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Joseph Conrad's Feminine Mystique

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Mary Lundergan

1969

JOSEPH CONRAD'S "FEMININE MYSTIQUE"

A Thesis

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the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Mary Lundergan Yates

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JOSEPH CONRAD'S "FEMININE MYSTIQUE"

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INTRODUCTION

Although some critics have mentioned Conrad's women characters in studies, they oftentimes find these figures to be primarily in the background without much to do with the development of the plot or the philosophy of Conrad. This is particularly true of earlier critics. Grace Isabel Colbron wrote in 1914:

They are out of it indeed, in this world of the sea, and those who live thereon in ships; this world of bleak or poisonous coasts, of secret harbours, mysterious rivers, savage jungle and savage men. The women are there, of course; but they are always the passive factor and never the active or positive force.¹

Even in the 1960's, Gustav Morf points out that many critics, including himself, believe that something is unfinished about Conrad's women.²

What does prevail in Conrad's writing, however, is just the opposite: a complete figure of considerable significance--a "feminine mystique"--in his stories. R. L. Megroz feels that his novel Chance alone is enough to establish Conrad as a successful creator of women characters.³

¹Grace Isabel Colbron, "Joseph Conrad's Women," The Bookman, XXXIX (January, 1914), 476.

²Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 41.

³R. L. Megroz, Joseph Conrad's Mind and Method (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 193.

Moreover, Bernard C. Meyer finds that women actually dominate Conrad's fictional world beginning with "A Smile of Fortune" in 1910.⁴

An examination of Conrad's life will provide one with insight into the revelation of his women characters. The following novels and short stories, investigated in this study, will reveal Conrad's portrayal of the woman, her characteristics and associated imagery, and her role in his works to unveil his all-encompassing philosophy of life: Almayer's Folly, The Arrow of Gold, Chance, Lord Jim, Nostromo, An Outcast of the Islands, The Rescue, The Rover, The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, Victory, "Amy Foster," "The Brute," "The End of the Tether," "Freya of the Seven Isles," "The Heart of Darkness," "The Idiots," "The Planter of Malata," "The Return," "A Smile of Fortune," and "Tomorrow."

⁴Bernard C. Meyer, Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 223.

CHAPTER I

THE MAN

The facts of an author's personal life are sometimes an unimportant element. With Joseph Conrad this is not the case. His life and his works are very closely related.⁵ Of his overwhelming subjectivity, Conrad himself wrote in A Personal Record:

Most, almost all, friendships of the writing period of my life have come to me through my books, and I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figure behind the veil; a suspected rather than a seen presence--a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction.⁶

In this vein, then, Conrad's women characters will be seen to be intimately related to the author's life. Those biographical facts and interpretations which are essential to this approach will be surveyed.

Teodor Jozef Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski was born on December 3, 1857, in the Russian-ruled Polish province of Podolia, near Berdichev. He was the only child of Appolo

⁵Oliver Warner, Joseph Conrad, No. 10 of British Writers and Their Works, ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 48.

⁶Joseph Conrad, A Personal Record (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925), p. xv.

and Evelina Nalecz Korzeniowski. Apparently, the most important factor in the constitution of Conrad was his mother. Some believe she gave him an ideal conception of women.⁷ Whether this is true or not, Evelina Korzeniowski certainly did have a major influence on Conrad not only as a child but also as an author. Jerry Allen says that the young Joseph Conrad played by the bedside of his mother when she was ill with tuberculosis. The boy was only seven when she died. Apollo Korzeniowski, melancholy and grief-stricken, turned so vehemently to religion that he virtually resigned from his role as a father to his son. He referred to the child as a "little orphan." Conrad did not even have the benefit of his father's physical presence when he (Joseph Conrad) was eleven years old; his father died of tuberculosis in Cracaw after his freedom from exile.⁸

Ford Maddox Ford writes that Joseph Conrad always spoke "deprecatingly" of his father; however, he always related feelings of "passionate adoration" for his mother. Conrad felt that the Polish national spirit had been molded by women like his mother. The men, he felt, were helpless.⁹ Morf feels that it may have been Evelina Korzeniowski who initiated her son's concern with the father-daughter

⁷E. H. Visiak, The Mirror of Conrad (London: Werner Laurie, 1955), p. 39.

⁸Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1965), p. 14.

⁹Ford Maddox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), pp. 76-77.

relationship. At any rate, Conrad was aware of the resulting conflict caused by the objection of Evelina Korzeniowski's father to her marriage. The father died still keeping his objection. Of this conflict Conrad wrote: "She was torn by the inward struggle between her love for the man whom she was to marry in the end, and her knowledge of her dead father's objection to that match." The result was that she "could not give to others that feeling of peace which was not her own."¹⁰

Evelina Korzeniowski was evidently even more important in her influence on Conrad than has been previously implied. If one scans Conrad's fictional works, the incestuous overtones--if not blatant incest--are obvious. Meyer finds that the incestuous relationship overshadows the more customary love affairs in Almayer's Folly, "Freya of the Seven Isles," and Chance. Ortega's passion for his cousin Rita appears in The Arrow of Gold. Conrad's unfinished The Sisters also deals with incest.¹¹ However, the mother-son relationship is conspicuously absent. Meyer discovers that Conrad makes such a relationship impossible. The mothers are usually dead. In The Secret Agent a male child appears. In order for Conrad to have allowed a female adult to be the child's guardian, he makes her the boy's sister.¹² What is so noticeably not there is just as important as what is so conspicuously there.

¹⁰Morf, Polish Heritage, p. 42.

¹¹Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 48-49, 114.

¹²Ibid., p. 114.

As already mentioned, feelings toward the father were quite different. Robert R. Hodges thinks that this affected Conrad's work, for there is a dislike of the ethic of sympathy and anti-authoritarianism.¹³ One might just as well call this Conrad's dislike of chivalry. The short relationship Conrad had with his parents is hardly what is totally responsible for his unusual concept of women. Nevertheless, as Meyer states, his mother's death gave him a feeling of being abandoned.¹⁴

Joseph Conrad suffered the pangs of his first loves in his middle teens. Probably to his first childhood sweetheart, Conrad wrote, "You always could make me do whatever you liked." This is the beginning of subservience to a loved woman. One can find this trait in all of Conrad's lovers.¹⁵ As best as one can determine from biographical accounts, this first love was Janina Taube. Even in later years when she married and Conrad wrote to her, he signed his letters: "Always your devoted servant, Conrad Korzeniowski."¹⁶

In 1873 Conrad fell in love with his distant cousin, Tekla. Najder relates that Conrad flirted with her and was severely reprimanded by her father.¹⁷ Moreover, Conrad

¹³Robert R. Hodges, Studies in English Literature, Vol. XXIX: The Dual Heritage of Joseph Conrad (Paris: Mouton & Company Printers, 1967), p. 37.

¹⁴Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 85.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶Zdzislaw Najder, Conrad's Polish Background (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 233.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 13.

obviously felt Tekla treated him harshly. The effect of this last affair was tremendous on the young, sensitive Conrad. In the first manuscript draft of The Laugh, a small portion of which was used in The Arrow of Gold, Conrad wrote concerning this relationship that he "had struck at something particularly wicked and even devilish." This girl had turned a genuine display of sentiment into ridicule. Conrad felt that he amused her at first; then he only bored her. He came out of this relationship with a complete mistrust of himself. He thought of her as a superior being. His final impression was that "if that's it never, never again."¹⁸

Of the other, more gentle love, Conrad was grateful for the mere pressure of her hand upon leaving Poland: "It was very little that she had done. A mere pressure of the hand. But he had remembered it for five and thirty years of separation and silence."¹⁹ John Dozier Gordon believes that upsetting early loves contributed to Conrad's desire to leave Poland.²⁰

A few years after Conrad's departure from Poland, he was in Marseilles. His Uncle Thaddeus supplied him with letters of introduction and a small allowance. The sixteen-

¹⁸Gérard Jean-Aubry, The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad, trans. by Helen Sebba (London: Ruskin House, 1957), pp. 287-288.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 288.

²⁰John Dozier Gordon, Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), p. 8.

year-old Conrad was fulfilling his dream by becoming a French sailor. Jerry Allen writes that this is the place where Conrad met the love that was to send him wandering upon the seas for some twenty years.²¹ The definitive biography of Joseph Conrad relates the episode. Conrad told that he became a member of a syndicate that operated the Tremolino, a sailing vessel used in smuggling. It was used in smuggling arms into Spain. This was done in support of Don Carlos de Bourbon, the Pretender to the Spanish throne. During this escapade, Conrad was to have fought a duel. The duel Conrad fought must have taken place in February, 1878. The duel was fought with a partner in the Tremolino escapade. Blunt, the partner, had been spreading slander because of jealousy--Conrad was in favor with Paula de Smogyi, the mistress of Don Carlos de Bourbon, and he was a rejected suitor. Out of honor, Conrad challenged Blunt to a duel. Conrad, however, did receive a bullet wound in the chest, which nearly killed him. Paula nursed him back to health. As soon as she discovered that he was going to be well, she disappeared from his life just as she had entered into it. She did not wish to compromise the future of Conrad.²²

There are those like Jocelyn Baines and Meyer, though, who find the truth of the Marseilles experience to be quite

²¹Jerry Allen, The Thunder and the Sunshine (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 60.

²²Aubry, Dreamer, p. 74.

different. Baines points out a letter written by Tadeusz Bobrowski, the guardian of Conrad after the death of Conrad's parents, to Stefan Buszczynski in which Conrad's duel was really a suicide attempt.²³ This letter, written in March, 1879, states what undoubtedly really happened:

He, Konrad, was left behind, unable to sign on for a ship--poor as a church mouse and, moreover heavily in debt--for while speculating he had lived on credit, had ordered the things necessary for his voyage and so forth. Faced with this situation, he borrows 800 francs from his friend, Mr. Fecht and sets off for Villa Franca where an American squadron was anchored, with the intention of joining the American service. He achieves nothing there and, wishing to improve his finances, tries his luck at Monte Carlo and loses the 800 francs he had borrowed. Having managed his affairs so excellently he returns to Marseilles and one fine evening invites his friend the creditor to tea, and before his arrival attempts to take his life with a revolver. (Let this detail remain between us, as I have been telling everyone that he was wounded in a duel. From you I neither wish to nor should keep it a secret.) The bullet goes durch and durch near his heart without damaging any vital organ. . . . Well, this is the whole story.²⁴

This passage from the letter of Conrad's uncle reveals a great deal about the twenty-year-old Conrad besides the fact that he was hardly in a duel.

His financial condition was hardly the kind that would lure a well-favored mistress from Don Carlos de Bourbon. Like a child Conrad wished to evoke sympathy from the man from whom he had borrowed money. He undoubtedly never really wished to kill himself. In addition to what has been

²³Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1960), p. 45.

²⁴Najder, Polish Background, p. 177.

said, Miss Allen, who holds to the duel story, admits that Uncle Thaddeus found out nothing about Paula when he came to straighten out Conrad's affairs in Marseilles.²⁵ Meyer claims that although Conrad may have seen Paula and modeled Rita after her, he hardly had a love affair with her. If there had been a duel, Paula de Smogyi would not have held her favor with the Pretender. Conrad, who was so terribly uncomfortable around women he liked previously, would hardly have undertaken so bold a venture. Conrad declared that he had lost at sea the arrow of gold Paula had given him. However, long after the end of the supposed affair, Paula appeared in a photograph with the ornament on her dress. Hence, Conrad's adoration of Paula took the form of a fictional escape from a painful reality.²⁶

Besides, one need only note the facts concerning his relations with other women after the supposed time of the duel. Some ten years later in Port Louis, Conrad was introduced to the Renouf family. He was a frequent visitor there. The attraction was evidently the twenty-six-year-old Mademoiselle Eugénie.²⁷ Conrad was to have asked permission to marry Mademoiselle Eugénie from her brother. He found, though, that she was already engaged and planned to marry in two months. Conrad was hurt by this and remained in

²⁵Allen, Thunder, p. 164.

²⁶Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 40-44.

²⁷Aubry, Dreamer, p. 142.

seclusion until he left the island of Mauritius never to return.²⁸ Aubry goes on to say in his Life and Letters that the novel written during this Mauritius stay was autobiographical.²⁹ Unless the bedraggled Alice was modeled after the refined Mademoiselle Eugénie, this can hardly be true. Meyer regards the view of "A Smile of Fortune" as autobiographical to be absurd. The importance of this ten-year period in Conrad's life is that it is so controversial. The controversy in both cases, Marseilles and Mauritius, concerns love affairs. In the Marseilles event, it is irrelevant who was responsible for the duel story. The fact is Conrad, if he did not initiate it, adhered to it throughout his whole life. In connection with Mauritius, he allowed Aubrey to believe "A Smile of Fortune" was autobiographical. Conrad must have realized that something was not as it should be in his relations with women, for he felt the need to supplement his actual life with fictional accounts.

Nevertheless, about a year after this last disappointment, Conrad entered into a warm, Platonic relationship with Marguerite Poradowska. This woman, who was a little more than a decade Conrad's senior, was not really his aunt although that was what he called her.³⁰ Conrad's letters

²⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

²⁹ Gérard Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, Vol. I (Garden City: Doubleday Page, 1927), p. 113.

³⁰ Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 91-100.

to her reveal his close and dependent relationship; he related to her the most intimate details of every illness.³¹

Conrad even wanted to publish his books in French under Madame Poradowska's name. Meyer sees in this an unconscious impulse to subordinate himself to her. This, as well as Conrad's wanting to put her up on a pedestal, is a forerunner of the loving submission of his fictional heroes to his statuesque fictional women.³² Something made this relationship different from all the others. Heretofore, Conrad had been unable to communicate with women. Meyer says Conrad saw in Madame Poradowska a mother; his relinquishment of Madame Poradowska is a relinquishment of his own kind and a rejection of a mother-son relationship.³³ It is interesting to note that the one woman many critics feel Conrad portrayed adequately is illustrated as more of a mother than a wife to her husband. More will be said of this later. At any rate, Joseph Conrad's relationship with Madame Poradowska is epitomized in two lines he wrote to her on February 8, 1891:

What touches me is not merely the fact that you wish to be of service to me. It is above all knowing there is someone in the world who takes an interest in me, whose heart is open to me, that makes me happy.³⁴

³¹John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm, Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

³²Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 106-109.

³³Ibid., pp. 101, 115.

³⁴Gee and Sturm, Letters, p. 21.

In October or November, 1893, at the home of friends in London, Conrad met a young, obscure girl named Jessie George. He visited the twenty-one-year-old girl irregularly. Weeks and months passed between visits.³⁵ Conrad did eventually propose marriage and was accepted by Jessie George on February, 1896.³⁶ Nonetheless, the facts surrounding the event are hardly those of a sophisticated man of thirty-nine. Conrad proposed after having dashed for shelter from the rain in the National Gallery. After reaching shelter, he simply blurted, "Look here, my dear, we had better get married and out of this. Look at the weather. We will get married at once and get over to France."³⁷ In talking to Jessie George's mother, Conrad demanded a short engagement because he had not long to live and besides that there were to be no children. Jessie George had no knowledge of why he thought he was going to die shortly. He also stated that he was going to take her abroad indefinitely.³⁸ (Conrad's fictional lovers oftentimes try to escape into another world; they find, though, that they cannot.)

Having announced his intention without the least preliminaries, Joseph Conrad suddenly left, hailed a cab, and fled from the girl to whom he had just proposed marriage.

³⁵Aubry, Dreamer, pp. 212-213.

³⁶Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad and His Circle (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1935), p. 12.

³⁷Ibid., p. 12.

³⁸Ibid., p. 15.

She did not see him for three days.³⁹ Jocelyn Baines writes that apparently Conrad was not overwhelmingly in love with Jessie George, and he finds no reason in letters why his choice fell on her.⁴⁰ It is also interesting to note that Conrad's statement that there will be no children in their marriage is enforced in his writings. His fictional characters have no children. The rare appearance of children causes the disintegration of the marriage from which they came.⁴¹

During the approaching wedding, Conrad hid behind a "matter-of-fact attitude." He kept Jessie waiting for half an hour. Mr. Hope and Mr. Krieger had to persuade Conrad to get on to the ceremony. Moreover, Conrad then got into a ridiculous argument with a cab driver. He even stated to Jessie Conrad when her sisters and brothers raised their voices in loud lament upon the new Mr. and Mrs. Conrad's leaving, "Good Heavens, if I had known this would happen, I--well I would never have married you." That night she was kept up into the wee hours of the morning addressing wedding announcements.⁴²

If, as Baines states, Conrad gives no impression of why he singled out Jessie to marry, why did his choice fall on her? Jessie Conrad herself stated that Garnett was

³⁹Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁴⁰Baines, Joseph Conrad, p. 171.

⁴¹Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 125.

⁴²Jessie Conrad, Circle, pp. 19-20.

against the marriage because Conrad was binding himself to a woman many years younger and of a different background.⁴³ Meyer feels that Conrad married this girl in her early twenties because she brought into his life two elements Conrad admitted held interest for him. These were the theme of exogamy and the relationship of father and daughter.⁴⁴ No matter what Conrad's reasons were for marrying Jessie George, what is really important is the nature of the marriage that held Conrad to her.

Jessie Conrad's memoirs reveal anything but complete bliss while living with this man and suggest an awareness of his strange constitution from the very beginning. The morning after the wedding, she relates, the train passed through a dark tunnel. There was a terrific detonation and a blinding flash. Her immediate reaction was fear of how little she actually knew of the man she had married: "Suppose he turned out to be a member of some secret society?"⁴⁵

On the honeymoon Conrad began almost immediately to write. Meyer notes that during this time, Conrad revealed himself nervous, sick, and uncomfortable. Noteworthy is the fact that as soon as he began to write, he wrote "The Idiots"--a woman stabs her husband when he tries to make

⁴³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁴Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 112.

⁴⁵Jessie Conrad, Circle, p. 20.

love to her because they have had all idiot children in their marriage.⁴⁶

It will become obvious that Conrad accepted Jessie Conrad more or less in the capacity of a mother. When he felt he was being deprived of this "mother," his reaction was a rejection of the "thief"--his son Borys, who was born on January 15, 1898.⁴⁷ Jessie Conrad writes that whenever she wished to be especially friendly, she would call Conrad "boy."⁴⁸ J. H. Retinger reinforces this by stating that Mrs. Conrad was a mother as well as an assistant to Conrad.⁴⁹ Joseph Conrad's reaction to his wife was that of a spoiled child. When Conrad was hungry, Retinger adds, he would not eat food that was not prepared solely by his wife. The relationship which existed between Conrad and his wife was fortunate; he would never have been able to produce the work he did without Mrs. Conrad's "maternal care of him."⁵⁰

The pregnancy of Mrs. Conrad sharpened Joseph Conrad's feelings. Jessie Conrad wrote that Conrad was not at all prompt in getting the doctor. He wished to stay for a second breakfast. When the baby was born, he wanted it taken away. He supposedly felt that it would disturb Mrs. Conrad.⁵¹ In

⁴⁶Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 118.

⁴⁷Aubry, Dreamer, p. 231.

⁴⁸Jessie Conrad, Circle, p. 255.

⁴⁹J. H. Retinger, Joseph Conrad and His Contemporaries (New York: Roy, Publishers, 1943), p. 71.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 74.

⁵¹Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him (Garden City, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1926), p. 43.

a letter to his friend Garnett, Conrad on January 24, 1898, wrote in a postscript no less, "Jess . . . desires me to state that the baby is a very fine baby. I disclaim all responsibility for that statement. Do you really think the volume will do?"⁵² In order to appreciate this, one must first read the serious and thoughtful manner in which Conrad wrote his letters. The dismissal of an important subject in one line of a postscript is hardly characteristic of Joseph Conrad. He then changes the subject completely to ask about a work. Meyer goes so far as to suggest that Conrad was actually hostile toward this pregnancy and the child it produced. He also feels this is characteristic of husbands who have had an unsatisfactory relationship with their own mother. They want to be the only child of a loving, nourishing woman.⁵³

Conrad would not even acknowledge his wife and baby in public. He gave her strict orders that when they went to visit Stephen Crane by train, Jessie George was to act as if she and her son had no connection with him while on that train.⁵⁴ After the birth of his second son John, Conrad exhibited similar peculiarity. This time Jessie and Joseph Conrad were on the train going to France. Conrad

⁵²Edward Garnett, ed., Letters from Joseph Conrad (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1956), p. 129.

⁵³Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 126.

⁵⁴Jessie Conrad, Circle, p. 57.

simply picked up a package containing the infant's clothes and threw it out.⁵⁵

When Conrad's oldest son Borys arrived at his twenty-first birthday, celebrations proceeded downstairs. Conrad's response to this was to remain in bed for three weeks. He later claimed that during this time he was not ill at all.⁵⁶ To put it mildly, Richard Curle says that he is not sure whether Conrad understood his sons. He goes on to state that there was a certain fear mixed in the boys' feelings toward their father.⁵⁷ In Borys Conrad's reminiscences, Borys relates that there was "a barrier of restraint" between his father and him.⁵⁸

Conrad's childish selfishness of his wife was so great that he could not allow her to think of herself. He could not even allow himself to think of her as a weak person--too weak to support him. He insisted that she was not a frail woman no matter what the doctor said.⁵⁹ This is quite a difference from his attitude toward himself.

It is not difficult to see the troubled, insecure relationship Conrad established with the opposite sex and the partial reasons for his emerging, somewhat bitter

⁵⁵Jessie Conrad, Circle, p. 122.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁷Richard Curle, The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, & Co., Inc., 1928), p. 134.

⁵⁸Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 250.

⁵⁹Jessie Conrad, Circle, p. 119.

attitude toward women. Conrad hated the feminism of his age and regarded it as a menace.⁶⁰ Conrad's rejection of chivalry, already mentioned, will be looked at more closely in his fiction. His mistrust of women is clear. Always scared of what women might do to him, Conrad either did not reveal his feelings to the women he was interested in romantically, waited until the last minute to do so, or revealed them so hurriedly that he excluded any room for rejection. Unfortunately, every fearful experience only reinforced another so that in the end, he was most anxious concerning any kind of emotional tie with a woman. The only ties with women in which he felt safe were fictional ones. So great was this feeling that even when his son had married, Jessie Conrad relates that Joseph felt there would be no happiness for Borys, his son.⁶¹ The only fruitful relationship between the sexes, he came to feel, was that of a mother and son. Rejecting one woman as a marriage prospect because of this feeling, he seems to have felt this way also about the woman he did marry.

From this unusual life of Joseph Conrad came the originals of his fictional women. So interrelated are the fictional women and his life that not only does he draw characters from actual life, but he also made the fictional

⁶⁰ Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 151-152.

⁶¹ Jessie Conrad, Circle, p. 257.

women part of his life. This practice is exemplified by Mrs. Conrad's notes on Victory: Conrad was having trouble with the novel. When he finally fought his way to the end, he threw open the window of the house and shouted to Mrs. Conrad in the yard, "She's dead, Jess!" When his wife asked who was dead, he retorted, "Why, Lena, of course. . . ." ⁶²

Drawing his fictional women from actual life, some feel that, in general, Conrad could not draw women as clearly as men because of a foggy memory of his mother. ⁶³ E. H. Visiak feels that Conrad's ideal conception of women is expressed in women like Mrs. Gould and Antonia, who appear in Nostromo. ⁶⁴ Meyer declares that all three Ritas (Rita of The Sisters, Rita of The Arrow of Gold, and Rita of "The Tremolino") represent an idealized and loved mother. ⁶⁵ The courtship of Willems and Aïssa, in An Outcast of the Islands, paralleled that of Joseph Conrad and Jessie George. ⁶⁶ Jocelyn Baines discovers that Antonia, in Nostromo, is more than likely modeled after Tekla, Conrad's cruel, first love, while Janina Taube, Conrad's more gentle, later love, was more like Mrs. Gould, in Nostromo. ⁶⁷ Jerry Allen believes that Paula de Smogyi, the one for whom Conrad supposedly

⁶²Frank W. Cushwa, An Introduction to Conrad (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1933), p. 238.

⁶³Morf, Polish Heritage, p. 41.

⁶⁴Visiak, Mirror, p. 39.

⁶⁵Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 51.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 115.

⁶⁷Baines, Joseph Conrad, p. 28.

fought a duel, was the model for Rita (in all the works already mentioned).⁶⁸ Meyer, however, feels that Rita is a composite creation: Marguerite (his "aunt"), Paula de Smogyi, sweetheart, and mother.⁶⁹ Exactly who was modeled after whom is irrelevant and problematical. What is important is the fact that virtually all of Joseph Conrad's fictional women are modeled after his early loves, Tekla and Janina. Meyer discerns that Tekla seems to be the origin of the women who are cat-like in their qualities; Janina posed for those Conrad wished to put upon a pedestal. Some are even a mixture of these two prototypes.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Allen, Thunder, p. 133.

⁶⁹Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 47.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 218.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONRAD'S WOMEN

In order to understand Conrad's conception of women, their importance in his work, and, more importantly, to realize his all-encompassing philosophy of life, it is essential to observe the characteristics of Joseph Conrad's fictional women. What emerges from this study is partial evidence of a "feminine mystique," if not an actual "femme fatale."

The first characteristic one recognizes is probably the aggressive nature of these heroines. This basic aggressive nature leading to conflict between the men and the women will be discussed in connection with the plot.

As a result of the women's destructiveness, the men who face them are helpless and even fearful in their presence. Adam Gillon finds in Joseph Conrad's fictional men a predominance of this passive kind. He views the men as timid in their relationships with women. Chivalry is a common characteristic of the men. Even the "bad guys" are chivalrous--courteous to women or noble in character. The lovers are considerate to the point of absurdity.⁷¹ The

⁷¹Adam Gillon, The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1963), pp. 70-71.

The response of the men to the women is quite often fear. Moser notes that when Alice speaks to the young captain, his response is fright.⁷² He asserts also that Willems fears Aïssa and Dain fears Nina.⁷³ This peculiar reaction of the men to the women quite often takes the form of impotence in the man. Frederick Karl points out that Winnie married Adolf Verloc in The Secret Agent strictly for security since Verloc is impotent.⁷⁴ Gurko indicates that Anthony and the captain in "A Smile of Fortune" are only able to look at the heroines; there is desire but apparently no ability to consummate their love for one reason or another.⁷⁵ Albert J. Guerard relates that the captain decides to make sexual advances only after his vanity is stung.⁷⁶ Even the man-hating Mrs. Fyne is able to detect in her husband "'femininity,' that drop of superior essence of which I am myself aware."⁷⁷

In addition to aggression, another characteristic of Conrad's fictional women is their isolation. It is usually

⁷²Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 98.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁷⁴Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad (New York: The Noonday Press, 1960), p. 193.

⁷⁵Leo Gurko, Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), p. 214.

⁷⁶Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 53.

⁷⁷Joseph Conrad, Chance: A Tale in Two Parts (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923), p. 146.

emphasized by the fact that many of Conrad's heroines are outcasts. That Flora de Barrel is an outcast is insinuated by mention of her cruel treatment at the hands of those around her. She is without a father when he is in jail, without friends, and without a job. Rita, likewise, feels like "A homeless outcast more than ever--like a little dog lost in the street--not knowing where to go."⁷⁸ Alice Jacobus is an illegitimate child and, therefore, a social outcast. Aïssa in An Outcast of the Islands is a half-caste who belongs to neither the whites nor the dark-skinned people. She is an outcast. Adam Gillon says that her loneliness is typical of Conrad's fictional women. Two women who are often excluded from Joseph Conrad's poor portrayal of women are Jewel in Lord Jim and Mrs. Gould in Nostramo; nevertheless, they, too, are very much isolated. Robert F. Haugh shows that Jewel is isolated by all her fears and misconceptions.⁷⁹ Gillon finds that Mrs. Gould is one of the most solitary of all Conrad's women characters.⁸⁰

Another manifestation of the isolation of Conrad's women is their difficulty in trying to communicate with men. They appear inarticulate. Wilson Follett suggests that the reason is that the women require the use of one's

⁷⁸Joseph Conrad, The Arrow of Gold (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1921), p. 98.

⁷⁹Robert F. Haugh, Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 73.

⁸⁰Gillon, Solitary, p. 151.

intuition to be fully appreciated.⁸¹ Gillon finds that Conrad's women are outside their men's main passion--the sea.⁸² If this were so, they might as well be inarticulate; but, this is hardly the case. There is ever present an attempt by the men to be understood and a portrayal of their inability to understand the women.

In addition, the absence of communication exists even in marriage. The whole of "The Return" concerns itself with a couple, the Herveys, whose marriage is simply a sham. There is no depth or real understanding at all. Even the respectable Mrs. Gould, in Nostromo, discovers that she is losing her husband to the silver. The epitome of this lack of communication between married couples is found in "Amy Foster." In this work the couple might as well be mute--each has a different native language and knows very little of each other's. This virtual muteness is associated with the lack of understanding which terrorizes their marriage.

Another common characteristic of these fictional women, besides isolation and aggression, is their association with an obstacle that prevents the consummation of their love with men. This includes the female's inhibitions regarding sex. Certainly Susan in "The Idiots" rebels when she stabs her husband because of his advances. Mrs. Hervey, upon her return, wants no part of her husband. Felicia

⁸¹ Wilson Follett, Joseph Conrad (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 80.

⁸² Gillon, Solitary, p. 68.

Moorsom, upon hearing the details of her one-time fiancé's death, recoils in fright from Geoffrey's love-making.

More often, however, the obstacle is a father. There exists in many stories an unusually strong father-daughter relationship. Joseph Conrad's first published book, Almayer's Folly, is concerned with this theme. First Meyer discovers that this element is prevalent in the characters (with their fathers, of course) of Nina (Almayer's Folly), Antonia (Nostromo), Flora (Chance), Alice ("A Smile of Fortune"), Freya ("Freya of the Seven Isles"), and Felicia ("The Planter of Malata"). Sometimes this relationship is strengthened by a disability of the father. Three of the men, including the father of Aïssa, are blind.⁸³

Some see Nina in this father-daughter relationship as simply a symbol of perfection and beauty.⁸⁴ Others see actual coquetry between daughter and father in the passages of this first published work of Conrad. Moser points to the passages he thinks indicate a rejected lover rather than a disappointed father. The father insinuates that she should not choose another as she has been "caressing my cheek." Moser suggests that her reply indicates she needs a fuller sex life or, as she says, a life of "power and love."⁸⁵ Whether one wishes to accept this interpretation

⁸³Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 268.

⁸⁴Gillon, Solitary, p. 119.

⁸⁵Moser, Achievement, pp. 52-53.

or not is not important. The fact is that Almayer's response reveals that he would rather strangle her than have her leave him and marry Dain. Also, as Moser concludes, Nina does seem to enjoy this episode like a girl viewing two fellows fighting over her. The reader does get the feeling that Nina Almayer is betraying her father.⁸⁶ In support of this interpretation, Gillon believes that de Barrel feels his daughter betrays him when she marries Anthony.⁸⁷ Even the villains like Scevola are like fathers in that they consider themselves as providers more than as husbands to their wives. These villains are also like fathers in protecting their wives' virtue.⁸⁸ Norman Sherry finds the marriage theme present in similar forms in Conrad's writing. Furthermore, the marriage ultimately implicates a father. Cornelius (Lord Jim) and Almayer (Almayer's Folly) both marry the female protégé of their benefactors. Jim (Lord Jim) must relieve Cornelius so he falls for Jewel, the step-daughter of Cornelius. Willems (An Outcast of the Islands), likewise, marries the daughter of his first benefactor.⁸⁹

Sometimes it is the suitor's own extreme politeness which prevents the union of him and the woman he loves.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

⁸⁷ Gillon, Solitary, p. 74.

⁸⁸ Moser, Achievement, pp. 113-114.

⁸⁹ Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 133.

Megroz thinks there is in Conrad's work a chivalry towards women which belongs to the dark patriarchal age.⁹⁰ Gurko believes that in providing this motif, Conrad is making a study of frustrated sexual desire. Conrad has very little sympathy for one who tries to elevate himself to the chivalric position of unselfishness. The outcome of such a humanitarian impulse can only be destruction. A character such as Roderick Anthony is only a "whipping boy for the inhibited Victorian male."⁹¹

Paul L. Wiley thinks that the fullest expression of the distrust of the chivalric ideal is in The Rescue. The Rover he sees as an affirmation of this.⁹² One need only review the works to substantiate this idea. The Rescue and The Rover are the last two fictional works published by Conrad. In The Rescue Tom Lingard finds himself in love with the wife of one of the men in his custody. In the sequence of events, Lingard finds that he must deliver Travers and d'Alcacer or allow Immada and Hassim to be killed if he holds true to his life-for-a-life pact with Damon, a chieftain warrior. Tom Lingard, of course, finds the solution to this dilemma compounded by the fact that he is now in love with Travers's wife. Because of this indecision, Lingard lets Edith Travers know that he wants

⁹⁰ Megroz, Mind, p. 192.

⁹¹ Gurko, Giant, p. 207.

⁹² Paul L. Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 188.

no part of her any more by turning his back to her and sailing to the north. The reason is that Lingard feels she has robbed him of his strength and power to help his friends.

The affirmation of this distrust of one trying to elevate himself beyond reason is Joseph Conrad's last published novel, The Rover. In this work the two lovers are Arlette and Lieutenant Réal. Although Réal is very much in love with Arlette, he indicates that he is unable to court her because he has been ordered by Napoleon to allow himself to be caught while carrying false dispatches that will send the British to another part of the Mediterranean. The following passage reveals this chivalrous absurdity:

[Réal] looked very seldom at Arlette for fear of being caught in the act.

The discovery that she had taken to wandering at night had upset him all the same, because that sort of thing was unaccountable. It gave him a shock which unsettled, not his resolution, but his fortitude. That morning he had allowed himself, while she was waiting on him, to be caught looking at her and then, losing his self-control, had given her that kiss on the hand. Directly he had done it he was appalled. He had over-stepped the line. . . . This was an absolute moral disaster.⁹³

Prevention of physical union in Joseph Conrad's works is obviously significant inasmuch as it occurs in so many novels and short stories. Besides the works already mentioned, there are Lena and Heyst in Victory. They are an excellent example of Conrad's denunciation of chivalry. Heyst takes Lena to a deserted island where the two live.

⁹³ Joseph Conrad, The Rover (Garden City: Doubleday Page & Company, 1923), pp. 212-213.

To the dismay of Lena, however, she finds that she is not a woman to Heyst; she is, instead, one who is causing an imperfection in what Heyst considers a noble and high character. Heyst makes it obvious to Lena that he is disturbed over the fact that he has become vulnerable to his emotions and not loyal to his code of conduct.

Even when the lovers do marry, they do not have any children. Marriages within a Conrad story never bear fruit.⁹⁴ Husband and wife act as if they are still single.⁹⁵ It is almost as if no marriage really takes place. This relationship involves not only the physical aspects of marriage; there are also no glimpses into the giving and taking characteristic of such a bond. Some critics would exclude the Goulds from this conclusion on the grounds that Conrad understands the undercurrents of married life by his illustration of their lives. However, one need only look at the attitude Mrs. Gould has toward her husband; she treats him "as if he were a little boy."⁹⁶ If Conrad did make an exception to his portrayal of faulty married life, that exception would depict that of a mother and child rather than a married couple. Quite the contrary is true, however. Richard Curle finds that Conrad's women are characteristically maternal.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Moser, Achievement, p. 109.

⁹⁵Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 272.

⁹⁶Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1921), p. 208.

⁹⁷Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Treibner & Company, Ltd., 1914), p. 145.

Likewise, Mrs. Gould is maternal. The Goulds are no exception to Conrad's portrayal for this reason. In addition, Mrs. Gould and her husband are without the children who would be a rival to the father (This is characteristic of Conrad's writings.).

Besides the distinctions already mentioned, Joseph Conrad's heroines share many physical characteristics which denote their strength or power. In Sarah Ruth Jones's thesis, "Does Joseph Conrad Present a Fixed Feminine Type," she finds that the power of Conrad's women lies in four areas: (1) the type of her beauty, (2) her capacity for great romantic love, (3) her heroic qualities, and (4) her mentality.⁹⁸ One of these points is significant here--the power of their beauty. Apparently all critics agree on this quality of Conrad's fictional figures. Miss Jones discovers that with the exception of a few of the women studied (The women studied were Nina Almayer, Aïssa, Jewel, Mrs. Gould, Winnie Verloc, Nathalie Haldin, Flora de Barrel, Lena, Doña Rita, and Mrs. Travers), they are tall.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Miss Jones finds that all the women, with the exception of Mrs. Gould, Winnie Verloc, and Aïssa, have fine, white teeth.¹⁰⁰ Visiak notes that "Conrad's women are dentally

⁹⁸Sarah Ruth Jones, "Does Joseph Conrad Present a Fixed Feminine Type" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1926), pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 96-97.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 101.

superb."¹⁰¹ Ford Maddox Ford wrote of Conrad's disappointment in discovering that he (Ford) wanted him to omit the detail of the teeth:

Why not good teeth? Good teeth in a woman are part of her charm. Think of when she laughs. You would not have her not have good teeth. They are a sign of health. Your damn woman has to be healthy, doesn't she?¹⁰²

Meyer relates this pertinent feature of the women to their overall feral appearance. The teeth are one of their terrifying features.¹⁰³ Mrs. Shomberg (Victory) is one of the few, and possibly the only one, who has a discolored tooth, a blue one.¹⁰⁴ One must remember, though, that she is not a creature to which Conrad intends to have men attracted; her own husband chases another woman, Lena. She is thought by all to be very ugly.

In addition to their perfect teeth, their hair is also a manifestation of the power of the woman over men. Descriptions of the women's hair are always there. Even when other features are not mentioned, there is the elaborate illustration of the hair. Miss Jones traces the description of the hair throughout Conrad's works in connection with the women she studied. She concludes that their hair is usually long and dark.¹⁰⁵ Meyer asserts that their hair styles are

¹⁰¹Visiak, Mirror, p. 69.

¹⁰²Ford, Personal Remembrance, p. 152.

¹⁰³Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 171.

¹⁰⁴Haugh, p. 105.

¹⁰⁵Jones, "Feminine Type," p. 99.

mostly of two types. One of these favorite coiffures is the single tress--"it reminded one of a club"--hanging down the back, and the other is the helmet-like coiffure of Kurtz's Congo woman, Felicia Moorsom, and Mrs. Hervey.¹⁰⁶ Certainly both of these hair styles denote strength. Meyer observes that Conrad had a revulsion toward hair which was not neat. This lack of neatness is typical of evil women. This, though, cannot be generalized. The unscrupulous Mrs. Fyne, who represented the feminism Conrad hated, is seen sitting without a hair out of place (Chance).

Nevertheless, some generalizations concerning the characteristics of Conrad's fictional characters can be made. Their attributes reveal isolated creatures of great strength. Because of this strength and isolation, the men they encounter are virtually never able to penetrate their world so beset by obstacles as to prevent actual sexual consummation.

¹⁰⁶Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 294-295.

CHAPTER III

IMAGERY ASSOCIATED WITH THE WOMEN

Although the characteristics of the women in his stories reveal quite a bit about Conrad's attitude toward women, generally and in his own life, the imagery of his female characters reveals even more about their prominent and symbolic role in his fiction. No doubt Conrad was very careful in choosing just the right words to describe them. He said himself: "Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world."¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, probably much more is revealed about his attitude toward women than he ever intended. Their imagery is no less important than their characteristics in conveying his themes.

Meyer finds, as already mentioned, that Conrad makes reference to the women's cat-like qualities because of the way he describes their teeth. Meyer substantiates the association between women and cats by finding many direct references to cats in the women's description. Aïssa is like "an animal as full of harm as a wild cat."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Joseph Conrad, Some Reminiscences (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912), p. 8.

¹⁰⁸Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 117.

The girl in "The Inn of the Two Witches" is like a "hungry cat." Winnie Verloc is described as "ready to fly at her father's eyes--like a cat."¹⁰⁹ In Tekla's feelings to Razumov she is as a "little cat." Meyer also finds that the tawny color of Rita's hair in The Arrow of Gold and the tawny color of the niece's hair in "Falk" serve to remind one of their leonine qualities.¹¹⁰

This tawny color is not, by any means, the most significant color reference. There are many more to color: white, black, and red play far greater roles in describing women. The women, at first, appear to be associated with white and black equally. One needs only to take a closer look to discover that the women are united with black. This association with black sometimes takes the form of shadows, fogs, or darkness. The white which appears, as will be explained, is essentially not united, as the black, with the woman.

The women are related to blackness in many different ways. The great majority of the women have dark or black hair. They are often a member of the dark races. Claire Rosenfield asserts that Winnie Verloc literally and symbolically is a creature who turns out the lights.¹¹¹ She is described in this way when approaching another: "Near

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 171.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 294-295.

¹¹¹Claire Rosenfield, Paradise of Snakes: An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Political Novels (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 260.

him, her black form merged in the night, like a figure half chiselled out of a block of black stone."¹¹² Claire Rosenfield calls Winnie "the shadowy feminine principle."¹¹³ In "Heart of Darkness," it is a woman who embodies this heart of darkness. The native woman who loves Kurtz is described as "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent. . . ." Her relationship with the heart of darkness or jungle is that

. . . in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous, passionate soul.¹¹⁴

This girl is the physical embodiment of the heart of darkness. When she throws her hands up to the sky, "at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer in a shadowy embrace."¹¹⁵ Even the women in Antwerp at the beginning of the story are two women knitting black wool. The two women knitted their black wool feverishly while on the lap of one is the ever-present cat found in Conrad's works. One woman is described as "uncanny and fateful." The two women were thought of as

¹¹² Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1921), p. 229.

¹¹³ Rosenfield, Snakes, p. 113.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," in Heart of Darkness, ed. by Robert Kimbrough (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 62.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

. . . guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. Old Knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant (Hail! . . . Those who are about to die salute you.)¹¹⁶

Kurtz's Intended is first met dressed in black¹¹⁷ and is referred to as "a Shade."¹¹⁸

When the woman is unable to be part of the jungle darkness, she is united with the fog of the cities. When Conrad describes the cities, he describes Winnie Verloc. Therefore, Winnie is related to the abyss of the fog.¹¹⁹ When Winnie's face is seen, it is "veiled in black net, in the light of a gaslamp veiled in a gauze of mist."¹²⁰ This mist or fog is equated with the black net Winnie is wearing.

The black veil plays a symbolic role in connection with women other than Winnie. Mrs. Hervey in "The Return" wears a veil, and Nathalie Haldin in Under Western Eyes also wears a veil. Taminah in Almayer's Folly wears a veil because she feels "shy among so many men."¹²¹ One finds a clue to the veil's anticipated meaning in Winnie's description. Winnie "under her black veil, in her own

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

¹¹⁹ Donald C. Yelton, Studies in English Literature, Vol. XXXIX: Mimesis and Metaphor (Paris: Mouton & Company, 1968), p. 127.

¹²⁰ Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent, p. 229.

¹²¹ Joseph Conrad, Almayer's Folly (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), p. 114.

house," is "like a masked and mysterious visitor of impenetrable intentions."¹²² That the veil designates a mysterious barrier between man and woman is also suggested in An Outcast of the Islands when Willems "turned furiously upon her and, tearing off her face-veil, trampled upon it as though it had been a mortal enemy."¹²³ Willems did not want this barrier between Aïssa and him. Donald C. Yelton believes that when the husband of Winnie tries to penetrate the mystery surrounding his wife by removing the veil, he discovers that he cannot.¹²⁴

Whiteness, often appearing as light in Conrad's works, is not only essentially outside the women, but they at times express aversion to it. In The Arrow of Gold, Rita is most at ease at night. With the approach of dawn, she exclaims:

Daylight, Don't look at me, George. I can't face daylight. No--not with you. . . . Nothing could touch the Rita whose hand was kissed by you. But now! Never in daylight.¹²⁵

Lena also prefers the dark:

. . . the tragic brutality of the light made her long for the friendly night, with its stars stilled by an austere spell; for the velvety dark

¹²² Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent, p. 211.

¹²³ Joseph Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, Inc., 1925), p. 139.

¹²⁴ Yelton, Metaphor, p. 256.

¹²⁵ Joseph Conrad, The Arrow of Gold, pp. 333-334.

sky and the mysterious great shadow of the sea conveying peace to the day-weary heart.¹²⁶

Moser feels that there is a pattern to the whiteness and darkness explained in terms of good and evil. In "Heart of Darkness" he discerns whiteness as evil and darkness as good. In Victory whiteness is good in a more religious sense, "a divine purity."¹²⁷ Good and evil, however, will hardly explain the significance of white and black in Conrad's fiction. Moser does say that the heroine is surrounded by light when she rejects the man.¹²⁸ The rejection itself, though, is not the reason for the illumination. The brilliance is precipitated by the conscious awareness (usually a man's) of those forces which govern, the dark, mysterious, impenetrable woman. In support of this view, Robert F. Haugh finds that the light appears in part during passionate moments of human communication.¹²⁹

When Mr. Hervey follows his wife to the bedroom after her return to him, he finds the light about her almost blinding. It is at this point in the novel that the sympathy of the reader changes from her to him. After giving her speech on conventional morality and finding his words to be hollow to his own ears, he begins to realize the truth

¹²⁶ Joseph Conrad, Victory (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1921), p. 159.

¹²⁷ Moser, Achievement, p. 125.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

¹²⁹ Haugh, Discovery, p. 50.

of the situation. While asking his wife if she can stand their sham of a marriage, he answers the question himself with the words, "Well, I can't" and leaves never to return. Hervey is now aware of the forces in power over him or the truth of the situation, and it is too ugly for him to bear. Moser mentions the episode between Flora, de Barrel, and Anthony in Chance in connection with light. His interpretation of the light, though, is different from the one supported by this paper. What does happen is that when Flora chooses Anthony over her father, her father becomes aware of the elements at power (Flora). Like Hervey, de Barrel finds this truth--the fact that Flora chooses Anthony--too ugly; he commits suicide. Even inanimate objects which shed light are spoken of as feminine. When Hervey is about to open the bedroom door where his wife is, he says that the light fixture is a "sightless woman of marble" who is "thrusting blindly at them a cluster of lights."¹³⁰

Freya wishes to make Heemskirk suffer for trying to kiss her. When she knows Heemskirk is peeping at her, she throws kisses to the other man, "the slowly ascending sun brought the glory of colour to the world, turning . . . the brig below her white--dazzlingly white. . . ." Prior to this, all is "shadowy" or "black shadows." Heemskirk is not only literally seeing; Freya is the agent in his figuratively

¹³⁰ Joseph Conrad, "The Return," Tales of Unrest (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920), p. 301.

"seeing the light."¹³¹ When Monsieur George enters the abode of Rita, he finds that "in contrast to the dark hall the room was most unexpectedly dazzling to my eyes, as if illuminated a giorno for a reception."¹³² George, like the others, realizes that his woman embodies the elements at power--she is in control of George.

It appears, then, that the color black is united with the woman. Blackness symbolizes her mystery, impenetrability, power, sensuality, and subconscious. Whiteness is not as closely associated with the woman. Nevertheless, it many times appears in connection with them. Whiteness occurs whenever another (usually a man) realizes the significance of the woman--one of power and mystery.

The women aroused to passion are frequently united with images of black and red. The association seems to be with sexual passion (red) and its deadly implications (black)--the power the woman has over the man. The most prominent of these figures is that of Mrs. Hervey in "The Return." She is portrayed in blackness and red brilliance in her bedroom: "The red glow from the vertical bars of the grate stood out at her feet, black and curved."¹³³ She is "like a black phantom in the red twilight."¹³⁴ In

¹³¹ Joseph Conrad, "Freya of the Seven Isles," in Tales of Land and Sea, ed. by William McFee (Garden City: Hanover House, 1953), pp. 418-419.

¹³² Joseph Conrad, The Arrow of Gold, p. 286.

¹³³ Joseph Conrad, "The Return," p. 295.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 298.

Lord Jim Jewel realizes that Jim is going to give his life for that of a native. In her outburst of passion, she flings her arms about his neck to prevent his going through with his sacrifice. While she uses her feminine charms to keep him with her, "the sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, steaming, like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the tree-tops, and the forest below had a black and forbidding face."¹³⁵ The same black and red appears here as it did in Mrs. Hervey's passion.

In The Secret Agent Winnie Verloc entices Tom into marrying her: "Take me out of the country. I'll work for you. I'll slave for you. I'll love you. I've no one in the world. . . . Who would look at me if you don't!"¹³⁶ In the same breath she speaks of her brother's death and shouts, "Blood and dirt! Blood and dirt!"¹³⁷ or red and black, red and black. When Freya wishes to make Heemskirk jealous, she throws good-bye kisses passionately to Jasper Allen while Heemskirk is looking. In this passionate gesture, "Her face was rosy." In her ability to arouse but not satisfy Heemskirk, "she was excited, she tingled all over, she had tasted blood!"¹³⁸ Conrad must have realized the disturbing sensation produced within himself by red and black. He wrote of

¹³⁵ Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1920), p. 306.

¹³⁶ Joseph Conrad, Secret Agent, p. 236.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 236-237.

¹³⁸ Joseph Conrad, "Freya of the Seven Isles," p. 419.

Felicia Moorsam in "The Planter of Malata": "All he had captured in his first, keen, instantly lowered glance was the impression that her hair was magnificently red and her eyes very black. It was a troubling effect."¹³⁹

Probably associated with redness in the context of the women is the fire imagery which Meyer and Moser discover in Conrad's fiction. Moser associates the red gleam about Mrs. Hervey with the fire imagery indicative of destructive female passion.¹⁴⁰ Meyer sees Felicia as the personification of fire, Mrs. Hervey as though she had been on fire, and Heyst's death by fire as the result of Lena.¹⁴¹ There are many other references made to the hand of the woman. Meyer cites Lingard's dropping Mrs. Travers's hand "suddenly as if it had burnt him." Willems flings his hand away from Aïssa "brutally like something burning."

There are other numerous references to shoes and fur in Conrad's imagery found by Meyer. Albert J. Guerard mentions that when the captain picks up Alice's shoe, he completes an act or ritual which becomes stereotyped in Conrad's love stories.¹⁴² Meyer declares that the many references to feet, footwear, and furs are actually fetishes of Conrad. At any rate, one must admit that the attention

¹³⁹Joseph Conrad, "The Planter of Malata," Within the Tides (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1916), p. 12.

¹⁴⁰Moser, Achievement, pp. 124-125.

¹⁴¹Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 174.

¹⁴²Guerard, Novelist, p. 53.

given to the feet is unusual. Meyer continues by observing the following passage in The Arrow of Gold which takes place when Monsieur George is looking at Rita's feet:

. . . the very shape, feel, and warmth of her high-heeled slipper, that would sometimes in the heat of the discussion drop on the floor with a crash, and which I would (always in the heat of the discussion) pick up and toss back on the couch.

When Edith Travers drops her sandal and picks it up, she begins "to regain her sense of the situation and the memory of the immediate past." When Ricardo catches sight of Lena's foot, he "throws himself on it greedily." He "presses his lips time after time to the instep muttering gasping words that were like sobs, making little noises that resembled sounds of grief and distress." Meyer also cites the fact that Geoffrey Renouard looks steadfastly at Felicia's shoe while talking to her. Besides believing that Conrad had a foot fetish, Meyer suggests that the sandal in the case of Mrs. Travers is some kind of a defense against male sexuality,¹⁴³ and the slipper of Alice held by her father is a symbol of his authority.¹⁴⁴

This imagery and outright references to the foot, however, more than likely are connected with the statue imagery of the heroines--the men are in a subservient position to them or are "down on their knees" worshipping them. Monsieur George significantly says before his elaboration of her footwear, "I had the time to lay my infinite

¹⁴³Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 295-297.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 76.

adoration at her feet. . . ." The men are often found literally and symbolically prostrating themselves before the women.

Quite a few critics associate stone imagery with Conrad's women. Aurom Fleishman finds in this stone imagery a depiction of inorganic nature in its silence and immobility.¹⁴⁵ Meyer finds in the allusions to statues and stones an enduring hardness of women. He summarizes by stating that this hardness expressed in allegories of persons and statues is not hard to understand when one takes into account the sensitive Joseph Conrad and his exposure to disease, disaster, and death. He looked for solidity and immortality in all things.¹⁴⁶ Paul L. Wiley cites the passage describing Felicia as a stone to Renouard.¹⁴⁷ Mrs. Hervey is "strong and upright like an obelisk." Captain Hermann's niece in "Falk" is like "an allegorical statue of the earth." Dona Rita "had a face like the faces of women sculptured."¹⁴⁸ Such passages are by no means infrequent.

It is not, however, the hardness and solidity that are so important in the interpretation of the statue imagery. The statuary, stone, and marble allusions lie somewhere

¹⁴⁵Aurom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), pp. 199-200.

¹⁴⁶Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 31-32.

¹⁴⁷Wiley, Measure, p. 161.

¹⁴⁸Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 31-32.

between the idea of falling at the woman's feet to worship her and the death imagery connected with her. Alice is sitting in her garden like a statue. "Her eyes were nearly closed, with only a horrible white gleam under the lids as if she were dead."¹⁴⁹ Even when the statuary or stone is likened indirectly with women, the message is death. Such is the case of the drawing-room of Kurtz's Intended:

The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus.

She came forward, all in black.¹⁵⁰

M. C. Bradbrook finds the atmosphere of the grave to be very strong in this scene.¹⁵¹ This is certainly a description of death symbolically indicated by the marble. The most impressive association between stone and death occurs in connection with Winnie Verloc. She is described as "death itself." The embodiment of this death is her form which was "a figure chiselled out of a block of black stone."¹⁵²

The jungle or vegetation imagery is a part of the women too. What is strange, however, is that it, too, is associated with death or decadence. It is first necessary to establish the relationship between the women and the

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Conrad, "A Smile of Fortune," Twixt Land and Sea (Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1919), p. 83.

¹⁵⁰ Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 75.

¹⁵¹ M. C. Bradbrook, Joseph Conrad: Poland's English Genius (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 29.

¹⁵² Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent, p. 229.

jungle. This is not difficult to do. Moser points to an unusual scene in Almayer's Folly. When Nina and Dain go into the jungle, there are references to creepers and flowers which reveal the femininity of the destructive jungle. While Nina throws her arms around the neck of Dain, parasites with pink and blue flowers strangle gigantic trees.¹⁵³ The life in the forest producing death is equated with women.¹⁵⁴ Karl finds that from Almayer's Folly to An Outcast of the Islands the jungle is a dominant death theme.¹⁵⁵ Guerard asserts that with the jungle and the thick grass, sex is an implicit menace. Consummation and embrace elicit Conrad's "gloomiest" writing.¹⁵⁶

Images of vegetation, like those of the jungle, are associated with Conrad's women. Frequently the girls are first seen sitting in a garden. When Alice is there, "the garden was one mass of gloom, like a cemetery of flowers buried in the darkness."¹⁵⁷ More unusual imagery is the young captain's association of Alice with the odor of rotten potatoes. As soon as the captain is aware of the awful odor of rotting potatoes, his thoughts turn to Alice:

. . . that lot of potatoes. My bargain with all its remotest associations, mental and visual--the garden of flowers and scents, the girl with her

¹⁵³Moser, Achievement, p. 54.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁵⁵Karl, Reader's Guide, p. 100.

¹⁵⁶Guerard, Novelist, p. 54.

¹⁵⁷Joseph Conrad, "A Smile of Fortune," p. 68.

provoking contempt and her tragic loneliness of a hopeless castaway--was everlastingly dangled before my eyes, for thousands of miles along the open sea. And as if by a satanic refinement of irony it was accompanied by a most awful smell. Whiffs from decaying potatoes pursued me in the poop, they mingled with my thoughts, with my food, poisoned my very dreams. They made an atmosphere of corruption for the ship.¹⁵⁸

There is, likewise, a union of some sort between death and consummation. As already mentioned, Dain and Nina go out into the death-like regions of the jungle to make love. When Anthony finally seeks a physical union in his marriage, Powell remarks of the room they are in: "It was very still in there; still as death."¹⁵⁹

Exactly what all this means precisely is difficult to say. Guerard feels that the jungle is primarily the enemy of consciousness.¹⁶⁰ Moser thinks that the linking of the jungle with the women and death is related to the idea that fertility is linked with death.¹⁶¹ Wiley suggests that the whole idea associated with decadence in "Heart of Darkness" is the "decadence" at the end of the century and connected this with a failure of normal love. This idea, he feels, is represented in Kurtz's Intended.¹⁶² Whatever other implications come later, all must agree so far that the fecundity, mystery, and danger of vegetation are united with the women.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁵⁹Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 434.

¹⁶⁰Albert Guerard, Jr., Joseph Conrad: Direction One (Parsyspany, New Jersey: Dudley Kemball, 1947), p. 36.

¹⁶¹Moser, Achievement, pp. 53-54.

¹⁶²Wiley, Measure, p. 63.

Water plays an unusual role in the imagery of the women. Water imagery sometimes suggests death. Claire Rosenfield finds that the idea of death imaged by pools, dark rain, stagnant water, dampness, or a devouring, drowning sea is used to describe Winnie Verloc.¹⁶³ M. C. Bradbrook discovers that when Flora and Arlette "come to life" (are passionate), they are depicted in drowning imagery.¹⁶⁴ What is important to note is that the death associated with the sea or drowning is equated with the life-like quality (passion) of the women. This is usually suggested in connection with their long, dark hair. When Flora de Barrel is seen finally embracing her husband, her "hair hung back in a dark mass like the hair of a drowned woman."¹⁶⁵ The lieutenant in The Rover discovers that when he looks at Arlette, she "looked as if he had just saved her from drowning. . . ." because of the way her hair looked.¹⁶⁶ When Dain, Nina's lover now in her embrace, talks to Nina about the mystery of the sea, "Nina's head had been gradually sinking lower."¹⁶⁷ Kurtz's Intended "came forward . . . floating"¹⁶⁸ in her abode of living death.

¹⁶³Rosenfield, Snakes, p. 113.

¹⁶⁴Bradbrook, Genius, p. 73.

¹⁶⁵Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 430.

¹⁶⁶Joseph Conrad, The Rover, p. 249.

¹⁶⁷Joseph Conrad, Almayer's Folly, p. 174.

¹⁶⁸Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 75.

When Lena feels "a sensation of warmth to her breast," it is "like a new sort of life."¹⁶⁹ She is then viewed supporting herself from a fall. Without stretching the imagination, this scene is reminiscent of the embrace of Nina and Dain, Arlette and Réal, and Flora and Anthony in that the embrace of a woman is associated with wetness. Of particular importance is the wetness of her hair coupled with the sensuality of the scene. Lena is seen

. . . embracing with both arms one of the tall, roughly carved posts holding the mosquito net above the bed. For a long time she clung to it, with her forehead leaning against the wood. One side of her loosened sarong had slipped down as low as her hip. The long brown tresses of her hair fell in lank wisps, as if wet, almost black against her white body. Her uncovered flank, damp with the sweat of anguish and fatigue gleamed coldly with the immobility of polished marble in the hot diffused light falling through the window above her head--a dim reflection of the consuming, passionate blaze of sunshine outside, all aquiver with the effort to set the earth on fire, to burn it to ashes.¹⁷⁰

When Monsieur George is smelling violets, Rita's scent, he finds this is "bringing me closer to her than the closest embrace." Still in Rita's bedroom, George finds that:

What troubled me was the sudden, as it were material, consciousness of time passing as water flows. It seemed to me that it was only the tenacity of my sentiment that held the woman's body extended and tranquil, above the flood.¹⁷¹

Again, in the scene of an embrace, the woman is illustrated

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Conrad, Victory, p. 221.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Conrad, Victory, p. 222.

¹⁷¹ Joseph Conrad, The Arrow of Gold, p. 295.

in drowning imagery. When Alvan Hervey is about to enter the bedroom of his wife, he feels he is completely surrounded by women. The dramatic illustration of man's victimization by women is seen in the maid's ascent up the stairs: He saw her come up gradually, "as if ascending from a well." He feels the darkness clinging to her black skirt is "rising like a silent flood." "It flowed from outside--it rose higher, in a destructive silence." The lights went out "and on her track the flowing tide of a tenebrous sea filled the house, seemed to swirl about his feet, and rising unchecked, closed silently above his head."¹⁷² Certainly this feeling of drowning is associated with his giving in to the sexual powers of his wife--he goes to her to make amends though to no avail. Perhaps the tie between the waters and the women is as Dain says: "The sea, O Nina, is like a woman's heart."¹⁷³

There is also a strange connection between the women and the sailing vessels of the sea. Jasper Allen has his manliness united with a brig:

His feelings for the brig and for the girl were as dissolubly united in his heart as you may fuse two precious metals together in one crucible.¹⁷⁴

When the brig is destroyed, he is sent into delirium. The destruction of the brig brings about anemia and death to Freya. Freya and the brig seem to be identified in the depths of his mind. In "The Brute" a ship is described

¹⁷² Joseph Conrad, "The Return," pp. 308-309.

¹⁷³ Joseph Conrad, Almayer's Folly, p. 174.

¹⁷⁴ Joseph Conrad, "Freya of the Seven Isles," p. 390.

deliberately and misleadingly to suggest a woman:

She did her best to break up my pluck for me tho'. She jolly near drove as fine a fellow as ever lived into a madhouse. . . . It used to make me sick to think of her going about the world murdering people.¹⁷⁵

As a steamer passes in "Heart of Darkness" bearing the dying Kurtz, the image of a woman is pictured in the description. Harry in "Tomorrow" draws an analogy between women and ships: "A ship's a ship. You love her and leave her, and a voyage isn't a marriage."¹⁷⁶ Moser points out the fact that in The Nigger of the Narcissus, there is only one woman in the ideal world and that is the Narcissus.¹⁷⁷ In "A Smile of Fortune" the captain of the Hilda is grieving because he has lost the figurehead of his ship at sea. He is not consoled by being told that he can replace it. His reply is "I would just as soon think of getting a new wife."¹⁷⁸ The figurehead is, incidentally, that of a woman. The woman's tie with the ship or brig is undoubtedly made to illustrate her more important union with the sea.

In addition to the imagery mentioned, there is also imagery used which portrays the women as androgynous. The most masculine woman who comes to mind immediately is Mrs.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Conrad, "The Brute," in Tales of Land and Sea, ed. by William McFee (Garden City: Hanover House, 1953), pp. 270-271.

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Conrad, "Tomorrow," in Typhoon and Other Stories (Garden City: Doubleday, 1921), p. 268.

¹⁷⁷ Moser, Achievement, p. 69.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Conrad, "A Smile of Fortune," p. 28.

Fyne in Chance. She is described as a terribly unfeminine person who has three daughters and continually surrounds herself with women. She represents anything which is against women's traditional role. In The Arrow of Gold Monsieur George is the victim of an Amazon whose head is "delicately masculine."¹⁷⁹ Nathalie has characteristics which carry a masculine stamp.¹⁸⁰ Meyer asserts that a symbolic phallus is on the woman's person: (1) Lena hides a knife in the folds of her skirt, (2) Rita has the arrow of gold in her hair, (3) the women have piercing glances, and (4) the wife of Gaspar Ruiz wears a sword that she "loved to feel beating upon her thigh."¹⁸¹ Meyer even finds that in describing the dress of the women, masculine apparel slips into the picture.¹⁸² The importance of this is probably overemphasized by some. More than likely, what is creeping into the imagery of the women is, as Gillon says, Conrad's Victorian negation of the independent woman.¹⁸³ Conrad writes in Nostromo in reference to Antonia: "A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency; she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation."¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 46.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 231-232.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 278.

¹⁸³ Gillon, Solitary, p. 70.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Conrad, Nostromo, pp. 66-67.

An awareness of Conrad's conscious attitude toward women is necessary to an understanding of his fiction. He thought that the woman who arouses one should be pursued.

Any other path would be dangerous and unnatural:

Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily fall short of the--the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering from which indeed something significant may come at last, which may be criminal or heroic, may be madness or wisdom--or even a straight if despairing decision.¹⁸⁵

His plots bear out the attitude toward women expressed in this passage. The imagery of his female characters, however, reveals not only his unconscious attitude toward women but more strikingly and profoundly the nature of his "feminine mystique." It reveals that, though Conrad believes a woman should be pursued, she is at the same time a mysterious, deadly, passionate force to be feared and revered.

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Conrad, Chance, pp. 426-427.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN AND THE PLOT

Some feel Conrad's women characters do not contribute much to the advancement of his plots; his stories would fare just as well without them. However, this is not true. The women characters are essential even in his plots centering on the all-male world of the sea. In still other works the women are responsible for almost every action.

Megroz says that Nostromo would be reduced by half in depth as well as length without the women, Mrs. Gould and Viola's daughters.¹⁸⁶ Mrs. Gould has the idealism that her husband has and is responsible for encouraging him in his own. She enters Conrad's moral world and is just as corrupted by the mine as her husband.¹⁸⁷

The "Heart of Darkness" is usually considered a sea story with virtually all of its characters being men. Quite antithetical to this belief is the fact that "Heart of Darkness" is a work about the female element. Already mentioned, the native girl in the jungle and Kurtz's Intended are the two most important characters in the work because they embody

¹⁸⁶ Megroz, Mind, p. 194.

¹⁸⁷ Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952), p. 61.

what the entire work is really about. The Intended, through imagery, is linked to Kurtz and has no separate existence without him.¹⁸⁸ When Kurtz dies, the place where she lives is like a tomb--she is dead too. The native girl is actually the heart or "soul" of this darkness. The girl and the darkness are one and the same. Guerard finds that this same darkness is one of "passivity, paralysis, and immobilization; it is from the state of entranced languor rather than from the monstrous desires that the double Kurtz, this shadow, must be saved." He goes on to say that Freudian theory suggests that this preoccupation may indicate a fear of the feminine.¹⁸⁹ So it is that the "Heart of Darkness" is really essentially and primarily a story of the woman.

Even in Lord Jim the role of Jewel is so significant that through her one is able to observe Jim's irresponsibility.¹⁹⁰ He is a dreamer who does not really see his ties with this world. If one can discover the importance of the women in the better "sea stories" that appear to have no meaningful women, it is obvious what is to be expected from Conrad's writings which have more apparent female roles.

The events of Victory are the result of the action of two women.¹⁹¹ The hero, Heyst, can do nothing and will

¹⁸⁸Lillian Feder, "Marlow's Descent into Hell," in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, ed. by Bradford A. Booth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), p. 289.

¹⁸⁹Guerard, Novelist, p. 47.

¹⁹⁰Moser, Achievement, p. 34.

¹⁹¹Megroz, Mind, p. 194.

do nothing.¹⁹² Even the victory is Lena's.¹⁹³ In Almayer's Folly, Nina is the great power. She is the stimulus that drives her father to seek gold; she is the avenue through which her father wishes to gain respectability.¹⁹⁴ In The Arrow of Gold, Rita is the controlling factor in both the Carlist intrigue and the episode of romantic love.¹⁹⁵ In Chance Flora de Barrel is the main influence over Anthony as well as her father. It is her decisions and moves that bring about the action in the plot.

Although the women characters are most significant wherever they appear and at times carry the main action entirely, it is true that their frequency of appearances in the works and the detail in their descriptions vary throughout the writing career of Joseph Conrad. The appearance of these women characters--including what they represent--and the attention given them by Conrad appear to vary to a great extent with the quality of Conrad's writing ability as he himself recognized. When he is able to disguise their menacing sexual significance, there seems to be no problem for Conrad. On the other hand, Conrad apparently falls into a creative vacuum if the female protagonists and their influence are recognized by Conrad for what they are.

¹⁹² Karl, Guide, p. 256.

¹⁹³ Megroz, Mind, p. 194.

¹⁹⁴ Gillon, Solitary, p. 119.

¹⁹⁵ Megroz, Mind, p. 194.

Critics apparently find the conflicts in Conrad's plots to center around Man vs. Himself; they discuss in depth the conflict between a man and his conscience. If mentioned at all, the women are found, for the most part, not to enter this moral world (Some find Mrs. Gould an exception.). Another conflict which is just as prevalent and more directly connected with the women characters is Man vs. Man (woman). The man and the woman are continually in opposition to each other.

One of the characteristics of Conrad's women-- aggressiveness--is indicative of this basic conflict in the works of Joseph Conrad. Their aggressiveness is epitomized in the words of Mrs. Fyne when she states in Chance, ". . . no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman."¹⁹⁶ Sometimes the women look passive while actually manipulating events so as to bring about their own desired results. Lena in Victory manipulates Heyst into falling in love with her by saving his life at the risk of her own.¹⁹⁷ The victory is apparently Lena's. Sometimes the aggressive nature of the women is a complete surprise to the men they encounter. Adam Gillon finds this to be true in Joanna's sudden independence and hate of Willems in An Outcast of the Islands. Willems had always thought Joanna very submissive. Mrs. Almayer in Almayer's Folly also savagely hated her husband and wished

¹⁹⁶Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 59.

¹⁹⁷Gurko, Giant, p. 214.

for revenge.¹⁹⁸ When the women die, they are triumphant over the men. Bernard Meyer finds that when Lena and Freya die, they are victorious.¹⁹⁹ Thomas Moser discovers that even the villains in Conrad's novels are helpless against aggressive female opposition: Ortega in The Arrow of Gold, Blunt in The Arrow of Gold, Scevola Bron in The Rover, and Jorgensen in The Rescue. Not only do the women prove to be aggressive in combat with villains but also in an amorous display of affection. Moser points out that Dain tries to prevent a kiss by Nina in Almayer's Folly. Nina kisses him anyway. Her surrender to Dain is described in terms of her own victory or aggression.²⁰⁰ Leo Gurko discovers that there is a sexual aggressiveness in Conrad's women generally. He uses as a good illustration Flora de Barrel and Captain Anthony of Chance. Anthony and Flora marry, but Anthony does not encourage a consummation of their love because of his peculiar, chivalrous notions. When Anthony comes to believe that Flora has married him out of desperation, he expresses to her his acceptance of her desired freedom. Flora's reaction is that she virtually has Anthony consummate their marriage immediately. This aggressive nature seems to have come to the surface even when Conrad tried to make his women pathetic. Moser says that when critics remarked of the

¹⁹⁸ Gillon, Solitary, pp. 119-120.

¹⁹⁹ Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 229.

²⁰⁰ Moser, Achievement, p. 52.

sensual-animal quality of Alice Jacobus in "A Smile of Fortune," Conrad said, "--goodness knows why. I tried to make her pathetic."²⁰¹ Aurom Fleishman does not say Conrad's women are aggressive, but he does say that they are ungovernable in the Asian tales.²⁰²

Not only are they aggressive, ungovernable, or however one wishes to classify them, Conrad's female characters are actually destructive. Their destructiveness, moreover, is channeled into the ruin of the men who love them. Dain borders on suicide because of Nina's tormenting love.²⁰³ Tom Lingard's passion for Edith Travers in The Rescue is his destruction. His yielding to the emotion of love caused him to lose all power of thought and action. Lingard's dream of the two of them together brings about the loss of his grip on reality.²⁰⁴ By submitting his love to Edith, Tom Lingard becomes an active agent in his own ruination.²⁰⁵ Rita in The Arrow of Gold, likewise, brings destruction to the soul of M. George.²⁰⁶ Geoffrey Renourd in "The Planter of Malata" has both his strength and security destroyed when Felicia

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 97.

²⁰²Fleishman, Politics, p. 95.

²⁰³Gillon, Solitary, p. 122.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 63.

²⁰⁵Edward Crankshaw, Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), p. 56.

²⁰⁶Gillon, Solitary, pp. 66-67.

Moorsom enters the fictional stage.²⁰⁷ The destructibility of Felicia Moorsom is further emphasized by the fact that she is unable to love her fiancé fully until he is dead. Gurko suggests this same characteristic in Flora when, because of her, the men on ship notice a change in Captain Anthony: irritability and exasperation.²⁰⁸ Amy Foster is the one responsible for the collapse of her marriage to Yanko Gooral in "Amy Foster." Yanko dies misunderstood as well as broken-hearted. Gurko attributes his tragic death to Amy's lapse into provincial stupidity.²⁰⁹ Regardless of the cause, a woman is responsible again for the sorrow of a man.

It is significant to note the way in which Freya Neilson of "Freya of the Seven Isles" brings torture and ruin upon the men in love with her. She has two to contend with; however, this fact hardly handicaps her destructive powers. Freya subjects one to a crushing defeat by constantly postponing their marriage and destroys the other by blowing kisses to his rival when she knows he is watching. Freya's only wish is to torture. Claire Rosenfield claims that Winnie Verloc in The Secret Agent is ultimately a destructive "mother."²¹⁰ The characters know intuitively of a woman's tortuous love. When the doctor is called in

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁰⁸ Gurko, Giant, pp. 206-207.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 211.

²¹⁰ Rosenfield, Snakes, p. 111.

The Arrow of Gold because of Ortega's wound, the doctor assumes that there is a woman somewhere behind the events that led to Ortega's wound.

By no means is the destruction wrought by women limited to men. Gurko indicates that Flora de Barrel is continually victimized by women. Flora's governess humiliates her, a widow turns her out because she isn't cheerful, her female relatives torment her, a jealous wife throws her out of domestic employment because of suspicion, and finally Mrs. Fyne wrecks her marriage.²¹¹ Meyer traces this ruinously injurious quality of the female in thirty-one stories, which are all the major fictional works except a few short stories. Of these stories twenty-five protagonists are emotionally involved with a woman. The result is that seventeen of these heroes lose their lives directly or indirectly because of women in their lives. Eight of these men escape with little more than their lives.²¹²

The conflict, then, that exists between the man and the woman is evident. Moreover, this kind of conflict, Man vs. Man (woman), underlies the plot structure of a number of Conrad's writings. As often as the woman is part of the narrative and attracts the sexual interest of a man, she is in opposition to that man.

The manner in which the women are introduced and the way in which they are developed in the plot of the novels

²¹¹Gurko, Giant, pp. 203-204.

²¹²Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 273-274.

are also significant at this point. Most critics agree that Joseph Conrad's characterizations are unique in many different ways; this uniqueness includes the women as well as the men. It is the characters that are important in the plot. The sensational settings are merely a background for influencing the actions and thoughts of the characters.²¹³

The women are very much a part of the dramatic movement as well as the emotional and intellectual growth of the characters in the plot. Robert Haugh discusses these characteristics of the female characters in relation to the vital part Flora plays in Chance. Haugh calls this Conrad's progression d'effect, the selection and arrangement of story elements in the plots.²¹⁴

The sequence of events is most important in Conrad's method of characterization. The amount of information Conrad reveals at any one time about one of his characters and the manner in which these bits of information appear--mostly through flashbacks--show this to be true. Because this method is so successful, Conrad is at times able to transform a minor character into a central figure.

Hence, Conrad's characters are revealed in striking ways. Megroz finds that Conrad's characters may be evaluated by their past.²¹⁵ Certainly this is true with the women

²¹³Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad and His Characters (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), p. 13.

²¹⁴Robert F. Haugh, "Conrad's Chance: Progression d'effect," in Modern Fiction Studies ed. by Maurice Beebe (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1965), p. 9.

²¹⁵Megroz, Mind, p. 185.

characters inasmuch as there are numerous flashbacks in relation to them. In Conrad's descriptions, simplicity and complexity are combined. Through the use of flashbacks, Conrad makes it difficult to know whether to consider Rita de Lastaola the lady of the arrow of gold or a freckle-faced girl.²¹⁶

The most significant part of Conrad's characterizations is the way in which the women are "pieced together" so that they finally become complete or whole characters. Sometimes this takes the form of a woman shifting from a minor character to a central figure. Richard Curle sums up this aspect of Conrad's art in his discussion of Flora. He finds that the true Flora is seen in the very last chapter of Chance. However, ". . . in retrospect, and allowing for the inevitable development from youth to maturity, much that emerges in the end can be glimpsed throughout her whole story."²¹⁷ Likewise, Lena, under the influence of Heyst reveals the "real core of her character."²¹⁸ Edward Said discovers that the figure of Mrs. Hervey in "The Return" is transformed from a "neglected doll into the central figure."²¹⁹

Joseph Conrad also puts into his plots something extra to make his characters unforgettable. Megroz believes that

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

²¹⁷ Curle, His Characters, p. 201.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

²¹⁹ Edward W. Said, Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 107.

the death of Lena has this something extra that makes her death an unforgettable event and, thus, Lena a memorable character. Megroz calls this the "unforgettable gesture that compels our realization." When Lena is shot, the reader is not aware of the shooting until Heyst is aware of the event that has taken place. This circumstance keeps the reader from taking her death lightly.²²⁰ By witnessing an event at the same time as one of Conrad's characters in the story, the reader is more a part of the action. The reader is more involved; the women characters are memorable.

²²⁰ Megroz, Mind, p. 187.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMEN AND CONRAD'S PHILOSOPHY

Although Conrad's portrait of the woman is partly a mystique, defying the laws of logic, she does play a major role in his fiction as he expounds a rational philosophy. Indeed, his mystique of the woman often determines the way in which he presents his message.

By equating the woman with the jungle and the dark-skinned races, for instance, he presents her as a manifestation of the same mysterious, primal force. The jungle imagery previously tied with the woman should leave no doubt as to their connection. They are both deadly, mysterious, and impenetrable. The literal relationship between the dark-skinned and the jungle needs no elaboration; moreover, Conrad leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader as to this same impenetrability of the dark-skinned races. Adam Gillon notes that when Almayer and Willems take a woman of a different race, they find that she is a total stranger.²²¹ Wilson Follett relates the fact that Conrad felt that "race is an insoluble enigma, . . . alluring of mysteries . . . deathly."²²² Conrad seems to expound upon this feeling

²²¹Gillon, Solitary, p. 119.

²²²Follett, Joseph Conrad, p. 57.

especially when distinguishing the dark-skinned race. The only relationship comprising this primal force left in question, then, is that between the woman and the dark-skinned race. Isabel Colbron indicates this relationship exists when she wrote: "The sheltered woman of Occidental civilization, and the woman who was the soul of the savage jungle, meet in the bond of primitive womanhood, which is the one phase of woman's life that seems to hold and interest Mr. Conrad, the one phase that calls out his best work."²²³ Conrad feels there is something so basic in women that any woman is related to the dark races through their women. The most illustrative depiction of this primal force probably exists in "The Heart of Darkness." In this work the very soul of the mysterious darkness is a woman, a dark-skinned individual, and also a member of the unknown jungle.

The power of this primal force is more than likely best exemplified in the author's handling of the conscious and the subconscious. Although he did not deal with these elements as such, Freudian theories not yet having been formulated, he must certainly have been aware of inner motives as well as surface motives. Some critics recognize Conrad as a forerunner in the exploration of this psychological maze of the mind.

In this exploration, the women, as agents of the primal force mentioned earlier, are most meaningful. Moser

²²³ Colbron, Conrad's Women, p. 179.

equates the female menace with darkness, death, and truth.²²⁴ Conrad leaves his reader no doubt as to the woman's relevance to the inscrutableness and irrationality of the subconscious. Claire Rosenfield finds that irrationality, the unconscious darkness, and death describe Winnie Verloc.²²⁵ Winnie is "unconscious femininity."²²⁶ Visiak recognizes that Doña Rita had "something secret and obscure which is in all women."²²⁷ Megroz notes that women are considered irrational by Marlow's statement that "if women are not rational they are indeed acute."²²⁸ Guerard realizes that Réal thinks Arlette is mysterious,²²⁹ while Gillon states that Alice remains a mystery to the young captain to the very end of the work. Gillon, in the same vein, notes that Lena is "like a script in an unknown language. . . ."²³⁰ Eloise Knapp Hay discovers that Nathalie represents the truth Razumov is hiding. She confronts Razumov with the fatality that Razumov found in Haldin, her brother.²³¹

²²⁴ Moser, Achievement, p. 80.

²²⁵ Rosenfield, Snakes, p. 113.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

²²⁷ Visiak, Mirror, p. 86.

²²⁸ Megroz, Mind, p. 192.

²²⁹ Guerard, Novelist, p. 285.

²³⁰ Gillon, Solitary, p. 138.

²³¹ Hay, Political Novels, p. 308.

Walter F. Wright reports Conrad believed that whatever is suppressed below the level of consciousness will destroy the mind.²³² For this reason, then, Conrad's women characters embody the inner pools into which those searching for truth must penetrate. However, the ambiguity of the situation is that penetration likewise brings about destruction.

Hence, the men are destroyed when they become aware of this force. As victims of woman, the men arrive at truth in their realization that women represent the force which has destroyed them. In support of this view, Gillon notes that Mrs. Hervey's return brings the knowledge to her husband that they have only viewed the surface²³³ or the conscious world. Furthermore, Gillon states that he has never looked at "the dark, hidden, inner regions"²³⁴ or the subconscious. The truth at which he arrives is a terrible revelation.²³⁵

He claims he cannot stand it. The women repeatedly introduce the inner, hidden world of sensuality to the man. Tom Lingard becomes aware of the sensual power Edith Travers has had over him and reveals it in his last interview with her. The result is that Lingard becomes isolated; he no

²³² Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 129.

²³³ Gillon, Solitary, p. 149.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

longer belongs to either the white or the black community. The significance of his plight will be discussed in connection with the themes of isolation and solidarity. Lena exposes to Heyst the world of sensuality. Lena's original name is Alma. Lee M. Whitehead discovers that "Alma" is a modern Arabic term for a dancing girl or courtesan.²³⁶ Heyst finds her sensuality to be his downfall.

The truth which the women characters unveil is more than sensuality. Felicia Moorsom reveals to George Renouard his sense of isolation when she turns him down as a husband. Aissa reveals a similar isolation of Willems to him when she brings to his attention the reality of solidarity--the group is dominant over the individual.

The woman is also able to find the truth in herself. Negroz notes that "Conrad's women arrive at truth, when they are not blinded by their limitations or their sufferings, as many of Conrad's men are, more directly and unerringly than men."²³⁷ Karl notes that Flora de Barrel comes to understand herself. Karl does not think this realization brings about her destruction possibly because she is so innocent.²³⁸ Wright suggests that Flora's identification with Anthony is the factor that enables her to live.

²³⁶ Lee M. Whitehead, "Alma Renamed Lena in Conrad's Victory," English Language Notes, III (September, 1965), 55.

²³⁷ Negroz, Mind, p. 196.

²³⁸ Karl, Reader's Guide, p. 238.

Contrarily, though, Wright finds that Anthony has enabled her to be free from self-analysis. Before being freed from her preoccupation with self-analysis, Flora wished to die.²³⁹ Follett states that Lena also has a victory over herself, "over some half-unacknowledged thing in herself that has been oppressed."²⁴⁰ As a result Lena gives her life for Heyst. Guerard sees "A Smile of Fortune" as such a lesson in self-knowledge.²⁴¹ Undoubtedly what Guerard is talking about is Alice's revelation to the captain of the illusion of his own imagination. At first he is charmed by her; however, he later feels nothing. Concerning this realization, he says:

And as I lingered in the cruel self-knowledge I felt the touch of her arm falling languidly on my neck and received a hasty, awkward, haphazard kiss which missed my lips. No! She was not afraid; but I was no longer moved.²⁴²

The captain fancies himself the rescuer of the poor little social outcast. She later reveals this concept to be non-existent so far as she is concerned. The captain no longer has anything to rescue. As already stated, Jasper Allen's masculinity is united with his brig in "Freya of the Seven Isles." Upon its destruction Freya becomes aware of her own inner role--the destroyer of masculinity. This awareness leads to her own death. Aurom Fleishman summarizes this paradox that exists in connection with Winnie Verloc. This

²³⁹ Wright, Romance, p. 34.

²⁴⁰ Follett, Joseph Conrad, p. 16.

²⁴¹ Guerard, Direction One, p. 37.

²⁴² Joseph Conrad, "A Smile of Fortune," p. 99.

knowledge, he says, "causes people to destroy each other when they learn evils formerly veiled." By the same token, Winnie realizes her helplessness without knowledge.²⁴³

Allan O. McIntyre explains this idea in his article about Conrad and his philosophy. The philosophy concerns the functions of the mind. McIntyre finds the naked "fact" basic to Conrad's epistemology. Facts underlie all existence; they appear very hard to grasp. Although they occur outside the mind, once they are inside the mind, they become a part of memory. Memory gives these facts personal coloring: "What the memory holds is not fact, or even useful information, but the flickering glows of meager praise and faint slights." Ideas are nothing but "the disguised servants of our passions." Conduct is based upon these ideas. "The few simple ideas are the several inspiring illusions each man clings to which makes life a little less of a burden."²⁴⁴ Perhaps these illusions must exist. Truth is unbearable.

Joseph Conrad wrote in his Reminiscences about the importance of fidelity:

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, amongst others on the idea of Fidelity.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Fleishman, Politics, p. 193.

²⁴⁴ Allan O. McIntyre, "Conrad on the Functions of the Mind," Modern Language Quarterly, XXV (June, 1964), 187-193.

²⁴⁵ Joseph Conrad, Reminiscences, p. 20.

The women in Conrad's fiction are symbolic of the sin of betrayal, in their relationship with men. Gillon notes that "Conrad's lonely . . . are an affirmation of human solidarity. Man's isolation proves that no person with a conscience can live by himself."²⁴⁶ Of those who characteristically betray is the woman. Haugh notes that Jewel is all wrapped up in her own fears. She reaches her dreaded end because she does not trust her fellow man.²⁴⁷ She has no belief in solidarity. Amy Foster betrays her husband when he needs her. When the husband cries out for water in his foreign language, Amy runs away with their child. Inasmuch as the rest of Conrad's women are isolated individuals or outcasts, they are, like Jewel and Amy, betrayers.

Moreover, a woman often leads a man into the act of betrayal. Gillon finds that Captain Whalley in "The End of the Tether" recognizes that he almost betrays society because of his daughter.²⁴⁸ He will attempt to pilot a boat when he cannot see at all for the sake of her. Arsat betrays his brother for the sake of a woman.²⁴⁹ Wiley relates that because of Lena, Heyst wants detachment for Lena and himself.²⁵⁰ Wright sees Aïssa, naturally, as responsible in making

²⁴⁶ Gillon, Solitary, p. 118.

²⁴⁷ Haugh, Discovery, p. 73.

²⁴⁸ Gillon, Solitary, p. 131.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

²⁵⁰ Wiley, Measure, p. 152.

Willems betray Lingard and Almayer.²⁵¹ Because of Flora de Barrel, Anthony detaches himself from human life and betrays solidarity; he tries to be something better than human. He is chivalrous to the point of absurdity. The result, as Wiley states, is "something less than human."²⁵² Eloise Knapp Hay concludes that Razumov betrays himself by submitting to Nathalie as a woman and a Russian. By surrendering to her, Razumov surrenders to Haldin, her brother.²⁵³ Wiley discovers that Conrad's philosophy of humanism (or solidarity) is expressed in Conrad's comment concerning Willems and Aïssa in their isolation and despair at the end of An Outcast of the Islands: "They both long to have a significance in the order of nature or of society."²⁵⁴

The half-white daughter of Lingard is a factor in Almayer's betrayal of his inner convictions. In spite of thoughts to reconsider, he marries her in order to get his dream of gold.²⁵⁵ In general, Conrad's theme of romantic love cannot be divorced from the theme of isolation. Because of their betrayal of the human community (they wish to be separated from it), the lovers find love painful.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹Wright, Romance, p. 129.

²⁵²Wiley, Measure, pp. 149-150.

²⁵³Hay, Political Novels, p. 308.

²⁵⁴Wiley, Measure, p. 78.

²⁵⁵Bancroft, Philosophy, p. 29.

²⁵⁶Gillon, Solitary, p. 76.

The sin of betrayal causes one to become an outcast. The term "outcast" expresses an individual suffering "moral degradation." The outcast violates the moral law.²⁵⁷ To be an outcast means one has been separated from human solidarity.²⁵⁸ This idea is probably best stated by one of the characters in Lord Jim: "We exist only in so far as we hang together."²⁵⁹

The woman is also essential in revealing the fundamental discrepancy between illusion and reality. The woman as an illusion is sought. Illusions are, of course, essential to life. Gillon finds that Felicia becomes an illusion to Geoffrey Renouard because he is unwilling to admit that she is not going to return his affection.²⁶⁰ Flora de Barrel is a dream to Roderick Anthony. She is "something as incredible as the fulfillment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the world in his arms--all the suffering world--not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow." The passage goes on to state that "Anthony walked slowly to the ship and that night slept without dreams."²⁶¹ Anthony need not dream; he has in his waking state a dream--Flora. Visiak notices that Rita is to George

²⁵⁷ Bancroft, Philosophy, p. 5.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁵⁹ Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, p. 164.

²⁶⁰ Gillon, Solitary, p. 75.

²⁶¹ Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 348.

"a cold illusion." Even in sleeping dreams, there is Rita. She tells George to dream no more.²⁶²

Even though these dreams (women) must be sought, they cannot be attained. This is so often found to be the case in Conrad's works. Fleishman finds the failure of Verloc's and Winnie's marriage to be a result of their mistaken view of that institution. Winnie feels the ideal marriage should establish Stevie, her ward, as a son.²⁶³

The world of George and Rita is likened to a dream: "This world is not a world of lovers, not even for such lovers as you two who have nothing to do with the world as it is."²⁶⁴ Lingard's illusory vision of Edith Travers and himself proves fatal. He thought there was a life for them together; there could not be one. This dream of his causes him to lose his hold on reality.²⁶⁵

The woman sometimes surrenders to a dream. Nathalie Haldin's illusion, Fleishman says, involved "mystical populism." Conrad may have thought her one of those individuals who must live in an illusion.²⁶⁶ Nathalie also subscribes to idealism.²⁶⁷ Crankshaw feels that Conrad introduces

²⁶² Visiak, Mirror, p. 108.

²⁶³ Fleishman, Politics, p. 193.

²⁶⁴ Gillon, Solitary, pp. 67-68.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁶⁶ Fleishman, Politics, p. 239.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

Theresa in order to keep Doña Rita a more earthly individual.²⁶⁸ Otherwise, Doña Rita would be too illusory. Edith Travers falls under an illusion too. The dropping of her veil symbolizes Edith's surrender to a dream of being with Tom. She realizes that Tom Lingard has no place in her world. She puts her veil back on and does not pursue the dream.²⁶⁹ Bancroft sees Freya as living in a dream when he states that she is in love with love.²⁷⁰

On still another level, Conrad reveals a conflict between the ideal and the sensual. Wiley sees the Captain's failure as breaking "the erotic spell of Alice to the girl as a human being in distress." This leaves conflict in the back of the tale. The same conflict, he feels, is settled in Chance.²⁷¹ Almayer's Folly illustrates the corruption of the will by passion because Dain and Nina are slaves of their sensuality.²⁷² Willems and Aïssa have the same conflict in An Outcast of the Islands.²⁷³ The wilderness symbolizes this same moral corruption in Lingard and Edith of The Rescue.²⁷⁴ Robert O. Evans sees the Intended in

²⁶⁸ Crankshaw, Art of the Novel, p. 199.

²⁶⁹ Gillon, Solitary, p. 64.

²⁷⁰ Bancroft, Philosophy, p. 55.

²⁷¹ Wiley, Measure, p. 138.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 37.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁷⁴ Gillon, Solitary, p. 64.

"The Heart of Darkness" as an agent in Marlow's realization of the "ethical nature of life."²⁷⁵ Stewart Wilcox finds the native girl in the same tale to have a "deep involvement with the flesh." Wilcox thinks that Kurtz is forever lost to both women--embodying flesh and spirit--because he trusted no human being.²⁷⁶ Mr. Wiley even sees the relationship between the hero and the villain as picturing this same conflict. The villain is the hero's evil double. The villain with erotic impulses must be conquered; the hero must conquer his own sensuality.²⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Conrad does present a road to redemption and salvation. The woman is most active in this redemption. Arlette is able to find a place for herself in society when she forgets herself. Her confession brings this about.²⁷⁸ Nathalie Haldin is responsible for bringing about a confession from Razumov. This confession is the climax of his severe psychological struggle.²⁷⁹ Donald C. Yelton asserts that Nathalie's removal of her veil precludes Razumov's confession that he betrayed her brother.²⁸⁰ Perhaps the many other

²⁷⁵Robert O. Evans, "Conrad's Underworld," Modern Fiction Studies, II (May, 1956), 59.

²⁷⁶Stewart Wilcox, "Conrad's 'Complicated Presentations' of Symbolic Imagery," Philological Quarterly, XXXIX (January, 1960), 16.

²⁷⁷Moser, Achievement, p. 107.

²⁷⁸Bancroft, Philosophy, p. 69.

²⁷⁹Karl, Reader's Guide, p. 224.

²⁸⁰Yelton, Mimesis, p. 258.

instances of women removing their veils implies a like revelation, a confession.

Meyer finds that it is often a woman that the hero seeks in order to make a confession. The hero hopes to evoke forgiveness from the woman and an expression of her love. Meyer finds this same theme to be true with Heyst, Jasper Allen, Captain Anthony, Decoud, Verloc, Falk, the Capataz, Razumov, Renouard, and even Kurtz. Lena acts as an agent in the act of redemption. Lena says she is called Alma. Besides its meaning mentioned earlier, the name implies that she has spiritual qualities.²⁸¹ Flora de Barrel is also able to look within herself for her own salvation.²⁸²

There are other ways, as the woman illustrates, to achieve salvation. Arlette's dream portrays the need of a substitute for sacrifice to remove guilt. Only this will make her love affair possible. This substitute is found in Peyrol; he dies so that the union can exist.²⁸³ Meyer believes that the ultimate goal and salvation of the hero is found in a mother. This is true in the case of Razumov. Razumov goes for Tekla; he finds in Tekla such a mother.²⁸⁴ Perhaps the other numerous "mother-son relationships" between lovers are there for the same reason.

²⁸¹ Karl, Guide, p. 261.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 242.

²⁸³ Fleishman, Politics, p. 153.

²⁸⁴ Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 205.

It is obvious, then, that those who find the women excluded from Conrad's moral universe are not looking closely enough. The women are in their own way very much a part of it. Even though the figures are at times illusive, they are, nonetheless, crucial to what Joseph Conrad has to say.

Joseph Conrad's attitude toward his women, one discovers even by a superficial examination of his works, appears to be different depending upon which work one is studying. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why critics disagree so much about Conrad's attitude toward women.

F. R. Leavis thinks that Conrad had quite an uncomplicated attitude toward women.²⁸⁵ Megroz believes the feminine characters actually enhance the realism, while the faults which exist are the result of the plot.²⁸⁶ "In general, Conrad delights in the contrast and contact of male men and female women."²⁸⁷ M. C. Bradbrook holds that Conrad's fictional women are just "too aerial" and do not even seem to belong to this world because of that. All in all, the women are treated by Conrad with too much restraint.²⁸⁸ They are not fully described. The result is that the woman is like Arlette, "a body without a mind." She is the shell

²⁸⁵ F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 222.

²⁸⁶ Megroz, Mind, p. 198.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

²⁸⁸ Bradbrook, Genius, p. 61.

that is characteristic of Conrad's women.²⁸⁹ Moser asserts that Conrad wishes unconsciously to save the men from the women in his novels.²⁹⁰

With the entrance of these women upon Conrad's fictional stage, the element of romantic love enters accordingly. Inasmuch as these women are controversial, so is the romantic theme that they introduce. Obviously this element was quite troublesome to the man whose conception of women was so ambivalent. Guerard sees clumsiness and evasion in Conrad's approaching the subject of sexual attraction. This evasion leads to a "major vulgarity" in Conrad's works.²⁹¹ Gillon holds that Conrad's treatment of this theme cannot be separated from the traditions of Polish romanticism. There is an atmosphere both spiritual and moral from the romantic chivalrous tradition of the Polish landed gentry.²⁹² Nevertheless, one should recognize the fact that Gillon is unable to find any direct influence of either Polish romantic poetry or literature.²⁹³

Most critics notice a change in Conrad's philosophy occurring about the time Chance was written. However, the interpretations as to exactly what takes place at this time are many.²⁹⁴ Guerard discovers that around 1910 "Evil and

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁹⁰ Moser, Achievement, p. 109.

²⁹¹ Guerard, Novelist, pp. 51-52.

²⁹² Gillon, Solitary, pp. 85-87.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 85.

²⁹⁴ Moser, Achievement, p. 131.

failure in this new cleansed moral universe are presumed to come from outside rather than from within."²⁹⁵ Love now replaces loyalty to the community. Meyer finds that Conrad's work after 1910 contains women who are not really alive (They lack variety and individuality.).²⁹⁶ After 1910 there are only broad generalizations which include the hatred and worship of women. Meyer attributes this loss of individuality which existed in the earlier characters to an illness of Conrad.²⁹⁷

Moser does the most detailed study tracing this theme of romantic love throughout Conrad's literary career. Moser notes that of the earlier period, the bad works all deal with love in a major way: Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, and Tales of Unrest.²⁹⁸ He also discovers that the odd imagery creates confusion.²⁹⁹ In writing "The Idiots," Conrad found he needed relief. The relief he needed he found in "An Outpost of Progress." Conrad described it as having "no love interest in it and no women--only incidentally."³⁰⁰ He succeeds in "Amy Foster" only because his major preoccupation is loneliness and isolation. Amy

²⁹⁵Guerard, Novelist, p. 257.

²⁹⁶Meyer, Psychoanalytic, pp. 233-234.

²⁹⁷Ibid., p. 238.

²⁹⁸Moser, Achievement, p. 50.

²⁹⁹Ibid., p. 52.

³⁰⁰Ibid., p. 70.

is concealed in her passivity and lack of imagination.³⁰¹ In addition, most critics mention the extreme difficulty Conrad had with "The Return." He found it necessary to put it away for a twenty-year period. From the very beginning, Conrad hated the book: "What I've written seems to me too contemptible for words."³⁰² Conrad also wrote about "The Return": "There are some things I must leave alone." However, when it came to the womanless The Secret Sharer, Joseph Conrad wrote: "The Secret Sharer, between you and me, is it. Eh? No damned tricks with girls there. Eh?"³⁰³

Freya marks the turning point, for Conrad decided to finish Chance in which the central theme is love. This decision determined his decline.³⁰⁴ Karl believes that in Chance Conrad believed that the universe was man and woman centered.³⁰⁵ In Victory, too, Conrad appeared to be all for love. The last words of a dying man in that novel are: "Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life!"³⁰⁶

But, as Gurko points out, the love scenes consist of "foot-kissing, exclamations and horrid rhetoric."³⁰⁷ In

³⁰¹Ibid., p. 86.

³⁰²Ibid., p. 71.

³⁰³Ibid., p. 99.

³⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 101-103.

³⁰⁵Karl, Guide, p. 237.

³⁰⁶Joseph Conrad, Victory, p. 301.

³⁰⁷Gurko, Giant, p. 218.

scenes which should be somewhat passionate, the lovers blurt out what amounts to nothing. In "A Smile of Fortune," the young captain is seen embracing Alice: "I tightened my embrace in time, gasping out, 'No--you don't!'" as if she were my mortal enemy."³⁰⁸ There are many other such passages of which this one is characteristic. Moser traces the existence of a "brief perfect honeymoon" in the later love stories--Victory, Chance, The Arrow of Gold, The Rover, The Rescue, and Suspense. In addition, these works intend, as Karl finds in Chance, the moral that love between a man and a woman is Conrad's greatest concern.³⁰⁹

There are those who feel Joseph Conrad proved himself capable of handling the subject of romantic love. Leo Gurko accounts for the belief that Conrad could handle romantic love by pointing out the subtle accounts of the marriages of the Goulds and the Verlocs, the convincing treatment of sex in An Outcast of the Islands, and the description of Willems when he sets eyes on Aissa.³¹⁰ This is not quite so. Mrs. Gould is virtually inarticulate and lacks effective communication with her husband. She realizes that she is losing her husband to the silver mine, and, as Crankshaw indicates, she conceals from her husband the news of Montero's victory for material interests.³¹¹ The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Gould

³⁰⁸ Joseph Conrad, "A Smile of Fortune," p. 88.

³⁰⁹ Karl, Guide, p. 237.

³¹⁰ Gurko, Giant, p. 202.

³¹¹ Hewitt, Reassessment, p. 61.

have a relationship more like a mother and son than a wife and husband has already been mentioned. What appears is that although the conscious Conrad may indeed intend for his women and their influence to be positive or affirmative, it is obvious that they are not.

Many find that with the introduction of the woman into the plot, there results in the words and actions of the male characters concealed and blatant misogyny. Guerard finds hidden misogyny in Victory:

The indefinable emotion which certain intonations gave him he was aware, was more physical than moral. Every time she spoke to him she seemed to abandon to him something of herself--something excessively subtle and inexpressible, to which he was infinitely sensible, which he would have missed horribly if she were to go away.³¹²

Similar passages suggesting Conrad's misogyny are in the work. He also finds that Under Western Eyes is not entirely free of woman-hatred although there is a new security and assurance in the presence of the "female menace."³¹³

Others find blatant misogyny in the words and actions of the characters. Meyer points to Marlow's long speech in Chance:

As to honour--you know--its a very fine medieval inheritance which women never got hold of. It wasn't theirs. Since it may be laid as a general principle that women always get what they want, we must suppose they didn't want it. In addition they are devoid of decency, I mean masculine decency. Cautiousness too is foreign to them--the heavy reasonable cautiousness which is our glory. And if they had it they would make of it a thing of passion,

³¹²Guerard, Novelist, p. 277.

³¹³Ibid., p. 220.

so that its own mother--I mean the mother of cautiousness--wouldn't recognize it. Prudence with them is a matter of thrill like the rest of sublunary contrivances. 'Sensation at any cost' is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power--the kind of thrill they love most. . . .³¹⁴

Guerard finds the misogyny in Victory to be a neurotic element that is too explicit and unqualified. This is said by recognizing Ricardo's very implausible passage: "I have a good mind to shoot you, you woman-ridden hermit, you man in the moon, that can't exist without--no, it won't be you that I'll shoot. It's the other woman-lover--the prevaricating sly, low-class, amorous cuss!"³¹⁵ The very embodiment of evil (the villain) in Victory has a terrific horror of the feminine presence.³¹⁶

This misogyny, naturally, is found to affect the situations of romance. Meyer declares that carnal love is blemished with the presence of cruelty, evil, and sadism.³¹⁷ Guerard believes that Conrad's sympathy is with Dain when Dain and Nina go into the forest. Dain or Conrad remarks that the look of a woman's surrender is her most terrible weapon.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 63.

³¹⁵ Guerard, Novelist, p. 275.

³¹⁶ Gurko, Giant, p. 216.

³¹⁷ Meyer, Psychoanalytic, p. 170.

³¹⁸ Guerard, Novelist, pp. 75-76.

In the midst of all the controversy, there does emerge a uniformity in Conrad's attitude toward his women characters. One needs, first of all, to recognize the fact that the imagery associated with the women is consistent in all his works. Hence, whether or not Joseph Conrad wished to effect a change in attitude with the writing of Chance is problematical. The fact is the elements of the post-1910 works are in harmony with those prior to that period.

Conrad is unable to deal with that which is feminine in a relaxed manner. It is as if Conrad were self-conscious in his approach to the subject. Moser finds that there is either an exclusion or a preoccupation with the subject.³¹⁹ It is almost as if Conrad either preferably excluded the woman or threw himself into their creation with the determination to write about those matters about which others had already written successfully. Even when Conrad deals directly with romantic love, there is a pairing off done in so much haste that one must conclude that he did not feel at ease with the theme.³²⁰

Joseph Conrad himself realized that he had difficulty portraying romantic situations. As mentioned, he found it necessary to rid himself of the "damn tricks" with girls in order to produce The Secret Sharer. At the end of The Arrow of Gold, Moser discovers, Conrad apologizes for his deficiency:

³¹⁹Moser, Achievement, p. 59.

³²⁰Ibid., p. 109.

Love as is well known having nothing to do with reason, being insensible to forebodings and even blind to evidence, the surrender of those two beings to a precarious bliss has nothing very astonishing in itself; and its portrayal as George attempts it, lacks dramatic interest. The sentimental interest could only have a fascination for readers themselves actually in love. The response of a reader depends on the mood of the moment, so much so that a book may seem extremely interesting when read late at night, but might appear merely a lot of vapid verbiage in the morning. My conviction is that the mood in which continuation of his story would appear sympathetic is very rare. This consideration has induced me to suppress it. . . .³²¹

Conrad implies an awareness of an ambivalence in his approach to the subject of women. The next concern, naturally, is what exactly his approach or attitude was.

Is the apparent misogyny in his works indicative of Conrad's true attitude toward women? This is hardly the case. The passages termed "vociferous misogyny" suggest more of an attitude of the mystery of women indicative of fear. Moreover, the entire range of opinions voiced by the characters in Conrad's works point to the mystery and lack of understanding in the relation of man and woman. Since Chance deals most explicitly with women, it is significant to observe what is said about women in the work. In regard to the fidelity of women, Marlow remarks:

There is not between women that fund of at least conditional loyalty which men may depend on in their dealings with each other.³²²

Concerning the woman's relation to the man, Marlow says:

³²¹ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

³²² Joseph Conrad, Chance, p. 209.

Mainly I resent that pretence of winding us around their dear little fingers, as of right. Not that the result ever amounts to much generally. There are so very few momentous opportunities. It is the assumption that each of us is a combination of a kid and an imbecile. . . .³²³

In connection with the woman's power, Marlow says:

. . . the mere fact of being a woman was enough to give her an occult and supreme significance. And she would be enduring, which is the essence of woman's visible, tangible power.³²⁴

The resulting mystery of the woman is epitomized in Marlow's saying:

A young girl, you know, is something like a temple. You pass by, and wonder what mysterious rites are going on in there, what prayers, what visions?³²⁵

Even while Marlow makes these comments, he succumbs to Flora de Barrel. He is responsible for keeping Flora from committing suicide and attempts to prevent Mrs. Fyne from ruining Flora's marriage.³²⁶ Therefore, one sees that Marlow contradicts himself much as Conrad contradicts himself. Conrad feels, it seems then, that as much as he conceives woman as a being of mysterious, fearful, and powerful influence, he is still drawn to her. So self-conscious about women and yet so drawn was he to them that he would have had people believe--including himself--that he had romances that did not in real life exist. This troubled attitude toward women is revealed, nevertheless, through their characteristics, the imagery

³²³ Ibid., p. 150.

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 310.

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 311.

³²⁶ Gurko, Giant, p. 205.

associated with them, and finally through the content of the plots to be what is most descriptively called his "feminine mystique."

CONCLUSION

The facts of Joseph Conrad's personal life enable one to understand more fully his women characters. From childhood to maturity, Conrad had disappointing relationships with women. The attachment Conrad had for his mother proved to be a frustrating one; his mother died when he was only seven years old. In his middle teens, Conrad's affection for the opposite sex was thwarted either by one young lady's heartless reaction (Tekla Syroczynska) or Conrad's own inhibitions because of his lack of self-confidence (Janina Taube). In order to hide from others the fact that he could not relate to women, Conrad invented the tale that he was in a duel over the mistress of the Pretender to the Spanish throne. Not long after this supposed event, Conrad was supposedly involved with another girl, according to Gérard Jean-Aubry, the author of the definitive biography of Joseph Conrad. Aubry's assertion is absurd. For one reason, Conrad was interested in Mademoiselle Eugénie at this same time. Secondly, when Conrad discovered that Mademoiselle Eugénie was already engaged, he hardly behaved like a man who had a great deal of experience with women and certainly not like a man who would court two women at the same time. While he had to be on the same island as Mademoiselle Eugénie, he secluded himself; when he was able to leave the island, he

never returned to it. His reaction to her engagement was like that of a schoolboy.

In spite of these disappointing encounters, Conrad entered into a warm, Platonic relationship with a woman, Madame Poradowsak. However, the relationship appeared to be like that between a mother and a son. Conrad did marry in 1896. The marriage, though, appeared to resemble a mother-son relationship just as the one between him and Madame Poradowska. In addition to the obvious connection one might make between the personal relations Conrad had with women and his fictional women, some critics specifically find prototypes or sources of his fictional heroines in the women mentioned.

The characteristics of Conrad's women reveal them as aggressive, destructive creatures responsible for the downfall of the man. In addition, they are isolated, inarticulate, and, therefore, impossible to communicate with. Even the marriages in Conrad's works lack any real communication. There are always obstacles to the consummation of the love between the women and the men: the women's inhibitions, their fathers, and the highly idealistic behavior or chivalry of the male. Many of the women, moreover, have some physical characteristics in common: white, strong teeth; dark, long hair; and height. All the characteristics indicate the power of the woman.

Although these characteristics provide insight into the nature of Conrad's women, the imagery associated with them

is equally as revelatory of their role in his fiction. The heroines are frequently associated with cats. They are also connected with certain colors: red, white, and black. The blackness seems united with the woman and symbolic of her mystery, impenetrability, sensuality, and connection with the subconscious. The women, however, are not directly responsible for the whiteness appearing around them. Whenever the man realizes the power the woman has over him, the woman appears in brightness. This brilliance or whiteness seems to represent another individual's (usually a man's) realization of the significance of the woman--she is all-powerful even though mysterious. The red occurs when the woman is aroused to passion. The statue imagery seems to symbolize, like the many references to the feet of the women, the subservience of the man to the woman. The water imagery and the many connections between women and boats suggest their union with the mysterious sea. The imagery associated with the women, as well as explicit statements in Conrad's works, suggests that he consciously thought women should be pursued, in spite of the fact that they were a mysterious, deadly, passionate force to be feared and revered.

These figures contribute much to the advancement of Conrad's plots. This is true not only in the works consisting of a plot centering around romantic love but also in the all-male world of the sea. Some works like "Heart of Darkness" are essentially about the female element. Nevertheless, the frequency with which the women appear seems to depend upon

whether or not Conrad is able to disguise their significance. If Conrad is successful in disguising their significance, he has no trouble; if their significance is revealed to him, he has problems and many times must even put the work aside. Because of the nature of the woman, the basic conflict is Man vs. Man (woman). Moreover, the woman emerges the victor. These women are also important in the plots because of the way in which they are "pieced together"--information about them and facets of their personalities are revealed so that at the end of a work, there appears a complete figure.

Although the woman is portrayed as a "feminine mystique," she is successfully used in revealing Conrad's philosophy. The jungle, dark-skinned race, and woman are manifestations of the same primal force. The woman, as an agent of this primal force, illustrates Conrad's thoughts concerning the conscious and subconscious. The woman is obviously associated with the irrationality of the subconscious. Since Conrad believed the subconscious of a man must be realized by him (each individual man), the fictional men are depicted as continually trying to penetrate the mystery of the women. The men, though, are destroyed when this is accomplished. The women introduce the world of sensuality to the man. The truth or inner motives the women reveal is more than sensuality. Sometimes the woman finds truth or hidden motives within herself. The truth, nonetheless, is unbearable. Even though the truth must be sought by each man, it will destroy him.

The woman also illustrates the sin of betrayal. She is quite often responsible for leading the man to the act of betrayal; at times she even betrays herself. These fictional women characters reveal a discrepancy between illusion and reality. The woman is often related to a dream. Therefore, although she must be sought, she cannot be attained. Besides the discrepancy between illusion and reality, the conflict between the ideal and the sensual is shown through the women. It appears that the erotic must be conquered.

In spite of the shortcomings of the woman, Conrad does present a road to redemption. There is the road to redemption through confession (usually a confession of a man to a woman) and through a substitute as a sacrifice (in the case of Peyrol) to remove the woman's guilt. The women, then, are very much a part of the moral universe in Conrad's writings.

Despite all the controversy, there emerges in the philosophy of Joseph Conrad a definite attitude toward a woman. She is associated with the sensual, subconscious, and mysterious forces which control man. Like a flame to a moth, she attracts man irresistibly but fatally to her.

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