NINE WOMEN IN THE FICTION OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem

Some critics of Joseph Conrad's fiction agree with Marlow's remark: "They--the women I mean--are out of it--should be out of it."¹ Denunciations of Conrad's characterization of women vary from mild observations that no women appear in some of his works and have only minor parts in others, to emphatic assertions that his poor handling of women characters was to blame for all of his weak spots and failures.

H. L. Mencken saw all of Conrad's female characters as "no more than soiled and tattered cards in a game played by the gods,"² and he concluded that Conrad had failed to depict even one convincing woman. Even before Conrad had created all of his fictional women, a critic maintained that women appeared in his fiction only as he needed them to enhance certain settings, to provide additional decorative touches, or to symbolize the savage element in nature.³

More recently Thomas Moser devoted two of the four chapters in his book on Conrad to his handling of love and romance and situations involving women characters. He too maintained that Conrad's characterizations of them usually failed; that his "inability to understand women, his tendency to sentimentalize female characterizations"\(^4\) were obstacles to his creativity; and that his artistry was threatened each time he dealt with the subject. Moser also theorizes that Conrad in his early writing put women into his fiction in imitation of other novelists because he desired popularity for his works, and that the inclusion of situations in which they appeared "invariably evoked from Conrad his flabbiest prose and his most melodramatic action."\(^5\)

Conrad himself admitted having difficulty in depicting women and romantic situations; he wrote to Garnett, "There are things I must leave alone," and he expressed satisfaction that there were "No damned tricks with girls" in "The Secret Sharer."\(^6\) A summation of Marlow's observations on women reveals a variety of prejudices and allusions to the mystery of women, which may or may not have been entirely in accord with Conrad's opinions.


\(^5\) Ibid., p. 116.

It becomes obvious to Conrad's readers that his fictional women are seldom clearly described and that they are always revealed through the perspective of the omniscient author or that of a central male character. Seldom are they so sharply characterized as the male protagonists, and in only a few instances are they the center of interest throughout the story. Some take little or no part in the dramatic action and seem actually relegated to worlds of their own where they are out of touch with reality and unable to take part in the search for truth.

If Conrad found the treatment of women and subjects involving them difficult, and if he expressed through Marlow his own inability to understand them, why was he not, as Moser says, content to write only perfect works containing no women? It must be assumed that Conrad felt women vital to the pictures of life and truth he wanted to portray and necessary to his presentation of certain beliefs. The purpose of this study is to show that many of Conrad's women characters were not merely passive factors and that their inclusion in his fiction was more functional than incidental.

Method

Nine of Conrad's more striking women characters will be examined individually. Since a study of this length could

7Moser, op. cit., p. 99.
not include all of the women appearing in Conrad's fiction, the nine used here were selected because of their contribution to or illustration of particular themes and because of their over-all technical or dramatic importance to the work in which they appear.

Chapter II deals with the heroine of the long story "Amy Foster" and her role in Conrad's interpretation of the frustrations and eventual disaster that come to an isolated man who is yearning for love and understanding. Although Amy herself seeks love, she is the agent of an indifferent, unsympathetic environment, and she destroys the central character by first accepting and later betraying him.

The influence of a native girl, Aissa, in the moral and physical destruction of the morally corrupt Willems is the subject of Chapter III. In _An Outcast of the Islands_ Conrad shows the depths to which a vain, unscrupulous man sinks when he gives in to inner weakness. Aissa appeals to Willems' weakness, and she attempts to assert power over him in order to gratify her own savage emotions. In the physical and moral isolation which consequently results for both of them, she precipitates his destruction.

Chapter IV examines the dual function of Lena in _Victory_. She demonstrates Conrad's belief that the security of belonging may be found through self-sacrifice: Lena's devotion penetrates the deliberate intellectual isolation of Heyst and leads them both to moral redemption.
The fifth chapter takes up the role of Winnie Verloc in *The Secret Agent*. Conrad referred to her as its imaginative center. He revised his original version to enlarge her part, although she appears to be only a minor character in the first two thirds of the novel. She is an example of those who consciously blind themselves to facts and to their desires in order to spend lives of fanatic devotion to another human. She also illustrates the tragic extremes of violent action to which the morally isolated person is driven when he becomes aware of his isolation.

Chapter VI deals with Flora, the heroine of *Chance*, and to a lesser extent with Mrs. Fyne. Mrs. Fyne typifies the woman who rejects her femininity, while Flora's isolation stems from a profound mistrust of mankind. Conrad shows in Flora's story how happiness and moral salvation may result from the recognition and repudiation of false beliefs. Unlike some of the tragic heroines, Flora lives to enjoy the moral kinship which comes to her.

The subject of Chapter VII is Nathalie Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*. When Razumov, who attempted to remain neutral in action in contradiction to his own philosophy, falls in love with Nathalie, he begins to see the horror of his failure to act. The realization leads to his desire to confess his

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his unworthy motives to Nathalie in order to receive punishment, which he feels will redeem him from guilt and loneliness.

Chapter VIII takes up Jewel in *Lord Jim*. The love affair of Jewel and Jim occupies a comparatively small portion of the entire novel, but it ties Jim more closely to the people of Patusan. After Jim's death, Jewel changes from a devoted, submissive native girl into a cold and effective judge of Jim's behavior.

Chapter IX presents Emilia Gould of *Nostromo*, Conrad's most extended and complex characterization of a woman. Mrs. Gould, a composite of the better qualities of the other women, symbolizes the finest aspects of society, acts as a unifying element in the structure of *Nostromo*, and takes a large part in its dramatic action. Conrad illustrates through her his belief that even the good are subject to moral separations, for neither her virtue nor her intelligence prevent her being overwhelmed by forces she recognizes but cannot control.

The tenth chapter contains conclusions based on the separate analyses in an attempt to establish relationships between Conrad's fictional women and certain of his themes and beliefs.
CHAPTER II

AMY FOSTER

In the long story "Amy Foster" Conrad dealt with the type of isolation "arising from irreconcilable differences and from that fear of the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads."\(^1\) Amy Foster was homely, stolid, and dull to a point nearing stupidity. But because she had barely "enough imagination to fall in love"\(^2\) with Yanko Goorall, she became the agent of his destruction. Yanko typifies Conrad's characters who are good, simple men isolated through no fault of their own and forever denied the comfort of human solidarity by unkind and uncaring circumstances.

Conrad revealed the story of Amy and Yanko through a narrator, Dr. Kennedy, who knew and understood the people of the English countryside where it was set. He described Amy as a woman whose appearance would impress no one, with one of those "faces that call your attention by a curious want of definiteness in their whole aspect."\(^3\) Kennedy also said she was "tender to every living creature"\(^4\) and described her

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\(^1\) Joseph Conrad, "Amy Foster," *Typhoon and Other Stories*, XXI (Garden City, 1931), 107-108.


sympathy for all suffering things, no matter how small or insignificant. Yet, when her employers' parrot screamed for help, Amy had unaccountably run away from its cries and allowed it to be eaten by a cat. Perhaps Conrad had Kennedy relate the incident as forewarning of the dangerous limitations of Amy's kindness and sympathy.

Yanko, a Carpathian emigrant, became, like the parrot, a victim of Amy's treacherous tenderness. He escaped drowning at sea to suffer indignities from the English people with whom he could not communicate. Conrad's sympathy for this kind of solitude is evident in this passage:

> It is indeed hard upon a man to find himself a lost stranger, helpless, incomprehensible, and of a mysterious origin, in some obscure corner of the earth. Yet amongst all the adventurers ship-wrecked in all the wild parts of the world, there is not one... that ever had to suffer a fate so simply tragic.  

His plight was described by the wretched state in which he was first seen by Dr. Kennedy: he was cold, muddy, and frightened from having hidden in a pigpound and later being imprisoned all night in a dirty woodshed. But Yanko's simple, trusting nature did not change; he maintained his faith in God, continued to say his prayers, and instead of condemning those who mistreated him, he merely wondered "what made them so hard-hearted and their children so bold."  

When Yanko sat alone in the woodshed wondering what new torments awaited him from those unsympathetic people, Amy went

\(^5\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 113.} \quad \text{\textit{Ibid.}}, \text{p. 127.}\)
to him with food and spoke to him the first kind words he had heard in England. Despite his ravenous hunger he kissed her hand in gratitude, for her humane treatment of him had restored his faith in humanity. "Through this act of impulsive pity he was brought back again within the pale of human relations with his new surroundings."7

Eventually Yanko was employed by a farmer with a fondness for curious objects and strange people, and after he prevented the drowning of the man's grandchild, he received somewhat better treatment from his employer. But the attitude of the people of the community at large remained critical and unfriendly. He could not understand their coldness and their practice of keeping their church locked on week-days, any more than they could understand his language, his odd dress, or his habit of lying on the ground during his lunch hour to watch the clouds and to think. "They became used to see him at last. But they never became used to him."8 When he attempted to make friends with the men at the local tap-room, they disapproved of his gaiety and forcibly ejected him.

Only Amy did not refuse Yanko's attempts to be friendly. She seemed to be captivated by him, and in spite of the open disapproval of the community, Yanko persisted in his ceremonious courtship of her. After remonstrances from Amy's father and others, the two married and settled into a cottage

7Ibid., p. 125. 8Ibid., p. 132.
provided by Yanko's employer. Still the townspeople continued to make disparaging comments and to refer to Amy as foolish for marrying a foreigner.

But Amy's infatuation could not provide for Yanko the full sense of belonging and the understanding he desired so much. His once happy nature began to change. Although he did not complain of being lonely, he confided to Dr. Kennedy when their son was born his delight that now "there was a man to whom he could sing and talk in the language of his own country." Later, he seemed to have lost none of his belief in Amy's goodness, but he was puzzled by her disapproval of his praying or singing in his native tongue to their baby.

Amy had gradually become more and more afraid of that in Yanko which she did not understand. Most of all she feared his constant need to communicate his thoughts, a thing which was unnecessary to one of her dullness. "Oh, I hope he won't talk!" she would say. At last repulsion and fear drove out all her tender feelings for Yanko. As Wright observed, "The nature of Amy's mind is, after all, not so simple, trusting, and loving as Yanko's, but instead is subject to fear and suspicion." Amy's distrust of what she found incomprehensible fed her fear and suspicions, and when Yanko became ill, she was too afraid of being alone with him to care for him properly.

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9Ibid., p. 137. 10Ibid., p. 139.

Dr. Kennedy warned her of the seriousness of his illness, but her former pity and "tenderness to every living thing" had given way to other emotions. When Yanko feverishly asked her for water to drink, her "maternal instinct and that unaccountable fear"\(^{12}\) caused her to take up the child and run away, leaving Yanko alone.

Dr. Kennedy found Yanko in much the same condition as when he had first seen him--alone, frantic with thirst, wallowing in mud in an attempt to get a drink of water.

The fever had left him, taking with it the heat of life. And with his panting breast and lustrous eyes he reminded me of a bird caught in a snare. She had left him... sick--helpless--thirsty. The spear of the hunter had entered his very soul. "Why?" he cried in the penetrating voice of a man calling to a responsible Maker. A gust of wind and a swish of rain answered.\(^{13}\)

Thus Conrad pictured Yanko's loss of all faith and all hope for any kind of understanding or acceptance from man, wife, or God. Because she failed to understand Yanko, Amy had "cast [him] out... to perish in the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair."\(^{14}\)

\(^{12}\)Conrad, "Amy Foster," *Typhoon*, XXI, 139.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 141.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 142.
CHAPTER III

AISSA

The theme is the boundless, mad vanity of an ignorant man who has been successful but is without principles or any motive other than the satisfaction of his vanity. Nor is he faithful even to himself. Whence the fall, the man's sudden descent into physical enslavement by an absolutely savage woman.¹

In this statement of the theme of his second novel, An Outcast of the Islands, Conrad points out the role of the lovely native girl, Aissa. Her contribution to the disintegration of the character of Willems cannot be minimized, for it is through the consequences of their illicit love that he is "shocked into a realization of his identity in the universal scheme."² The theme of this novel is revealed in Willems' attempt to deny this identity and the inevitability of his being forced to admit it. Since Willems' moral and temperamental failings are more important in Conrad's theme than the actual solitude enforced by circumstances, and Aissa aggravates his failings, her importance to the theme can best be revealed through a description of Willems' decay and eventual death.


Willems first appears as a man obsessed by his egoistic desire to be an all-powerful benefactor to certain people in his community. Not realizing that his greed tricked him into marrying the half-caste Joanna, he delights in thinking of himself as "a providence" to her numerous relatives, and revels in his sense of power over them and in their dependence on him. He wants even more power, and, contemptuous of scruples, believing that he cannot fail at anything he tries, he embezzles a sum of money. The first proof of his unfaithfulness to himself occurs when he attempts to repay the money secretly, thereby asserting his desire to keep within the moral law he pretends to disdain.

Confronted with his employer's discovery of his guilt, Willems fears telling Joanna, whom he has dominated for so long, that they must leave Macassar because he cannot appear before the people stripped of power. After she surprisingly turns on him and rejects him, he contemplates drowning himself. Displaying further weakness, he thinks:

To walk again amongst those men who yesterday were ready to crawl before me, and then feel on my back the sting of their pitying or satisfied smiles—no! I can't.3

His self-destructive thoughts are interrupted by Captain Lingard, who had befriended him when he was a destitute, runaway boy, and had later brought him to Macassar. To provide him with temporary refuge, Lingard takes him on his ship to

3Joseph Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, X (Garden City, 1928), 39.
Sambir. He is to spend some time with Almayer at Lingard's trading post, the river approach to which it is its owner's dearest trade secret.

Very soon, Willems, who already knows and hates Almayer, feels lonely, trapped, and bored with him and Sambir. Exploring the islands one day, he encounters Aissa for the first time. At that moment he feels that perhaps here is his chance to forget the humiliation of his recent past. But the hope is also filled with foreboding:

Willems stared at her, charmed with a charm that carries with it a sense of irreparable loss, tingling with that feeling which begins like a caress and ends in a blow, in that sudden hurt of a new emotion making its way into a human heart, with the brusque stirring of sleeping sensations awakening suddenly to the rush of new hopes, new fears, new desires—and to the flight of one's old self.\(^4\)

Although Willems was from the first isolated by his disregard of moral obligations and his belief that he is impervious to disaster or defeat, Aissa is the immediate cause of his awakening to his isolation; for in answer to her very first words to him, he admits that he is the outcast of his people.

Before his second meeting with Aissa, Willems begins to forget some of the unpleasantness in his past, and, temporarily his ambitions for the future. His only thoughts are centered on Aissa's beauty and his desire for her. It is inevitable that this man, once so unwilling to face unpleasant

\(^4\text{Conrad, An Outcast of The Islands, X, 69.}\)
reality that he contemplated suicide, should lose himself in considering a far more pleasant subject: "There was nothing in the whole world—for that idle man—but her look and her smile. Nothing in the past, nothing in the future; and in the present only the luminous fact of her existence."5

But Willems does not submit passively to this destruction of his self-possession. In spite of the disasters in his past which he would gladly forget, his conception of his own worth remains such that he hesitates at the idea of losing himself even to such an overwhelming force as Aissa.

But in the sudden darkness of her going, he would be left weak and helpless, as though despoiled violently of all that was himself. He who had lived all his life with no preoccupation but that of his own career, contemptuously indifferent to all feminine influence, full of scorn for men that would submit to it, if ever so little; he, so strong, so superior even in his errors, realized at last that his very individuality was snatched from within himself by the hand of a woman.6

Wavering thus between delight and dejection, Willems flees from Aissa when she at last seems ready to surrender to him. He tells himself repeatedly and emphatically that the affair must end there and makes his way back to Almayer, feeling that he has surely put an end to such madness. But his resolution lasts a very short time; he weakens and hurries back up the river to their meeting place, telling himself that he goes only for a last look at the spot.

5Ibid., p. 76.
6Ibid., p. 77.
But the distraught man forgets to secure the canoe in which he arrived, and it floats away from him. In order to find another boat, he must pass Aissa's house. Again there comes to him that awful sense of separation from himself and the fears for his future.

He seemed to see what went on within him, and was horrified at the strange sight... That woman was a complete savage... The novelty of the sensations he had never experienced before... destroyed his courage. He was disappointed with himself. He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization. He had a notion of being lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat--lost his footing--fell back into the darkness.7

Once more Willems follows a course of giving in instead of counting beforehand the possible consequences of his actions.

Willems represents many things to Aissa in addition to the powerful physical attraction he holds for her. Possessing him and exerting power over him represent an achievement to her, for

He was of the victorious race. He appeared to her with all the fascination of a great and dangerous thing; of a terror vanquished, surmounted, made a plaything of. They spoke with just such a deep voice—those victorious men; they looked with just such hard blue eyes at their enemies. And she made that voice speak softly to her, those eyes look tenderly at her face.8

Aissa's strong loyalty to her tribe, particularly to her blind father, demands that she hold Willems captive in retribution for the suffering the whites have caused her people. She uses

7Ibid., p. 81. 8Ibid., p. 75.
her most effective weapons, her savage beauty and charm, to over-power him.

After remaining five weeks in the native village with Aissa, Willems returns to Almayer at the post. He is frantic because Aissa has left him. He pleads with Almayer to set him up as a trader so that he and Aissa can be together until he is financially able to take her away from the islands. Almayer's indignant refusal brings back some of Willems' old belligerence and cunning, and he threatens to disclose to the Arab traders, Aissa's friends, Lingard's secret passageway to the river and the trading post. But this spark of his old nature barely glows before Almayer drives him away with threats and curses.

Willems' short separation from Aissa had filled him with agony and the fear of losing her again forever. When he finds her once more, he is told by her tribesmen that she will be taken from him permanently unless he discloses Lingard's secret to them and to the Arabs. At first he feels disgusted with himself for having fallen into the hands of these thieves and robbers. But when he weighs his disgust against his desire to possess Aissa, he consents to their plan. He rationalizes that he had, after all, gone to Almayer first with his proposition and had been forced by his refusal to deal with these people against Almayer, Lingard, and those of his own kind. He ends by finding a certain amount of pleasure in giving himself up for this woman without whom his life is nothing.
Reunited with Aissa, Willems forgets his infidelity until she forces him to face it by questioning him about his conference with her friends and the plans for disclosing the secret. Then troublesome thoughts occur to him—

Not that he had any conviction about it. . . It was an indistinct feeling, a threat of suffering like the confused warning of coming disease, an inarticulate monition of evil made up of fear and pleasure, of resignation and of revolt. He was ashamed of his state of mind. After all, what was he afraid of? Were those scruples? Why that hesitation to think, to speak of what he intended doing? Scruples were for imbeciles. His clear duty was to make himself happy.9

With his old feeling of superiority reasserting itself, he is again convinced that his only obligation is to himself. But the interlude of self-righteousness and happiness he finds in being with Aissa is menaced by a dream which will become a recurrent symbol of his isolation from himself. Conrad describes it as an

. . . indistinct vision of a well-known figure; a man going away from him. . . who walked away growing smaller, but never getting out of sight for all his steady progress. He felt a desire to see him vanish, a hurried impatience of his disappearance, and he watched for it with a careful and irksome effort. There was something familiar about that figure. Why? Himself!10

His passion for Aissa, who from the first found him attractive, mysterious, and "ready to be enslaved," has now succeeded in destroying both his self-possession and the few remaining traces of his identity with the world of white men.

9Ibid., p. 142. 10Ibid., p. 145.
Then he sees Aissa's decrepit father crawling toward him to kill him with a knife, and when the full import of his separation from both himself and others comes to him, he is afraid.

He was in the grip of horrible fear. . . . It was not the fear of death. . . . It was not the fear of the end, for he knew that the end would not come then. . . . It was the unreasoning fear of this glimpse of the unknown things, into those motives, impulses, desires he had ignored, but that had lived in the breasts of despised men, and were revealed to him for a second, to be hidden again behind the black mists of doubt and deception. It was not death that frightened him; it was the horror of a bewildered life where he could understand nothing and nobody round him; where he could guide, control, comprehend nothing and no one—not even himself.11

Finally the horror of his isolation is upon him—a horror which is to return to him repeatedly as he alternately loves and hates both Aissa and himself.

Although Aissa had earlier agreed to act as a lure in persuading Willems to betray Lingard, she demonstrates a fierce loyalty to her lover in her savage struggle with her father for the death knife. She refuses her father's command to kill Willems, saying she would sooner take her own life. For this the old man curses her long and bitterly, and she is forced to admit that the white man has brought only misfortune to her and her kind. When the terrified Willems demands that she desert her people with him, she refuses; for she recognizes the falseness in him and no longer believes his promises.

Fearing she would lose him among the whites, and determined to keep him always, Aissa locks herself away from him.

11Ibid., p. 149.
He pleads with her to return and promises his undying devotion, but once more she refuses: "Sleep in peace—for the time of your going is near. Now I am afraid of you. Afraid of your fear. When you return...you will find me here. And there will be nothing but love. Nothing else!—Always!—Till we die!"\(^{12}\) Driven by his frenzied desire for Aissa, Willems sets out to complete his betrayal of Lingard by guiding the Arabs to Lingard's secret river passage.

When Lingard learns of Willems' treachery, he decides to punish him by sentencing him to a lifetime of isolation on an island with Aissa. Misunderstanding Lingard's intentions, Aissa begs him to spare Willems' life, although she admits that she is now rejected by him, does not understand him, and worst of all, no longer has any power over him. She knows that she has been deceived by him all along, yet she pleads with Lingard to leave him to her, because to her he is everything. Her father is dead, and the others of her race have gone.

The intensity of her pleas affect the strong old man: he pitifully urges Aissa to leave Willems and return to her people; and when she refuses, he assures her that he will spare Willems' life. It was apparent that she had affected him deeply:

> They stood together, crossing their glances; she suddenly appeased, and Lingard thoughtful and uneasy under a vague sense of defeat.

\(^{12}\text{Ibid.},\space p.\space 156;\space Conrad's\space ellipsis.\)
... He felt discontented and surprised. Unexpectedly he had come upon a human being—a woman at that—who had made him disclose his will before its time.¹³

Facing Lingard at last, Willems refuses to defend himself against the other's physical assault, yet he maintains in reply to Lingard's accusations and assault on his character that he has been blameless—that "the evil was in them, not in me."¹⁴ Denying any guilt or weakness in himself, Willems says that Lingard and Almayer were indirectly the causes of his being enslaved by Aissa. He tries to rationalize his betrayal of Lingard by saying that the passageway to the trading post would have been discovered sooner or later anyway. He insists that his degrading behavior is Aissa's fault, saying, "I fought against her. She goaded me to violence and to murder. . . . She pushed me to it persistently, desperately, all the time."¹⁵ He insists that his undoing came from Aissa's appeal to something within him that he could not understand, and he begs Lingard to take him out of her sight.

"When I think that when I first knew her it seemed to me that my whole life wouldn't be enough. . . . And now when I look at her! She did it all. I must have been mad. Every time I look at her I remember my madness. It frightens me. . . . And when I think that of all my life, of all my past, there is nothing left but her, the cause of my ruin, and you whom I have mortally offended . . . ."¹⁶

But Lingard leaves, and in the days that follow, Aissa is repeatedly thrust aside when she attempts to comfort Willems.

¹³Ibid., p. 255. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 266. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 270. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 274; Conrad's ellipsis.
She cannot understand the curses and insults he flings at her in English; she mourns because of his fear, anger, and loss of desire for her. The disintegration of Willem's character is gradually forcing him to admit that, instead of being the conqueror of circumstances, he is helpless and alone. 17

Willem does not yet fully comprehend how helpless and alone he will be. For a little while longer he struggles mentally against the circumstances that have exiled him. He feels no remorse, only hate for his past and regret for the "unavoidable fate" that brought him to such depths of sordidness. He goes so far as to entertain moments of hopeful fantasy about escaping from Aissa and the island by canoe. But the fantasy is as futile as his only tool (a penknife) for cutting down a tree to make a canoe. He cannot abide the thought of dying there and being forgotten; he deludes himself that something or somebody will turn up to help him escape the torture which he is not courageous enough either to endure or to end.

For the second time in his life Willem feels like calling out for help, but he realizes that no one will hear him, that not even Lingard, his rescuer in times past, cares for him. In putting his desire for Aissa ahead of all else, he has cut himself off from everyone in the world except her. He feels very sorry for himself, and "his anger against her, the cause of all his misfortunes, vanished before his extreme need for

17 Wright, op. cit., p. 130.
some kind of consolation. Perhaps... she might help him to forget."

But in the moment at which Willems is so close to confessing his wrongs and his need to suffer for them, he remains contemptuous of everything but himself.

He planned the deliberate descent from his pedestal, the throwing away of his superiority, of all his hopes, of all ambitions, of the ungrateful civilization. For a moment, forgetfulness in her arms seemed possible; and lured by that possibility the semblance of renewed desire possessed his breast in a burst of reckless contempt for everything outside himself."

Because he is thinking only of his own misery and disregarding Aissa's, the oblivion he seeks in her arms does not come. This last chance of escape from hopelessness is denied him. There is nothing at all left for him, and he admits for the first time that he is a lost man, an outcast in every sense.

As he sits in despair, Joanna, whom Almayer has sent, appears, and Willems thinks at first that she is a product of his delirium. When he sees she is real, his thoughts are not of her and their child, but of the boat in which they came as a means of escape for himself. Joanna mistakenly weeps and asks his forgiveness, but Willems resumes his domineering of her and wonders how to get his revolver and escape before Aissa returns. When Aissa does appear, Willems is tempted for a moment to kill both her and Joanna so that neither can hinder his escape.

18Ibid., p. 337. 19Ibid.
When the two women meet, each demands to know who the other is; each denounces the other and Willems. It is ironic that these two, both determined to possess Willems, defame each other for the sake of a man unfaithful to them both. In a supreme gesture of scorn and contempt, Aissa flings all her personal adornments at Joanna's feet. Joanna slaps Aissa before she runs, shrieking, with the child in her arms, to the boat.

Willems intends taking from Aissa the revolver she has brought to defend him with. When she seems to hear again the voice of her father urging her to kill Willems, Aissa gives him a last warning in the name of their past love: "'Do not come near me... or you die now! Go while I remember yet.'" But Willems is crazy with his desire to escape the island and desperate for the gun. Still believing himself invincible, he lunges for it and is shot. In the seconds following the report, he believes that Aissa has missed him. Confident for the last time of his invincibility and feeling that at last he understands "the joy, the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life," he falls dead. Almayer tells later of finding Aissa holding the dead Willems and fiercely defending her right to possess him in death as she had once possessed him in life.

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20Ibid., p. 360; Conrad's ellipsis.

21Ibid.
Conrad said of the hero and heroine of this novel, "To me they are typical of mankind, where every individual wishes to assert his power, woman by sentiment, man by achievement of some sort—mostly base." Willems, originally separated from society by his vanity, became isolated both physically and mentally when he sought greater power, because he was not the superior being he thought. In her desire to assert power over Willems, Aissa separated herself from her people as surely as she had contributed to Willems' isolation. By creating Aissa to appeal to Willems' weakness, Conrad illustrated the destruction sure to come to a man acting against the basic integrity of the human community.

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CHAPTER IV

LENA

Lena, like Aissa, is another of Conrad's women characters whose function can be shown best through an account of the development of the male protagonist. Although Lena herself illustrates Conrad's theme of the isolated individual searching for solidarity, this aspect of her role is secondary to the part she plays in Heyst's return to the human community.

Heyst belongs to that group of Conrad heroes who understand, appreciate, and subscribe to the ethical code, who suffer from fears and weaknesses, but meet the crises in their lives successfully through their achievement of self-knowledge.¹ The crisis in the life of Axel Heyst was precipitated by Lena; his self-knowledge was a magnified reflection of Lena's. As surely as Heyst had helped her to escape from solitude, she had helped him to escape his isolation.

Heyst's state of isolation was deliberate and self-imposed; and since it was voluntary and intellectual, it was subject to penetration through his emotions. His self-isolation came about because his pessimistic father warned him of the utter futility of becoming involved in or trying to do anything about the

problems of mankind. The elder Heyst had told his son,

I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity. It is perhaps the least difficult—always remembering that you, too, if you are anything, are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself... Look on—make no sound.

From his father's words Heyst formulated his belief that by wandering through life as an impartial and unemotional observer he could avoid suffering and resist becoming involved in the troubles of mankind. However, his plan for remaining "invulnerable because elusive" had certain imperfections. One of these was his pity for people less fortunate than himself.

Pity for Morrison, a destitute trader, caused Heyst to lend him money. In an effort to repay Heyst, Morrison made him his partner in a coal mining venture. During a trip to promote the mine and assure its success, Morrison died. Because Morrison's death came while he was on a mission in Heyst's behalf, the latter felt in some way to blame for it. The incident served to confirm his belief that only grief could result from meddling in human affairs.

Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature... He deemed himself guilty of Morrison's death.

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3Ibid., p. 90.
4Ibid., p. 65.
At this point in his life Heyst felt that he could no longer "look on" safely, and, determined to keep entirely to himself, he withdrew to the deserted island on which the abandoned mine lay. The physical solitude there intensified Heyst's sense of separation. Like other Conrad characters "freed by choice from normal human ties and obligations," he found himself in the "inescapable presence of conscience." He began to think of himself as a prisoner of the island with no one to whom he could turn. His loneliness was increased by his knowledge that he had betrayed his own principles in assisting Morrison. Furthermore, he was bewildered by the fact that he, who had deliberately sought solitude, had become lonely in it. Eventually loneliness caused Heyst to go to the mainland for a short visit. Conrad hinted at the consequences of the trip in the lines, "His reappearance shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble." Heyst's philosophy is seen to be faulty, because he could not ignore his emotions when he was faced with others as lonely as he.

The next person for whom he felt pity was the girl Lena. When Heyst first saw her, she was playing in a traveling orchestra employed at the mainland hotel operated by Schomberg.

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To Heyst, Lena looked sensitive, frightened, and lonely, and her appearance moved him to speak to her. He was unaware that he was for the second time being drawn into the affairs of others by the same emotion which had involved him with Morrison. Wright attributes Heyst's lack of awareness of his pity for people like Lena and Morrison to the fact that

. . . his aloofness cannot be violated by those who are not themselves alone. They belong in a world which he has renounced, and their security makes him independent of them. What he does not perceive is that his own solitariness of mind lets him imaginatively enter the minds of others who are similarly isolated and that that imaginative creation of their feeling compels him to identify himself with their destiny.?

Heyst's immediate identification of Lena as "similarly isolated" proved correct.

Lena told him that she had spent her childhood in poverty and unhappiness. Forced by her father's illness to join the orchestra in which Heyst found her, she had known few reasons for being happy and had no one who really cared whether she lived or died. When she met Heyst, she was being mistreated by the managers of the orchestra and amorously pursued by the repulsive Schomberg. She had never known anyone like Heyst. She was overwhelmed by his genuine interest in her, and she trusted her future welfare entirely to him.

Heyst's concern for Lena was completely at odds with his policy of letting others work out their own destiny. He was

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intensely sympathetic toward her, and, as he visualized their respective states of isolation, "Heyst seemed to see the illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish... and leave them both face to face in a moral desert as arid as the sands of Sahara, without restful shade, without refreshing water."\(^8\)

Heyst was disturbed by his inability to disregard the girl and her troubles and by the sudden clouding of his usually clear mind by "the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman."\(^9\)

The underlying cause of Heyst's confusion and the resultant period of indecision was that he had until then succeeded in repressing his emotions only partially. At this point "he had no illusions about her; but his sceptical mind was dominated by the fulness of his heart."\(^10\) These emotions cut short Heyst's hesitation, for he was one of those of whom Conrad said,

Those dreamy spectators of the world's agitation are terrible once the desire to act gets hold of them. They lower their heads and charge a wall with an amazing serenity which nothing but an indisciplined imagination can give... his complete inexperience gave him the necessary audacity.\(^11\)

When Lena appealed to him and put herself completely in his care, Heyst felt that it was indeed his mission to save her from her unhappy surroundings.) With such a new picture of his purpose in rescuing her, he surveyed himself carefully in a mirror, because "he felt so strange that he could not resist the suspicion of his personal appearance having changed during

\(^8\) Conrad, *Victory*, xxiii, 80.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 82.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 83.
\(^11\) Ibid., p. 77.
the night. What he saw... was the man he knew before. It was almost a disappointment—a belittling of his recent experience."12

Thus Lena caused Heyst to take the first step toward rejoining a part of the human community and assuming some share of responsibility for his fellow man. In Wright's interpretation of Conrad's philosophy, "Whatever caused a man to feel that he was in accord with a tradition of 'sincere emotions' would help him to find his integral place in the universal scheme,"13 and Conrad had given Lena those qualities which had the power to evoke in Heyst the "sincere emotions" he had long tried to suppress. With renewed confidence in himself, Heyst succeeded in his plan for stealing Lena away from Schomberg and the orchestra managers.

Lena appeared from the first to understand the full implications of the terms on which she left the mainland to live with Heyst, for she did not expect him to marry her. She preferred his terms to remaining there in the hostile atmosphere of strangers, of whom she said, "They are too many for me."14 Her insecurity and loneliness made her want above everything to be loved and needed by Heyst as she loved and needed him. She felt his failure to accept and return her devotion more than she could tell him, but she showed wisdom beyond her nineteen years in getting along with him once they were alone on

12Ibid., p. 90  
13Wright, op. cit., p. 39.  
14Conrad, Victory, XXIII, 79.  
15Ibid., p. 201.
the island. Though she could not understand Heyst, she continued to think there must be some way for her to deserve his love.

She felt in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice. This was something of which he did not seem to have an idea. He was a strange being without needs.15

When they had been together on the island for three months, Heyst was still pleasantly surprised at times by Lena's love for him; "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."16 On such occasions Heyst was very close to his moment of self-revelation, to the realization of the falseness of his intellectual isolation. He admitted to himself that

the girl he had come across, of whom he had possessed himself, to whose presence he was not yet accustomed, with whom he did not yet know how to live; . . . gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life.17

But Heyst was not yet ready to give up his belief that "he who forms a tie is lost."18 There was still in him "a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome. . . the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare."19

16Ibid., p. 188.  
17Ibid., p. 200.  
18Ibid.  
19Ibid., p. 212.
He knew that in exchanging his loneliness for Lena's company he was losing the freedom from responsibility he had long prized and was gaining a burden. When Lena inquired about Morrison and about Schomberg's accusations that Heyst had robbed and murdered him, he felt that such an involvement with life's burdens and the suffering they caused were almost too much to bear:

All at once... he detested her. But only for a moment... his hidden fury fell into dust within him, like a crazy structure, leaving behind emptiness, desolation, regret. His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself—that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught... 20

Heyst tried to strengthen his belief in "looking on" by turning to the books of philosophy his father had written, just as he had previously explained his own philosophy to Lena by saying that it all came from his father's teachings. But Lena interrupted his search for affirmation of his beliefs with a sudden statement of her own feelings:

"You should try to love me!... sometimes it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever.... Do try!"21

Preoccupied with his own fading beliefs, Heyst had never before that time realized he had not confessed his love for her in so many words.

The actual test of the love of these two came with the arrival of a boat carrying three men sent by the jealous, vindictive Schomberg. These men, "Plain Mr. Jones," his

20Ibid., p. 215. 21Ibid., p. 221.
secretary Ricardo, and their servant Pedro, had been told by Schomberg that they could easily rob Heyst of the large sum of money he was supposed to have taken from Morrison. The trio represented to Lena and Heyst a form of danger that Mr. Jones himself defined:

"I, my dear sir? In one way I am—yes, I am the world itself come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast—almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate—the retribution that waits its time."22

The intrusion of outsiders could not have come at a worse time for Heyst. Ever since Lena's revelation of Schomberg's accusation, followed by her own accusation that he did not love her as he should, Heyst had been bitterly reverting to his former state of moral solitude. He saw these events as more proof of his original belief that only isolation could fore­stall suffering.

In this frame of mind Heyst was aware of the threat of these men to himself and Lena, but he could not bring himself to act against them. At first he maintained for Lena's benefit his old detached and scornful attitude. When the Chinese servant stole his revolver and later deserted him, Heyst was more agitated. He told Lena,

"They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time—anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. Since you told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense—it extends even to myself."23

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22Ibid., p. 379.  
23Ibid., pp. 329-330.
Fear for Lena's safety had brought him another step nearer his time of complete self-recognition. But years spent in aloofness had left him physically and emotionally unprepared for an encounter with men like Jones and Ricardo, and he could no longer relegate his fears to mere wondering about the outcome.

The vague apprehension of a distant future, in which he saw Lena unavoidably separated from him by profound and subtle differences; the sceptical carelessness which had accompanied every one of his attempts at action, like a secret reserve of his soul, fell away from him. He no longer belonged to himself. There was a call far more imperious and august.24

While Jones and his partner were plotting to find and steal Heyst's non-existent treasure, Lena looked upon their arrival as her first big chance to prove her devotion to Heyst. When Ricardo attempted to attack her, she fought him off successfully. During the struggle Lena discovered Ricardo's knife, which she decided to take from him to provide Heyst with a means of defense. She was no longer the frightened girl who had been terrified by Schomberg's advances; having Heyst to defend had changed her.

She was no longer alone in the world now. . . . she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her—the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him. . . .25

Lena did not tell Heyst about seeing Ricardo or of her plan to meet him again to get the knife, because she wanted to perform this dangerous, self-sacrificing deed alone.

24Ibid., p. 245.  
25Ibid., p. 292.
Heyst had not yet thought of a practical means of resisting the attack that was sure to come. He was still complaining against the circumstances that had put him in such a position: "And the bitterest of this humiliation is its complete uselessness." Lena, however, felt that more than circumstances were to blame for their plight. She suggested to Heyst that perhaps they were being punished by Heaven for having lived together unlawfully, and that she was to blame for having entered into the relationship willfully. Heyst replied that he believed no such thing, but she insisted she would find a way to earn his forgiveness for having tempted him.

When Heyst outlined his plan for taking the would-be murderers by surprise and allowing her to escape, Lena pretended to agree to hide and to wait while he went to them for his signal. But instead of obeying Heyst's instructions, she met Ricardo to get the knife from him. Mr. Jones, who hated all women, discovered that Ricardo had been concealing his knowledge of Lena's presence from him. Enraged by Ricardo's display of infidelity, Jones forced Heyst to accompany him to hunt down and kill Ricardo. Thinking that Lena was hiding as he had told her, Heyst was shocked when he and Jones saw Lena with Ricardo inside the house. His distrust of mankind in general made him certain that Lena, whose love he had never really accepted, had betrayed him.

26 Ibid., p. 350.
Lena had just taken possession of the knife when Jones fired at Ricardo and hit her. She did not know that she was hit, and when Heyst went to her, she told him happily that she had saved him. Misinterpreting the scene between her and Ricardo, Heyst spoke to her bitterly, but she mistook his accusations for teasing. Heyst remained silent, unable to express any further emotions. When Lena begged him to pick her up and carry her away,

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her, and she no longer had the strength to throw her arms about his neck. 27

At that moment he became aware of the error he had made in isolating himself, in trying to deny the existence of any emotions he might have felt. When Lena asked, "Who else could have done this for you?" 28 he admitted that only she could have saved him, thus ending his belief that he could have existed safely alone.

Lena died feeling that Heyst at last "was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart--for ever!" 29 She had found her "place in the scheme of things" by giving her life for Heyst and had triumphed because she was no longer alone. Her death proved something to Heyst, too. He knew there had been in the world someone who

28Ibid.  
29Ibid., p. 407.
loved him so much that he could never bear isolation again.
Without Lena there remained for him only "woe to the man whose
heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put
its trust in life." He decided to end his own life as a
final tribute to his newly acquired knowledge of himself.

Although Conrad's characterization of Lena was not so
clear as that of Heyst, he used her in two ways to illustrate
the theme of Victory. Not only was she victorious in finding
her way out of solitude, but she also led Heyst from his intel-
lectual isolation to eventual moral salvation. Since the ap-
proach to Heyst's awareness of himself was primarily through
his emotions, Conrad could hardly have created a better means
of reaching Heyst's consciousness than Lena--passionate,
perceptive, and supremely capable of devotion.

30Ibid., p. 410.
CHAPTER V

WINNIE VERLOC

Conrad's letters reveal that he revised his original version of The Secret Agent partly for the purpose of expanding the role of Winnie Verloc. He wanted to emphasize "the ironic relation of her fate to a long sequence of events... in a world uninterested in the thoughts and feelings of an obscure woman." Winnie's philosophy "that things do not stand much looking into" was in Conrad's view one which made her susceptible to tragedy. It was an unrealistic attitude which kept her in moral isolation because she persisted in ignoring facts.

Winnie's reason for choosing to isolate herself was her excessive devotion to her half-witted brother Stevie. It was a devotion which called upon her pity, courage, and self-sacrifice; it directed her every action. Her tragic death is Conrad's dramatization of the fate of one who suddenly finds himself without the cause for which he has lived.

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2 Ibid., p. 194.

She had begun her isolation by rejecting the young man whom she loved but who could not support her mother and Stevie, in order to marry Verloc, who accepted responsibility for the whole family. By denying her love for the young man and suppressing the disgust she actually felt for Verloc, Winnie believed that she had gained the security she desired for her brother. She maintained an appearance of domestic contentment in her drab surroundings and seemed to be a loyal and dutiful wife.

Despite their appearance of compatibility, the Verlocs actually were "morally so isolated from each other as to be utter strangers."\(^4\) Mr. Verloc, selfishly fond of his wife, "with the regard one has for one's chief possession,"\(^5\) wanted to be loved only for himself, and Winnie was as incapable of loving him as he was of disregarding his own physical comfort. He was quite comfortable in his life with Winnie and her family. Winnie's mother, who admired him, conspired with her daughter to keep Stevie from annoying him, and Winnie kept him well fed, expressed appropriate concern for his health, and seemed to appreciate his providing for them all.

Since he did not suspect Winnie's real reason for marrying him, Verloc's most pressing concern was supporting his household without exerting himself physically any more than he had

\(^4\) Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
to. He was a fat, indolent man who acted as the secret agent of a foreign power while he pretended to be the friend and confidant of anarchists. His dingy, disreputable shop at the front of the Verloc home was less a source of income than a blind for his other activities.

As the story opened, Verloc was interviewed by his new superior, who insulted him by saying he was fat and incompetent and that he had no business being married if he wanted to pose successfully as an anarchist. Moreover, he threatened Verloc with losing his position if he could not find within a month someone willing to blow up Greenwich Observatory.

Verloc's career increased the couple's spiritual isolation: he deceived his wife as to the kind of work he really did. Actually, telling Winnie his worries would have been futile, for "she knew nothing and cared nothing about the world at large, and her life was guided by emotions and principles she took for granted and never thought of questioning."\(^6\) She habitually ignored all problems she could not understand and concentrated instead on what would be best for Stevie. When members of the anarchist group gathered to talk in Verloc's home, Winnie paid little attention to them except when their talk of oppression and cruelty excited Stevie.

Winnie's mother was also deeply concerned about the boy's future security. She feared Verloc might tire of supporting

\(^6\)Richard Curle, *Joseph Conrad and His Characters* (London, 1957), p. 120.
all of them, and in order to relieve him of one burden, she managed to get herself accepted by a charity home. Winnie reacted to her mother's decision to leave in a manner much as she had reacted toward the anarchists. Although at first she was shocked enough "to make her depart from that distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts which was her force and her safeguard in life," she soon regained her composure and helped her mother to prepare for the move.

The older woman's departure meant something different to Verloc—worried about his assignment, and threatened with the loss of his income, he felt the old lady had left in the manner of rats deserting sinking ships. But all he said to Winnie was that perhaps it was just as well. Winnie thought briefly of questioning the meaning of his comment, but her complacency prevailed. "She did not allow herself to fall into the idleness of barren speculation. She was rather confirmed in her belief that things did not stand being looked into."

Thus Winnie remained unaware of Mr. Verloc's worries and continued her one topic of conversation—Stevie. Hoping to get his wife's attention and sympathy, Verloc translated his mental discomfort into terms of physical illness. He succeeded briefly in catching her interest, but when he mentioned that he was going away for a few days, she accepted the information without comment. She looked upon his trips as

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periods of relief from his presence and opportunities to spend more time with Stevie.

In scenes such as the foregoing Conrad presented Winnie as if she were only a part of the setting, perhaps existing only to establish Verloc as a humane, uncritical man with no ambition except to remain comfortable. Conrad kept Winnie's part in the action at a minimum in order to give impact later to the way the "plotting and counterplotting of society constituted the sinister enveloping force which at first drew closer and then suddenly and catastrophically overwhelmed her. . . . and to more strongly prepare for the impending tragedy."\(^{10}\) This early treatment of Winnie as a minor character also made Verloc's conduct more horrifying when its full effect on her was revealed because she was an essentially innocent victim of his political involvements.

As Verloc continued his search for someone willing to dynamite the observatory, the narrative moved forward with scenes focused on anarchists, police agents, embassy people, and various others of his associates. When he returned from his visit to the continent, Winnie used every means at her command to strengthen the relationship between her husband and her brother. She wanted Verloc to be impressed with the boy's devotion to him and to make sure at the same time that Stevie felt wanted by her husband. She encouraged Stevie to make

\(^{10}\text{Wright, op. cit., p. 182.}\)
himself useful to the lazy Verloc in every way the boy's simpleness permitted, and she urged Verloc to take her brother with him on his nightly walks.

On these walks Verloc found the morbidly sentimental Stevie an apt listener. The thought of suffering of any kind always aroused in the boy a compulsion to take action to relieve the sufferer, and Verloc played upon this exaggerated compassion skilfully. Unknown to Winnie, Stevie became a willing accomplice convinced that he would be acting in the interest of all suffering humanity if he participated in the explosion plot. He thought he would be striking out at forces that made, in his words, a "bad world for poor people."\footnote{Conrad, \textit{The Secret Agent}, XV, 171.}

Pleased by Verloc's increased interest in her brother, Winnie did not object to his proposal to allow Stevie to visit one of the anarchists living in the country. She thought it might be good for the boy. Since she had, without Verloc's knowledge sewed an address label into Stevie's coat, she no longer worried about his staying lost for long periods of time when he forgot his name and address. She had absolutely no foreboding about his visit except that he would probably get his clothing dirty.

Verloc meant no harm to his brother-in-law when he later brought him from the country and gave him careful instructions for placing a can of nitroglycerin against the observatory wall. It seemed to him the most expedient way of carrying out
his assignment, and besides, "Mr. Verloc had augured a favourable issue to his enterprise, basing himself not on Stevie's intelligence... but on the blind docility and on the blind devotion of the boy."\textsuperscript{12} He had imagined a number of possible endings for the incident, but Stevie's death was not among them. He was horrified when the boy stumbled before reaching his objective and was blown to bits by the explosion. To Verloc, "Stevie dead was a much greater nuisance than ever he had been while alive."\textsuperscript{13}

Conrad meant the senseless death of Stevie to climax a series of equally senseless incidents precipitated by the false beliefs and purposes of all of the characters in the novel. Since the interest of the novel lies in character studies rather than in surprises, the story progressed according to "the order in which characters themselves became conscious of their connection with the crime or its solution."\textsuperscript{14}

Nearly everyone else connected with the incident heard of the accident before Winnie did, for she had neither been out nor talked with anyone. "She was alone longer than usual on the day of the attempted bomb outrage in Greenwich Park, because Mr. Verloc went out very early that morning and did not come back till nearly dusk. She did not mind being alone. She had no desire to go out."\textsuperscript{15} In this way Conrad pointed

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 229. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{13}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14}Wright, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 181.

\textsuperscript{15}Conrad, \textit{The Secret Agent}, XV, 190.
out that Winnie was isolated not only from society but from her husband as well. She never appeared outside the shop or her home, except for the trip to the almshouse with her mother, until after Stevie's death. This physical solitude plus her mental isolation made losing her brother an irremediable blow to her.

Her husband, "shaken morally to pieces," both by the accident's probable consequences and at having to tell Winnie, had spent the hours between the explosion and dusk sitting dazedly alone in a tavern. When he went home, he was shaking physically so violently that Winnie was sure he was ill. She tried, as usual, to comfort him with food, the thing in which he seemed to find his greatest pleasure.

But Verloc could not eat, any more than he could tell his wife the bad news. Instead, he told her he had withdrawn all their money from the bank because they would need it to leave England. Winnie argued mildly with him about the necessity for leaving the home she regarded as a haven for Stevie. As she always did, she reduced the idea to her fundamental terms of whether or not it would be good for her brother, then decided "it wouldn't stand examination. She condemned it from every point of view. But her only real concern was Stevie's welfare. He appeared to her... sufficiently 'peculiar' not to be taken rashly abroad. And that was all." Confident of

16 Ibid., p. 230. 17 Ibid., p. 195.
her power to hold her husband, she announced that he would have to choose between staying in London with her or going abroad without her.

Before the issue was settled, Verloc had to go out on business with a man who came to the shop. Though he still looked extremely odd, "Mrs. Verloc, for the purposes of practical existence put these appearances to the cold." 18 After reminding him to leave their money with her, she sent him off with an injunction to hurry home so she could look after his cold.

When Police Inspector Heat arrived to tell her of the explosion and showed her the address tag from Stevie's coat, Winnie became alarmed. But even facts such as these were slow to form in her mind the actual thought that Stevie had been harmed. Her suspicion was not confirmed until Verloc returned and she overheard Heat accuse him of the crime.

Verloc quickly admitted his part in the incident and asserted his willingness to clear his conscience by making full confession. But Heat advised him to leave London before anyone guessed that it was not he but Stevie who had been killed. The interview ended with Heat refusing to lock Verloc up immediately, and the unhappy man was left alone to face his wife's grief.

Conrad made the obese Verloc appear very small and very much alone in the presence of the consequences of his actions.

18 Ibid., p. 200.
He was "singularly alone... bewildered by the circumstances of society and unable to turn anywhere for comfort." Winnie sat in numb despair while he paced about her muttering excuses for himself and trying to justify his actions to her. He felt that if Winnie had not sewed the tag into Stevie's coat, he might not have been in such a tragic position, but he was magnanimously not bitter toward her. Much as he desired her sympathy and understanding for himself, he would have comforted her. When she remained perfectly still, his thoughts turned back to his physical well-being, and he consoled himself with eating.

It was impossible for Verloc to console his wife because he did not understand the depth of her feeling for Stevie. Nowhere else had Conrad created a couple so outwardly compatible and yet inwardly so separated by the very secrecy of their natures. Winnie's "philosophical, almost disdainful lack of curiosity, the foundation of their accord in domestic life," made it impossible for them to communicate adequately. Verloc wanted desperately to confide in his wife, but he could not. He had to be content with talking to her about the necessity for making practical arrangements for living during the time he expected to be imprisoned, and he insisted that most of his actions had been and would continue to be in her best interest.

19Wright, op. cit., p. 193.
In the original story Winnie became angered by her husband's continued talking, stabbed him, and the end of the novel followed soon after. According to Wright, Conrad did his most extensive and effective revision at this point in order to further explore Winnie's psychology and to find out "what philosophic implications might be suggested by the fact that her tragedy came at the end of an intricate series of events about which Winnie herself knew nothing." Thus Winnie became the dramatic and thematic center of interest at that point and remained so until the end of the novel.

In characterizing Winnie, Conrad demonstrated how circumstances existing in society can sometimes work in such a way that they destroy solidarity, make loneliness seem greater, and the most praiseworthy ideals seem trivial. Winnie's exaggerated conception of her duty to her brother had caused her to act insincerely in her relationship with Verloc. That contributed to her moral failure and to the eventual meaninglessness of her life. When Verloc robbed her of her most powerful reason for existing, she was filled with rage and helpless anguish at her betrayal.

As Verloc talked of practical matters, she sat silently ignoring his words and engrossed in visions of her own. Her mental change became apparent in the pictures appearing in her mind. She reviewed in memory scenes of her earliest protection of her brother, and "visions of seven years' security for

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21 Wright, op. cit., p. 194.
Stevie loyalty paid for on her part; of security growing into confidence, into a domestic feeling, stagnant and deep like a placid pool."22 She had lost the one thing that held her to conventional ties, and her bargain with Verloc was ended.

She looked upon her husband as the cause of her anguish, the murderer of her beloved brother. Circumstances had at last forced her to "look into things," but, like Heyst, her self-suppression had given her no experience to understand things she had long ignored. Though she felt free of Verloc, "she did not exactly know what use to make of her freedom. Her personality seemed to have been torn into two pieces, whose mental operations did not adjust themselves very well to each other."23 For a time she could not act decisively. Though she wanted to run from Verloc, she lingered as if there remained some last act that would end their bargain with complete finality.

Temperamentally Winnie was like Stevie—she too felt compelled to strike out at that which caused suffering. Even her protection of Stevie had never been passive, ("She had battled for him—even against herself"24), and her indecision grew into a desire to take action against Verloc. When he made himself comfortable on the sofa and called to her in what she recognized as his wooing voice, she answered obediently.

23Ibid., p. 254. 24Ibid., p. 254.
He had aroused in her the only passion she would ever feel for him—the desire to kill him. All of her suppressed emotions rose to the surface, and as she approached Verloc with a knife in her hand, she looked very much like her brother.

Wright interpreted Winnie's actions in these words:

There is here no momentary impulse. In marrying Verloc and in deceiving him for seven years into thinking that he is "loved for himself," she has been as secretive and uncandid as he. Now, when she realizes that her studied efforts of deception have been defeated by the more sinister deceit of Verloc himself, her habitual craftiness and singleness of mind guide her unwaveringly through her act of revenge. . . . With the stabbing she brings to its termination all the life she has ever known.25

When she had stabbed Verloc, Winnie's facial resemblance to Stevie subsided, and for a few moments "she was a woman enjoying her complete irresponsibility and endless leisure."26

Following the period of dazed immobility which came upon her after the death blow, Winnie became afraid. What she had thought of earlier as a necessary act of retribution suddenly became "an extremely plain case of murder."27 Again she faced a problem demanding immediate solution. Terrified by the thought of being hanged for her crime, she decided to drown herself by jumping into the river.

But she could not do so. The composure with which she acted in killing Verloc had deserted her, and she was further weakened by the thought of her absolute loneliness. "Mrs. Verloc. . . thought that she was a very friendless woman. . . .

25Wright, op. cit., p. 195.
She had no acquaintances of her own. Nobody would miss her in a social way.\textsuperscript{28} Too weary to walk all the way to the river, she thought of escaping the gallows by leaving the country. But the small, closed-in world in which she had existed had left her ignorant of how to get out of London. She felt more hopelessly lost and alone than ever.

Conrad gave Winnie her last apparent chance to find hope and salvation through another human being when she met Comrade Ossipon, a revolutionary who had visited Verloc and frequently gazed meaningfully at Winnie. This man, who depended for his living on his ability to charm women out of money, had been wondering whether or not Winnie would have money coming from Verloc. (He assumed, as others did, that Verloc had been blown up.) He immediately began flattering Winnie, and "Mrs. Verloc accepted it all with the fierceness the instinct of self-preservation imparts to the grip of a drowning person. To the widow of Mr. Verloc the robust anarchist was like a radiant messenger of life."\textsuperscript{29}

In her desperation Winnie mistook his manner for understanding sympathy and an expression of his fondness for her. She pleaded with him to help her go away, and Ossipon, not realizing what she had done, was quite willing to go with her at her expense. But when they returned to close the shop, he discovered that Winnie had stabbed her husband; then he too

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 269. \textsuperscript{29}Ibid., pp. 273-274.
felt panic. When an approaching policeman intensified Winnie's fear of hanging, she threw herself completely at his mercy, promising tearfully to love and serve him forever if he would only save her.

Conrad illuminated that side of her nature which compelled her to devote herself to someone as selflessly as she had lived for Stevie. Unlike Lena, Winnie did not meet the awareness of her need for moral solidarity with strong determination to make herself loved. Instead, "hatred, dread of the scaffold, and hope of escape are tumultuously intermingled in her mind,"30 and she saw Ossipon more as a rescuer than someone to love her.

Ossipon was horrified at the idea of living with a murderer, and he planned to desert her as soon as he had obtained her money. He pretended to help her, took her money to buy her a ticket for the boat train, and gave her careful warning about how to evade anyone looking for them.

Once they were in the train compartment, Ossipon became aware of the frightening similarity of Winnie's facial expression to that of the weak-minded Stevie. When Ossipon, who was actually horrified by the resemblance, remarked on it to Winnie, she interpreted his words as condolence. For the first time she felt that someone sympathized with her, and she wept. In the outburst of grief she spoke to Ossipon her last words of the novel, words which implied her ideal of self-forgetfulness,

30Wright, op. cit., p. 196.
for her helplessness, and her fears.

She lamented aloud her love of life, that life without grace or charm, and almost without decency, but of an exalted faithfulness of purpose, even unto murder. . . .

"How could I be so afraid of death! Tom, I tried. But I am afraid. I tried to do away with myself. And I couldn't. Am I hard? I suppose the cup of horrors was not full enough for such as me. Then when you came. . . ."

She paused. Then in a gust of confidence and gratitude, "I will live all my days for you, Tom!" 31

But her outburst of grief meant nothing more to him than the opportunity he sought to leave her alone, and he jumped from the slowly moving train. Although Winnie had disciplined her emotions for years, she could not stand being deserted by the one person she thought she could trust and devote her life to. It was the final blow in a long series of emotional shocks.

After getting on the boat, Winnie lay stunned and silent until she overheard a conversation implying that she would be taken into custody for her crime. Knowing she could not face the gallows, Winnie jumped into the channel and drowned herself.

The last pages of the novel described the effect of her death on Ossipon, for to the rest of London, and to the world, she was as insignificant dead as she had been in her friendless life at the beginning of the story. But the newspaper account of Winnie's suicide had stunned Ossipon so that he wandered about aimlessly, unable to enjoy even the money he had taken from Winnie, and afraid for his very sanity. Thinking of Winnie's death, he could not face anyone, man or woman.

31 Conrad, The Secret Agent, XV, 298.
He was haunted by the newspaper story of her suicide, which had ended: "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang forever over this act of madness or despair."\(^{32}\) Perhaps Conrad meant that her tragedy came partly as a result of the senseless actions of a despairing faction in society.

\(^{32}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 307}; \text{Conrad's italics.}\)
CHAPTER VI

FLORA DE BARRAL AND MRS. FYNE

Chance is the history of Flora de Barral and her progression from isolation to moral kinship through approximately twenty years. Conrad illustrated in this novel how love between a man and woman can be a positive force in the attainment of moral solidarity. Throughout Chance Flora is the center of interest, but another memorable woman character, Mrs. Fyne, is closely connected to her story.

The sheltered, financially secure world which Flora knew as a child made her trusting, innocent, and unprepared for the wounds her self-confidence received when that world collapsed. Flora loved her wealthy father although he virtually deserted her to pursue business interests. After the death of her mother, she was left in the care of Eliza, a governess who was a frustrated, middle-aged woman tired of her work and looking for a financially secure way out of it. She had encouraged a match between Flora and a young man, hoping that when Flora came into money of her own the young man would marry her, get control of the fortune, then leave her to enjoy the de Barral money with the governess.

Eliza had always petted Flora, who thought she was "the wisdom, the authority, the protection of life, security embodied
and visible and undisputed."¹ But Eliza's true nature was revealed when de Barral's business failed, just before Flora was sixteen. Knowing her scheme had failed and feeling all the bitterness of one whose years of work had been futile, she took her spite out on Flora before leaving her. Repeatedly she called the unsuspecting girl a fool and told her "she was in heart, mind, manner and appearance an utterly common and insipid creature"² whom nobody could ever love. Flora listened in surprised silence, for she knew nothing of what had provoked the tirade. She did not protest until the woman screamed at her that she was the child of a cheat and a swindler, then concluded,

"He's nothing but a thief... this father of yours... you are a vulgar, silly nonentity, and you shall go back to where you belong, whatever low place you have sprung from, and beg your bread—that is, if anybody's charity will have anything to do with you!"³

That was Flora's first look at the evil of a world from which she expected nothing but good. The shock was a lasting one. "¹It was never forgotten. It was always felt; it remained like a mark on her soul, a sort of mystic wound to be contemplated and to be meditated over.⁴

The whole scene had been watched from a distance by Mr. and Mrs. Fyne, who had known the de Barrals a long time. When the governess and the young man left, Flora ran to the Fynes.

¹Joseph Conrad, Chance, III (Garden City, 1928), 117.
²Ibid., p. 119.
³Ibid., p. 122.
⁴Ibid., p. 118.
They were humane people who felt they should help Flora, though their good intentions often outran their capabilities, for as Marlow put it, "they were strangely consistent in their lack of imaginative sympathy."\(^5\) Scenes like the one with the governess were to be repeated in Flora's life, and she turned to the Fynes following each one.

Mrs. Fyne was an ardent theoretical feminist who had developed a cold, detached manner as a result of the selfish cruelty of her poet father. She had eloped with Mr. Fyne to escape her father's domination, and she felt it her duty to warn susceptible young girls against the dangers awaiting them in a man's world. Of her philosophy Marlow said:

"It was a knock-me-down doctrine—a practical individualistic doctrine... that no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman (who by the mere fact of her sex was a predestined victim of conditions created by men's selfish passions, their vices and their abominable tyranny) from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence. She had even the right to go out of existence without considering any one's feelings or convenience, since some women's existences were made impossible by the shortsighted baseness of men."\(^6\)

Some of Mrs. Fyne's actions were dictated by her philosophy, but usually her audacity was only in her thoughts.\(^7\) Much of the time she sat calmly with her arms folded across her bosom, wondering, "But what could one do after all!"\(^8\) Mrs. Fyne and her husband were always kind to Flora when she came to them.

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\(^5\)Ibid., p. 113. 
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 59. 
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 123. 
\(^8\)Ibid., p. 166.
with her troubles, but something in Mrs. Fyne's make-up made her withhold from Flora the sympathy the girl actually needed. Instead of understanding, Mrs. Fyne gave her lectures. The extent to which Flora accepted her policy of feminism was revealed as Flora's story continued.

After the scene with the governess, Mrs. Fyne sat calmly by Flora and waited for her to come out of her speechless daze. She did her best to comfort the girl, but she soon pronounced Flora "too emotional—much too emotional to be ever really sound."9 She did what she considered her duty, although "at no time did she think the victim particularly charming or sympathetic."10 Mrs. Fyne said nothing reassuring when Flora pleaded for an explanation of the governess' rage, but she did warn her that she must expect the world to pass a "very severe judgment on her father."11 Flora grew determined to defend her father from what she believed was the unjust cruelty of the world. Her determination, which grew out of Mrs. Fyne's advice, grew into an obsession that was a partial cause for Flora's moral isolation.

Flora remained at the Fynes until her father, then in prison, put her in the custody of some cousins. The cousins were crude, insensitive people who continually abused Flora's feelings, just as the governess had done by calling her father

9Ibid., p. 139. 10Ibid., p. 140.
11Ibid., p. 141.
a cheat and a convict, and by telling her how inadequate and unlikable she was. She repeatedly ran off to the Fynes for comfort. Eventually the cousins grew tired of her and took her to Mrs. Fyne to stay. The woman listened to her in her usual manner, not criticizing, not sympathizing.

Intending to be helpful, Mrs. Fyne found a position for Flora with an elderly woman looking for a cheerful, loving companion who would forget all her troubles as she herself had done. Before long, however, it was obvious to the woman that Flora was not at all the kind of person she wanted. She returned the unhappy girl to the Fynes, complaining that she could not stand the strain of being looked at in a peculiar way at times, and that "'when one remembered that her father was in prison, shut up together with a lot of criminals and so on--it made one uncomfortable.'"12 Again Flora had impressed upon her the disgraceful truth about her father and her own inability to please people.

Mrs. Fyne next placed her charge with a German family in the position of governess to their two young sons. Feeling that she had inherited a damaged character from her father, and unwilling to be subjected to further torment about him, Flora dropped the name of de Barral and used Smith. She worked hard at her job and became, as she wrote to Mrs. Fyne, "'mercifully drugged by her task,'" except when she was off duty and alone.

12Ibid., p. 179.
But circumstances similar to those which had originally destroyed her self-confidence recurred. The man of the household, like the elderly woman, wanted to be loved, and Flora, "for all her experience was still too innocent, and indeed not yet sufficiently aware of herself as a woman to suspect his attentions to her as anything more than kindness. She thought him sympathetic—the first expressively sympathetic person she had ever met."  

Her trust was as misplaced as it had been in the governess, and her self-esteem received another blow in much the same manner. The man's wife accused Flora indignantly and in no uncertain terms. Completely ignorant of the woman's implications and the real cause of her rage, Flora thought that her attempt to conceal her identity as the daughter of a convict had been discovered.

Returning to the Fynes, she confessed fully to Mrs. Fyne, whose "opinions had a large freedom in their pedantry," and once more she received neither a rebuke nor consolation. Instead she received a partial explanation for the cause of her dismissal and was again left to her own mistaken and self-abasing conclusions. Her evaluation of herself could not have been lower.

Flora's lack of self-confidence and friendlessness made her appear to Mrs. Fyne a likely subject for her teachings about getting ahead in the world, but she was disappointed that the girl seemed to act on her advice so seldom. Actually

\[13\text{Ibid., p. 181.}\]  \[14\text{Ibid., p. 183.}\]
Flora was more deeply influenced than she imagined. Although she did not yet follow Mrs. Fyne's counsel to take advantage of every opportunity to turn things to her own good, Flora was convinced of her right (which Mrs. Fyne had often preached) to end her unhappy existence. She proved it when she told Marlow, who had seen her about to jump from a cliff, "'I don't see why I shouldn't be as reckless as I please.'"

It was during this period of despondency that Flora met Captain Anthony, Mrs. Fyne's brother, who was a rather unwilling guest in the Fyne home. Anthony and his sister had nothing in common except that their personalities had been largely moulded by their poet father. Anthony's rebellion against tyranny of his father had assumed the form of "reticent romantic illusion. He had inherited the sensitiveness without the brutality of his father." He was most uncomfortable in the energetic household of his sister. Mrs. Fyne admitted to Marlow that she was grieved at Anthony's choice of vocations, for as a sea captain, he had no social advantages, and, she added, they could hardly converse with each other.

Anthony met Flora accidentally when he interrupted her second attempt at suicide. He was drawn to her immediately. Possibly he saw her as a kindred misunderstood person who looked as if she had been hurt too young and too often, or

15Ibid., p. 145.

perhaps it was simply that neither of them seemed to be particularly comfortable as guests of the Fynes. Whatever the cause of his original interest, Anthony, who usually talked little, began talking volubly to Flora. But he asked no questions about her troubles and promised not to inquire from his sister.

Flora reacted strangely to Anthony.

"She felt his nearness intimately, like a touch. She tried to disregard this sensation. . . . It wasn't worth while. . . . Of course he didn't ask questions as to her crying because he didn't care. No one in the world cared for her, neither those who pretended nor yet those who did not pretend. She preferred the latter."17

His denunciation of life on shore entranced her, and she found listening to him soothing and peaceful. "Everything he had said seemed somehow to have a special meaning under its obvious conversational sense. . . . He had made himself felt."18

When the two met the following day, Anthony remarked rather gruffly to Flora that if his sister were the only friend she had, it was about time someone looked after her. He felt even more attracted to her than before; he thought "if only he could get hold of her, no woman would belong to him so completely as this woman."19 But when he declared his love for Flora, she could not believe him. The governess and others who had followed her, including Mrs. Fyne, had convinced Flora

17Conrad, Chance, III, 220.
18Ibid., p. 222.
19Ibid., p. 224.
that she was "odious and unlovable."\textsuperscript{20} Besides, "the world had treated her so dishonorably that she had no notion even of what mere decency of feeling was like."\textsuperscript{21}

Confused and frightened by both her own emotions and Anthony's display of his, Flora decided to try for the third time to destroy herself. This time Anthony prevented it simply by meeting her as soon as she left the Fyne house. He insisted that he wanted to take her with him to sea, away from her troubles. When he learned she would not leave her father to face the world alone on his release from prison, Anthony agreed that she was right in considering him. Because of his generous attitude, Flora felt his willingness to marry her was more a noble gesture to rescue her than anything else.

Flora had none of Anthony's "conscious and lofty confidence... which leads men into equivocal situations."\textsuperscript{22} Instead, she had developed a self-protective attitude of withdrawal from active participation in life to escape the hurts that had come to her each time she had acted. Even Anthony's gentleness was strange and unbelievable to her. It was a gentleness born of his "supreme delicacy," which Marlow pronounced idiotic. The different views held by Flora and Anthony left them little hope for understanding each other, because neither fully understood himself.

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 122.  \textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 236.  \textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 328.
Mrs. Fyne, however, was sure she understood the whole situation. Although she professed always to take the woman's part in things, her calmness nearly deserted her when she discovered Flora and her brother had both run off.

"The appeal of the abandoned child Flora had been irresistible. But now she had become a woman, and Mrs. Fyne was presenting an implacable front to a particularly feminine transaction. . . . Mrs. Fyne did not want women to be women. Her theory was that they should turn themselves into unscrupulous nuisances. An offended theorist dwelt in her bosom somewhere."  

Because she really loved her brother as little as she did Flora, it seems, she hated the thought of having them both on her hands as a part of her family. She wanted to be rid of them for good. She felt sure Flora had thrown herself at her inexperienced brother and had taken advantage of him. She did not hesitate later to say so to Marlow and her husband before sending them off to London to look for the couple after receiving a letter from Flora which, in her opinion, made finding them imperative. Although she never allowed anyone else to see the letter, she felt that revealing its contents as she had interpreted them would create a final break between them and herself.

Flora had written to Mrs. Fyne because she felt she owed the older woman an explanation. She told her that Anthony had taken all the initiative, and that while she did not love him, she had no scruples against marrying him. She feared Mrs.

23 Ibid., p. 189.
Fyne's reaction, even though her own behavior had been in line with the woman's feminist preachers. "I knew she would disapprove," she told Marlow later.

But the letter had its effect on Anthony, too, for Mrs. Fyne had ordered her husband to talk Anthony out of his "positive infatuation... hopeless and inexplicable madness." On the strength of his wife's interpretation of the letter, Fyne assured his brother-in-law that Flora wanted him only to provide a secure future for her father. His added implication that Anthony was taking unfair advantage of Flora's distress hurt most. Anthony thought perhaps Fyne was right and that he ought to leave Flora alone. But, he wondered, "How could he abandon her? That was out of the question. She had no one. Or rather she had someone. That father. He was willing to take him at her valuation..."

Suddenly he made up his mind to marry Flora for any reason, or for none at all except that he wanted her. He knew that she had not lied to him; he had never even asked her if she loved him. In reality Flora could not have answered him at that time, for she herself did not know.

"... since Anthony had suddenly broken his way into her hopeless and cruel existence, she lived like a person liberated from a condemned cell by a natural cataclysm, a tempest, an earthquake; not absolutely terrified... but stunned, bewildered—abandoning herself passively...

\[26\text{Ibid., p. 330.}\] \[27\text{Ibid., pp. 330-331.}\]
In her unhappy life, Flora had never known the sensation of love before, and she was unable to recognize it then.

Anthony waited until they were aboard his ship, the Ferndale, which would be their home, before he expressed his thoughts fully to Flora. He was set on being as honest as he thought she had been in writing Mrs. Fyne. Telling her that she must marry him, he added,

"You need not be afraid. If you say so I shall not even look at you. . . . Don't you understand that I won't let you buy shelter from me at the cost of your very soul? . . . You are too much a part of me. I have found myself since I came upon you, and I would rather sell my own soul to the devil than let you go out of my keeping. But I must have the legal right. . . . if only for your father's sake. . . . Surely you are not so proud that you can't understand that I as a man must have my pride too?"

Flora mutely accepted the terms he had set forth. It seemed for her both a rescue and a betrayal in a sense, much the same thing she had always received from Mrs. Fyne when she had turned to her in need. She thought to herself there were some things she would never understand even if she were to try. Flora's resignation in accepting Anthony's suggestion that their marriage be a nominal one was her first step in finding moral salvation. For the first time, she did not try to run away from a rejection.

After a few days they were married, and Anthony's calmness, "that scrupulous attitude which he felt bound in honour to assume then and forever, unless she would condescend to make a

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Ibid., pp. 335-336.
sign at some future time, added to the heaviness of her heart."\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps she had begun to realize she loved Anthony, but she was far too much in the grip of her past experiences to try to express herself or to hope that he really loved her. She, too, felt honor bound to accept the situation without allowing herself to speculate on the outcome of it: "'All she wanted was to get at the truth; to see what would come of it.'\textsuperscript{30} Thus Conrad implied that even an imperfectly realized love had led Flora for the first time since she was sixteen to a desire to face things, even the unpleasant thought that she was again being rejected as a person.

Both Flora and Anthony misread in the other's silence an acceptance of the situation. Anthony began to lose some of his former assertiveness toward Flora; he no longer spoke to her with his old assurance of knowing what was best for her. Nevertheless, he insisted on her going alone to meet her father at the prison when he would be freed the next day, so that she could break the news of their marriage herself. Anthony had carefully rearranged the officers' quarters aboard the Ferndale to provide separate cabins for himself and Flora and another for de Barral, whom he had not met, but regarded sympathetically.

Mr. de Barral's appearance shocked Flora. Though many things about him were the same, she had remembered him so

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 341. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 344.
fondly that she expected him to be more affectionate toward her. She could not see him as an evil old egoist whose delusions of grandeur and insistence on his innocence had been intensified during his imprisonment. He was suspicious of Flora at first, as if to determine what effect "all those lies" that had kept him in jail had had on her. But her words and manner reassured him, although he expressed no interest or concern about the life she had led while he was away.

When Flora told him she had been married the day before, he was furious. He felt her marriage was another act of vindictiveness from a world that had already persecuted him enough: his own daughter had betrayed him. Flora accepted all his accusations as further evidence of the harm his imprisonment had done him. She was resolute in her desire to shield him from further injustice.

From the time they boarded the Ferndale and met Anthony, de Barral was openly contemptuous of both. He never ceased complaining that he had been taken from one prison to another and reproaching Flora at every opportunity for marrying. He was soon "shunned as though he had been the devil"31 by the crew.

Flora soon gave up protesting his venomous pronouncements that she had sold herself to Anthony and that he knew she did not love her husband. She tried hard to believe that his

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31Ibid., p. 351.
behavior stemmed from jealousy of Anthony, and she felt that
protesting

"... might have made things worse; and she did not want to quarrel with her father, the only human being that really cared for her, absolutely, evidently, completely--to the end. There was in him no pity, no generosity, nothing whatever of these fine things--it was for her, for her very own self, such as it was, that this human being cared. This certitude would have made her put up with worse torments.... She felt also helpless, as if the whole enterprise had been too much for her.... She was becoming a fatalist." 32

Anthony appeared hurt and offended, even in the eyes of his crew, who suspected from the strange cabin arrangement that something was wrong. He kept to himself as much as possible and stayed aboard the Ferndale while de Barral and Flora lived ashore for a short time. During this time de Barral proposed to his daughter that the two of them run away. Flora refused, for by then she had become "patient, steeled against every hurt and every disgust to the point of wondering at herself," 33 and had begun to think of the ship as her only refuge from a world in which she did not fit.

When the Ferndale began its next voyage, it had a new second mate, Powell. He was about Flora's age, a pleasant young man who soon became the confidant of both Flora and her father. Flora genuinely liked him, but de Barral was only using him in the way the governess had used her "nephew", as a means to his own ends. He wanted Powell to cause a break between his daughter and the son-in-law whom he detested.

32Ibid., p. 380
33Ibid., p. 387.
Failing in that, de Barral brought the situation to a head by trying to poison Anthony. Powell, who had seen through a skylight, warned the captain in time. When both de Barral and Flora arrived at the scene, Anthony's damned emotions erupted. Mr. de Barral left the cabin, but remained near enough to eavesdrop. When Anthony attempted to calm Flora and send her away too, she refused to go. Though he would not tell her what happened, he admitted that he had stopped "fighting, or waiting, or hoping!" and had surrendered to her and to her father. To Powell, who was watching, he looked exhausted as he told Flora:

"I renounce not only my chance but my life... I, who have said I never could let you go... own myself beaten... You are free. I let you off since I must." 35

Flora was for a moment crushed by the spoken proof of what she called his "cruel magnanimity," but somehow she found the strength to reply, "You can't cast me off like this, Roderick. I won't go away from you. I won't--." 36 She threw her arms around Anthony's neck and clung to him desperately until the surprised and triumphant man carried her off to his cabin.

Old de Barral could not stand his rejection. After telling Powell that he had never really trusted Flora, he drank the poison he had intended for his son-in-law. Powell and  

34Ibid., p. 428. 35Ibid., p. 430. 
36Ibid.
Anthony later concealed from Flora the fact that his death was suicide. She never knew that her beloved father's last words had been a bitter denunciation of her and all that she had tried to do for him.

With their misunderstandings resolved, Flora and Anthony spent six happy years at sea before Anthony was drowned as the result of a ship collision. Wright summed up the significance of his death this way: "His death itself, devoid of all heroic gestures is a final expression of the poetic vision which has caused him to make life a romance of chivalric adventure..."37 But he had died knowing the true worth of his vision.

Years later the mature Flora had sufficiently analyzed her earlier behavior and its relationship to Mrs. Fyne. She realized that the letter which had caused so much trouble had been "the echo of Mrs. Fyne's own stupid talk"38 more than anything else. And, she admitted to Marlow, her foolishness had caused her to endure much humiliation and agony before she disclosed her love for Anthony. She knew that she had been fortunate in having him for a time: "I have had a fine adventure... The finest in the world! Only think! I loved and I was loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear. All the world, all life were transformed for me!"39

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37Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad (Lincoln, Neb., 1949), p. 34.
38Conrad, Chance, III, 443.
39Ibid., p. 444.
Flora illustrated Conrad's belief that the rejection of false self-analysis and mistrust of life can come about through love. He indicated also that once having found moral kinship through love, Flora would not long remain alone. Powell, with whom she had long ago felt the kinship of youth, had returned to her life to stay.
CHAPTER VII

NATHALIE HALDIN

Under Western Eyes is another novel in which Conrad portrays love as a positive force in man's struggle to fit himself into the universal scheme of things. The moral crisis of the protagonist, Razumov, is brought about by his love for Nathalie Haldin. Razumov, like Heyst, had built up an intellectual neutrality to protect himself from his fear of becoming involved too deeply in the affairs of a real world. He had compounded his isolation by betrayal of a trust. His nihilism was the kind to which "only a new impulse which culminates in suffering or even death could confer... reality." 1 Falling in love with Nathalie was for Razumov that "new impulse."

A letter written by Conrad to Galsworthy might indicate that he planned to make Razumov's love for Nathalie and its consequences the center of Under Western Eyes, which he originally meant to call Razumov. 2 However, in writing the final version he restricted the love story to less than ten per cent of the novel's pages and showed Razumov and Nathalie together

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in only three scenes. Therefore, an explanation of events preceding Nathalie's appearance is necessary in order to show the importance of her brief but dynamic role.

The journal of Razumov, a serious young Russian student, came into the hands of Nathalie Haldin's language teacher, who both narrated and took a small part in the action of *Under Western Eyes*. Razumov, living alone in St. Petersburg and devoted to his studies, had no real ties with anyone or anything except the Russian national past. He kept entirely apart from the revolutionary students and condemned them for wanting to destroy that past. "He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality." His ambitions were to win academic recognition and eventually achieve a position in government service. "There was nothing strange in the student Razumov's wish for distinction... A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love."

Razumov had never been loved, for he was the unacknowledged son of a nobleman, and his mother had died before he had ever known her. But he had earned the respect of Victor Haldin,

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3 Moser, op. cit., p. 94.


5 Ibid., p. 14.
an extreme revolutionist, because of his reserved manner and his apparent devotion to his studies. Haldin was unaware of Razumov's political convictions, and when he helped assassinate a government official, he ran from the scene to Razumov's lonely room for safety and help.

Haldin's story and his request for help sickened and infuriated Razumov, not only because he considered the man a criminal, but because being caught assisting him would ruin his own political chances. Reluctantly he left at Haldin's insistence, to try to arrange for his escape; but after much inner conflict Razumov went to the police with the story. Haldin was caught, but neither torture nor fear of death made him implicate Razumov by revealing that he had gone to him for help.

Because he had betrayed the unsuspecting Haldin from egotistical rather than idealistic motives and because Haldin had refused to betray him in turn, Razumov's conduct brought him mental suffering. Immediately he began to feel that he was suspected by the revolutionaries and the police alike. There was nowhere he could go to feel safe or wanted.

When government agents demanded that Razumov go as a spy to Geneva, he could not refuse. There he was supposed to investigate a group of exiled revolutionists. His reputation as a hero (he was thought to have aided Haldin) had preceded him, and he was welcomed warmly by the leaders of the revolutionaries and taken quickly into their confidence. Razumov could no longer keep to himself or refuse to take an open political stand.
In his student days he had done just that, isolating himself intellectually by taking no action for either the revolution or the old order. He was, therefore, susceptible to the tragedy Conrad envisioned for the man who became a law unto himself. Betraying Haldin had simultaneously robbed him of his neutrality and his faith in himself. As he had said to himself before informing on Haldin, "All a man can betray is his conscience," and that was exactly what he had done.

His dual position as government informer and revolutionary hero gave Razumov a good opportunity to justify the betrayal to himself by taking vengeance on Haldin's comrades and preying on their belief in him. He wrote in his diary later, "I had to confirm myself in my contempt and hate for what I betrayed... Victor Haldin had stolen the truth of my life from me, who had nothing else in the world."

Razumov's "confirmation" began with his outward acceptance of the praises of Haldin's friends. He thought that such a planned revenge would surely lay the phantom of Haldin, which appeared to him at times, and bring back his old feeling of superiority and self-sufficiency.

At the same time that Razumov attained the full confidence of the revolutionists, he began to doubt the wisdom of his own beliefs. He saw Haldin still as a "moral spectre infinitely more effective than any visible apparition of the dead."

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6Ibid., p. 37.  
7Ibid., p. 359.  
8Ibid., pp. 229-230.
Pretending to agree with Haldin's friends and writing his reports to them, Razumov felt more lonely each day. When he was alone with his thoughts, he feared the solitude he found there.

This solitude was unlike that in which he had voluntarily existed as a student, for then he had believed in his convictions and in his ability to achieve his dreams. Among the exiled revolutionists in Geneva, "the futility of all this overcame him like a curse. . . . He could not believe in the reality of his mission. He looked round despairingly, as if for some way to redeem his existence from that unconquerable feeling." 9

Both the full horror of his moral separation and his way to redemption had come to Razumov when he met Nathalie Haldin. To this woman and her mother Razumov was someone Victor Haldin had trusted, and because of their love for Victor, they too were prepared to trust the man whom they considered his friend. Nathalie's faith in him was particularly bitter to Razumov.

When Nathalie first appeared in the novel she and her mother were worried because there had been no recent letters from Victor. They knew of the assassination in St. Petersburg, but they did not know Haldin had been executed for his part in it until they read the news in an English paper. Nathalie was intensely shocked, but her mother's grief became a deadly quietness which gradually destroyed her reason. Nathalie conscientiously cared

9Ibid., p. 316.
for the older woman and maintained a calm exterior which bore
witness to her pride in her brother's sacrifice. But under-
neath her outward stoicism "'she felt herself abandoned without
explanation... What she wanted was to learn at almost any
cost how she could remain faithful to his departed spirit.'"10

She felt that Haldin had been an active representative of
all the best of revolutionary ideals and that someone must be
found to take over his work. Since Razumov was the only name
Haldin had ever mentioned in his correspondence, Nathalie was
convinced he was the man to assume her brother's task. Pre-
pared thus by her brother to worship Razumov, she was particu-
larly eager to meet him when she heard he was in Geneva.

Haldin had also preconditioned Razumov's attitude toward
Nathalie. "Every word uttered by Haldin lived in his memory.
They were like haunting shapes; they could not be exorcised.
The most vivid among them was the mention of the sister."11
Haldin had given Razumov a mental picture of a lovely girl with
large trustful eyes.

The first time he saw Nathalie, Razumov had been power-
fully affected by her: "He had responded... to the harmonious
charm of her whole person... and then turned his gaze away.
He said to himself that all this was not for him; the beauty
of women and the friendship of men were not for him."12 When

10Ibid., p. 140.
11Ibid., p. 167.
12Ibid.
Nathalie impulsively introduced herself to him, Haldin actually turned away from her for a moment. She regretted her loss of self-control, yet confided to her teacher that she attributed Razumov's strange behavior to his feeling for her brother.

But he was reacting to entirely different emotions, which he described later:

"When you stood before me... and I looked into your eyes—I knew that something had happened, but I did not know then what... What could I have known of what was tearing me to pieces and dragging the secret for ever to my lips? You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace."13

Knowing nothing of Razumov's real emotions, Nathalie had seen him as a very handsome young man who was quiet and reserved probably because he was troubled by deep thoughts concerning his work as a revolutionary. She had asked him to meet her later, because she was in need of a fellow-believer in whom she could confide. But days later Razumov still had not met her at the appointed place, and she had decided that her impulsive behavior had caused him to mistrust her.

Actually it was Razumov's own emotional state that caused him to avoid Nathalie for more than a week. When he finally saw her again, the only explanation he offered was that he had been hindered. When Nathalie left immediately to attend her mother, Razumov was forced into a conversation with the old language teacher, who had been walking with Nathalie.

13Ibid., p. 358; Conrad's ellipsis.
He explained to Razumov that Nathalie wanted to discuss with him the suspicious circumstances of her brother's arrest. Razumov was visibly disturbed, but the older man regarded his behavior as a sincere tribute to Haldin. The professor told Razumov that Mrs. Haldin and Nathalie wanted to know him because he had been Haldin's friend.

"They had only that son, that brother, for a link with the wider world, with the future. The very groundwork of active existence for Nathalie Haldin is gone with him. Can you wonder then that she turns with eagerness to the only man her brother mentions in his letters... both his mother and his sister believe implicitly in the worth of your judgment and in the truth of anything you may have to say to them. It's impossible for you now to pass them by like strangers."14

But Razumov reacted almost violently to the teacher's suggestion that he might say something to the two women, especially the mother, that would still their suspicions that Haldin might have been betrayed. "Must I go then and lie to that old woman!"15 he exclaimed. For hours afterward he was troubled by the teacher's reply that perhaps the truth would do. Thinking of the possible consequences of telling the truth, Razumov found new tortures which added to his mental distress. He went as far as to consider leaving Geneva, but "he recognized... that leaving was impossible. It would have been a fatal admission, an act of moral suicide."16 Razumov tried to content himself with listening to the revolutionaries and being

14 Ibid., p. 190. 15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 204.
secretly contemptuous of them. But he experienced only a deepened sense of disgust with himself: "How am I to go on day after day if I have no more power of resistance—moral resistance?" 17

In the meantime, Nathalie had come to her own conclusions about him. She was very much aware of him as a handsome young man. She told her friend the teacher that although she did not understand Razumov, she felt "he was studying her to determine whether she was worthy of his trust," and that she was convinced "that this extraordinary man is meditating some vast plan, some great undertaking; he is possessed by it—he suffers from it—and from being alone in the world." 18 She could not have guessed at either the vastness of his plan or the depth of his suffering.

Razumov was suffering—so much, in fact, that he tried to rearrange his own convictions, which he now doubted entirely, in the hope of discovering at least one thing he could hold on to. He despised himself for his weakness and for wanting to evade issues; he wondered, "Is it possible that I am shrinking? It can't be! It's impossible. To shrink now would be worse than moral suicide; it would be moral damnation... Is it possible that I have a conventional conscience?" 19

17Ibid., p. 233. 18Ibid., p. 202

19Ibid., p. 288.
Razumov's conscience was not only conventional, it was also burdened. The idea of being understood fascinated him. He returned to St. Petersburg to talk with Councillor Milkulin, the man to whom he had betrayed Haldin. Milkulin, he thought, was perhaps the only person in the world to whom he could speak freely. More oppressed than ever, because he was unable to tell the truth to Milkulin, Razumov returned to Geneva.

Mrs. Haldin had never been told that Razumov was in Geneva, but she had grown daily more suspicious of her daughter's absences (she had been meeting Razumov), so that Nathalie was forced to tell of his existence. The older woman demanded that he come to her at once and sent Nathalie to find him.

By then Razumov had decided that since he had not been able to confess to Milkulin, the only thing left was to keep up a brave pretense. Visiting Mrs. Haldin would be a test of his ability to do so, he thought. However, the woman distressed him greatly. Her silence destroyed his self-possession, and he envied the dead Haldin, who was still remembered by the woman. He would have run quickly from the Haldin house, but Nathalie arrived home after searching for him and cut off his escape.

To the language teacher, who was with Nathalie, their conversation began as if it were to be a love scene. It was inevitable, he believed, that the sister and the friend of the dead Haldin should love one another. Razumov, he thought, was coming forward at last in his own way, for "he had
discovered that he needed her—and she was moved by the same feeling."20

He had needed her; only by confessing to Haldin's sister could he expiate his guilt. But the manner in which he told of Haldin's betrayal was ambiguous, and Nathalie was slow to realize the full meaning of his story. She sat in stunned amazement when she finally understood, and she said nothing until after he had gone. Then she whispered, "'It is impossible to be more unhappy... It is impossible... I feel my heart becoming like ice.'"21

Nathalie, who had wondered how to serve her brother's memory best, had unknowingly done his betrayer a great service. But since she had been innocent throughout her association with Razumov, her act brought her not punishment, but a greater knowledge of herself. She left Geneva to join the active revolutionists in St. Petersburg—"there was no longer any Nathalie Haldin, because she had completely ceased to think of herself."22 Thus she had in Conrad's view found her place in the universal scheme of things.

Addressing Nathalie later in his diary, Razumov declared that she had freed him from the blindness of hate and anger: "'the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me. Now I have done it... I am in the depths of anguish, but there

20Ibid., p. 347.
21Ibid., p. 356.
22Ibid., p. 375.
is air to breathe at last—"23 The confession to Nathalie and her mother gave Razumov courage to admit his deception to the revolutionists. He was resigned to whatever punishment they might give to him. So that he could never again act as a spy, they burst his eardrums. Though his days would thenceforth be lived in silence, he had at last found his way out of isolation. "Yes, I am washed clean,"24 he had said.

Nathalie Haldin is outstanding among the women in Conrad's fiction for more than one reason. As the only one of them to whom he gave the role of confessor, she is clearly more than incidental to the expression of his belief that crime brings isolation, and that confession brings punishment and moral absolution. She was carefully depicted as the type most appealing to Razumov, both as a woman and as a confessor. Conrad saw Razumov's confession to a beloved woman, the sister of the man he had betrayed, as far more dramatic than confession to anyone else would have been. Furthermore, though Nathalie takes a negligible part in the action of the story, she determines the unfolding of Razumov's character.

Nathalie is unique among Conrad's heroines because even without taking a major part in the action, she is the most powerful agent in the redemption of the central character.

23Ibid., p. 361. 24Ibid., p. 357.
CHAPTER VIII

JEWEL

The theme, plot, and hero of Lord Jim are familiar to many people. In addition to these components of the novel, its structure, style, and narrator have been discussed with varying degrees of thoroughness by most of Conrad’s critics. Yet, Jewel, the beautiful native girl who is the only woman in Jim’s life and practically the only woman in the novel, has seldom been discussed. Although the love affair of Jewel and Jim exists in a relatively small portion of the story, it serves distinct purposes. Since Jewel in some respects symbolizes the entire Patusan episode of Lord Jim, her role deserves a more thorough explication than it is usually given.

Jewel resembled other native women in Conrad’s fiction in that she too represented that which was foreign to the protagonist. To Jim she was a new chance to prove himself worthy of faith and trust. Never had he been loved so devotedly by anyone.

Marlow first heard of her in a myth-like rumor that Jim had in his possession an enormous, priceless emerald taken by strength and cunning from a fleeing ruler. The rumor said that he kept the jewel concealed on the person of a young woman. Later, Marlow’s observation of Jim and the living Jewel disproved some of the legend; Jim had indeed acquired a great treasure,
but "he did not hide his jewel. In fact, he was extremely proud of it."\(^1\) Marlow could see that she was infinitely precious to Jim.

Jewel had been brought to Patusan as a baby after her half-white mother was deserted by her father. There her mother had married a disgusting, evil Malacca Portuguese man who never ceased being jealous of Jewel's father and treating Jewel and her mother cruelly. Jewel knew nothing of the world outside Patusan. She had lived entirely among the natives, had little contact with white people, and had no one in whom she could confide except her mother. Marlow could not imagine her concept of the world outside Patusan,

"... all that she knew of its inhabitants were a betrayed woman and a sinister pantaloon. Her lover also came to her from there, gifted with irresistible seductions; but what would become of her if he should return to these inconceivable regions that seemed always to claim back their own? Her mother had warned her of this before she died. ..."\(^2\)

During the first six weeks of their acquaintance, Jim was very sympathetic toward Jewel. He offered to protect her from the insane tirades of her step-father, Cornelius, whose "filthy denunciations" of Jewel and her dead mother "led her an awful life, stopping only short of actual ill-usage."\(^3\) And she, who had known no kindness except her mother's, responded by protecting Jim from danger.

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\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 207-208.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 288.
She knew Cornelius had plotted Jim's death, and night after night she watched over him. On the night he was to have been killed, Jewel woke him, gave him a revolver, and urged him to follow her. Thinking at first that she was in trouble, Jim went willingly. But when she told him his own life was threatened, "Jim... experienced a sense of deception... He was weary of these attempts upon his life. He had had his fill of these alarms... He... was angry with the girl for deceiving him." It was soon apparent that the danger was real, and once the attackers had been fought off, Jim realized that his safety meant everything to the girl who had bravely stood by him. Jewel unselfishly urged him to leave her, but suddenly he was aware of his love for her: "He realized that for him there was no refuge from that loneliness which centupled all his dangers except—in her," and if he went away from her it would be the end of everything.

Because Jim needed her as a refuge from his isolation, Jewel became a necessary part of his life. He explained his feelings about her to Marlow thus:

"I—-I love her dearly. More than I could tell... You take a different view of your actions when you... are made to understand every day that your existence is necessary—you see, absolutely necessary—to another person. I am made to feel that. Wonderful... It is a trust... I believe I am equal to it..."

4Ibid., p. 298. 5Ibid., p. 300. 6Ibid., p. 304.
Although she was possessive of him, Jewel's love for Jim had a gaiety and sweetness unlike the savageness of Aissa's for Willems. It seems to Marlow that

"her tenderness hovered over him like a flutter of wings. . . . Her vigilant affection had an intensity that made it almost perceptible to the senses; it seemed actually to exist in the ambient matter of space, to envelop him like a peculiar fragrance, to dwell in the sunshine like a tremulous, subdued, and impassioned note."

However, her mother's warning that men were not to be trusted, and her inherent suspicion of the whites caused Jewel to doubt Jim. She could not repress her haunting fears that he would some day leave her just as mysteriously as he had appeared to her. Although she had Jim's full confidence in matters concerning Patusan, she believed he was not completely truthful when he told her he would never leave her.

She was convinced that Jim had a secret he would not share with her, which would some day be the cause of his return to the world she thought of as his. In some ways she appeared to know Jim better than he knew himself, Marlow thought, but Jim's secret was altogether beyond her comprehension. She was compelled to ask Marlow, whom she hardly knew, for assurance that Jim would remain with her, even though she suspected Marlow of coming from outside to take Jim away with him.

Although Marlow assured her that he preferred seeing Jim remain on Patusan, he could not convince her that she and Jim would never be separated. He came nearer to telling Jewel the

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truth about Jim than she could have guessed when he said that Jim was "more true" than any other man. But her anxieties continued, and even though she was ashamed of her lack of faith, she insisted on asking Marlow about Jim's secret:

"What is it? ... He says he had been afraid. How can I believe this? Am I a mad woman to believe this? You all remember something! You all go back to it. ... What is this thing? Is it alive?—is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel. Has it got a face and a voice—this calamity? Will he see it—will he hear it? In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me—and then arise and go. Ah! I shall never forgive him. My mother had forgiven—but I, never!" 8

Marlow was moved by Jewel's words, but he could say nothing truthful without being cruel. At last her persistence aroused his anger, and he told her Jim was forgotten and unwanted by the world because he was not good enough. Jewel admitted that Jim had used the same words in describing himself to her, but she had not and would not believe them.

Marlow realized that he had been unsuccessful and that in saying Jim was not good enough, he had only added "to her anguish the hint of some mysterious collusion, of an inexplicable and incomprehensible conspiracy to keep her for ever in the dark." 9 It was inevitable, he thought, that Jewel would suffer because of Jim's love for her.

When Marlow decided it would be best if he left Patusan, Jim went as far as the coast with him. He explained to Marlow that he was held there in large measure by Jewel and her trust

8Ibid., p. 315. 9Ibid., p. 321.
in him. "Jim the leader was a captive in every sense. The land, the people, the friendship, the love, were like jealous guardians of his body. Every day added a link to the fetters of that strange freedom."10 It was clear that Patusan and Jewel were inexorably paired in his life; from the night he had refused to leave Jewel and Patusan, he had been possessed by both.

"The land, the people, the forests were her accomplices, guarding him with vigilant accord, with an air of seclusion, of mystery, of invincible possession. There was no appeal, as it were; he was imprisoned within the very freedom of his power."11

As far back as the night of Jim's decision to remain in Patusan, Jewel had misgivings about what might happen to him: "She was afraid for him... she saw in him only a predestined victim of dangers... she under-estimated his chances of success."12 Jewel's intuition was right, but when the arrival of Brown brought the summons for Jim that she had dreaded so long, she never stopped "wrestling with Jim for the possession of her happiness."13 She could not understand his decision to give himself up to Doramin. She felt that he was being unfair to both her and her people. Either resistance or running away would have made sense to her, but not the course Jim had chosen. His insistence that there was nothing left to fight for seemed to her an affront and a betrayal of her love for him.

10Ibid., p. 262. 11Ibid., p. 283.
12Ibid., p. 310. 13Ibid., p. 410.
The accumulated hours of fear and dread of being left desolate turned into indignations; when Jim would not stay, she screamed after him her judgment of his faithless action, and she refused his plea for forgiveness. It was beyond her comprehension that he should have gone "'away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct"14 of which she had never even been told. She could not believe that their love, which had been her whole life, was only a part of Jim's.

When Marlow returned to Patusan he heard from Stein of Jim's death. Stein had been unsuccessfully trying to console Jewel and to talk her into forgiving Jim. But Jewel remained convinced that Jim had deserted her, as her mother had warned.

"'He has left me. . . you always leave us--for your own ends. . . . It would have been easy to die with him. . . . He would not! . . . It was I who stood before his eyes; it was at me that he looked all the time! . . . He could see my face, hear my voice, hear my grief! . . . He was made blind and deaf and without pity, as you all are. He shall have no tears from me. . . . He fled from me as if I had been worse than death. He fled as if driven by some accursed thing he had heard or seen in his sleep."15

Jewel no longer wanted an explanation for what she thought of as Jim's shameful desertion of her, though she had been close to one when she said he had been driven away from her by a dream. But for her there could never be an explanation. Her devotion had been cheated and humiliated, and she would

14Ibid., p. 416.
15Ibid., p. 348.
never be consoled. She would from that time lead "a sort of soundless, inert life."\textsuperscript{16}

Conrad had earlier shown with Flora that love could bring happiness. By characterizing Jewel as devoted, loyal, and consistently good, he made her a pathetic example of the unhappiness which could come to an innocent person through love. Because she was deserted even though she had been faithful to Jim, Jewel provided the most damning judgment of Jim's falsehood.

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\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 416.
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CHAPTER IX

EMILIA GOULD

The heroine of Nostromo, Conrad's longest novel, is for several reasons outstanding among his fictional women. Just as Conrad considered silver "the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale,"\(^1\) so Mrs. Gould could be considered the pivot of these effects on the lives of others; for it is in relationship to her that many of the other characters are introduced and developed. This charming, completely believable woman is actually present during much of the action of the novel, and at all times, "the influence of her humane, perceptive individuality seems to permeate the book."\(^2\) As Warren points out, "she sets up the human community, the sense of human solidarity in understanding and warmth and kindness... Around her the other characters gather to warm their hands, as it were, at her flame."\(^3\)

In addition to having Emilia Gould provide that solidarity sought by the other characters, Conrad also made her

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the final and most tragic example of the theme of Nostromo—the defeat of noble ideals by material interests. Unlike those whose subjection to materialism comes through their innate weakness, Mrs. Gould is defeated because she could not, for all her strength of character, prevent her husband's enslavement by the silver which kept him from her and consigned her to loneliness. It is she who "pronounces the final judgment on both her husband's egoism and the evil wrought by the mine."  

In order to show Mrs. Gould's defeat by material interests and Conrad's use of her as a touchstone in this story of men struggling to find their places in the scheme of things, a brief summary of the plot of Nostromo is necessary.

The Republic of Costaguana is dominated by the Gould Concession and the San Tomé silver mine which Charles Gould sees as a means of civilizing and bringing progress to the backward country. But the mine attracts politicians and greedy revolutionaries from elsewhere. Not one of these is Martin Decoud, who is motivated by love for patriotic Antonia Avellanos to try to form a separate republic. During the ensuing revolution, he and Nostromo, self-made leader of the common people, try to save a six months' accumulation of silver bars by taking it out of the port of Sulaco. When their boat is hit by an enemy troopship, they manage to reach a deserted island and bury the silver. Nostromo leaves the political refugee Decoud hidden there and

returns to Sulaco to find that he, Decoud, and the silver are all presumed to be lost. Driven mad by the solitude, Decoud kills himself. Nostromo, feeling betrayed and unappreciated, decides to tell no one where the silver is and to carry it off for himself a little at a time. The mine continues to flourish, and the separate republic becomes a reality. When a lighthouse is erected on the island where the silver is, Nostromo goes there more often, for he is engaged to one of the two daughters of the old man who keeps it, and he is in love with the other one. One night the girls' father mistakes Nostromo for an intruder and shoots him; Nostromo dies without revealing the hiding place of the silver.

Unlike characters placed by Conrad in physical isolation, those in Nostromo are surrounded by and are ostensibly a part of an organized human community. Bound together by common hopes and fears, they are often unaware that their false ideals and weaknesses have isolated them.

In the novel Costaguana is the world in miniature, with all the world's tumult of conflicting voices that babble or shriek or whisper—love and jealousy, ambition and patriotism, generosity and greed. All the forces of an intricate civilization are there: factions within the state, industrial unrest, the various duels of class and sex; the instinctive and irrepressible force, too, of public opinion, of social evolution. ... Elsewhere Conrad shows men fallen out of their background: here he shows, in elaborate and detailed expansion, one of those backgrounds out of which they fall.5

As the epitome of the finest things represented by the human community, Mrs. Gould was an important part of this background. Called the first lady of Sulaco, she quickly and easily became the center of the town's social world after arriving there as a bride.

The mantle of the Gould's hereditary position in Sulaco had descended amply upon her little person; but she would not allow the peculiarities of the strange garment to weigh down the vivacity of her character, which was the sign of no mere mechanical sprightliness, but of an eager intelligence. ... Doña Emilia's intelligence being feminine led her to achieve the conquest of Sulaco, simply by lighting the way for her unselfishness and sympathy.\(^6\)

Her hospitality was extended to all classes of people in the town as well as to the influential business men and politicians who visited there. Her charm was as evident to the highest dignitary as it was to the most homesick young surveyor.

Conrad described her gracious manner in these words:

She kept her old Spanish house (one of the finest in Sulaco) open for the dispensation of the small graces of existence. She dispensed them with simplicity and charm because she was guided by an alert perception of values. She was highly gifted in the art of human intercourse, which consists in delicate shades of self-forgetfulness and in the suggestion of universal comprehension.\(^7\)

Her understanding and sympathetic concern for others inspired their devotion and admiration. It was "as if God had given Mrs. Gould the power to look into the very breasts of people,"\(^8\) and her benevolence was extended impartially to all.

\(^6\)Conrad, Nostromo, p. 73.  
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 50.  
\(^8\)Ibid., p. 121.
Dr. Monygham once reflected, "she thinks of the Viola children; she thinks of me; of the wounded; of the miners; she always thinks of everybody who is poor and miserable!" 9

Using Mrs. Gould to symbolize the most desirable aspects of the community, Conrad showed her helping many different people, and in so doing wove more closely the relationship between the many characters in Nostromo. Introducing old Giorgio Viola into the story, Conrad mentioned reading spectacles that Mrs. Gould gave him. Because of her many acts of kindness to the entire family, the Violas called her "our Doña Emilia—that angel." Her influence prevented the Viola house from being torn down to make way for the railroad. She sheltered Linda and Giselle Viola following their mother's death. When she heard that Nostromo was engaged to Linda but infatuated with Giselle, she proposed to speak to him about marrying Linda soon in order to save the younger girl's reputation. After old Viola had shot Nostromo, it was Mrs. Gould who comforted Giselle.

There were others who valued Mrs. Gould's friendship as much as the Violas did. To Don José Avellanos, formerly powerful Sulacoan statesman, she had an intelligent mind capable of appreciating his political and philosophical views. Although he detested tea, old Avellanos went across the street each day at tea time to talk with Emilia. Antonia, his proud and beautiful daughter, awed and shocked the other young ladies of the town with her "emancipated ways" and her ability to
hold her own in political discussions with men; left alone by the rest of society, Antonia depended on Mrs. Gould for understanding and companionship. When Decoud was presumed drowned, Mrs. Gould knew better than anyone else the depth of Antonia's grief.

Martin Decoud, the young man who professed no faith in anything other than his own sensations, had spent hours in the Gould drawing room in conversation with Antonia. When he decided to remain in Sulaco to publish a patriotic newspaper, he told Mrs. Gould first; it was during this conversation that he made her see how her husband had made a fetish of his mine.

Decoud, who "recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties,"10 valued Mrs. Gould's intelligence so much that he asked her to help him on one occasion. Learning of the defeat of the Ribierists (Sulacoan defenders) outside the city, he pleaded with Mrs. Gould to keep the news from her husband, who would surely have cancelled the next day's shipment of silver bars from the mine to Sulaco. Decoud was particularly eager to have them arrive for exportation in order to assure continued financial backing from members of the Gould Concession in America, backing which was essential to his plan for forming a separate republic. Always scrupulously honest before, Mrs. Gould agreed to conceal the information from her husband, for Decoud had appealed to her sense of responsibility for the people's welfare. Convinced

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10Ibid., p. 557.
that she acted in the best interest of both husband and Sulaco, she entered into the first of her conspiracies concerning the silver. The second conspiracy was to be much later with Nostromo.

Nostromo (Giovanni Batista Fidanza) valued his prestige more than anything else. Although he loved being "just the man for the job," he eventually resented those who ordered him about and seemed not to appreciate him properly. When he was told to take the six months' accumulation of silver out of Sulaco before the enemy could arrive, he felt for the first time that the Goulds had expected too much of him. He felt that he had been asked to undertake a thankless task at great risk to himself—a task which seemed unlikely to bring him the glory and fame he sought. Later his enormous pride in his reputation was hurt at having to return to Sulaco without a success to report, and he felt that no one had even tried to appreciate the risks he had taken. Since he felt no particular loyalty to the Goulds, he decided to keep the hiding place of the silver secret as partial retribution for his injured pride. Thus he, like Mrs. Gould, had fallen victim of the silver by concealing information about it.

Since no close relationship existed between Mrs. Gould and Nostromo during most of the novel, it is significant that Conrad brought them together during Nostromo's death scene. Nostromo sent for Mrs. Gould, saying that he had something to tell her about the silver. Mrs. Gould dreaded hearing him, for,
... frankness personified, she remembered with an exaggerated horror that for the first and last time of her life she had concealed the truth from her husband about that very silver. She had been corrupted by her fears at that time, and she had never forgiven herself.\textsuperscript{11}

Thinking of Decoud's confidence to her and its results, she exclaimed, "'Isn't it lost and done with? Isn't there enough treasure without it to make everybody in the world miserable?"\textsuperscript{12}

But her sense of duty overcame her dread, and she went to Nostromo.

When she asked what had become of Decoud, Nostromo's reply showed his concern for his wounded vanity and his bitterness toward her:

"Who knows? I wondered what would become of me. Now I know. Death has come upon me unawares. He went away! He betrayed me. And you think I have killed him! You are all alike, you fine people. The silver has killed me. It has held me. It holds me yet. Nobody knows where it is. But you are the wife of Don Carlos, who put it into my hands and said, 'Save it on your life!' And when I returned, and you all thought it was lost, what do I hear? It was nothing of importance. Let it go."\textsuperscript{13}

At that moment Mrs. Gould admitted to him that she, too, had always hated the idea of that silver. But he refused to be placated; he persisted in expressing his hatred for everything she represented to him. Mrs. Gould, he felt, had usurped from him some of the recognition his vanity demanded. As a part of the Gould Concession, she represented to this "man of

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 621. \quad \textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 622.
the people" the capitalism he detested. She typified those whose admiration he had desired most and had come to feel cheated of.

Either Nostromo wanted to die assured that the silver had destroyed her peace of mind as it had his, or perhaps he felt at the last that he could reveal the hiding place of the treasure only to a woman of her integrity and goodness. He told her,

"Marvellous!—that one of you should hate the wealth that you know so well how to take from the hands of the poor. The world rests upon the poor, as old Giorgio says. You have been always good to the poor. But there is something accursed in wealth. Señora, shall I tell you where the treasure is? To you alone... Shining! Incorruptible!"

But Mrs. Gould sensed that he was reluctant to reveal the secret kept so long and painfully, and wanting to hear no more about the silver, she refused to let him tell where he had hidden it. Nostromo died after admitting the fact of his guilt, but without blaming himself for it.

Immediately afterward, Dr. Monygham, who had long suspected Nostromo, asked her whether he had confessed. Because she preferred to let Nostromo's reputation for incorruptibility remain what it was, Mrs. Gould replied that he had told her nothing, thus entering into another conspiracy by concealing his theft. In denying Nostromo's attempt to confess, she further isolated herself by lying about the silver.

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 623.\]
Yet it was through Mrs. Gould that Dr. Monygham succeeded in restoring himself to the human community. This evil looking, sarcastic man, "whose short, hopeless laugh expressed somehow an immense mistrust of mankind,"15 found salvation in devoting himself to Mrs. Gould. Because he loathed and mistrusted himself, he believed in no one. He was haunted by the memory of Father Beron, who had tortured him so terribly that he had betrayed friends, and he was torn by the fear that under similar circumstances he might do so again. Cynical as he was, "only Mrs. Gould could keep his unbelief in men's motives within due bounds."16

From first to last Dr. Monygham's part in the novel relates to Mrs. Gould. Her importance to him was evident in Conrad's introduction of him, attired in an incongruous garb topped by a white linen jacket, limping down the street on his way to the Gould house. The description told something of Mrs. Gould's character as well as the doctor's.

The little white jacket was in reality a concession to Mrs. Gould's humanizing influence. The doctor, with his habit of sceptical, bitter speech, had no other means of showing his profound respect. He presented this tribute very seriously indeed; it was no trifle for a man of his habits. Mrs. Gould felt that, too, perfectly. She would never have thought of imposing upon him this marked show of deference.17

Knowing Mrs. Gould meant a great deal to the doctor. After he

15Ibid., p. 48.  
16Ibid.  
17Ibid., p. 50.
was befriended by the Goulds and made official physician for
the mine, he became recognized, though never accepted, by
the townspeople. Mrs. Gould's influence on him was more than
a superficial one, for

Since he had got to know Mrs. Gould something had altered
in him. Through her tact and instinctive understanding,
through her unselfishness and compassion, she had aroused
in this soured and embittered man a sense of devotion
that knew no bounds.\(^{18}\)

Monygham's chance to demonstrate this devotion came during
the revolution in Sulaco. In order to gain time for the arrival
of reinforcement troops, he pretended to turn traitor to the
Goulds. At great personal risk he went to Sotillo, the com-
mander of the invading force, to tell him that Gould had
purposely sunk the silver in the harbor to hide it. During
Sotillo's frenzied search for the treasure, Monygham was held
prisoner and barely escaped hanging. As Curle pointed out,
"It was for Mrs. Gould he did it... with a sort of exaltation.
Surely by this act of cold and lonely courage he atoned for
anything he may have said when his body was being mangled by the
bestial Father Beron."\(^{19}\)

In redeeming himself from his fear of behaving in a
cowardly manner, Monygham had also, in a manner of speaking,
become a victim of the mine, which "presented itself to his

\(^{18}\text{Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad and His Characters (London,}
\text{1957), p. 100.}\)

\(^{19}\text{Ibid., p. 101.}\)
fifty-years-old eyes in the shape of a little woman in a soft
dress."20 Eventually he would have sacrificed anything or
anyone for her sake. Though his sarcastic words and inscruta-
tible aspect kept anyone from suspecting his love for her, he
grew to resent anyone who seemed close to Mrs. Gould. He was
especially bitter toward Charles Gould for acting without
consideration for Mrs. Gould's feelings. Like Decoud, he was
aware of Gould's "idealization" of the mine and his neglect
of his wife, and "his heart ached because the woman to whom
he had given his undying devotion had seen her happiness slip
away from her through her husband's absorption in his vast,
expanding mine."21

This absorption kept Charles Gould unaware of his growing
separation from his wife. He loved her deeply, but neither
of them expressed such emotions in words very often. From the
time of his decision to go to Costaguana, she had agreed with
his conviction that by improving economic and social conditions
through developing the mine, he might make up for his father's
having died a failure there. Mrs. Gould acted in complete sym-
pathy with his ideals; she encouraged and helped him in every
possible way. She believed that the sincere, unassuming man
she loved was driven by purest motives, and that they "had
been morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life
against the unnatural error of weariness and despair."22

20Conrad, Nostromo, p. 482.
21Ibid.
22Ibid., p. 81.
Depending on her capacity for understanding him, Gould spent more of his time with the mine and less with his wife. "He trusted that, though a little disenchanted, she would be intelligent enough to understand." Gould expected her to know his unspoken thoughts, for as he once pointed out to her, the best part of his feelings were in her hands, and he thought they had long ago said everything there was to say on the subject of the mine. Though she was concerned about the physical and emotional demands the mine made on him, Mrs. Gould's preoccupation with the well-being of everyone around her kept her for a long time from showing bitterness toward his changing treatment of her.

It was Decoud who had first put into words whatever misgivings she had when he told her:

"Mrs. Gould, are you aware to what point he has idealized the existence, the worth, the meaning of the San Tome mine? He cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairytale. The earth is not quite good enough for him, I fear."

And Mrs. Gould could not defend her husband's motives from Decoud's sceptical analysis of them. She realized at that time to what extremes Charles Gould's idealism of the mine had gone. Conrad described her awakening this way:

\[23\text{Ibid.}, p. 158.\]  \[24\text{Ibid.}, pp. 229-230.\]  \[25\text{Ibid.}, p. 238.\]
The fate of the San Tomé mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvalation of precious metal, leaving her outside.\textsuperscript{26}

During the revolution Gould himself began to realize that his original concept of his mission had changed somewhat. He had not in the beginning longed for power, but he realized gradually that the power the mine gave to him would be the means of saving the country. At times, though, he resented the fact that "the mine had corrupted his judgment by making him sick of bribing and intriguing merely to have his work left alone from day to day."\textsuperscript{27} However, Gould refused to think of someone else taking over the mine, and at one point resolved to blow it up rather than let it fall into alien hands. In describing Gould's decision, Conrad expressed several things about his character, among which was "the remorse of that subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress of his thoughts."\textsuperscript{28} But like Nostromo, refusing to blame himself, Gould would not fully acknowledge his guilt.

Mrs. Gould's failure to complain about Gould's neglecting her had, in effect, contributed to their separation. Conrad proved through her that virtue is not necessarily a guarantee

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 245.  \hfill \textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 406.  
\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 407.
against isolation. When the progress Gould hoped for was achieved, Gould saw himself and the mine going on to still greater accomplishments, while Mrs. Gould felt that a once-cherished dream had come to a bitter end. But she would not blame her husband for her disillusionment; instead, she rationalized about material success and the failure of their marriage.

What more could she have expected? It was a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through. There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degeneracy of the idea.  

Feeling that no one knew or cared about her loneliness, she was at last fully aware of having lost her husband completely to "material interests." She saw the mine in the San Tomé mountain crushing her and her husband as it had his father. Alone with her dead dreams, she looked like "a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labors, the powerlessness of her magic."  

In this woman, who illustrated some of the brightest facets of the human community, and at the same time fell victim to outside forces, Conrad created one of his most complex women. He also pictured through her his concept that unselfish devotion to others could bring about isolation and destruction, as it

29Ibid., p. 582.  
30Ibid., p. 581.
had to Winnie. Unlike Winnie, Mrs. Gould was not wholly
destroyed. Conrad implied that by facing her solitude with
resignation, she would perhaps find moral salvation.

An immense desolation, the dread of her own con-
tinued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco.
With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone
the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love,
of work—all alone in the Treasure House of the World.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 583.
CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Conrad felt that it was not the function of a writer to make dogmatic pronouncements on moral and psychological subjects, but that "it was an author's task to provide different perspectives from which a reader could look at reality"\(^1\) and thus formulate his own standards of behavior. Beach pointed out that it would have been impossible for Conrad to present human nature and reality as he saw it without using the varied points of view which gave his work completeness.\(^2\) The numerous perspectives Conrad used reflected the convictions underlying the themes of his fiction.

Some of Conrad's fiction indicates that he looked upon existence within the security of the human community as not only desirable, but ideal, because the community consisted of a group bound together by similar basic emotions and needs, which gave them a sense of moral solidarity.\(^3\) In Conrad's view, "man's primary function in life [is] to recognize his own


mortal destiny in an immortal universe," and such self-
identification was based on his ability to identify himself
in relationship to his fellow-man. Conrad repeatedly drama-
tized both the struggles of people trying to attain this state
of solidarity and those destructive actions by which people
thrust themselves and others out of the community and into
isolation. To show this as a struggle that is common to all
mankind—not just the male half—and thus to present a truth-
ful picture of human nature as he saw it, Conrad created
certain women characters.

It is true that some of Conrad's fictional women, like the
toothless old crones who crouched around the fringes of scenes
in Lord Jim, An Outcast of the Islands, and Nostromo, exist
solely for the purpose of enriching his settings. But at the
other extreme are those like Mrs. Gould or Amy Foster, who are
not only involved in the moral drama, but are agents of co-
hesion or dissolution within the community.

A study of the women in Conrad's fiction also reveals
that some of them have dual functions. Mrs. Gould, for in-
stance, provides a feeling of security to Antonio, Monygham,
the Violas, and others, but she was also a victim of the same
destructive forces which overpowered most of the characters
in Nostromo, unable to help either herself or her husband escape
the isolation which Conrad foresaw for those who became enslaved
by materialistic ideals.

4Wright, op. cit., p. 37.
A woman whom Conrad pictured in moral solitude of her own making was Winnie. Far from being a negligible character, she reacted as violently to her moral crisis as any of Conrad's male characters did in similar circumstances. Like Mrs. Haldin, she had made one person her whole world, and his death destroyed her.

Conrad employed some of his women characters as catalysts in the moral failure of others, for "it was not the superficial how of his characters' actions, but the fundamental why, and particularly the why of moral failure"\(^5\) that interested him most. Whether or not these women were fully characterized, their characterizations were complete enough to contain elements sufficient to bring about the moral failure of others. Aissa's charms presented to Willems a temptation he was unprepared to resist, even though he considered himself superior. Amy Foster destroyed Yanko because ignorance kept her from comprehending the depths of his longing for love and understanding. Flora, whose misconceptions about life caused her to draw back from it, was for a while a victim of the ideas which Mrs. Fyne repeatedly professed but did not practice.

Not all of Conrad's heroines contributed to the moral isolation of others, however, nor did all of them who were morally separated remain so. To prove his belief that moral redemption can result from recognition and rejection of intellectual

isolation, Conrad used Lena, who helped Heyst achieve his self-recognition and moral salvation at the same time that her own came about. In Chance he illustrated the fact that love can be a positive agent in rejoining man to the human community. The love of Flora and Anthony both redeemed her from her fear of participating in life and caused him to reject his delusion. It was also love which motivated Razumov to confess his guilt to Nathalie and thereby gain his own moral redemption.

None of these women should be considered as purely incidental in Conrad's works. The examination of them indicates that he deliberately introduced them into his fiction for varied purposes. The unfolding of their characters was, in some cases, as central to the theme as that of the males. They contributed invaluably to the characterization of the men, and sometimes, as in An Outcast of the Islands and Victory, they provided the closest view of the moral change in the hero. All of these women were vital in their own ways to Conrad's expression of his beliefs.

It is true that for the most part Conrad did not write long, vivid physical descriptions of his heroines. Seldom would one be able to look up from the pages of Chance or The Secret Agent and "see" Flora or Winnie. Even a careful reader might have difficulty in remembering whether Mrs. Gould was blonde or brunette, or any of the physical features except the eyes of Jewel or Aissa. But who could forget the things these
stood for? No matter how incompletely he described some of them or how short their roles were, Conrad's fictional women demand consideration as characters in their own right.
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