

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF WOMAN IN
SELECTED FICTION OF JOSEPH CONRAD

by

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ABSTRACT

Conrad's female characters have not been viewed favorably by the majority of critics. They have not been viewed as contributing organically to Conrad's novels, but as adding, at most, a romantic interest to his works.

An alternative view of Conrad's women is suggested in this thesis. It is argued that Conrad's principal female characters are integral elements of his fiction. Five of Conrad's works are examined in an attempt to demonstrate that women play an important role in the presentation of a basic Conradian theme, the conflict between egoism and altruism.

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CHAPTER I

For the past decade and a half, Conrad's female characters have been viewed unfavourably by the majority of critics. The presence of women in Conrad's fiction has generally been considered to detract from rather than to enhance his art. As one critic writes:

Generally speaking, when we meet Conrad's women we move into the realm of magazine romance where the conventional and romantic emotion is suggested by the conventional and over-worked word.¹

This view of woman has led a great number of critics to ignore Conrad's female characters or to consider them as superfluous additions to his novels, additions which add a romantic interest but which contribute little or nothing to the illumination of Conrad's major themes. Albert Guerard, for example, in what is considered to be the standard critical study of Conrad, says of the Patusan section in Lord Jim:

. . . for pages on end the reader is allowed to forget [the] moral problem and theme . . . a characteristic mediocrity sets in with the introduction of Jewel . . .²

¹Neville Newhouse, Joseph Conrad (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1966), p. 74.

²Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 168.

The critical perspective which associates woman in Conrad's fiction with "bad writing" seems to have been largely determined by a study of the novelist first published in 1957, Thomas Moser's Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline. In this book, which is essentially a psychological critique of Conrad, Moser comes to the conclusion that

there is something about the theme of love which elicits only bad writing from Conrad, something that frustrates his most strenuous effort to create.³

He finds women and love the "uncongenial subject"⁴ for Conrad. He argues that Conrad's attempt to deal with women in his works was frustrated by his misogynous attitude, and that furthermore it marked a turning away from moral judgment.⁵ He therefore concludes that Conrad's attempt to include women in his fiction was a major cause of his artistic decline. This conclusion leads him to ask why Conrad, "rather than subordinating women and love in the full length novels, did not cut them out altogether and produce only perfect works like The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and 'The Secret Sharer'".⁶

Recent critical commentaries on Conrad, however, have often reflected glimmerings of dissatisfaction with the unfavourable view of Conrad's women initiated by Moser.

³Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 69.

⁴Ibid., p. 50. ⁵Ibid., p. 130. ⁶Ibid., p. 99.

Bruce Johnson, for example, in his study of Conrad, specifically in his chapters on Lord Jim and Nostromo, suggests that readers of Conrad tend to minimize the importance of women in his novels.⁷ Robert Andreach, in his comparative study of Conrad and Ford, indicates that he also is of this opinion; he advocates a "reexamination of women in Conrad's imaginative world".⁸ And, Adam Gillon, in a somewhat earlier work, has suggested that the position of woman and love in Conrad's fiction has been undervalued, that women and love "is not an uncongenial subject with Conrad, but his treatment of [them] reveals Conrad's vision of mankind".⁹

Such dissenting voices as these suggest the possibility of a different view of Conrad's women, a view which considers them more functional than most critics have allowed.

This thesis proposes to demonstrate the viability of such a view. In order to accomplish this aim it will examine the role of the principal female character in five of Conrad's works: "The Lagoon", "Karain: A Memory", An Outcast of the Islands, Lord Jim and Victory. It will be shown that in each of the works examined the principal

⁷Bruce Johnson, Conrad's Models of Mind (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971.)

⁸Robert J. Andreach, The Slain and Resurrected God (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 19.

⁹Adam Gillon, The External Solitary (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1960), p. 87.

female character constitutes an integral part; it will be shown that these women, rather than merely supplying a romantic interest, play an extremely important part in the presentation of what Lawrence Graver identifies as a basic Conradian theme, the conflict between egoism and altruism.¹⁰

Before outlining the manner in which the principal female characters in the works to be discussed serve to illuminate this theme, it is necessary to define the forces involved, and to indicate Conrad's attitude towards them. Egoism, as it emerges in Conrad's fictional world, may be defined as self-love or self-indulgence. Altruism, on the other hand, may be defined as an abnegation of self, as an awareness of and concern for the needs and well-being of others.

As critics such as Adam Gillon¹¹ and Royal Roussel¹² have excellently illustrated, egoism is an isolating force which separates man from the community. Altruism, on the other hand, leads man to a commitment to the community and a recognition of the bonds of solidarity. As the community or communal awareness represented the ethical norm for Conrad, each of these terms, in addition to indicating a

¹⁰Graver writes: "this theme . . . is the foundation on which all his [Conrad's] major work is built".
Conrad's Short Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 45.

¹¹Adam Gillon, The Eternal Solidarity.

¹²Royal Roussel, The Metaphysics of Darkness
 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 20-21.

relation to society, also indicates a moral condition. Egoism, in Conrad's world, evokes moral condemnation, while altruism evokes moral commendation. In an early letter to his publishers, Conrad wrote: "Egoism . . . is the moving force of the world . . . [but] altruism is its morality."¹³

Man, as he is presented in Conrad's fiction, may be viewed as a composite of these two irrational and opposing forces. Most of Conrad's male protagonists, from Arsat to Axel Heyst, ultimately find themselves torn between their egoistical and altruistic impulses.

In the works to be examined in this thesis, it will be shown that woman functions as a catalytic agent for the release of these irrational forces within man. In the early works of Conrad to be discussed in this paper, "The Lagoon", "Karain" and An Outcast of the Islands, it will be shown that the principal female character awakens the egotistical impulses of the male protagonist and, as a result, constitutes for him a temptation to commit a breach of solidarity.

Thomas Moser has suggested that Conrad's presentation of these women reflects his misogynous attitude; he has argued that in these early works woman represents a sexual threat, a challenge to the masculinity of the

¹³John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm, Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska 1890-1920 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 91.

protagonist.¹⁴ This paper suggests that the threat is more clearly a moral one. Woman in these works does challenge the masculinity of the protagonist, but masculinity is defined by Conrad in his works, not in sexual terms, but in moral terms. Masculinity, as Conrad reveals in The Nigger of the Narcissus, is characterized by courage, loyalty and fidelity. The principal female characters in the works to be examined test the protagonist's masculinity, that is they test his loyalty and fidelity.

In the later works of Conrad to be examined, Lord Jim and Victory, it will be shown that the role of the principal female characters is reversed. In these novels woman awakens the altruistic, rather than the egoistic impulses of the male protagonist, and, as a result, constitutes a temptation for him to commit himself to the community, to form an allegiance to human solidarity.

While it is not the purpose of this thesis to make a general statement concerning the role of woman in all of Conrad's works, the propositions to be examined do seem to apply to Conrad's women as a whole. The principal female characters in Almayer's Folly and Heart of Darkness, Nina Almayer and Kurtz's native woman, follow the pattern of the early works discussed in this paper. In Almayer's Folly, Nina Almayer represents an appeal to the egoistical

¹⁴Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, pp. 50-131.

desires of the young Malayan warrior, Dain Maroula, an appeal that eventually leads him to betray his allegiance to his business partner, Almayer. In Heart of Darkness, the native woman represents an appeal to the egotistical impulses of Kurtz, an appeal that ultimately leads him to take part in "unspeakable rites".¹⁵

The principal female characters in Nostromo, Under Western Eyes and Chance, follow the pattern that is found in Lord Jim and Victory. Emilia Gould, Natalia Haldin and Flora de Barral appeal to the altruistic impulses of the male protagonist and tempt him to acknowledge an allegiance to human solidarity.

¹⁵Joseph Conrad, Youth and Two Other Stories (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), p. 124.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter it will be shown, through an examination of "The Lagoon", "Karain" and An Outcast of the Islands, that in the early fiction of Joseph Conrad, the principal female character often constitutes a temptation for the male protagonist to sin against the human community through a gross violation of the sacred bonds of solidarity. It will further be shown that this temptation usually consists of an appeal on the part of the woman to the most basic of man's egoistical desires; she brings out in the protagonist the unworthy longing for peace and irresponsibility. Finally, it will be shown that a surrender on the part of the male protagonist to the desires that the woman releases can, in the world of Conrad's early fiction, lead only to spiritual and moral destruction.

In Conrad's first short story, "The Lagoon", the principal female character, in keeping with the pattern that has been outlined, constitutes a temptation for the male protagonist to commit a breach of solidarity; she awakens in him the desire to indulge the self even at the expense of his loyalty to his brother.

In this tale, Arsat, the sword bearer of the ruler of his country, becomes infatuated with Diamelen, a servant of the ruler's wife. From his first glimpse of this woman

Arsat seems to have fallen under a spell: " . . . I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice".¹⁶ He becomes obsessed with a desire to possess this woman: "To get her I would have faced all mankind."¹⁷ As the story progresses, the nature of Arsats infatuation becomes increasingly clear. For Arsat, who at one point confesses: "I wanted [only] peace in my heart"¹⁸ Diamelen is the embodiment of a dream of an idyllic life:

Could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten--where death is unknown!¹⁹

Conrad's portrayal of Diamelen reinforces her function as the embodiment of Arsats dream. Diamelen, at first glance, seems to be merely the stock heroine of a romantic love story. As a character, she is underdeveloped and her role in the story seems to be simply to die. It is this that in part has led to the critical opinion that "when we meet Conrad's women we move into the realm of magazine romance".²⁰ Diamelen's shadowy and underdeveloped character, however, her almost spectral nature, serves to underline her connection with Arsats dream.

Thus enchanted by Diamelen, Arsat chooses to ignore the demands of loyalty to his ruler and to satisfy the

¹⁶Joseph Conrad, Tales of Unrest (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 195.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 202. ¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 201.

²⁰Neville Newhouse, Joseph Conrad (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1966), p. 74.

"hunger of his heart",²¹ the selfish desire to possess this woman, a desire which he terms love:

There is a time when a man should forget loyalty and respect. Might and authority are given to rulers, but to all men is given love.²²

However, in his surrender to Diamelen, or rather to the desires that she has released, Arsat loses his manhood.

As his brother later observes:

There is half a man in you now--the other half is in that woman.²³

Once a proud and fearless warrior, Arsat is reduced to kidnapping his beloved from her master and slinking away in the darkness of night. His brother, who aids him in this enterprise, reproaches him for his behavior:

We are men who take what we want and can hold it against many. We should have taken her in daylight.²⁴

Arsat, however, his heart in the "weak hands"²⁵ of Diamelen, persists in his cowardice. When his brother later wants to shout the cry of challenge to let the people know that they are "freeborn robbers",²⁶ Arsat, in the "name of his love",²⁷ begs him to remain silent. And shortly after, when the three are in danger of capture, Arsat abandons his brother to a brutal death, and sails away with the woman who possesses his heart, with the woman who, in seeming to

²¹Joseph Conrad, Tales of Unrest, p. 195.

²²Ibid., p. 198. ²³Ibid., p. 198. ²⁴Ibid., p. 197.

²⁵Ibid., p. 200. ²⁶Ibid., p. 198. ²⁷Ibid.

promise the fulfillment of a dream, anticipates symbolically Jim's "veiled Eastern bride":

She sat in the middle of the canoe with covered face . . . and I had no regret at what I was leaving because I could hear the breathing close to me . . .²⁸

Arsat's cowardly act constitutes a betrayal of human solidarity; it is a denial of a bond between brothers for a selfish and personal end. Three times his brother calls his name and three times Arsath refuses to acknowledge him. These refusals strongly suggest Peter's denial of Christ, the living symbol of the communal bond.

Driven by his love for Diamelen to forsake his brother and his people, Arsath now allows this force to lead him to the isolation and irresponsibility of what he believes to be an idyllic existence: "My love was so strong that I thought it could guide me to a country where death was unknown."²⁹ Yet seeming to promise a world in which death is forgotten, it leads him to one which is fixed in death, for Arsath's decision to fulfill his desires at the cost of his brother's life has resulted in his moral destruction. His spiritual state is reflected by the still and stagnant lagoon in which he finds himself:

The forests, sombre and dull, stood motionless and silent. . . . At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown

²⁸Ibid., p. 197.

²⁹Ibid., p. 198.

swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final.³⁰

To the white man who narrates the tale, and who later comes to visit Arsat, this world appears to be fraught with evil:

The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him--into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence.³¹

In this world of death, Diamelen, who to Arsat seemed to embody a promise of peace and eternal life, herself dies. Diamelen's death is accompanied by the dissipation of Arsat's dream. Arsat is made to see that his dream was but an illusion: "he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions."³² He comes to recognize that "there is no light and peace in the world but [that] there is death . . ."³³

Freed of his illusions, Arsat becomes intensely aware of his shame and of his sin. He vows to return to society to avenge his brother and to atone for his crime:

We are sons of the same mother--and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now.³⁴

And in this vow Arsat's sin is expiated. The natural

³⁰Ibid., p. 187. ³¹Ibid., p. 193. ³²Ibid., p. 204.

³³Ibid., p. 203. ³⁴Ibid.

surroundings which formerly had reflected the sickness of his soul now reflect its rejuvenation:

The breeze freshened, a great brilliance burst upon the lagoon, sparkled on the rippling water. The forests came out of the clear shadows of the morning, became distinct, as if they had rushed nearer to stop short in a great stir of leaves, of nodding boughs, of swaying branches.³⁵

The motif of the later short story, "Karain: A Memory", is, as Conrad himself observes in his preface, "almost identical with the motif of 'The Lagoon'".³⁶ Karain, the male protagonist, is led away from the community and finally brought to kill his best friend, Pata Matara, by the seductive attractiveness of a woman.

At the beginning of the story the narrator goes to great lengths to describe the power and prestige of the native chief, Karain: "To no man had been given the shelter of so much respect, confidence and awe."³⁷ Yet beneath this veneer of greatness, the narrator suggests, lurks an unfathomable horror: " . . . one could not imagine what depth of horrible void such an elaborate front could be worthy to hide".³⁸

In the fourth part of the tale, Karain himself reveals the "horrible void" behind the elaborate front. Early in his youth he had pledged himself to help his lifelong friend, Pata Matara, to pursue and execute his sister, who had brought shame on the Matara family by running away with

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. ix. ³⁷Ibid., p. 5.

³⁸Ibid., p. 6.

a Dutch trader. Matara's sister, however, proves to be a bewitching beauty: " . . . her beauty was extreme, silencing the reason and ravishing the heart of the beholders".³⁹ And Karain, from the outset of this pursuit reveals himself susceptible to this beauty. As he and Matara observe the departure of the fleeing girl, he joins with his friend in calling out "insults and threats".⁴⁰ Yet although he is aware of the seriousness of her transgression, he feels compassionate towards her, he is sorry to see her leave:

I saw in the gloom within the enclosed space of the pram a woman with streaming hair going away from her land and her people. I was angry--and sorry. Why?⁴¹

As in "The Lagoon", the woman in this tale releases desires in the man which threaten the solidarity of the community. Karain, although he is barely conscious of it at this point, is moved by a desire to possess this girl. What he had earlier observed about the Dutchman has now become true of himself: "She had ravished his heart!"⁴² And just as the Dutchman had "left all--for her",⁴³ so too will Karain.

Karain and Matara set out after the woman and her husband, but the quest is a long and lonely one and fraught with many hardships:

We starved. We begged. . . . We cut rattans in the forest for a handful of rice, and for

³⁹Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 30.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

a living swept the decks of big ships and heard curses heaped upon our head. We toiled in villages; we wandered upon the seas with the Bajow people, who have no country. We fought for pay; we hired ourselves to work for Goram men and were cheated; and under the orders of rough white-faces we dived for pearls in barren bays, dotted with black rocks, upon a coast of sand and desolation.⁴⁴

During these years of hardship and loneliness, Karain becomes obsessed with a vision of the woman that they pursue:

. . . I saw her every day--always! At first I saw only her head, as of a woman walking in the low mist on a river bank. Then she sat by our fire. I saw her. I looked at her. She had tender eyes and a ravishing face. I murmured to her in the night.⁴⁵

Karain's earlier desire to possess the girl reasserts itself: "She was all mine, and no one could see her--no one of living mankind."⁴⁶ Karain's desire to possess this woman, however, reveals itself to be more than just a physical desire. Woman comes to represent for Karain, as she did for Arsath, a dream of peace. The feminine figure that he continually sees before him becomes for Karain a sustaining force, a means of escape from the loneliness and hardship he encounters: ". . . she whispered to me with compassion, with pity, softly--as woman will; she soothed the pain of my mind".⁴⁷

Karain's obsession with this "woman" gradually undermines his allegiance to Matara. Because he has come to view her as soothing and sustaining, he determines not

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁷Ibid.

to fulfill his oath to his friend:

Her eyes were tender and frightened, her voice soft and pleading . . . who shall be thy companion, who shall console thee if I die? . . . I murmured to her, "You shall not die," and she smiled . . . ever after she smiled!⁴⁸

Thus when he and Matara finally confront the sought-after couple, Karain deliberately shoots and kills his friend rather than the woman of his dreams:

. . . Matara leaped at her with uplifted arm. I pulled the trigger, saw a spark . . . the smoke drove back into my face, and then I could see Matara roll over head first and lie with stretched arms at her feet.⁴⁹

The dissipation of the smoke from the fateful discharge, however, is accompanied by the dissipation of Karain's dream. Contrary to his expectations, the woman for whom he has destroyed his soul fails to recognize him:

She looked at me long, she looked at me with unflinching eyes and said aloud . . . "I never saw him before." . . . What! never before? Had she forgotten already--after so many years--so many years of wandering, of companionship, of trouble, of tender words! Forgotten already!⁵⁰

Karain, "loyal to a vision",⁵¹ is, ironically, "betrayed by his dream, spurned by his illusion".⁵² Having led himself to believe that through this woman he would find peace and consolation, Karain is horrified to discover that he has only found eternal unrest. He is left to walk the

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 37. ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 38. ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 39.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 40. ⁵²Ibid.

earth, haunted by the ghost of his friend and the knowledge of his sinful infidelity.

In Conrad's second full-length novel, An Outcast of the Islands, the principal female character once again constitutes a temptation for the male protagonist to commit a breach of solidarity. Aissa, the beautiful and bewitching native girl that Willems meets in the distant country of Sambir, leads him to betray the trust of his friend and benefactor, Captain Lingard. Willems, it must be stressed, however, lacks the nobility of Arsat or Karain. He is a self-centered, egotistical man whose concept of solidarity, from the beginning of the novel, is an extremely limited one. His feeble bond with the community of man is based largely upon self-interest. He is a man who although he disapproves "of the elementary dishonesty that dips the hand in the cashbox",⁵³ is completely lacking in scruples: "The wise and strong the respected have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power."⁵⁴ Willems' surrender to Aissa and his subsequent betrayal of Lingard, therefore, must be viewed not as the tragic fall of a noble soul, but as the inevitable act of a debased and hollow man.

An Outcast of the Islands is primarily concerned with tracing the spiritual deterioration of this hollow man. At the outset of the novel, Willems reveals himself

⁵³Joseph Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 8.

⁵⁴Ibid.

to be a person who is enamoured with his public image and intoxicated by his own success:

Willems had the street to himself. He would walk in the middle, his shadow gliding obsequiously before him. He looked down on it complacently. The shadow of a successful man! He would be dizzy . . . with the intoxication of his own glory. As he often told people, he came east fourteen years ago--a cabin boy. A small boy. His shadow must have been very small at that time; he thought with a smile that he was not aware then he had anything--even a shadow--which he dared call his own. And now he was looking at the shadow of the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. going home. How glorious!⁵⁵

This image of a successful man, which is largely the result of Willems' unscrupulous dealings, proves, however, to be as fleeting and ephemeral as a shadow. Willems' concept of self, very much like Jim's, is suddenly destroyed by a fatal jump. Willems steps off "the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty"⁵⁶ by attempting to defraud his employer, Hudig. And much to his dismay, he is apprehended in the attempt and unmasked for what he really is: "Oh you great man!" . . . "You are nobody . . ."⁵⁷

Willems, in anticipation of Jim, at first refuses to accept the reality of his failure and the truth that has been revealed about himself. His immediate reaction is to disown his moral slip by projecting it onto another self: "What a fatal aberration of an acute mind! He did

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 7. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 3. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 27.

not recognize himself there. He must have been mad. That's it. A sudden gust of madness."⁵⁸ When the truth of the situation begins to force itself upon his consciousness, however, he cannot endure the shame. He decides that he must "leave [the] island, go far away where he was unknown. To [where] . . . he would find an opening . . . for his abilities. . . ."⁵⁹

Willems appeals to his life long friend and benefactor, Captain Lingard, for a second chance, for an opportunity to redeem his self-image, and Lingard, sympathetic to his plight, removes him to the distant country of Sambir, the site of his secret trading post.

Life in Sambir, for Willems, however, is wearisome and discouraging. He is prevented from helping with Lingard's business by Lingard's partner and representative, Kaspar Almayer, who views him as a potential rival for his employer's affections. Thus excluded from all commercial activity Willems is only made more conscious of the "ruins of his past success":⁶⁰

The man who, during long years, became accustomed to think of himself as indispensable to others, felt a bitter and savage rage at the cruel consciousness of his superfluity, of his uselessness; . . . [he] seemed to be left outside the scheme of creation in a hopeless immobility filled with tormenting regret.⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 23. ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 26. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 64.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 65.

To escape from the constant reminder of his failure, Willems begins to avoid the trading post and to venture deeper and deeper into the jungle "in search of a refuge from the unceasing reproach of his thoughts".⁶² It is during one of these forays that he unexpectedly encounters the native woman, Aissa.

From his first glimpse of this woman, Willems seems to be overcome by a strange passion:

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 the 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.⁶³

In his recent study of Conrad's fiction, John Palmer voices a common critical view of Willems' enchantment with Aissa, when he states: "Like the highest (or lowest) vision of Jim or Kurtz, Willems' passion for Aissa is ultimately resistant to declarative statement."⁶⁴ The nature of Willems' passion, however, seems to be more clearly defined by the novel than most critics have allowed. On the literal level, Willems' attraction to Aissa is obviously sexual. Willems' sexual desire for Aissa, however, seems to mask a deeper desire. It is interesting to note that

⁶¹Ibid., p. 65. ⁶²Ibid., p. 67. ⁶³Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁴John A. Palmer, Joseph Conrad's Fiction (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 59.

Aissa appears to Willems, during his quest for "a refuge from his thoughts", "with the impalpable distinctness of a dream".⁶⁵ It would seem from this context that Aissa appears to Willems as the end of this quest. Like Arsat and Karain, he seems to view a woman as a means of escape from reality, as a consoling force, as a potential source of peace: "There was no safety outside of himself--and in himself there was no refuge; there was only . . . that woman."⁶⁶

Aissa, as an uncivilized native and daughter of the dark and foreboding jungle, represents for Willems the alluring appeal of savage torpor. Aissa's effect upon Willems is almost Circe-like:

Pressing against him she stood on tiptoe to look into his eyes, and her own seemed to grow bigger, glistening and tender and promising. With that look she drew the man's soul away from him through his immobile pupils, and from Willems' features the spark of reason vanished under her gaze and was replaced by an appearance of physical well-being, an ecstasy of the senses which had taken possession of his rigid body; an ecstasy that drove out regrets, hesitation and doubt, and proclaimed its terrible work by an appalling aspect of idiotic beatitude.⁶⁷

Willems' race-consciousness at first causes him to resist his attraction to Aissa, but his desire for her ultimately undermines his will, and he surrenders himself to her completely:

⁶⁵Joseph Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands, p. 70.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 140.

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 among shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat--lost his footing--fell back into the darkness. With a faint cry and an upward throw of his arms he gave up as a tired swimmer gives up because the swamped craft is gone from under his feet; because the night is dark and the shore is far--because death is better than strife.⁶⁸

Willems' surrender to Aissa and to the appeal of peaceful ease that she represents is a sign of his degeneration, of his spiritual deterioration, for through this surrender he, like Arsat, loses his manhood:

Where was the assurance and pride of his cleverness; the belief in success, the anger of failure, the wish to retrieve his fortune, the certitude of his ability to accomplish it yet? Gone. All gone. All that had been a man within him was gone, and there remained only the trouble of his heart--that heart which had become a contemptible thing; which could be fluttered by a look or a smile, tormented by a word, soothed by a promise.⁶⁹

By succumbing to Aissa, Willems is reduced to a state of complete and utter indolence:

. . . he felt very peaceful with a peace that was as complete as the silence round them. . . . All the anguish, suffering, strife of the past days; the humiliation and anger of his downfall; all that was an infamous nightmare, a thing born in sleep to be forgotten and leave no trace--and true life was this: this dreamy immobility with his head against her heart that beat so steadily.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 80-81.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 146.

Like the Greeks who submitted to Circe, Willems, through his surrender to the Circe-like Aissa, is transformed into a slothful creature. Significantly, Almayer's daughter, Nina, later calls after him: "Pig! Pig! Pig!"⁷¹

Willems' passion for Aissa provides the pivot of the novel. The local politicians of Sambir, jealous of Lingard's power, plot to undermine his rule. They realize, however, that they are greatly in need of Willems' help. Aware of his dependence upon Aissa, they determine to force Willems to aid them in their enterprise by separating the woman from him.

Deprived of Aissa, and the consolation she provides, Willems is driven to distraction:

"She is gone. Gone." he repeated with tears in his voice. . . . "At first," he whispered, dreamily, "my life was a vision of heaven. . . . Since she went I know what perdition means, what darkness is. I know what it is to be torn alive. . . ." ⁷²

Thus, when Babalatchi, the directing force behind the whole affair, offers to restore Aissa to Willems on the condition that he guide the enemy forces into Sambir, Willems unhesitatingly accepts his proposition. He, like Arsath and Karain, deliberately chooses to betray his friend in order to satisfy his own selfish desires:

Scruples were for imbeciles. His clear duty was to make himself happy. Did he ever take an oath of fidelity to Lingard?⁷³

⁷¹Ibid., p. 94. ⁷²Ibid., p. 89. ⁷³Ibid., p. 142.

As Paul Wiley has observed, this drama of temptation and betrayal parallels the biblical account of man's fall.⁷⁴ Amid a setting of lush vegetation which is highly suggestive of the biblical garden, Willems, driven by his passion for the native woman Aissa, is tempted to sin against Lingard, the white god of Sambir. Aissa, at this stage of the novel, emerges as a type of Eve figure. Like her biblical counterpart, she allows herself to become the agent of an evil power. At the behest of Babalatchi, who is strongly reminiscent of Milton's Satan, she willingly isolates herself from Willems in order to force him to betray Lingard.

These biblical echoes, by exalting the story to mythic proportions indicate the magnitude of Willems' crime and at the same time, underline Aissa's importance.

Willems believes that by betraying Lingard, and thereby reuniting himself with Aissa, he will once again obtain his "vision of heaven".⁷⁵ He obtains instead, however, a vision of hell. Willems, like Karain, is "betrayed by his dream".⁷⁶ After his act of infidelity, Willems discovers that he can no longer find peace and forgetfulness with Aissa:

He took her in his arms and waited for the transport, for the madness, for the sensations remembered and lost . . . but only

⁷⁴Paul L. Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 39.

⁷⁵Joseph Conrad, An Outcast, p. 89.

⁷⁶Joseph Conrad, Tales of Unrest, p. 40.

[felt] cold, sick, tired, exasperated with his failure--and ended by cursing himself.⁷⁷

He finds in her instead a constant reminder of his guilt, of his moral failure, of his spiritual deterioration. She becomes for him, ironically, a source of eternal unrest:

Look at her! . . . Look at her eyes. Ain't they big? Don't they stare? You wouldn't think she could shut them like human beings do. I don't believe she ever does. I go to sleep if I can, under their stare, and when I wake up I see them fixed on me and moving no more than the eyes of a corpse. While I am still they are still. By God--she can't move them till I stir, and then they follow me like a pair of jailers. . . . I swear to you I can't stand this!⁷⁸

And ultimately Willems finds himself in a "No Exit" situation, for as punishment for his crime he is condemned by Lingard to perpetual exile in Sambir, with Aissa:

There was no rest, no peace within . . . his prison. There was no relief but in the black release of sleep without memory and without dreams; in the sleep coming brutal and heavy, like the lead that kills. To forget in annihilating sleep; to tumble headlong, as if stunned, out of daylight into night of oblivion, was for him the only, the rare respite from this existence which he lacked the courage to endure--or to end.⁷⁹

Driven by desperation, Willems attempts once more to find forgetfulness in Aissa's arms, but as he embraces her he sees only a vision of his own moral corruption:

He stood still and rigid, pressing her mechanically to his breast. . . . And all at once it seemed to him that he was peering

⁷⁷Joseph Conrad, An Outcast, p. 338.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 271.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 332.

into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole of decay and whitened bones; into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall.⁸⁰

Willems' vision not only reveals his spiritual corruption, it predicts his physical destruction as well, for shortly after, he is shot through the heart by Aissa.

In the foregoing discussion it has been shown that, in the early works of Conrad, woman is consistently associated with man's egotistical longing for peace and irresponsibility and that as a result she represents a temptation for the male protagonist to betray the bonds of solidarity. In the works of Conrad published after 1900, however, the role of the principal female characters undergo a drastic change. This new role will be examined in the next chapter on Lord Jim.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 339.

CHAPTER THREE

In Lord Jim, published in 1900, the role of the principal female character is the direct antithesis of her role in the earlier novels. Jewel, the young Malayan girl whom Jim discovers in Patusan, constitutes a temptation for the male protagonist to commit himself to life rather than to sin against the solidarity of mankind. She is the physical embodiment of the demands of life from which Jim, her lover, flees. As will be shown in this chapter, she attempts to awaken Jim to reality and to a conscious awareness of his humanity, to a conscious understanding of his limitations as a man and of the necessity of human solidarity.

The seductive female of the earlier works, however, is, although somewhat rarefied, still very much present in Lord Jim. As has been shown in the previous chapter, the desires which led Arsat, Karain and Willems to betray their fellowman were awakened by their female counterparts. In Lord Jim, the desire which leads the male protagonist away from the human community is also associated with a female figure:

. . . his opportunity sat veiled by his side
like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered
by the hand of the master.⁸¹

⁸¹Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), pp. 243-44.

Jim's "veiled Eastern bride" is a metaphor for the "missed opportunity",⁸² the "missed distinction",⁸³ and ultimately for the dream of peace which Jim pursues throughout the novel. This ideal, personified as an alluring woman, emerges as Jewel's rival for Jim's heart. Whereas Jewel's appeal is to Jim's altruistic impulses, the "Eastern bride" is representative of the demands of his ego, of a "sublimated, idealized selfishness".⁸⁴

As Marlow at one point observes, Jim's story "is a love story".⁸⁵ Jim is ultimately torn between his love for a fellow human being and his love of self. Jewel and Jim's "Eastern bride", therefore, and the forces they represent, are integral elements of the structure of the novel, for they are the poles between which the protagonist vacillates.

Before discussing Jewel's role, it is necessary to discuss more fully Jim's nature. Throughout the novel, Jim reveals himself to be a romantic egoist. He is a man obsessed with an ideal concept of himself. What the old merchant, Stein, at one point says of man seems to be especially true of Jim: "He wants to be a saint and he wants to be a devil and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow--so fine as he can never be. . . . In a dream".⁸⁶

⁸²Ibid., p. 93. ⁸³Ibid., p. 94. ⁸⁴Ibid., p. 177.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 298. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 213.

Jim, as Stein correctly points out, is a dreamer. He is a man who "gazes hungrily into the unattainable".⁸⁷ This is illustrated early in the novel when Jim is still a young seaman on board a Merchant Marine training ship. High in his station in the fore-top, isolated from the hustle and bustle of life below him, Jim dreams of heroic exploits; he relives the adventures he has read about in his "light holiday literature":⁸⁸

He saw himself saving people from sinking ships; cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shell-fish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men--always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.⁸⁹

Jim withdraws to this world of his imagination, to this world derived from boyish adventure stories, because it is here that he can indulge in his ideal, it is here that he can display the heroic nature that he believes himself to possess.

Reality, however, continually intrudes upon Jim's dream and reveals the fictional nature of his self-image. In the training ship Jim's daydream is interrupted by a real emergency. A sudden and unexpected storm endangers a small craft near the Merchant Marine vessel. Jim's shipmates

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 19. ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 5. ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 6.

quickly spring into action and attempt to rescue the occupants of the swamped boat; Jim, however, as if paralyzed by this confrontation with reality, does nothing: "he stood still--as if confounded".⁹⁰

Jim at this point is revealed to be a man of somewhat less than heroic proportions. He fails in his duty both as a seaman and as a human being. Jim, however, will not accept the truth of the situation; he refuses to acknowledge his potential for failure. He rationalizes his inactivity, blaming "the brutal tumult of earth and sky for taking him unawares"⁹¹ and resumes his exalted existence:

He could detect no trace of emotion in himself, and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage.⁹²

Jim goes so far as to convince himself that it was in fact better for him not to take part in action which does not measure up to his concept of heroism.

The incident on the training ship foreshadows the crucial event of Jim's life, his desertion from the Patna after it was damaged by a floating derelict. On the eve of the accident Jim stands watch alone on the bridge, lost in his dream:

"How steady she goes!" thought Jim with wonder, with something like gratitude for this high peace of sea and sky. At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 9.

⁹²Ibid.

deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness; they passed before him with an heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself.⁹³

Immersed in this dream, Jim is almost unaware of the world around him. He is in a state of semi-consciousness, he is on the verge of falling asleep:

The line dividing his meditations from a surreptitious doze on his feet was thinner than a thread on a spider's web.⁹⁴

Jim the dreamer is throughout the novel often to be found asleep. This recurring pose is symbolic of Jim's somnambulist existence. He goes through life like a sleep-walker, oblivious of the reality around him.

When the captain and the chief mate shortly intrude upon Jim's consciousness, Jim contemplates his own superiority to the crew:

. . . those men did not belong to the world of heroic adventure . . . he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him . . . he was different.⁹⁵

Jim, however, is at this point, one of those men who had never been tested "by those events of the sea that show the inner worth of a man . . . that reveal the quality of his resistance and the secret truth of his reliances, not only to others, but also to himself".⁹⁶

⁹³Ibid., p. 20. ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 25. ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 24.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 17.

Jim's "inner worth" is revealed a few moments later when reality once again interrupts his dream. The Patna suddenly strikes a submerged object and Jim impulsively joins with the crew in abandoning the ship and its passengers to the mercy of the sea. In jumping from the Patna, Jim abandons the heroic heights to which he aspires and suddenly finds himself down among the most contemptible of men, the men with whom he had protested that he had nothing in common.

After his desertion, Jim, as Marlow points out, is "partly stunned by the discovery he had made--the discovery about himself".⁹⁷ Jim, however, refuses to accept the truth of this discovery; he again refuses to acknowledge his potential for failure. Once more, while struggling desperately "to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be",⁹⁸ he attempts to rationalize his behavior:

Oh yes, I know very well . . . I jumped. Certainly I jumped. I told you I jumped, but I tell you they [the crew of the Patna] were too much for anyman. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over.⁹⁹

Jim's condemnation of the crew of the Patna is, on the literal level, merely one more of his "artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge".¹⁰⁰ On the symbolic level, however, it is an unconscious admission of

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 140. ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 169. ⁹⁹Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 182.

guilt. The crew of the Patna, or more specifically, the captain of the Patna, emerges from the novel as a symbol of Jim's inner condition of his potential for betrayal and failure. He emerges as Jim's other self, as his "secret-sharer". Just before the accident, and Jim's subsequent desertion, the captain, dressed in a sleeping suit (a symbol of the unconscious in Conrad's works) comes on deck. And Jim at this point, in a sudden epiphany, recognizes him as "the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world we love".¹⁰¹

Jim's refusal to face his inner self, to acknowledge his potential for failure, for betrayal, is, in essence, a refusal to acknowledge his humanity. Jim continually sees himself as a superior being, as a god-like figure. Man, however, as the novel makes clear through its various characters, is a finite being capable only of limited action. He is a flawed creature,¹⁰² a born coward,¹⁰³ he is incapable of standing alone and must trust for his salvation not in himself, but, as Marlow observes, "in the men that surround him, in the sights that fill his eyes, in the sounds that fill his ears, and in the air that fills his lungs".¹⁰⁴

Jim's life after the crucial Patna incident is a continuous flight from self, a continuous attempt "to lay

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰²Stain at one point observes, "Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece.", p. 208.

¹⁰³The French Lieutenant points out: "Man is a born coward.", p. 147.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 21.

the ghost of a fact".¹⁰⁵ He moves from job to job and from place to place searching for his "chance missed", for an opportunity to redeem his self-image, to realize his ego-ideal.

The pursuit of his idealized concept of self, of his dream of heroic fulfillment, ultimately leads Jim to Patusan, for he comes to see Patusan as a land of opportunity, as his second chance.

Beneath this desire for a second chance, however, lies a longing for irresponsibility and peace. Jim's continuous flight Eastward indicates a desire to escape from the responsibility of his moral transgression. Significantly, one of the first comments he makes after his arrival in Patusan is "Peaceful here, eh?"¹⁰⁶

This longing for easeful repose, it must be noted, is inherent in Jim's temperament and is evident from the beginning of the novel. His romantic desire for heroic adventure, his dream of heroic exploits, masks a yearning to escape the demands of life altogether. In fact, in all of his actions can be detected what Conrad termed "the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence".¹⁰⁷

Jim's withdrawal to Patusan is arranged by the "dream" merchant, Stein. After listening to Marlow talk of

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 148. ¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 274. ¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 13.

Jim, Stein concludes: "He is Romantic--Romantic!"¹⁰⁸ He sees Jim's problem, however, not as "how to get cured"¹⁰⁹ but how to live, "how to be".¹¹⁰ Stein (himself a romantic, as Marlow points out) believes all men to be idealists and he sees the pursuit of the ideal as the only solution of how to be:

A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns--nicht war. . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.¹¹¹

He therefore proposes to send Jim to "a star of the fifth magnitude",¹¹² to a country where his "earthly failings",¹¹³ his reputation were unknown in order that he might work out his salvation.

Stein, however, is presented in a foreboding manner, and his advice to Jim, therefore, seems somewhat questionable. Stein lives in a house of death, a veritable tomb for his dead butterflies and beetles:

. . . the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern. Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but, in a sombre belt about four feet broad--catacombs of beetles. Wooden tablets were hung about at irregular intervals. The light reached one of them, and the word Coleoptera written in gold letters glittered mysteriously upon a vast

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 216. ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 212. ¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 213.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 214. ¹¹²Ibid., p. 218. ¹¹³Ibid.

dimness. The glass cases containing the collection of butterflies were ranged in three long rows upon slender-legged little tables.¹¹⁴

And to Marlow, Stein's advice, "to follow the dream"¹¹⁵ seems to make attractive not the way to be, but the way to destruction:

The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn--or was it perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls--over graves.¹¹⁶

Jim, feeling that he has been granted a "clean slate",¹¹⁷ eagerly departs for Patusan, his opportunity, his second chance by his side, still veiled, but taking on a more definite and a more alluring form:

. . . his opportunity sat veiled by his side like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master.¹¹⁸

Patusan, a far off Eastern country torn by strife, offers Jim a chance to display the heroic nature he believes himself to possess.

And for a time it seems as if Jim has indeed realized his ideal, that he has left his earthly failings behind him. He heroically frees Doramin's people from the tyranny of Sherif Ali, effectively subdues the Rajah Allang and establishes a reign of peace and harmony. And because of these

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 204.

¹¹⁵Ibid. ¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 282.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 243-44.

actions he is exalted to the position of an infallible deity by the people of the country.

Jim revels in the fictional or dream-like quality of all he has done among the people of Patusan who, as he twice points out, to him resemble characters in an adventure story. But that Jim's own role in Patusan is itself fictional is clearly illustrated shortly after. As Marlow points out, no man can escape his past:

. . . a clean slate did he say? As if the initial words of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock.¹¹⁹

Reality once more intrudes upon Jim's dream and reveals the illusory nature of his success. The pirate, "Gentleman Brown", suddenly appears to threaten the Malayan community, and Jim once again reveals his true nature. He betrays the natives by granting Brown safe passage out of Patusan. Jim grants Brown his freedom because he sympathizes with him:

. . . there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience, a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts.¹²⁰

Brown in effect is the "secret sharer" that Jim refuses to face. He is representative of the inner self from which Jim flees, of the potential for betrayal that he refuses to acknowledge.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 291.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 387.

Jim, however, refuses to be cheated twice of his dream. He had safeguarded his position and his self-image by taking full responsibility for the decision to free Brown, by pledging his life should anything go wrong. Thus when Doramin's son, Dain Waris, is later killed by the fleeing Brown, Jim is able to vindicate his honour. His final act is a gesture to sustain his fictional role. Taking the responsibility of Brown's actions "upon his own head",¹²¹ he, with "a proud and unflinching glance",¹²² sacrifices himself to Doramin's wrath. And, ironically, in this complete withdrawal from life he realizes his ideal, he obtains the hand of his "Eastern bride":

Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may very well be that in the short moment of his last proud and unflinching glance, he had beheld the face of that opportunity which like an Eastern bride had come veiled to his side.¹²³

Jim's opportunity to go to Patusan, however, is a second chance, not to "save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be",¹²⁴ but to face reality, to acknowledge his humanity and to embrace life.

It is the young Malayan girl whom Jim encounters in Patusan and whom rumour refers to as "a precious gem . . . altogether priceless",¹²⁵ that represents for Jim this second chance. And Jim, through the name he confers upon

¹²¹Ibid., p. 415. ¹²²Ibid., p. 416. ¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 169. ¹²⁵Ibid., p. 280.

this woman, signifies his awareness of this:

Jim called her by a word that means precious
in the sense of a precious gem--jewel.¹²⁶

Critics on the whole have ignored Jewel's importance in Lord Jim. Her function has been examined superficially at best, and at times has been completely distorted. Thomas Moser, for example, views Jewel as a threat to Jim, as a potentially destructive force.¹²⁷

Such a view, however, at first seems valid because Jewel bears a certain resemblance to the women of Conrad's earlier works which were discussed in the last chapter. Towards the end of the novel, for example, after Dain Waris has been brutally murdered by Brown, she exhorts Jim to flee with her from Patusan rather than to return to Doramin as he has promised. Like Diomelen or Aissa, Jewel thus seems to constitute a temptation for the male protagonist to sin against solidarity. However, as has been pointed out, Jim's decision to sacrifice himself to Doramin does not represent a commitment to life or an acknowledgment of solidarity but a commitment to his self-centered dream. Jewel, therefore, emerges not as a destructive figure, but as a redemptive figure. Throughout the latter half of the novel she represents for Jim an alternative to the pursuit of the dream; she offers him a new existence based upon a selfless love and a hard, prosaic reality. And in this

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 276.

¹²⁷Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), pp. 84-85.

respect she illustrates an important change in the role of woman in Conrad's fiction.

Jim first meets Jewel at the home of her step-father, Cornelius, the trading post to which Jim has been assigned by Stein. Jewel is badly treated by Cornelius and Jim is deeply moved by her plight: "He sympathised deeply with the defenceless girl at the mercy of that mean cowardly scoundrel."¹²⁸ Jim, through his compassion for human suffering, is led to form a tie with Jewel and to hesitatingly commit himself to life: "I can stop his game. . . . Just say the word."¹²⁹ ". . . Command me."¹³⁰ For this reason, and despite the fact that he feels he can do nothing for Stein's business in Patusan, Jim decides to remain at the trading post: "To leave the house would have appeared a base desertion."¹³¹

Jewel not only appeals to Jim's altruistic impulses, to "his latent feeling of fellowship",¹³² she also awakens him from his illusion of self-sufficiency and makes him consciously aware of his human frailty and of the necessity of human solidarity. This is clearly illustrated later in the novel when Sherif Ali's hirelings attempt Jim's life.

Before this attempt, Jim, secure in his belief that

¹²⁸Lord Jim, p. 288.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 289.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 297.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 290.

¹³²Joseph Conrad, The Nigger of the Narcissus (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 11.

nothing can touch him, is significantly asleep. He is suddenly roused, however, by a frantic Jewel:

. . . Jim's slumbers were disturbed by a dream of heavens like brass resounding with a great voice, which called upon him to Awake! Awake! so loud that, notwithstanding his desperate determination to sleep on, he did wake up in reality. The glare of a red sputtering conflagration going on in mid-air fell on his eyes. Coils of black, thick smoke curved round the head of some apparition, some unearthly being all in white with a severe, drawn, anxious face. After a second or so he recognized the girl. She was holding a clammar torch at arm's length aloft, and in a persistent, urgent monotone she was repeating, "Get up! Get up! Get up!"¹³³

Jewel rouses Jim not only from his slumbers but also from his illusion of security and self-sufficiency. She awakens him to reality, she alerts him to the danger that threatens him: "You were to be set upon while you slept."¹³⁴

Through Jewel's efforts Jim is made to see the utter helplessness of his isolated condition:

He told me that he had never felt so small, so powerless--and as to courage, what was the good of it? . . . He was so helpless that even flight seemed no use. . . .¹³⁵

It is only with Jewel's help that Jim is able to defeat his assailants. Not only does she hold the torch that reveals his imminent danger, she also arms him against it: ". . . she put into his hand a revolver, his own revolver"¹³⁶
 . . . "Fire! Defend yourself the girl . . . cried."¹³⁷
 And, as a result Jim comes to recognize the necessity of

¹³³Lord Jim, pp. 296-97.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 297.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 299. ¹³⁶Ibid., p. 297. ¹³⁷Ibid., p. 301.

human solidarity and the value of his bond with Jewel:

. . . he realized that for him there was no refuge from that loneliness which centupled all his dangers except in her. "I thought," he said to me, "that if I went away from her it would be the end of everything somehow."¹³⁸

Jim, at this point, formalizes his tie with Jewel by vowing eternal fidelity to her. Jewel, however, moved by her concern for Jim, and also by an innate skepticism, at first begs him "only to go away":¹³⁹

She was unselfish when she urged Jim to leave the country. It was his danger that was foremost in her thoughts--even if she wanted to save herself, too--perhaps unconsciously . . .¹⁴⁰

Jewel is haunted by the memory of her father who had also promised to remain faithful to his wife: "Other men had sworn the same thing."¹⁴¹ Despite his promise, however, he had left Jewel's mother for his own ends and abandoned her to a lonely grave. (It is this grave significantly that Jim tends throughout his stay on Patusan, the grave that, on a symbolic level, will later become Jewel's.)

Jewel's fear of betrayal is aggravated by her continual awareness of the fact that there is something that Jim "can never forget".¹⁴² She is apprehensive of the force which has driven Jim to Patusan, a force which she fears but cannot comprehend:

You all remember something! You all go back to it. What is it? You tell me!

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 300. ¹³⁹Ibid., p. 310. ¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 314. ¹⁴²Ibid.

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. . . . Will it be a sign--a call?¹⁴³

Jewel, as Marlow observes, mistrusts Jim's very slumbers.¹⁴⁴ Although she for the moment has Jim's "heart in her hand",¹⁴⁵ she is intuitively aware of the hostile forces which contend with her for its possession, Jim's dream, his ego-ideal, the focal point of his somnambulistic existence.

Despite Jewel's fears, Jim does for a time remain faithful to her. He succumbs to his altruistic impulses and leads a selfless existence with Jewel seemingly based upon a prosaic reality. To Marlow at one point he confesses:

I-I love her dearly. More than I can tell. You take a different view of your actions when you come to understand, 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!¹⁴⁶

Jim, however, cannot forsake his dream. It becomes clear that he can remain faithful to Jewel only so long as his allegiance to her does not conflict with his conception of self.

Later, when Dain Waris has been brutally murdered by Brown, Jewel begs Jim to flee from Patusan or to at

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 315.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 318.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 304.

least defend himself against Doramin. Jim, however, refuses for he sees in his surrender to Doramin the opportunity to realize his dream.

Ted E. Boyle, echoing Thomas Moser, sees Jewel at this point as a destructive feminine figure, analogous to Dido or Calypso, who threatens to prevent Jim from fulfilling his destiny. Jim, he suggests, fulfills the archetypal pattern of the Odyssey and the Aeneid by rightly deserting this woman:

The temptation of sexual pleasure, or, at least, love of woman which will keep the hero from fulfilling his destiny, is also common in the archetypal pattern. The hero, Odysseus with Calypso, Aeneas with Dido, succumbs for a time, but is finally reminded of his destiny by the gods and forsakes the woman. Such is the case with Jim and Jewel.¹⁴⁷

The fact, however, that "Gentleman Brown", "a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers",¹⁴⁸ indirectly serves as the messenger of the gods, as a reminder of Jim's high destiny, suggests that Jim's action is a parody rather than a fulfillment of an archetypal pattern, that his desertion of Jewel is a betrayal rather than an escape. Brown, as pointed out earlier, represents the human potential for failure that Jim refuses to face. But Brown also represents the extremist perversion of Jim's romanticism:

. . . Jim did not know the almost inconceivable egotism of the man which made him, when resisted and foiled in his will, mad

¹⁴⁷Ted E. Boyle, Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (Folcroft: The Folcroft Press Inc., 1965), p. 82.

¹⁴⁸Lord Jim, p. 369.

with the indignant and revengeful rage of a thwarted autocrat.¹⁴⁹

He reflects the base egoism which lurks beneath Jim's "sublimated selfishness", the egoism which causes him to revert to a somnambulistic state. Oblivious of the world around him, Jim marches out of life and into the splendour of his dream. Jewel's greatest fears are realized. As she points out:

It was like a blindness and yet it was I who was speaking to him; it was I who stood before his eyes; it was at me that he looked all the time.¹⁵⁰

.
He could see my face, hear my voice, bear my grief! . . . he was made blind and deaf and without pity as you all are. . . . He went away from me as if I had been worse than death. He fled as if he had been driven by some accursed thing he had seen or heard in his sleep.¹⁵¹

Jim thus ignores the real chance that Patusan offers him. His leap into the mud of that country was symbolic of his leap into mundane reality, into "the trust, the love, the confidence"¹⁵² of Jewel. Jim, however, disdainful of the mundane at the last, "made . . . tremendous . . . efforts, efforts that . . . made him blind. . . . to crack the earth asunder, to throw it off his limbs".¹⁵³ He "tears himself out of the arms of a jealous lover at the call of his exalted egoism".¹⁵⁴ "He goes away from a living woman to

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 394. ¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 348. ¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 380. ¹⁵³Ibid., p. 254. ¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 416.

celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct."¹⁵⁵

In his final attempt to redeem his self-image, Jim betrays his responsibility to the woman who loves him. Through this act (which is essentially a reenactment of his desertion from the Patna), Jim destroys Jewel and the forces of life, the altruistic impulses that she represents. Marlow later finds the bitter and despairing woman in a death-like pose:

I saw the girl sitting at the end of a big mahogany table, on which she rested her head, the face in her arms. The waxed floor reflected her dimly as though it had been a sheet of frozen water. . . . Her white figure seemed shaped in snow; the pendant crystal of a great chandelier clicked above her head like glittering icicles. . . . All the heat of life seemed withdrawn within some inaccessible spot in her breast.¹⁵⁶

In Lord Jim then, the destructive force of the earlier works, the insatiable demands of the ego imaged as a woman, still dominate the novel. Jewel, the potential redemptive figure, finds that she is no match for Jim's "Eastern bride", and is left, at the end of the book, to lead "a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein's house".¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 347-48.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 416-17.

CHAPTER FOUR

The principal female character in Victory, Conrad's last great novel, emerges more strongly and unequivocally in the role that was introduced by Jewel. Lena, the "fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy",¹⁵⁸ like Jewel, awakens the altruistic impulses of the male protagonist. Like Jewel she constitutes a temptation for the protagonist to embrace life. Her function is also to bring him to an understanding of self, to an awareness of the necessity of love and to a recognition of the shallowness and unreality of his present existence. Where Jewel, however, fails in the attempt, Lena succeeds. The title of the novel is a tribute to her success.

The focus of the novel at its outset is on its protagonist, Axel Heyst. Profoundly influenced by the skepticism of his philosopher father, who viewed the world as a "bad dog",¹⁵⁹ Heyst reveals himself to be a man who has determined to lead a detached and aloof existence:

Heyst was not conscious of either friends or enemies. It was the essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless

¹⁵⁸Joseph Conrad, Victory (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 353.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 57.

wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world--invulnerable because elusive.¹⁶⁰

Through this desire for detachment, however, Heyst reveals himself to be, like Jim, a pursuer of an egotistical dream of peace and irresponsibility. Throughout the novel he is significantly referred to as a "romantic",¹⁶¹ "an utopist",¹⁶² "a pursuer of chimaeras".¹⁶³

As in the case of Jim, the quest for peace and irresponsibility leads the protagonist away from life. Heyst's wanderings eventually bring him to the distant and isolated island of Samburan. Heyst's withdrawal to this island, however, reflects not only a withdrawal from life, but a withdrawal from reality as well, for Samburan proves to be an unreal world populated only by ephemeral shadows:

His [Heyst's] most frequent visitors were shadows of clouds relieving the monotony of the inanimate brooding sunshine of the tropics.¹⁶⁴

And, in this world Heyst himself seems to lose his reality; he is "disregarded like an insignificant ghost".¹⁶⁵

Heyst, however, is enchanted with this world of death-like peace and isolation and his enchantment proves to be "an unbreakable one".¹⁶⁶ It is only through his

¹⁶⁰Joseph Conrad, Victory, p. 90.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 7.

eventual surrender to Lena that Heyst is able to escape from the prison of unreality that is his dream and to awaken to the reality that is life.

In keeping with his attitude of detachment and cold unconcern, Heyst of course sees no value in human relationships. In fact, he views them as essentially destructive:

One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure . . . I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.¹⁶⁷

Despite a rational adherence to this philosophy, however, Heyst finds himself inadvertently drawn into life. While passing through Timor he comes to the rescue of the altruistic trader and sea rover, Morrison, and forms a "tie" with him. But Morrison unfortunately dies and Heyst, feeling that he has betrayed his own life "which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness",¹⁶⁸ retires to his island home and resolves to keep himself from further involvements. It is important to note, however, that Heyst is initially led to deviate from his code by a feeling of sympathy and compassion for the distressed Morrison:

The Swede was as much distressed as Morrison, for he understood the other's feelings perfectly. No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 199-200.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 18.

It is this compassionate nature, this irrational but wholly human aspect of his being that Heyst, through a lack of self-knowledge, has failed to take into account in formulating his philosophy of life. Morrison (who significantly is later referred to as the "submerged Morrison")¹⁷⁰ in his altruism may be seen as a dramatization of Heyst's inner nature, as a type of "secret sharer". It is the Morrison like aspect of his psyche, his buried human nature, that Heyst must ultimately resurrect and come to terms with.

The incident with Morrison foreshadows the central situation of the novel, Heyst's involvement with Lena. In his voluntary exile to Samburan, Heyst experiences a feeling of loneliness and is vaguely aware of the contradiction of his rational philosophy by his natural feelings:

. . . though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.¹⁷¹

Heyst's emotional state is reflected by the smoldering volcano which stands near the island of Samburan:

His nearest neighbour . . . was an indolent volcano which smoked faintly all day with its head just above the northern horizon, and at night levelled at him, from amongst the clear stars, a dull red glow, expanding

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 66.

and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark.¹⁷²

Like the volcano with which he is compared, Heyst on the surface is placid and indolent. Internally, however, he is seething with the fire of repressed emotions. It is these emotions which cause him to return to civilization and Schomberg's hotel. It is there, during one of Schomberg's concerts, that he meets Lena. Moved by compassion for the maltreated girl, he once more impulsively plunges into the stream of life:

Heyst laid down his half-smoked cigar and compressed his lips. Then he got up. It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street of the abominable town of Delli in the island of Timor and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely.¹⁷³

Echoing Lord Jim, he subjugates himself to Lena and temporarily reenters an active sphere of existence. "What would you wish me to do? Pray command me."¹⁷⁴

Lena, as we learn shortly, is called by two names: "They call me Alma. I don't know why. Silly name. Magdalen too."¹⁷⁵ These names are indicative of the symbolic function she is to perform throughout the novel. Alma means soul or life, and as the novel progresses, Lena emerges as a symbol of the forces of life. Magdalen, on

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁷³Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 88.

the other hand, suggests Lena's fallen nature. As is later pointed out, she, like Ricardo, has her "origin in the dregs of mankind".¹⁷⁶ In this respect she is representative of "soiled" humanity. Heyst, if he is to acknowledge and embrace life, like Jim, must come to recognize and accept all of life's dirty imperfections.

It is interesting to note that Lena, like the female characters of Conrad's early novels, exerts a certain charm over the male protagonist. Her charm is a result of her music-making ability. As a young girl she had been taught by her father to play the violin. Furthermore, she is possessed of a melodious and bewitching voice.

Heyst, on the other hand, had been weaned on silence, and during the course of his life had cultivated an appreciation for it:

Like most dreamers to whom it is given sometimes to hear the music of the spheres, Heyst the wanderer . . . had a taste for silence which he had been able to gratify for years.¹⁷⁷

Yet when he hears the music of the orchestra in which Lena plays, he is irresistibly drawn to it:

. . . there is an unholy fascination in systematic noise. He did not flee from it incontinently, as one might have expected him to do. He remained, astonished at himself for remaining. . . .¹⁷⁸

And later, when Heyst talks with Lena he is enchanted by

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 308. ¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 66. ¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 68.

the sound of her voice:

But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter sup-portable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without hearing the tune.¹⁷⁹

Lena's appeal to Heyst is to the irrational aspect of his being, to his altruistic impulses. She seems "to enter his body, to infect his heart".¹⁸⁰ She awakens in him dull stirrings of the life he has consciously denied. In the garden behind the concert hall she tempts him towards life and action. And Heyst, in succumbing so far as to rescue Lena from Schomberg and to carry her off to Samburan, discovers that there is "a lot of the original Adam in him after all", "that this primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed".¹⁸¹

However, although the irrational aspect of his nature is seduced by Lena, Heyst's rational nature, his intellectual skepticism, will not allow him to acknowledge his feelings for Lena, or to recognize the stirrings of life within himself. As he fears and mistrusts life, so too he fears and mistrusts Lena, the representative of life: "it flashed through his mind women can deceive men so completely".¹⁸² This is clearly illustrated in the

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 74. ¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 191. ¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 81.

first few weeks that Heyst and Lena spend alone together on the island of Samburan.

Lena soon reveals that she is dependent upon Heyst for her very existence, that she would cease to be should he not acknowledge her presence:

"Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!"¹⁸³

Yet it is evident that Heyst does not want to acknowledge her. He tries desperately to fight the emotional attraction he feels towards her and to avoid making any commitment. In order to make clear his attitude towards Lena, he tells her of his involvement with Morrison:

I had in a moment of inadvertence, created for myself a tie. How to define it precisely I don't know. One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure what it was. I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.¹⁸⁴

Lena, however, despite Heyst's attempts to alienate her is only drawn closer to him. "She felt in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice."¹⁸⁵ She attempts to make Heyst commit himself to her: "You should try to love me! . . . Do try!"¹⁸⁶ She seems "to abandon to him something of herself--something excessively

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 187. ¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 200. ¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 221.

subtle and inexpressible",¹⁸⁷ something which gives Heyst "a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life".¹⁸⁸ As his heart is touched by Lena's love, Heyst who had previously been but a shadow, "an insignificant ghost"¹⁸⁹ imprisoned in his dream world, momentarily becomes a real being.

Lena not only gives Heyst a sense of his own reality, she also awakens him to the reality of life, the life that she herself represents. This is indicated by Heyst's changing perception of her. Heyst, immersed in his dream, is at first incapable of seeing Lena just as Jim, in his surrender to his ideal at the end of Lord Jim is incapable of seeing Jewel. Lena initially appears to him as a "dream invading the reality of waking life, a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts".¹⁹⁰

However, after she has touched his heart and aroused his altruistic impulses Heyst perceives Lena in a different manner:

It was a shock to him on coming out of his brown study to find the girl so near him, as if one waking suddenly should see the figure of his dream turned into flesh and blood. She did not raise her shapely head, but her glance was no dream thing. It was real, the most real impression of his detached existence--so far.¹⁹¹

Lena at this point is almost triumphant, for Heyst is on the verge of capitulation:

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 188. ¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 200. ¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 319. ¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 92.

All his defenses were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat.¹⁹²

Yet Heyst cannot forget the words of his dead father: "Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love."¹⁹³ Unable to free himself of the influence of his father and his philosophy of detachment, Heyst is unable to acknowledge his humanity and commit himself to life. And because of this he comes to feel "a sense of incompleteness" and of "imperfection"¹⁹⁴ both in his relationship with Lena, and in himself.

The psychological struggle that Heyst experiences is symbolically dramatized when Mr. Jones and his company arrive at Samburan. On one level, the fearsome trio is representative of the brutal and filthy world that Heyst has tried so hard to ignore but from which he cannot escape:

Here they are, the envoys of the outer world.
Here they are before you--evil intelligence,
instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute
force is at the back.¹⁹⁵

Jones and his secretary Ricardo, however, are also representative of different aspects of Heyst's psyche. They emerge as Heyst's psychological doubles. Heyst cannot escape the evil of the world because the evil lurks in him, as it does in the breast of every man.

Mr. Jones, "evil intelligence", reflects Heyst's

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 221. ¹⁹³Ibid., p. 219. ¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 329.

tendency towards withdrawal, for, like Heyst, he is a gentleman drifter who wants no part of humanity. His own distaste for life is manifested by his sickly death-like appearance: "Mr. Jones . . . looked remarkably like a corpse . . ."196

Jones' symbolic function in the novel is made clear by his opposition to Lena. Whereas Lena represents a commitment to life through love, Mr. Jones, who is a misogynist, a hater of women, and by extension of all that they symbolize, stands for detachment and death. It is between these two figures and that which they represent that Heyst throughout the novel vacillates. He is caught between his attraction for Lena and his affinity with Jones.

Ricardo, Mr. Jones' "secretary", is referred to as instinctive savagery. If Jones is representative of Heyst's tendency for withdrawal, Ricardo is a symbol of Heyst's potential for evil, of the "instinctive savagery" which lurks in every man's heart, which is prevented from dominating and destroying an individual by the restraints of society and the bonds of solidarity, but which can be actualized through withdrawal.

Ricardo himself has degenerated to the state of a savage beast. He is always described in animalistic terms. He is concerned only with gratifying his own selfish and

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 112.

egotistical desires and he does whatever he feels is necessary to achieve his ends:

. . . he depended on himself as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law.¹⁹⁷

Oblivious to the bonds of solidarity, Ricardo lacks any sort of saving restraint. He is ruled by his feral instincts. This is clearly illustrated by his invasion of Heyst's bungalow:

The self-restraint was at an end; his psychology must have its way. The instinct for the feral spring could no longer be denied. Ravish or kill--it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long.¹⁹⁸

And when he later confronts Lena he is recognized for what he is:

It seemed to her that the man . . . before her was an unavoidable presence which had attended all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world.¹⁹⁹

It is interesting to note, however, that Ricardo at one point compares himself to Lena: "You and I are made to understand each other. Born alike, bred alike, I guess."²⁰⁰ Both Ricardo and Lena are products of the dirty world and both react emotionally rather than rationally to it. Both as a result emerge as symbols of the irrational, but Ricardo in his selfcenteredness is representative of base egoism, while Lena, in her unselfish altruism is

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 113. ¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 288. ¹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 298.

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 297.

representative of Christian love.

Heyst's conflict is dramatized through the interaction of his two doubles with Lena. Jones and Lena, however, have little interaction during the course of the novel. The fact that they do not meet is indicative of Heyst's refusal to acknowledge Lena and to accept life. While Mr. Jones is on the island, Heyst demands that Lena stay hidden and not reveal herself, although she at one point observes: "People will have to see me someday."²⁰¹ And, significantly, before his final confrontation with Jones, Heyst orders her to dress herself in a black gown and veil, suggestive of funeral attire, and to hide herself in the darkness of the jungle. Lena thus clothed again becomes completely invisible to him:

. . . his eyes, accustomed now to the darkness had lost her completely. . . . She had done what he had told her to do and had approached him invisible.²⁰²

This final attempt of Heyst's to hide Lena from Jones is symbolic of his denial of Lena and of his refusal to acknowledge the life she represents and the love she offers. It is important to realize that if Jones the misogynist were to see Lena he would leave the island immediately. It is not until Lena and Jones do meet, and Heyst is forced to recognize and admit his love for Lena, that Jones and that aspect of Heyst's psyche which he represents, finally disappears.

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 302.

²⁰²Ibid., p. 371.

The greater part of the last section of the novel is concerned with Lena's interaction with Ricardo. Lena attracts Ricardo (as she does Heyst) like "a concealed magnet".²⁰³ Unable to control his savage instincts any longer, Ricardo, after ensuring that Heyst has left the bungalow breaks in upon Lena. Lena struggles with him as if he had been "an evil spirit"²⁰⁴ and manages to hold him at bay. Her actions are viewed by Ricardo as "the proofs of [an] amazing spirit"²⁰⁵ and consequently she is able to transform his desire for her into "an awed and quivering patience".²⁰⁶

Gradually Lena gains complete control over Ricardo. She wins his trust and by so doing turns him against his master and companion, "plain Mr. Jones".

Lena's conversion or conquest of Ricardo is symbolic of her emotional seduction of Heyst and her domination of the irrational aspect of Heyst's being. As she sets Ricardo against Jones, so too, as has been shown, she sets the Ricardo aspect of Heyst's psyche, his irrational and instinctive nature against his rational, Jones-like nature.

In mastering and subduing Ricardo, Lena saves Heyst's life, both literally and symbolically. Because Ricardo trusts her, she is able to bring about his disarming. Driven by her love for Heyst she concentrates her

²⁰³Ibid., p. 285. ²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 291. ²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 395.

whole attention on the capture of Ricardo's knife:

She saw only her purpose of capturing death--
savage, sudden, irresponsible death, prowling
round the man who possessed her, death
embodied in the knife ready to strike into
his heart.²⁰⁷

On the literal level Ricardo's knife represents the threat of physical death, but it is also a symbol of spiritual death, of a poisoning of the heart against life and love.

The actual capture of the knife is presented in biblical terms. Ricardo, the representative of Heyst's irrational nature with its potential for evil and self-destruction, is presented as the serpent in the garden. Lena, the representation of life and love, is presented as Mary, the Virgin Mother. And, as Mary triumphed over her adversary, so too does Lena:

The knife was lying in her lap. She let it
slip into the fold of her dress, and laid
her forearms with clasped fingers over her
knees, which she pressed desperately together.
The dreaded thing was out of sight at last.²⁰⁸

.
The very sting of death was in her hands; the
venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted,
safe in her possession--and the viper's head
all but lying under her heel.²⁰⁹

Although Lena is able to subdue Ricardo and that aspect of Heyst's psyche which he represents, she cannot as easily overcome Jones and the intellectual skepticism, the distrust of life he symbolizes. Lena and Jones, as has been pointed out, do not come in contact with each other because

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 394. ²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 400. ²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 399.

on the literal level Heyst attempts to keep them apart while on the symbolic level they represent mutually-destructive forces. Because of this Lena and Jones do not clash openly; they struggle with each other through the person of Axel Heyst. Their battle is a struggle to gain control of his being.

Heyst is a captive on the island of Samburan, a captive of Mr. Jones and of that element of his being which Jones symbolizes. Lena is his potential means of escape. Heyst, however, continually refuses to acknowledge her as such. Even when he is finally forced to admit Lena's presence on the island he does so with reluctance and disgust:

Heyst was disgusted. . . . He regretted
having mentioned the girl. . . .²¹⁰

Consequently Heyst remains "a prisoner captured by the evil power of a masquerading skeleton out of a grave".²¹¹ He cannot free himself of Jones or of that aspect of his nature that Jones represents. As a result, when Mr. Jones leads him back to the bungalow where he sees Lena together with Ricardo, he is susceptible to the "ghostly venom"²¹² which Mr. Jones pours into his ear:

Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies,
too--the mud of the gutter. I tell you we
are no match for the vile populace.²¹³

Heyst, dominated by the skepticism represented by his double, Jones, believes his philosophy of detachment to be

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 386. ²¹¹Ibid., p. 390. ²¹²Ibid., p. 392.

²¹³Ibid.

vindicated and himself, betrayed:

Doubt entered into him--a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs and lodge in his entrails.²¹⁴

Just as Jones feels "taken in"²¹⁵ by his secretary Ricardo, so too Heyst feels that he has been deceived both by Lena and by his own human instincts. Consequently, although "he could have thrown him down"²¹⁶ Heyst permits Jones or that part of his being that Jones symbolizes, to fire the bullet that mortally wounds Lena.

Lena, however, through her death, is able to defeat Jones and the distrust of life that he represents and bring Heyst to an awareness of love and an acceptance of life. After the fateful shot, Heyst, distrustful of Lena, enters the bungalow with an air of detached amusement, reminiscent of his former attitude towards Morrison. Yet despite his attempt to distance himself emotionally from Lena, he is irresistibly drawn towards her. The voice which had initially attracted him to her still cuts "deep into his very breast, so that he could hardly understand the words for the sheer pain of it".²¹⁷

And in a sudden epiphany he becomes aware of Lena's sacrifice and the power of her love: "He caught his breath, looked at her closely and seemed to read some

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁶Ibid., p. 390.

²¹⁵Ibid.

²¹⁷Ibid., p. 404.

awful intelligence in her eyes."²¹⁸ As she painfully explains the reasons for her secret meeting with Ricardo, Heyst curses "his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true-cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life".²¹⁹ With a "sudden fury"²²⁰ he tears off the dress he had ordered her to wear, the funeral shroud symbolic of his denial of life, to reveal "the swelling breast of a dazzling as it were, sacred whiteness".²²¹ Heyst at this point finally acknowledges Lena and surrenders completely to his altruistic impulses: "stooping over her with a kindly, playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart--for ever".²²²

Lena at last emerges victorious, and her victory is a victory over the death represented by Jones, a victory of life. Through his recognition of Lena's deed as an act of love and sacrifice, Heyst comes to an awareness of the superficiality of his life of philosophical detachment and of the reality of his involvement with Lena, which had been ultimately deeper than the skepticism initiated by his father. His last words to Davidson, before he commits himself to the all-purifying flames of the burning bungalow, testify to this recognition, the fruit of Lena's victory:

²¹⁸Ibid.

²¹⁹Ibid., p. 406. ²²⁰Ibid., p. 405.

²²¹Ibid.

²²²Ibid., p. 407.

Woe to the man whose heart has not learned
while young to hope, to love--and to put
its trust in life!²²³

²²³Ibid., p. 410.

CONCLUSION

The role of woman in Conrad's works, it must be concluded, is a more important one than has generally been allowed. In the previous discussion of "The Lagoon", "Karain", An Outcast of the Islands, Lord Jim and Victory, it has been demonstrated that woman is an integral aspect of Conrad's art. It has been shown that the principal female characters in these works play an important part in the presentation of a basic Conradian theme, a theme which may be viewed as the basis of Conrad's moral creed, the conflict between egoism and altruism. The nature of woman's role in these works, as has been amply demonstrated, is to serve as a catalyst for the release of the irrational forces of egoism and altruism within the male protagonist.

In Chapter two of this paper, it was shown, through an examination of "The Lagoon", "Karain" and An Outcast of the Islands, that in Conrad's early works woman serves to awaken the egoistical impulses of the male protagonist and therefore constitutes for him a temptation to commit a breach of solidarity. It was further shown that a surrender on the part of the male protagonist to this temptation inevitably resulted in his moral destruction.

In Chapter three it was argued that in Lord Jim the role of the principal female character in Conrad's fictional world undergoes a drastic change. It was demonstrated that while she still bears superficial similarities to the women of the earlier works, she here awakens the altruistic rather than the egoistical impulses of the male protagonist. She therefore constitutes for him a temptation to acknowledge an allegiance to humanity rather than to betray the solidarity of mankind.

In the final chapter of this paper, it was shown that in Victory, Conrad's last major work, woman emerges strongly in the role which was introduced in Lord Jim. Lena appeals to Heyst's altruistic impulses and thereby leads him to a reconciliation with the human community. The protagonist's surrender to the temptation represented by woman results in his moral redemption.

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