal of ladylike behaviour in patriarchal societies: women should be morally upright, but also agreeable and accommodating. Conrad challenges this convention and does not idealize Flora. Instead, he portrays Flora as true to life. Flora can be provokingly difficult in her relationship with others. The cousin who arrives at the Fynes to take Flora home seems well-mannered and honest. Although Marlow describes Flora as living among the family, "a passive victim, quivering in every nerve, as if she were flayed," the cousin describes Flora as patronizing and difficult: "'What I say is that people should be good-natured. She can't stand being chaffed. She puts on her grand airs. She won't take a bit of a joke from people as good as herself anyway'". He accuses her of causing "'nothing but 'ructions' in the family, and of not having enough "sense to appreciate a plain, honest English home'". His final words to Flora effectively cast doubt on her amiability: "'Good-bye Florrie. Good luck to you -- and I hope I never see your face again'" (*C* 152). De Barral's cousin's family members are not the only people who find Flora difficult. A kind lady terminates her employment because Flora, so capable of joyful animation with Charley, is unable to be cheerful with her (*C* 154). Mrs. Fyne and her daughters dislike Flora and feel she lacks liveliness and humour. Flora's aloofness makes her the object of suspicion and hatred by the men aboard the *Ferndale* (252).

Conrad also undermines the archetype of the fragile orphan and challenges literature's inscribed gender expectations by revealing that Flora is more cunning than the men who see themselves as her saviour. Flora's natural instincts for self-preservation belie

her less convincing self-destructive gestures (Berman 154). After Marlow sees Flora near the cliff she reveals that she was contemplating suicide when he interrupted her by his call. The alleged suicide attempt, however, is suspect. Flora has ventured out with Mrs. Fyne's walking stick; unless Flora intends to bash herself into unconsciousness or trip herself into the quarry, the walking stick seems an extraneous item for a pedestrian planning to take his or her own life. And Flora does not tie up the Fynes' dog, a highly exuberant canine whose company might impede even a spontaneous act of self-destruction. Nevertheless, Marlow not only repeats the story of Flora's rescue (*C* 171), but also begins to feel a sense of responsibility for her (*C* 178).

Conrad strengthens his commentary by presenting Captain Anthony as another man who finds victimhood in women appealing. Flora is quick to ascertain this quality and use it to her benefit. Flora learns that Captain Anthony is unmarried and from his behaviour perceives that he is a man who is shy with women. Although Mrs. Fyne has not spoken to her brother about Flora's sad history (*C* 188), Flora knows that her appearance of beleaguered, innocent frailty can work to her advantage. She takes long walks, knowing that Captain Anthony spends hours sitting under a tree providing a view of all the nearby walking paths. It is not surprising when Captain Anthony appears through a gate in the field and joins Flora, who is on her way to another attempted suicide. Even Marlow chortles at the idea that Flora and the Captain meet by accident, thereby occasioning another rescue: "Again she hesitated with an effect of innocent shyness .. then glided on ... When suddenly Captain Anthony came through a gate out of a field. I coughed down the beginning of a

most improper fit of laughter, and felt ashamed of myself. Her eyes raised for a moment seemed full of innocent suffering" (*C* 183). Flora's perception that the Captain is attracted to women toward whom he can feel protective quickly proves true. Flora's tears move him to action: "He was impressed and interested by the mysteriousness of the effect ... Suddenly he advanced two steps, stooped, caught hold of her hands lying on her lap and pulled her up to her feet" (*C* 186). Captain Anthony glows at the chivalric possibilities Flora's situation affords him: "But her misery was his opportunity and he rejoiced while the tenderest pity seemed to flood his whole being" (*C* 189). In a speech which recalls the intense ferocity of Heathcliff exhorting Catherine, and the rhetoric of which clearly communicates Conrad's parodic intention, Captain Anthony tells Flora he cannot leave her. His attraction to her appearance of helplessness is clear:

> "'No use! No use! You dare stand here and tell me that -- you white-faced wisp, you wreath of mist, you little ghost of all the sorrows of the world. You dare! Haven't I been looking at you? You are all eyes. What makes your cheeks always so white as if you had seen something ... Don't speak. I love it ... Why you would vanish ... what little there is of you. Some rough wind will blow you away altogether'". (*C* 192)

Flora uses her appearance to draw out Captain Anthony's sense of chivalry so effectively that the two soon marry. However, Conrad also employs their marriage to undermine literary convention.

Flora and Anthony marry. Conrad, however, does not follow the conventional pattern of the romance story. Flora and Anthony do not immediately begin living happily

ever after. Marlow suggests that Flora and Anthony are late in consummating their marriage because Anthony believes Flora has wed him only to provide her father a home; Anthony, therefore, acts nobly and does not demand his conjugal rights. According to Marlow, Flora perceives the Captain's abstinence as another sign that she cannot be loved (*C* 278). Rieselbach suggests that Anthony may be so caught up in the illusion of Flora's fragility that he fears "[h]aving sexual relations with Flora would be tantamount to murder" (109). Hewitt suggests that Marlow's narration is coloured, among other things, by his perception of Flora as fragile and defenseless (308). However, Flora's actions challenge these perceptions of her defenselessness.

Conrad chooses to portray Flora as clever enough to establish a relationship that allows her a voice in her marriage. Flora's handling of Anthony's love reflects Conrad's belief in the intelligence of women and his belief that they should be considered equal partners in marriage. The ongoing references to Anthony as the "son of the poet" hint that Anthony, like his father, has the potential for domestic violence. His laughter is "blood-curdling" and his smile "rapacious". He storms at Flora in fury, and growls "at her in a savage passion", and with a "ferocity ... which was new to her" (*C* 189-91). Flora accepts Anthony's abstinence from sex with her because it is to her benefit to do so. She establishes with him an understanding of the kind of married relationship she wishes to form. Flora understands that Anthony's chivalry includes possessiveness:

> "And even as he spoke with indignation the very marks and stamps of this ill-usage ... seemed to add to the inexplicable attraction he felt for her person. It was not pity alone ... It was something more spontaneous, perverse and exciting. It gave

> him the feeling that if only he could get hold of her, no woman would belong to him so completely as this woman". (*C* 190)

The more Anthony's speeches suggest that he is trying to free Flora, the more she becomes enslaved (Smith 349). In Flora's eyes, Anthony's magnanimity makes her his prisoner (Land 186). Flora must make Anthony aware of her true nature in order to establish a marriage in which she is considered an equal partner. Only by establishing her strength can she prevent future occurrences of Anthony's refusal to listen to her: "She was saying to herself that he caught her words in the air, never letting her finish her thoughts" (*C* 277). Only by showing her courage can she stop the cruelty and bullying which lie beneath Anthony's strange protestations of love:

> "'It must be done. You are listening to me -- eh? or would you go again to my sister?' His ironic tone, perhaps from want of use, had an awful grating ferocity. 'Would you go?' he pursued in the same strange voice. 'Your best friend! And say nicely -- I am sorry ... Or can you be thinking of taking your father to that infernal cousin's house? No! Don't speak. I can't bear to think of it. I would follow you there and smash the door'". (*C* 280)

Flora soon proves capable of coping with the tension caused by Anthony's behaviour: "She beat him at his own honourable game and the thoroughness of her serenity disconcerted Anthony a bit. It was he who stammered when it came to talking" (*C* 283). As Wiley suggests, Conrad feels that the novel's hero must "learn to conquer his two unworthy motives, false chivalry and sensuality, in order to win the heroine and make normality triumph over abnormality" (132).

Once it is no longer necessary for Flora to appear a victim, Conrad reveals her strength and courage as formidable. Preferring to look after her own needs, she fires Mrs. Brown, her lady companion (*C* 256). On their journey from the prison she physically subdues her father as he attempts to jump from the carriage (*C* 302). Later, she also manages his difficult behaviour (*C* 267, 293). Flora shows courage when she lights a flare and prevents a collision with another ship (*Ch* 265) and also when she stands up to Anthony:

> "'I assure you I haven't got the slightest wish to evade my obligations,' she said steadily. "Even if I could. Even if I dared, even if I had to die for it!' He looked thunderstruck. They stood facing each other at the end of the saloon ... 'Your magnanimity', she said sharply '... There is a perfection in it -- do you understand me, Roderick? -- which makes it almost possible to bear.'" (*C* 320)

It is after she reveals her true nature that Flora chooses to make her desire for Captain Anthony known to him. Conrad portrays Flora as the embodiment of a free woman who refuses others to take charge of her life, no matter how bad her situation may be.

Conrad challenges the literary convention that portrays good women as sexually passive. Flora goes on the offensive when Anthony indicates that he plans to leave the marriage. She flings herself at Anthony and holds him tightly: "'You can't cast me off like this Roderick. I won't go away from you. I won't'" (*C* 354). Nineteenth-century novels often portray poor, dependent young heroines such as Fanny Price as moral exemplars with serious sensibilities and little overt interest in men. Although he presents Flora as chaste,

Conrad also presents her as often lively and aware of the charms of the opposite sex. Descriptions of Flora repeatedly refer to her as an innocent child, yet she is sixteen years old, an age that, for young women of her time, was appropriate for marriage. She finds rides with Charley delightful, enjoys humorous conversations with her painting teacher, partakes in "unrestrained" discussions with Captain Anthony (*C* 136), and indulges in flirtations that bring about conflict in her cousin's family (*C* 142). Indeed, so passionate is Flora's disavowal of her cousin's son that one wonders if the lady "doth protest too much":

> "From what Flora herself related to Mrs. Fyne, it seems that without being a very perceptibly less 'odious' that his family had in a rather mysterious fashion interposed his authority for the protection of the girl. 'Not that he cares,' explained Flora, 'I am sure he does not. I could not stand being liked by any of these people. If I thought he liked me I would drown myself rather than go back home with him'". (*C* 144)

Flora is dismissed from her job with a German family because the wife did not like the attention her husband paid Flora. The husband's "paternal" attention may have been inappropriate advances, but it is difficult to believe the Fynes' interpretation that Flora "was still too innocent, and indeed not yet sufficiently aware of herself as a woman, to mistrust [his] approaches" (*C* 156). Flora is certainly sufficiently aware of her womanhood when she runs away to London with Anthony. Also, Flora charms Mr. Powell, both while on the *Ferndale* and after the death of her husband (*C* 366). Here, once again the perception of Flora's fragility draws a man to her. In a conversation with Marlow late in the novel, Powell says: "'[Do] you know what she looked like to me with those big eyes and

something appealing in her whole expression? She looked like a forsaken elf'" (*C* 349).

In *Chance*, Conrad juxtaposes the actions of the novel's men and women in order to comment on the weaknesses of men and on how men in paternal societies mistreat women. Conrad creates Marlowe as a garrulous misogynist and Captain Anthony as a boring, ineffectual believer of chivalric ideals. Indeed, none of the male characters in the novel are presented positively. Flynn is a good man but takes action only when he receives instruction from his wife. Fathers are selfish, possessive egotists who regard their children as objects. Anthony's father is a "delicate poet" who nonetheless is insensitive to, and abusive toward, his children. He is described as manifesting "traces of the primitive cave-dweller's temperament". Mrs. Fyne's situation is analogous to that of Flora: she ... "remained in bondage ... for several years, till she too seized a chance of escape by throwing herself into the arms ... [of] Fyne" (Wiley 69). De Barral, busy embezzling money, ignores his wife and child until he becomes a widower and then expects that same child to sacrifice her happiness for him. Schwartz suggests that de Barral assumes a role much like that of Pandarus when he attempts to bring together his married daughter and young Powell (91).

Flora reveals women's ability to look after themselves. She proves too that women do not always have to be amiable and amenable, pleasing and placating, in order to survive. Conrad challenges literary conventions that portray women as frail and helpless and thereby inscribe traditional patriarchal expectations for women's behaviour. Nadelhaft argues that *Chance* contains an atmosphere of collusion "in which a variety of men seem to conspire to aid Flora while in reality they seek to muffle her voice to negate her individuality, all in the

guise of kindness and altruistic concern" (110). However, Flora's actions prove her intelligent enough not only to survive but to achieve independence and self-actualization. Berman feels that "by the end of the novel [Flora] remains the most invulnerable figure of all, surprisingly strengthened by those experiences which prove fatal to her father and husband" (154). Another woman who can look after herself is Flora's governess.

Conrad's portrayal of the governess challenges the archetype of the wicked stepmother. Johnson argues that *Chance* is a parody of Victorian literary conventions and that the governess "might have come straight out of a Dickens novel, bringing her young man and gin bottle with her" (347). In his characterization of the governess, Conrad employs exaggeration to undermine a literary convention that depicts such women as evil. Conrad also uses the governess to comment on men whose misogyny perpetuates traditional stereotypes of women and weakens their perceptions and sound judgment.

Conrad employs the gossip and innuendo of other characters to present the governess as a stereotype: a depraved, malevolent and a villainous predator of the innocent children in her care. She is a " kind of literary *tour de force* ... required only to be ... abounding in repressed malignancy" (Stewart 214). However, because the gossip mongers he creates are not reliable, Conrad undermines the stereotype. Rieselbach is correct when she suggests that the governess' role is to act as yet another target for Marlow's frequent denunciation of women in general (88). Marlow is a misogynist, and his descriptions of the governess are informed by the Fynes, who enjoy helping those they perceive as helpless victims. Moreover, a close reading of the novel reveals the Fynes' and Marlow's biased

interpretations of the governess' actions. Mrs. Fyne accuses the governess of devising a plan to marry Flora to "an impecunious relation of her own -- a young man with furtive eyes and something impudent in his manner" (*C* 92-94). However, the effect of Charley's charm on Flora does not indicate any conspiracy to use Charley as a means to gain access to Flora's money; young women of sixteen can be very arbitrary in their attraction to, or repugnance for, twenty-three year old men

Moreover, the description of Flora's behaviour and attitude before her governess' departure does not suggest abuse or cruelty in their relationship. The governess looks after Flora's physical needs and successfully shelters her from "the world's ways, the unconsciousness of danger, of pain, of humiliation, of bitterness, of falsehood" (*C* 91-101). Although the governess dislikes Flora (*C* 104) she is extremely conscientious in her duties, including the management of drawing, music and dance teachers, as well as doctors, dentists, servants and tradesmen. Although Fyne hints at an unwholesome relationship between the governess and Charley, the fact that "[t]here was a room always kept ready for him ... at the farther end of a ... passage" suggests the circumspection of their behaviour inside Flora's home. After the bankruptcy, the governess' responses to Flora are terse and brusque (*C* 88-90), but her abruptness is understandable considering the circumstances of her lost employment. The Fynes suggest that the governess is dishonest when she packed those articles in "her special apartment ... taking everything belonging to her and some things of *less unquestionable ownership*" (my italics); but these items in her apartment are later described as having been presented by and not to de Barral and, therefore, could indeed

be her possessions. The Fynes say that the governess draws a cheque on household money (*C* 90); however, their theory that the governess is guilty of wrong-doing is conjecture: "In a very short time the odious fellow appeared ... Mrs. Fyne groaned ... audibly; and asked her husband what it might mean. Fyne naturally couldn't say. Mrs. Fyne believed that there was something horrid in progress" (*C* 99). Marlow views the governess' quick departure as an act of betrayal. However, the governess reveals the quick intelligence of a working woman whose first concern is the need to find employment in order to survive.

Conrad shows the reader that neither the Fynes nor Marlow are credible in providing an accurate judgement of the governess. The Fynes are a couple waiting in the wings for an opportunity to play a role in Flora's victimization (*C* 103); and, since the drama requires a villain, they have chosen the governess for the part. Mrs. Fyne has no proof of the governess' moral depravity, yet rejoices at news of the bankruptcy: "'Then that poor child would be safe from these designing, horrid people'" (*C 97).* While watching the governess' departure, Fyne observes no evidence of harmful action on her part, and yet "[t]hough no great reader of character, he did not credit the governess with humane intentions" (103). Both Fynes are guilty of creative conjecture.

Conrad lets Marlow voice his flamboyant speculations about the governess in order to establish Marlow as representative of men whose misogynistic attitude perpetuate prejudiced views of women. Stewart points out that Marlow is obsessive concerning female psychology and "has more to say about it than is at all likely to hold our attention" (213). Marlow's initial description of the governess as "amazing" (*C* 87) places her beyond

the realm of the ordinary. Therefore, she does not fit the types of women that Marlow lists. She is not a "perfectly harmless, naïve, usual, inefficient specimen," a "common-place silly adventuress," a "model of all virtues," a "repository of all knowledge," or "anything harmless, conventional, and middle class". Marlow does not perceive women as individuals and this explains why, although he has never met the governess, Marlow describes her temperament as one of "fierce resentment of repression; a feeling which like genius or lunacy it apt to drive people into sudden irrelevancy" (*C* 92). He guesses that she is forty years old and imagines a sad and sordid relationship in which she clings desperately to a callow, feckless Lothario half her age:

> "She was clearly a woman uncommon enough to live without illusions -- which, of course, does not mean that she was reasonable. She had said to herself, perhaps with a fury of self-contempt, 'In a few years I shall be too old for anybody. Meantime I shall have him ... by throwing to him the money ...'. Well, it was a desperate expedient -- but she thought it worth while". (*C* 95)

After hypothesizing a relationship between the governess and her lover, Marlow then imagines the impending end of the affair: "He was, with a young man's squeamishness, rather sick of her ferocity" (*C* 99).

The extravagant nature of Marlow's musings about the governess provides clues that undermine his veracity. The anonymous listener to Marlow's tale accuses him of having "a ghastly imagination" and far-fetched suggestions:

> "I couldn't refuse Marlow the tribute of a prolonged whistle. 'Phew! So you suppose that ...' He waved his hand impatiently. 'I don't suppose. It was so. Anyhow why

> shouldn't you accept the supposition.'" (*C* 93-94)

The listener reiterates his suspicions later in the conversation and Marlow does not deny the accusations:

> "'But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others,' I stuck in. 'Or at least some of us seem to ... Is that we may amuse ourselves gossiping about each other's affairs? ... Marlow silenced me, ... 'surely life must be amused somehow.'" (*C* 105)

The language in many of Marlow's musings about the governess clearly indicates the conjectural nature of their content:

> "What they said to each other in private *we can imagine*. [The governess] came out of her own sitting-room with red spots on her cheekbones, which having provoked a question from her 'beloved' charge, were accounted for by a curt 'I have a headache coming on'. But *we may* be certain that the talk being over she *must have said* to the young black-guard: 'You had better take her for a ride as usual.'" (*C* 89) (my italics)

The fanciful speculations of both the Fynes and Marlow illustrate the absurdity of literary conventions that lock woman into stereotyped roles, and of those who perpetuate the stereotypes. Just as Flora proves the Fynes and Marlow wrong, the governess proves them foolish. Conrad also comments on patriarchal attitudes and misogynist thinking in his presentation of Mrs. Fyne.

Conrad portrays Mrs. Fyne as a perpetrator of stereotyping but also its victim. Marlow, who is a misogynist and, therefore, a prejudiced judge of character, disapproves of Mrs. Fyne because she does not fulfill the archetypal roles of affectionate wife and warm,

nurturing mother. She acts "as if Fyne were a widower and the children not her own but only entrusted to her calm, efficient, unemotional care" (*C* 45). Marlow also feels Mrs. Fyne is heartless when she is honest with Flora about the changed circumstances of her life in order to prepare Flora for the "hardest realities of unprivileged" existence (*C* 122). He chides Mrs. Fyne for her "unflinching propensity for speaking the truth" because her behaviour does not fit his image of how women should act: "The women's rougher, simpler, more upright judgment embraces the whole truth, which their tact, their mistrust of masculine idealism, ever prevents them from speaking in its entirety" (*C* 126). Marlow categorizes women as liars and yet casts aspersions on Mrs. Fyne's womanliness because she is honest. Conrad uses Marlow's contradictions and inconsistencies to make the reader fully aware that Marlow's views of women are not to be taken seriously.

Marlow represents men unable to perceive women as anything but "types". Because Mrs. Fyne does not fit the archetypal role of "good mother", Marlow turns to another archetype to label her. He describes Mrs. Fyne as exhibiting a "sort of peculiar self-possession [which] gave her the appearance of a very trustworthy, very capable and excellent governess" (*C* 45). He states, "Mrs. Fyne [was] sitting with folded arms and not a hair of her head out of place. She looked exactly like a governess who had put the children to bed; and her manner to me was just the neutral manner of a governess. To her husband, too, for that matter'"(*C* 52). Conrad's portrayal of Mrs. Fyne reveals her efficiency and confidence. However, her efficiency and confident demeanor rankle Marlow. And since he associates Mrs. Fyne with Flora's governess, whom he perceives as

morally depraved (Rieselbach 91), Marlow perceives a connection between female efficiency and evil. His reference to Mrs. Fyne's "splendid teeth" alludes to predators and perhaps werewolves (*C* 45). Marlow represents men who feel uncomfortable and perhaps threatened by women who do not follow conventional gendered rules of behaviour.

Marlow's remarks about Mrs. Fyne's disciples provide Conrad with commentary on the difficulty many men experience in accepting married women who maintain their identity by keeping their female friends. Marlow's interpretation of the relationship as some eccentric cult indicates that he finds the concept of camaraderie between women foreign:

> "The girlfriend problem exercises me greatly. How and where the Fynes got all these pretty creatures to come and stay with them I can't imagine. I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. These girls in fact came for Mrs. Fyne. They treated her with admiring deference ... [t]hey were like disciples". (*C* 45)

Marlow's detailed list of Mrs. Fyne's apparel (*C* 120), and his description of her "mature, smooth-cheeked face of masculine shape" (*C* 59) imply that her sexuality is ambiguous. Watts alludes to Mrs. Fyne's lesbianism (118), as does Rieselbach, who feels, however, that Marlow probably means to poke fun at Mrs. Fyne's assumption of the masculine role of ideologue and political activist (91). Like Emila Gould and the women in *Under Western Eyes,* Mrs. Fyne is a woman who shows an interest in politics. However, Marlow implies that Mrs. Fyne is a lesbian because he is unable to accept as normal a woman who likes to think about and discuss what have traditionally been considered manly topics, such as politics. His statement that he thought "these pretty creatures ...were obtained to amuse

Fyne" reveals that he is unable to consider women beyond the role of sex partner. Marlow cannot accept women as individuals (*C* 91-92).

Although Conrad employs Marlow's remarks about Mrs. Fyne to criticize misogynist thinking, he also uses Marlow to comment on feminist ideology. Conrad distrusted ideology and did not agree with a "[p]rogrammatic feminism which adheres to abstract dicta rather than individual needs" (Nadelahft 115). However, Marlow's misogyny is not evidence of Conrad's discomfort with or opposition to equal rights for women. By describing Mrs. Fyne's philosophy as "mad blunderings" Marlow exemplifies men who cannot understand feminist ideology because they are unable to comprehend the situation of inequality at the heart of patriarchal systems. An attentive reader with some feminist perspective recognizes in this diatribe "Marlow's outrage at women's self-determination" (Nadelhaft 115). He does not understand the concept of equality that drives Mrs. Fyne's philosophy: "It was ... a practical individualistic doctrine ... That no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruple should stand in the way of a woman ... from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence ... since some women's existences were made impossible by the short-sighted harshness of men" (*C* 59). Conrad underscores the absurdity of Marlow's misogynistic rant by means of the narrator's response: "'Do you expect me to agree with all this?' I interrupted" (*C* 62). Guerard argues that Marlow is not to be taken seriously because "his editorials on women are boring [and his] uneasy comments on his narrative authority are as tiresome" (270).

Conrad reinforces his criticism of misogynist men like Marlow by portraying Mrs.

Fyne as a woman who, although sometimes misguided, is intelligent, courageous and determined. Although Conrad may have based Mrs. Fyne on Suffragist leaders such as Carrie Nation or Sylvia Pankhurst (Watts 119), she is not merely a caricature of a feminist leader. Mrs. Fyne is astute enough to understand that her early life as a "domestic slave daughter of Carleon Anthony" is a result of a social system that allows and perpetuates the perversion of power. Hence, egalitarianism forms the basis of her ideology. Marlow is not astute enough to understand that "Mrs. Fyne's wretched childhood ... illuminated for her the tyranny inherent in patriarchy" (Nadelhaft 111). Like many men he assumes women are not very intelligent. Moreoever, although Marlow is incapable of comprehending Mrs. Fyne's feminist doctrine he refuses to accept that she understands it: "She probably did not. She was not intelligent enough for that. She had no knowledge of the world" (*C* 61). Marlow's attitude toward Mrs. Fyne's intellect is rather ironic in light of his inability to form and articulate an argument to counter what he describes as her "knock me down doctrine" of feminist behaviour (*C* 58-59).

Mrs. Fyne reveals great courage and determination in coping with and eventually fleeing from a tyrannical father. Marlow represents men who are blind to the conditions women often endure in families where patriarchal attitudes lead to abuse. Marlow states that "[a] poet may be a simple being, but he is bound to be various and full of wiles, ingenious and irritable". However, he gives Mrs. Fyne no credit for her courage in escaping a life in which she was "strictly cloistered"; nor does he commend her determination to assist other women enduring similar circumstances: "[S]he too published a little book ... It

was a sort of handbook for women with grievances (and all women have them), a sort of compendious theory and practice of feminine free morality. It made you laugh at its transparent simplicity" (*C* 64). Marlow also refuses to give Mrs. Fyne credit for helping Flora (*C* 61). Marlow scorns Mrs Fyne even though she has behaved rather admirably, albeit misguidedly. Furthermore, Mrs. Fyne assists Flora out of completely disinterested benevolence, for Mrs. Fyne does not find Flora particularly likeable (Rieselbach 91).

Marlow has difficulty understanding Mrs. Fyne's refusal to be a victim. He likes women best when he perceives them as meekly accepting male protection. For Marlow, humility is a highly commendable female virtue. *Chance* is not the first novel in which Conrad uses Marlow to illustrate how abusive behaviour towards women is both recognized and ignored by society. However, in *Chance*, Conrad presents Marlow as unconcerned about the situation of women.. Nadelhaft argues that Conrad created a greatly changed Marlow in *Chance*:: "[the novel] represents a powerful departure from earlier treatments of such abuse and violence, for Marlow's revelation of his own tendency to blame the victim and enjoy her victimization " (113).

It must be pointed out that Conrad portrays Mrs. Fyne as inconsistent. She espouses a feminist ideology that encourages women to be ruthless; however, when Mrs. Fyne discovers Flora's adherence to that same ideology, she is outraged. Mrs. Fyne's reaction to the news of her brother's elopement with Flora may result from a "deep-seated fear of conventional marriage" (Nadelhaft 116). Her inability to stay true to her feminist teachings may also reveal Conrad's distaste for ideologues. However, the difficulty Mrs. Fyne

exhibits in negotiating a path between believing an ideology and applying its teachings in real life situations makes her a more believable character. As is true for most of us, it is easier to spout theory than realize it in action. She knows she must bear responsibility for the consequences to her brother when Flora takes Mrs. Fyne's theory and puts it into practice. Her rage at Flora illustrates a very human need to share the blame and deflect the guilt that she must harbour.

In *Chance,* Conrad both illustrates and undermines Marlow's assertion that "We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical". The novel's form emphasizes the patterns of behaviour inscribed in and perpetuated by fiction that prevents women from self-actualization. Schwartz describes the form as a "series of Chinese boxes" and argues that much of the novel's imagery is derived from the trope of imprisonment (46). Conrad frees his female characters from this imprisonment by allowing them to act in ways that undermine prescribed expectations for behaviour and that reveal their strengths.

Victory (1915)

In *Victory,* as in *Chance,* Conrad undermines literary conventions that portray women as frail and helpless by creating a female character more capable of fulfilling the hero role than the hero himself. Conrad also uses Lena, the novel's major female character, to again comment on the readiness of men to perceive women as helpless in order to maintain the patriarchal view that women are inferior to men and, therefore, need their

protection. Lena's life also provides a vehicle by which Conrad criticizes patriarchal societies that consider women prey for men.

Many critics describe *Victory* as a love story in which Axel Heyst, a withdrawn, idealistic, wanderer motivated only by chivalry, rescues Lena, a downtrodden and defenseless waif. For example, Schwartz perceives Lena as representing London's poor, a child of the street caught up in hopeless poverty (73). Like Flora in *Chance*, Lena is an opportunity-in-waiting for a white knight. Daleski notes how Lena is so often described as "white", "spectral", "ghost-like" and clinging to Heyst's arm like a fragile flower (116). Lena tries in turn, through love, to rescue Axel from the nihilism that has produced in him a philosophical detachment from and rejection of the world. Her love for Axel is so ardent that she sacrifices herself to save his life and prove to him the strength of her passion (Land 193).

However, a close reading of *Victory* reveals that although several men in the novel believe her helpless, Conrad does not follow the archetypal pattern of the damsel in distress genre in his characterization of Lena. Lena is not a damsel in distress, but a young woman, who, although poverty-stricken and poorly educated, can look after herself because she possesses the qualities typical of so many of Conrad's female characters: strength, endurance, intelligence and courage. Conrad introduces Lena as she is viewed by Heyst, a man whose treatment of Morrison has already identified him as a saviour (*V* 66). Even before he notices Lena, Heyst's good Samaritan sentiments have been aroused at the plight of the women in Zangiacomo's orchestra: "Heyst felt a sudden pity for these beings,

exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace, whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos" (*V* 112). His gaze then rests on two female characters whom Conrad justaposes to each other. The description of Mrs. Zangiacomo establishes her as villainous. She is a "raw-boned" woman with a "bad-tempered curve to her nostrils" and "ugly elbows"; her actions are "brusque" and "impatient" and she strides with an "aggressive and masterful gait." In contrast, Lena is described as "motionless", with a "small pair of hands" lying in her lap and with feet, "in low white shoes ... crossed prettily." Further details attest to Lena's youth and hint at her innocence. Like the other players she is dressed in white muslin. The players, however, are clearly established as "no longer young," while Lena's youth is emphasized when Heyst refers to her as "'A girl, by Jove!'" In addition, she eschews the long, untied tresses of the archetypal wanton woman and wears her hair neatly coifed in "two thick brown tresses rolled round an attractively shaped head". After Mrs. Zangiacomo pulls her off the stage, Lena stands rather demurely with her "eyelids lowered" (*V* 113-114). Conrad effectively establishes in the reader the expectation that Heyst will step in and assist the young waif. However, the degree of contrast between the two female characters also suggests that Conrad is being ironic, not only in the portrayal of the two women but also in that of the champion who charges in to save the sweet ingenue from the cruel older woman.

The Dickensian details of Lena's background suggest that Conrad creates them with tongue in cheek in order to poke fun at the archetype of the helpless orphan. Nothing in the novel indicates that Lena's conversations with Heyst about her sad and squalid childhood

are anything less than truthful. However, the information presented tugs at the heartstrings and effectively portrays her as a victim. In her life she has come across very few pleasant people; abandoned by her mother, she was raised by a poor, sometimes drunken musician father who, falling victim to a paralytic stoke, literally falls over into the well of the orchestra; there is no one who cares if she "makes a hole in the water ... or not". Like Flora de Barral, Lena tells her story with great poignancy.

> "[Lena]had, of course has no money at all. The quantities of 'black men' all about frightened her. She really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe ... A consul! What was it? Who was he? What could he do? And when she learned that perhaps he could be induced to send her home, her head dropped on her breast. 'What am I to do when I get there?' she murmured with an intonation just so, with an accent no penetrating -- the charm of her voice did not fail her even in whispering." (*V* 120)

A close look at this passage reveals how Conrad undermines archetypal patterns that inscribe gendered behaviour for women. Lena may look like a helpless waif but she does not act like a frightened, docile woman. Unlike the other women in the orchestra she does not join the male customers at the tables. Because of the allusions to innocence in Lena's description, readers assume that she finds mingling with the men distasteful and intimidating. Her reluctance, however, may suggest she is someone who exhibits passive-aggressive behaviour when dealing with authority. Lena knows what her employers expect of her between musical selections, but quietly rebels against their expectations by choosing to remain on the stage as long as possible. When Mrs. Zangiacomo "drops a word" into Lena's ear, Lena does move off the stage, but she certainly is not intimidated enough to

begin readily fraternizing with the men: "[Lena came] down the three steps from the platform to the floor of the hall. There she paused, stumbled one pace forward, and stood still again ... She had not moved ... She was looking down, very still ... without movement" (*V* 114). Lena does not act like a damsel in distress, and she does not speak like one either.

Conrad employs incongruity in his characterization of Lena in order to undermine the archetype of the meek, helpless woman. When Heyst asks if Mrs. Zangiacomo has pinched her, Lena's responds, "It wouldn't have been the first time. And suppose she did -- what are you going to do about it?" The tough, challenging tone of this question does not fit Lena's waif-like appearance. When Heyst asks Lena to order him to assist her, she is somewhat bewildered, but not for long. She notices his "courteous tone" and "kindly expression" and quickly ascertains that he is a potential good Samaritan. Lena implores Heyst not to interfere, but her request reveals that her coyness is part of her strategy to gain Heyst's assistance: "'Don't you try to interfere," she said so earnestly that Heyst asked, in his faintly playful tone: 'Is it your wish that I should leave you?' 'I haven't said that,' the girl answered" (*V* 115).

Conrad also challenges the literary convention of the damsel's rescue. Lena takes on the aggressive role usually reserved for the hero and orders Heyst to rescue her: "'*You* do something! ... I don't care what it is, but you must do something! ... What did you mean then, by saying 'Command me'?' she almost hissed" (*V* 121). Lena is much like Jewel, who entreats Jim to act against Gentleman Jim. While ordering Heyst to act Lena is "fierce and

entreating at the same time -- clamorous, in fact". She bullies and shames Heyst into action, and he consents. Heyst does not rescue Lena; on the contrary, Lena uses Heyst to rescue herself. By inverting a literary convention that portrays women as passive and defenseless, Conrad challenges patriarchal expectations of male and female behaviour. Rieselbach alludes to the irony in Conrad's portrayal of Lena by pointing out that although Lena appears a "waiflike [and] friendless" victim, she ultimately proves stronger than her rescuer (114). Conrad provides Lena other occasions to prove her mettle. She manages to elude the advances of the odious Schomberg (*V* 124) and Mr. Zangiacomo as well. (If Zangiacomo's interest in Lena is other than merely professional, it helps to answer several questions: Why is Lena the only female employee to reside in the hotel? Why is Mrs. Zangiacomo so ferocious in her dealings with Lena? Why are both Schomberg and Zangiacomo so frantic to search out Lena once she has fled Sourabaya?)

The description of Heyst's reaction when Lena accepts his plan to leave Sourabaya underscores the irony of Lena's supposed helplessness and Heyst's supposed heroism:

> "Get away now,' he said rapidly, "and try to smile as you go." She obeyed with unexpected readiness; and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him; and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience. (*V* 121)

Wayne C. Booth describes irony as a kind of private joke between the author and his

audience (49–50). The reader experiences the joke in the passage by perceiving several of Heyst's misconceptions. Heyst instructs Lena to smile and believes that she does so in compliance with his order; the reader, however, realizes that Lena smiles because she has successfully convinced Heyst to take her away. Heyst notices the "mechanical, ordered" nature of Lena's smile, but feels that it is part of a role she is playing in order to mislead the Zangiacomos; the reader understands that, in order to gain his assistance, Lena may have been performing the role Heyst expects of her -- the helpless young maiden. Heyst, then, reflects upon what he believes is Lena's excellent pretence of a smile and concludes that all women are capable of duplicity; the reader perceives that Heyst is unaware of how Lena has succeeded in gaining Heyst's assistance. Finally, although he is convinced that Lena's smile is feigned, Heyst nevertheless confesses to being emotionally moved by it; the reader recognizes that what Heyst feels is sexual attraction, but that Heyst does not fully recognize it as such.

Conrad resists another literary archetype when he creates a relationship between a young female who is already experienced in the ways of the world and an older man who is still naïve about them. He also comments on the double standard of behaviour that permeates patriarchal societies. Lena's ability to survive the tough realities of the world she has thus far experienced stems from a strong talent for tactical thinking. Immediately after she gains Heyst's support, Lena's confidence and assertiveness give way to feelings of panic and insecurity. Fearing Heyst may abandon or lose interest in her, she cleverly appeals to his sense of honour and alludes to the physical attraction he feels for her:

> "Oh, I knew it would be all right from the first time you spoke to me! ... "Command me," you said ... You'll never be sorry. Listen -- I'm not twenty yet. It's the truth, and I can't be so bad looking, or else -- I will tell you straight that I have been worried and pestered by fellows like this before". (*V* 124)

When, at her allusion to other men approaching her, Heyst recoils from her, Lena quickly switches strategies and chooses guilt as a weapon: "'Is it my fault? I didn't even look at them ... Have I looked at you? Tell me. It was you that began it'". Lena understands the double standard of society: men pursue women but do not want women who have been involved with other men. So, she appeals to what she knows are Heyst's chivalric tendencies: "'[I]t isn't easy to stand up for yourself when you feel there's nothing and nobody at your back. There's nothing so lonely in the world as a girl who has got to look after herself'". Next, she challenges his virility: "'I know what sort of girl I am; but all the same I am not the sort that men turn their backs on -- and you ought to know it, unless you aren't made like others.'" Lastly, she appeals to his pity: "'I am dead tired,' she whispered plaintively" (*V* 124-25). Conrad's portrayal of Lena reveals his sympathy for women in situations such as Lena's but he does not sentimentalize or idealize her character. He presents her as tough, assertive, and crafty; however, the poverty in her past and her need to survive the present provide ample justification for her attitudes and behaviour.

Literary archetypes and patriarchal conventions of female behaviour are constantly undermined in *Victory*. When Lena allows Heyst to name her (*V* 126), she reveals her ability to think strategically in order to remain safe. However, some critics see her action as proof of Conrad's misogyny and his inability to do women characters well. For example,

Heywood argues that Heyst's choice of names sets up the traditional virgin/whore dichotomy often employed in defining women's nature: "What Heyst accomplishes through combining elements of each name into one is that he names [Lena] with or designates her as a contradiction ... so that either name or definition associated with that name loses its power to signify". Lena, therefore, becomes a cipher, a nothing (9). Vanderwielen suggests that Lena's instruction to Heyst to choose whatever name he likes shows Lena's willingness to let Heyst dominate her: " [It] verifies [her] willing complicity in her own subjugation, even an eagerness to embrace it" (204). For women, the matrimonial ritual of exchanging the father's surname for that of the husband is both associated with the Adamic rite and is the most explicit sign of the "appropriation of the female within the masculine economy" (204). Lena's demand forces Heyst to take on an active role and allows Lena to claim the passive role as her right. However, the theories of Heywood and Vandervielen are based on an interpretation of Lena as both lacking in intelligence and submissive, characteristics her behaviour does not support.

Allowing Heyst to name her does not reveal Lena's passivity; it provides evidence of her clever thinking. In order to escape the Zangiacomos and Schomberg, Lena knows she must use Heyst, and she is perceptive enough to realize that Heyst is somewhat sexually fastidious. By allowing Heyst to give her a new name she metaphorically re-creates herself as a woman unsullied by the moral pollution of the world, a woman pure enough for the most fastidious of men. Lena's astute analysis of Heyst's moral meticulousness is proven by his reply to her: "'How I should like to forget everything that has gone on before, as one

forgets a dream that's done with, fright and all ...' 'Would you really?' he asked ... 'I understand that women easily forget whatever in their past diminishes them in their eyes'" (*V* 124-25). Lena's reference to "what has gone on before" does not reveal anything remiss in her own behaviour. Heyst's reply, however, reveals his assumption that Lena is guilty of some sort of shameful action. Her reply shows good tactics as she again appeals to Heyst's need to play the role of saviour: "'It's your eyes that I was thinking of, for I'm sure I've never wished to forget anything till you came up to me that night and looked me through and through.'" The strategy proves so effective that Heyst puts aside his fastidiousness and becomes quite courtly in his compliments; he tells Lena that he is in love with her voice and that she smiles "most charmingly -- in a perfect fascinating way". After she leaves he feels "a great wave of heat [pass] over him" (*V* 127-28).

Conrad's choice of names for Lena reveals that he uses irony to undermine the literary convention that calls for the defenseless waif to fall in love with her rescuer. Orlich suggests that Lena's names are part of the Biblical imagery that reflects the novel's theme of love. Lena's real name, Alma, means nourishing or bountiful. Her love nourishes the latent human capacities in Heyst and "draws him into a gradually deepening experience of authentic love". Magdalen, from which Lena is derived, suggests the fullness of love: "Magdalen the sinner was forgiven because she had learned to love deeply" (Orlich 71). Orlich bases her argument on the assumption that Alma/Lena falls in love with Heyst. However, Conrad challenges the convention by choosing to have Heyst fall in love with Lena, and Lena remain more interested in survival than love.

Much fiction has traditionally portrayed the rescued damsel falling in love with her gallant rescuer. Conrad inverts this tradition by first creating Heyst as a man who is not a handsome Prince Charming. The descriptions of Heyst do not present him as sexually attractive to a young woman. At her first glance at Heyst, Lena sees a head, "largely bald," "sunburnt cheeks" against a "white brow," and "long, horizontal moustaches of crinkly bronze hair", the "kindly expression" of his eyes takes precedence over their blueness." Lena's initial reactions to Heyst bear close analysis. At first she is astonished, not at his male beauty, but by his "near presence." "Stony amazement" gives way to "momentary alarm" and then "resignation" (*V* 115). Another description also suggests Heyst's lack of physical attractiveness: "It is difficult to suppose that [Lena] was seduced by the uncovered intellectual forehead and the long reddish moustaches of her new friend ... She had never had a friend before; and the sensation of this friendliness going out to her was exciting by this novelty alone" (*V* 119). As mentioned above, Lena does not perceive Heyst as a potential lover but as a potential saviour and Samaritan. Lena goes on to say that she knows "how to stand by a man" and did so for her father; but this statement suggests duty or loyalty, not love. And her reference to her father indicates that she sees Heyst, a man several years her senior, as just such a father figure.

Conrad strengthens his challenge to the literary archetype of the damsel who falls in love with her rescuer by undermining another convention: the secluded island which provides an idyllic location for love to flourish. If she loved Heyst, Lena would consider their island refuge as an Edenic sanctuary for them; however, she views the location as too

isolated and removed from the world she knows. She feels the top of the island, which looks out to the sea, is "an abomination of desolation" and so lonely that "it makes [her] heart sink" (*V* 208). Lena's sense of isolation on the island is especially significant in considering her meaning when she tells Heyst: "'Well, you were thinking of me, anyhow. I am glad of it. Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me, I shouldn't be in the world at all'" (*V* 205). Lena is not declaring that her passion for Heyst is so strong that she cannot exist or is worthless without him. It is merely an assertion that, other than a sense of her own consciousness, Heyst provides the only other human frame of reference she has on the island. Wang is present, but so silent towards her as to be invisible. When Lena tells Heyst that she can be only what he perceives her to be, she is explaining that their isolation occasions this effect. How Lena views herself does not matter; their circle of existence is so narrowly circumscribed that if Heyst thinks her unchaste or lascivious, there are no others present to contradict his point of view. Lena's statement does not reveal her love for Heyst but her concern about his perception of her.

Many critics fail to see Conrad's inversion of the archetype. For example, Rieselbach argues that Lena falls in love with Heyst but that he remains cold to her: "Lena's simplicity, candour, and direct expression of feeling is contrasted with Heyst's coldness, caution, and propensity to generalize". Lena expresses her heartfelt emotions but Heyst inevitably retreats into the posture of mockingly playful politeness. Often his intent is to put Lena in the wrong by making her honesty and directness seem in bad taste (117-18). However, the "heartfelt expressions" and evidence of affection do not flow from Lena but

from Heyst. Heyst's male gaze takes in Lena's "faintly covered cheeks and red lips, parted slightly;" he admits to having grown fond of her speech and to "[t]he indefinable emotion which certain intonations gave him;" he places his arm around her waist; and, he tells her he finds her "amiable, good, gracious -- and pretty". While Lena's gaze takes in Heyst's "mature face" and thin hair, he calls her "princess of Samburan" and asks if he has "found favour in [her] sight" (*V* 206 -10). Heyst tells Lena he is "'willing to sit ... and look at [her] until [she] is ready to go'" (*V* 216). He experiences an "ever-growing appreciation" of her "figure of grace and strength" (*V* 229) and tells her that her voice makes her unforgettable (*V* 253). However, Lena's reactions to Heyst do not suggest the same degree of emotional and physical attraction.

In *Victory,* Conrad again contrasts the behaviour of the female and male characters in order to comment on the strength of women living in patriarchal societies. Heyst, like so many male characters who are the subject of criticism in Conrad's novels, is a man of little discernment and great self-delusion. In an attempt to follow his father's philosophy of detachment, Heyst tries to live as a recluse, but soon introduces himself into Morrison's life and then into Lena's. He espouses isolation, but becomes upset at the news of Schomberg's gossip about him (*V* 221). Like Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), he chooses the hermit's life but cannot stay away from his neighbours. Heyst also exemplifies men who feel women are intellectually inferior. He does not understand how clever Lena is (*V* 209). As Rieselbach points out, Heyst "sees [Lena] as a creature almost of another species: he cannot tell if she is stupid or inspired, weak or strong"(120). When Lena accuses him of

putting on his air of "universal scorn and unbelief", Heyst chooses to ignore the truth of her assertion: "'No, I am like that, born or fashioned, or both. I am not for nothing the son of my father'". Heyst does make a rather playful attempt at self-analysis but his revelations show him to be obtuse: "'How to define it precisely I don't know. One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure what it was. I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered his soul'" (*V* 215). Heyst is unaware of his feelings for the woman he has 'done something for'; nor does he recognize his lack of sensitivity to Lena's position. Lena, however, grows increasingly aware of Heyst's lack of perception and his other limitations as well.

Conrad also undermines the conventional rescue story with his presentation of Lena and Heyst's relationship. Unlike Cinderella and her prince, Lena and Heyst do not live happily ever after. In the early days of their relationship Lena's tone "betrayed always a shade of anxiety, as though she were never certain how a conversation with [Heyst] would end." Certainly a young woman in love may feel anxious about pleasing her lover but Lena's statements to Heyst hardly resound with affection; instead, they suggest a degree of contentiousness on her part. She is annoyed when Heyst comments on the length of time she has been away: "'I was not very far from you ... You could have called me if you wanted me ... And I wasn't so long ...'" (*V* 205). She accuses him of unfairness and of fabrication:

> "It looks as if you were trying to make out that I am disagreeable ... Am I? You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently. I shall end up believing I am no good ... And then I *won't* be any good ... That I won't. I can only be what you think I am ... It is so. It couldn't be any other way

with a girl like me and a man like you." (*V* 206)

These assertions are direct and heartfelt expressions of emotion, but the emotion is not love, but irritation or anger. Furthermore, Lena does not trust Heyst. She is appalled at Heyst's description of the incident with Morrison because she understands how the incident parallels her own situation with Heyst and does not bode well for her future: "'You saved a man for fun -- is that what you mean? Just for fun?'" (*V* 212-15). Later, she cannot overcome her initial response to the news that Heyst is the man in Schomberg's story about the alleged betrayal of Morrison: "'All you confess is that you wouldn't judge me.' 'I said I couldn't,' [Lena] whispered. 'But you thought that there was no smoke without fire!'" (*V* 226). Lena does, however, tell Heyst that she is incapable of believing anything bad about him. Rieselbach argues that because Lena feels it would be a sacrilege to judge him she has given Heyst mental authority to do whatever he likes (232). However, Lena is neither capitulating to Heyst nor blinded by love for him; she is merely being truthful. She is astute enough to recognize that Heyst, although incapable of murder, is deluded enough to allow his perception of himself as detached to undermine relationships he has formed with others. Lena also understands the ephemeral nature of a relationship that, like theirs, is based primarily on sex. She, therefore, attempts to transform and strengthen their relationship by suggesting that Heyst should try to love her. She does not, however, openly suggest that she loves Heyst. Later, after Jones and his men arrive on the island, Lena realizes that her isolated situation with Heyst makes her dependent on a man who will choose to be passive rather than deal with Jones. She feels an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more

completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice (350). However, her reference to sacrifice does not stem from Lena's adoration of Heyst. She does not think of sacrifice because of a need to gain Heyst's love or to prove her own. Lena mentions sacrifice to assure her safety on the island. She knows that if she attempts to sacrifice herself, Heyst will again play the saviour and attempt to keep her safe from Jones and his men.

Jones' arrival on the island allows Conrad to complete his inversion of the archetype of the damsel rescued by the gallant prince. Conrad highlights the inversion by contrasting the actions of Lena and Heyst, thereby challenging traditional literary depictions of women that perpetuate two patriarchal ideas: women need the support of men, and men are powerful and self-sufficient. Lena's actions dramatize her insight, intelligence and courage while Heyst's ideas and actions prove him incapable of protecting anyone. Heyst will not put up a fight because, as an espouser of nihilism, it is "'difficult to resist where nothing matters'" (*V* 216 - 17). He doubts whether he has courage enough to fight for he is not "'the sort that always itches for a weapon, for [he has] never been anxious to use one in the quarrels that a man gets into'" (*V* 224). Consequently, Lena realizes that she must take charge of her own safe-keeping. Heyst seems oblivious to the threat the men pose, yet Lena, having physically defended herself against rape by Ricardo (*V* 291), is well aware of the danger. Heyst makes a series of blunders. He houses the three criminals and leaves his revolver unattended, thereby allowing Wang time to steal Heyst's revolver and run off to the safety of his compound (*V* 259). Heyst's plan of action consists of leading Lena to the compound and begging Wang to give her sanctuary. When Wang flatly refuses, Heyst then

goes off to chat with Jones, leaving Lena to deal with a complicated set of signaling instructions. As they travel through the forest Lena leads the way (*V* 333). Lena, the damsel in distress, will have to come to the rescue because Heyst, the novel's hero, is incapable of doing so. Conrad uses Lena's successful battle with Ricardo to dramatize her courage and physical strength. Lewis suggests the ferocity of Lena's response to Ricardo's attempted rape reveals a ready perception, based on experience of "that kind of ... behaviour" (75). Her plan to trick Ricardo and take hold of the gun indicates that she is quick-thinking and resourceful. Lena's pretense of interest in Ricardo's amorous advances is a clever ploy to save herself, because she knows any attempt by Heyst will prove ineffective. To view Lena's manipulation of Ricardo as an action motivated solely by her desire to save Heyst is to ignore all the evidence Conrad provides of her determination and ability to extricate herself from threatening situations.

However, after portraying Lena as cunning and feisty, Conrad then suddenly transforms her into Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House, a pattern of the Victorian lady of selfless innocence (Gilbert and Gubar 22). The description of Lena's death suggests she is now a female character similar to Amelia Sedley: "A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty" (*V* 309). This section of the novel is the topic of much critical discussion. Lena's death has been explained as a victory over sceptism (Leavis 202), a vindication of the vitality and truth represented by Lena, and the rectitude and power of love (Bradbook 66-

67). Other critics feel that Conrad's irony is at play. Berman argues that the triumphant announcement of Lena's death is not meant as a proclamation of the ideals of love and loyalty for which she purportedly dies, but to suggest that Lena's victory is ironic. Bonney argues that Conrad means to be ironic in the most merciless way (129). Adam Gillon suggests that *Victory*, more than any of Conrad's novels is influenced by the work of his favourite Polish poet, Juliusz Slowacki (143). Slowacki's penchant for utilizing irony to undermine genre conventions has been discussed earlier in the Introduction.

Conrad signals his irony to the reader in ways other than the sudden change in Lena's character. Conrad cranks up the volume on the rhetoric he chooses to present Lena's sacrifice for love. Lena is described as "serene, as if fatigued only by the exertion of her tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love". Her lips are pale, her smile is faint, and as she lies dying she takes on the majestic immobility of marble (V 380). The passages resound with melodrama and portray Lena in a way that is inconsistent with her earlier characterization:

> by the end of the novel [Lena] has come to regard herself as a priestess of love, a rival of the fabled Cleopatra in her courage and grandeur. Even as she lies mortally wounded with a bullet through her breast, she rejoices in the victory of her lover; and she awaits her impending death as if it were but a momentary sleep before her eternal union with Heyst. (Berman 165)

However, at the same time Conrad is employing such florid rhetoric, he continues to undermine the archetype of the defenseless waif rescued by the gallant hero. Lena insists on being given the knife, a symbol of phallic power, that reinforces her role as the novel's

action hero, not the story's maiden in distress. When she asks, "'Who else could have done this for you?'" the reader's reaction is to answer, "Certainly not Heyst", because Heyst has proven ineffective as a chivalric knight. The irony in the dialogue is apparent when Lena reminds Heyst that *she* has saved *him*, but suggests that he take her into his arms and carry her away from the island (*V* 380). Based on Heyst's past performance, a truer picture would be one of Lena carrying Heyst to safety. Although the irony is obvious, the question of why Conrad decides on these changes must be addressed.

Conrad makes these changes to Lena's characterization in order to comment on the propensity of men to perceive women as helpless in order to perpetuate the patriarchal belief that men are superior. This explanation, however, necessitates an exploration of the novel's narrative technique. Although the narration throughout most of the novel is omniscient, Conrad uses Captain Davidson to narrate the beginning and the end of *Victory* for the artistic purpose of establishing the sex of the narrator as male. Bonney compares the opening narrator to a kind of chorus, a speaker who does not exist as a person intimately involved with the people and events he describes and who gathers most of his information at second hand. He describes the omniscient narrator who takes over as distant and detached (133). However, there is little degree of detachment in Davidson's description of Lena after she has fended off the advances of Ricardo. Moreover, there is much in the narrative that suggests Davidson's "commitment to Heyst" (*V* 383), a male colleague who has been put into the shameful position of being upstaged by a young girl. Davidson arrives at the island just seconds before Lena's death. By explaining Lena's actions as rooted in love for Heyst,

Davidson relieves Heyst of the ignominy of unmanly behaviour and perpetuates the patriarchal belief that women are inferior and therefore need men to ensure their safety. Therefore, the narrator needs to reconstruct the situation and recast the female role to fit an image that will heroize the male protagonist. Conrad reveals men's need to perceive themselves as indispensable to women by allowing Davidson to transform Lena from a tough little fighter into a rather flamboyant martyr to love.

Conrad allows Davidson to paint Lena's action from the palette of sainthood to comment on the difficulties some men experience in accepting the reality that many women display an equal and often superior aptitude for survival in a world based on ruthless competition. Although critics such as Erdinast-Vulcan (182-83), Guerard (259), and Bradbrook (316) feel the inconsistency of narration is one of the novel's weaknesses, John Palmer views the same inconsistency as a strength. He feels that Conrad chose both the structure and point of view of *Victory* because they best suited the special artistic purposes for the novel (183). Schwarz feels one of the novel's themes is the strength of women: "the salvation of the race lies in women because contemporary life shows that men have forfeited the right to moral leadership and because it is women ... who have retained the necessary passion and energy" (72). Gillon describes Lena's death as "ironic triumph" and suggests that the end of *Victory* is a kind of parody of the "thunderous and melodramatic" finale to Shakespeare's major tragedies: the significant players are dead and strewn about the stage, while the thunder which has been rumbling over Samburan comes to an end (146). However, in *Victory*, Conrad chose to follow the conventions of Shakespeare's comedies, in

which the women are much like Lena, spirited and resourceful, and very proficient at turning the tables on the hero.

Conrad reveals that women in patriarchal societies must be spirited and resourceful in order to survive their treatment by the men in these societies. His criticism of paternalist attitudes and behaviour is revealed in the attitudes and actions of the male characters in the novel. Lena's father is a drunkard who leaves the rearing of his daughter to various landladies. The odious Schomberg constantly harasses Lena with his sexual advances: " he prowled around her, mute, hungry, portentous behind his great beard, or else assailed her in quiet corners and empty passages" (*V* 119). Like Heyst, Schomberg is self-deluded. He convinces himself that Lena is attracted to him and that possessing her will prove him heroic: "Ah, if only he had the girl with him he would have been masterful and resolute and fearless" (*V* 143). Ricardo tries to rape her. Heyst thinks he is intellectually superior to Lena and refuses to admit to his feelings of love for her. Jones is a misogynist and hates all women and is capable of doing them physical harm (*V* 295).

Conrad's portrayal of Mrs. Schomberg strengthens his commentary on men's treatment of women in patriarchal societies. Mrs. Schomberg exemplifies life in a patriarchy for women whose husbands abuse them. Schomberg blames his wife for his own shortcomings and constantly bullies and degrades her: "'Stupid female! ... Get out of my sight ...Go and dress yourself for the table d'hote'" (*V* 142). Mrs. Schomberg is so abused that she remains almost totally silent for fear of upsetting her husband. Many men, for example Davidson, mistake her silence for lack of intelligence. However, she proves their

assumption wrong when she, like Lena, reveals her talent for survival. By telling Davidson about Jones' presence on the island she outsmarts her husband and his plan to abandon her for a younger woman. Conrad's message that men underestimate women's intelligence – and may suffer for it – is revealed in Davidson's statement about Mrs. Schomberg: "'She's much cleverer than people have any conception of'" (*V* 382).

Chapter 4

THE LATER NOVELS

1919 – 1925

In his later novels Conrad is less consistent in the use of the strategies discussed above, but he continues to create complex female characters who are allowed a voice in the narratives. He also juxtaposes the behaviour of the women with that of the novels' men. In *The Arrow of Gold,* Conrad explores the ways in which some men exploit and objectify women. He subverts the conventions of the romance, but the novel focuses even more strongly than earlier ones on the tendency in men to perceive themselves as heroes and to see women as they wish women to be. Conrad also reveals how economic independence, usually the purview of men, allows women a means of self-actualization. *The Rescue*, a novel that Conrad began early in his career, is in an imperialist romance setting, but the focus of its criticism is not the oppression of women under imperialist rule, but the restrictions on women living in the privileged world of imperialist power; women who may enjoy wealth and status within marriage are often as repressed and restricted as their poorer sisters. *The Rover,* Conrad's last complete novel, revolves around the final days of Peyrol, an elderly sailor; however, it allows Arlette, a young woman traumatized by political violence, to arrive at self-awareness and use her new found assertiveness to stand up for herself and fight to have her needs fulfilled. Adèle de Montevesso of Conrad's unfinished novel, *Suspense*, provides a voice for women wed to jealous, possessive, psychologically

abusive men who marry to satify their need for power. Adèle's character is reminiscent of Emilia Gould, who exemplifies intelligence, loyalty, dignity, and courage. Had Conrad completed *Suspense,* Adèle might be listed among his strongest heroines.

***The Arrow of Gold* (1919)**

In *The Arrow of Gold,* Conrad again creates a novel about a female character whose story subverts many of the conventions of gendered behaviour inscribed in much literary fiction. Conrad subverts gendered thinking by portraying Rita as a woman who refuses to hide her sexual behaviour and bow to the hypocrisy and double standards of patriarchal societies. Rita de Lastaola is a woman of great beauty and wealth who not only refuses to follow patriarchal conventions, but also refuses to become the type of woman the men in her life wish her to be. Rita's story allows Conrad to comment on women's need for financial independence as a requisite for independence and self-actualization.

Conrad begins his subversion of gendered roles with the novel's title, *The Arrow of Gold.* The title refers to the pin, " a gold arrow with a jewelled shaft "(*AG* 70) that Rita uses to hold back her hair. The arrow of gold may be "symbolic of the anomaly with which Rita confronts George, the arrow being at once a decoration and a weapon, an object both precious and dangerous" (Land 248). Because long, unbound hair has traditionally signified a loose woman, the arrow, which keeps her hair in place, may represent Rita's morality. Or, it may allude to the arrows of Cupid and thereby signify the love for Rita that has pierced M. George's heart; in this case the arrow represents the power which female beauty has over

men. However, an arrow also acts as a phallic symbol, reflective of power and privilege reserved for men in patriarchal societies. The arrow's composition of gold and jewels also alludes to another kind of power, the power of wealth. By granting Rita the arrow of gold, Conrad creates a woman who has qualities consistent with his earlier female characters, but with the entitlement traditionally held only by men. Like Lena, Flora and Winnie Verloc, Rita comes from a background of impoverishment and abuse. However, Allegre's legacy provides her the empowerment that Conrad's earlier heroines do not enjoy. As Guerad points out, "The fortune she inherits from Allegre corresponds closely to other Conradian treasures: Kurtz's ivory, Nostromo's silver and Peyrol's gold. It gives her the means to exercise her choice, once she becomes her own mistress, and makes her, like Nostromo, an object of power and interest" (248).

Rita's story is Conrad's commentary on the way in which patriarchal societies perpetuate sexual abuse and a double standard for sexual behaviour. In many patriarchal societies men blame women for provoking sexual advances even when this attention is unwanted or unsolicited. Throughout her life men have preyed upon Rita because of her great physical beauty. As a child she suffers the sexual harassment of Ortega (*AG* 103), and while still an adolescent becomes the victim of Allegre, a man considerably older than she. Conrad establishes Rita's youthful innocence in the description of the first meeting between victim and victimiser:

> "'Henry Allegre caught her very early one morning in his own garden full of thrushes and other small birds. She was sitting on a stone ... and reading a tattered book of some kind. She had on a short, black, two-penny frock ... and there was a hole in one of her stockings. She raised her eyes and saw him looking

> down at her thoughtfully over that ambrosian beard of his, like Jove at a mortal.'" (*AG* 28)

Words such as "caught" and details such as "thrushes and other small birds" portray Allegre as a predator and Rita as his defenceless prey. The predatory nature of Allegre's intentions are reinforced by both the allusion to Jove, the deity whose many transformations culminated in the rape of mortal women, and by the details of Rita's appearance. Conrad does not present Rita as seductive or coquettish: "'[s]he had a hole in her stocking not because her aunt and uncle were poor ... but because she was then careless and untidy and totally unconscious of her personal appearance'"(AG 29). He makes it clear to the reader that Rita does not initiate the sexual advances of the men who desire her.

Allegre's relationship with Rita is Conrad's critique of the hypocrisy of social conventions that perpetuate a double standard of moral judgement based on sex. Allegre successfully negotiates the acquisition of his young mistress, and then shocks his Parisian colleagues by taking her out in public. Although his colleagues agree that Allegre's mistress is extremely young, their moral outrage is short-lived because Allegre is a man whose status and wealth prove a powerful salve: "'[T]heir hats had to come off all the same, especially the hats of fellows who were under some sort of obligation to Allegre. You would be astonished to hear the names of people who ... owed money to [him]'" (*AG 39)*. As Geddes describes her, Rita is too quickly matured as a result of the appropriation of her youth by Allegre and other men in her life (133). In many societies today Allegre would be seen as a sexual molester of children.

Ortega represents the misogyny (*AG* 303) that results in the verbal abuse and

physical violence against women: "'Women are the origin of all evil. One should never trust them. They have no honour. No honour!'" (*AG* 258). Ortega's ongoing sexual harassment of Rita underscores Allegre's abuse of her. Conrad again indicates the innocence of the young Rita. She is freckled and sunburned, and "slender as a match" as she tried "to hide [her] bare feet under [her] skirt" while sitting next to the young Ortega (*AG* 102). Ortega exhibits other forms of malign behaviour. He stones Rita, leaving her bruised and hurting, and assails her for hours with verbal insults. Later, he works to destroy her reputation with the members of her family (*AG* 103-08).

Allegre's actions reveal Conrad's criticism of men who view women as their property. Allegre bargains and arbitrates for possession of the teen-aged Rita in exactly the same way as a wealthy collector parleys for the purchase of a beautiful *objet d'art*: "The sly approaches, the astute negotiations, the lying and the circumventing ... for the love of beauty" (*AG* 31). Once Allegre has acquired his possession, he never lets her out of his sight or wishes anyone to approach her. Mills states:

> "'[A]ll she knew of the world of men and women ... was what she had seen of it from the saddle two hours every morning during four months of the year or so. Absolutely all, with Allegre self-denyingly on her right hand, with that impenetrable air of guardianship. Don't touch! He didn't like his treasures to be touched unless he actually put some unique object into your hand with a sort of triumphant murmur, 'Look close at that.'" (*AG* 40)

Allegre's objectification intensifies as he places Rita in a variety of roles, thereby negating her identification as a real woman. Allegre paints Rita not as herself, but in roles such as the "Byzantine Empress" and "The Girl in the Hat" (*AG* 20). These paintings reveal that

Allegre wishes to catch and keep his possession in state of eternal stasis, imprisoned within each picture's frame. He says that in Rita he sees "'something of the woman of all time'" thereby transforming Rita from a woman of distinct character and physiology into a generalization of femaleness, devoid of traits particular to an individual woman (*AG* 22). Allegre's description also mythologizes Rita, casting her as a sort of goddess and thereby perpetuating responses to her that are rooted in stereotypical thinking and not based on knowledge of the woman herself.

A statement by Mills suggests that many men share Allegre's attitude and behaviour toward women. Mills considers Rita "'the most admirable find ... amongst all the priceless items [Allegre] had accumulated in that house'" (*AG* 17). Conrad uses the story of the sculptor, Doyen, to reinforce his commentary about the objectification of women. Like Allegre, Doyen sees in Rita a beautiful muse; however, Doyen's statements indicate that he reduces her to a variety of body parts:

> "'I shall finish my artist's life with your face; but I shall want a bit of those shoulders too ... You hear, Allegre, I must have a bit of her shoulders too. I can see through the cloth that they are divine. If they aren't divine I will eat my hat. Yes, I will do your head and then – *nunc dimittis.*" (*AG* 37)

Geddes points out that painting and sculpture are working metaphors that give shape to all aspects of *The Arrow of Gold,* and suggests that Conrad uses these metaphors as references to the Pygmalion myth and to Midas, who inadvertently transformed his daughter into an object of gold (121-22).

Conrad also turns to allusion and symbolism to underscore his critique of the

objectification of women. Although Blunt states that he does not perceive Rita as a Danae (*AG* 31), the allusion to Zeus's visit to the beautiful mortal parallels the relationship between the wealthy, mature Allegre and the young, innocent Rita. Moreover, the picture of the Assyrian bull that adorns Allegre's stationary alludes to myths such as the "Rape of Europa", another story of a divine visitation culminating in an act of sexual aggression (*AG* 40). The most obvious symbol of female objectification is the dummy that Allegre uses as a substitute for Rita and which now stays in Blunt's room. The dummy is described as having "no head or hands but with beautifully shaped limbs composed in a shrinking attitude "(*AG* 15). Roberts argues that after Allegre's death the dummy becomes a substitute for Rita in the minds of George, Mills and Blunt:

> This dummy functions as a symbolic projection of a male sadistic fantasy. Although it does retain its limbs, which like Rita's are "beautifully shaped", it otherwise resembles William Faulkner's formulation of such a fantasy in *Mosquitoes:* 'a virgin, with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me'. (539)

The dummy, however, represents more. Its lack of a face symbolizes women diminished to a state of total anonymity and analogous to mass-produced goods. Rita is lowered in value from prized possession to commodity. But the reduction of women does not stop at the level of commodity. That the headless dummy has no brain suggests that women are devoid of even the most primitive intelligence. Lacking that which gives her identity, a woman is reduced to an object, the purpose of which is to provide men a means for sexual gratification of the most detached and insensitive kind. Thus, the lack of

cognitive ability in women justifies, for men, the perpetuation of relationships based on nothing more than male desire. Kate Millet argues that Henry Miller presents in his novels no interest in the emotional surrender of women. In their sexual encounters with women his protagonists exhibit a "self-conscious detachment before the manifestations of a lower order of life" (297). However, Rita's lively intelligence, and her refusal to surrender her emotions, indicates Conrad's respect for women as autonomous beings. Conrad employs the dummy to reinforce his critique of men who, like Allegre, view women as objects and, therefore, are capable of forming relationships with women based solely on ownership and power.

Rita's portrayal resists traditionally inscribed gendered codes for female behaviour. Rita is interested and actively involved in politics, a domain traditionally reserved for men. She supports the cause of Don Carlos, the Pretender to the throne, by providing financial assistance for procuring arms. Land argues that Rita's involvement in politics is a reaction against her uncles and the established beliefs and codes of behaviour into which she, as a Spanish Catholic, is born, and against the scepticism of Allegre, whose influence distances her from the values and beliefs inculcated during her childhood:

> Rita, in her involvement in the Carlist cause, is herself attempting a compromise between the conflicting principles of her upbringing. The rigidity of Carlism, its adherence to the principles of legitimacy and Catholicism reflect the attitude of her uncle, the priest: but the freedom of her own activity, culminating in her reputed affair with the pretender and the scandal associated with her name, derives from the influence of her free-thinking, aristocratic patron, Henry Allegre. (247)

However, Land's view reduces Rita's involvement to the level of an adolescent rebellion, the kind in which a young woman flaunts her boyfriend's anti-establishment views in order to irritate her parents. It also assumes that Rita is incapable of comprehending political ideology and taking a stand based on her judgement of the ideology. According to Land, her relationship with men constitutes the core of Rita's interest in politics. She has a passion for politics because she is either reacting against men, or being influenced by men. However, Rita loves politics because she is captivated by power and delighted at having the means to play with the big boys in the political arena: "'Of course the rooms in the hotel at Tolosa were retained for her by an order from Royal Headquarters ... General Mongroviejo called on her officially from the King ... Then Baron H ... They say he was very much frightened by her arrival ... Who else? Yes, the Archbishop came'" (*AG* 44). Throughout the novel, references are made to Rita's close association with those enjoying political influence and authority (*AG* 241, 329).

Rita is not the first female character in Conrad's novels to be interested in politics. Emily Gould, Antonia Avellanos, and the women of *Under Western Eyes* exhibit both a comprehension of political manoeuvring and the qualities necessary for responsible political leadership. However, what constitutes their interest is a desire to make a better world for the poor and oppressed. Despite a poor background, Rita exhibits much less philanthropy or public-spiritedness than Conrad's other heroines. Rita's interest is the manoeuvres and stratagems of politics. When George shows surprise at Rita's actions in procuring arms for the Pretender, Blunt explains that, for Rita, such a dangerous job is a trifle (*AG* 11). Blunt

tells George that Rita's involvement also allows her freedom of movement that few citizens enjoy: "' I have no doubt she had a pass from the French Government giving her the completest freedom of action'" (*AG* 47). She exhibits intelligence, intuitive perception, a combination of common sense and imagination. Rita is not a woman influenced by any mere doctrine. It is more likely that Rita represents the political philosophy of Conrad himself, for the author, sceptical of most forms of socialism, was firm in his support of constitutional monarchies which, he felt, afforded its citizens the best opportunity for political stability. Conrad states his views in the "Author's Notes": "Don Carlos de Bourbon, encouraged by the general reaction of all Europe against the excesses of communistic Republicanism, made his attempt for the throne of Spain" (*AG* viii). The fact that Conrad allows Rita to represent his political beliefs attests to his respect for women's political acumen and their involvement in political policy and implementation. His portrayal of Rita is evidence that Conrad does not share the misogyny of Blunt, Allegre and other of his male characters.

Conrad reveals his understanding of the important qualities that women bring to each other and to society by allowing Rita to express how empty her life has been without the presence of women. Rita realizes that she has been deprived of the experience of sharing female sensibilities and attitudes (*AG* 107). Nadelhaf suggests that *The Arrow of Gold* is the last of the novels -- the first two being *Victory* and *Chance* -- that explore the consequences for women who grow up not only motherless but deprived of the opportunity to develop as women securely connected to other women: "The overt consequences of solitary coming of

age for woman are implicit in both *Victory* and *Chance*, but not until the character of Rita in *The Arrow of Gold* does a woman speak openly and pointedly of the need for women in a young woman's life" (119).

Rita repeatedly expresses her understanding of this need. Motherless from the age of seven (*AG* 104), she has had no women to whom she can turn for advice or support during times of emotional vulnerability. In explaining her relationship with the Prince she states,

> "'Listen, I don't need to justify myself, but if I had known a single woman in the world, if I had only had the opportunity to observe a single one of them, I would have been perhaps on my guard. But you know I hadn't ... It never entered my head to be on my guard against his warmth and his terrible obviousness.'" (*AG* 75)

When Madame Leonore expresses her interest in Rita to George and Dominic, she explains the necessity for women to have other women in their lives: "'You see, we women are not like you men, indifferent to one other unless by some exception. Men say we are always against once another but that is only men's conceit'" (*AG* 123).

Conrad uses Rita's story to comment on the tendency of men to harbour the illusion that most women seek and solicit romantic relationships with them. The effect Rita has on the men around her results from their own illusions. As Wiley suggests, "Rita is a teasing filmy embodiment of the Divine at least partly because Blunt, Mills and George all wish to see her that way. (And it is clearly George's impression that Conrad wishes to convey.)"(149). The men imagine signs of Rita's love and misinterpret her actions as

signals of her ardour for them. Erdinast-Vulcan argues that in *The Arrow of Gold,* Conrad also sends out signals. These falsely establish the novel with the reader as a love story when in reality it is not typical of that form:

> The generic conventions to which [the novel] appears to adhere, which would induce a normally competent reader to relate to the sphere of romance, are constantly undermined and violated by a process of 'defamiliarization', a series of striking and blatant transgression of the generic code. (188)

Conrad lets his reader know that George is a not a trustworthy narrator and that he may be guilty of fabricating Rita's attraction for him as part of the heroic narrative into which he has written himself. One of the first "transgressions" is George's pretence to be a seaman and chivalrous knight when the reader knows that Blunt and Mills have manipulated him into these roles. Conrad's uses an allusion to Ulysses ironically in order to undermine the credibility of George's narration. Whereas Homer's Ulysses fought at Troy and spent years trying to return to Ithaca and Penelope, "Ulysses" in *The Arrow of Gold* spends most of his time sitting in the sumptuous surroundings of a drawing room waiting for Penelope/Rita and attending to her needs. George and Blunt cannot accept that Rita's resistance to their advances indicates that she is not in love with them. Because they cannot understand that she prefers her freedom and independence to a relationship with a man, George and Blunt interpret Rita's resistance as a sign of her sexual maladjustment. Wiley agrees with the men when he writes that

> Her frigidity is a product of the terror inspired in her as a child by Ortega's sexual wrath and later by the view of mankind stripped of its clothes opened to her by Allegre ... Against this dread ... her hysterical gesture of transfixing

> her hair with the golden arrow – an attempt to take cover
> behind the aesthetic mask – provides a simulated defense. (166)

However, Wiley's view is only partly right. Rita is certainly influenced by Allegre's cynicism. She reveals his influence when she tells Blunt and Mills that Allegre forced her at an early age to see mankind "stripped of its clothes" (*AG*). However, Wiley's bases his assumption of Rita's sexual frigidity on the misconception that a woman who avoids sexual relationships with men does so out of some form of deep-seated psychic affliction. This reasoning frees men from cause or blame by faulting the female for being psychologically weak or maladjusted.

Conrad reveals that what men interpret as signs of a sexual frigidity are strategies women have developed to protect themselves from unwanted sexual advances. Rita distances herself from any man who tries to foster a relationship that she does not does want. At one point, George mistakes Rita's behaviour for signs of her interest in him and, trying to embrace her, takes hold of her arm. Rita's arm suddenly becomes "insensible, passive, like a stuffed limb" and Rita herself becomes inanimate all over. Rita resorts to this same behaviour before the early stages of her relationship with George. Rita's explanation of her conduct does not reveal any psychological wound; her action is both deliberate and practical: "'It's only a habit ... I have to practise that in self-defence lest I should be tempted sometimes to cut the arm off'"(*AG* 85). What Wiley interprets as Rita's frigidity is a clever tactic, practised from the early encounters with Ortega: "'Then he [kissed me] again, and by that time I was gone dead all over ...[like a] corpse'"(*AG* 103). Rita's

distancing is a strategy she learns from her relationships with men who use her to meet their own needs and satisfy their yearnings (*AG* 141). Rita's life has been full of men who have used her. Allegre and Ortega are only two of the men who desire Rita for selfish reasons. Versoy uses her to create interest in his writing (*AG* 50); an elderly journalist feigns paternal interest in her well-being while secretly coveting the art treasures that are part of her inheritance (*AG* 67); Blunt is attracted by her beauty but his primary interest is her fortune (*AG* 172); George tries to make Rita experience the same desire for him as he experiences for her. He is besotted with Rita's beauty, and much of what he perceives as Rita's initial growing familiarity with him is self-delusion (*AG* 84-85).

Conrad undermines literary convention and challenges patriarchal views of women's dependence on men. Rita is a woman who does not need or seek self-validation or identification through her relationship with a male. She will not compromise her desires in her dealings with men and therefore, always remains in control of her relationships with them. Because Rita deals with both Blunt and George, Land writes that the story illustrates a pattern that develops in much of Conrad's later work, the woman torn between two men; for example, Edith Travers is torn between Lingard and her husband (242). Land's interpretation is wrong for both women. As pointed out below, Edith never loses sight of returning to England. Blunt and George may yearn for Rita, but she is not torn between the two men because she never loses sight of her own determined desire to remain independent. She is astute enough to grasp the true nature of Blunt's interest in her and reveals her insight into his character when she expresses her reasons for refusing his advances:

> "'[Blunt] is jealous. He is not jealous of my past or of the future; but he is jealously mistrustful of me, of what I am, of my very soul ... He is a most noble and loyal gentleman, but I own my Basque peasant soul and don't want to think that every time he goes away ... he feels tempted to brush the dust off his moral sleeve. That! Never! ... And then, I don't love him ... I never did. At first he fascinated me with his fatal aspect and his cold society smiles. But I have looked into those eyes too often. There are too many disdains in this aristocratic Republican without a home. His fate may be cruel, but it will always be commonplace.'" (*AG* 197–98)

It is Rita who decides to establish a romantic relationship with George (*AG* 321) and it is she who decides to end it (*AG* 333). Madame Leonore points out that Rita "'is for no man! She would be vanishing out of their hands like water that cannot be held'" (*AG* 125). Rita's own words reinforce Madame Leonore's opinion: "'Men are rather conceited about their powers. They think they dominate us. ... Yet for the most part they can do it because women choose more or less consciously to let them do so'" (*AG* 204). Rita's ultimate refusal of George is an instance of what Erdinast-Vulcan calls the second generic transgression. Conrad could have followed the conventions and ended the story after the kiss that George mistakenly thinks eternalises their love. Instead of allowing the lovers to live happily ever after, Conrad affords Rita the power to abandon the relationship, and the result illustrates disillusionment "with the supreme value and power of love" (189–90).

By granting Rita independence of means as well as mind, Conrad resists literary conventions and also comments on how money empowers women and allows them to resist domination and arrive at self-actualization. Conrad inverts the archetype of the poor girl

who finds and marries a rich man; Rita is a rich woman pursued by poor men. Moreover, Rita is not the archetypal genteel, ladylike heroine. She may be described as an archetypal fairy-tale beauty with thick, luxurious hair, alabaster skin, and ruby red lips (*AG* 58); however, much of Rita's behaviour is not typical of many of literature's ladylike protagonists. Conrad does not create Rita as demure or concerned with decorum. No Conrad novel before *The Arrow of Gold* has a female protagonist that is so unrestrained in her behaviour. Rita entertains male visitors in a low-cut, form-fitting dressing-grown (*AG* 58), has temper tantrums and throws objects such as brass bowls (*AG* 98). Rita smokes openly and often hurls the cigarette box when vexed (*AG* 198). She involves herself in activities that may be judged outside the law (*AG* 169). Rita initiates sexual liaisons and when a relationship with a man is sexual she makes no attempt to conceal or shroud its nature (*AG* 320).

Nadelhaft feels that it is his female characters, and especially Rita, that Conrad turned to as an expression of self:

> It seems that over the years women characters came to represent aspects of Conrad's own experiences ... the desire to be understood for oneself, the attempt to achieve autonomy in a way that allowed for both intimacy and self-knowledge ... With age, the author came to the creation of women characters who argue in their lives and in their words against that generalising tendency. (124)

Rita is determined to resist any attempt to cast her as the feminine ideal. When George asserts that she is "all the women in the world", she refuses to be labelled: "` I am not One.

No, I am not One'" (*AG* 286). She is fully aware of her strengths and does not subscribe to conventions of behaviour that demand women be self-effacing:

> "'Listen amigo', she said, "I have suffered domination and it didn't crush me because I have been strong enough to live with it; I have known caprice, you may call it folly if you like, and it left me unharmed because I was great enough not to be captured by anything that wasn't really worthy of me ... There is something in me that will not be dazzled by any sort of prestige in this world, worthy or unworthy'". (*AG* 195)

In *The Arrow of Gold,* Conrad highlight's Rita's character by juxtaposing her behaviour with that of the men in the novel. Erdinast-Vulcan argues that the novel is narrated in such a way that Rita and George have about them a quality of the unreal: "both ... seem to suspect that their own existence is predicated upon a fictional – and fictitious – model" (191). However, Rita's honesty and lack of pretension undermine Erdinast-Vulcan's theory. Throughout the novel Rita is candid about her peasant background and her somewhat wicked past: "'I am ashamed of nothing, of nothing. Don't be stupid enough to think that I have the slightest regret. There is no regret. First of all because I am I'"(*AG* 204). On the other hand, Captain Blunt enjoys little of Rita's honesty. Mills describes him as "[t]horoughly false" and replete with "illusions [and] pretensions" (*AG* 56). He proves his mendacity by slandering Rita with a lie that ultimately results in his duel with George (*AG* 329).

Although George is not false in his dealings with Rita, his proclivity for harbouring delusions places him solidly in the company of the male *poseurs* who fill the pages of

Conrad's novels. Early in the novel, Conrad reveals George's romanticizing tendencies when he informs the reader that the young "Ulysses" has had little experience on the sea. Geddes argues that the George who narrates the novel is reliable, self-deprecating, and -- as the reader is told -- blessed with a good memory. However, the evolution of another of Conrad's narrators, Marlow, has taught the reader that the passage of years may not always bring wisdom to the narrative point of view (138). Although the older George tells the story from the distance of several years, his use of art and theatre metaphors emphasizes the illusory nature of his recollections. Not only does George wrongly interpret Rita's feelings for him (*AG* 213), he perceives and expresses his attraction for her in the overblown rhetoric of purple prose in poorly written love stories. A conversation that takes place as George is about to set sail on another of Rita's missions reveals the contrast between the two characters:

> "'But I will go as if you didn't exist – yet only because you do exist. You exist in me. I don't know where I end and you begin. You have got into my veins and into my brain'.
> 'Take this fancy out and trample it down in the dust,' she said in a tone of timid entreaty.
> 'Heroically,' I suggested with the sarcasm of despair."
> (*AG* 212-13)

Like Blunt, George is self-deluded, but he affords Rita no physical danger, however, Ortega's delusions are both obsessive and aberrant, as evidenced by the depraved behaviour that culminates in the scene of horror in the fencing room (*AG* 294 –305). Once again Conrad emphasizes women's honesty by placing it in opposition to the delusions of his male

characters.

In *The Arrow of Gold,* Conrad continues to maintain his honesty in dealing with female characters by refusing to create them all as gentle, genial or pleasing. Rita's sister, Therese, is self-righteous, greedy, and disloyal (*AG* 236). She judges Rita a sort of whore of Babylon and constantly alludes to what she believes are Rita's impure and dissolute relationships with a wide variety of men (*AG* 148). However, she suffers no sense of moral compromise when she constantly exhorts Rita to give her ownership of the residence for which she is housekeeper (*AG* 108). She exhibits no remorse for betraying her sister by informing Ortega of Rita's presence in the house, thereby putting her sister in physical and sexual danger by a depraved stalker (*AG* 294). Therese is not afforded any sympathy from the narrator but the author provides her with reasons for her attitudes and actions.

Therese has been raised in a patriarchal Christian society still under the influence of the male-dominated Catholic church and, therefore, has been indoctrinated with the theory that women are the cause of evil, especially those whose demeanour or appearance attract men. Despite Rita's youth and innocence, Therese considers Rita and not Allegre the seducer. Therese feels that Rita is Eve incarnate. A church, run by men, that sets women against each other has moulded Therese's feelings about her sister. Conrad underscores the hypocrisy of the church's condemnation of the female by portraying Therese as nun-like in her appearance and devotion to the church (*AG* 33). Conrad's criticism of patriarchal religious institutions extends to other forms of abuse. Although the church condemns women, it welcomes their skills and labour. Therese worked for her uncle and other priests

as housekeeper, and would have earned very little, if any, money for her efforts (*AG* 148); she represents women whose faith has left them open to exploitation by the very religious leaders whom they are taught to respect and obey. Rita astutely, and ironically, observes that her sister has been instructed to perceive men as the important gender (*AG* 109). Therese's penury explains her insistent demands for ownership of Rita's home. She has been afforded no education and, without some form of economic security, her future is open to destitution and further exploitation.

Like Therese, Mrs. Blunt is a woman whose poverty forces her into behaviour many may consider cunning and self-serving. Therese represents the woman born into poverty. Mrs. Blunt exemplifies the woman who has enjoyed considerable wealth and privilege but now finds herself in a state of near penury: Beautiful and charming, but no longer youthful or considered desirable by men, Mrs. Blunt's financial circumstances occasion ongoing vigilance in the search for a wealthy wife for her son (*AG* 24). Geddes argues that Mrs. Blunt is a sham who "hides her greed and hypocrisy behind the robes of art ... [and] spouts clichés about aesthetic truth" (124). Blunt often appears embarrassed by the energy and insistence of her measures to secure their financial security (*AG* 20). However Conrad is sympathetic to Mrs. Blunt, a woman who, unable to depend on a feckless, pretentious son, must turn to living "by her wits in order to survive (*AG* 161). Blunt humiliates his mother by inviting Monsieur George to form a trio at breakfast, and then abandons her to Monsieur George in order to visit Rita. George, cognisant of their scheme to bring about a marriage between Blunt and Rita, is hardly solicitous in his feelings towards Mrs. Blunt, yet even he

exhibits a degree of commiseration for her plight: "'Oh, yes, she was growing old, and secretly weary, and perhaps desperate'" (*AG* 165).

In *The Arrow of Gold*, Conrad reveals how patriarchal societies use money to impose restrictions on women. Beautiful women may gain access to the world of wealthy men, but they are treated like objects and remain in that world only as long as they remain beautiful. However, having money empowers women to escape abusive situations and to refuse the roles that men wish them to play. Rita's wealth allows her to ignore traditional ideas of female decorum and live her life as she chooses. In his next novel, Conrad explores the ways in which women of privilege must also fight to maintain their independence and self-actualization.

***The Rescue* (1920)**

The Rescue tells the story of a relationship that develops between Edith Travers, a beautiful and wealthy Englishwoman and Tom Lingard, a romance-obsessed adventurer born into the lower classes. In this novel Conrad criticizes the conventions of English society that prevent women such as Edith from developing their fullest potential for self-actualization. In earlier novels Conrad censures western society for its treatment of poor women such as Winnie Verloc, Flora de Baral, and Lena. In *The Rescue* Conrad demonstrates that women privileged with affluence and rank fare no better in systems rooted in patriarchy than their poorer sisters. Edith and her husband own a yacht and keep company with the attachés of various embassies (*TR* 114), but wealth has not prevented Edith from

being restricted by the expectations of the upper class to which she belongs. Conrad continues to resist literary conventions that inscribe women's behaviour in patriarchal societies.

In *The Rescue,* Conrad undermines conventions of traditional love stories that present the heroine pining for a handsome swashbuckler to rescue her from a life of distress and carry her off to a lifetime of worshipful adoration. Edith Travers is a resourceful woman who, unlike many of Conrad's male characters, has feet too firmly planted in the realities of life to be deluded by the fantasies of romantic fiction. Edith's relationship with Lingard is not based on romantic love, but on what he represents and what he can offer her in terms of adventure and experience beyond the restrictive conventions of her society. For Edith, Tom Lingard is an avenue of escape from a society that defines people by gender and class and which regiments and represses their natural inclinations by means of a strict and confining code of behaviour

Early in the novel, Lingard is immediately attracted to Edith. Her light complexion, pale fair hair and the suppleness of her movements captivate him (*TR* 128). In a portion of the novel that Conrad eventually deleted, and which describes Lingard's strong sexual attraction, Conrad's choice of symbols is rather obvious: "He muttered flinging the ramrod down the barrel violently ... The intimacy of his thought with that woman seemed to affect his body like strong drink, so that while cocking a musket he swayed a little" (Moser 65). Edith has plenty of time to inspect Lingard once he boards the yacht and begins his discourse with her husband. However, despite Lingard's manly good looks (*TR* 364), her

reaction is hardly one of immediate attraction. She expresses surprise at d'Alcacer's "liking [Lingard] at first sight" (*TR* 120) and does nothing to come to Lingard's assistance during the escalating altercation between Lingard and her husband. Edith is not fascinated by Lingard but by the unrestrained articulation of raw feelings that results from the quarrel. When d'Alcacer suggests intervening in the quarrel, she implores,

> "Don't go, pray; don't stop them. Oh! This is truth – this is anger –something real at last. ... No, but this is – such a fresh experience for me to hear – to see something genuine and human. Ah! Ah! One would think they had waited all their lives for this opportunity – ah! ah! ah! All their lives – for this – ah! ah! ah!" (*TR* 123)

Edith is enchanted by Lingard's direct, unpolished expression. She reveals her fascination with Lingard's lack of subtley later that night, when he explains to her his role in securing the safety of those on the yacht:

> "Do you think [Jorgenson] would have kept them back if they hadn't expected me every day? His words would have been nothing without my fist."
> She heard a dull blow struck on the side of the yacht ... she smiled above his head, fascinated by the simplicity of images and expressions. (*TR* 143)

Wiley argues that Edith represents supreme subjectivism, a woman unable to respond to life and passion, "the feminine type of civilized decadence that can be traced back through Felicia Moorsom," the main female character in "The Planter of Malata"(182). Edith's reaction to Lingard's story disproves Wiley's argument. While her husband and those in her social circle would have judged Lingard's word as proof of disdainful boasting, Edith finds

Tom's lack of affectation refreshing. After a life of discourse tainted by abstruse niceties, Edith enjoys the transparency of Tom's statements. In the circles in which she moves, people do not engage in conversation that is so forceful and honest.

Edith clearly distinguishes the difference between Lingard and her husband. Tom is a forthright plain-speaker, and Travers is a phoney whose bluffing masks his cowardice. Geddes suggests this when he notes the importance in *The Rescue*, of the language of diplomacy, and describes the novel as a tragedy of manners in which Conrad explores the relationship between the exterior indicators of human behaviour, such as etiquette and speech, and the "psychology which underlies human action" (147-48). Edith astutely recognizes this relationship when Travers informs her that it is of no consequence if she pays Tom the debt owed to him, no matter what the terms. In other words, Travers will not mind if his wife has a sexual encounter with Lingard. Realizing that Travers has been shamming illness to justify his inaction and indifference, she tells herself, "He's making the most of it.... It's a matter of diplomacy" (*TR* 405).

Conrad reveals the constraints patriarchal societies place on women for whom upper class salon conventions of artificial and affected discourse are abhorrent and tiresome. D'Alcacer sees in Edith "various shades of scorn which he suspected to be the secret of her acquiescence in the shallowness of events and the monotony of a worldly existence" (*TR* 114). Even Edith's husband, although much less insightful than D'Alcacer, is aware of his wife's lack of enthusiasm for the practices of their social circles:

> "[Y]ou made for yourself a detestable reputation of mental superiority, expressed ironically. You inspired mistrust in the best people. You were never popular."

> "I was bored", murmured Mrs. Travers. (*TR* 243)

Moser feels that Conrad wishes Edith to be a "brilliant and sensitive" salon leader, approaching the complex humanity of a Henry James heroine, but achieves instead a society woman much like those who inhabit the works of Bulwer-Lytton, an author whom Conrad criticised for the elegant insincerity of his dialogue (169). However, Moser misses Conrad's commentary revealed in Edith's awareness of her entrapment in and the emptiness of her upper-class life. It is that awareness that explains her eventual interest in Tom Lingard.

By bringing Lingard and Edith together Conrad is able to utilise the incongruities of their lives to underscore the ways in which Western society restricts women's opportunities for choice and development. Just as Edith is locked into a role by the customs and practices of her class, so is Tom shackled by his lower-class birth. Initially, Edith is unable to relate to Lingard or his life (*TR* 137), but she soon sees that their lives are similar. Conrad's use of symbolism clearly reinforces her awareness of the death-like stasis of her own:

> She saw herself standing alone, at the end of time ... All was unmoving as if the dawn would never come ... the sun would never rise any more; all was mute, still, dead – as if the shadow of the outer darkness, the shadow of the uninterrupted, of the everlasting night ... the shadow of the night so profound and so vast ... the restless shadow that is like a suspicion of an evil truth ... stood arrested as if to remain with her forever. (*TR* 138)

Lingard recounts to Edith his history as a trawler boy and the memories of a land that allowed him only "'poverty, hard work -- and death'" (*TR* 197). Only by escaping England was he able to free himself of England's restrictive class system. Leaving home at sixteen,

sixteen, he struggled as he travelled round the world and had "'the time to forget where [he] began'" (*TR* 144). As Lingard reveals the story of the rescue and his subsequent plan to restore Hassim and Immada to power, Edith is fully aware of the "disproportionate and absurd ... devotion" to the brother and sister that motivates Lingard's rather vainglorious efforts; nevertheless, she finds herself admiring the man for authoring his own life, a life structured around and driven by "the greatness of an idea" (*TR* 148). From the effete upper class Lingard's efforts and character would elicit cynicism and ridicule; for Edith, they count as manifestations of the courage to create one's own fate:

> He had a large simplicity that filled one's vision. She felt herself slowly invaded by this masterful figure. ... The glamour of a lawless life stretched over him like the sky over the sea ... There was in him crime, sacrifice, tenderness, devotion, and the madness of a fixed idea. (*TR* 194)

Conrad underscores the sense of imprisonment Edith feels in conforming to her society's rules of propriety by describing how much she is enthralled by the exotic and sensational nature of a real life adventure unfolding before her like those found in a boys' book of thrills and excitement on the high seas. As she prepares to accompany Lingard to Belarab's compound she finds herself looking at Tom "as at a great actor on a darkened stage in some simple and tremendous drama" (*TR* 254). Inside the compound Edith delights in the intensity of the sensations offered. She is made giddy by sights such as "two Illanum chiefs, half naked and bedecked with charms and ornaments, of bright feathers ... and shining beads." Soon Edith feels that she too is a performer inside a wondrous work of theatre: "[she] had the sensation of acting in a gorgeously got up play on the brilliant lighted

stage of an exotic opera" (*TR* 262-67). As Krenn points out, light is a significant symbol in the novel in connection with Edith. (125). The more Edith sees in the light of the operatic setting of her new experiences, the more illumination she gains into the sterility of life under Western social conventions.

Edith's acquaintanceship with Lingard makes her increasingly aware that her class and its conventions prevent friendships and relationships based on truth and sincerity. Like Mrs. Hervey in "The Return", Edith longs for meaningful communication in her relationships. In the social circles of her life in England, the exchange of direct and honest discourse is hindered by rules of restraint and decorum. Although she has known him a very short time, Lingard's frank and open revelations have forged a relationship that she has never before experienced: "She thought with wonder that of all the men in the world he was indeed the one she knew the best" (*TR* 194). Edith is surprised to discover that in spite of her affection and respect for d'Alcacer, she is more knowledgeable about Tom than about her old friend (*TR* 231). As Nadelhaft argues, the strong appeal of Lingard and Edith Travers for one another clearly depends upon the freedom from the conventional standards applied to women within affluent Western cultures (129).

Edith provides Conrad with a vehicle to comment on patriarchal societies that view marriage as the only avenue of development for women. When Lingard, ignorant of Travers' importance in English politics, asks Edith who he is, Edith begins to understand how much her life is mandated by the conventions of a society that expects women to identify themselves in terms of their relationship to men *(TR* 141). Realizing that Lingard

has confided in her as an equal, Edith perceives how her sense of individuality has been formed and influenced by her class: "Then it occurred to her that this man by his action stripped her at once of her position, of her wealth, of her rank, of her past. 'I am helpless. What remains?'" (*TR* 152). The equality Tom affords Edith is a result of his distance from behaviour that western societies impose upon their women (Nadelhaft 129). Conrad's strategic placement of these two characters' dissimilar lives very effectively illustrates the way in which class and societal convention stifle the individual potential of not only the poor, but also of women typically viewed as advantaged.

Like so many of Conrad's women, Edith is intelligent and soon understands that in order to achieve self-actualization she must turn away from the stasis and vacuity of her life and experience intense sensations and emotions. Therefore, despite her bemusement at the naïve romanticism of Lingard's self-appointed role as saviour to the Wajo siblings, Edith envies Tom the excitement and danger of his life. She also understands that his entry into her life has provided an opportunity to experience what her static, empty existence has never allowed: curiosity and adventure (*TR* 139). She, therefore, insists on accompanying Lingard to both the *Emma* and to Belarab's compound. Edith needs to discard the "manacles of her education, sophistication, and indifference in order to embrace her naked feelings, her primitive impulses and instincts. Only then will she be able to *feel* her way back into life" (Geddes 152–53). Conrad turns to symbolism to highlight the development of Edith's self-actualization. As she accompanies Lingard in the rowboat moving out to meet the *Emma*, Edith reflects on her surroundings:

> And all this -- the wan burst of light, the faint shock as if

> something remote and immense falling into ruins, was taking place outside the limits of her life which remained encircled by an impenetrable darkness and by an impenetrable silence. Puffs of wind blew about her head and expired; the sail collapsed, shivered audibly, stood full and still in turn; and again the sensation of vertiginous speed and of absolute immobility -- succeeding each other with increasing swiftness merged at last into a bizarre state of headlong motion and profound peace .(*TR* 219)

Conrad comments on the way patriarchal societies prevent women from developing their fullest potential. He reveals the roles that women in other societies fulfill. Edith experiences the types of situations and circumstances with which Tom deals, but also sees what life is like for a woman like Immada, who experiences adventure, but also respect and dignity. Indeed, it is Immada, not Lingard, who draws Edith into the conflict between Tom and Travers. Edith exhibits no interest in putting an end to her husband's insulting behaviour towards Lingard. Except for her pleasure in the dialogue between the two, she remains unconcerned and passive throughout the argument. It is the discovery that one of the visitors on board is female that provokes Edith's intense curiosity: "She said with animation: `Why, it's a girl'" (*TR* 128)! Although enchanted by Immada's beauty, Edith's interest is drawn by Immada's way of life.

> "I had no idea of anything so charmingly gentle," she went on in a voice that without effort glowed, caressed, and had a magic power of delight to the soul. "So young! And she lives here – does she? On the sea – or where? Lives ..." Then faintly, as if she had been in the act of speaking, removed instantly to a great distance, she was heard again: "How does she live ?" (*TR* 130)

Lingard's description of Immada's life as one of "`war ... hunger .. thirst, and

unhappiness'", fuels Edith's fascination: "'That child!' she said in slow wonder'" (*TR* 130). Later, as she reflects on the day's events, it is clearly the experiences that Immada has undergone that entrance Edith:

> Nothing stood between that girl and the truth of her sensations. She could be sincerely courageous and tender – and passionate and – well, ferocious. Why not ferocious? She could know the truth of terror – and of affection, absolutely, without artificial trammels, without the pain of restraint. (*TR* 140)

Edith follows Lingard to both the *Emma* and the compound and, having experienced a sense of freedom and adventure, continues her journey to self-actualization by dressing in Immada's clothing. She describes her yachting costume, the fashion of her upper-class life, as "too heavy ... intolerable" (*TR* 239), and wears instead a thin cotton jacket and embroidered sarong. The jacket, loose-sleeved, low cut and collarless, represents the lack of restrictions enjoyed by Immada in her society. The combination of the jacket's silver clasps and the sarong's golden threads symbolize Edith's resistance to upper-class ideas of tasteful restraint and rules of decorum. By casting off her yachting outfit and putting on the clothing of a native woman, Edith "provides a clear image of her desire for authenticity in the form of naturalness" (Nadelhaft 129). Her rejection of Western clothing also signifies her rejection of colonial attitudes of cultural and racial superiority. Edith's hair, previously described as coiled, is now "all loose"(*TR* 237), and follows the relaxed style of Immada and other native women. In Western literary tradition, long hair, worn loose and unbound, often carries the connotation of female sexuality. Travers chooses this interpretation when he suggests that Edith is "indulging [her] taste for fancy dress" (*TR* 238), thereby intimating

that by wearing native costume she is taking on the attributes of a"fancy" or fallen woman. However, Edith's hair hints at nothing prurient; it merely signifies the liberation of a woman who speaks of herself as "`the most severely disciplined person in the world'" (*TR* 243).

Edith wears light leather sandals (*TR* 238) which reveal her bare skin and alter her usual gait so that she walks, like Immada, with quick short steps (*TR* 256). This new mode of walking connotes the energy and assertiveness of native women, and is very different from the slow, languid movements that signify the ease and privilege of Edith's upper-class status. The sandals are what make Edith feel most exotic, perhaps because wearing them simulates so closely walking in the shoes of a Malay woman of distinction and dignity. Immada's shoes and clothing are made for a woman ruler and therefore signify Edith's growing awareness of her own potential power:

> "And let me tell you that those clothes are fit for a princess – I mean they are of the quality, material, and style custom prescribes for the highest in the land ... where I am informed women rule as much as men ... I also know the strength of the thread." (*TR* 247).

Edith's awakening to the agency and authority of women is summed up in her response to her husband's criticism that her new clothing makes her look like a heathen: "`As long as I don't look like a guy'" (*TR* 248). She does not want to be male, but a female who, like Immada, is seen in her society as equal to a man, and afforded the same opportunities. As Bonney suggests, dawning the veil affords Edith a power she is not allowed in her upper-class world. She is depicted as the mystical and potent veiled Woman, who extends back to the ancient cults of Magna Mater (146). Edith's original intention is to

wear the veil to show respect for Moslem religious sensibilities, but she learns that the veil, which exposes only her eyes, acts as a defense against Lingard's needful gaze and enables her to confront him more boldly.

In his portrayal of Edith, Conrad once again contrasts women's realistic attitude toward life with the romantic self-delusion of men. Wiley states that Edith's weakness is her inability to see the real as anything but dream (182); however, Edith's understanding of the artifice of her social class undermines this view. And Krenn argues that Edith prides herself on her lack of conformity, but does not really acknowledge the new or unusual. Instead, Edith relegates what she has never before experienced to the level of the unreal, thereby distancing herself from a sincere acceptance of a culture other than her own (131). However, Edith's behaviour proves Krenn wrong. Edith demonstrates her acceptance of Immada's culture by wearing Immada's clothing. Also, Edith confides to Lingard that she has never been able to lose herself in a story. Throughout her life she has been living "'in front of a show, and ... [has] never been taken in for a moment by its tinsel and its noise or anything that went on the stage'" (*TR* 271-274). Edith's romantic inclination is stimulated by the "personality of Lingard" (Krenn 126), but everything she asserts in the conversation above indicates that she does not fall victim to those romantic inclinations. Edith is insightful enough to understand her fascination with the bold daring of Lingard's life. She respects his energy and determination but also realises that he is unable to separate himself from the role he is playing. Like Emilia Gould, who quickly perceives that her husband's obsession with the mine prevents her from any significant role in his life, Edith is astute

enough to realise that Tom's obsession with playing a hero in a chivalric epic is both misguided and doomed. As with so many of Conrad's heroes, Lingard's dream is romantic and replete with false chivalric ideals, but it is also based on ambition for power. Consequently, Lingard is capable of being ruthless in attaining his goal (*TR* 336). As she and D'Alcacer discuss Lingard's activities, Edith wonders "'in all the world who is there to save that man from himself'" (*TR* 363). Despite her attraction to and compassion for Lingard (*TR* 195, 372), Edith knows that their paths have crossed only for the moment. Erdinast-Vulcan feels that "Edith is attracted but never totally surrenders to Tom's mode of perception: "Her aestheticism ... splits experience into the categories of the factual and the fictional, the real and the illusory, the object of knowledge and the stuff of dreams" (55).

Edith understands that Tom has cast her as the heroine in his dream because of her beauty and the appeal of her class (*TR* 271). She perceives early on that Lingard finds in her situation an opportunity to save a damsel in distress, and she is quick to inform him that she is no helpless waif: "'And pray don't look upon me as a conventional 'weak woman' person, the delicate lady of your own conception. ... Make that effort please against your own conception of what a woman like me should be'" (*TR* 227). The dropped sandal represents Lingard's romantic delusions. Edith does not tell Lingard about the sandal because it alludes to the story of Cinderella. Any reference to a story of a maiden's rescue by a handsome prince will only feed Lingard's dream of himself as a chivalric Prince Charming. Bonney points out that Lingard's proclivity for casting himself as the hero in a story of mythic proportion is prefigured by his discussion with Shaw about the story of Paris

and Helen (146). And Erdinast-Vulcan argues that Lingard is similar to Jim, who represents the author's need to turn away from the scepticism and relativism of modernity and recover the mythical sensibilities of an earlier time. Even before Edith's arrival, clues to Tom's eventual failure to live within his self-created myth are evident; however, Edith's entry into his self-made narrative results in a clash between the mythic and the modern worlds and Tom is defeated by his inability to continue the pretence (48).

As he does in *The Arrow of Gold*, Conrad reveals how women are subjected to both the possessiveness of men and their proclivity to think that women are in love with them. Edith understands that her role in Tom's dream is as stifling and restrictive as that of being the wife of a high-born Englishman. Conrad reveals Tom's penchant for control early in the novel with a description of Lingard's relationship with his brig (*TR* 17). On Edith's return to Belarab's compound, as she is trying to gain her way through an opening in the wall, Lingard grabs hold of her:

> his helpful and irresistible grip had changed into a close clasp, a crushing embrace, the violent taking possession by an embodied force that had broken loose and was not to be controlled any longer. ... his great strength, too seemed able to fill all space in its enveloping and undeniable authority. Every time she tried instinctively to stiffen herself against its might, it reacted, affirming its fierce will. (*TR* 352)

For Edith, the most disconcerting and distressing illusion is Tom's belief that she is in love with him and cannot control her desire to be with him: "'You came to me because you couldn't help yourself'" (*TR* 372).

Like many of Conrad's female characters, Edith is not only realistic but also honest

and resourceful. Although she is strongly attracted to Tom, Edith states from the start that she intends to assure the rescue of her husband and Mr. D'Alcacer (*TR 194*). Knowing Lingard's vow to Hassim and Immada, and the difficult position in which his love for Edith places him (*TR* 362), Edith nevertheless resolves to use her power over Lingard to gain freedom for herself and the others. Despite her respect for Immada, Edith consciously competes with the young woman for Tom's devotion, fully aware of the nature of her actions: "Edith Travers is determined to win; therefore, she stays near Lingard on the trip to the *Emma* and later to Belarab's stockade" (Krenn 119).

Even when she is torn with anguish over her request that Tom leave her alone, Edith is not concerned about losing Lingard as a lover; she worries that she will lose Lingard as a negotiator for her freedom. Tagge suggests that Edith is a woman who breaks the rules and, unlike Conrad's admirable male characters who do the same, feels no guilt for what she has done (103). However, it is clear that when Edith asks D'Alcacer if he considers her a "creature of darkness", she feels sorrow for Tom's position and does experience guilt over her actions. Nevertheless, she borders on ruthlessness when she tells d'Alcacer, "'I assure you I came here not with any notion of marching out in triumph ... I came here, to speak in the most vulgar way, to save your skin – and mine'" (*TR* 359).

Conrad affords Edith a status that few of the male protagonists attain. Although her husband is a most unpleasant man, Edith's obligation to their relationship remains her focus throughout the time of his capture. Her steadfastness contrasts with the behaviour of Lingard, who loses sight of his promise to Hassim and Immada. Edith also remains clear-

headed and courageous throughout her ordeal. Indeed, it is Edith who encourages Lingard to keep his word by returning the hostages after the agreement with the Malays has been broken. Once again Conrad's novels highlight the consequences for women of Western society's patriarchal conventions, and undermine the methods by which traditional literary portrayals of women perpetuate these stifling conventions.

Conrad's choice of ending again reveals that he resists traditional elements of the romance story. Like *Victory* and *The Arrow of Gold, The Rescue* inverts the convention by refusing a "happily ever after" ending. Geddes points out that the endings of Conrad's late novels are far less affirming than is the norm for their type (165). Nadelhaft argues that the conclusion suggests that Edith's life after Lingard will continue to be one of restriction characteristic of life for privileged women in patriarchal societies:

> For Edith Travers, the return to the yacht and its voyage back to civilisation' promises a lifetime of artifice, disappointment and conventional relationships. Intelligent, untrained, chained to a wealthy bigot, she will retain her capacity for self-criticism and analysis but not the ability to change the confines of her life. (130)

Erdinast-Vulcan agrees, writing that Lingard's defeat is also Edith's "abandonment to a life of empty gestures and hollow words" (156). Jones feels that Edith has experienced her adventures so deeply that the result is an epiphany about the truth of Western society but also difficulty in dealing with her role in that society: "Mrs. Travers, however, is transformed ... and we suspect that her disaffiliation from the moral structures of her mother country ... will problematise her return" (188). Conrad, however, ends the story as he must. Had he wished merely to write a novel popular with the masses he probably would

have ended *The Rescue* with a description of Edith and Lingard sailing off into the sunset in his brig. Instead, Lingard's brig veers north as Edith's yacht heads south. Conrad stays true to reality, fully cognisant that a wealthy, upper-class Englishwoman scorning her home and her privileged life for a handsome but ultimately feckless adventurer is too unbelievable for anything but the most sensational fiction.

D'Alcacer assumes that Edith will stay with Tom but her actions reveal a desire to shield herself from the image of such a scenario. Conrad's use of symbolism makes Edith's feelings clear: "Mrs. Travers stood up suddenly, but still careful to keep her face covered, she threw the end of the scarf over her shoulder" (*TR* 362). Edith states the truth of the situation: that she had been moulded by her history and culture and cannot escape from or break the mould: "'I am made of clay that is too hard'" (*TR* 411). Land is correct when he writes that it seems perfectly reasonable that a woman like Mrs. Travers, having grown up in a country governed by strict conventions and material wealth, would not find it in herself to conduct a successful revolt (254). Conrad finishes the novel with Edith's return to England so as not to reduce the heroine to a common literary stereotype and her story to the lightest form of romantic escapism. His clearly expresses his respect for Edith when he states: " I cared too much for Mrs. Travers to play pranks with her on the lines of heroics or tenderness" (Aubry 243-44). Conrad's resistance to stereotyping women as too tender to be tough continues with his last completed novel, *The Rover.*

***The Rover* (1923)**

In *The Rover,* Conrad displays his resistance to stereotyped portrayals of young women by creating a Snow White figure whose past is one of violence and bloodshed. Arlette represents women who have suffered at the hands of men corrupted by political ideology and their quest for power. Her story reveals how she spends much of her life trying to recover from the scars of the Revolution. Schwartz describes Conrad's opinion of politics as blighting innocent lives and leaving in its wake, "human wreckage" (148). Arlette embodies the wreckage but also the resilience and will to rebuild life from the remnants. Conrad's last completed novel reveals how he continued to comment on the lives of women in patriarchal societies and to create powerful female characters.

Conrad describes Arlette's beauty in the clichés often used to describe the good girl of fairy tales and children's stories. The narrator points out the blackness of her hair, the perfect oval of her face, the redness of her smooth cheeks, and the whiteness of her throat (*R* 21). However, although Arlette's appearance is that of a Snow White figure, she is not a passive heroine rescued by her Princes Charming and carried off to a life of wedded bliss. Like Lena in *Victory*, and Rita de Lastaola in *The Arrow of Gold*, Arlette is a female character whose actions oppose traditionally inscribed female behaviour.

Conrad immediately establishes Arlette's assertiveness when, within minutes of meeting Peyrol, she engages in behaviour bordering on boldness: "suddenly [she] advanced quite close to him and began to finger the lapel of his coat" (*R* 23). Also, Arlette initiates the relationship with Real by pulling him to the window where she gazes at him in the

moonlight. Instead of maintaining a conventional demure, bashful comportment as the relationship between the two progresses, Arlette pursues Real. Her behaviour is such that Catherine complains that Arlette has no fear or shame (*TR 172).* Schwartz suggests that, throughout the novel, Arlette intuits Peyrol's feelings for her, and instinctively plays upon his sexual attraction to her, because that is the strategy that saved her life during the reign of terror (148). By the end of the novel this boldness is transformed into audacious determination when Arlette literally fights to keep Eugene Real, the man she loves, from leaving her for military adventure. Although she has grown to love Peyrol, the rover, and to regard him as an authority figure, she physically attacks him to prevent Real's departure. Her resolve is such that the men on the boat pale at the energy of her determination:

> "Peyrol!" she cried twice ... "I want him back.." ... Arlette flew down the slope. The first sign of her coming was a faint thin scream ... Real jumped to his feet with an extremely scared face ... Arlette came on board with such an impetus that Peyrol had to step forward and save her from a fall ... She struggled in his arms with extreme violence. The heiress of Escampobar with her loose black hair seemed the incarnation of pale fury ... and suddenly struck the rover twice in the face with her clenched fist. (*R* 247)

Conrad subverts the stereotypical portrayal of the youthful, innocent female who remains pure despite the moral corruption around her. Arlette participates in the violent bloodbath that was part of the revolution. While still a child she sees her parents killed and is forced by Scevola to accompany their killers. Like kidnap victims who eventually grow to believe the ideology of their kidnappers, Arlette participates in the murder of French citizens deemed guilty of betraying the revolutionaries. Arlette gets caught up in the frenzy of carnage because Conrad wishes to portray her as a complex character with the human

propensity for sin:

> "I had red splashes all over me. I had to run with them all day, and all the time. I felt as if I were falling down, and down, and down ... And suddenly I heard myself yelling exactly like the others. Do you understand, Monsieur l'Abbé? The very same words." *(R 54)*

Unlike conventional literary heroines whose roles inscribed codes of behaviour for woman, Arlette is not demure or genteel. Despite the scandalous nature of her reputation in the community, she makes no secret of her past, offering to tell Peyrol about the Revolution and her experiences in it: "' Have you ever carried a woman's head on a pike?'"(*R* 22). She is honest about her past and forthright about her beliefs and motives. When Arlette goes to the village church the local priest assumes that Arlette's impassioned prayer is a sign that she seeks redemption for her past actions. She shatters his assumptions when she confesses that her motive is fleshly rather than spiritual: "'Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé,' she said in her clear seductive voice. 'I have prayed and I feel answered. I entreated merciful God to keep the heart of the man I love always true to me or else let me die before I set my eyes on him again'" (*R* 158).

Arlette represents women whose self-actualization is made difficult by the way men treat them. Scevola has involved Arlette in the bloodshed of the Revolution and has objectified her, thinking she is his possession. As she walks home from the church her thoughts reveal that she understands that circumstances in her youth have stifled her sense of self and makes no apologies for what she could not have controlled: "' And if I have been possessed ... as the Abbé said, what is it to me as I am now? That evil spirit cast my true

self out of my body and then cast away the body too. For years I have been living empty. There has been no meaning in anything'" (*R* 157). Despite her love for her aunt, she refuses to be influenced by her aunt's contention that Arlette's past makes her unfit for any man. Arlette knows her own worth and is not swayed by conventional thinking and rules which she does not believe or respect (*R* 159). Her aunt's thoughts are coloured by the preaching of her church and Scevola has been blinded by political ideology. However, Arlette follows her own beliefs and insights. In *The Rover,* Conrad once again challenges literary archetypes by portraying a young woman who refuses to be defeated by the conventions of a society that perpetuates gendered behaviour and attitudes.

***Suspense* (1925)**

Suspense is the novel Conrad was writing when he died. In *Suspense,* Conrad employs the conventions of the novel of sensation to emphasize the imprisoning and oppressive nature of life for women in paternalist societies. Conrad wrote to Richard Curle that there were several narrative directions in which the novel could move, but Conrad's death left the novel's major focus open to conjecture. The action takes place in Genoa, *circa* 1815, and its major development might have been Napoleon's escape from Elba. The protagonist, Cosmo Latham is a young Englishman who begins to fall in love with Adèle de Montevesso, a beautiful French woman who, at sixteen, guarantees the safety and well-being of her parents by entering a loveless marriage with Helion, an older man who is extremely wealthy and extremely jealous. The circumstances of Adèle's marriage reveal

Conrad's criticism of the way in which women often suffer the abusive behaviour of their husbands.

Adèle leads a suffocating existence in her husband's residence, Palazzo, a setting typical of the novel of sensation. There, the corridors are dark, confusing and gloomy. When sunlight appears it pours dramatically from windows at strange angles, taking Adèle by surprise and adding to the atmosphere of impending danger (*S* 83). Her imprisonment is enhanced by the sense of voyeurism or spying which is established by means of servants who watch, listen and report on Alèle's every move (*S* 139). Conrad often describes Adèle in terms of portraiture and stage design or tableau, a trope common to the novel of sensation (Jones 205). These descriptions emphasize Adèle's entrapment and the stasis of her life. The suggestion of insanity characteristic of the novel of sensation comes from Adèle herself, who states that she has been so unhappy that at times she felt she was going mad. However, although Conrad uses the conventions of the novel of sensation to set the scene of Adèle's marriage, he resists the novel of sensation's archetypal portrayal of women.

Unlike Rita, who is born into poverty but gains financial independence, Adèle is born into wealth but suffers the loss of autonomy which money allows women of her time period. The details of her life provide a critique of a patriarchal society that disallows freedom for women outside married life. Although confined to just a few pages of this unfinished novel, Adèle takes her place as one of Conrad's many strongly delineated female characters.

Conrad again creates a woman whose honesty contrasts with the self-delusion and

pretentiousness of the male characters. Adèle describes the domestic difficulties of her parents' life after the revolution and openly states that she accepted her husband's marriage proposal for financial reasons and in spite of her feelings of revulsion towards him. Her forthrightness is underscored by her decision to share her feelings with Helion before accepting his marriage proposal: "' I didn't care for him in the least and probably never should; but ... if he would secure my parents' future comfort my gratitude would be so great that I could marry him, without reluctance, and be his loyal friend and wife for life.'" Much likeWinnie Verloc in *The Secret Agent,* Adèle reveals truthfulness and insight when she states that she was filled "by the spirit of self-sacrifice" and too young to understand the consequences of her actions (*S* 134 -136). Despite her wealth and high status amongst persons such as the Queen of Sardinia (*S* 90), Adèle remains unpretentious and natural. Although many years have separated them, she insists that Cosmo call her Adèle. She puts Cosmo, described as socially awkward, at ease and speaks with sincerity about her gratitude and affection for his family. Cosmo comments to Adèle's father, the Marquis: "' [Y]our daughter has forgotten neither the language, nor the people , nor the sights of her early life. I was touched by the fidelity of her memory and the warmth of her feelings'" (*S* 103). Conrad emphasizes Adèle's lack of pretentiousness by juxtaposing her behaviour with that of her husband. Upon meeting Cosmo, Helion discusses his wealth and his circle of acquaintances in a way that Cosmo describes as "vulgar boasting" (*S* 125).

Like Rita in *The Arrow of Gold,* Emilia in *Nostromo,* and Natalia in *Under Western Eyes,* Adèle is interested in the workings of politics. She is an intelligent woman open to

new political views. She describes herself as having "liberal ideas" and, therefore, impatient with the intolerance of the same royalist with whom her parents are aligned (*S* 142-43). She displays a disdain for those who experienced the revolution but have returned to France "` without a single new idea in their heads, like merciless spectres out of a grave, hating the world to which they had returned ... [having] forgotten nothing and learned nothing'" (*S* 149). Adèle reveals both her fascination with Napoleon and her sense of humour when she describes to Cosmo a meeting with the Emperor who, informed of her childless state, advises her to "try to make some other arrangement". She tells Cosmo, "with a slightly ironic intonation", that she did not make any other arrangements. (*S* 146-47).

Adèle's description of her life with Helion constitutes Conrad's commentary on the treatment of women in male-dominated societies. As Jones suggests, not only does Conrad free his heroine from the conventions of the sensational novel by creating a stage for her confession, he also provides her with a sympathetic audience in Cosmo (207). Despite Adèle's fidelity, Helion's jealousy is evident when he repeatedly refers to the reminiscences of youthful days that Adèle and Cosmo share (*S* 127). His jealousy caused him to verbally abuse Adèle, and to humiliate her in a debased way. Helion pays associates and friends to make his wife the victim of scandal mongering and lies in order to besmirch her reputation and honour. Adèle, the victim of her husband's anger and bitterness, is treated like a parcel, sent off and returned at her husband's whim (*S* 136 -38). Like Rita, she is an *objet d'art* imprisoned in a museum housing beautiful paintings, sculpture, and furnishings. Her

role as mistress of the home is undermined when, without consulting her, Helion hires Palazzo Brignoli, and brings into it three strangers, his two aunts and his niece Clelia (*S* 149).

Conrad allows Adèle a voice with which to communicate the conditions of her life and their effects upon her. Although Adèle's courage holds up and she shrugs off Helion's threats "like a poisoned robe" (*S* 138), she is unable to test her capabilities or establish any sense of self-identity. She tells Cosmo that she goes "through life without raising objections to anything" (*S*150). Although Cosmo comments on the serenity of her demeanour, he also perceives fatigue and fear. Adèle discloses that she must constantly be wary of revealing her thoughts, opinions, and emotions. She compares her loss of identity to "taking the veil" and repeatedly confesses that Helion "could never forgive [her] for being" what she was (*S* 141-51).

Adèle's dignified courage is very different from the feistiness of Arlette. The portraits of two such different women reveal Conrad's understanding that women are individuals in their psychological make-up and in their dealings with the societies in which they live. While some women openly fight to have their voices heard, others realize they must negotiate a quiet, subtle way to maintain a sense of self.

Conclusion

My examination of Conrad repudiates charges that his longer fiction is misogynistic, and reveals his work as significant in its attempts to subvert literary conventions that inscribe patriarchal ideas and institutions that marginalize women and keep them powerless. Patterns have emerged in this examination that show that Conrad's female characters provided him a vehicle for critical commentary on the absolute necessity for women to be involved in all aspects of society if society is to be humane and just. In his novels Conrad uses contrast and irony to create women who display the strengths and qualities that his male characters strive for but fail to achieve. In his personal life, Conrad was a difficult man, but one who respected and admired women. His positive attitude toward women is revealed in many of the female characters who populate his works of longer fiction. A close reading of Conrad's novels reveals a writer who was strongly feminist in his views of women and their place in the world.

From the beginning of his writing career Conrad revealed his support for women by turning his back on traditional portrayals of women in literature. In his first three novels, *Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Island,* and *Lord Jim,* he refuses to follow the Imperial Romance's stereotype of the native woman as an evil temptress who seduces the white colonialist standard bearer of a morally superior race. Conrad undermined the stereotype by inverting it. Nina Almayer, Aissa, and Jewel do not behave like the exotic seductress in many of the Imperial Romance novels. Instead, they exhibit the very qualites of courage and daring that the writers of the Imperial Romance hoped to instill in the men who

travelled to exotic places and established the imperialist interests of Europe and Great Britain. Conrad's subversion of literary conventions continued throughout his development as a writer. Next he subverted Coventry Patmore's ideal woman, "the angel in the house". In *Nostromo*, he undermined the convention of the wife whose faith in her husband never falters because his wisdom and judgement are superior to her own. Emilia Gould is more insightful and far wiser than Charles; although she never loses her love for her husband, she loses faith in his methods and motives. In *The Secret Agent*, Winnie Verloc displays the commitment and efficiency of a perfect housewife; however, she breaks the convention in a display of unladylike violent behaviour that leaves her husband dead on the living room sofa. The three major female characters in *Under Western Eyes* are atypical of women in much of literature; they are more interested in leading lives devoted to political change than wedded bliss.

In *Chance, Victory, The Arrow of Gold,* and *The Rover,* Conrad created women who subvert the literary convention of the little waif who needs a man to rescue and protect her. However, Flora, Lena, Rita, and Arlette turn this archetype on its head as they prove pluckier and more capable than the men who attempt to come to their rescue. Conrad also showed that many men perceive women not as they are, but as men want them to be. *The Rescue*, one of Conrad's last novels, reflects both the beginning and the end of his career: Edith Travers proves more capable than her rescuer, Tom Lingard, a man highly influenced by the ideals of heroism inscribed in the Imperial Romance.

By freeing himself from conventional portrayals of women, Conrad provided a

method by which he was able to criticize the effects of patriarchal societies on those women who have traditionally been marginalized or shut out. Nina, Aissa, and Jewel represent women living in countries where imperialist powers come for gain, impose their own culture, and then leave with no regard for the damage they have caused. In each of these novels, Conrad emphasized the plight of women living under imperialist systems, by providing a minor female character whose story echoes that of the heroine. Emilia Gould is not a native woman, but as the wife of an imperialist she sees the environmental results of imperialism for the citizens of Costaguana and speaks out about them. She also expresses her antipathy to the greed-driven corruption and the violence-riddled political manoeverings of the men who run the province.

Conrad revealed that conditions for women living within the imperialist nations are no different. He uses Winnie Verloc to expose the corruption that permeates every level of England's patriarchal society. When Winnie drives a knife into Verloc she exacts justice for women in a society where poverty forces them into situations of abuse, self-sacrifice, and unhappiness. In *The Rescue*, Conrad showed that rich women in patriarchal societies suffer restrictions that prevent them from achieving happiness. In *The Arrow of Gold*, Rita proves that, for women, money can bring freedom of choice, but that women must still battle the male proclivity to consider women as objects to be possessed. In *Chance* and *Victory*, Conrad showed that men in patriarchal societies need to perceive women as helpless in order to possess them.

Conrad revealed respect for women, admiration for their abilities, and support for

their inclusion in all levels of society. Conrad's female characters do not stay in the kitchen and cook. Aissa and Jewel prove their courage and leadership in battle. Emilia Gould combines physical endurance, political acumen, and altruism, and takes an active role in Costaguana's economic growth and social development. Conrad created this same combination of traits in Natalia Hardin, Tekla, and Sophia Antonovna. Tekla and Sophia have first-hand experience of revolutionary action yet remain committed to helping the masses attain power, rather than trying to achieve power for personal gain. Conrad combined criticism of patriarchal societies and the men who run them, with portrayals of strong women who view political power as a tool to improve living conditions for the people. He contrasted the self-delusion of men who aspire to be heroic, and the ability of women to accept the harsh realities of life and work heroically to survive them. It is clear that Conrad's writing is not misogynistic, but feminist in its view that, for a society to be healthy, women must be involved in all aspects of and at all levels of that society.

Critics who have based their ideas about Conrad's fiction solely on an examination of its male characters, must now re-evaluate their views. Present and future students of Conrad's work must be vigilant in their choice of scholarly reading: a great deal of early critical analysis of Conrad's fiction is inaccurate because it is narrowly focused on only the men in the stories. Both students of Conrad and students in feminist studies must disregard Conrad's early and inaccurate reputation for misogyny and look at Conrad's work for what it reveals about his support for women's independence and equality. Students of modern British literature must also re-examine Conrad's work at all stages of his career, from the

early, ongoing subversion of literary conventions, to the later experiments with new narrative techniques.

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