Joseph Conrad's Female Characters in Selected Fiction.

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JOSEPH CONRAD'S FEMALE CHARACTERS
IN SELECTED FICTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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M.A., Duke University, 1960
August, 1967
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my gratitude for the kind encouragement and valuable advice of my mentor, Dr. Thomas L. Watson. I also wish to acknowledge the flawless patience and the many benevolent ministrations of my wife, Mary Louise Jones Bross.
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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes eleven of Conrad's short stories and two of his novels to show the importance of female characters in developing several acknowledged Conradian themes, to discover an implicit attitude toward femininity, to exemplify the classic types among Conrad's women, to free some of the stories from disparagement as works ruined by Conrad's sexual neurosis, and to indicate the rich variety and ambivalence in Conrad's fictional treatment of women.

The women in "The Idiots," "The Brute," "Amy Foster," and "The Lagoon" are crucial to the expression of the illusion theme. In these tales a rational, determined male protagonist struggles to relate to a tormentingly ambiguous cosmos, which fluctuates from indifference, to sympathetic response, to insidious malevolence. He either suffers demoralization through the maddening inscrutability of phenomena or is profoundly disillusioned by a vision of the nothingness of existence and the meaninglessness of human values and interpretations. The female characters embody two types of illusion: they epitomize both the ambiguous phenomenal world and ephemeral, subjective human meaning.

Conrad's concern with the relative validity of idealism, realism, and cynicism also found expression through female characters. In "The Informer" and Under Western Eyes
Conrad considers comically and sympathetically woman's tendency to confuse her natural and quite valid compassion with the deluded and extremely emotional philosophy of anarchism or revolutionism. In the short story woman's shallow commitment to this ideology constitutes blatant hypocrisy, but in the novel her profound compassion redeems the irresponsible and perverse ideology to which she gives only superficial allegiance. In "Gaspar Ruiz" the female character is driven by an intense, cynical hatred which contrasts with a nation's hypocritical abuse of the ideal of political liberty.

The Conradian conflict between loyalty to one's civilization or group and fidelity to private impulse depends upon certain female characters in Victory, "Karain," and "The Return." Lena's chief function is to reconcile the detached Heyst with the human community through the irrational and sometimes absurd appeal of her love, sacrifice, and compassion against the isolating force of his corrosive skepticism. "Karain" and "The Return" show that the stability of a society consists often in the steadfastness of woman, yet is often destroyed by her audacious capriciousness. Some women in other works symbolize the abstract concept of civilization.

In two tales Conrad gives his criticism of a tame, complacent bourgeois society, largely through a character-foil between a narrow and unattractive housewife and a free, natural, and unconventional woman. Of the two, "Falk" is spoiled by the woodenness of the unconventional earth-
goddess. Conrad evidently found uncongenial the simple,
positive unambiguous evaluation of the natural world and of
instinct, which underlies the tale. "Because of the Dol­
lars" is less interesting a failure because of the contrived
contrast between shrewish matron and sentimentalized whore.
"A Smile of Fortune," however, is a clever account of a
naïve young man's corruption by the bourgeois commercialized
view of sex and woman.

The conclusions of this study are that Conrad's atti­
tude toward femininity in these works is too ambivalent,
complex, and too involved with other subjects to be consid­
ered misogyny; that, far from being included merely to
please the public, his female characters are crucial to the
effect of each of these works and inextricably connected
with its imaginative conception; that the most salient sin­
gle trait among Conrad's women is ambiguity or duplicity--
an ambiguity qualified by Conrad's unorthodox moral concep­
tion of illusion, a duplicity capable of wide variation in
character type and moral effects; that Conrad's female char­
acters have important aesthetic functions and philosophical
meanings in relation to several of Conrad's chief themes.
INTRODUCTION

In the continuing assessment of Joseph Conrad's fiction critics have yet to reach a state of accord, nor is there complete agreement among Conrad's biographers regarding the facts of his life and the nature of his personality. Much of the uncertainty and disagreement in both realms seems to hover around his relationship with certain women in actual life and around the status and meaning of the female characters in his fictional world. For example, beginning with his life, biographers are puzzled by the contradiction between his statement, in a canceled passage in The Arrow of Gold, that the object of his first love was a demoniacal and sadistic creature whose torments left a permanent scar, and his earlier statement, in the "Author's Note" to Nostromo, that this first love was a high-minded and idealistic patriot girl who often scolded him for his lightheadedness but thrilled his heart with an intimate press of the hand when he took his final leave from her and from Poland to go to sea. There have been some speculative attempts to identify Conrad's first love with one of two friends of his childhood, Janina Taube or Tekla Syroczynska; but no certain proof is available. The actualities of the affair in Marseilles, which left Conrad with a bullet wound near the heart, are still a matter for conjecture; but whether the wound resulted
from an attempt at suicide or from a duel, it is considered by some commentators very likely that a love affair with the woman who became the model for Dona Rita of *The Arrow of Gold* lies at the source of the mystery. Whether this woman was Paula de Smogony, sometime mistress of Don Carlos, pretender to the Spanish throne, is likewise a matter of debate. Jerry Allen holds that Paula and Rita are identical; Jocelyn Baines, that the story is preposterous.

Conrad's marriage to a young woman of the lower-middle-class, Jessie George, has had many different interpretations. The chief objects of speculation are: what is revealed about Conrad's attitude toward love and marriage by his warning, just after his proposal to Jessie, that he probably was not to live long, and that there would be no children, and by his immense anxiety just after the wedding ceremony? Also, did the simple Jessie's companionship bring Conrad chiefly boredom and loneliness, in which he longed for an intellectual equal? Or was she the only person with enough patience to endure Conrad's extravagant temper tantrums, depressions, and delirious ravings during attacks of gout and malaria, as her memoirs seem to indicate? Was her relationship with Conrad largely maternal? Was she one of several models for the character of Amy Foster, as one critic has suggested? What was the precise nature and extent of Conrad's attraction to Jane Anderson, the American reporter who visited the Conrads several times during World War I, and whose presence in their household was a source of tension between Conrad and Jessie?
The uncertainties regarding Conrad's associations with women are quite numerous, but they are no more perplexing than the purely literary arguments concerning the success or failure of his female characters, their relative importance or superfluity for the total effect of various novels and short stories, and the attitude of Conrad and of his protagonists toward sex and women. For instance, why is the character of Dona Rita so appealing and so successfully convincing to Albert Guerard, but such a repellent stock figure in the view of Jocelyn Baines? How can the quarrel about Victory—to F. R. Leavis a classic among Conradian masterpieces, to Guerard a tale of love and adventure for adolescents—be resolved without coming to grips with the problem of Lena's character? What is the meaning, for the total effect of Heart of Darkness, of Marlow's interview with the fiancée of Kurtz at the end of the book; what is the moral nature of his lie to her, and why did Conrad leave her such a shadowy and unsubstantial personage? Is the final section of An Outcast of the Islands, which treats the relationship between the isolated Willems and Aïssa, anticlimactic, as many critics hold? Is Willems' supposed attraction to Aïssa confused by certain subtle indications, in Conrad's account of his thoughts, of a fear of sex? A great number of such particular questions have led to the formulation of larger questions: Is Conrad capable of creating convincing, realistic female characters, or are all his feminine portraits shadowy, unreal, sometimes over-generalized, sentimental
stock figures—often resembling those in cheap magazine fiction? If so, is this to be explained by the separation of Conrad from feminine company through the exigencies of his trade as a seaman, or was there something in Conrad's psyche which made him either blind or hostile to women? Are misogyny, fear of feminine sexuality, dread of impotence, fear of emasculation by a woman, incestuous desires, and voyeurism on the part of Conrad's heroes and villains—and perhaps on the part of Conrad himself—apparent in *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, "The Return," "The Lagoon," "A Smile of Fortune," and *The Rescue* (to name only a few of the works so charged by some critics)? Do several of Conrad's short stories and novels fail because of certain abnormal psychological stresses aroused in his efforts to render in fiction any relationship between the sexes? Is the decline in Conrad's powers as a novelist during his later years to be attributed to his unwise attempt to treat women as central characters and to furnish love interest for his public, although he had a strong but unacknowledged antipathy to this subject? These are the questions with which current criticism of Conrad's female characters is most concerned.

This area of Conrad studies seems fertile and challenging, if not rather formidable. The questions seem to lead into the dark realm of Freudian psychology, to demand perhaps more biographical information than is now available, and to require the establishment of criteria for measuring such delicate matters as the degree of convincingness of a female character and the precise identifying characteristics
of a symbolic emasculation. However, it may be that the
difficulties in studying Conrad's female characters and re-
lated problems have been compounded by the neglect of those
works which deal most directly with female characters and
exclude matters more or less extraneous to the question of
the nature of woman. These works—all of them short stories—are admittedly minor pieces, and it is perhaps understandable
that they have been set aside in favor of the complex master-
pieces; yet they should not be, as some have been, dismissed
as total failures or wrongly interpreted by inappropriate
references and comparisons to works concerned with other
matters—for instance, with the theme of betrayal, guilt,
and redemption. In Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness, and several
other fully-developed works, women characters are relegated
to a rather minor position, often appearing in those more
doubtful parts of the work which are of least importance to
the effect of the whole or which are definitely open to the
charges of laxness, superfluity, and fatigue of the imagina-
tion. It would seem that although the critical problems
suggested by the female characters in these longer and more
complex works are interesting, other pieces, which treat
female characters more centrally, in which most of the as-
pects of the work—events, theme, imagery, philosophical
content—are related to a female character, or to the abstract
idea of femininity, might serve better as focal points for
a study of Conrad's women.

The primary task of the critic who would attempt to
bring some light to this question would be to select certain
works in which Conrad shows a definite central concern with women characters, which are relatively simple and, compared to the more complex masterpieces, show less preoccupation with matters other than the nature of femininity, yet treat female characters in such a way that a study of these works might help to clarify the function of female characters in the more complex masterpieces—works which are minor, yet more pertinent to the study of female characters in Conrad's fiction. A certain group of short stories seems to fulfill these requirements and furthermore to be clearly related as a number of clever variations on a few themes which recur in most of those works of Conrad in which female characters have a place of any appreciable significance. These themes are: (1) woman and the ambiguous cosmos, (2) woman as the supporter or the cynical betrayer of human idealism, (3) woman as the sustainer or the destroyer of the solidarity of civilization, or the illusion of its solidarity, (4) woman and the values of a bourgeois society.

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to demonstrate the special pertinence of eleven of Conrad's short stories as touchstones or focal points for the study of his female characters, to indicate the importance of female characters in these tales for the expression of certain Conradian themes, to search for an attitude toward women implicit in these tales, to define a characteristic status or meaning of woman in them, to exemplify certain kinds of female characters which become classical types in Conrad's fiction, to free some of these stories from disparagement by
certain critics as works ruined by Conrad's sexual neurosis, or as works which inadvertently treat sexual abnormalities, and to indicate the rich variety and ambivalence of Conrad's fictional treatment of woman. In order to make clear the relevance of these short stories to the full-length major works, I have drawn comparisons between the women in these eleven tales and the women in selected novels.

The first chapter considers the theme of an illusory, ambiguous, or incomprehensible cosmos and several female characters as they relate to and function within this theme, in four short stories: "The Idiots," "Amy Foster," "The Brute," and "The Lagoon." The chapter seeks to indicate the unity of theme and of type of female character which these tales share, but which has not been accounted for in previous discussions of these stories, and to reveal, by detailed analysis of each story, the interesting variations in type character and in theme which they exemplify. Although these are assuredly minor works, they are concerned centrally with the typical Conradian theme of "illusion," and peripherally with the theme of isolation, with the difficult question of the value of human imagination, and with the state of physical and spiritual immobility, that fate which overtakes or threatens several of Conrad's heroes. The chapter comments on the different attitudes (of narrators and/or protagonists, expressed or implied) toward the indefinite cosmos and the female characters who epitomize it. This point has some bearing on the larger question whether Conrad's fictional treatment of women expresses misogyny. Since the female
characters in these tales are identified with a cosmos whose ambiguity torments, immobilizes, and destroys the male protagonist, the chapter also considers whether these stories are symbolic dramatizations of emasculation, as some critics claim. Throughout the chapter comparisons will be made between characters and themes in these works and in other stories and full-length novels.

The theme discussed in the first chapter shades readily into the theme of the group of stories to be examined in Chapter Two: woman as the supporter or the cynical betrayer of human idealism, of noble, optimistic aspiration. In all four of the tales discussed in Chapter One, the protagonist's inadequate and wavering perceptions or interpretations—his "illusions"—are part of Conrad's concern, just as the particular "illusion" known as idealism is his concern in the tales which the second chapter discusses. But among the first four tales only "The Lagoon" shows a preoccupation with "illusions" as human interpretations which do not concern the physical world and which are the direct source of conflict within an individual soul—those interpretations which separate cynics from idealists in "Gaspar Ruiz" and "The Informer." "The Lagoon" serves as a convenient transition between these two themes, since it treats both an ambiguous cosmos and human illusions which are more or less autonomous from the ambiguity of the cosmos.

The third chapter analyzes two stories—"Karain" and "The Return"—which exemplify another theme which concerns the fluctuation and illusory quality of human meaning—the
theme of woman as the sustainer or destroyer of the solidarity of civilization—or of the illusion of this solidarity. The chapter examines "The Return" as Thomas Moser's prime example of a work ruined by Conrad's sexual neurosis, rejects Moser's reading, and suggests an alternate reading. This story's secondary concern with bourgeois values makes it a proper transition for the theme of the short stories examined in the next chapter.

The fourth chapter considers three stories in which female characters figure prominently in Conrad's portrayal of the bourgeois values of materialism, false respectability, and safe, sheltered conformity. The chapter reveals the thematic function and the basic shortcomings of Conrad's characterization of the women in the stories "A Smile of Fortune," "Falk," and "Because of the Dollars." The closing chapter summarizes the dissertation and draws certain conclusions from the foregoing study.
CHAPTER I

WOMAN AND THE AMBIGUOUS COSMOS

Several of Conrad's short stories in which women play prominent roles share a common plot pattern and a common theme which is different from the essential Conradian theme of guilt, betrayal and redemption and which is not universally associated with women or the idea of femininity. Yet for reasons which will probably remain undiscovered, Conrad saw some significant connection between this theme and the nature of woman. The theme has affinities with Calderon's theme, _la vida es sueno_, but it centers on man's inadequate comprehension of an inscrutable cosmos. The protagonist in these tales undergoes a tormenting vacillation, in which the physical universe alternates and wavers indefinitely from innocent, indifferent, and mindless phenomena to an expression of a malevolent will obscured by an appearance of impersonality and indifference; from an entity sympathetic and responsive to human meaning to a mere collection of things totally empty of human meaning, among which man's values and purposes seem ephemeral and illusory. In each of these several tales one or more female characters are linked or identified with the obscure and ambiguous physical universe or with some particular object on which its obscure malevolence or indifference is focused. The female characters become
subtle epitomes or manifestations of the cosmos and share its mystery, although in some of these stories female characters are as much the victims of the ambiguous cosmic force as are the male protagonists. The ambiguity of the cosmos remains in most of these tales completely balanced and unresolved, and the moral meaning or status of the female characters—and the tale's implied attitude toward them—is also richly ambivalent and complex. Nevertheless, from tale to tale, as the cosmos is more or less indifferent, responsive or hostile, so the qualities of the female characters vary in degrees of ambiguity or definiteness and of guilt or innocence. The male protagonists are often aggressive, rational, and directive men whose straightforward determination is foiled by the obscure and arbitrary shiftings of the cosmos or some part of it with which they struggle.

These tales do not focus on an obscure but crucial moral choice, as do Lord Jim, "The Secret Sharer," and others of Conrad's more familiar works. Instead they are concerned with a matter which would seem prior to questions of morality and to involve epistemology or metaphysics rather than ethics, for in all of them man is the suffering victim of the inherent obscurity of the universe, or of his inadequate perception of it. The dominant mood of these tales is futility, and in some of them the protagonist experiences a profound sense of isolation, a sensation of existing in a universe empty of values, purpose and meaning. At the end of some of the tales his torment has taken the form of immobility, a state for which Conrad seemed to possess a
a profound antipathy, and which in many of his works is the undoing, the crucial failure, or the spiritual death of the hero. Although their main concern is with the theme of cosmic ambiguity, these tales thus also give attention to two other typical motifs of Conrad's fiction.

These stories are not dramatizations of that obscure moral choice which for some critics is the hallmark of Conrad's genius, but their skeptical or pessimistic view of life is an expression of one important aspect of Conrad's temperament, if we are to believe the reports of his associates. Furthermore, the potent scrutiny, in these tales, of a mysterious visible world, their "magic suggestiveness" of hidden meaning in the spectacle of mere things, is an essential quality in all of Conrad's art.

Since female characters are identified with the mystery of the obscure cosmos, which is the theme of these tales, they are here more dominant than in any other of Conrad's works. These stories are thus specially pertinent for the study of several aspects of the question of female characters in Conrad's fiction--the convincingness of his female characters, the attitude toward sex and women which his work implies, the unconscious meaning which femininity had for Conrad, the sexual meanings which some critics have found in his work, the charge that Conrad possessed an antipathy for love as a fictional theme and chose to treat women centrally only in order to satisfy his reading public's expectations. The following analyses of "The Idiots," "The Brute," "Amy Foster," "The Lagoon" suggest answers to these questions.
"The Idiots," the second story in Tales of Unrest, is usually dismissed as a derivative piece modeled on Maupassant or Flaubert or Zola and as a tale of horror showing on Conrad's part an amateurish attraction to material interesting only in the journalistic unusualness and extravagance of its superficial events, which were indeed taken largely from reports about an actual brood of idiots born to a peasant family near Lannion in Brittany where the newly married Conrads had set up their menage. But to see "The Idiots" as essentially derivative in content is to overlook the recurrent interest shown in Conrad's conversations, letters and other fiction in metaphysical skepticism, in the idea of non-existence of matter, and in the theme of man faced by a universe whose quality seems to fluctuate between obscure hostility and empty neutrality. Furthermore, the philosophical content of this tale is by no means submerged by the extremely sordid and bloody events. There has been some speculation on the relevance of the marital strife dramatized here to Conrad's own recent marriage and to his attitude toward women in general, but the particular use of the idea of femininity as connected with the story's theme is at least as important to an understanding of the literary qualities of the piece as any real or supposed biographical relevance.

In "The Idiots" man's tragic or pathetic consciousness of nature is represented by the excruciating torment of insidious hopes, fears, and suspicions which an increasingly bitter conflict with nature raises in the rather lethargic breast of a Breton farmer, Jean-Pierre Bacadou. The stubborn
consistency with which his farm resists his efforts to revive its productivity and the uninterrupted sequence of idiot children which his wife bears are evidently coincidental and result from contingency, but they are nonetheless puzzling and ominous. Having been emancipated by his years of military service from the political conservatism and the superstitious Christianity of his backward province, he returns to his father's farm an aggressive and radical Republican and atheist, bitter at the plight of the poor man who is stripped by the Marquis' taxes only to be duped and further exploited by the greedy clergy. His goal in private life is to rescue his neglected patrimonial farm from the chaos into which it has fallen. As a first step in his program to revive the farm he gets married—chiefly in order to beget sons who will help him subdue and save the land. When the farm remains lethargic and when idiot follows idiot in the cradle, his stalwart atheism is shaken. His mother-in-law, the simple Mme. Levaille, a very prosperous and primitively religious businesswoman, thinks his troubles are divine punishment for his atheism and his Republican heresy, and under the force of her venerable personality he begins to consider this diagnosis seriously. Finally he swallows his pride and agrees to see if the bane on farm and wife will be lifted if he makes his peace with God and the priests. His misfortunes continue; another idiot is born and the farm remains lethargic under sluggish mists and clouds. Jean-Pierre's smoldering frustration breaks out in drunken fits and finally culminates when, in drunken despair and defiance of fate,
he demands that his wife submit to his will to beget more offspring. She murders him with a pair of scissors, runs mad, eludes her would-be rescuer (whom she mistakes for her husband's ghost), falls (or perhaps jumps) into the sea and drowns.

There seems to be a certain principle or entity looming in the background of this human experience and imminent in the earth—particularly in the Bacadou farm—a force which is heedlessly productive and heedlessly destructive, impulsive, steadfast and enduring, irrational, dark and seemingly passive. It is not conscious or personal enough to be hostile, but is evidently antagonistic toward aggressiveness and direction and irresponsive to rational, conscious and purposive thought. Though it may have its own mysterious and obscure order of working, it resists the masculine determination of Jean-Pierre Bacadou to subdue the farm and save it from its primeval squalor. Its true nature is thus uncertain, equivocal, wavering; it is perhaps in its own vague way purposeful and ordered, but perhaps haphazard and disordered; perhaps expressing in its workings laws perfect and beyond human ken, but perhaps working merely by chance; perhaps directed toward beneficial purposes, perhaps serving, through its obstinate failure, some obscure malicious will. The idiot children are one manifestation of it. The narrator's ambivalence concerning their relation to the cosmos reveals his general uncertainty whether the cosmos itself is sane or idiotic: "They were an offence to the sunshine, a reproach to empty heaven, a blight on the concentrated and
purposeful vigour of the wild landscape." Notice that although the landscape seems possessed of concentration and purpose it is nevertheless called "wild." The emptiness of heaven, when compared to these monstrosities the idiots, seems to imply purity and dignity; but it is nonetheless emptiness—implying non-direction, contingency. The sentence is a suggestively unresolved contradiction on the obscure nature of the cosmos.

In its geographical condition the setting of the tale also takes on ambiguity. It is described as "the hilly and green country, set in a barren circle of rocks and sands" (p. 61). Ambiguity is a condition also of man's relationship with the land here; it is a vital partnership fraught with uncertainties. After the birth of his twins, "Jean-Pierre pictured two big sons striding over the land from patch to patch, wringing tribute from the earth beloved and fruitful" (p. 61). The earth is beloved, yet for some unspoken reason its yield must be extorted by force. A murky atmosphere, mist, and grayness suggest the indefiniteness and the hidden nature of the physical world; Conrad's words carry a sense of the pathos of human helplessness before the inscrutable cosmos:

Jean-Pierre went from field to field, moving blurred and tall in the drizzle, or striding on the crests of rises, lonely and high upon the gray curtain of drifting clouds, as if he had been pacing along the very edge of the

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1Joseph Conrad, Tales of Unrest (Garden City, 1924), p. 58. This edition is used for future citations of "The Idiots" in this dissertation.
universe. He looked at the black earth, at the earth mute and promising, at the mysterious earth doing its work of life in death-like stillness under the veiled sorrow of the sky. (p. 70)

Note again the subtle contradictions concerning the nature of the cosmos: the earth is mute but promising; the sky expresses a sorrow, but a veiled one; the earth's activities resemble death but are actually preparations for life.

As Jean-Pierre tells his old father his ambitious plans to revive the farm, Conrad skillfully suggests the wavering of the farm between a mere thing and a semi-personal presence: "Over the manure heap floated a mist, opal-tinted and odorous, and the marauding hens would stop in their scratching to examine with a sudden glance of their round eye the two men, both lean and tall, talking in hoarse tones" (p. 59). The fowls' glance seems to suggest that they—and, by extension, the insensate farm itself—are vaguely and ominously aware of Jean-Pierre's innocent and rash determination.

The indefiniteness of the land, its tendency to hover between personality and impersonality, is mirrored by a defeated lethargy, an emptiness of soul, an effacing and deep-seated passivity in its people. The father of Jean-Pierre echoes this in his senility, and the seaweed-gatherers are too superstitious, too foolishly passive, withdrawn, and over-cautious to be very curious about the spectacle of Susan Bacadou running mad over the beach at night. Jean-Pierre himself, despite his radical views, his emancipation, his determination to flout the priests and to save the farm,
shares the inert futility of all Breton farmers:

Like the earth they master and serve, those men, slow of eye and speech, do not show the inner fire; so that, at last, it becomes a question with them as with the earth, what there is in the core: heat, violence, a force mysterious and terrible—or nothing but a clod, a mass fertile and inert, cold and unfeeling, ready to bear a crop of plants that sustain life or give death. (p. 63)

But this identification of the undemonstrative typical Breton with the mute, gray and indistinct land is obscured by a stronger identification of the women characters with the earth whose deep and obscure heart is so equivocally hot or cold, fertile or inert, beneficial or malevolent. They are simply separate epitomes of the cosmos and the obscure force which may or may not be behind it, which is the Unknown, or Chance, or Fate. The non-directive, disordered, and haphazard quality of this entity is clearly shared by the indolent hired girls whom Jean-Pierre on his return from military service finds chattering unrebuked in the kitchen from morning until night. Their indolence and disorder is related to the squalid condition of the farm, and they are furthermore identified, in their chattering, with the cackling hens who turn an almost knowing glance on the farmers in a passage quoted above. Also identified with these hens as manifestations of the "daemon" of the farm are "the cackling lot of strange women who thronged the kitchen" (p. 61) on the day the idiot twins were born, forcing the elder Bacadou to leave the house. Bacadou's wife Susan is another manifestation of this earth-force. When asked by her husband about their retarded children, she cannot answer intelligently.
Her response is an inarticulate wail of emotion, the animalistic earth-force made audible. The pigs in their sty across the yard hear it and answer, grunting in the night (p. 62).

But the dominant character in the story has even clearer ties with the insensate, inscrutable earth and with the irrational or hostile entity which informs it. She is Madame Levaille, Bacadou's mother-in-law, a shrewd and practical businesswoman who prospers as effortlessly as the earth itself in the earth-related activities of agriculture, real-estate, and marble-quarrying. She is thick-set and stout, "broad-cheeked, wide-eyed, persuasive in speech: carrying her point with the placid and invincible obstinacy of an old woman who knows her own mind" (p. 66). Like nature, she is perennially vigorous despite her many years, and, like nature, seems to be in all parts of the countryside at once on her errands of business. She accepts a primitive and traditional Catholicism with a simple and jovially mechanical devotion; she is a great friend of priests and sees no incongruity in interrupting her religious duties, leaving a wayside church, and meeting a deferential farmer in an inn to close a deal in potatoes or stones or land. Her religion seems in no way to alter her immutable prosperity, and in no way connected with her true nature, just as the steadfast earth brings forth its bounty oblivious of the religious or political alignments of its superficial and transient inhabitants.

Madame Levaille is also like nature in that she seems
to lack profound feeling for the individual life in her busy
care for general productivity. She seems provident but
rather calloused and impersonal where one would expect to
find intimate feeling and sympathy. She shows a shallowness
and a paucity of human understanding when her daughter con­
fesses to her that she has been driven to murder her husband:
"I wish you had died little. I will never dare to show my
old head in the sunshine again. There are worse misfortunes
than idiot children. I wish you had been born to me simple——
like your own. . . " (p. 77). As she watches Susan's body
being carried from the bay, her expressions of emotion are
rather stifled and limited: "There are unfortunate people
on this earth. I had only one child. Only one! And they
won't bury her in consecrated ground! . . . Her eyes filled
suddenly, and a short shower of tears rolled down her broad
cheeks. She pulled the shawl close about her" (p. 85). The
very pathos of her grief lies in its limited self-awareness;
it is as brief and as empty of meaning as a shower of rain.
To the end of the story there is the same equivocal, uncer­
tain, wavering quality in Madame Levaille as in the earth
itself. One hesitates to recognize a human meaning behind
her limited expression of grief; one doubts whether such a
meaning exists for her. She lacks a rationality, a basic
consciousness, to raise questions about the meaninglessness
of suffering.

Her situation is ironic as well as pathetic, since she
herself is victimized by the arbitrary sorrow visited upon
Jean-Pierre Bacadou, by the puzzling and blindly hostile
force of which she is the precise epitome: her grief, if subhuman, is nevertheless painful. Her pathos is augmented by her blindness to the sordid advantage to which the priests of Ploumar and the Marquis de Chavanes have turned the suffering of Jean-Pierre and his family. Since Bacadou's consternation about his children weakens his atheism and finally, with Mme. Levaille's persuasion, sends him and his financial favor back to the Church, the greedy and hypocritical clergy rejoice in his disgrace and affliction, which they dignify by references to "the inscrutable ways of Providence" (p. 64). Since Bacadou's return to the Church necessitates a renunciation of his republicanism, the Marquis, who fears the growth of radical forces in his domain, joins the churchmen in gloating over this influential man's change of heart. By persuading Bacadou to trust the priests, she has made of his subsequent sorrow and of her own an instrument to serve the will of these unscrupulous scoundrels. At the story's close the Marquis leaves the weeping Mme. Levaille to have her made guardian of the Bacadou idiots and administrator of the Bacadou farm in order to keep the land in conservative hands. The land, now under the control of Mme. Levaille, who in her limited awareness epitomizes the land, has thus completely succeeded in evading the directiveness of the man who once intended to deliver it from its disorder and squalor. Unaware of this sordid bargaining by priests and Marquis, and only partially conscious of the wrongness of Fate, Mme. Levaille remains, in her lethargic pain, one of Conrad's most pathetic characters.
Mme. Levaille's daughter, in her death scene, shares with her mother the blindness which is characteristic of the feminine principle, although Susan Bacadou's is an insane and violent resistance to truth. She resembles nature in its heedless waste of its own forces in a natural catastrophe. The scene of her final madness and her suicide or accidental death by drowning is foreshadowed by the description of Bacadou's eroding fields:

From morning till night one could see all over the land black denuded boughs, the boughs gnarled and twisted, as if contorted with pain, swaying sadly between the wet clouds and the soaked earth. The clear and gentle streams of summer days rushed discoloured and raging at the stones that barred the way to the sea, with the fury of madness bent upon suicide. (p. 70)

Frightened by a hallucination of her murdered husband, she has run down the slope to the beach and been brought momentarily to her senses by a touch of sea-spray. She is desperate to return home and plans what she will say to her judges at the trial, but when an intrepid seaweed-gatherer approaches to calm her and rescue her, she mistakes him for her husband's ghost. She clings vehemently to this delusion, and in her maddened impulse to avoid him she falls or jumps into the sea. Thus at times the blind energy of the earth-force works, as in the birth of the idiots, and in the stubborn, squalid chaos of Bacadou's farm, for its own defeat.

Two men in this tale are opposed to the passive, instinctive and nondirective feminine principle in their aggressiveness, their questioning, their purposeful actions. The would-be rescuer of Susan Bacadou is a man called Millot who, like Bacadou, has been emancipated by military service
from the superstition, the habitual submission to tyranny, and the other backward ways of the province. He mocks the warning of his fellow seaweed-gatherers that the fleeing figure is an accursed thing, a damned soul. He shares with Bacadou an aggressive and directive impulse which seems to be antagonistic to the basic ways of the earth-force—and he is likewise eluded by its irrational and vehement impetus. The other men in the story, the Marquis and the priests, are idlers who live by subtly turning the ways of the Inscrutable to the purposes of their own sordid greed.

To many of Conrad's characters tormented by their "consciousness of nature" comes a vision of nothingness. So Jean-Pierre Bacadou has his unsatisfying suspicions that pure nothingness, absolute non-meaning, lies at the bottom of his suffering. Returning drunk to his farm late at night, he stops his cart and shouts toward the village church: "Hey there! Come out!" Getting no response, he mutters, "Nobody there. A swindle of the crows. That's what this is. Nobody anywhere... I've been made a fool" (p. 67). This vision of nothingness does not end his torment; he lacks the concentration to remain a nihilist and ends instead as the victim of a sordid murder. His despairing defiance hurls him on the scissors of his wife.

It has been shown how Jean-Pierre's wife and mother-in-law and other female characters represent the cosmos in its irrational, semi-conscious energy and in its tormenting indefiniteness. In her last moments Susan discovers and comes to represent the horrifying nothingness which her
husband has drunkenly cursed. Fleeing the hallucination of Bacadou madly across the moonlit beach, she comes to her senses for a moment:

She . . . began to remember how she came there—and why. She peered into the smooth obscurity near her. She was alone. There was nothing there; nothing near her, either living or dead. The tide was creeping in quietly, putting out long impatient arms of strange rivulets that ran towards the land between ridges of sand. Under the night the pools grew bigger with mysterious rapidity, while the great sea, yet far off, thundered in a regular rhythm along the indistinct line of the horizon. . . . This place was too big and too empty to die in. (p. 81)

In the same scene in which she comes to sense and fear the emptiness of the cosmos, she epitomizes it. In her mad and ineffectual scurrying across the dark and resounding shore, her obscure figure becomes, in the eyes of the superstitious seaweed-gatherers who watch her, a ghost, a phantom, a "fleeing shadow" (p. 80).

It is evident that the female characters in "The Idiots" are not superfluous. The nature of their personalities, as they reflect the darkly ambiguous quality of the cosmos, is the center of the story. The affinities between the earth-force and Mme. Levaille, Susan, and the peripheral female characters are clearly marked but remain subtle and suggestive and do not cause the characters to become mere symbols of this force. The hardy and venerable Mme. Levaille is a quite convincing and believable character as she is presented in an aggregate of typical vignettes—crossing herself as she steps from the gloom of a village church, coming out with unhurried anticipation to arrange a bargain with a farmer; bullying the workmen in the pub beside her quarry;
and finally as she weeps briefly over her daughter's death, only partially and momentarily aware that here is a mystery for which the mechanical rituals of her superficial and jovial Christianity have little relevance. She is a figure of profound pathos. The earth-force, or the quasi-personal entity of the cosmos, is likewise convincingly but not blatantly present in the several passages in which Jean-Pierre Bacadou is described walking over his misty fields, and its basic ambiguity is suggested in the unresolved and subtly contradictory descriptions of the landscape. The torments of the Breton farmer are quite understandable and empathetic. The vague and ambiguous entity with which the story deals is convincing in both its manifestations—in the farm and in the female characters as well.

The attitude of an author toward his subject is not always readily discernible, but it would seem that Conrad's attitude toward the female characters in "The Idiots" is complex and richly ambivalent. He is restrained and tolerant in portraying Mme. Levaille's unabashed mixture of mechanically ritualistic and rather superficial Christianity with vigorous and shrewd concern for worldly things, for, after all, she lacks the consciousness or complexity of mind to be hypocritical—she can see no conflict between these two parts of her life. Conrad seems to look on her natural prosperity, glossed over with jovial religiosity, as a comfortable and, within itself, a successful if unpenetrating adjustment to the mystery of life. He is not unaware of her limitations; he treats with understated irony her failure to
see the true qualities of the Marquis and the priests and to note the calloused and mercenary use to which they put her simple good nature and her sorrow. He likewise spares nothing in his treatment of Susan's vehement and obstinate delusion that Millot is Bacadou's ghost and the absurd and needlessly horrible death to which she rushes. His identification of Susan's wail with the grunting of the pigs is a brutal comment on her emotional unintelligibility. Probably the most negative portrayal of woman is in the loud, squalid and lazy hired girls whom Bacadou finds nesting in the family kitchen on his return from military service. But Conrad's sensitivity to the pathos of Mme. Levaille (which is not lessened by his recognition of her somewhat subhuman level of awareness) is the most memorable and dominant element in his attitude toward woman in this tale. It is a sympathy qualified by Mme. Levaille's connection with the absurd and obscure mystery which drives Bacadou to a sordid death, but Mme. Levaille is also its victim. Despite their connection with this perhaps evil force—or because of it—Conrad's attitude toward Mme. Levaille and the other female characters cannot be dismissed as simply misogyny. It is an attitude further qualified by the fact that the cosmic force never becomes definitely malevolent but remains equivocal. At one point in the story the narrator goes so far as to suggest that Bacadou's torment is caused not by an inherent or purposeful obscurity in the earth-force, but by Bacadou's own limited perception: "He looked at the black earth, at the earth mute and promising, at the mysterious earth doing
its work of life in death-like stillness under the veiled sorrow of the sky" (p. 70). In spite of the "death-like stillness" and the unresolved contradiction of "mute and promising," the earth in this sentence is definitely not wicked or purposeful in its obscurity, but rather a positive force, misunderstood by Bacadou because of man's limited awareness of nature. The sentence removes momentarily the insidious suspicion of a malevolent will underlying the cosmos, and momentarily, by extension, it redeems the women characters who are identified with this cosmos and unites them with a fertile and positive mystery rather than a bleak obscurity. The women characters are also redeemed by favorable comparison with the cowardly, greedy and officious Marquis and the self-deceiving and hypocritical priests. When an unctuous priest runs to the Marquis with the glad tidings of Bacadou's disgrace and affliction, the Marquise, amused and half-bored, observes the scene with superior detachment, quite aware of her husband's vicious tyranny: "Your ambition is perfectly insatiable, Charles," exclaimed the marquise gaily" (p. 65). The moral value of femininity in this tale fluctuates with the moral value of the mysterious cosmos and varies inversely with the moral value of masculine rationality and aggressiveness. It is thus richly ambivalent and inextricably connected with the central ambivalence of the story.

"The Idiots" cannot be considered one of those works in which failure was the natural result of Conrad's effort to deal with women characters centrally. It is a story of
great intensity and of universal significance. It treats with profundity a monumental theme, a crucial aspect of the human situation. The intensity of the story derives from Jean-Pierre's struggle with a metaphysical question which at the end remains unresolved: Is the cosmos, nature, a meaningful and ordered system with a **logos** imminent in it or with some at least semi-personal entity transcending it? Is it the expression of an arbitrary and absurdly hostile will which man should defy if he is to preserve his dignity? Is there mere nothingness behind phenomena? The sense of indignity and the abject nakedness of incertitude before the Inscrutable alternates with the cold fear of discovering a quite neutral nothingness behind the illusion of phenomena. Which is to be preferred: the torment of continued incertitude or the questionable security of a perfect knowledge of absolute and isolating nothingness at the core of existence?

Conrad's treatment of this question as a subject for fiction is not surprising, considering the testimony of many observers that he displayed at times a rather skeptical and pessimistic tendency and was susceptible to moods of depression during which the uses of this world seemed vain and futile. He seems to have possessed also an almost Oriental capacity for wonder at the mystery of existence. His prose is laden with the word "illusion," and his letters show a propensity to entertain thoughts about the non-existence of matter, the unknowability of reality, the comic or tragic stupidity of man before the Incomprehensible, for which his characters display now dread, now flippant acceptance, now
contempt as for a sordid puzzle not worth the trouble of deciphering. In a letter of September 29, 1898, he wrote Edward Garnett of a long conversation he had had with a Dr. McIntyre in Glasgow concerning the non-existence of matter and the possibility of an infinity of simultaneous universes constituted by "waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness."\(^2\)

This subject of the doubtful metaphysical constitution of the universe, or of man's epistemological struggles, seems to concern something more basic than moral choice, which some commentators have considered Conrad's great theme. But metaphysical uncertainty, which is a condition prior to moral choice, was for Conrad a subject of great interest. The emphasis he gave it is seen in a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, dated January 31, 1898: man's adjustment to nature, his war with nature, but most of all simply his consciousness of nature makes him tragic.\(^3\) Here Conrad finds the tragic quality of human life not in interpersonal relations, as a modern reader might expect, but where Greek tragedy finds it—in man's relation with the unknown and unknowable universe, conceived as a single and semi-conscious force, a quasi-personal entity. Because of Conrad's awareness of the metaphysical basis of tragedy as well as the moral basis, he

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was able in many passages in all of his fiction to suggest the special tone that the mystery of the universe gives to the activities of man, for which it forms the ominous backdrop. Thus while the petty agent of a cowardly European greed slyly talks with Marlow by night on the bank of the Congo, Marlow is aware of the tremendous wall of vegetation which stands behind the muttering sycophant; thus Marlow in Chance compares the discomfort of the sight of a clear night sky wherein the Immensities seem dreadfully open to the viewer, with the relative peace and comfort of the sky in moderate English sunshine, in which the Immensities are veiled by a pitying beauty; thus the image of the moon climbing between the sides of the gorge in the Patusan mountain as Jim relates to Marlow his adventures in redemption has somehow a strange and more than ordinary meaning. The value of Conrad's awareness of the metaphysical basis of tragedy depends on the subtlety, the suggestiveness, the seemingly inadvertent aptness with which it is expressed in such images as these. Conrad seems less successful when he tries to write directly about it with abstract nouns and oxymorons—for example, with the recurrent "fascination of the abomination" and similar phrases in Heart of Darkness, which have been soundly ridiculed. His struggles to express the dread of universal nothingness or the insidious suspicion of a malevolent will which lies behind the seeming impersonality of natural forces led him occasionally to write passages where the strain on his imagination remains obvious; nevertheless, he not only succeeded in several
important passages in full-length novels, which give a metaphysical dimension to Jim's and other heroes' moral choices; but also in a number of intense short stories he gave suggestive life to the tragedy inherent in man's consciousness of nature.

The subject which in "The Idiots" is the theme of a whole short story appears significantly in most of Conrad's fiction. "The Idiots" is thus a treatment of a subject which for Conrad had an inherent intensity. Its intensity is compounded by the understated and detached irony which Conrad preserves through most of the tale. It is evident, for instance, in his treatment of Jean-Pierre's unspeakable disappointment in siring another idiot even after he has given in to the priests. When, following his capitulation, a third child is born:

His new credulity knew of no doubt. The ill luck was broken. He spoke cheerily to his wife. She was also hopeful. Three priests came to that christening, and Madame Levaille was godmother. The child turned out an idiot too. (pp. 67-68)

It would be a distortion to apply to this story the findings of such critics as Moser and Guerard who discover in many of Conrad's works an unwitting symbolic representation of man emasculated by woman—a representation which Conrad's unconscious fear of woman and sex led him to embody in his work, despite his superficial conscious intention. It is true that Susan's murder of her husband may be considered in some sense an extreme form of emasculation—but only if it is conceded that all murders of men by women in all of world literature are unconscious representations of
emasculating. Such unwitting symbolic representations would therefore by no means be abnormal but would indeed, by their frequency, represent the norm. It is thus impossible, according to this line of reasoning, to consider any of Conrad's works uniquely and specially abnormal, and equally impossible to hold the view that their aesthetic shortcomings, if any exist, are caused by the arousal of anxiety stemming from Conrad's abnormal sexual attitudes.

It may be objected that Susan's murder of Jean-Pierre is no ordinary kind of murder, but is associated with other occurrences in the story which lend it certain overtones suggesting emasculation. It is true that Susan's murder of her husband is preceded by his humiliating capitulation to the priests, which turns out to be fruitless, and to which he was prompted by Mme. Levaille. His determination, aggression, and defiance of the priests have been weakened and destroyed and replaced by a meek acquiescence, through the force of his mother-in-law's indomitable personality. This is a more defensible interpretation of Bacadou's torment and death as symbolic emasculation, since the effects on him of Mme. Levaille's persuasion share some qualities of emasculation—he is rendered abject and impotent, frustrated, and humiliated. Yet it must be admitted that not all sensations of abjectness, impotence, frustration, and humiliation are the result of emasculation; there are other causes for these feelings. Furthermore, it is not really Bacadou's masculinity which Mme. Levaille has destroyed—it is his defiance, ultimately, of the mystery of the unknown, and his dignity—
during his drunken blaspheming of the village church, he suspects that he has been made a fool, that he is the victim of an absurd Cosmic Joke. But, at the end of the tale, Mme. Levaille is herself the victim of the same incomprehensible, arbitrary punishment—her one child cannot be buried in consecrated ground. It hardly seems warranted to consider Mme. Levaille's victimization as a sexual injury—nor is there any reason to read Bácadou's own loss of dignity, humiliation, and abjectness before the Inscrutable as a blow to his sexuality. There is no necessary connection between the state of being fooled about the nature of the cosmos and the state of emasculation.

Furthermore, to read Bácadou's tragedy as a symbolic emasculation is to relegate the story's concern with man's pathetic helplessness before the Inscrutable—which is revealed, by certain passages cited above, to be the story's theme—to a position of total irrelevance. It would be an error in emphasis comparable to reading the tale of Judith and Holofernes as a treacherous emasculation of man by woman rather than the heroic example of Judaic nationalism for which it was perpetuated.

"The Brute," a rather slight tale in A Set of Six, shows the same interest in the tension between the physical world's tendency to assume quasi-anthropomorphic awareness and purpose and its tendency to remain a mere physical thing. Here the physical world is represented not by nature in the usual sense, but by a completely inanimate object—a ship
which through certain "accidents" seems to possess a hostile will of its own.

The tale is told by a former third mate of the ship, a man named Ned, to Conrad's unnamed narrator (the "I" of the story) and two other seamen in a pub. Ned, and one of the hearers who has once seen the ship, comment on the fascinating and insoluble question of the ship's ominous nature—its waywardness and difficulty of control seem to have no pattern which would be assignable to definite quirks and peculiarities of its structure and would therefore be understandable and predictable. Instead it "behaves" with perverse unpredictability—snapping the towing cables which would be expected to hold a vessel of its weight, then suddenly coming under control with surprising readiness. With seemingly malicious determination it defies the most alert and careful efforts of all its crews—and the law of average as well—in regularly taking one life during each voyage. In its launching it crushes a shipwright, damages one tug, and sinks another. The atrocious regularity of its murderous spite even becomes an object of sardonic humor: its first victim is the retired and aged founder of the Apse shipping firm. When the ship, planned to weigh no less than 2,000 tons, turns out when completed to miss the expected tonnage by exactly one ton, the old gentleman is so exasperated that he takes to his bed and, despite a characteristic venerable robustness, dies.

The ship's numerous accidents, which cause anxiety, overwork, and death, do no harm to the ship itself. The
immunity of "the brute" from the consequences of its own
diabolical unpredictability is a further cause to believe
that conscious intention and not chance underlies its many
mishaps. "You would have thought," says Ned, "that a ship
so full of deadly tricks would run herself ashore some day
out of sheer cussedness. But not she! She was going to
last forever. She had a nose to keep off the bottom." 4
So strong is the propensity of man's mind to anthropomor-
phize all of reality that the third mate even seeks an
explanation for the ship's peculiarities in the hypothesis
that she might be insane (p. 137).

The sinister regularity of her dangerous record—one
death per voyage—suggests a conscious plan, just as the
invariable idiocy of each successive child born to the Baca-
dou family suggests a conscious intention of Someone or
Something. But there remains the comforting or insidious
doubt that the regularity may result from mere chance. The
family of shipowners continue touchily to hide their fear
and disgrace behind some such explanation, and they either
do not allow or do not attend to any rumors about the ship's
atrocious luck. Minds are puzzled and tormented by a basic
question about the nature of reality: Can a pattern be the
result of mere contingency? Does the nature of chance pre-
clude the idea of plan? Can the existence of a conscious,
unseen force be proved by the argument from design? The

ship exerts an evil fascination: Ned tells how once a pair of sailors passed by the ship in dock, saw her name, cursed her horrible reputation, then, after standing about aimlessly, came aboard to look for the mate, obviously eager to be signed on. But naturally the atmosphere on board is not conducive to open discussion of her treacherous character—she stifles and embarrasses any direct approach to her mystery. Officers working the ship under the force of its inimical mystery feel so haunted as to be afraid at times to give orders to their men.

The chief opponent of the ship is the first mate, Ned's older brother Charley, who corresponds in character to Bacadou and Millot in "The Idiots"—very direct, aggressive, rational, determined men who think that the mysteries which baffle and conquer their fellow men can be met and explained and managed by calm, clear thinking, by careful, ever-watchful, rational action: "There was a sort of sternness about Charley's face which never left it, not even when he was larking in his rather wild fashion" (p. 146). Charley's first words with his younger brother after the latter has joined the ship recall in their determination the foreboding talk between Jean-Pierre Bacadou and his father about the younger Bacadou's hopeful plans for reviving the family farm:

"'And, first of all, get it well into your head that we are not going to let this brute kill anybody this voyage. We'll stop her racket.'

'I perceived he was in dead earnest about it. He talked grimly of the ship, and how we must be careful and never allow this ugly beast to catch us napping with any of her damned tricks." (p. 146)

The ship eludes the mate's determination in a manner
which puts the greatest strain on the belief that her pattern of treacherous accidents is explainable by mere chance. At first Charley's watchfulness so successfully baffles her slightest waywardness that he once makes an unguarded remark about bringing home all her crew this voyage. Despite the consternation which this stirs up in the cabin, all goes well, and the ship, to the mate's great relief, is attached to a tug's tow rope at the mouth of the Thames. The mate's vivacious and rather tomboyish fiancée, Maggie Colchester, niece of the captain, has come on the voyage for her health. Delighted with her lover's conquest of "the brute," she flouts with characteristic cheek Charley's warning to get below. When two other ships collide on the river, the tug towing the wicked ship has to stop for a moment. Then, straining to get the drifting ship moving upstream again, the tug tears out the ship's towing chock. There ensues a swift-moving tangle of ropes, and the port anchor, on which Maggie had been standing to get a clear view of the operations, begins ominously to move.

"The first touch of the hawser against the fluke threw her down; she was up on her feet again quick as lightning, but she was up on the wrong side. I heard a horrid, scraping sound, and then that anchor, tipping over, rose up like something alive; its great, rough iron arm caught Maggie round the waist, seemed to close with a dreadful hug, and flung itself with her over and down in a terrific clang of iron, followed by ringing blows that shook the ship from stem to stern—because the ring stopper held!" (p. 152)

Of course it is difficult to see this freak accident in any other way than as a personal attack by the ship on the man who had boasted of conquering her. But by its very
freakish nature the incident seems contrived. The reader finds more difficulty perhaps in suspending his disbelief while reading this tale than while reading any other piece of Conrad's fiction. The concept of a ship which with perfect consistency "kills" a man on each voyage is less credible than the concept of a Breton farmer who begets four idiots. For this reason the tense and tantalizing mystery of an unconscious yet somehow stealthily conscious cosmos is less successfully treated here than in "The Idiots."

"The Brute" is a slight piece, meant, according to Conrad himself, as mere entertainment and depending, as many slight works do, on a fanciful and light willingness of the reader to suspend his disbelief and accept the writer's whimsical premise. If this is granted, the reader can judge the remainder of the story as an interesting manipulation of this premise. The story also merits attention as a light variation on the theme which this study examines in more serious pieces by Conrad.

From the beginning of this tale to its end, the abominable mystery of the ship is connected, often humorously, with certain female characters or with the idea of femininity. The narrator comes into the pub in the middle of Ned's account to hear: "That fellow Wilmot fairly dashed her brains out, and a good job, too!" (p. 129) He naturally assumes that a woman is being discussed, and that the deceased was an inhuman female ogre. It is soon reported that she was in the habit of "going about the world murdering people" (p. 131). One opinion of this "woman" related by the speaker suggests
a sordidness of character and at the same time has a puzzlingly humorous effect of understatement when heard as a comment on a murderess. It seems that a person of venerable mien once said reluctantly: "I assure your, Mrs. Colchester, I am beginning to feel quite unhappy about the name she's getting for herself" (p. 133). The former third mate Ned seems to claim the sympathy due from fellow males to a man who has suffered a long and painful involvement with a domineering woman when he says he was delighted to hear of Wilmot's dashing her brains out:

"You may be surprised at it, but then you haven't gone through the experience I've had of her. I can tell you, it was something to remember. Of course I got off scot free myself—as you can see. She did her best to break up my pluck for me though. She jolly near drove as fine a fellow as ever lived into a madhouse. What do you say to that—eh?" (p. 131)

Thus hints have been carefully laid in order to raise expectations of a story about a woman of questionable social reputation, violent temper and relentless spite. The narrator's "double-take" is typical of the jocularity which is mixed in with the story's melodrama and its fascinating horror—perhaps with ill effect for unity of tone.

Although the tale is about a ship rather than a woman, this first casual connection between woman and ship is supported by later hints in the character descriptions and in other details. Many aspects of the ship suggest the feminine trait or value of domesticity: the name of the awesome vessel is the Apse Family. It is the pride of a firm of shipowners who are themselves a very familial organization—in fact their business associations and their family ties
coincide precisely, and its many ships are all named after members of the Apse clan. Before this ship's disturbing and scandalous career, nothing had ever happened to any of the numerous Apse vessels. The firm seems to have taken a familial attitude toward all its employees and its ships: "plenty of men and plenty of good salt beef and hard tack put aboard—and off you go to fight your way out and home again. . . . They treated their people well—as people don't get treated nowadays—and they were awfully proud of their ships" (p. 135). But this one, built to be like the others, but "still stronger, safer, still more roomy and comfortable" (pp. 136-137) turns out to be the family's black sheep. The domestic values of homeliness, elegance, and safety were the chief aim of her owners and builders, and as she grew, her planning became a family endeavor with all the relations giving their sometimes ill-founded advice until the vessel became indeed less a ship than a home of elephantine Victorian sumptuousness. "The commodore captain of the employ was to command her, and they planned the accommodation for him like a house on shore under a big, tall poop that went nearly to the mainmast" (p. 136). But her seaworthiness suffered for this grandiose domesticity—soon she was "growing into the clumsiest, heaviest ship of her size right before all our eyes, without anybody getting aware of it, somehow" (p. 136). Conrad in his other short story, "Falk," has shown his natural seaman's distaste for the invasion of the pristine world of the sea by domestic values. It is not surprising that the quirks of this ship
which make it so unwieldy and unpredictable—and which give it the indefinite quality of seemingly conscious malice which is the central motif of the story—stem from the contemptibly domestic appearance and structure of the vessel (although this connection is never made explicit and remains vague and buried under the inscrutable mystery of the ship as malevolent will yet mere physical thing).

There is a clear identification between the ship and the character of Mrs. Colchester, wife of the captain. She is like the ship in her huge physical bulk, her ugliness, her puzzling and unpredictable, perverse obstinacy. Old Colchester himself had long wanted to quit the exasperating and ominous vessel he commanded, but his wife refused to allow it: "Funny, eh? But with women"—as with this weirdly perverse ship—"you never know how they will take a thing, and Mrs. Colchester with her moustaches and big eyebrows, set up for being as strong-minded as they make them. She used to walk about in a brown silk dress, with a great gold cable"—suggesting a ship's cable—"flopping about her bosom. You should have heard her snapping out: 'Rubbish!' or 'Stuff and nonsense!'" Her puzzling, paradoxical combination of such ugly brutality with a love of domestic comfort and elegance, parallels the ship's two mutually contradictory attributes of implacable and spiteful brutality with over-sumptuous domestic elegance. A woman with several masculine traits—heavy eyebrows, a hoarse, deep laugh, and even a moustache—she belongs with other women in Conrad's fiction who assume a man's behavior and are for this reason the
object of Conrad's intense scorn: Mrs. Fyne in Chance and Dona Erminia in "Gaspar Ruiz," for example. Conrad's comments on the nature of masculinity and femininity in his description of Mrs. Gould's character in Nostromo are also appropriate. This mixture of masculinity and femininity was to Conrad as contemptible as the analogous mixture of the nautical with the domestic life—scorned in all his works save "Youth," where the wife of Captain Beard is presented sympathetically.

Despite her pretensions to propriety and refinement, Mrs. Colchester is either indifferent to the ship's brutality and its dark and ominous evil, or she consciously condones it. In this she recalls, among others of Conrad's female characters, the aunt of Charles Marlow, who excuses the atrocious rapacity of the Belgian "colonization" of Africa with a Bible verse: "The laborer is worthy of his hire." She too combines refined and idealistic values with an indifference toward inhuman brutality. Mrs. Colchester recalls also, though to a lesser degree, Mme. Levaille of "The Idiots," the wealthy and prosperous old Breton matron who practises strict religious piety but condones or excuses the brutality of the Great Unknown which wreaks undeserved and arbitrary punishment upon the Bacadou family until it ends by causing her only daughter's suicide.

Mrs. Colchester's gruff ejaculations of "Rubbish!" and "Stuff and nonsense!" are her invariable retorts to anyone's suggestion that the ship might be supernaturally dangerous. She excuses or overlooks the horrible record of the vessel--
even when Mr. Apse himself expresses consternation at the spreading rumors about the Apse Family: "'Oh,' says she, with her deep little hoarse laugh, 'if one took notice of all the silly talk,' and she showed Apse all her ugly false teeth at once. 'It would take more than that to make me lose my confidence in her, I assure you,' says she" (p. 133). It is difficult to tell whether, beneath her gruff defense of "the brute," she actually does or does not believe secretly in the ship's murderous nature; however, one scene indicates that she does. When Charley boasts unwarily of bringing the whole crew home safely: "That silly, hard-bitten old woman flew out at Charley as though he had said something indecent" (p. 149). It is clear to the former third mate Ned that in her angry defense of the ship she is condoning murder to secure for herself the peaceful bliss of the hearthside. Were it not for her husband's command of the Apse Family she would have to live a life which in its shabby sordidness recalls the aspersions which the yarn-spinner cast on the ship early in the tale—getting a bad name, driving good men crazy, finally getting her brains dashed out by one of her lovers: "They had no children, and had never set up a home anywhere. When in England she just made shift to hang out anyhow in some cheap hotel or boarding-house. I daresay she liked to get back to the comforts she was used to. She knew well she couldn't gain by any change" (pp. 132-133).

Another female character in the story, one who plays an important part in the destruction of "the brute," shares
the same combination of sordidness and domesticity seen in Mrs. Colchester. She is governess to the children of some passengers on the voyage, Mr. and Mrs. Pamphilius. She displays the same paradoxical—or hypocritical—mixture of refinement and evil as does Mrs. Colchester. A governess is expected to be a paragon of refinement, but just after fulfilling the domestic duty of putting the children to bed, she dons a red flannel dressing gown (much like the one worn by Joanna Willems in An Outcast of the Islands, which becomes the symbol of her shabby and indolent domesticity), stations herself inside the little house on the poop, sitting "on the settee near the open door to cool herself, I daresay," (p. 159) and undertakes the sordid enterprise of seducing the officer of the watch, the second mate named Wilmot.

Ned has explained that Wilmot had always vociferously proclaimed an animosity to women but was, beneath this subterfuge, simply awed by their presence and would react with immediate, uncontrollable and aggressive passion toward any woman who bent her finger toward him. Wilmot's view of women is thus an extreme example of ambivalence—for him they oscillate violently and unpredictably between objects of loathing and the most desirable of all things in the universe. They possess the same fatal fascination by which "the brute" attracts seamen, and the mystery of the dualism which they present to Wilmot is as deep as that of the conscious-unconscious dualism of "the brute." As an apprentice seaman Wilmot had deserted his ship to chase the lady of his choice; his career was saved only by his skipper's "rescuing" him
from a house of ill fame. Now while in full charge of the ship, making slow progress near a coast during a night of squalls, he hears the whisper of the governess from the little house on the poop. He loses all self-control, deserts his duty, and remains wrapped in her close embrace until he hears the lookout shouting that he can hear breakers ahead. Wilmot's frantic efforts to save the ship come too late, and his career at sea is irrevocably ruined—although no human life is lost—when "the brute" runs aground on the shelving rock.

Ned, narrating the loss of the Apse Family, mentions "a sort of poetic justice"—evidently referring to the role of a woman in the destruction of a ship which had "killed" a woman (p. 161). There is likewise the same poetic justice, or at least an ironic consistency of dominant trait, in other factors connected with "the brute's" destruction. The skipper, it seems, was a "festive" and "hospitable" soul. He entertains guests from shore at a farewell lunch until late in the evening and thus delays the ship's departure from Port Adelaide until the hour and the weather have grown unpropitious. Not wishing to deprive his party of its raison d'etre, he insists on beginning the voyage immediately after his guests have left, despite a brewing squall. He sets a course close to the shore in order to lessen the effect of the winds, and, tired out from his hospitable celebrations, "sought his virtuous couch," leaving the dutiful but seduceable Wilmot in charge for part of the night. Thus all factors leading to "the brute's" destruction—"the captain's festive
hospitality, Wilmot's repressed but volatile passion, and
the governess's sordid sexuality—smack of domesticity and
femininity.

Still another female character in "The Brute" reflects
the hypocritical mixture of superficial refinement with a
tendency to condone evil and brutality. She is not in the
yarn told by Ned, but is barmaid of the Three Crows, the pub
in which the "I" of the story hears Ned's tale. The pub is
a very respectable place, but the overtones of the occupa-
tion of barmaid are often sordid, and the name of the estab-
ishment recalls the death-haunted ballad of "The Three
Ravens," or at least suggests the conventional ominous
associations of death of which scavenging birds are a por-
tent. Like the female characters discussed earlier, her
character shows a domestic concern for superficial refinement
but also a rather calloused, almost consciously condoning,
attitude toward evil. When the narrator enters the pub, Ned
is exclaiming to his two listeners in a voice loud enough to
be easily overheard in the outer room by both narrator and
barmaid: "That fellow Wilmot fairly dashed her brains out,
and a good job, too" (p. 129). The narrator is shocked by
the remark, but he is more startled by the barmaid's failure
to register in her expression any notice of the brutality of
this remark:

This inhuman sentiment, since there was nothing profane
or improper in it, failed to do as much as to check the
slight yawn Miss Blank was achieving behind her hand.
And she remained gazing fixedly at the window-panes,
which streamed with rain. (p. 129)

Miss Blank's Olympian indifference to the dashing out of
brains, plus her association with the bar of ominous name, give her an aura of fatality not unlike that of the two old women knitting wool, the receptionists in the anteroom of the Belgian firm for the colonization of Africa in *Heart of Darkness*. Miss Blank is either a hypocrite or a woman of quite paradoxical nature—a calloused prude. Her rule over the pub is such that any inhuman sentiment—but not the slightest impropriety—can go unnoticed. The narrator describes his entrance: "Dodging in from the rain-swept street, I exchanged a smile and a glance with Miss Blank in the bar of the Three Crows. This exchange was effected with extreme propriety" (p. 129). The end of the tale gives the narrator's equally careful exit: "On going out I exchanged a glance and a smile (strictly proper) with the respectable Miss Blank, barmaid of the Three Crows" (p. 162). This so insistently respectable barmaid enters the tale only one other time. The narrator, exasperated by his ignorance of the tantalizingly suggestive subject of Ned's tale, asks it of Ned point blank. He hears Ned say, "The Apse Family." Not knowing it as the name of a ship, his mystification is compounded, and he almost lets out a "damn," but Miss Blank, coming in to warn one of the listeners of the arrival of his cab, stifles his profanity by her respectable presence (p. 134).

Miss Blank's casual attitude toward the tale of dark and evil cruelty which she overhears corresponds precisely to Mrs. Colchester's indifference toward the inscrutable viciousness of "the brute." In her silence and in her name
is suggested a basic indifference or emptiness which the female characters in "The Idiots" share with the realm of physical nature. The blankness of her personality corresponds to the impersonality of the inanimate ship, which, as the tale shows, is capable of suddenly and treacherously changing from mere impersonal thing to the instrument of a malevolent purpose.

The character of Maggie Colchester is the object of pathos; her death seems to be contrived by the writer to be as horrifying as possible, and the prospect of a brave and spunky girl with long, beautiful hair being cruelly clutched by a monstrously animated anchor is rather melodramatic. Her obvious role in the tale is to intensify the inscrutable horror of the inanimate ship: this time it has killed an innocent woman; it has offended humanity in this inordinately cruel fashion—and it has also killed the fiancée of the man who had boasted of bringing home everyone safely. And of course it can be construed as a mere accident understandable and explicable by the laws of physics—supposedly free from any supernatural interpretation.

Nevertheless, even though her role is that of innocent victim, Maggie shares some of the traits associated with the other female characters and with the ship itself. She is obviously obstinate. Ned says, "The way she cheeked my big brother used to frighten me. I always expected it [their romance] to end in a frightful row" (p. 147). Watching the busy docking operations from the forecastle head, she disregards the warnings of danger from her fiancé, though she does
so with a winsome impertinence. This impertinent desire to act contrary to her fiancé's warnings is, like the "motivation" of the ship, completely unreasonable, unfathomable, inscrutable. Her presence on the ship might be taken as a pretension to the privileges of masculinity and as an improper mixture of the nautical with the domestic world, both of which mixtures Conrad seems to have abhorred. Much of her very winsomeness as a heroine derives from her tomboyish nature: "She didn't care a rap for wind, or rain, or spray, or sun, or green seas, or anything. She was a blue-eyed, jolly girl of the very best sort" (p. 147).

Charley's romance with her, even though it contrasts so obviously with the other shipboard romance in this tale—the sordid seduction of Wilmot—is rather obscure, dark, inscrutable in its origins and effects. It is an unaccountable impulse which deprives the lover of his normal vision of things. When Ned first meets his big brother after years of separation, he notices in him a rather frenzied mirth which he had never before seen in Charley's character. His later actions are equally sudden, surprising, bewildering; his motivation at least momentarily seems obscure to Ned. Charley jerks him out of his cabin to rush him through the streets of a port. Finally the purpose comes clear: to buy a ring for Maggie. Later Charley and Maggie later leave the ship together and seem to fall into a trance during their short walk on shore:

These two went over the gangway publicly, before all hands, going for a walk together on that awful, blazing, hot day, with clouds of dust flying about. They came
back after a few hours looking very staid, but didn't seem to have the slightest idea where they had been. (p. 148)

Thus Maggie, despite the melodramatic sentimentality which hovers around her character, also possesses the traits of inscrutable and sometimes perverse obstinacy and pretensions to the privileges of masculinity. Her relationship with Charley is marked by an obscurity, an indefiniteness and a semi-consciousness which leaves them both in a trance. Both love relationships in the tale—the wholesome love of Charley and Maggie as well as the sordid love of Wilmot and the governess—have about them a darkness, a mystery, an obscurity not unlike the unpredictable mystery of the ship.

In this tale, both human meaning and objective physical reality reveal a basic illusory or mysterious quality. The meaning of human "illusions" and the meaning of physical reality are equally inscrutable.

When Maggie shrugs off Charley's warning to get off the forecastle head, she shows perhaps an indifference to the evil of the ship; but this is not to be identified with Mrs. Colchester's or Miss Blank's condoning of inhumanity. Maggie can hardly be accused of being in league with evil in order to secure the bliss of the hearth, as Mrs. Colchester is. Instead Maggie simply does not take evil or danger seriously. The manner of her death recalls one of Marlow's speeches from *Heart of Darkness* on the inability of idealistic women to live safely in a world of facts: If women, he says, were allowed to set up the beautiful world in which they live in daydreams, some fact that men have lived with
for ages would suddenly start up and knock everything down. Maggie herself is destroyed by the sudden starting up of a particular fact: a ship's anchor.

The story indicates that women relate to evil either by foolishly, irrationally, obstinately, ignoring it and being ultimately destroyed by it; or by hypocritically or unwittingly being in league with it, excusing or condoning it by some subterfuge— in a kind of wicked symbiosis which belies the superficial goodness and propriety and domestic peace which they so highly prize.

The masculine jocularity with which the tale is related has been mentioned earlier as possibly inappropriate to the melodrama and sentimentality and to the serious horror of the indefinite malice of "the brute." This pervasive humor, however, may be seen as a technique of evasion. It tends to throw another veil over the central mystery of the ship's possession or lack of consciousness, will, or purpose by preventing too close and serious a consideration of that mystery. It may be also that the humor in the bar is intended to give a ballast of credible, everyday actuality to a tale which deals with a semi-supernatural phenomenon. It is difficult to decide, however, whether this use of humor is actually effective as a technique of evasion and verisimilitude or whether the result is a mixture of jocularity and seriousness which in its final effect reads as a disastrous lack of unity of tone.

"The Brute" seems definitely to belong with "The Idiots" as a treatment of the theme of a stubbornly inscrutable
universe epitomized by women, but it differs in several important aspects from the earlier tale because of Conrad's ill-advised attempt to base a merely entertaining story on an idea which is inherently serious and which such a natively skeptical and pessimistic nature as Conrad's was perhaps incapable of treating lightly. Noting the mixture of melodrama, sentimentality, sarcasm, disgust, horror, and light humor in different parts of the tale, the reader may be led to wonder whether Conrad was certain of his intention.

The difference which accounts for the laxness of "The Brute" lies in the less precisely balanced dualism of the ship. In "The Idiots" the question of nature's (or the farm's) malevolence or indifference remains unresolved. In "The Brute," the ship's cleverly contrived murder of Maggie, though it is an "accident," practically demands the reader's verdict that the vessel is malicious, and the story slips into the genre of tales of bewitchment, which may qualify as "entertainment," but which relinquish any claims on the reader's serious attention. Furthermore, the ship is a less equivocal and more definitely malicious inanimate opponent and does not demand of the male protagonist a compromising decision to regard the inscrutable element as innocent.

Jean-Pierre Bacadou, led by his mother-in-law to see his bad luck as just punishment and to attempt to make amends, becomes, perhaps, the fool of the cosmos' joke. Charley, mate of the Apse Family, becomes not the fool of an inscrutable and unresolved mystery, but the victim of pure but elusive malice. Finally, the ship, which serves as the dark and
Inscrutable object in "The Brute" is, by virtue of its particularity, less representative than the farm, or the force behind the birth of the idiots, of the general obscurity which it is man's lot to face.

The characters in "The Brute," male and female, are undeveloped and flat, and are thus suited to the general laxness and unpenetrating effect of the story. The heroine, with lots of long hair and eyes which seem to shoot electric sparks, is perhaps the least interesting for the extravagant and adjectival conventionality of her charms and for her obviously limited function as an innocent victim of the abominable spite of "the brute." Despite the extreme, freakish brutality of her death, no genuine pathos adheres to it, because of the lightness of the tale, the contrivance of the accident, and the bald obviousness of Conrad's attempt to appeal to a stock response. Since her character remains almost completely undeveloped, the reader seems to be expected to weep over the destruction of a lot of light brown hair and blue eyes that shoot electric sparks. The despicable Mrs. Colchester, with her deep voice, moustache, heavy eyebrows and large teeth, is a caricature drawn with heavy and obvious scorn and not meant as convincingly realistic. But her mysterious defence of the character of the ship, prompted by a love for sweet and elegant domesticity, is an interesting and not entirely unconvincing paradox, although it may be that Conrad insists upon it too strongly and directly and fails to make it as suggestive and subtle as is the stimulatingly paradoxical and more convincing Mme. Levaille.
The same may be true of Miss Blank's paradoxical or hypocritical nature, by which she condemns impropriety but condones inhumanity. The dualism is plausible and human, but Conrad depends for its verification on the narrator's straightforward and contemptuous testimony to it rather than giving it independent verisimilitude. The ugliest drawing of a woman character is that of the governess, whose amorous escapade wrecks the ship. Conrad shows a vehement willingness to descend to vulgarity in suggesting that her alibi for coming up on deck during a squall and sitting, in her bathrobe, in one of the deck houses was not really to seduce Wilmot, but to "cool" herself. Thus most of the women in the tale are objects of disgusted and scornful laughter.

As the ship is less inscrutable, less ambiguous and more definitely evil than the misty Bacadou farm, the female characters in "The Brute," except for Maggie Colchester, are more definitely evil, less ambivalent than Mme. Levaille. Mrs. Colchester may be considered an obscuring force in that she thwarts all attempts to clarify the ship as evil with her gruff retorts, "Rubbish!" and "Stuff and nonsense!" Miss Blank's name suggests indefiniteness and emptiness, but by and large the women here are only superficially vague—their tendency to shake off ambiguity and emerge as definitely evil is much greater.

Nevertheless, the story's flat and undeveloped female characters cannot be considered the reason for the failure of the tale, nor can Conrad's attitude toward sex or woman. The story shows a laxness of imaginative power and a
superficiality throughout. Even the communal bond of seaman­ship, an idea which Conrad usually makes profound and real, even in a light work such as "Youth," becomes, among the men in the pub in this story, hackneyed and uncompelling, a symbol eliciting only a stock response. One of the hear­ers of the tale is a taciturn, huge man who the narrator says is in himself a monument or symbol of the glory of river pilots, the focus for the solidarity of all followers of the sea, but the reader has only the narrator's monotonously repeated insistence that this is so, and the man's taciturn­ity remains that of a wooden character rather than becoming a suggestive and evocative silence.

Yet certain aspects of the female characters are the most intriguing qualities in the tale: the pattern of perverse obstinacy and unpredictability of which they all are variations, the correspondence between them and the ship in their dualism of domestic propriety and brutal acceptance of inhumanity, the dark uncertainties which pervade the relation between the sexes, and the "poetic justice" by which the ship, having eluded all rational, determined and straight­forward efforts to conquer its malice, is finally destroyed by a woman who shares its mixture of wickedness and domestic­ity and who is evidently unaware of the whole question of the ship's nature. There is thus a well-wrought pattern of variations on a basic mystery and dualism in the nature of the cosmos and in the nature of woman. The paradox, dualism, or hypocrisy of woman and of the cosmos is so consistent an inconsistency as to be humorous.
The tale lacks intensity, and its attitude toward woman and the cosmos is flat and negative rather than complex, restrained, tolerant, and ambivalent. The failure of the story may result from Conrad's failure to make communicable to a reader a vehemently contemptuous but unprofound and unanalyzed pessimism, a vengeful interpretation of the cosmos or Fate as a covert and absurdly inimical will. This view of life remains the author's subjective interpretation; the reader is not compelled by artistic persuasion and verisimilitude to share it. The incident in the story which is supposed to stand as the most condemning evidence of a hostile Fate (Maggie's death), lacks genuine pathos, and it can be seriously doubted that Conrad himself in cooler moments considered this obviously contrived event as grounds for mature and serious cosmic pessimism. The tale is either a subjective and basely contrived or a tongue-in-cheek argument for pessimism; however, some of its contrivances—the covert dualism and absurdly mixed nature of the ship mirrored in the characters of women, and the "poetic justice" of the ship's destruction—are quite cleverly worked out. It is necessary to note that Conrad's misogyny—if that is the proper name for his attitude toward women here—is perhaps ultimately not an attitude toward woman per se. It seems to result not from feelings about sex but from his connection of the mystery and dualism—or hypocrisy—of woman with the seemingly willful obscurity and covert malevolence of the cosmos.
"Amy Foster" has the same basic theme of man's epistemological struggle with the Inscrutable. Here again man is tragic because of his consciousness of his environment—of nature, of the cosmos. This tale gives a more interesting contrast between masculinity and femininity, since here the contrast does not follow the traditional and expected juxtaposition of male rationality with female irrationality and impulse; nevertheless, the Incomprehensible is again clearly identified with the central and peripheral female characters in the story. Conrad is interested here also in the strange potency for the human mind which lies in the visible world, an interest which he acknowledged in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. He is concerned furthermore with the nature of belief, with the inadequacy and instability of an individual's worldview or orientation, which in Conrad's eyes is never safe from disillusionment, always falling short of the security of an Absolute, always dwarfed by the immense and eternal obscurity which seems at times to nurture and indulge man's dreams and at times to loom menacingly, contemptuously, or obliviously above man's limited understanding.

The story is related by a country physician named Kennedy to the unnamed narrator, the "I" of the tale. Yanko Gooral, the central character, is a young mountain peasant of the Eastern Carpathians, innocent, simple of heart and of childlike good will. With numerous others of his countrymen he is herded on board a ship by swindlers posing as emigration
agents, who promise an easy fortune in America. The ship goes down in a storm off the coast of a dreary and provincial shire in England where Dr. Kennedy has his practice. Yanko alone survives, to be cruelly misunderstood, taunted as an insane man, mistrusted, and feared by the amazingly close-minded inhabitants, whose worldview and orientation, whose very manner of seeing, are so incompatible with Yanko's as to make him believe at first that he is living among the dead.

After arousing the fear and indignation of the villagers, who mistake him for a runaway lunatic or a drunk tramp, Yanko is locked up in a woodshed by one of the town worthies. His servant girl, Amy Foster, pities the man who she is sure means no harm, and brings him bread. To Yanko she appears "in the aureole of an angel of light" and becomes for him the one intelligible phenomenon in the strange realm he has entered. He finds work as a shepherd, marries the girl, and becomes quasi-acclimatized in Colebrook, though his ways of speaking, singing, looking, and walking and his excitable spirit remain repellent to the natives. The birth of a son signals a change in his domestic life. Amy grows morbidly suspicious about his speaking and singing to the child in his own language, and in her dull mind there grows a pervasive fear of his strangeness, which had at first attracted her. Yanko falls ill with lung trouble and during a fit of fever asks Amy for water, not realizing he is speaking his native tongue rather than English. He is amazed by her silence and immobility. She is startled by his direct
and insistent request in a foreign and unearthly language, and she is terrified by the passionate entreaties with which Yanko reacts to her dumb stare. A wave of brute panic sweeps over her, and she snatches up the child and runs to her father's house. The next morning Dr. Kennedy finds Yanko lying outside their cottage, mortally ill from exposure. He dies, asking "Why?"

Conrad has achieved an intense irony by his adroit shifting between Yanko's and the English peasants' woefully incompatible viewpoints--especially in their respective accounts of the outcast's first several days near the village. The tale has been seen as a fable representing the pathetic condition of man in the inhospitable environment constituted by human life. But it seems clear that the chief feature of the inhospitality of Yanko's environment is the mutual misunderstanding which marks his relationship with the Colebrook peasants and the oppressive strangeness of the countryside--in short, Yanko's pathetic failure to wrest a meaning from his physical and social environment.

The Incomprehensible is not quite coincident with the whole realm of Nature in "Amy Foster" as it was in "The Idiots," for here it is only the sea and the narrow world around Colebrook which is so inscrutable to the outcast Yanko--his native Carpathian landscape is idyllic and meaningful to him. He is not aggressive and rational man set over against indefinite and ambiguous nature, as was Jean-Pierre Bacadou. On the contrary Yanko is linked with nature and compared by the narrator to a woodland creature.
Nevertheless the inhospitable Colebrook landscape closes in on Yanko and becomes for him the entire world; his uncomprehending perceptions from the time of his arrival until his death are so completely confined to this small area that they come to represent mankind's experience of bewilderment and estrangement by all of the universe at large; by the medium of life itself.

This recalled intelligible universe of Yanko's which alters his vision of the Colebrook countryside, this expectancy of meaning in things, marks the main contrast between him and the natives of Colebrook, for whom things are mere things, who would never, during their dinner hour, lie on their backs and gaze at the sky. The unnamed narrator watches the Colebrook peasants as he rides over the drab fields with Dr. Kennedy:

The men we met walked past slow, unsmiling, with downcast eyes, as if the melancholy of an overburdened earth had weighted their feet, bowed their shoulders, borne down their glances. "Yes," said the doctor to my remark, "one would think the earth is under a curse, since of all her children these that cling to her the closest are uncouth in body and as leaden of gait as if their very hearts were loaded with chains."

Yanko, by contrast, is "a being lithe, supple and long-limbed, straight like a pine, with something striving upwards in his appearance as though the heart within him had been buoyant" (p. 164). He vaults over stiles, strides elastically past the plodding natives, offends the village by

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5Joseph Conrad, *Falk, Amy Foster, Tomorrow: Three Stories* (Garden City, 1923), p. 164. This edition is used for future citations of "Amy Foster."
singing loudly uncouth and melancholy songs in the fields, and doing fiery dances in the local pub where the taciturn town fathers gather.

The contrast between Yanko and the natives of Colebrook is only superficially an ethnic conflict—a clash between racial temperaments. Thematically the contrast is not simply between two ways of seeing—a neutral balancing of two national worldviews, each a more or less valid interpretation or mental ordering of the universe. Thematically the conflict is between imaginative insight and the spiritual blindness of superficial and plodding realism—or, more neutrally stated, between realism and imagination. The ethnic trait of demonstrativeness which the Colebrook citizens find so repellent in Yanko is simply his response to a meaningful universe, of which his memory continues to inspire an open exuberance of soul. The English peasants of course have no experience of a world in which every part of reality is fraught with meaning, and they naturally deny its existence and find nothing but madness in Yanko’s response to a meaning they have never perceived.

As a theme this contrast is by no means limited to this single short story and by no means has always the same outcome. Probably its classical treatment is in Lord Jim, especially in the famous passage in which Stein and Marlow discuss the nature of "dream" and focus on the attitude of "romanticism" as the key to understanding Jim. Conrad quite often speculates, in his fiction, on the comparative connection between one of these two worldviews (realism and
imagination) with the state of immobility and inertness of body and of personality which for Conrad corresponds to demoralization, dehumanization, or spiritual death. Thus in "Typhoon" the mate Jukes undutifully allows himself to slip into a dangerously immobile stoic resignation as a result of his jejune rendering of himself, in his own imagination, as heroically enduring, undaunted Man before the force of the elements. It is the naive realist, Captain MacWhirr, who continues ploddingly and unimaginatively to think of the next thing that must be done, and who keeps the ship afloat. Thus in Heart of Darkness it is Marlow's ordinary, workaday side which balances the force of his Kurtz-like, seductive imagination, which would send him ashore "for a howl and a shake," to join the dark and primitive uproar, perhaps finally to submit to the emptiness which Kurtz has seen as the basis of the universe. Thus in Victory Heyst's immobilizing pessimism is a result of his imagination, ultimately of his father's philosophy, which rejects the naively realistic valuation of life as having purpose and meaning.

In "Amy Foster" also Conrad has scrutinized the possible correlation of imagination and immobility, or realism and immobility. Here the correlation clearly links the plodding realism of the Colebrook peasants—an acceptance of things as mere things, rather than signs shadowing forth mystical meaning—with confusion, vagueness, hollowness, immobility, and death; imagination is connected here with human understanding, pity, compassion, with sharpness of eye and with sprightliness of movement, with demonstrative
feeling—in short with life. It is connected also with Amy Foster's real but unsustained love. Dr. Kennedy notes that there is no kindness of heart without some imagination, and that Amy possessed enough of it to be moved by pity and to discover her ideal in an unfamiliar shape—in Yanko. "Amy Foster" is the pathetic story of an imaginative man's hopeless struggle for meaning in an equivocal universe.

The portrayal of realism in this story as spiritual blindness often involves the metaphor of short-sightedness; Yanko as an epitome of imagination is quick of glance and sharp-sighted. One of the inhabitants of Colebrook, however, is wearing "immense black wire goggles" (p. 178) which he must remove in order to see Yanko. Yanko, helping one of the natives plough, sees "what for anybody else would have been a mere flutter of something white"—but what is actually his employer's granddaughter falling into a horsepond. When he suddenly bolts away to save the child, leaving the horses on the turn, the waggoner is extremely disgusted at what seems to his limited vision a completely senseless action. The gaze of most of the Colebrook natives seems to be earthward, and the descriptions of Amy Foster give hints that her love-prompting imagination is to be short-lived by repeatedly emphasizing her short-sightedness and dullness of eye.

Physical mobility, along with quickness of eye, becomes in this tale another index, or representation, of imagination—of the worldview which sees meaning inherent in things or which imposes meaning on things. The muscular exuberance of Yanko is merely his imaginative response to a meaningful
universe. As the epitome of imagination, as a seer of meaning, he contrasts with the plodding realists of Colebrook not only in his fluency of speech as opposed to their stammering; in his quick and far-reaching glance as opposed to their dull eyes; but also in his lightness of gait as opposed to their clumsy and heavy steps. Amy tramps over stiles in stolid boots; Yanko vaults over them.

Professor Guerard considers an antipathy for passivity or inertia to be among the basic components of Conrad's psyche. Immobility is often in Conrad's fiction a treacherous state, and seems to have been connected in his mind with physical death or death of the soul. Certainly his uncle Thaddeus Bobrowski frequently urged Conrad to keep active in order to avoid the pessimistic moods to which he was subject by hereditary temperament. But immobility in this tale and in other works cannot be considered separately from the equally deplorable state of disillusionment. Here as elsewhere in Conrad, immobility follows naturally from disillusion, from loss of life's meaning, from a glimpse of the bare nothingness which is at the core of the cosmos.

The meaning or content which Yanko's imagination finds in mere things is always marked by the symbols and signs of his primitive Christianity. Conrad uses the contrast between his naive religious mind, which finds immediately and everywhere in the external world these signs and symbols, and the

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drab Reformed Christianity of Colebrook, to indicate the more basic contrast between Yanko's imagination and their realism, between Yanko's open affirmation of the Unseen and the Colebrook rectory's preference for blankness, for repression, in religion, for submergence of meaning in mere thing. Conrad shows Yanko's vision interpreting and altering all he sees to fit the basic meaning he has been taught to find in the world. Having never seen a ship before, Yanko sees the masts of the vessel which is to take him to America as "bare trees in the shape of crosses" (p. 172). His memory of a railway station automatically compares the crowd around the locomotive to the crowd around the miraculous Holy Image in the Austrian valley below his mountain home (p. 171). He is concerned by the bareness of churches amidst so much wealth and by the absence of the traditional images of the Redeemer at the roadsides (p. 193). After Yanko's death, all that remains to perpetuate the memory of this foreigner is his mark beside the rector's notation of his name in the marriage register of the parish: "The crooked cross made by the castaway, a cross whose tracing no doubt seemed to him the most solemn part of the ceremony. . . ." (p. 201). The little metal cross hanging at the belt of Miss Swaffer, one of Colebrook's rare High Anglicans, was at one time all that prevented his feeling completely alienated and disoriented.

When ladies from the rectory attempt to persuade Yanko to give up crossing himself and praying aloud at evening, and when they succeed in getting him to put aside the religious medals and scapula and cross which he wears round his
neck, their action represents the general preference for blankness, for repression, the general tendency to deny the existence of meaning and to submerge and smother transcendental content in ordinary things. It is significant that women are here the representatives of this tendency.

Of great relevance to Yanko's imagination and his tendency to find meaning in things is his reaction to the spectacle of the sea. His experience aboard the emigrant ship remains the segment of his tribulations which is most nearly empty of meaning for him. Since he has never seen a ship and has lived a land-locked life as a mountaineer in a remote part of Austria, he is totally unable to understand his experience or to form an intelligible conception of it. He has endured a sequence of sensations of darkness, creaking timber, crowded conditions, etc., but he is unable to assimilate these sensations into a meaningful concept and thus that period in his memory has remained blank. His later reaction to a sight of the sea is profound consternation, an inability to look upon the water for more than a moment. The sea for Yanko is clearly a symbol of blankness, a part of reality totally and frightfully devoid of meaning. The first description of the sea in this story suggests a boundlessness, a blankness eternally abiding, beside which all else is temporary, ephemeral, illusory:

The doctor pointed with his whip, and from the summit of the descent seen over the rolling tops of the trees in a park by the side of the road, appeared the level sea far below us, like the floor of an immense edifice inlaid with bands of dark ripple, with still trails of glitter, ending in a belt of glassy water at the foot of the sky. The light blur of smoke, from an
invisible steamer, faded on the great clearness of the horizon like the mist of a breath on a mirror; and, inshore, the white sails of a coaster, with the appearance of disentangling themselves slowly from under the branches, floated clear of the foliage of the trees.

Later, Dr. Kennedy notes that Yanko's "straight-glancing, quick, far-reaching eyes . . . only seemed to flinch and lose their amazing power before the immensity of the sea" (p. 195). Evidently the sea in its monotonous and boundless immensity, and in its unfamiliarity to an Austrian mountaineer, represents for Yanko a disturbing nothingness, a realm of emptiness in which the imaginative mind can find no meaning—can find only pure and unbearable matter without inner truth—pure non-meaning. Thus, after he has had cause to doubt the one repository of meaning in the meaningless landscape of Colebrook (his wife, Amy Foster), after he has acquiesced, to some degree, to non-meaning, he loses his antipathy for the immense blankness of the ocean: "He looked upon the sea with indifferent, unseeing eyes" (p. 206).

Amy Foster offers a distinct contrast to Yanko in her extreme dullness and seeming emptiness of personality. At first, early in Yanko's sojourn at Colebrook, she becomes for Yanko the one face which is intelligible, the epistemological center and touchstone for the otherwise meaningless universe. Nevertheless, like Mme. Levaille, she shares the obscurity of the earth and is linked with the principle which vaguely informs the natural world. Later in the tale she reveals qualities like those of the women characters in "The Idiots." She becomes a tormenting mixture of meaning and
non-meaning, a creature who wavers between symbol and meaningless object. When Dr. Kennedy points her out to the narrator from their carriage, the narrator's immediate and spontaneous judgment is: "She seems a dull creature" (p. 159). But somehow her dullness is qualified by enough imagination for her to show pity and kindness and even to find her ideal of love and beauty—temporarily, it is true—in the outlandish figure of Yanko. To Dr. Kennedy and to the reader this contradiction remains "an inscrutable mystery" (p. 162).

Amy's habitual kindness to animals may partially explain her kindness to Yanko, who resembles an animal when he first comes to Colebrook. But readers of "The Idiots" will find in Amy Foster's precarious and exasperating oscillation between imaginative response and sub-human passivity and dullness the typical quality of Conrad's female characters: a tormenting hovering between meaning and non-meaning, between possession of the secret of existence and a disillusioning and isolating emptiness. This duality or contradictory valence is not explained in "Amy Foster" or in any other of Conrad's similar tales. It is instead presented imaginatively as a basic truth of life—the unpredictable shifting of man's vision from purposive illusion to bare, neutral, and frightening reality is never in Conrad's works treated otherwise than as a mystery, and the nature of woman in Conrad's view of life seems, in the works here analyzed, somehow linked to that final, ultimate cosmos which so unpredictably shifts and changes in value under man's pathetically feeble and inadequate scrutiny; whose visual aspects are to mankind
symbols benevolent and treacherous, or uninspiring lumps of matter, illusory and eternally void of divine breath.

It seems of little use to seek to explain Amy's attraction to Yanko, which so completely contradicts her essential dullness, as motivated by a simple and animalistic sexual passion. Nevertheless, Professor Guerard spoils an interesting analysis of the tale by giving this completely unfounded and superfluous speculation without acknowledging its need for support or verification by reference to details in the story (p. 49). This interpretation seeks a solution for a contradiction which Conrad himself evidently considered ultimately insoluble. Amy's emergence from the lethargy typical of Colebrook peasants, and her later shift from imagination and love back to dullness and fear, must remain a mystery. To explain the latter as waning of interest in her foreigner husband after her sexual desires have been satisfied is to overlook entirely the theme of epistemological uncertainty in which Conrad from work to work and outside his fiction showed an enduring interest.

Though Amy's double nature is not explained, it is prepared for by her behavior in regard to her mistress's parrot early in the tale: "Its peculiarities exercised upon her a positive fascination. Nevertheless, when that outlandish bird, attacked by the cat, shrieked for help in human accents, she ran out into the yard stopping her ears, and did not prevent the crime" (p. 74). Her fearful withdrawal on this occasion and later, when asked by Yanko for water, is only partially explained by the doctor's statement that she
was of kind heart, but "when sharply spoken to, she was apt to lose her head at once" (p. 74). Like many of Conrad's women, she is non-directive, vague in temperament, and the very sudden directness of the parrot's and Yanko's appeal for help may be the cause of her complete betrayal of them, so out of character with her evident compassion. A general elusive vagueness in her appearance is the quality which Dr. Kennedy first noted about her during a professional call on her employer's wife:

"I attended Mrs. Smith, the tenant's wife, and saw that girl there for the first time. . . . I don't know what induced me to notice her at all. There are faces that call your attention by a curious want of definitiveness in their whole aspect, as, walking in a mist, you peer attentively at a vague shape which, after all, may be nothing more curious or strange than a signpost." (pp. 160-161)

Her "want of definiteness" is not only visual; her speech, unlike Yanko's fluent and musical voice, is marred by "a slight hesitation in her utterance, a sort of preliminary stammer which passes away with the first word" (p. 161). She is also short-sighted. In her vagueness of character, aspect, and speech she is linked to the earth, to the Colebrook countryside of leaden skies, mists, and fogs reminiscent of the Breton atmosphere in "The Idiots." She is suggestive of the earth, of a general natural force, in her tenderness "to every living creature"—she is devoted to the pets of the family she serves, weeps over a mouse in a trap and "had been seen once by some boys on her knees in wet grass helping a toad in difficulties" (p. 162). Also like the earth, she is passive, and Dr. Kennedy finds in her mind
a certain inertness mysteriously contradicted for a time by her surprising imagination. She is furthermore linked to the earth in her dominant colors: her hands and face are red, "not with a mantling blush, but as if her flat cheeks had been vigorously slapped!" (p. 73). Her eyes are dull brown, contrasting with Yanko's quick, black and white glance, and her hair is dusty brown. The same colors of brown and red are prominent in one of the most evocative of Conrad's descriptions of the land in this story:

The rim of the sun, all red in a speckless sky, touched familiarly the smooth top of a ploughed rise near the road as I had seen it time innumerable touch the distant horizon of the sea. The uniform brownness of the harrowed field glowed with a rose tinge, as though the powdered clods had sweated out in minute pearls of blood the toil of uncounted ploughmen. (p. 160)

Amy becomes for Yanko, in the story's climax, what the dull and misty Colebrook region has been for him and what the female characters at certain points in other Conrad tales represent to the male characters: a harrowing vision of total emptiness of meaning. The scene in which this occurs is a representation of man attempting to relate to a void universe. She meets Yanko's request for a drink of water with a silence and immobility echoing the blank neutrality which his soul, so desirous of meaning, of response, cannot tolerate. She is the epitome of a barren, empty, and unresponsive world. In the course of the story she has passed through the typical sequence of valences through which many of Conrad's female characters progress in different tales--from a promising symbol of ideal meaning to a tormenting mixture of meaning and non-meaning, to a final vision of
nothingness. His last utterance, "Why?" indicates his ultimate domination by the Incomprehensible.

At the end of the tale she is again identified with the earth that endures without meaning or response. Kennedy remarks that Amy never speaks of Yanko now. She merges with the Colebrook fields as an epitome of man's blank environment:

Not a word of him. Never. Is his image as utterly gone from her mind as his lithe and striding figure, his caroling voice are gone from our fields? He is no longer before her eyes to excite her imagination into a passion of love or fear; and his memory seems to have vanished from her dull brain as a shadow passes away upon a white screen. (p. 213)

"Amy Foster" is a more profound work than either "The Brute" or "The Idiots." It is the pathetic story of an imaginative man's hopeless struggle to find meaning in a universe of unsteady, wavering and stifled meaning. It tells how his fellow men, who have capitulated to a meaningless world and become as dead, isolate and hinder him; it tells of his momentary discovery of meaning in a woman who, like the cosmos, is unsteadily meaningful, shifting between meaning and emptiness; of her betrayal of him by becoming "blank" and unresponsive, and of his subsequent suffering and death through deprivation of meaning. This story concerns the incomprehensibility of the cosmos more directly than does "The Idiots," for Jean-Pierre's suffering comes not only from his failure to understand the arbitrary consistency of begetting four idiots, but also from the very physical affliction itself. Yanko suffers directly from a failure to make sense of the visible world, to understand the unintelligible, drab,
effaced, misty, and meaningless Colebrook landscape and the strange failure of its inhabitants to expect meaning. He is not, like Jean-Pierre Bacadou, faced with the choice between atheism and theism, between two possible interpretations of the cosmos; instead he is faced by the problem of discovering or imposing any meaning at all. Of course this epistemological or metaphysical problem is practically non-existent for the protagonist in the less profound story, "The Brute"—he is neither fooled in his interpretation as is Bacadou, nor ultimately powerless to wrest any interpretation at all from a meaningless matter, as is Yanko, but simply outmanoeuvered by an only slightly doubtful malevolent will.

There are certain similarities between this story and "The Idiots": both link the vagueness, indefiniteness, non-directiveness, and uncertain, wavering quality of the earth, or the entity which informs it, with the female characters, and in each story the linking is subtle and suggestive rather than overt. Both tales deal with primitive, unintellectual characters, and in both the female characters tend to be especially irrational and animalistic. Amy's ease in communicating with animals recalls the linkage between Susan Bacadou and the pigs, that between the hens and the hired girls, and that between Mme. Levaille and the fecund force of Nature as a whole. Amy's inconsistency, however, links her more closely than these other female characters with a cosmos which wavers, as man scrutinizes it, between meaning and non-meaning. She is also linked with this cosmos by becoming, for Yanko, the one meaningful and orienting element
in an otherwise meaningless world. The female characters in the tales discussed previously do not take on this function, but in the story to be treated next in this chapter, and in others of Conrad's tales, they do so.

As a treatment of the same theme expressed in "The Idiots," "Amy Foster" offers an interesting variation in the respective roles of the male and female characters. The basic contrast between Yanko's and Amy's temperaments and views of life is not the same contrast between rationality and irrationality which was the key to the antagonism between Jean-Pierre Bacadou and his wife and mother-in-law. Both Amy Foster and Yanko are nonrational primitives; the meaning in the universe which Yanko sees and by which he lives is marked by mystery, by faith; in this sense it is not antagonistic to Amy's irrationality and non-directiveness. Both Amy and Yanko are connected or identified with nature, with the cosmos; Amy is identified with the earth, but Yanko himself is described as a woodland creature, and he certainly lacks the factual, aggressive and direct approach of Jean-Pierre Bacadou and his double Millot to the mysteries of life. Nevertheless, for all the mystical overtones and non-rationality of Yanko's primitive Christianity, it is a process for rescuing the hidden and obscure meaning of life, which is initially submerged in hard facts. Yanko's view makes meaning external and explicit. In "Amy Foster" the difference between the male and female characters' worldviews is less obvious, but woman is nonetheless identified with a more lethargic, barren, and vacuous universe than is man.
Or perhaps the more meaningful world of Yanko is a subjective imposition which alters and therefore falls short of the true nature of the objective world, which may be, for the extreme skeptic, empty and void of human meaning. If the skeptic is right, it is the male character in this tale who is the less realistic and, contrary to Marlow's charge that women are idealistic, it is the female character who can stand to live with truth.

The character of Amy Foster is treated with perhaps less ambivalence than that of Mme. Levaille, but it would be difficult to consider the narrator's or Conrad's attitude toward Amy as simple misogyny. As in "The Brute" and "The Idiots," the attitude toward woman here cannot be considered an attitude toward woman or sex per se. Instead it is bound up inextricably with an attitude toward the cosmos. As in "The Idiots," there are male characters in this story who might seem as worthy of censure as the female characters—the men who imprison Yanko as a madman and who throw him out of the Colebrook pub because he sings fiery songs show the same dullness, the same rejection of meaning, the same preference for drabness and the same inhumanity of which Amy is guilty. She transcends the general dull and plodding temperament of her people—if only momentarily—and achieves an act of imagination. It may be that she is more guilty than the others who merely reject Yanko, since, by her wavering from dullness to imaginative insight and back to her former dullness, she betrays him. Yet the tale does not seem to condemn her any more than it condemns the landscape for being
unmeaningful for a castaway from the Eastern Carpathian mountains. She shares something of the sympathy which Conrad shows toward the guiltlessly unprofound Mme. Levaille--although only to a small degree, because Amy does not suffer--not even enough to weep with the brevity and meaninglessness of a summer shower. The image of Yanko is evidently, as Dr. Kennedy supposes, "as utterly gone from her mind as his lithe and striding figure, his carolling voice are gone from our fields" (p. 213).

"Amy Foster" is the first tale here discussed which treats the contrast between imagination and realism and which sees physical immobility as a symbol of spiritual vacuity and death, and as the result of disillusionment, of the discovery of the total absence of meaning in the universe. Incidentally, it gives a more negative valuation of the sea than is common in Conrad. In its treatment of the contrast between imagination and realism it suggests the large Conradian question of "dream," which figures prominently in Lord Jim and elsewhere, and in its preoccupation with immobility it has ties with "The Lagoon" which will be clarified by the following analysis.

It is also the first of the tales thus far analyzed in this study in which human interpretations, values, ways of seeing, when juxtaposed with the meaningless and void physical world (as Yanko's expectancy of meaning is here brought in contact with the Colebrook landscape and the boundless sea), become illusory. Jean-Pierre Bacadou vacillated between two opposing meanings for the vague cosmos, but Yanko
experiences the total lack of meaning in a glimpse of the bare and neutral stuff of reality. This confrontation and the subsequent vanishing of "illusions" is still more central in "The Lagoon."

"The Lagoon," the final story in Tales of Unrest, has been criticized and parodied for pretentious and amateurish overwriting and for cheap exoticism; for "patches of adjec­tival prose, heavy with images of writhing plant life, and straining mightily to express the 'unspeakable' and the 'impalpable.'"7 These descriptions of the jungle, in their paranoid vision of a hidden and menacing will, are said to be not only "bad writing," but also "markedly subjective and compulsive" writing. "And there is nothing in the story itself to occasion" such compulsive and subjective outpouring (Guerard, p. 67; italics in original). It seems that Conrad erred through an uncertainty of purpose. The tale, says Guerard, is a haphazard and unwitting mixture of "symbolist prose-poem, story of crime and punishment, and local color story" (p. 67).

But it appears that "The Lagoon is not merely a failure. At the hands of ingenious commentators it has not escaped the task of exemplifying "the misogynous pattern" which is said to run through most of Conrad's fiction--(Guerard, p. 66)--the pattern here evidently being indicated by Diameleen's role in leading Arsat to betray his brother.

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According to one critic the immobility of the jungle in the first several paragraphs represents the moral destruction that results from Arsat's love for Diamelen, for when she dies "the setting changes dramatically to suggest the possibility of redemption" (Moser, p. 70). Furthermore, this misogyny is simply one expression of the dark underworld of Conrad's tormented psyche, which is here shadowed forth in his description of the vegetation surrounding Arsat's lagoon: "Powerful but ambiguous sexual feelings clearly lurk beneath the surface of the prose" (Moser, pp. 51-52).

A more sympathetic approach to the tale views it as a weak adumbration of a subject and a style which were to become later identified as the essential Conradian theme and manner. Thus the repetition, the lengthened syntax, the numerous and "post-positioned" adjectives, the preoccupation with contrasts of light and dark found here will become, when chastened, the ingredients for the basic Conradian rhetoric, the "magic suggestiveness" admired even by such champions of the plain style as Ernest Hemingway. Also, the white man who here rather indifferently listens to Arsat's tale will later become a conscious and "intimate author-projection," a Marlovian first-person narrator who hears ambivalently a brother's confession of his impulsive betrayal of trust, partially sharing, partially condemning his guilt. Furthermore, Arsat's impulsive act of betrayal is later to become "the essential Conradian crime" (Guerard, pp. 66-67)—the Conradian subject par excellence, the theme that reaches its culmination in *Lord Jim*, "The Secret Sharer," *Under*
Western Eyes, and other masterpieces.

I feel that these three views of this tale—(1) as a stylistic failure, (2) as a revelation of "the misogynous pattern" fraught with neurotic sexual feelings, and (3) as an adumbration of the later developed story of impulsive betrayal and guilt—must be modified or corrected by a clarification of the story's theme. The "subjective and compulsive" passages describing the jungle, contrary to Guerard's charge, are not completely purposeless and unjustified; nor are the descriptive passages, for Conrad's purpose, too long, too heavy with adjectives, or elaborate simply for the sake of elaboration; nor are they unwitting revelations of a neurotic attitude toward sex. The wavering "paranoia" apparent in the jungle-descriptions has nothing to do with sex. These visions or interpretations of the jungle, waver- ing as they do between a fear of hidden malevolence and a recognition of indifference, are relevant instead to the avowed subject of the tale: the phenomenon of illusion. Furthermore, the main concern of "The Lagoon" is not with Arsat as the typical Conradian hero—a Lord Jim who must redeem an impulsive act of betrayal. If this were true the elaborate description of setting would be merely a frame, and an arbitrary and clumsy frame, for Arsat's confession, and the tale's structure would be indeed amateurishly over-elaborate and top-heavy.

Although "The Lagoon" may be incidentally interesting as an early analog to "The Secret Sharer" and Lord Jim, its emphasis is not on an act of quasi-moral status, but on the
vague and painfully shifting human vision of things which is prior to action and a more basic act of the soul than is overt action. The final sentence of the story establishes its theme: "He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions." (p. 204). Conrad's main concern in this tale is with the nature of "illusions"—with man's elusive and pathetically inadequate awareness of reality—of life—a theme prominent in the works analyzed on preceding pages of this study.

The "illusions" mentioned in the last sentence of the story are the human purposes around which Arsat, as any other human being, has structured his life. The basic dichotomy of Arsat's life is made clear by his story. Through a tropical night of mists and occasional forest-stirring breezes, while his wife lies dying in their hut, Arsat tells his story to the white traveler who spends the night on his porch. The taciturn white Tuan hears how Arsat and his brother, two fierce Malay warriors, have fought a war to secure their Ruler's throne and have subsequently been made his sword bearers. But soon after peace is restored to their kingdom, Arsat becomes enamored of a servant girl, Diamelen, belonging to a formidable female potentate whom their Ruler is afraid to offend. Arsat decides to put aside loyalty for 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 and strength and courage" (p. 196). Guided by his brother, they steal the willing Diamelen while
the Rajahs and their people are distracted by a crowded and festive nocturnal fishing party. They have almost reached safety in their canoe when they are apprehended, while resting on a beach, by a prau full of the Rajah's men. Arsat's brother tells the lovers to flee across the narrow cape to where a canoe is waiting. As long as his gunpowder will suffice, he is to hold off the pursuers, who have no firearms, then rejoin Arsat and Diamelen. The lovers reach the canoe as Arsat's brother comes into sight, running toward them, pursued by many men. He falls, but soon recovers, shouting "I am coming!" Arsat, seeing the number of his pursuers, pushes the canoe into deep water, urges Diamelen, and paddles away, never turning his head, while his brother screams his name at the moment of death. Diamelen dies soon after the tale is done, and dawn comes on the lagoon. The white man offers to take Arsat with him up the river in his boat, but Arsat replies:

"No, Tuan. . . . I shall not eat or sleep in this house, but I must first see my road. Now I can see nothing--see nothing! There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death--death for many. We are sons of the same mother--and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now. . . . In a little while I shall see clear enough to strike--to strike. But she has died, and . . . now . . . darkness." (pp. 203-204; all but last two ellipses are mine.)

The "illusions" which Arsat is left contemplating at the end of the tale are visions or interpretations of life which for him had made the world intelligible. They are two: one is the purpose which formerly directed and oriented his life: his love for Diamelen, for which he betrayed his brother. Now after his lover's death he returns, or attempts
to return, to his previous "illusion": loyalty to his broth-
er, or now rather to his brother's memory, which requires
vengeance against his slayers. It is essential to note that,
according to the tale, both of these orientations—not merely
the love of Diamel— are illusory. Arsat is not emerging
from the darkness of an infatuation for a woman which has
deprived him temporarily of his true, proper, and steady
vision of life. Both the love for Diamel and the loyalty
to his brother which that love overthrew are mere "illusions."
The darkness of a world of "illusions" into which Arsat
stares, oblivious of "the great light of a cloudless day,"
embraces not only the love of the woman now dead but also
the loyalty to the brother betrayed.

There is nothing in the story to suggest that Arsat's
relationship with Diamel has been disappointing or disil-
usioning from the time of their first coming to dwell beside
the lagoon until this moment when she lies dying. Arsat's
love for her, nevertheless, is an illusion— by virtue of its
subjectivity and transience— when she dies, it loses its
efficacy as the central motif around which the man's life is
oriented. But there is nothing inherent in it as a love
relationship or a sexual relationship which gives it this
illusory quality. Arsat's loyalty to his brother has proved
itself to be equally transient. His love for Diamel is
neither more nor less illusory than any other human feeling
or activity. There are many juxtapositions in this tale of
ephemeral human meaning and the spectacle of objective,
physical nature. All of them indicate not that love per se
is illusory, but that all human meanings are illusory.

Arsat's love for Diamelen is equally as strong and valid an "illusion" as his loyalty to his brother, and it remains so until her death, when the old "illusion" naturally exerts its force. Arsat is the epitome of a mankind which must placidly submit to the pathetic human limitation of being able to discern and follow only one of life's equally intense, valid, and at times contradictory "illusions" at once. And he must accept not only the anguish of contradicting "illusions" but also the emptiness and immobility, the motivational vacuum, the hollowness of heart which results from the total deprivation of "illusions" which he suffers, between the death of one "illusion" and the rebirth of another.

To ask why Conrad would consider all of the motivating purposes of human life "illusions" is to raise unanswerable questions about the development of his skeptical and pessimistic temperament and of the worldview by which he saw much of human life as futile. But skeptical and pessimistic he was, judging from the evidence of his other fiction, his letters, and the testimony of friends and relatives. Nevertheless, the most conclusive evidence that a writer held his beliefs tenaciously in actual life does not make these beliefs plausible as the theme of a piece of fiction. A work of art is not justified merely by the truth or the consistency of the artist's beliefs. It is in the experience of Arsat here related and in the accompanying recurrent shifts of the tale's vision back and forth between the aspect of
the jungle and the tale of Arsat that these human orientations, valuations, or meanings seem illusory, ephemeral. This short story succeeds in giving imaginative and convincing "life" to the philosophical idea that human meanings are hopelessly unrelated to "the great light of a cloudless day."
The ironic coincidence of the moment of Diamelen's death with the moment of dawn is one indication of the separation of human meanings from the reality of the cosmos (although Professor Moser quotes the same paragraph as an indication rather of the misogynous content of the tale):

"She burns no more."
Before his face the sun showed its edge above the treetops rising steadily. 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. In the merciless sunshine the whisper of unconscious life grew louder, speaking in an incomprehensible voice round the dumb darkness of that human sorrow. (p. 203)

Conrad's concentration on the mobility or immobility in the jungle which he describes in the opening paragraphs relates to the matter of a universe which is half-responsive, half-indifferent to human meaning. The opening descriptions of the frozen, immobile jungle do not indicate, as Moser believes, the moral destruction of Arsat through his sexual relation with Diamelen. In a sense they foreshadow the vanishing of "illusion" and the loss of mobility which follows this loss of meaning, but they do so quite unsympathetically to the human content in Arsat's tale. Note that the virtual immobility of the jungle is the backdrop to Arsat's narrative of adventurous human activity, in which "illusions" inspire
the fiery acts of rebellion, abduction, manslaughter, betrayal. Except for the occasional "sigh" of a breeze among leaves and a wayward slap of water against the piles of Arsat's hut, the cosmos is silent during the re-living of Arsat's painful conflict between powerful "illusions"--a conflict in which one value is deserted and betrayed for the sake of another. The jungle becomes mobile and loudly rustling, almost animate, when Diamelen dies and an "illusion" vanishes, leaving a void in which the heart is uninspired and man is immobile. The obvious meaning is the isolation of human values and meanings from the phenomenal universe--from reality. Arsat (with his human meanings or "illusions") and the jungle are diametrically opposite in their fluctuations, precisely unattuned to one another. Before the tale is begun, Arsat and the white man, sitting on the porch of the hut in the night, face an emphatically empty and lonely universe void of human meaning. The voices of the Malay boatmen gradually die out from the traveler's sampan floating on the lagoon: "It was as though there had been nothing left in the world but the glitter of stars streaming, ceaseless and vain, through the black stillness of the night" (p. 193).

But for the reader of "The Lagoon" the strongest "proof" of the illusory nature of human meanings and values is in the convincing and empathetic immobility of Arsat in the last scene. He stands completely immobile, caught in a spell of painful and restless lethargy. His immobility has nothing to do with sex. Instead it is the basic quality of
his "disillusionment"—his soul is helplessly empty between the passing of one "illusion" and the return of another. The pathetic malaise of Arsat is the most remarkable achievement of "The Lagoon." It is entirely convincing and empathetic to the reader, and it is the picture of man tragically conscious of the universe which so often fascinated Conrad. In this story it is the end effect for which all the preceding description of gloomy setting and the romantic narrative of exotic Malayan adventure are preparation. Arsat, like the other male central characters in the stories here previously analyzed, experiences a vision of nothingness, ironically accompanied by intense physical illumination. Staring at the rising sun, he murmurs, "I can see nothing" (p. 203). His present blindness is an example of the dependence of mankind on such "illusions" as love and loyalty. Arsat, scarcely conscious of the full meaning of his "disillusionment," has learned that the human vision of meaning lacks the objectivity and constancy which it seems to possess—that human meaning is ephemeral when compared to the indifferent cosmos. He has learned also that human meanings are illusory in that they are at times mutually contradictory, antagonistic: his love for Diamel, so strong that it seemed to promise to lead him to a country without death, led him to betray his brother, a son of his own mother, a part of himself. Dramatized in the exotic adventure of Arsat is the tragically meaningless and arbitrary shift within the human soul from one "illusion" to another. Worldviews, traditional orientations, ways of seeing, crumble
awesomely without intelligible causes—voices of former friends somehow amazingly become voices of enemies as Arsat with his brother and Diamelen flee past the coast in the darkness close by the place where their countrymen are comparing their catch after the fishing party. Arsat is incredibly able to watch his brother pursued by enemies and rushing to join him in the canoe, and to push the craft into deep water. He later describes the action to his listener as if it were someone else's behavior. Both the origin and the passing of "illusions," whose truth and validity seem self-evident, are incredible, inscrutable, incomprehensible. At the beginning of his confession, Arsat says to the white man: "I always remembered you, Tuan, till the time came when my eyes could see nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the one who is dying there—in the house" (p. 195).

It is this consciousness of the ephemerality of his "illusions," and a vague awareness of the arbitrariness of the changes, within his soul, of one "illusion" for another, which cause Arsat's immobility. His immobility is also due to his mere half-awareness of the fact that these "illusions" lack the external objectivity of the phenomenal universe. Like Jean-Pierre Bacadou, or Madame Levaille, Arsat becomes a pathetic character because, not only are the shifts from one "illusion" to another arbitrary, but furthermore, he lacks the perceptivity to be more than vaguely aware that the meaningless and shifting pattern of man's vision of the universe is somehow wrong, somehow not as it should be. He meets this harrowing experience—this discovery that his
goals are ephemeral and his inherent way of organizing the cosmos is arbitrary and inadequate—with the simple whispered exclamation: "O Mara bahia! O Calamity!" (p. 195)

If the main concern of "The Lagoon" is, as I believe, with the phenomenon of "illusions," then the passages in which the white man sees the jungle very subjectively—at times, as Guerard has it, almost with a paranoid's vision—are justifiable and are in fact occasioned by the theme of the tale. It is necessary to note that not all of the subjective descriptions are the author's view of the jungle: many represent the white traveler's vision and are therefore not open to the charge of authorial subjectivism. The following passage is clearly not the author's self-indulgent, nightmarish picture of the setting. This and other passages in which the jungle seems to waver in its meaning are the musings of the character of the white Tuan:

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death—of death near, unavoidable, and unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. 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. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears. (pp. 193-194)

This is the typical Conradian vision of an ambivalent universe wavering and fluctuating between symbol and emptiness, between meaning and non-meaning. As the white man muses,
the spectacle of the jungle fluctuates:

A plaintive murmur arose in the night, a murmur sudden and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air around him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences. (p. 194)

But the sound is not, as the slumbering white man thought, the murmur of wind in the forest, but the voice of Arsat beginning his tale. Human meaning and the objective, exterior world in both these passages are being confused, one imposed upon the other. There is a counterpoint throughout the tale by which human meaning and meaningless nature seem now to merge and now to separate. At one point before telling of his betrayal of his brother, Arsat pauses to praise that brother's courage and strength, and from the silent land comes a gust of warm air—almost a conscious response of stifled remorse and foreboding "--a breath loud and short like an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth" (p. 199). But for the most of Arsat's stirring tale of human desire and ferocity the jungle is immobile and indifferent; it becomes freshened, animate, mobile only with the dawn, when Diamelen dies and Arsat slips into the immobility of a man whose "illusions" have darkened and disappeared.

The white man's imposition on the jungle of his vision of strife between good and evil is another manifestation of the inadequate and unstable and ephemeral "illusions" by which human beings live and which, by their arbitrary shiftings, cause the suffering of Arsat. Even the Malay boatmen's
superstitious view of Arsat and their white Tuan constitutes a manifestation of the same human propensity:

They would have preferred to spend the night somewhere else than on this lagoon of weird aspect and ghostly reputation. Moreover, they disliked Arsat, first as a stranger, and also because he who repairs a ruined house, and dwells in it, proclaims that he is not afraid to live amongst the spirits that haunt the places abandoned by mankind. Such a man can disturb the course of fate by glances or words; while his familiar ghosts are not easy to propitiate by casual wayfarers upon whom they long to wreak the malice of their human master. White men care not for such things, being unbelievers and in league with the Father of Evil, who leads them unharmed through the invisible dangers of this world. To the warnings of the righteous they oppose an offensive pretence of disbelief. What is there to be done? (pp. 189-190)

Their superstitious assessment of Arsat is shown in the course of the story to have unexpected truth in it; Arsat (as well as any other human being—even the boatmen themselves) is necessarily the victim and the accomplice and master of immaterial entities which are ultimately separate from the visible universe—the "illusions" by which human life is directed and given a sense of purpose. In the final scene of the tale, however, Arsat is tormented not by "illusions" but by their departure, which leaves a valueless, bare, and dark universe—a world in which immobility is man's plight.

Diamelen is the least developed of any of the women characters in the stories analyzed so far in this study. Arsat's tale is a simple story, and Diamelen as she appears there is no more than a shadowy symbol of woman or a stock Oriental damsel in a tale of lovers who dare to flout the obstacles to their union. Her role during the telling of
the tale is simply to die. It may be that the character Diamelen is purposefully left shadowy and unsubstantial by Conrad in order to underline his connection of her with all that is ambiguous in the external universe and unsubstantial in human "illusions." Arsat's perception of her during the early stage of his love and during his flight by canoe with her, is usually fragmentary, obstructed, vague and hazy, and its vagueness is carefully and explicitly emphasized. When she runs to him to be carried away in the night she speaks no word, but carrying her, he feels her heart beat against his breast (p. 197). In the canoe she sits behind Arsat with her face covered, but he can hear her breathing. During their long and arduous race the lovers exchange words only once; when Arsat tells Diamelen to sleep and save her strength, he hears only "the sweetness of her voice" but not the words of her response, and he does not turn to look at her (p. 198). To Arsat as well as to the reader, she remains only partially revealed, just as the forest only intermittently seems significant of human meaning. Like other women characters in Conrad's fiction she is a mixture of revelation and evasive obscurity. The most animated image of Diamelen in the entire tale is the provocative one which remains in the white man's memory: "The long-haired woman with audacious face and triumphant eyes" (p. 192).

Nevertheless, despite her vagueness, or because of it, Diamelen becomes for Arsat the one meaningful object in the universe, just as Amy Foster does for Yanko: "My eyes could see nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the
one who is dying there—in the house" (p. 195). Like Yanko, who is possessed by the idea that his wife holds the secret of life, Arsat, in the intensity of his love, believes that with Diamelen he can find a country where death is unknown. Arsat's identification of Diamelen with a dream of life in its greatest intensity, in its eternal freedom from death, constitutes the same ethereal and unsubstantial vision of woman as Yanko received—and Arsat experiences the same subsequent disillusionment and vision of nothingness, although Arsat's disillusionment is caused by Diamelen's death rather than by some change in her character. Diamelen is thus connected or identified with life itself, which, Arsat discovers, is made up of illusion. Seeming to promise a life in which death will be forgotten, Diamelen herself dies. She is the epitome of the disillusionment which is the end of all man's hope, of all man's search for meaning, for life intense and purified of the fear of death. She epitomizes all the worldviews, the basic assumptions and orientations, which seem so objective and which it is merely human to take for granted.

The flight of an eagle, described just prior to the moment when Arsat reports Diamelen's death, may be a symbol of the progress of human "illusions." Just after the rising of the sun:

The unveiled lagoon lay, polished and black, in the heavy shadows at the foot of the wall of trees. A white eagle rose over it with a slanting and ponderous flight, reached the clear sunshine and appeared dazzlingly brilliant for a moment, then soaring higher, became a dark and motionless speck before it vanished into the blue as if it had left the earth forever. (p. 202)
Thus human "illusions" pass through momentary mobility and illumination to immobility, darkness and ultimate nothingness.

When the white traveler arrives at Arsat's hut, Diamelen is burning with fever and unconscious. She is oblivious of Arsat's attempts to get her attention, and in this unreachable, irresponsive, incommunicative state she recalls the oblivious and incommunicative Amy Foster, or, the deluded and hallucinating and therefore unreachable Susan Bacadou. The narrator's description of Diamelen emphasizes her mixture of seeming consciousness with total unconsciousness. She shows the same indefiniteness, the same wavering between animation and vacancy and emptiness of soul that was noted in Madame Levaille and Amy Foster:

She lay still, as if dead; but her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom, staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. She was in a high fever, and evidently unconscious. Her cheeks were sunk slightly, her lips partly open, and on the young face there was the ominous and fixed expression—the absorbed, contemplating expression of the unconscious who are going to die. (p. 191)

Unconscious, yet seeming to contemplate, with staring but unseeing eyes, Diamelen in the hours before her death, just before meaning forever departs from the dream or "illusion" which she represents for Arsat, resembles the ominous jungle, at which the white man peers in its tormenting mixture of meaning and non-meaning, of obvious indifference and subdued responsiveness.

Thus, although Diamelen is the epitome of Arsat's "illusion" or dream of life and peace, the representation of
ephemeral human meaning, as opposed to the actual and objective cosmos empty of human meaning, she is also connected with the natural world (for that natural world is never quite free of hints and glimmers of human significance or apparent responses to human meaning). Twice she is connected symbolically with the ambiguously suggestive vegetation in this tale—each time very subtly and perhaps casually. When she deserts the tents of her mistress and under cover of darkness runs to meet Arsat and his brother as they hide in the shadows, ready to receive her, in the poetic oriental speech of Arsat: "She came running along the shore, rapid and leaving no trace, like a leaf driven by the wind into the sea" (p. 197). Her action in coming to Arsat, even the nature of her love itself, thus becomes questionable, hazy, ambiguous, like the vegetation to which she is compared. Is there human meaning in her action? Diamelen is taciturn throughout the story. The question is identified with the larger question raised by the white man's contemplations: is there human meaning in the cosmos? Once again Diamelen, or Arsat's perception of her, is identified with the ambiguous vegetation. Arsat tells of the early days of their love:

I loitered on the path to the bath-houses in the daytime, and when the sun had fallen behind the forest I crept along the jasmine hedges of the women's courtyard. Unseeing, we spoke to one another through the scent of flowers, through the veil of leaves, through the blades of long grass that stood still before our lips; so great was our prudence, so faint was the murmur of our great longing. (p. 196)

The murmur of their great longing passes through the dense hedge, just as from time to time during Arsat's tale,
evocative sighs and murmurs glide through the leafy stillness surrounding the hut—sighs of sympathetic response to human meaning—or murmurs of absolute indifference; just as, earlier in the tale:

Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests. (p. 189)

The character of Diamelen, then, is constantly and consciously screened, obscured, blurred, so as to merge with the inscrutable phenomenon of nature. Incidentally, the only other woman given more than casual mention in the tale is Inchi Midah, evidently a female potentate who held some subtle kind of power over Si Dendring, Arsat's Ruler. It is significant that the epithet by which Arsat refers to her—"the lady with the veiled face" (p. 195)—indicates an ominous obscurity.

Diamelen is thus identified throughout the tale both with the spectacle of nature, which is always only imperfectly perceived and incessantly wavering between indifference and human meaning, and with mankind's "illusions," which are equally ambiguous and, to man's eternal sorrow, inconsistent.

The connection between Arsat's immobility and his relationship with Diamelen calls for closer scrutiny, since some readers have felt that Diamelen herself is the direct cause of the hero's immobility and have found in this tale an example of Conrad's supposed hatred and fear of woman as a threat to masculine aggressiveness, valor, and honor. It
is clear that when Arsat takes Diameleen he chooses a new way of life—a new human meaning or "illusion"—and deserts the old. Before his enamorment with Diameleen his main interest was war: "You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life!" (p. 194) He continually refers to himself and his brother as men of a fierce race who take what they want. In this old way of life a kind of recklessness, almost fatalistic, is central. Arsat, it seems, was once as reckless as his brother, who now gently taunts Arsat for his refusal to shout defiance as they steal Diameleen away in their canoe: "There is half a man in you now—the other half is in that woman" (p. 198). Instructing Arsat to flee with Diameleen while he holds back the enemy, he says, "I will hold out as long as I can, for she is but a woman—that can neither run nor fight, but she has your heart in her weak hands" (p. 200). These remarks may be the source for some readers' belief that the tale is basically misogynous. It would seem from an isolated consideration of these statements that Diameleen's effect on Arsat is, as Moser believes, to make him cowardly. But Arsat himself seems to feel that his new dream of life requires a kind of courage, but a courage strongly different from the courage of battle. Thus Arsat, telling of his betrayal of his brother, claims for himself a type of courage even in the moment when he leaves his brother helpless to die alone and flees with a woman:

I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice—and I never turned my head. My own
name! . . . My brother! Three times he called—but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? (p. 201)

Arsat's words here suggest that in the emotional intensity of his moment of betrayal he saw that at the center of his old way of living—a paradoxical search for life (passion, exhilaration, ecstasy, excitement) in the jaws of death—there lies a basic fear of life. Arsat's choice of Diamelen over his brother is a choice of peace rather than war, of rest and being rather than activity or doing, and of life or happiness pursued openly and directly rather than indirectly and covertly through a fatalistic abandon of oneself to the chances of war.

Arsat's life with Diamelen on the lagoon has been a life of relative inactivity; it is not a period of striving for success but one of the enjoyment of success achieved. It involves being rather than doing. The contrast between doing and being seems for Conrad to have been one of the basic distinctions between masculinity and femininity. In a letter to Edward Garnett explaining the motivation of the characters of Willems and Aïssa in An Outcast of the Islands, he wrote of Aïssa:

There is in her that desire to be something for him—to be in his mind, in his heart—to shelter him in her affection—her woman's affection which is simply the ambition to be an important factor in another's life. They both long to have a significance in the order of nature or of society. To me they are typical of mankind where every individual wishes to assert his power, woman by sentiment, man by achievement of some sort—mostly base. (Letters from Joseph Conrad: 1895-1924, p. 42)

The question of Diamelen's effect on Arsat, of her meaning for Arsat, is related to the question of the relative
value of activity and rest, of war and peace. Arsat's de-
scription of the period of peace in Si Dendring's kingdom at
the time when he fell in love with Diamelen indicates his
ambivalence toward peace—a time when traders and farmers
prosper, "a time of deer-hunts and cock-fights; of idle
talks and foolish squabbles between men whose bellies are
full and weapons are rusty" (p. 195). The relative values
of rest and activity were likewise ambiguous to Conrad.
Marlow in Heart of Darkness holds that action, work, is the
only way of knowing oneself, that it is valuable not for its
static result, its accomplishment, but only for this self-
knowledge, and that such self-knowledge is all that life
offers. But for Stein in Lord Jim, man's incessant mobility
is both the essence of his humanity and the root of his pre-
dicament: "We want in so many different ways to be. . .
This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and
sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud
keep still."

Perhaps the truth is that Conrad did not believe man
capable of attaining happiness through being but only through
doing, through action. But he knew that the happiness which
derives from mere being is an eternal dream of man. He knew
that human life per se is inconceivable without this aspira-
tion, that every man must decide to follow it or control it
or suppress it. I do not feel that his stories and novels
express a complete rejection of this dream or of woman, with
whom this dream is often associated in his fiction. To Con-
rad the human propensity to desire happiness through rest
and being, and to value finality and stasis and the end result of action rather than action for its own sake, was a basic and fascinating element in human nature.

Arsat's ambivalence about peace, and the story's basic ambivalence about the dream of happiness through stasis, is not a precisely balanced ambivalence, but it is an ambivalence. Both of the ways of life between which Arsat oscillates are illusory, and are based on contradictions or paradoxes. Both ways end in death and are ephemeral, marked by the instability of all human hopes. Either one's life—one's experience of meaning, passion, intensity—is in the moment of risking death recklessly, or one seeks life itself, directly, only to find that this way also is subject to the power of death and disillusion. Thus the story's attitude is ambivalence, not a pure hatred of peace. In turn, "The Lagoon" does not really show a hatred of woman or a fear of sex. Woman and love between the sexes (as opposed to brotherly loyalty) are the objects of ambivalent feeling, and in this lies the intensity, the strength, of the tale. To discount the value of the ambivalence about love, peace, "illusions" as the theme of the story, and to dismiss it as simple misogyny, as irrelevant to a consideration of the literary value of the tale—or relevant only as a supra-literary attitude of Conrad's which affects the story only by disturbing the author's psyche so traumatically as to interfere adversely with the creative process—is certainly a distortion.

No discussion of "The Lagoon" should remain silent on
the question of style, and although the present study is concerned mainly with clarifying the theme of the work, relating the story to several others of similar content, ascertaining the apparent intention of the author—and freeing him from certain unfair psychopathic diagnoses and certain charges of an amateurish uncertainty of purpose—the preceding interpretation of the subject of "The Lagoon" might justify some of the peculiarities of a style which has been rebuked by many critics and called by one: "the silliest and most narcissistic prose by any major writer in English."  

It is my opinion that the style of "The Lagoon" becomes inappropriate and objectionable only when the theme of the tale is mistakenly identified as the typical Conradian theme of betrayal and guilt and when the structurally central but thematically less crucial crime of Arsat is given more importance than the last scene of his immobility and "disillusionment," the first scene of a forest immobile but stirred by hints of mobility, and the several references, during the telling of Arsat's tale, to a forest which wavers between human responsiveness and thingish indifference. A style's justification lies in its appropriateness to the theme of the work which it expresses. The imagery and the diction in the descriptive passages of this story

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underline and give appropriate support to its meaning. The imagery will be considered first.

The reader of the opening paragraphs of "The Lagoon" finds something disturbing and oppressive in its atmosphere. This oppressiveness has been equated by one reader with the tension of sexual repression, but it has actually nothing to do with sex; there are other sources than sexual neurosis for feelings of oppression. The feeling that derives from these paragraphs is caused by the awareness of a universe which is ambiguous, which wavers between mere thing and conscious mind, just as did the landscapes in "The Idiots" and "Amy Foster." This wavering between consciousness and unconsciousness is here represented or symbolized by a picture of the forest as held in frozen immobility and silence, yet troubled in its emptiness by the subtlest suggestions, the faintest vestiges, of life, of motion, of stifled sound. Conrad has subdued but not eliminated all images of motion in the essentially immobile facade of this landscape. The disturbing contradiction inherent in the forest must remain subliminal. The very natures of motion and of stasis must be merged. Throughout the description the idea of motion must be kept present but made to appear illusory and futile. Thus the progress of the boat up the river is made illusory by the monotony of the terrain on the sides of the river; there are no landmarks by which an observer might get his bearings and become aware of movement. Despite the activity of the boatmen the boat seems to remain motionless. The regular rhythm of the eight paddles, which make only a single
splash, has a lulling, monotonous effect; the movement of the steering oar becomes not movement, but a static shape: "The steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semicircle above his head" (p. 187). The disturbance of the water by the canoe is "short-lived" (p. 187). As the white man leans lethargically on the roof of a small house placed aft in the boat, staring over the stern, his view is monotonously simple; the river runs in a perfectly straight line toward the sinking sun (p. 187), offering no interesting bend or variation for judging distance. Thus distance, along with motion, becomes illusory. After the boat has been toiling up the river, the closing sentence of the third paragraph robs it of the result of motion: the boat only then seems to enter the portals of the land (p. 188). "For the last three miles of its course," the river "flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east"--and the idea of direction as well becomes futile and illusory, for the river's destination is "the east that harbours both light and darkness" (p. 188).

The rhetorical peculiarities of these opening paragraphs constitute a definite technique which proved effective for Conrad's purpose. They create a melancholy world in which all things and motives seem futile, purposeless, illusory. The exhaustive detail of the imagery suggests that the reader is regarding the scene through the staring eyes of a brooding and lethargical observer. "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.

The "post-positioning" of adjectives (or the placing of them after the nouns they modify), which more than one reader has deplored, is vital to the slowing down of the prose, as is the monotonous repetition of similar grammatical constructions, such as the use of adjectives in pairs: "The forests, sombre and dull, stood motionless and silent. . . ."

The lengthened sentences have the same effect and skillfully delay the progress of the thought; one gains the actual meaning of the statements here only through a struggle against the obscuring rhetorical techniques and the rhythm of the prose. When the white man's boat turns to pass out of the river into Arsat's lagoon, a paragraph of five long sentences (142 words) is spent in enumerating the perceptual effects of this simple action--the gurgling of the water, the glow of the sunset cast on the side of the boat, the shadows of the crew on the water, etc. Especially important for the delaying and slowing down of the thought are the chains of incremental repetition in certain sentences: "For the last three miles of its course the wandering, hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon, flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east--to the east that harbours both light and darkness" (p. 188).

The illusory quality of the concept of motion (and of the related concepts of distance and direction) is vital to the theme of the story--in fact it is one expression or
concrete representation of that theme: all human aspiration, all human dream, all human meaning, are illusory, futile. The terrain of "The Lagoon" is not restfully void of motion; it is oppressed by the illusion of motion, and its facade of silence and stillness is subtly stirred by such isolated vestiges of motion and sound as "the brown swirl of eddies" (p. 187), by the water that "frothed alongside with a confused murmur" (p. 187), by "the short-lived disturbance" of the boat advancing upriver (p. 187). The idea that motion is illusory or futile is also strengthened by the unsubstantial, immaterial phenomenon of sound being here conceived as motion—and motion which is lethargic and haphazard: "the repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skipped along over the smooth water and lost itself, before it could reach the other shore, in the breathless silence of the world" (p. 188). The only motion is of such disembodied, unsubstantial things as sound, and is thus illusory.

The sixth paragraph of the tale, often quoted to exemplify the story's supposedly unjustified subjective and over-elaborate style, contains some of the tale's subtlest suggestion of the mixture of motion and immobility—and, by extension, of meaning and non-meaning—in the landscape. Here the faint hints of movement which disturb the facade of immobility are not such actual occurrences of motion as the movement of paddles, the swirl of waters, or the call of a bird, but are qualities of imagery, diction and figurative language:
The narrow creek was like a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and sombre walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests. (pp. 188-189)

This sixth paragraph develops to the highest degree the tension already established between the obvious immobility of the scene and the suggestion of mobility. Here the author eschews such direct statements as the sentence which ends the third paragraph: "And the white man's canoe, advancing upstream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had forever departed" (pp. 187-188)—or the sentence midway through that paragraph: "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" (p. 187). These two sentences are the most subjective statements not explicitly identified as representing the thoughts of the white man who observes the forest. They are apparently the private interpretations of the narrator which are given without any effort to convince the reader. They receive some support from the more objective descriptive details which surround them, but their diction—"portals of a land," "bewitched into . . . immobility"—belongs to the genre of
fantasy, and the passages in which they occur become, be-
cause of them, more lax and less intense.

The sixth paragraph achieves a greater sense of ten-
sion between immobility and obscure and subdued mobility by
relinquishing until its final sentence this kind of subjec-
tivism. Conrad's method here is to describe as motionless
those objects which would normally be expected to betray
some slight movement, but which miraculously do not; for
instance, "the festooned draperies of creepers," "the trac-
ery of small ferns," the "unstirring leaves" (pp. 188-189).
The diction is carefully selected so as to mix words denot-
ing types of motion—creepers, twisted, tangled, soared—
with words denoting stillness—dull, sombre, impenetrable.
The mixing becomes oxymoronic with the image of a root
"writhing and motionless," and the word "unstirring" is it-
self an example of motion negated; it suggests motion in the
very moment of denying it. The word "oozed" implies very
gradual, hardly perceptible motion.

Most important in this picture of static vegetation
are the still but curved, twisted, contorted shapes and the
infinitesimally fragmented forms, which suggest motion and
unrest. The result is a disturbingly paradoxical frozen
movement—a feeling of suppressed agitation. This curved
and contorted imagery contrasts with the dominant image of
the preceding passages—a simple and symmetrical scene of
the perfectly straight river bounded on both sides by monotonous jungle and shooting directly toward the sun. It there-
by serves to further separate this paragraph from the
preceding material and to make the paragraph a culmination and climax of the tension between immobility and mobility which, in a lower key, pervades the opening passages.

The tension of the paragraph is also echoed stylistically in the rigid rhythmic and rhetorical patterns of its sentences. The basic sentence pattern consists of two elements: a short and simple main clause followed by a phrase modifying its subject or in apposition with its subject. The two elements are separated by a major pause:

The narrow creek was like a ditch: // tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven.

Immense trees soared up, // invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers.

... a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, // black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake.

Darkness oozed out from between the trees, ... // the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests.

The breaking of the flow of words into short segments slows down the reader to a brooding pace and may suggest a laborious struggle, a halting, painful progress restrained by dense and numerous obstructions. The passage is fraught with heavily-stressed monosyllables and stiffening spondees or near-spondees: "Immense trees soared up"; "a twisted root of some tall tree"; "small ferns, black and dull"; "Darkness oozed out." The dominant rhythm of the paragraph following this one, however, seems to be a light dactylic: "trailing the delicate colouring of its image under the floating leaves
and the silvery blossoms of the lotus"; "in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads." The post-positioned adjectives, the bane of some readers, are effective in giving a further impediment to the prose, as are the monotonously equal periods and the repetition, especially noticeable in the final sentence of this sixth paragraph. This paragraph has one more word than the seventh, but its sentences contain fourteen marked interruptions, whereas those of the seventh contain only nine. In a sentence of only thirty-four words in the sixth paragraph there are five pauses which constitute complete breaks.

Just as the sixth paragraph ends, an intrusion of somewhat subjective and negative valuation destroys the objective balance of mobility and immobility: the scene now becomes clouded by "the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests" (p. 189). Immediately following this emotionally and rhetorically turgid passage comes a quick release in tension: In the next paragraph, the narrow and "tortuous" creek broadens suddenly into a lagoon, and the surrounding colors change from black to the restful and hospitable "bright green" of the grass, "the reflected blue of the sky," the "delicate colouring" of a "fleecy pink" cloud mirrored in the water beneath "the silvery blossoms of the lotus" (p. 189). The nibong palms lean over the roof of Arsat's hut "with a suggestion of sad tenderness and care in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads" (p. 189). The claustrophobic impression in the sixth paragraph, where the boatmen's words "reverberated between the
thick and sombre walls of vegetation," is relieved by the spacious scene of the peaceful lagoon. The confusing disarray of forms overlapping and partially hidden gives way in the seventh paragraph to an order in which each thing is easily perceived: the forests recede, the strip of green grass frames the blue lagoon, the house is raised on high piles and stands out from the jungle. The strenuous and turgid rhythm of the prose is replaced by a loose, swift and natural flow of lightly accented words. There are no more spondaic sections, no more post-positioned adjectives, no more repetition to slow down the pace of the prose.

Following this buildup to climax and release of tension, the tale moves on to introduce Arsat and Diamelen. The remainder of the story consists of Arsat's narrative of his experiences, interspersed with his simple expressions of remorse and bewilderment and with the narrator's observance of changes from time to time in the ambiguous spectacle of the tropical night. Finally Diamelen dies, the dawn comes, and the white man leaves Arsat suspended in the emotional and physical immobility between the death of one "illusion" and the rebirth of another. An overview of the story shows that each part concentrates on the shifting mixture of perceptual revelation and obscurity, emotional response and indifference to human meaning, physical motion and inertness, in the jungle. Thus the sunset described before Arsat begins his tale is seen as an obscuring of brilliance by darkness, but stars come out, and "the great lagoon gleaming suddenly with reflected lights resembled an oval patch of night sky
flung down into the hopeless and abysmal night of the wilderness" (p. 192). Arsat is heard in the hut attempting to rouse his unconscious wife; then as he comes out and sits silent by the fire, the illumination of the cosmos becomes no longer a perhaps meaningful patch of light amid the "hopeless" night, for the stars themselves are said to be "streaming ceaseless and vain" (p. 193). Immediately after this comes the white man's imposition of an "illusion" or interpretation of a strife between good and evil upon the indifferent wilderness. His dreaming is interrupted by Arsat's voice, which at first he mistakes in his drowsy consciousness for the murmur of the forest. Arsat's tale is then told to the point when the three fugitives rest on a beach, and as Arsat pauses to praise his brother's strength and courage the forest's murmur seems somewhat responsive, like "an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth" (p. 199). Arsat concludes his tale through the moment of betrayal and rises "an indistinct and silent figure above the dying embers of the fire" (p. 201). Mist drifts over the lagoon and obscures the reflected stars. More white vapor creeps in, hiding all below the level of the porch, leaving visible only the tops of trees "outlined on the twinkle of heaven, like a sombre and forbidding shore—a coast deceptive, pitiless and black" (p. 201). The words in which Arsat expresses his painful conflict ring in "the empty distances" (p. 202), but the palm leaves above the hut rattle "with a mournful and expiring sound" (p. 202). Dawn comes, but even this illumination is seen as being also an obscuring action: "The stars shone
paler as if they had retreated into the frozen depths of immense space” (p. 202). Mists disappear and the lagoon is unveiled. Then comes the image of the rising eagle, which passes from mobility and illumination to darkness and iner-
tness, then vanishes. Nature is illuminated and "unconscious life" is speaking in the swaying and nodding branches, but it speaks "in an incomprehensible voice" near "the dumb darkness of that human sorrow" (p. 203). Arsat says, "I can see nothing," and the white man leaves him standing "lonely in the searching sunshine," looking "beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions" (p. 204). The wavering of the face of nature between revela-
tion and obscurity, emotional response to human meaning and indifference, and physical motion and iner-
tness; and the opposition and similarity between nature and mankind is a constant concern throughout the tale.

The foregoing analysis of style and structure in "The Lagoon" may seem irrelevant to the subject of this study; nevertheless it is necessary for part of my purpose: to show that the treatment of woman as a fictional character and the treatment of love as a subject, contrary to some of the current critical opinions, did not result in the aesthetic failure of the story. The sytlistic peculiarities of the tale do not represent Conrad's nervous concentration on setting in order to avoid giving attention directly to the love element, nor is the imagery of tangled vegetation a covert expression of misogyny.

"The Lagoon" seems to offer little support for an
interpretation of it in whole or in part as an inadvertent dramatization of certain sexual situations or conditions or as a part of the "misogynous pattern" in Conrad's fiction. The taunts of Arsat's brother—that Arsat is only half a man now that Diamelen possesses his heart—should not be accepted as an expression of the author's belief that the effect of Diamelen on Arsat is emasculation, in the sense of depriving him of his courage. Those critics who have reached this conclusion have shown perhaps more confidence in the judgment of Arsat's brother than is warranted. The brother of Arsat is not marked by any special designation as the authorial voice, and his reckless desire to rouse a great number of men to pursue the three fugitives and perhaps engage them in combat, by shouting defiance, does not represent a standard by which Arsat is to be judged. Considered realistically, it is rather foolhardy. Furthermore, the remark by Arsat's brother expresses the creed of Arsat's former way of life, which is as illusory as his love for Diamelen, since this former "illusion" also leads to death. Arsat's immobility should not be considered an indication of his emasculation; there is no reason to interpret the "disillusionment" which causes this immobility as in any sense—even metaphorically—a sexual injury or deprivation. His "disillusionment" is a profound psychological or spiritual dislocation—a discovery that human interpretations and values which he had considered permanent and objective are transient, subjective, and at times mutually contradictory. To interpret this condition as some type of sexual allegory by which psychological
dislocation is not really to be taken for what it is, but instead represents a sexual injury would seem to needlessly and arbitrarily narrow the meaning of the work.

"The Lagoon" complicates the theme of an incomprehensible cosmos by combining with it the idea of the illusory nature of human meanings and values. This latter idea may be viewed as a concern which is corollary to the theme of an inscrutable universe, for as the cosmos becomes so extremely alien to uncomprehending man, human values seem to have no place in it, no objective verification, and at last vanish. "Amy Foster" portrayed the eventual disappearance of a man's "illusions" and his subsequent death through such deprivation, but the "illusions" of Yanko were certain habitual and for him standard human interpretations of the visible world. He was no longer able to impose these upon his surroundings because of his geographical dislocation, in a sensuous environment (such as the hold of his ship during the storm), which resisted interpretation and became a meaningless blank to him. The sensations he experienced during his voyage and shipwreck were not adaptable by his "primary imagination," in Coleridge's sense of the term. "Amy Foster" in a sense demonstrates the limitations, the transience, the subjectivism, the ephemerality of man's primary imagination. "The Lagoon" also demonstrates the inadequacy and instability of the primary imagination—for the jungle seems to fluctuate between mobility and immobility—or the instability of the objective world, which, if the skeptic is to be believed, wavers independently of man's perception, or does not exist
at all. But "The Lagoon" concerns different human "illusions" from those which result from the activity of the primary imagination. "The Lagoon" also shows the inadequacy and illusoriness of interpretations not concerned directly with the objective world but rather with man's ideals and standards of conduct, with an individual's relations with his brother and with his beloved. Love and loyalty here become "illusions." In this sense "The Lagoon" transcends the tales previously discussed as a treatment of man's confrontation with an ambiguous cosmos. It represents the more thorough and complex treatment by Conrad of a theme which is one of the most significant in world literature and a vital subsidiary theme in most of Conrad's fiction. Furthermore, its female characters and its concept of femininity are shown here as crucial to Conrad's typical approach to the theme and his habitual expression of it. By virtue of the indefiniteness and obscurity with which Conrad purposefully evokes the character of Diamelen and the links which associate her with the meaningful-meaningless cosmos, she suggestsively becomes the innocent epitome of a richly and tormentingly ambiguous cosmos, whose waverings innocently—or perhaps with sardonical malice—elude the limited perceptual powers of men. By virtue of her inspiration in Arsat of the desire for a life of static content through love, she represents with equal subtlety one of man's several ephemeral, transient, subjective "illusions."

Diamelen is thus central to the theme of "The Lagoon."

For the very reason that her character is deeply involved in
its meaning, it is difficult to give a simple statement defining the tale's probable attitude toward Diamelen, but it is ambivalence rather than simple misogyny. The attitude toward the female character in this tale involves an attitude toward the cosmos which fluctuates between meaning and non-meaning, just as it did in the tales previously discussed. It also involves here an attitude toward the relative values of the conditions of mobility and immobility, action and stasis, war and peace. It is thus the most complex ambivalence toward the female character exhibited in any of the tales thus far examined.

I feel that "The Lagoon" is a work of conscious complexity expressing a concept of great significance for the human situation and of great personal meaning for Conrad, and that it is not a haphazard mixture of several obscure intentions. I feel also that it merits complex analysis. The present problem in current criticism of "The Lagoon" has resulted from several chance or temporary circumstances: (1) In the "Author's Note" to Tales of Unrest Conrad disparaged it as the final product of his "Malay period," an early stage in his career marked by a subject and a style from which he then wished to be dissociated in the review sections of the papers. Conrad's erring judgment of the story has been slavishly repeated since its appearance. (2) Max Beerbohm wrote a parody of Conrad's style and thought, called "The Feast, by J#s#ph C#nr#d," which takes the name of its central character from An Outcast of the Islands, the motif of an isolated weak-willed and demoralized European in
the tropics from *An Outcast*, *Almayer's Folly*, and "An Outpost of Progress," its sordid and cynically narrated conflict between a cunning Negro and the "hollow" white from "An Outpost," and images of writhing vegetation, stars reflected in water, etc., from the first two of these works and from "The Lagoon." Conrad mistakenly referred to Beerbohm's parody in the "Author's Note" as a "guying" solely of "The Lagoon," and subsequent critics of the story have been perhaps too hasty to follow his lead. (3) A controlled and careful, elaborate, rhythmical, formal, and rhetorical prose style, of which "The Lagoon" is an example, has passed out of favor and become associated with the outmoded social manners and beliefs of the last century. (4) Critics of Conrad have shown a tendency to devalue his pessimism about the metaphysical nature of the universe as invariably jejune, shrill, and self-indulgent complaining about the Cosmic Joke, or (5) to interpret evidence of that pessimism or other elements in this story as symptoms of a sexual malaise. (6) The interest in Conrad mainly as an observer and tracer of man's moral sense, in the narrowest interpretation, has led many students to read "The Lagoon" as an early treatment of the multiple and insidious complexities of conscience in a man who has committed an act of ambiguous moral status. These factors have worked together either to obscure hopelessly its theme or to plunge the tale into such wide disfavor as to render it, in the eyes of many readers of Conrad, not worthy of attention. The story merits a much more respectable place in the Conrad canon than these chance circumstances have
tended to give it. A critical reassessment of its value should begin with some such clarification and revaluation of its theme and the role of Diamelen as I have suggested in the foregoing analysis.

The preceding study of the four short stories affords some basis from which to consider the question of whether Conrad’s female characters are convincing, for, few as the tales are, they exemplify the various degrees of convincingness among Conrad’s women. Maggie Colchester in "The Brute" could not be considered more than a shallow, weak and conventional stock heroine. If she represented the general tendency among the women in Conrad’s fiction, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are uniformly as shadowy as much current criticism has charged them. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between the shallowness of Maggie (which is the weakest point in "The Brute" and which results in the failure of her death to effect any but the most superficial pathos) and the appropriate and functional indefiniteness of Diamelen, whose character, for a clear aesthetic purpose, must be an obscure evocation of femininity rather than a detailed portrait of an individualized woman. Her role as mirror of an ambiguous cosmos requires indefiniteness and obscurity in the presentation of her character. The indefiniteness and inconsistency in the character of Amy Foster has its justification in the same thematic function. Her sudden and inexplicable change from sympathy to suspicion is required if she is to share the
incomprehensibility which the Colebrook landscape holds for Yanko—if she is to change from the one meaningful image in a meaningless panorama, to the very epitome of hollowness in a bleak and incomprehensible world. Conrad has assumed a difficult task: to create convincing fictional characters whose chief attribute is indefiniteness. Perhaps his most telling success at this task in Amy’s description is Dr. Kennedy’s simile: "There are faces that call your attention by a curious want of definiteness in their whole aspect, as, walking in a mist, you peer attentively at a vague shape which, after all, may be nothing more curious or strange than a signpost" (p. 74). The simile captures something of the mystery and suggestiveness which attaches to a vagueness, but which in fiction is more difficult to represent than an interesting, detailed and vivid description.

The character of Mme. Levaille is perhaps the one character from this group of tales who is convincing in the manner of most characters in fiction—that is, even though she is the epitome of an obscure cosmos, she is not made to reflect this obscurity, as Amy Foster and Diamelon do, through an indefiniteness of Conrad’s presentation of her character, but rather through the attribution to her of certain clear and definite traits: irrationality, an unthinking, automatically responding quality, her tendency to prosper without effort, and the earth-relatedness of her several activities. By contrast the characters of Diamelon and Amy Foster represent Conrad’s achievement in depicting indefiniteness more directly and quite successfully, and they
should be remembered as examples of characters whose shadowy quality is quite purposeful and functions in relation to the theme of their stories.

The most obvious conclusions which can be drawn from the examination of these four tales are that they show a remarkably constant general plot pattern in which a male protagonist struggles against the obscurity of the cosmos, which is reflected in the character of one or more women in the story; that Conrad's attitude toward women in all of the stories seems to be bound up inextricably with his attitude toward the cosmos; that his attitude toward both the cosmos and woman is in most of the tales ambivalent, unresolved, suspended, and usually too complex to be considered misogyny; that it is the source of whatever profundity and intensity the tales possess. As this attitude is less ambivalent, more resolved and simple, the story becomes more an unreasoned complaint against the Cosmic Joke and remains a subjective, uncommunicative and unconvincing out-pouring of spleen. As the attitude is more restrained, ambivalent, wondering, and tolerant, the story becomes more profound, complex, and convincing as a representation of the human situation.

Despite the consistency of the role of woman in the general pattern of these tales, her representation of an ambiguous cosmos allows for great flexibility and variety among the different female characters within each story and from tale to tale. They share the characteristic of indefiniteness, of mystery; their characters all show an
elusiveness, a veiled and obscure quality, and a tendency to be antagonistic to clarity, rationality and directiveness. Usually woman's non-directiveness or elusiveness is compounded by an unresolved dualism of character: Mme. Levaille is something of a Mother Nature figure, thoroughly involved with things of this world—forces of nature and matters of business—yet she is a regular and devout, if somewhat superficial Catholic. Her dualism seems innocent, interesting as an example of typically human inconsistency; it is even mildly amusing in the tolerant view in which Conrad sees it.

Mrs. Colchester is dualistic also; her taste for elegance and domesticity, with all that this implies about the virtues of home life, is belied by a basic selfish brutality and a willingness to excuse the ship's perhaps obvious maliciousness in order to secure for herself an elegant home. Her dualism is hypocritical and results from her attempt to hide a conscious and purposeful inhuman treachery. The two opposing characteristics of Amy Foster—sympathetic, imaginative kindness and animalistically stupid fear of the unknown—are not simultaneous but alternating. Her dualism does not seem to result, as does Mrs. Colchester's hypocrisy, from a conscious attempt to cover up some kind of malice, and she is not an obviously guilty person, for she can no more be held responsible for her nature than an animal can be morally condemned for its instincts.

Woman's nature in these four tales embraces many different personality traits, yet is consistently veiled, mysterious, and paradoxical, for different reasons (from
nature or instinct or from malicious purpose) and to different effects (innocence or guilt). The women characters in this group of stories also afford examples for inquiry concerning woman's relation to the objective world. In *Heart of Darkness*, before Marlow has fairly begun his yarn, he inadvertently and haphazardly mentions a girl (whom the reader later learns is Kurtz' fiancée) but hastily drops the subject, insisting emphatically that women must be kept out of his story, that women must be protectively excluded from all the real difficulties which test the moral and physical substance of men, that they know nothing of facts and should never be allowed to try to set up the idealistic structures they build in their dreams, in the actual world, where some irremediable fact to which men are acclimatized would suddenly start up and knock over their frail and unsubstantial creations. Yet in *Chance* the same Marlow attributes a cowardly and idealistic distaste for and fear of truth to men, and a courageous ability to live with uncomfortable reality to women: "The women's rougher, simpler, more upright judgment, embraces the whole truth, which their tact, their mistrust of masculine idealism, ever prevents them from speaking in its entirety. And their tact is unerring. We could not stand women speaking the truth." Albert Guerard sees the heroes of the last several novels Conrad wrote as innocent, simple, and naïve men who are protected or rescued by the heroines. In the earlier, more intense and successful novels, he says, the opposite is true: more interesting and complex heroes, men aware of insidious moral
perils, rescue and protect women. Guerard feels that this reversal of pattern in the later novels is somehow associated with Conrad's moving away, in these works, from pessimism, from his earlier and characteristic "eccentricity, tragic inwardness" and "despair"; and his corresponding movement toward "the normal and affirmative" (Guerard, p. 292). He believes, furthermore, that a similar change between the earlier Marlow and the later one is apparent, and that the Marlow of Chance has even become feminine (p. 269). Marlow's reversal of his accusation of women as afraid of truth can be found in a basic change in Conrad's view of life, according to this hypothesis. Yet there is evidence these two opposite verdicts on women do not represent an early and a later Conrad, but were held more or less simultaneously throughout his life. In an essay on Maupassant, written in 1904, Conrad considered as proof of Maupassant's compassionate but scrupulous truth to the realities of life, the fact that women like his work:

The writer of these few reflections, inspired by a long and intimate acquaintance with the work of the man, has been struck by the appreciation of Maupassant manifested by many women gifted with tenderness and intelligence. Their more delicate and audacious souls are good judges of courage. Their finer penetration has discovered his genuine masculinity without display, his virility without a pose. They have discovered in his faithful dealings with the world that enterprising and fearless temperament, poor in ideas but rich in power, which appeals most to the feminine mind. ("Guy de Maupassant" in Wright, Joseph Conrad on Fiction, pp. 60-61)

Yet within a few years of this accolade of woman's keen sense of truth and courage, Conrad in 1910 bewailed woman's weak-minded and cowardly retreat from a world of hard facts,
especially as this moral cowardice and facile disregard for truth is apparent in her literary taste: Reviewing *Quiet Days in Spain* by C. Rogue Luffman, Conrad wrote:

Little girls seem to like him. One of them, after listening to some of his tales, remarked to her mother, "Wouldn't it be lovely if what he says were true!" Here you have Woman! The charming creatures will neither strain at a camel nor swallow a gnat. Not publicly. These operations, without which the world they have such a large share in could not go on for ten minutes, are left to us--men. And then we are chided for being coarse. This is a refined objection but does not seem fair. ("A Happy Wanderer" in Wright, *Joseph Conrad on Fiction*, p. 100)

The female characters in the four stories here analyzed exemplify Conrad's two opposing interpretations of femininity. Diamelén, who inspires Arsat to seek the elusive ideal of static contentment, is an excellent representation of feminine idealism. The white man, having seen the isolated Malay couple at some time after their escape to the lagoon, remembers Diamelén's look of audacious triumph at having achieved her ideal. It becomes a transitory ideal nonetheless, for, in this isolated lagoon where Arsat expected to find freedom from death, Diamelén dies. Despite her obviously illusory idealism, she also is linked with the meaningless and real objective world--with the vegetation which symbolizes that universe where the stars are vain in the sense of purposeless, yet their streaming, unlike man's ideals, is ceaseless.

In "The Brute" Maggie Colchester is killed because she does not really believe in the malice--or at least the danger--of the ship. She represents woman unable to adapt to a world of harsh facts which may start up and wreck the
flimsy stuff of feminine daydreams. Yet Mrs. Colchester thrives on the advantages of living on board "the brute," and manages to adjust in its evil and dangerous world much more easily than do the male characters, who find life on board the Apse Family at best uncomfortable. Miss Blank, barmaid of The Three Crows, unites in her character a callousedness and a prim idealism. She "will neither strain at a camel nor swallow a gnat," for she yawns while Ned narrates the dashing out of brains, yet her very presence stifles an almost-uttered "damn," and demands the strictest propriety in the bar in which she is arbitress of manners. The charge that women are foolish and cowardly idealists who must be protected by men, who understand the dangerous facts of life, is belied in "Amy Foster." There it is the male protagonist who cannot endure an empty universe, void of human meaning, who must live by imposing on bare reality some "unreal" interpretation. It is Amy who endures a meaningless world—who by her dullness is adapted to such an existence. Woman in that tale and in "The Idiots" is far more adapted to the real world than man, for man's directiveness, his aggression, his rationality is antagonistic to a universe of indefiniteness and vagueness, a shifting and irrational world which in "The Idiots" is not certainly the evil world of "The Brute," but a world which, like Bacadou's farm, carries on positive and productive functions, though it is veiled by a death-like stillness and unstirring mists. The world to which women relate more directly, more realistically than men, is not always a clearly evil world, as it
tends to be in "The Brute," although it is evil in several other works. Heart of Darkness (a book in which Conrad seems never to have decided whether evil comes from within man's corrupt soul or is the result of corruption by a dark continent) has its woman who fails to understand evil or man's necessity to live with it, to "swallow a gnat" (though in Kurtz' case the evil which he agrees to live with turns out to be of rather greater proportions than this): Kurtz' fiancée remains an idealist and a faithful believer in the cosmic achievement and glorious martyrdom of her Kurtz. But this image of woman is countered by the old women who knit wool in the anteroom of the Belgian firm for colonization and corrupt exploitation, who seem to have the complete and detached, even bored knowledge of evil which the Fates possess. And, judging by the description of the dark and foreboding parlor where Marlow meets Kurtz' "Intended," the fiancée seems also in some relation with evil, even if unwittingly and innocently.

Woman's "realism," in the sense of her easier adaptation to the "real" world, seems in these four stories an automatic, instinctive and unthinking adaptation. It may be that her realism is for this reason robbed of the usual meaning of the term, but just as the cosmos itself is in these and many others of Conrad's works never clearly conscious or unconscious, so woman is often not freed without reservation from conscious complicity in the morally equivocal universe. Furthermore, some of Conrad's women, such as Edith Travers of The Rescue, seem quite intelligent and
conscious of the subjectivity of human values and the meaninglessness of life, yet appear to have adapted to it almost as well as the shallow and animalistic Amy Foster. The fact that many women seemed to Conrad better able than men to adapt to a universe which seems to lack meaning evidently left his attitude toward woman as ambivalent as it ever was. The question probably remained open and unresolved for him—whether the ability to adapt to an equivocally meaningful world was a sign of strength or of weakness, whether it reveals a character which is fiendish, animalistic, or realistic.

In a digression from the analysis of "The Idiots" evidence of Conrad's concern with the metaphysical mystery of the universe was cited in the form of a letter telling of his discussing, far into the night, the nonexistence of matter. The theme of an ambiguous visible world, naturally intriguing to Conrad's skeptical temperament, was not only a matter for nocturnal discussion and a theme for the few tales examined in this chapter, but also found subsidiary treatment in some of the major longer works in the Conrad canon.

The theme which I have traced in these short stories is clearly separate from that of fidelity, betrayal, and the redeeming test, which seems to hinge on the phenomenon of moral choice, widely accepted to be Conrad's chief concern as a novelist viewing the human situation. Conrad's interest in the illusory nature of reality—or of man's concept of reality—may in the final assessment be less central to
his statement on the human condition than a theme involving moral choice, but his concern, in fiction, with a mysterious sensuous universe cannot be set aside glibly as "self-indulgent skepticism . . . translated into the deliquescent jargon of Marlow . . . or served out as a sauce without meat" (Mudrick, p. 11).

Thomas Moser, in *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*, has held that the decline of Conrad's powers as a novelist dates from his rejection of moral choice as a subject for fiction and his simultaneous attempt to treat the love story as a central motif and women as central characters. I find this hypothesis untenable. These four short stories and the works analyzed in the following chapters, which treat female characters centrally, and which embody the theme of illusion rather than that of moral choice are indeed secondary in literary merit to the masterpieces *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and "The Secret Sharer." Many of them are nonetheless successful artistic statements, and they cannot all be dismissed with the verdict of "self-indulgent skepticism" or with a speculative diagnosis of the neurosis to which they supposedly owe their origin. Their source is in Conrad's temperamental skepticism and his tendency to ponder the intriguing mystery of the sensuous world, rather than a concern with more or less abstracted moral considerations. It may be helpful to review briefly some of his important works in order to assess the relative significance of these two concerns (to the degree that they are separable) for his great achievement as a literary
artist and an observer of the human soul.

Conrad is widely acknowledged as an expert creative artist in depicting the phenomenon of moral choice in all its kaleidoscopic ambiguity. The labyrinthine moral pilgrimage of discovery or perhaps perplexity which awaits the reader of Lord Jim is a splendid example of Conrad's tirelessly persistent scrutiny of a moral situation and his proficiency in capturing the almost sensuous "feel" of guilt, redemption, self-deception and spiritual renewal. This vein in Conrad is deep and justly admired. Nevertheless it would be widely recognized that Conrad's conception of morality—seemingly so simple with its icons of Duty and Fidelity and Honor—led him away from moral choice per se to matters which might be called quasi-moral or perhaps epistemological or metaphysical. Indeed this is the path that the entirety of modern thought has taken, although it has substituted a particular branch of epistemology—psychology—for all epistemological inquiries and has replaced metaphysics with the scientific method. It may seem naïve and artificial to separate Conrad's epistemological concerns from his moral ones, for our age cannot seriously consider any inquiry into morals which does not use the findings of psychology, and Conrad's worth to our age as a moralist depends on his recognition that problems in psychology or communications or physical and scientifically verifiable conditions in the environment lie at the basis of moral issues. When we think of Conrad's value as a moralist we assume that his recognition of these complexities is the source of his value.
Moral questions in Conrad are constantly becoming epistemological—a character becomes tragic because of his ill-founded idealism which comes dangerously close to advantageous self-deception, or because of his rigidly cynical realism, or because of the narrowness or indeed the breadth of his awareness. Conrad seems to have made no separation between "purely" moral and metaphysical or epistemological matters in, for instance, the moral choices made by Martin Decoud and Nostromo. Decoud's metaphysical beliefs about the futility of action are inseparable from his moral choice of suicide. Nostromo's misinterpretation of his relationship with the leaders in politics and industry in Sulaco is inseparable from his moral choice of betrayal. Charles Gould's faith in "material interests" may be more a matter of epistemology, metaphysics, attitude, and may be difficult to conceive as moral choice. But it is quite clear that Marlow's and Stein's thoughts about the nature of "dream" are part of our effort to understand a particular moral choice which occurred dramatically at a crucial moment in time: Jim's guilty leap from the deck of the Patna. In many of Conrad's major works, even though he leads the reader back to the source of morality, the springs of moral choice which lie in "dream," in Conradian "illusion," the epistemological questions are still bound up with an act of choosing. Since overt action is related to thought and to the phenomenon of personality, it is difficult to separate moral matters from what seem to be non-moral ones in Conrad's fiction.
It would seem, however, that Conrad has written some of his finest passages in full-length novels and some of his most intense shorter pieces on themes that are scarcely related to moral choice at all. The very structure of The Nigger of the Narcissus, as Professor Guerard has admirably analyzed it, seems to suggest that Conrad at least in this one work saw what would ordinarily be considered moral matters as separable from another aspect of man's existence, and that he assigned heroism to the non-moral aspect. In the passages describing the seamen's struggle against the storm, the crew members are heroic; in the parts of the book which concern a matter more widely deemed moral--the seamen's attitude toward Wait's lie and Donkin's cowardly rebellion--they are abject and pathetic buffoons. It is in their non-moral relation to the universe that they attain heroic stature. Their heroic stature results from their proper following of their craft--which involves standards more easily considered aesthetic than moral--and their natural functioning in tune with the ship--which involves the metaphysical matter of being rather than doing. The most consistently heroic of them, Old Singleton, is as far from making moral choices as is the rudder or the mainsail; thus his heroism. Moral questions most clearly arise when Donkin stirs up the men about their "rights," and it is then that they lose their natural majesty as heroes and become deluded by the phantoms of sentiment, pity, and other unworthy feelings aroused by the spectre of Wait.

In Heart of Darkness, which seems to deal directly
with the nature of evil, Conrad evades the phenomenon of the 
moral choice, giving instead the awesome mystery of evil 
seen as a spectacle or conceived as a metaphysical entity—
not analyzed as a psychological process—or even a moral act 
of choosing. The reader never learns how or why Kurtz became 
an evil man; Conrad merely presents the evidence of his 
change from the altruistic idealist who wrote the pamphlet 
for the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to the 
Nietzschean enditer of the "footnote": "Exterminate all the 
brutes!" Here the moral realm slips entirely into the epistemological: Every man is evil; every man has his origin in 
the dark, primitive evil represented by Africa. Evil then 
loses its meaning as a moral entity and survives only as a 
metaphysical entity. The achievement of heroism—or "victory"—in this tale lies in the epistemological act of self-
recognition, and the evil self that is recognized corresponds 
(in a diabolical version of Emersonian monism) with the one 
universal metaphysical evil entity which is expressed in the 
cosmos.

Elements which cannot be considered moral choice per se, which concern moral choice only indirectly or not at all, 
would seem to have a position of great significance in some 
of Conrad's chief masterpieces. The hypothesis that Conrad's 
failure as a novelist in later years was caused by his aban-
donment of the theme of moral choice therefore appears quite 
doubtful, and the corollary hypothesis, that Conrad's female 
characters, since they appear in works not concerned with 
moral choice, fall short of representing Conrad's
characteristic powers of creation, or are defective by association with such works, appears equally doubtful.

My own opinion, based upon the foregoing analyses, is that "The Lagoon," "Amy Foster," and "The Idiots," three stories in which women are central and in which the moral choice has little or no importance, are quite successful treatments of a theme of great significance in the fiction of Joseph Conrad.
 CHAPTER II

WOMAN AS IDEALIST AND CYNIC

Certain conclusions in the first chapter suggest that one criterion which Conrad evidently found relevant in his consideration of women was the degree to which their view of life was valid, realistic, adapted to this present world, skeptical, or even cynical; or was instead idealistic, aspiring, naïve, deluded, or characterized by escapism. The many female characters in his fiction constitute a finely shaded spectrum from fanaticism, from naïve, well-meaning, or hypocritical idealism, through a valid idealism capable of functioning in a world of fact, to the bitterest cynicism. The relative values of the various species of realism, cynicism, idealism, are examined not only in Conrad's studies of such heroes as Jim, Decoud, Heyst, Marlow, and Kurtz, but also in his portraits of Mrs. Gould and Antonia Avellanos in *Nostromo*; Edith Travers in *The Rescue*; Nathalie Haldin, Sophia Antonovna, Tekla and Mme. de S-- in *Under Western Eyes*; Kurtz's fiancée in *Heart of Darkness*; Mrs. Fyne in *Chance*; and Lena in *Victory*. The nature of that human hope or delusion which is eternal was clearly as crucial and ambivalent a question to Conrad in his characterization of women as was the nature of the phenomenal world.

Several women in Conrad's life seem to have left him
impressed with the quiet strength of their modest and steadfast idealism—notably his mother, the young Polish girl who became the model for Antonia Avellanos, and the widow of a distant cousin, Marguerite Poradowska. Yet his memories of them evidently did not impair a hard-headed, skeptical suspicion that many idealists—both men and women—are the victims of their own gullibility. His female characters often show a pathetic propensity to make crippling sacrifices for trivial, unworthy causes; through their delusive idealism they often become unwitting accomplices of evil and at times the most disgusting of meddling hypocrites. For those women whose sheltered idealism is an idle daydream, quite easily maintained apart from the facts of life which test the strength of souls, Conrad shows an unmitigated scorn. He sardonically denies them the right to either their refined and scrupulous criticisms or their daintily enthusiastic applause of men's actions in an ambiguous but dangerously real moral struggle, for which these armchair moralists can have no valid understanding and no true sympathy.

It must be noted, however, that Conrad's condemnation of gullible and hypocritical women characters is actually directed toward the society for whose shallow idealism these women serve as focal points and reflections, just as his attitude toward the indefiniteness and wavering obscurity of women in the tales discussed in the first chapter is more an attitude toward the ambiguous cosmos they epitomize than an attitude toward woman per se. On the other hand, the valid, courageous, and inspiring idealism of certain of his women
tends to contrast with the sordid greed, the moral expediency, the spiritual blindness, the egotistic fanaticism of the men who surround them and of their society at large.

"The Informer," a farcical but by no means a shallow tale in A Set of Six, offers an example of Conrad's idealistic female character. This deluded young poseur should not be taken to represent the average among his women in type or degree of idealism; however, she does exemplify a type of feminine idealism which in its extreme absurdity and superficiality is not at all rare in Conrad's fiction. The story is told by a distinguished and well-mannered anarchist, famous for scathingly ironic revolutionary pamphlets but not for his secret plots of assassination and destruction. His listener is a rather prim and easily shocked connoisseur of Chinese bronzes. The two men have met for dinner in an exclusive restaurant in London, and the anarchist, designated as Mr. X to shield his identity, offers the tale as proof to the connoisseur that people of wealth and good family contribute to the cause of anarchy; that the comfortable and bored upper classes live lives so void of serious meaning that they cannot believe in the imminence of an anarchistic holocaust; that they are so willing, from boredom, to see mischief made—even at their own class's expense—that they sometimes give palpable aid to anarchists who are preaching and working for their destruction. Mr. X himself has been made rich from the demand for his writings by the upper classes, who chuckle over his wit and weep at his pathos—
without taking his bloody conclusions seriously. He shocks
the connoisseur's ideal of womanhood by assuring him that
women among the upper classes are particularly prone to this
kind of amateur anarchism. He tells how the charming daugh­
ter of a rich public official in London, affecting a coura­
geous independence of mind and a fervent enthusiasm for the
cause of social reform, offered a building she had inherited
to a band of anarchists as their headquarters and soon became
thoroughly engrossed in her amateur anarchism. "To more per­
sonal charm than mere youth could account for, she added the
seductive appearance of enthusiasm, of independence, of
courageous thought. I suppose she put on these appearances
as she put on her picturesque dresses and for the same rea­
son: to assert her individuality at any cost" (A Set of
Six, pp. 80-81).

As X's story develops, the young woman reads proof and
writes fiery articles for the journal which is printed in
the cellar of her building, unmindful that the manufacture
of explosives is proceeding effectively on the third floor,
where an agency for Stone's Dried Soup has been established
as a front, and that the anarchists are shipping not only
propaganda but also bombs to Europe in tins of powdered
soup. She goes so far in her assumed devotion to the cause
as to convince herself that she is in love with one of the
anarchists, a young man named Sevrin. X has observed a
tête à tête between the two. In his analysis, not only the
girl's self-deluding pretensions to anarchistic fervor, but
also her expressions of erotic feeling are mere gestures--as
all the feelings or commitments or actions of her class are mere gestures:

"I had no doubt that he [Sevrin] was in earnest. As to the lady, her gestures were unapproachable, better than the very thing itself in the blended suggestion of dignity, sweetness, condescension, fascination, surrender, and reserve. She interpreted her conception of what that precise sort of love-making should be with consummate art. And so far, she too, no doubt, was in earnest. Gestures—but so perfect; . . . I had seen . . . Sevrin captivated and spellbound by the consummate and hereditary gestures that in a certain sphere of life take the place of feelings with an excellent effect." (pp. 85, 99)

The tale becomes an intricate maze of falseness, however, when the reader learns that not only is the young lady self-deluded, but her anarchist lover is a spy, an informer for the police. A convert to anarchy in his youth, he has wavered in his optimism and lost his faith; now thoroughly disillusioned, he is working against the cause as fanatically as he had earlier supported it. The story thus takes on the quality of a clever situational farce: the lady is fooling both herself and Sevrin in her affected devotion to anarchy and to Sevrin as the champion of her assumed ideals; Sevrin, seriously enamored of the lady, is false to her in his impersonation of an anarchist. He must maintain this disguise, though he longs to share with her his negative insight into the cause and to convert her to his own view.

Mr. X enters the tale when he and other heads of the movement in Brussels suspect treachery in this London cell. He arranges for some comrades to impersonate the police and stage a fake raid on the building, hoping that the unknown informer will give himself away under these circumstances.
Thus the farcical and already multiple masquerading is compounded, for to the girl's unwitting falsehood and Sevrin's fanatically serious duplicity is added the impersonation of a squad of policemen by a second group of anarchists.

During the raid Sevrin maintains his pose as an anarchist, and it seems the plan has failed until the girl enters the cellar. It is a traumatic moment for her: she is confronted as an enemy by the police, men whom she and her class have traditionally and instinctively considered their guardians. Her hobby of anarchy seems to have become a serious and dangerous business; her emancipated, independent thought appears to have had real and physical consequences in a world of action. She evidently must now sacrifice her personal dignity and perhaps even her bodily safety, which the aristocratic mores of her class have constantly protected as something sacred. X analyzes coolly her state of mind: "For all their assumption of independence, girls of that class are used to the feeling of being protected, as, in fact they are. This feeling accounts for nine tenths of their audacious gestures!" (p. 92). Her pretensions to independent and courageous thought vanish—though she is too shocked and frightened to be aware of or embarrassed by the sudden loss of her assumed role. She becomes in a moment the aristocratic lady she has ever remained beneath her affectation; and, true to her instincts—or to the more basic gestures of her class—she expects protection. She looks appealingly to Sevrin, and X's plot is saved, for the informer, fearful of the possible effect of the raid on an
eccentric explosive expert in his laboratory upstairs, seeks to answer the girl’s appeal and save her, though he believes he is thereby sacrificing his career as an informer, for even the police (for whom he mistakes the impersonating anarchists) must believe that Sevrin is a member of the movement if he is to retain his easy admittance to anarchist circles. Sevrin, importuning the bogus inspector to get the lady out of the house, shows him his credentials as an international police spy and attempts to leave, calling the lady to follow him. She wavers, uncertain of her role, pulled evidently between the desire to be protected as an aristocratic lady and her pretensions to anarchy. The former impulse seems to gain control, and she takes a few steps to follow Sevrin just as a scuffle ensues at the door. Sevrin is blocked from the exit and thrown to the floor, and it dawns upon him that he is caught in a trap by true anarchists.

One of the more volatile members of the cell begins to harangue Sevrin eloquently, but the informer silences him with a haughty retort: "Don’t be a fool, Horne. . . . You know very well that I have done this for none of the reasons you are throwing at me. . . . I have been thwarting, deceiving, and betraying you—from conviction" (p. 97). Sevrin turns to the lady with the same appeal, "From conviction," with the hope of justifying in his last moments what to her must appear a wounding and disillusioning falseness, and with the further hope of rewinning her sympathy and converting her from anarchy to his own type of anti-anarchy.
The lady's mind at this point is a rather intricate convolution of truth and falsehood—or of conflicting impulses toward opposite types of gesture—her pretensions and her class instincts are in conflict. Conrad suggests her mental oscillations, contradictions, and inconsistencies, but wisely leaves their analysis to the reader's imagination. It seems that the girl has dropped her pretensions under the pressure of what seems to her a real test of her sham commitment. She has appealed to Sevrin on the aristocratic claim of chivalry due a lady of her standing—evidently forgetting that Sevrin is, as far as she knows, an anarchist dedicated to the destruction of her class and all its traditions, a devotee of principles which, by her hasty reversion to the manners of the aristocracy, she has thrust aside. She is of course unconscious of this wavering of allegiances and exemplifies Conrad's concept of woman completely lacking a realistic grasp of an ideological and physical conflict. But this is not her last inconsistency. By the sudden appearance of the incriminating credentials, Sevrin is now no more an anarchist than is she. One may think that, having seen the danger of her compromising involvement with anarchy, she would be relieved to find that the connection of her love with this dangerous activity has vanished like a nightmare—that she would welcome the revelation that she has been involved not with an anarchist but with a guardian of the state. But, adding inconsistency to inconsistency, she is crushed by Sevrin's incriminating disclosure. She picks up the document: "Holding it spread out
in both hands, she looked at it; then, without raising her
eyes, opened her fingers slowly and let it fall." (p. 96).
Blissfully unaware of her own inconsistency, she is disillu-
sioned by Sevrin's falsehood. With quite innocent duplicity,
she has expected Sevrin to save her from real involvement
with anarchism, yet to remain a symbol of the courageous
ideal of independent thought—a symbol which she can pretend
to love.

Sevrin insists that what has seemed his culpable du-
plicity was done "from conviction," but she is puzzled.
Neither her pretensions to independent thought nor her more
basic aristocratic instincts can orient her to Sevrin's fanat-
cical anti-anarchism:

"She did not know what to do. But the luckless wretch
was about to give her the opportunity for a beautiful
and correct gesture.

"I have felt in me the power to make you share
this conviction," he protested ardently. He had for-
gotten himself; he made a step towards her—perhaps he
stumbled. To me he seemed to be stooping low as if to
touch the hem of her garment. And then the approppri-
ate gesture came. She snatched her skirt away from his
polluting contact and averted her head with an upward
tilt. It was magnificently done, this gesture of con-
ventionally unstained honour, of an unblemished high-
minded amateur." (p. 98)

The situation is fraught with irony. In a superficial
view of the scene the lady is the more true to the principles
of anarchy than Sevrin is, despite—or because of—her more
numerous oscillations from a conventional aristocrat to a
would-be anarchist, to a frightened aristocratic damsel in
distress, and back to an amateur anarchist of unstained hon-
or. Furthermore, she is able to hold to her ideals at the
end of the story simply because these ideals are merely a
matter of gesture—simply because the theatrical arrangement of the scene affords her an opportunity for a magnificent gesture. On the other hand, Sevrin's sincere fanaticism makes him appear a real traitor to the cause; since the girl's entire standard of truth— even in her life as an aristocrat—is a matter of gesture, she is incapable of a serious betrayal of a cause to which she has given only pretentious—and unconsciously pretentious—allegiance. For this reason X is right in comforting her in her disillusionment, when he says that no one can explain to her the meaning of Sevrin's justification for his spying—"from conviction"—for "conviction" is to her a meaningless word. Viewed from a certain abstract standpoint, woman, according to this incident, is more faithful, in her fashion, than is man to idealistic principles.

Spurned by the girl's magnificent gesture, Sevrin quickly swallows some poison to cheat the anarchists of just retaliation, and Mr. X sees the girl to her flat. Afterwards X sends her Sevrin's diary, and she goes into retirement, then leaves for Florence, and finally retreats to a convent. "I can't tell where she will go next," says X. "What does it matter? Gestures! Gestures! Mere gestures of her class" (p. 101).

The young girl's life is separated from the real world of valid commitments and responsibilities; she lives in a magic circle in which the very nature of truth itself is a matter of gesture. Since she knows nothing of true commitment, of behavior which has actual consequences, she is not
hypocritical; there is an immovable barrier between her and men like X, who, by the sincerity of his own convictions, can understand Sevrin's traitorous change from the hopeful anarchism of his youth to his later anti-anarchism:

"A vague but ardent humanitarianism had urged him in his first youth into the bitterest extremity of negation and revolt. Afterwards his optimism flinched. He doubted and became lost. You have heard of converted atheists. These turn often into dangerous fanatics, but the soul remains the same." (p. 100)

Conrad has juxtaposed ironically a serious and valid inconsistency in man with a facile consistency in woman. The pattern is present in *Heart of Darkness* and figures most prominently in the final scene of the novel, between Marlow and Kurtz's fiancée. Kurtz has gone to Africa as an emissary of light, a missionary of moral and cultural progress, leaving in Europe his "Intended." She has nevertheless gone with him in spirit, for in the center of the wilderness he has painted an allegorical portrait of her as a symbol of idealism, in a long white robe and lifting a torch—blindfolded, however. Kurtz has written a stirring pamphlet for the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs and impressed his less idealistic and more mercenary colleagues as an amazing man. He becomes indeed godlike to the Africans, yet in some veiled way his zeal miscarries. It is not lost, however: it is instead transformed and perverted, by its very strength, into abominable lust and greed. Nevertheless, Marlow feels that the true moral substance of Kurtz has not changed, that his cry, "The horror! the horror!" is an indication of some kind of victory; and his depth of soul still
lifts him morally above the petty and mercenary, "flabby and weak-eyed devils of a rapacious folly," and, ultimately, beyond good and evil.

In like manner, when Sevrin loses the optimism of his early conversion to anarchy, he does not merely acquiesce in the political status quo, nor does he become a conventional bourgeois capitalist; instead, his native impetus of spirit (or fanaticism) carries him to the opposite extreme to become an anti-anarchist—but it remains, in X's view, the same fervent drive which earlier had been directed toward anarchy. In both men's metamorphoses, the true spirit is somehow consistent. Marlow realizes that an understanding of Kurtz's change requires a feeling for the abstract nature of commitment—that a conventional awareness of the difference between good and evil actions will not suffice. Therefore he does not attempt to explain to Kurtz's fiancée how his dying cry was a victory, but allows her to translate, as it were, Kurtz's profound victory into the conventional goodness and consistency which she can understand and applaud. Nor can Mr. X explain to the feminine would-be anarchist how Sevrin's betrayal of the cause could be based on "conviction."

"'What was it he said to me?—"From conviction!" It seemed a vile mockery. What could he mean by it?"

"'That, my dear young lady,' I said gently, 'is more than I or anybody else can ever explain to you.'"

Mr. X flicked a crumb off the front of his coat.

"And that was strictly true as to her. Though Horne, for instance, understood very well; and so did I."

Conrad has created other female characters whose
idealism is mere pretension. Mrs. Fyne in *Chance* is an example of a free-thinking, iconoclastic, "emancipated" woman. Having suffered under the arbitrary harshness of an egotistic and brutal father, she has revolted against the conventional theory of woman's role in life. In Mrs. Fyne's cynical view, woman, despite the superficial honors and courtesies paid to her, is in conventional society the slave of man's desire, greed, and egotism, and she is morally justified in using any means available in escaping from masculine tyranny. Mrs. Fyne preaches to young girls in her care that women are not bound by any moral standards in their struggles against this tyranny. She expounds unabashedly amoral feminine retaliation to her protegées in peripatetic lectures and in books, but her own retaliation against the male monster consists in her easy domination of a rather spineless husband. Her great inconsistency is exposed when Flora de Barral, a girl in her care, seems to Mrs. Fyne to have seduced and tricked this daring woman's brother into marrying her on false pretenses—just to provide an easy living for herself. Flora would seem to have proved a diligent and brave follower of the Fyne school of feminism, but Mrs. Fyne objects, with blatant inconsistency, that Flora has ruthlessly tricked her brother—that she has not acted fairly.

Conrad's caricature of shallow and inconsistent feminine idealism and free-thought in the character of Mrs. Fyne does not attain the scathing irony of his presentation of it in "The Informer," chiefly because in the short story woman's
inconsistency, from a certain absurd perspective, is quite consistent. The young woman remains quite unaware that she has almost been called to reveal her lack of valid and sincere responsibility; under the stress of the bogus raid, she has almost shown her true colors—but she remains, in her own superficial mind, a faithful adherent to anarchist principles. Her every thought is a matter of posturing; her posturing is her sincerity. Mrs. Fyne seems to know the difference between commitment and hollow talk, but the girl in "The Informer" does not.

Mr. X does, however, allow her validity in one area in her life. He claims that her feminine power over Sevrin is completely innocent and valid and quite free from pretension: "We have no ground in expediency or morals to quarrel with her on that account. Charm in woman and exceptional intelligence in man are a law unto themselves" (p. 90). Her true integrity lies beneath the heavy layers of pretension. It has no connection whatever with her brave and free life as an agitator. She is of the same pattern as Mme. Levaille of "The Idiots," who leads a real and valid life as a successful businesswoman, an epitome of Nature in her easy prosperity, yet professes Christianity and superficially fulfills its rituals with an unstrained and unthinking regularity. The integrity of both women is something very basic to their natures, lying far deeper in their characters than the surface allegiances they consciously and even enthusiastically and regularly profess.

The character of the young lady in "The Informer" seems
to represent the lowest level of sham idealism, a travesty on the idea of human commitment. It may be concluded by some readers that Conrad considered woman more capable of such contemptible treachery than man, and that this tale should be dismissed as an expression of a misogyny too personal to have much universal appeal. Yet the story's final implication is a moral nihilism which is too thorough, too bitter, and too serious to be confused with mere misogyny. This nihilism cannot be shrugged off as the same self-indulgent and subjective complaint against the cosmos found in "The Brute." On the contrary, this attitude is well controlled and carefully analyzed; it is not betrayed by that story's false pathos and obvious contrivance. The connoisseur who hears X's tale is profoundly disturbed. His consternation is too genuine—and ultimately too valid and sympathetic, despite his primness—to result from a misogynous anecdote. Mr. X's story has shown him an uncomfortable and irrepressible fact about the human personality.

It is true that one purpose of X's tale is to show that women are especially likely to become such amateur anarchists, that even in England where people do not actively aid the cause of anarchy, "most women, if not always ready to play with fire, are generally eager to play with a loose spark or so" (p. 79). But X intends a broader application. The story illustrates his earlier comment, which the connoisseur finds particularly shocking in the plush restaurant: "There's no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence" (p. 77). That is, appeals to
reason, to pity, brotherhood, and charity, set forth with all the persuasive power that rhetoric can impart, do not affect the actions of human beings. They are stirred, and they enjoy being stirred, but they are not changed. The failure of the race to respond to human pathos or to alter their behavior as a result of a line of reasoning shows that thought and action are to most people, as they are to the young girl who dabbles in a radical movement, two entirely separate and never-converging realms. The young lady offers an obvious, colorful, and intensely ironic example of this attitude, but she is by no means the one villain of the piece. The world presented by "The Informer" is empty of valid human idealism; the story leaves a lingering impression of bleakness.

The tendency of European society as a whole supports X's cynical thesis as readily as does the girl's more comical hypocrisy. The public's demand for his iconoclastic pamphlets—as ironic wit to be enjoyed or pathos to be wept over sentimentally for their own sake, but not as a serious appeal for humanitarian response, a cry for repentance, or a warning of imminent violence—shows that society separates thought from action quite rigorously. The male characters in the story likewise exemplify the human tendency to separate thought from action. The connoisseur, a man of culture, has his ideal of womanhood rudely shocked when he hears of a young lady of his class reading proof for two fiery anarchist journals: "Nothing, in my opinion, could have been less fit for the eyes of a young lady. . . . One of them
preached the dissolution of all social and domestic ties; the other advocated systematic murder" (p. 89). But he himself stands condemned by X's censure of a society in which gestures take the place of feelings and of valid moral action—a society consisting of "amateurs of emotion." The connoisseur's own words condemn him: he describes himself to the reader as one "whose whole scheme of life had been based upon a suave and delicate discrimination of social and artistic values" (p. 77). To him manners—perhaps even gestures—have taken the place of true feelings; his "delicate discrimination" has become a sort of moral pedantry; he and his class are the victims of their own thorough over-refinement; their lives have become morally irrelevant.

The connoisseur's character is vital to the effect of the tale, for he is the one person in the story, except for the cynical Mr. X, who becomes really aware of the universal folly and rottenness which plagues a race of sham-idealists. As X's story proceeds, the connoisseur gradually becomes more and more aware of its unintended but nonetheless stinging condemnation of his own life, which is intelligent, refined, cultured—guided by high ideals of humanism—but void of relevant idealism. Conrad's characterization of him is understated, yet his prim, punctilious character pervades the tale; there is a definite contrast between his venerable complacency at the beginning and his restless and vaguely irritable perturbation at the end. It is a carefully controlled characterization, balancing his repellent primness with his genuine refinement. His suaveness, his mild
satisfaction with his own bland wit are indicated at the beginning by his clever metaphoric suggestion that his friend's delight in meeting odd personalities makes him a collector of acquaintances: "He would reject, with genuine surprise, the name of a collector. Nevertheless, that's what he is by temperament. He collects acquaintances. It is delicate work. He brings to it the patience, the passion, the determination of a true collector of curiosities. . . . He observes them, listens to them, penetrates them, measures them, and puts the memories away in the galleries of his mind" (p. 73). He is not ashamed of his ignorance of the ways of anarchists. His lack of curiosity reveals a perfect complacency: "Anarchists, I suppose, have no families. . . . But indeed I don't understand anarchists" (p. 75). At one point in the tale X asks him if he is surprised at the behavior of some of these men. X receives an emphatic and almost haughty assurance that he knows nothing of anarchists; it is evident that he would consider such knowledge a degrading hint of impropriety: "I protested hastily that I was not surprised in the least; that I thought nothing of the kind; that anarchists in general were simply inconceivable to me mentally, morally, logically, sentimentally, and even physically" (p. 97). To him anarchism has about it a taint of vulgarity; yet he cannot repress a rather prurient interest in what he calls Mr. X's underground life: "As I sat, evening after evening, facing him at dinner, a curiosity in that direction would naturally arise in my mind." But he excuses himself, for this is not a vulgar and compromising interest
in passion and violence, but rather the safe, detached, clinical interest of a collector: "I am a quiet and peaceable product of civilization, and know no passion other than the passion for collecting things which are rare, and must remain exquisite even if approaching to the monstrous" (p. 76).

Mr. X disturbs the connoisseur by his union of the most elegant refinement with a career of overt and unabashed violence. In the connoisseur's view violence and refinement are antithetical; art—or at least connoisseurship—and evil have nothing whatever to do with one another. His opinion seems sound, but he has evidently gone so far in this line of thought as to consider violence completely irrelevant to a life of culture and therefore non-existent. In his own ingenuous words he is a person "to whom all sorts and forms of violence appeared as unreal as the giants, ogres, and seven-headed hydars whose activities affect, fantastically, the course of legends and fairy-tales" (p. 77). He seems to have been affected morally by the assumptions of a collector: that only the rarities which are out of the reach of the vulgar populace have significance—in moral terms, simple and obvious good and evil, as opposed to his finely-measured propriety, to his "suave and delicate discrimination of social and artistic values," are coarse matters suitable for the concern of the lower classes and have no real relevance to the life of a connoisseur, a humanist, a man of distinguished taste and culture. Thus the "monstrous" anarchist Mr. X is quite disturbing in his similarity to the connoisseur
himself: "He had the manner of good society, wore a coat and hat like mine, and had pretty near the same taste in cooking. It was too frightful to think of" (p. 76). It is perhaps a telling point that his recognition of X as a cultured man akin to himself depends partially on such morally irrelevant trivia as X's coat, hat, and taste in cooking.

The sterility, the museum-like emptiness and coldness of the connoisseur's treasure-rooms symbolize the void of moral irrelevancy in which he is self-imprisoned:

My treasures are disposed in three large rooms without carpets and curtains. There is no other furniture than the étagères and the glass cases whose contents shall be worth a fortune to my heirs. I allow no fires to be lighted, for fear of accidents, and a fire-proof door separates them from the rest of the house. (p. 74)

To him one indication of the value of his way of life is its separation from a coarse world in which violence exists. This leads him, unconsciously, to value its very irrelevance to a real world. If valid, responsible, and objective idealism is among the capabilities of human nature, it is certainly not to be found in the life of this connoisseur, which is ultimately as irrelevant in a world of hard facts and meaningful actions as are the posturings of the young, feminine anarchist-manqué.

It would seem that "The Informer" exposes the vanity of bourgeois idealism by juxtaposing it with the true dedication of anarchists to a valid cause. Yet Conrad's presentation of the anarchists is far from laudatory—even though it is not as contemptuous and sardonic as his portrayal of Verloc and the volatile and lethargic anarchists in The
Secret Agent. In the connoisseur's private musing about the odd and to him irrelevant and inconceivable psychology of anarchists, Conrad raises the valid and obvious question about anarchy as a way of life: Does not the aim of anarchy --the destruction of society, of law, and of most everything else--make the daily activities and feelings which constitute human life absurd?

I imagine he [Mr. X] must have been a lonely man. Anarchists, I suppose, have no families--not, at any rate, as we understand that social relation. Organization into families may answer to a need of human nature, but in the last instance it is based on law, and therefore must be something odious and impossible to an anarchist. But, indeed, I don't understand anarchists. Does a man of that--of that--persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed, for instance? Does he lay his head on the pillow, pull his bedclothes over him, and go to sleep with the necessity of the chambrement général, as the French slang has it, of the general blow-up, always present to his mind? And if so how can he? I am sure that if such a faith (or such a fanaticism) once mastered my thoughts I would never be able to compose myself sufficiently to sleep or eat or perform any of the routine acts of daily life. I would want no wife, no children; I could have no friends, it seems to me; and as to collecting bronzes or china, that, I should say, would be quite out of the question." (p. 75)

The anarchists, for all their scorn of the young lady's invalid gesturing, espouse a doctrine which has no relevance to the humble and ordinary actions which constitute human life. For all his primness, the connoisseur has hit on the prime and most reasonable objection to anarchy. The impending destruction of society, the "general blow-up," would seem to remove the meaning from such basic things as sleep, love, marriage, family, and hobbies--to deprive them of their profound and instinctive significance which lies too deep in human nature for rational analysis. The anarchists in this
story display an amazing failure to grasp the actualities of their situation: when X warns Horne, the London ring-leader, of the existence of an informer among his group, the wild-eyed Horne brushes the subject aside "with irrelevant exaltation: "I have something in hand that shall strike terror into the heart of these gorged brutes!"" (p. 86). Another member of the group shows the same blindness to immediate reality. He is the explosives expert who works in the top-floor in his laboratory. X fears his apocalyptic temperament might be upset by the fake raid on the house and possibly cause an explosion. X goes upstairs to warn him, but: "Before I had quite finished explaining to him what was going on he shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and turned away to his balances and test-tubes. His was the true spirit of an extreme revolutionist. Explosives were his faith, his hope, his weapon, and his shield" (p. 88). The validity of the anarchists' idealism is again challenged by a glimpse of the hollowness of their sense of brotherhood, which supposedly unites them against an unenlightened and hostile world. During the "raid," X sees a member of the group chewing up and swallowing a piece of paper, evidently some secret information which should not fall into the hands of the police: "He was a true and faithful 'companion.' But the fund of secret malice which lurks at the bottom of our sympathies caused me to feel amused at that perfectly uncalled-for performance" (p. 89).

If the anarchists fail to represent valid and objective human idealism, Sevrin the informer fails doubly. His
rejection of fanatical anarchy as a hopeless illusion does not save him from its fanaticism, its hollowness, its irrelevance. Before "his optimism flinched" he had thought the destruction of society would cure the world's ills. Now he believes with equal foolishness that a destruction of anarchy will be the panacea. He fails to see that the negation of a philosophy--especially of the negative philosophy, anarchy--does not constitute a positive philosophy; he is thus repeating the classical mistake of orthodox anarchists --that destruction itself suffices--that creation is not necessary for the establishment of a good society. It is because of this kinship that the anarchists' ring-leader Horne and the informer Sevrin are, as X assures the narrator, two fanatics who can understand each other. The girl is puzzled by Sevrin's haughty declamation--"From conviction!"--but Horne is silenced in his loud denunciation of Sevrin, because he realizes that they are both men of "conviction." Sevrin has merely compounded the typical anarchists' faith in negation.

Mr. X himself is an anarchist, yet he is an intelligent person who does not seem to share the rabid fanaticism, the blindness to actualities, the obvious absurdities of the other anarchists and cannot be disposed of as easily. Among Conrad's moral nihilists and his skeptical and cynical villains--Mr. Plain Jones of Victory, Gentleman Brown of Lord Jim, and others--Mr. X is perhaps the most intelligent, detached, and respectable character. By means of his total repudiation of ideals, he seems to escape the sham idealism
of the girl, the narrator, Horne, the explosive expert, and Sevrin. He believes, cynically, that "There's no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence."

His cynicism is made more horrible, to the reader as well as the narrator, by his mixture of what seems to be true cultural values with this cynicism. His appreciation of the connoisseur's Chinese bronzes is obviously profound; he values art and culture, but is dedicated to the belief that only terror and violence—not art and culture—will amend mankind, and he is working for the destruction of the civilization which has produced the art and culture he deeply admires. In the common estimation, art and culture are directly related to the social and moral betterment of humanity; but, just as surely as the feminine would-be anarchist separates thought from valid action, so Mr. X admires the works of the creative human spirit, yet in his practise fails to show a belief in the existence of a positive, improving force in human nature.

Of course the connection between morality and culture is not as clearly settled as the connoisseur would believe it to be. The group of artists and men of letters called Decadents, during the late nineteenth century, saw art and conventional moral beliefs as two separate realms, and the present century saw violence and learning in monstrous reconciliation when scholars in Nazi Germany administered the imprisonment, torture and death of fellow European men of culture in concentration camps. Whether or not the creative impulse is completely separate from the moral sense, it
is nevertheless difficult to reconcile a love of art with an anarchist's destructive purpose. Mr. X would seem to be living a contradiction as certainly as the young lady--yet he seems to be sincere in each of his opposing allegiances. It is difficult to decide rationally whether his contradiction is "better" than the young girl's. For both X and the girl, however, ideals are one thing and action quite another.

X's belief in terror and violence as a way to amend mankind is of course open to the objection which faces any philosophical position advocating brute force as an amending or a morally justifiable means: If terror and violence are necessary for human amendment, who will wield this terror and violence? Will a mere member of the human race do so--by X's own premise, one who is incapable of amendment save by becoming the object of terror and violence? X's philosophical position either involves an infinite regression or assumes the existence of a Nietzschean superman, which concept implies a hierarchy, which is anathema to the devout anarchist.

There is no valid idealism in "The Informer," for objective, sound human values do not exist, or at least are not represented by any of the story's characters. Idealism has been replaced by the girl's gestures, by the connoisseur's over-refined mannerisms and irrelevant discriminations, by the anarchists' fanaticism, by Sevrin's doubly empty anti-anarchism, and by X's belief in the sole validity of brute force. Thus the woman character, though she is central to the story's effect, is not the villain of the
piece, but one prominent manifestation of the rottenness that plagues human idealism. Her shallowness and inconsistency, her travesty on idealism constitute only reflections of a basic human trait, a split between action and thought which Conrad bitterly presents as an inescapable aspect of the human condition.

In "The Informer" Conrad's attitude toward feminine idealism (as well as his attitude toward human idealism generally) is quite contemptuous, but in another work he was capable of viewing sympathetically this same feminine superficiality, inconsistency, and irrationality. In Under Western Eyes a female character plays a role quite similar to that of the young woman in "The Informer," but Conrad's attitude toward Nathalie Haldin, her moral status in the novel, and her final impression on the reader are strikingly different. Conrad did not change his belief about woman's idealism between the writing of the story and the novel. Nathalie Haldin is, like the girl in "The Informer," a woman whose true integrity consists in a very basic, natural tendency, rather than in some conceptual ideal with which her true nature is at times consciously, but only tenuously, involved. What is changed from the would-be anarchist to Nathalie Haldin is rather Conrad's estimation of the moral value of this feminine consistency-within-inconsistency.

The characters taken together—so similar in their roles, so different in their effects—offer an excellent representation of Conrad's ambivalence toward woman. The characters demand comparison, and the two works show
basically the same plot but strikingly dissimilar attitudes on the author's part toward social revolution, human idealism, and fanaticism, as well as feminine idealism. In each work a young man becomes a police spy informing on the activities of a group of revolutionists. Razumov in Under Western Eyes is virtually forced into this position by circumstances that develop from his effort to avoid implication with Victor Haldin, a fellow student who has come to Razumov's room to hide after committing a political murder, believing, wrongly, that Razumov is in sympathy with his cause. To avoid implication, Razumov betrays Haldin to the police—not out of malice and not really from a sincere belief that the autocratic, totalitarian regime is perfect, but mainly from a fearful resentment against Haldin's wrongful and selfish willingness to endanger Razumov's future by so implicating him, and against his rather presumptuous and egotistical belief that Razumov of course shares his political sympathies. After this seemingly patriotic act, Razumov cannot escape the role that the Russian state police mark out for him. Sevrin's becoming an anti-anarchist is less profoundly developed in the slighter piece of fiction: he simply loses his optimism as a revolutionist and replaces it in anti-anarchism.

In each work a young woman with unconsciously shallow pretensions to revolutionism falls in love with the man who has become known as a great agitator, unaware that he is diametrically opposed to the principles she superficially espouses, and is in fact betraying a group of revolutionists.
In *Under Western Eyes* the irony of this attraction is compounded, for it is Nathalie's own brother whom Razumov has betrayed. In "The Informer" Conrad turns the situation to good use as a situational farce: a young lady unwittingly false in her pretensions to anarchism is in love (falsely) with a false anarchist and unaware of his falseness. In *Under Western Eyes* Conrad writes a tragedy in which the political alignments of hero and heroine are neither fanatical nor quite as culpably shallow and hypocritical as in "The Informer." In the novel, furthermore, the heroine possesses unconsciously and the hero works out, tragically, a sense of constancy and identity which lies deeper than superficial political alignments. The novel ends with a painful separation and misunderstanding between the two, just as the story does. Yet in the novel, this is a pathetic rather than a farcical situation, and it is to some degree transcended by a spiritual bond between the two principle characters.

Nathalie Haldin's involvement with revolutionism is not as shallow and hypocritical as that of the young lady in "The Informer." Nevertheless, Conrad makes it clear that Nathalie's understanding of the social revolution is limited. She is one of several women in Conrad's fiction who remain on the periphery of a moral, political, or physical struggle; who are enthusiastic, empathetic, or harshly and punctiliously critical, yet lacking that understanding of the situation which only direct experience can give. When the novel opens, she and her mother are living in Switzerland. Before
leaving Russia, she had listened avidly on many occasions to her brother expounding his radical doctrine, his compassion for and faith in the ordinary, low-class Russian people, his anger against the cruelty of the State. She has grasped the humanitarian element in his doctrine with the understanding natural to her tender and imaginative character, and she has become, with her shining eyes, a human symbol of her brother's hope and idealism; Haldin tells Razumov at one point that, if he is captured and executed, his immortality will subsist partially in Nathalie herself, whom he has inspired. The reader feels that she is less aware of the egotism, the fanaticism, the futile bloodiness, the hollow self-delusion, of her brother's "faith" and actions. He assassinates a state official, by throwing a bomb at his sleigh, thereby killing a number of innocent bystanders. He takes the very horror of the act as a sign of its justification, telling Razumov that he is sure his calling must be of divine origin, for, if it were not, the bloodiness of his deed would make it an absurd and futile atrocity leading nowhere but to despair. He remains blissfully unconscious of his flimsy unspoken assumption: that despair and absurdity simply cannot, by definition, be the result of deeds motivated and inspired by his particular mystic vision of Russia's destiny. He is possessed of an obstinate and desperate optimism capable of justifying, in his own eyes, any degree of extremism for the sake of any pitifully trivial purpose.

Nathalie Haldin cannot see this darker side of her brother's humanitarian idealism because of the distance
between her home in Switzerland and the scene of his deeds in Russia, and also because of the tendency of her natural tenderness to cancel and assuage the fanatical egotism in her brother's act, in view of the compassionate motive which inspired it. She is analogous to the feminine would-be anarchist, who is able to separate anarchism's humanitarian purpose from its fanatical cruelty, and to the aunt of Charles Marlow, who is able to glorify the avowed altruistic purpose of the Belgian firm for the colonization of Africa and to wink at its unacknowledged desire for profits. Nathalie Haldin's involvement with revolution never becomes the deluded hypocrisy of the girl in "The Informer," for, unlike her, Nathalie confines her involvement to a passive empathy, sorrow, and hope in her brother's cause. She does not actively participate in the meetings of an exiled group of Russian agitators in Geneva, whose theatricality, egotism, and futility repel her.

Unlike the shallowness of the girl in "The Informer," Nathalie Haldin's failure to grasp profoundly the serious, practical meaning of her brother's revolt is a redeeming failure. She possesses a compassion and a hope which, if it is in the end futile, is more humble, less egotistical, more positive, less blind and obstinate, than her brother's inspired and sacrificial fanaticism. Razumov writes in his diary that the doctrine which in her brother horrified and repelled him, appeared in her an innocent, noble, and winsome aspiration. Nathalie differs from the exiled revolutionists in the positive force of her idealism, which contrasts
strongly with the destruction of society to which they are pledged. When Razumov confesses to the group of revolutionists and to Nathalie that he is the informer, she is totally disillusioned in her hopes for him as a fellow worker to continue her brother's crusade. After parting from him, she tells the narrator that more positive work must be done in preparation for the dawn of a new Russia, and she returns to her homeland to live a sacrificial life of compassion unadulterated by violence, caring for the sick in hospitals, administering directly to the great Russian people for whose sake her brother had committed inspired atrocities.

Just as in the farce "The Informer" the young girl possessed a natural personal charm, acknowledged by X to be meaningful in and of itself, independent of any connection with the anarchistic principles she believed herself to be serving, so Nathalie Haldin's compassion has objective value independent of the validity or the invalidity of her brother's revolutionary ideas, of which she believes her compassion is merely a tributary feeling. In the novel's final valuation, her compassion is more valid than the revolutionary ideas with which she considers her own idealism rationally connected, but which have only superficially affected, channeled, colored—or perhaps tainted—her basic and native idealism and compassion. Her sincere sacrificial spirit and her brother's more sophisticated and doctrinaire idealism are in her mind so inextricably united that, just as the girl in "The Informer" cannot understand Sevrin's betrayal of the cause "from conviction," so Nathalie cannot understand
Razumov's rejection and betrayal of her brother and his ideals. However, her compassion toward the Russian people is logically more reconcilable with Razumov's more hesitant and tolerant, constructive hope for social amelioration than with her brother's bloody mysticism. Razumov and Nathalie are tragically separated by a void of misunderstanding, for Razumov realizes that Nathalie's idealism is too closely identified by her with her brother's revolutionary doctrine for him to dissuade and convert her from her pathetic delusion—just as Sevrin had hoped, in vain, to make the girl feel the force of his anti-anarchistic "conviction." An attempt to extricate Nathalie's idealism from her brother's fanaticism would, Razumov fears, destroy her idealism entirely. This would be, he writes to her in his diary, to "steal her soul."

The two works show that Conrad held an intensely ambivalent attitude toward a feminine idealism which is in each of these contrasting female characters essentially the same irrational, somewhat blind, emotional, deluded, and passive aspiration.

The works discussed in the first section of this chapter show feminine idealism as a rather casual and irrational—if not hypocritical—intertwining of woman's native charm or instinctive compassion with a social ideology. However, the female character in "Gaspar Ruiz," (the first tale in A Set of Six) opposes, with a basic emotional and personal strength, the force of a social and collective ideal—
political liberty and independence— which stirs the masses of her country with an appeal to the noblest human aspirations. In this tale it is a male character, not a female character, whose flimsy idealism is treated with rather gentle cynicism by the omniscient narrator. It is the woman's basic and natural emotion—for she has renounced her own ideal and now professes no superficial ideology—which gives her appalling acts their validity. The story, set in nineteenth-century revolutionary Chile, balances the atrocities committed in the name of rational and enlightened idealism with the equally extreme and implacable fury of a woman.

A civil war is an event capable of evoking ferocious emotions and perverting high ideals, for during a revolution, as one of the principal characters explains:

"... the enemy is not at the door, but within your very house. At such times the heat of passionate convictions passing into hatred, removes the restraints of honour and humanity from many men and of delicacy and fear from some women. These last, when once they throw off the timidity and reserve of their sex, become by the vivacity of their intelligence and the violence of their merciless resentment more dangerous than so many armed giants. ... Women are ready to rise to the heights of devotion unattainable by us men, or to sink into the depths of abasement which amazes our masculine prejudices." (pp. 24-25)

The story is told to a group of British naval officers some years after the revolution, by the aged General Santierra, one of the heroes who led the Chilean people to freedom. He presents quite an opposite personality from the cynical Mr. X, for, instead of showing cool amusement at the inconsistency and folly of woman's shallow idealism, General Santierra must sadly acknowledge many a breach of honor
in his own cause, many a cruel and stupid deed on the part of his fellow liberators which sullied the purity and contradicted the very nature of his ideal. It is not his part to laugh at woman's ineffectual dabbling in terror and violence. Instead he must express a profound horror at a woman's willingness to set aside all ideals of propriety and feminine delicacy and all pretensions to honor in order to achieve the purpose of her implacable will. The central motif of the story is the contrast between General Santierra's impractical and weak idealism and Doña Erminia's simple, elemental, and amoral hatred.

Gaspar Ruiz is a young Chilean peasant of amazing physical strength but of docile will and lethargic intellect. When the revolution begins, his status is too humble for him to be aware of either the advantages or the disadvantages of any form of government, and his association with the army of independence is neither an indication of idealism on his part nor a sign of the noble consistency and purity of General Santierra's ideal of liberty as it is practised by his fellow patriots. Soldiers of the Republic ride into his father's rancho one morning, spear the watchdogs, hamstring a cow, take some of the best horses, and impress Gaspar Ruiz into their band, crying "Viva la Libertad!" Certain events in Ruiz's subsequent military career put still a worse light on the ideal of "la Libertad" for the humane Santierra—then only a lieutenant in the Army of the Republic. Ruiz, despite his great strength, is captured alive by the Royalists and forced to march at the head of an infantry charge. He is
captured again by his own army and, along with other former rebels, is condemned to be shot as a deserter. His plight evokes the pity of Lt. Santierra, who, with his youthful and unrealistically refined appraisal of wartime justice, attempts to save the lives of some of the men; but he is unable to dissuade the more hardened officers, who merely mock his tender heart, and Ruiz is among those who face a firing squad one evening. By chance he survives and crawls to a dilapidated house, the home of a once proud and now insane Spaniard of the old regime, whose estates and fortunes have been confiscated by the patriots "by proclamation, for he was a bitter foe of our independence," as Santierra explains. Doña Erminia, the daughter of the destitute family, has remained proud and bitter. She saves the life of the peasant, who idealizes her as an angel of mercy and, though he feels the humility of his class, falls in love with her.

Gaspar Ruiz, now unjustly made a fugitive from his army, begins lethargically to see the wrongness of his treatment. The girl prompts this vague hostility: "if she were a man, she would consider no life worthless which held the possibility of revenge" (p. 30). An earthquake destroys the dilapidated house and kills the girl's parents; Gaspar breaks into the house during the cataclysm, rescues his Erminia, and carries her away to live with his uncle in Santiago. There in her vengeful mind she conceives a plan to wreak her hatred on the Republicans. She writes a letter for Gaspar Ruiz to the Commander in Chief of the Armies of the Republic, General San Martin, pleading his cause and asking to be
reinstated as a trusted patriot. San Martin gives him a chance to show his valor and loyalty by leading a small band against a Royalist ammunition garrison, which he takes brilliantly without losing a man. San Martin magnanimously makes him a captain on his return, and General Santierra notices that a determined and severe confidence has replaced the lethargic docility of his old acquaintance. "He was an audacious fellow. He had snatched a soul for himself out of a cataclysm, remember" (p. 42). San Martin gives him as his military charge the protection of the southern frontier during the absence of the greater part of the Chilean army on a mission to liberate Peru. The Civil Governor, however, resents his marriage to a woman of Royalist sympathies, and spreads suspicion about his character. Stirred into hatred by his wife, he takes a band of trusted men, drags the Governor from his house during a ball, and murders him. He thereafter becomes a partisan chief living in the hills with his followers, claiming to defend the Royalist cause. He is accompanied on horseback on all of his forays by his implacable wife, who "poured half of her vengeful soul into the strong clay of that man, as you may pour intoxication, madness, poison into an empty cup" (p. 52). In her insatiable lust for revenge, she uses as a deadly weapon the superhuman strength of Gaspar Ruiz, and the awe in his followers which this strength inspires, to spread death and destruction over two provinces of the new Republic. She controls him by the force of his love, cruelly allowing him only the slightest indication of affection in return for vicious blows struck
against the Republic. "After every skirmish, after every raid, after every successful action, he would ride up to her and look into her face. Its haughty calm was never relaxed. . . . He tried to melt her icy heart in a stream of warm blood" (p. 48).

Naturally the Republic is able to break the power of Gaspar Ruiz only by separating him from his wife. He agrees to an alliance with Carreras, the corrupt president of a neighboring country, and sends his wife and child into Carreras' mountainous domain for safety during a particularly arduous campaign against the Chilean army, now returned victorious from Peru. Carreras makes a dishonorable offer to the Republic: for a price he will have his men escorting Erminia and her young daughter kidnap them and bring them to a remote fort of the Chilean Republic high in the mountains. To Santierra's embarrassment, the Republic compromises its honor by agreeing to deal with the scoundrel, and the wildly distraught Gaspar Ruiz cannot rescue his family, despite the aid of a tribe of savage Indians in besieging the fort. His troops bring up a small cannon to blow open the gate, but the gun carriage has unfortunately slipped off the mountain road into an abyss on the way. Ruiz conceives the desperate plan of offering his own body, on all fours, as the gun carriage. The fort's gate is splintered successfully, but Ruiz falls to the ground at the last shot, mortally injured by the strain and the impact. A Republican force arrives and puts his men to rout; just before he dies, Gaspar Ruiz sees his wife briefly:
"On all the earth I have loved nothing but you, Gaspar," she said.

"His head made a movement. His eyes revived. 'At last!' he sighed out. Then, anxiously, 'But is this true . . . is this true?'

"'As true as that there is no mercy and justice in this world,' she answered him, passionately. She stooped over his face. He tried to raise his head, but it fell back, and when she kissed his lips he was already dead." (p. 66)

The Republican government intends to keep Erminia in custody. As the escort, led by Lt. Santierra, wends its way on a particularly narrow road edging the mountain, Erminia gives the Lieutenant her child to hold, saying she trembles from fear of the height. She then jumps from her saddle into the abyss, leaving the young Lieutenant completely unnerved by her appalling and horrible determination. He rears the child as his own heir and never marries. A woman of some forty years now, she appears briefly at the end of the story to greet the English guests who have listened to General Santierra's tale.

The story presents a conflict between a Republic, stirred by but not consistently faithful to an ideal of freedom, and a woman motivated by an intense and relentless personal hatred, willing to ignore all scruples to gain her revenge. Although her initial motive lay in an injured aristocratic pride, she soon puts aside all pretenses to aristocratic honor; in fact, her cause becomes no longer political or ideological. From her point of view, she is not fighting in a class conflict; she sees the Republicans as simply the object of her hatred—not as a political enemy. In General Santierra's words, "the heat of passionate
convictions" in Doña Erminia has passed into hatred. It has removed her "restraints of . . . delicacy and fear." Santierra claims that women are basically more intense than men, so that when these superficial restraints are removed, they "become by the vivacity of their intelligence and the violence of their merciless resentment more dangerous than so many armed giants." He feels that Doña Erminia's ruthless devastation and terrorizing of a province was motivated not by her devotion to a political cause or a way of life, but from a personal hatred which he considers peculiarly feminine in its intensity: "Women are ready to rise to the heights of devotion unattainable by us men, or to sink into the depths of abasement which amazes our masculine prejudices."

The conflict represents a neat moral balance: Neither the Republicans nor Doña Erminia follow those formal and honorable courtesies or considerations which the adherents of worthy military causes believe must be maintained for a moral and spiritual triumph, without which a mere military victory would be meaningless. Each side is willing to adopt means which violate the sacredness of its ends. Part of Doña Erminia's hatred must stem from the outraged pride of aristocracy; yet she tricks Lt. Santierra by appealing falsely to the ideal which he thinks they both share as aristocrats: noblesse oblige. Early in the tale she asks him to obtain from his commander a safe-conduct pass for Gaspar Ruiz, now recuperated from his unjust execution but fearing a second and more successful one. She leads Santierra
to believe that her family have magnanimously overlooked political differences and class prejudices and harbored Ruiz as a helpless victim of the unjust execution to which Santierra himself had objected. Her true purpose is not to reinstate Gaspar Ruiz as a patriot, but to allow him to pose as one long enough to gain the confidence of the Republicans, and ultimately to use him as a weapon against them. Later, when this becomes clear, Santierra is deeply disillusioned: "I thought her great. Alas! She was only implacable" (p. 33).

Her furious hatred has already led her to adopt another means which is an even more desperate and nullifying compromise to her aristocratic pride, and which, ironically, embarrasses Santierra in its inadvertent fulfilling of Santierra's own ideal of classless brotherhood. In order to avenge the outrage to her aristocratic pride, and to gain control of Ruiz's strength, she puts aside pride and woos an ignorant peasant. Fifty years later, when Santierra tries to explain this to his listening guests, his difficulty is obvious:

"I am, as you know, a republican, son of a Liberator. . . . As a boy I fought for liberty; I've always believed in the equality of men; and as to their brotherhood, that, to my mind, is even more certain. . . . But-- . . . The tale of a king who took a beggar-maid for a partner of his throne may be pretty enough as we men look upon ourselves and our love. But that a young girl, famous for her haughty beauty and, only a short time before, the admired of all the balls in the Viceroy's palace, should take by the hand a guasso, a common peasant, is intolerable to our sentiment of women and their love. It is madness. Nevertheless it happened. But it must be said that in her case it was the madness of hate--not of love." (pp. 25-26)
Ironically, the outraged aristocrat, the enemy of Lt. Santieria, comes to fulfill in the flesh Santieria's own ideal—and the spectacle of this fulfillment horrifies Santieria the Liberator. He can hardly bring himself to contemplate such an impropriety: "I rode past the house every day almost," he began again, "and this was going on within. But how it was going on no mind of man can conceive. Her desperation must have been extreme, and Gaspar Ruiz was a docile fellow" (p. 27).

The foreboding obscurity which has been seen to veil the human emotion of love in other stories by Conrad is present in this phenomenon of Doña Erminia's relationship with the guasso Gaspar Ruiz. Her motivation remains uncertain. She seems to have attached herself to him solely in order to use his strength against her enemies, and furthermore, after the death of her parents, there is no one to protect and care for her save this devoted peasant. She is dry-eyed in her last moments with Gaspar Ruiz, when for the first time she professes to love him. Late as it comes, this profession may even so be a lie prompted by a momentary pity for a faithful and useful servant in his extremity. Her subsequent suicide may be more plausibly explained as disdain for a life empty of the possibility of continued vengeance than as the extreme act of a bereaved widow. Nevertheless, in a soul where ruthless vengeance has become the one motive, the overriding principle, where the evil emotion of hatred has become the soul's perverse good, it is conceivable that such a means to her profound vengefulness as was Gaspar Ruiz
could become the object of a sort of perverse love, that a relationship which began as expedient exploitation ended, through the effect of a twisted psychological condition, as love.

Whether or not Doña Erminia's association with Gaspar Ruiz remained a cruel exploitation which never allowed him any substantial reward of self-esteem and which kept him painfully unaware of the true nature of her feelings toward him, it is certain that his association with the Republican cause is an exploitation of him as a mindless object, and that any understanding he might have attained as to his status as a Republican is prevented, not only because his mind cannot grasp the complexities of an ideological conflict, but also because the ideology is not understood or faithfully served by the men who coerce him into the ranks of the glorious Army of Independence. Human rationality and idealism are absurdly mocked when Gaspar Ruiz is kidnapped to become a soldier and his father robbed by men who shout "Viva la Libertad!" It is difficult to decide which is worse—Doña Erminia's duplicity in her enslavement of him through the force of love, or the hypocrisy of the kidnappers, who use lasso, bayonet, and idealistic slogans. If Doña Erminia's "love" for this peasant is perverse or dishonest, she is to be accused only of duplicity—not of self-deluding and fanatical hypocrisy. Despite the tendency of some commentators to concentrate on an abnormal and overriding misogynous pattern in Conrad's fiction, fanaticism in this tale is at least as dark and insidious, as inscrutable
in its combination of good and evil, as forebodingly obscure as is the force of human love.

It may be questioned whether Doña Erminia's actions constitute inconsistency and true hypocrisy. Even though they violate the principle of the aristocratic pride which initially inspired them, they do not constitute a simultaneous duality but rather a reversion—a renunciation of her former aristocratic ideal of honor in her desire for vengeance. After she has become a lawless bandit, she does not attempt to justify the harshness of her vengeance against Republicans by claiming to uphold aristocratic values against an insurrection of the unworthy and ignorant masses. Her actions should thus not be judged as hypocritical in that they undermine her claims to aristocratic privileges in the very act of upholding the principles of her class. Expediency has become her only criterion, taking the place of aristocratic beliefs, and her actions should be judged as to whether or not they satisfy not the honor of an aristocrat but the raw hatred of an individual soul.

She differs here strongly from her father, who resents and mocks Republicanism as an idea; he has become a lunatic when confronted by a world turned upside down, in which he now is of less importance than are the Negroes who were his slaves. To him, Republicanism is insane as an abstract idea, and with bitterness he mocks himself and his enemies. When he hears a knock on his door he responds: "Come in, come in. This house belongs to you. All this land belongs to you. Come and take it. . . . Does not all the land
belong to you patriots?" (p. 21) He clings to his old idea of aristocracy; that is, he maintains his consistency in his defeat, and he goes mad. His daughter, however, seeing it impossible to retain aristocratic principles and conquer— or find revenge— renounces those principles. She becomes possessed of such intense hatred that the pride which inspired it is forgotten. The loss of her ideal results from the very intensity with which its injury was resented.

Doña Erminia, then, is not hypocritical; on the contrary she has become an audacious cynic—not as intellectually cynical as Mr. X in "The Informer," to be sure; nevertheless, moral standards have ceased to exist for her. She is nowhere in the story accused of hypocrisy— neither by the appalled General Santierra nor by the omniscient narrator. She is shockingly inhuman, animalistic, implacable, but she is free from self-delusion, and in her cynicism she contrasts with the sordid representatives of "la Libertad," who are guilty of hypocrisy, self-delusion, and fanaticism. The decision as to which side is morally better or worse defies moral analysis and offers the reader instead a Conradian "choice of nightmares."

Doña Erminia may be said to reveal the two traits which are opposed in many of Conrad's female characters: propriety and evil or violence. She is an aristocrat, evidently a paragon of refinement, who becomes cynical and animalistic and denies all standards of morality and propriety in her violent hatred. In this she recalls the girl in "The Informer." But she differs strongly from this character,
for she is free from the shallowness and hypocrisy which
make ineffectual the girl's dabbling in terror and violence.
Doña Erminia is literally wedded to violence, in the flesh,
and her espousal of terror and brute force has effects in a
real world—it is not the misled, idealistic imagining of an
amateur of emotions. Doña Erminia's reversion from propri­
ety to violence does not constitute hypocrisy or inconsist­
ency, for it is not a simultaneous union of these two oppo­
sites.

In her union of violence with propriety, she recalls
the female characters in other stories here analyzed, yet
she differs from them significantly. In "The Brute" the
female characters condone the spiteful and treacherous cru­
elty of a seemingly innocent and neutral cosmos. There evil
is an attribute of the cosmos itself, though it is a veiled
evil, a malicious will masked by indifference. In "The
Idiots" the cosmos remains ambiguous and ambivalent, but if
the cosmos which the female characters epitomize is indeed
hostile, its hostility is not instilled by the female char­
acter, who remains at least not consciously guilty. In
"Gaspar Ruiz" the neutral earth-force, the indifferent and
blind physical universe, is linked not with a woman but with
Gaspar Ruiz, who is not evil before his union with Doña Er­
minia (and it can be questioned whether his docile and prac­
tically helpless service of her hatred constitutes an evil
attributable to the man himself). In this particular mix­
ture of violence and femininity, the malice must be identi­
fied as having its source in outraged and vengeful woman,
not in the innocent physical force.

"Gaspar Ruiz" offers a contrast, furthermore, to Under Western Eyes, for in that novel Nathalie Haldin's essentially good and morally valid compassion is in some sense perverted by the warped and fanatical idealism of her brother, whereas Doña Erminia's wickedness, far from resulting from the poisoning effect of fanatical beliefs, is completely cynical. It is, like Nathalie Haldin's compassion, a basic and nonrational, non-ideological force. Whereas Nathalie Haldin's positive and good natural force was insidiously "converted" and misdirected by a twisted ideology, Doña Erminia became evil in her vehement opposition to a fanaticism somewhat similar to that of Victor Haldin.

Despite these contrasts, "The Idiots," "The Brute," "Amy Foster," "The Informer," Under Western Eyes, and "Gaspar Ruiz" all represent, on one hand, woman's propriety, delicacy, and compassion, and on the other, woman's violence, hatred, and implacability. In the last three of these, Conrad connects this feminine dual valence with woman's propensity to idealism or to cynicism. He portrays this dual propensity with bitter and scathing humor, with tenderness, tolerance, compassion, and a sense of the tragedy of human ideals, and with awe at the intensity of raw human emotions. As in "The Informer," so in this tale, Conrad juxtaposes woman's inconsistent idealism with the imperfect idealism of male characters and places the female character against the background of a world sordidly empty of valid idealism. Through this juxtaposition and in this context, feminine
idealism becomes an ambiguous and multi-valent moral phenomenon.

General Santierra sadly admits the frailty of the power of an ideal over the minds and actions of men. Conscious of its failure among his colleagues, Santierra himself nevertheless presents an unspotted record in its service, and his faithful support speaks well of the ideal as a realistic hope for mankind. He is not an idealistic fool, blind to the atrocities which accompany a liberation and victimize numbers of innocent people in the name of liberty. His calm and objective recognition of the undeniable failure of men to follow this ideal makes him seem all the more possessed of a true vision of it, unclouded by wishful thinking or a willingness to wink at the hypocrisy and gullibility, the cruelty and opportunism which arise from a people stirred by the ideal of liberty. Nevertheless, the story of Gaspar Ruiz exposes certain absurd and vicious betrayals of the ideal for which General Santierra's integrity cannot atone. Furthermore, at certain points in his narrative, General Santierra shows quite brief but nonetheless shocking slips in objectivity and an outright repudiation of his ideal, which do as much to tarnish the reader's impression of human idealism as do the more blatant indifference and vices of his comrades-in-arms.

One of the exposures most damaging to General Santierra's impression as a faithful idealist is his confession that he finds shocking Doña Erminia's wooing of a peasant; for in his rejection of this action he seems to show that
the ideal of classless brotherhood is for him merely an empty slogan. He shows a quite conscientious objectivity in analyzing the hostility between himself and Doña Erminia's father, who taunted him each time he rode past the decaying house: "For centuries Spaniards born had shown their contempt of us Americans. ... And now it was our turn."

(pp. 23-24) But Santierra's prejudices are betrayed by his complacently doctrinaire explanation of the old man's poverty:

"His estates, his house in town, his money, everything he had in the world had been confiscated by proclamation, for he was a bitter foe of our independence. From a position of great dignity and influence on the Viceroy's Council he became of less importance than his own negro slaves made free by our glorious revolution. It may be that, wandering ruined and houseless, and burdened with nothing but his life, which was left to him by the clemency of the Provisional Government, he had simply walked under that broken roof of old tiles."

(p. 22; italics mine)

When an earthquake destroys the old building and buries Doña Erminia's parents in its ruins, Santierra attributes probably more political meaning to the event than is warranted. His diction smacks of a manifesto: "An enormous and unconsecrated grave had swallowed them up alive, in their unhappy obstinacy against the will of a people to be free" (p. 41). Santierra elsewhere in the account reveals a humorous degree of fanaticism similar to that of the girl in "The Informer": he expects political ideology to be the prime element of attraction in a love affair: "I rode from the fort to the town almost every evening, to sigh at the window of a lady I was in love with, then. ... She was a good patriot, you may believe. Caballeros, credit me or not, ... I do
not believe I could have been fascinated by the charms of a woman of Royalist opinions" (p. 23).

Santierra, himself an aristocrat, is forced to face several incidents which severely try his faith in the equality of man. As a young lieutenant, owing his rank to his father's high standing as a Republican leader, Santierra is scorned and taunted by the adjutant of his battalion: "a common fellow, with no merit except his savage valour, he made me feel his contempt and dislike from the first day I joined my battalion in garrison at the fort" (p. 11). He is "a truculent, raw-boned man in a ragged uniform," with "a spluttering voice" that "issues out of a flat yellow face" (p. 7). Santierra explains how often, in the presence of this repulsive adjutant, "I suffered immense humiliation," and feared "his rough and cutting tongue" (p. 11).

His faith in the masses is also undermined by the Republicans' imperfect sense of honor. Later in the tale Santierra is captured by Gaspar Ruiz and sent as a messenger to the fort where Ruiz's family is held as hostages. He is under his oath to return to Ruiz, but his fellow patriots attempt to persuade him to break his oath, spur his horse, and try to reach the fort's gate. These are typical examples of the ideal of liberty served by men whose fiery passions have destroyed the true nature of their ideal.

The validity of General Santierra's idealism becomes most questionable when he seeks to give empirical proof of its soundness:
"I've always believed in the equality of men; and as to their brotherhood, that, to my mind, is even more certain. Look at the fierce animosity they display in their differences. And what in the world do you know that is more bitterly fierce than brothers' quarrels?"

All absence of cynicism checked an inclination to smile at this view of human brotherhood. (p. 26)

Thus with an unconscious slip in logic, Santierra proves man's brotherhood, which usually implies love, by the fierceness of his hatred, and "brotherhood" becomes an empty sound, or a fiendish quality, rather than the noble ideal it is usually taken for.

The world of "Gaspar Ruiz" is, like that of "The Informer," a world empty of valid idealism, epitomized here by two opposed forces: the appeal of idealistic Republicanism betrayed by sordid men and sordid means, and the private, unscrupulous, emotional hatred and lust for revenge of a proud woman. The cynical omniscient narrator, in describing the scene of Gaspar Ruiz's execution, acknowledges that the world portrayed by the story is a valueless universe:

A red and unclouded sun setting into a purple ocean looked with a fiery stare upon the enormous wall of the Cordilleras, worthy witness of his glorious extinction. But it is inconceivable that it should have seen the ant-like men busy with their absurd and insignificant trials of killing and dying for reasons that, apart from being generally childish, were also imperfectly understood. (p. 19)

The emptiness of values from this world may be in some sense the cause of Lt. Santierra's complete unnerving after witnessing Doña Erminia's suicidal leap from her mule's back into the deep valley:

"I cannot describe to you the sudden and abject fear that came over me at that dreadful sight. It was a dread of the abyss. . . . My head swam. . . . I was
speechless and cold all over. . . . My heart stood still, and from the depths of the precipice the stones rattling in the bed of the furious stream made me almost insane with their sound.

"Next moment we were round the turn and on a broad and grassy slope. And then I yelled. My men came running to me in great alarm. It seems that at first I did nothing but shout, 'She has given the child into my hands! She has given the child into my hands!' The escort thought I had gone mad." (p. 68)

General Santierra's fear of the abyss may be interpreted as the awesome vision of a world of emptiness, which many of Conrad's heroes discover in certain relationships with women who reflect this meaningless cosmos.
CHAPTER III

WOMAN AND THE THEME OF CIVILIZATION

In much of his fiction Conrad shows a consciousness of humanity *en masse*, of mankind as a community. It would be difficult to overlook his preoccupation with isolation and his fascination with the ambiguous conflict of human solidarity and subjective, personal impulse, the two appeals between which an individual must work out his destiny. Conrad shows interestingly inconsistent attitudes toward the partial or abject dependence of the single personality upon the community for his moral equilibrium, and toward the moral effects subsequent to the deprivation of this stabilizing influence. In *An Outcast of the Island*, he views with disgust Willems' degradation, his betrayal of Western values through separation from civilized society in a savage, tropical environment. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz' similar degradation becomes a moral victory separating him irrevocably from those "pilgrims of progress" who in the same work maintain a superficial fidelity to Western mores. In his condemnation of these latter characters, Conrad contrasts a true and valid fidelity to the moral standards of a society with a foolish maintenance of the trivial forms of civilization. Yet he is often quick to tolerate or even to glorify
a concern for the routine habits which constitute an orderly life. Marlow admires the persistence of the accountant in the wilds of Africa who, with unbelievable patience, has trained a native woman to starch his shirts; this trivial aspect of the man's life seems to contribute no small part to his sanity in a barbarous land now made more insane by the hypocritical nightmare of European exploitation.

An Outcast of the Islands and Heart of Darkness juxtapose savage, non-Western barbarism with Western culture and suggest ambiguously wavering and relative moral valuations of the two. "The Informer" and Under Western Eyes treat the conflict between civilization and anarchists who seek to cure its ills by destroying it. Another important foil to conventional civilization, along with anarchy and savagery, is the realm of shipboard life, which as in The Nigger of the Narcissus shows a more consistent, realistic, and valid solidarity than the hollow society of landsmen. Still another foil or opposition to civilized solidarity is the philosophical detachment and nihilism of such characters as Heyst and Decoud.

Through this variety of attitude, Conrad's contemplation of the phenomenon of society or civilization becomes rich and fascinating. His novels and stories examine, uphold, ennoble, celebrate, satirize, and condemn the principles, sentiments, refinements, and institutions of civilized man. He reveals the arbitrariness of civilized conventions with humor, pathos, and anger; he reveres and challenges the value of tradition; he gives virtually equal
emphasis to the folly of social reform based on sentimental impulse and to the nobility of man's desire for freedom. He scathingly denounces the cowardly virtue which stems from the herding instinct and shows the quiet heroism in man's fidelity to a sense of human solidarity. But not all of Conrad's treatment of the idea of human civilization states or implies a moral judgment. Conrad is able to suggest a character's more or less morally neutral consciousness of the existence of a human community. For instance, Willems, shocked by his expulsion from a trading firm in the Malay Archipelago, wanders through the port town where he once was a figure of some influence among the half-castes. He stumbles unawares into the native quarter where he has never been before and becomes momentarily conscious of an intricate and pervasive web of relations uniting the lives of the people who toil and suffer in those slums. Similarly, the sight of the sea for Marlow and Jim, who have just emerged from the dark, brooding, isolated land of Patusan, evokes an awareness of the active and purposeful realm of civilized man--especially of that part of it made up of men who find their livings on the sea. In one of the later paragraphs of The Nigger of the Narcissus, an extended metaphor comparing the European continent to a great ship has the same effect: it presents the abstract idea of the whole human community to the mind of the reader; it adumbrates a vague and general but stirring concept of the entire, vast human community in its timeless and sordid sinfulness, its grandeur, its moral steadfastness and insignificance.
Conrad's women characters may stand in many different relations to this important theme of civilization in its several manifestations. A female character may simply symbolize civilization as an abstraction, as Conrad's recurrent image of the woman carrying a torch or some other source of light seems to do. Kurtz' portrait of his "Intended" has this function, as does Mrs. Travers bearing a torch on her mission to give Lingard the message ring of Hassim in *The Rescue*. A female character may also epitomize a particular type of culture or society, especially as it is juxtaposed with a contrasting society, as do the European *femme de société* Mrs. Travers and the barbarous princess Immada. The woman may also represent the empty and hollow, ordinary civilization of landsmen which contrasts with the true solidarity of men of the sea. Woman in Conrad's fiction may represent only the most salient trait of a people, as the girl in "The Informer" represents the decadent shallowness and hypocrisy of European society. In some works the woman tempts the hero to commit a breach of solidarity; in others she tries to bring an "isolato" back into communion with mankind. A woman in Conrad's fiction may herself betray her society by forsaking it for the love of a member of an antagonistic group, or through skeptical unbelief in the validity of her society's forms, meanings and purposes. She may, on the other hand, adhere steadfastly to the ideals of her society and work for its ultimate enhancement, purification, and aggrandizement through her own deeds and through her encouragement of certain male characters in this activity.
The moral effect or meaning of the woman character depends in part on the particular moral meaning of civilization itself, which varies from work to work and which in a single work may be purposefully ambiguous. For example, in *Nostromo* Doña Emilia Gould is something of a symbol for the high ideals, the hopes and the latent and tragically thwarted aspirations of civilization, and civilization in this novel happens to have positive moral value. On the other hand, in "The Idiots," civilization is a superficial and corrupt chaos, a one-sided power struggle in which Conservatives use religion as a means to manipulate the masses; here, however, woman is not the epitome of civilization, but a creature of instinct who, like the fecund earth, dumbly brings forth things beneficial or harmful, oblivious both of her own nature and of the vicious but subtle maneuvers of political parties as well. In *The Nigger of the Narcissus* Conrad identifies woman with civilization, which here is a thing of the soiled land, a proper medium for the villain Donkin, and a disintegrating force. The conventional, corrupt civilization of the landsman lacks the cleanliness, honesty, and the true and unspoken solidarity of men united in the hard craft, the exacting ritual of the sea life. Those of Conrad's female characters whose idle and invalid lives contrast with the experiences of heroic seamen contribute significantly to the final effect of works in which they receive only the briefest mention. This is true of those wives and relatives of such seamen as Captain MacWhirr in *Typhoon*, Captain Whalley in "The End of the Tether," and Captain Alistoun in *The*
Nigger of the Narcissus—women who are by and large contrasted as epitomes of society in its ordinary mode from which these seamen are isolated by both the exigencies of their trade and by the special insight into reality which seaman­ship brings them. Most of these women reflect the falseness and drab emptiness of ordinary civilized life in contrast to a group of men who, in their association through seamanship, constitute a society among themselves, closed to the average citizen of "normal" society, free from the conventions, cor­ruptions, and refinements of life on land. Their women represent what is for Conrad one of the worst aspects of society --its hollow conventionality, its propensity to hide truth behind empty forms, behind the banal safety of the herd--its unreality as compared to the intense realities of a life pitted against the elements of nature or against the moral uncertainties and temptations of isolation in a primitive environment. Like the society they epitomize, these women are audacious in their safe separation from the world of concrete danger, from the facts of life inherent in the ele­ments which a seaman must face. Their idle and comfortable existences are passed as if in a dream, setting off in bold relief the reality faced by such men as Captain MacWhirr, Captain Whalley, or Kurtz. Thus on the deck of the Narcis­sus, just arrived in port from her pilgrimage, ennobled by her isolating rendezvous with truth, the wife of the Captain personifies the unreality of the ordinary world. Fashion­ably dressed and carrying a parasol, she looks as if she had dropped from the sky.
Among the most significant of Conrad's women characters who represent a certain type of civilization are Kaspar Almayer's wife and daughter in *Almayer's Folly*. In the mind of the wife, "rescued" by Lingard from a horde of Malay pirates to whom she had belonged and whom Lingard had defeated and destroyed in a sea fight, the ways of white men are inscrutable. She does not understand Lingard's failure either to kill her along with his other enemies or to take her as his wife or concubine or slave, to bear his children, praise his valor, and do his domestic chores. Instead he grants her life, but makes it practically unendurable by leaving her in the care of a convent in Singapore, where she is baffled by the white man's religion and made miserable by boredom and isolation from her own kind. Lingard finally marries her to his protegé, Kaspar Almayer, a young Dutchman who dreams of grandiose wealth and of an opulent life in Holland but is thwarted by his own idle, self-pitying and feeble character. The confused woman's comprehension and evaluation of Western man sinks still lower. Living with her self-defeating and egoistic husband in a trading post on the bank of Lingard's secret river, she misses her former exciting and, by her standards, much more respectable life as the faithful accomplice of fierce pirates. She comes to abhor all the trappings of the white man's culture, and in fits of rage she destroys her husband's European furniture and curtains. She reverts to the most backward degree of savagery, forsaking Almayer's house for the huts of the Malay women servants whom she rules, and in a few years she
is a squalid and repellent savage hag with wild grey hair and teeth stained with betel juice.

Her Eurasian daughter Nina has a more sophisticated view of the contrast between Western civilization and the semi-savage life of Malay sea-nomads, yet she makes a choice similar to her mother's and rejects the empty and futile dreams of her father for the love of a dashing Malay warrior and for the ties of her oriental heritage. The perspective that Conrad offers on Western civilization through the eyes of these two women of a barbarous race foreshadows his scorn of Westerners' provincialism and his contempt for the provincials' attempts to impose Western culture on Africans in *Heart of Darkness*.

The significance of several of Conrad's female characters lies in their effect upon the relationship of the hero toward his civilization or society. They may contribute to his betrayal of or rebellion against his society. They may tempt him to a morally ambiguous act, able to be interpreted as the base betrayal of loyalty to friends and the sacred traditions of his people, or, on the other hand, as the brave and honest discovery that personal impulse, private feeling, is more meaningful than the false, hollow, and arbitrary code of conventions. For example, in "The Lagoon" Arsat flouts his ruler's authority, forsakes his people, and betrays his brother for the love of a woman. In this tale two conflicting impulses—the appeal of private, individual happiness, and the appeal of loyalty to a community—are equally illusory and ephemeral; they are also equally valid.
and strong. The story seems to attach no more value to one of the "illusions" than the other, and for this reason the ultimate moral meaning of Diemelen's effect on Arsat's loyalty to brother, ruler, and tribe is unresolved. Similarly Jewel in Lord Jim attempts to dissuade Jim from the desperate suicidal act by which he hopes to be spiritually and morally reinstated as a responsible member of human society, faithful to his people's code of honor. She appeals to his sense of private and individual happiness as separate from this sense of community. In this novel Jim's concept of heroism and of responsibility to the honor code of his community is never free from Marlow's sophisticated doubts concerning Jim's egoism and "romanticism." Yet unlike Arsat, Jim himself does not experience disillusion concerning both communal loyalty and personal love, but leaves the arms of a real woman to embrace an ideal. The doubt about the validity of his conception of this ideal is not in his own mind, but in Marlow's. Both works leave the question of the relative values of loyalty and love somewhat unresolved, but it is even less resolved in "The Lagoon" than in Lord Jim because of Arsat's disillusionment in both realms and of Jim's perhaps questionable but self-convincing moral redemption. And the moral meaning of woman in "The Lagoon" is likewise the less resolved.

The role of woman as she represents the appeal of personal, private, subjective goals, as opposed to loyalty to a society and its values, is more complex in such works as An Outcast of the Islands. Conrad here treats a conflict
between personal impulse, in the form of sexual desire, and loyalty to a friend and to the demands of a society. An Outcast is a study in the degradation of a civilized man in the wilderness, under the spell of insane lust for a semi-savage woman. The moral meaning of the woman, however, is not as simple as this statement of the bare situation might make it seem. Aïssa does constitute the temptation of Willems to forsake human solidarity; her function corresponds roughly to that of Arsat's wife in "The Lagoon." But Willems' sense of human solidarity is from the beginning pathetically base—it is a parody of true and valid human solidarity. Willems' rejection of society is not the act of a lost, violent soul, but of a "hollow man"; it is an act of ambiguous moral import because the only kind of solidarity he has known is based on petty greed. Before his temptation by Aïssa, Willems has been hypocritical and half-hearted both in his sense of solidarity and in his egoistic rebellion as well. He has boasted to his poolroom cronies that he owes his rise from a penniless runaway to the confidential clerk of a powerful and influential businessman to his lack of scruples: "Where there are scruples there can be no power." Yet he lacks the sense of superiority necessary to flout society's basic demands—he bends the law covertly rather than breaking it. His standing as a daring, unscrupulous rebel against society is damaged by the pettiness of his bourgeois goal: to gain admittance in the social circle made up of those colonial Dutch families who attend the governor's Sunday card parties. He later fails to accept the
true meaning of his betrayal of Lingard, who thinks of his crime correctly as "incomplete rascality." Rather than wiping out Lingard's interest in Sambir and burning his settlement, Willems clothes his sin of betrayal as a legal act, running up the Dutch flag to indicate the region's freedom now from Lingard's control.

Since Willems' concept of solidarity is so corrupt, the moral meaning of his breach of solidarity is equivocal. Nevertheless, this admittedly corrupt sense of solidarity is all Willems has with which to counter the threat of moral seduction by Aïssa and her primitive environment. Thus in brief moments when, his resistance temporarily awakened, Willems realizes the depth of his degradation, the image of his former self which he contrasts to his present self is pathetically petty—a money-grubbing, "shore-bound quill-driver," in Lingard's words.

Aïssa's savage life, free from the false conventions of Western civilization, which permit crimes to be committed under the guise of respectability, and her sincere and daring rejection of her own society's mores, give the lie both to Willems' hollow respectability and to his hollow revolt. The woman character Aïssa represents the force of primitive life and has a definitely adverse effect on the main character's loyalty to his sense of human solidarity, just as does Arsat's wife. But in this situation the concept of solidarity is itself corrupt, or is represented in a repulsive form—hollow, bourgeois conventionality—the safety of the herd. Willems fails because he lacks both a valid and
honest sense of human solidarity to which he might be loyal, and enough strength of ego to dare to reject the hypocritical and empty solidarity which he knows. His actions lack authenticity. In the morally equivocal situation described here the woman character Aïssa has a dual role: she tempts Willems to a breach of solidarity, but her own strength of ego and her own freedom from his kind of hollow responsibility make her the moral foil to Willems the bourgeois, hollow, would-be rebel. She has a role much more complex than that assigned her as the emasculator of Willems by some critics.

Aïssa serves a further purpose as the human embodiment or abstract symbol of the tropical wilderness and the barbarous and violent culture of her semi-savage people. In this role she is somewhat similar to Nina Almayer and her mother in *Almayer's Folly*. This aspect of her function is made clear by her opposition in the novel to Willems' wife Joanna, who is the living representation of the hypocrisy, spiritual decay, and sordid greed of the Dutch colonials in the Malay Archipelago and, by extension, of Western civilization as a whole. She is the bastard daughter of Willems' prosperous and highly respected boss, Old Hudig, a gruff and pompous man of steadfast persistence in the pursuit of wealth. Evidently one of the first commercial pioneers in this corner of the world, from his youth Hudig has been making money with more diligence than honesty, seldom declining an opportunity to deal in opium. He has taken shrewd and ruthless advantage not only of the natives but also, more recently, of his clerk Willems, to whom he has married his
half-caste daughter, allowing Willems to remain ignorant of her illegitimacy and to consider the marriage a sign of Hudig's special favor and an alliance of great commercial advantage. Thus Joanna is thoroughly tainted with the essence of the mercenary greed of the West; Willems has wed her solely in order to establish himself in business by marrying the boss's daughter. She is furthermore representative of the hypocrisy by which Western society condones lust and incontinence if they are kept secret and "redeemed" by the respectability of wealth—for the entire seaport town, except for Willems, knows that Joanna is sprung from the wild oats Old Hudig sowed some years back, yet Hudig is not reproached for the scandal because of the power and admiration which his money-making talents command.

Joanna is described as a perpetually drowsy woman with unkempt hair, heavy-lidded eyes, wearing a wrinkled red housecoat with the torn hem trailing behind her as she grips awkwardly a dirty child. She is a fitting symbol of Western society's hollow respectability: her marriage to Willems, obviously a marriage of convenience, is devoid of passion, although Joanna is the fleshly embodiment of discreet and respectable incontinence. Before Hudig dismisses him, Willems browbeats his wife as a favorite pastime and boasts to her of his influence, his commercial shrewdness and reminds her of the many advantages she enjoys as his wife. When he tells her Hudig has fired him for petty theft, she suddenly changes from an abject dummy to a strong-willed shrew; she expels him from the house, threatening action by Hudig, and
the Willems household becomes a caricature of those vicissitudes of domestic life which are the eternal complaint and butt of jokes in Western society. To add to the hypocrisy which hovers around the couple, Willems experiences pangs of conscience from time to time about the disruption of his marriage and the breaking of his sacred wedding vows, though he is glad to be able to claim, in his disgusting mental meanderings, that Joanna is to blame for their actual separation. Later the hypocrisy surpasses all expectation. After Lingard has marooned Willems with Aïssa in a lonely clearing on the river, as punishment for the betrayal of the secret of Sambir, Joanna feels remorse for her behavior toward her husband and comes to seek forgiveness from her long-suffering mate. Determined to find her husband, she stays at Almayer's house for many days, sleeping in a room which Almayer once intended to be the accounting office of the station. Perhaps her most telling description as a symbol of corrupt and squalid, mercenary Western society is given in the passage in which Conrad describes her waiting in this room. The office was completely outfitted by Lingard to humor Almayer, who had little idea, when he first came to Sambir as Lingard's agent, what trading in such a remote region would entail. He filled the shelves with new, clean and heavy ledgers, brought in a roll-top desk and a safe, reams of paper, envelopes, pens, and ink. The neat and well-accoutered office of course fell into disuse, and the ledgers were never opened, the ink dried to powder, and the room, locked up at last, became all covered in thick
dust. Joanna, idle, abject, pouting, and weeping for her sins, a bastard spawned by the well-hidden and temporary lust of a pompous pioneer of commerce now chaste and respectable in his greed, the dull and passionless partner in a mercenary marriage, now sits and watches a rectangle of sunlight drag the dusty floor while her young son plays among the refuse of futile commercial aspirations, the impotent and neglected vestiges of the glorious world of trade.

Between this feminine embodiment of the ills of Western society and Aïssa, a passionate and violent woman who represents the tropical wilderness and a barbarous culture, the weak-willed and empty-souled Willems vacillates. In the final scene of the novel, Joanna, aided by information from the tattling Almayer, arrives at the clearing with boatmen to take her husband back to their former domestic haven. Willems, his passion for Aïssa now spent, welcomes the sight of Joanna as a means of escape and shows himself willing to return to their former bullying and cringing marital relation, but Aïssa arrives on the scene. Both women, as epitomes of their respective civilizations, react to each other according to the mores of their different societies. Joanna is appalled at her husband's sexual infidelity and, hiding behind Willems and invoking the saints, shows cowardly contempt to this rough and shameful savage woman. Aïssa, according to the manners of her society, does not consider Willems an adulterer, but sees Joanna as Willems' first wife in a polygamist's household, traditionally due great respect from more recent wives in the same family. Yet she feels
deeply insulted by Willems, for among her people the Sirani tribe, of which Joanna is a member (through her Malayan blood), are a people held in extreme contempt, and Willems has thus made Aïssa the underling of a base, despised woman from the dregs of society; he has made her the slave of a slave. Because of the peculiar and contrasting mores of their respective societies, the two women hold each other in ironically reciprocal and equal contempt.

These two women exemplify a frequent pattern in Conrad's fiction, in which a civilized woman and a primitive, savage woman are contrasted, yet are at times shown to be in some ways similar. Thus Kurtz' European "Intended" has as little true understanding of the nature of Kurtz' experience as his savage mistress, who, clothed in baubles, stands bewildered and longing on the river bank as the steamer takes Kurtz away from the land of darkness. The "Intended" later discusses Kurtz with Marlow in a darkened parlor where the grotesque and gloomy shapes of Victorian furniture somehow impress Marlow's mind with the same foreboding awareness of evil which he sensed in the dense tropical forest. The same pairing of barbarous and civilized women is seen in the short story "Karain," to be examined later in this chapter. If the category of savagery is broadened to include not only actual savages, but also women who flout the mores of their society and are in some measure cast out from it, the pattern might also be exemplified by such other pairs as Doña Rita de Lastoala and her sister Therese in The Arrow of Gold, Flora de Barral and Mrs. Fyne in Chance, and Laughing Ann
and Davidson's wife in "Because of the Dollars."

Although Willems' seduction by Aïssa is the immediate cause of his flagrant disloyalty to Lingard and to his society, Aïssa's role is more complex than simply to cause this disloyalty—for by her own shameless flouting of the mores of her own culture she reveals the lack of courage and authenticity which makes Willems' betrayal a smaller and more shameful thing than outright betrayal. But there are female characters in Conrad's fiction who, instead of leading the hero to rebel against or betray his community, attempt to draw detached "isolates" back into active involvement in the human community. These women relate to individualistic, autonomous heroes isolated from "normal" society by egoistic, independent temperament and by a philosophical, intellectual detachment from life.

In Victory the hero, like Kurtz, has "kicked himself free of the earth," though not in Kurtz' altruistic-egoistic fashion. Heyst is an isolated individual because of his philosophy of detachment from ordinary life, which he considers, following the thought of his philosopher-father, a vain delusion. Something of a Hamlet-like figure, Heyst scorns the purposes of this world. The ultimate function of Lena, the girl he rescues from a miserably lonely existence as a musician in an all-female orchestra, is to reconcile the detached Heyst with the world, to enable him to see meaning in the actions and purposes of the human community and to attain involvement in it. This is the precise opposite effect of most of the women characters in the stories
discussed in the first chapter of this study, whose essential emptiness, vagueness, or incomprehensibility came to disillusion the male characters as a reflection of the purposeless and blank universe.

Heyst's life has been a long and successful evasion of involvement, but the section of it which the novel narrates shows Heyst flirting superficially with involvement through his casually begun friendship with Morrison, then, after Morrison's death, escaping into his former skepticism. He later becomes more thoroughly and fatally involved with Lena, and the nature of his relation to her and to the human community at the end of the novel is rather equivocal.

A wanderer among the islands of the East Indies, Heyst has puzzled and amused the group of traders and seamen with whom he drinks, plays cards, and shoot billiards in seaport hotels. They find him formal, cordial in a rather distant manner, and so eccentrically content to wander idly back and forth through the Archipelago as to be impossible to understand. He evades with punctilious courtesy all efforts to break through his reserve, and after a time is accepted nonchalantly on his own cordially unfamiliar terms by the jovial group whom the unnamed narrator calls "us"—mildly curious men who behind his back laugh gently at him as a mysterious eccentric, yet maintain an easy or indifferent respect for his privacy. Before he meets Lena, Heyst has experienced a brief and superficial involvement with humankind and has startled his gregarious observers by an unheard-of deviation into behavior seemingly motivated by normal human intentions.
and desires. He seems to have been forced into this by chance. By a single charitable action he has obligated a character as eccentric as himself, who has extended credit for years to the inhabitants of an isolated region completely dependent on the visits of his vessel, their only link with the outside world. Though he threatens to "squeeze" them some day, Morrison knows he will never bring himself to demand payment of his flattering primitive creditors, and that he will be unable to repay Heyst. He therefore insists on squaring things with him. His obstinate and moralistic demand for fairness overcomes Heyst's evasiveness; he forces Heyst to accept a partnership with him in the Tropical Belt Coal Company. This rather wild venture proves lucrative for both men. Morrison is too simple a soul to notice or care about the detachment of Heyst, and Heyst seems to view with quiet and detached amusement this venture into active and purposive life and his subsequent wealth and fame among the idle crowd on hotel verandas. Morrison returns to England and dies, and Heyst is momentarily the lone tycoon of the T. B. C. Co., but, to his equal amusement the vein of coal becomes suddenly depleted, the firm is liquidated, and he is left the sole inhabitant of a small island with an exhausted mine.

Just having regained his usual freedom from involvement with humanity, Heyst meets Lena. He "rescues" her and brings her to his island. He soon discovers that the situation now facing him somehow cannot be kept at a distance by means of the quiet amusement with which he spent his years
with Morrison. His quandary is interrupted by the arrival on the island of a desperate threesome: a cultivated, brutal and cynical egotist of cadaverous aspect, whose moral nihilism is a match for Heyst's intellectual skepticism, of which it is the evil reflection; a simple-minded but cunning, cat-like henchman; an ape-like creature of amazing brawn and subhuman intellect. Deluded by a false lead from a petty enemy of Heyst's, the three expect to find a huge store of wealth, to bully or kill Heyst, and to make off with the loot. Heyst forgets the problem of his threatened involvement with Lena; the world seems to have brutally forced him into involvement against his will. He finds it impossible to face the sordid and senselessly-motivated danger of the desperate three with the same cool detachment he would have felt were Lena not endangered also. But Lena finds the circumstances quite propitious for penetrating Heyst's mysterious detachment and bringing him into an involvement with her--and, through her, with the world. Her success in doing so, viewed objectively, is quite ambiguous or equivocal. With a woman's intense, subjective, and unrealistic determination, she feels that all will be well if she can somehow capture the knife belonging to Ricardo, the cat-like henchman of the leader of the group, who styles himself "plain Mr. Jones." Considered realistically, Ricardo's knife is by no means the key element of the danger; Conrad suggests that the woman's mind, thinking in symbols with childlike simplicity, naturally and unconsciously comes to consider it as the embodiment of the evil threat of the
three desperadoes. It is a type of almost hypnotically delusive obsession. Excited and stimulated by her sincere but objectively absurd purpose, she blossoms under the stress and challenge of physical danger. She is mortally wounded by a shot fired by Mr. Jones just after she has attained her goal; unaware that she is dying, she gives the knife to Heyst, full of the pride and exultation of her triumph and sacrifice.

Heyst's punctilious courtesy, his detached formality, and his quality as a gentleman have some bearing on his isolation and his equivocal return to the community of human-kind. They constitute a double-edged trait: his politeness is an aspect of civilization, and as such it should link him with his fellow men; yet it functions as his barrier against involvement in the deluding and futile purposes of life. Thus a type of ambiguity or duplicity lies at the very basis of the forms of civilization. Because of this duplicity it is a perplexing question whether the end result of society is to bind men together or to sever them from each other. Furthermore, this duplicity in civilization's meaning and effect accounts for the great similarity and difference between Heyst and Mr. Jones. Both men are aristocrats and live according to a very refined sense of form. Ricardo tells Schomberg that a gentleman insists upon doing things correctly, without heat or "ferocity" or any wasted motion, "just for the look of the thing." Both Heyst and Jones scorn emotions as delusions, consider most of the world's inhabitants to be fools or hypocrites, and solipsistically
affirm only the rightness of their own sense of form. Mr. Jones believes that most men are deluded, since they claim they are honest and morally upright, but are actually moral and physical cowards hiding a thief's desires and practices behind a facade of legalism. Mr. Jones claims integrity and courage in his outlaw existence, for he eschews such subterfuges. Heyst's skepticism is deeper. For Heyst, not only the moral pretensions of "tame" thieves, but all human purposes, are delusions. Nevertheless the two men are quite similar in their intellectual, rational, philosophical positions. Heyst's actual philosophy, as well as Mr. Jones's, undercuts any foundation for human solidarity. Both men go about the world observing the forms of society, but not believing in an enduring solidarity which would give these forms meaning. Heyst is not the criminal Mr. Jones is; yet he is as thorough in his unbelief. Ricardo insists repeatedly that Jones is a "gentleman"—ironically unaware of the usual moral connotations of the word. Yet Heyst's gentlemanliness is equally meaningless in view of his philosophy of detachment. Their difference lies not in their rational creeds, but in irrational temperament. Heyst is separated from Mr. Jones by means of Heyst's compassion, which has no foundation in his rational and conscious beliefs. Heyst is more subject to the appeal of irrational compassion than is his criminal double. For this reason Heyst is vulnerable to the equivocal and ambiguous meanings and effects of Lena. Mr. Jones's virulent misogyny is an index of his total rejection of the irrational element in
human life, which, according to the novel's evident assumptions, finds its extreme expression in femininity. In the general conception of this novel, it is on this irrational element, rather than rational and conscious creeds, that human solidarity—for better or worse—is founded.

Certain aspects of Lena's character make it clear that her chief effect on Heyst concerns the solidarity of human society, the ties of the great human community, or civilization. Her love for Heyst represents one form of solidarity, and her situation as a pathetic victim of the world's neglect and ill treatment—its violation of human solidarity—demands his compassion and help. Their first encounter is prompted by Heyst's pity for Lena and his indignation at the arbitrary cruelty of the despicable wife of the orchestra leader. He sees the woman pinch Lena, whereupon he offers the girl his assistance with the words "Command me." To Heyst Lena appears in the same quality as Morrison had appeared some years earlier: as a "representative of all the past victims of the Great Joke." Although Heyst has scorned the delusive powers of the cosmic joke throughout his life, he is nevertheless compassionate toward those who have been fooled by it. In Heyst's early youth his father had advised him to make up for his temperamental ineptitude for skeptical nihilism by cultivating the kind of contempt known as pity; now

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9Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (Garden City, no date), p. 163. This Doubleday Anchor paperback edition is used for all references to the novel in this dissertation.
the meeting with Lena prompts Heyst's pity, courtesy and civility. Heyst is master of a playful and detached, courteous manner which indicates that perhaps the principle of human solidarity still exerts a subdued influence over his actions. Lena's loneliness and isolation evoke for Heyst the idea of the human solidarity which should have cared for the girl and averted the misery which has plagued her life. At their first meeting Heyst suggests she might go to the British Consul for aid, but:

When she learned that perhaps he could be induced to send her home, her head dropped on her breast. "What am I to do when I get there?" she murmured with an intonation so just, with an accent so penetrating—the charm of her voice did not fail here even in whispering—that Heyst seemed to see the illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish before the naked truth of her existence, and leave them both face to face in a moral desert. . . . (p. 65)

The peculiar richness of Lena's voice seems to lend profundity to her representation of miserable humanity. Heyst asks if there is some way she could defend herself against the cruel and indifferent women of the orchestra, but Lena responds: "'They are too many for me.' These few words came out of the common experience of mankind; by virtue of her voice they thrilled Heyst like a revelation." (p. 62)

Her voice was charming when she spoke to him of her miserable past, in simple terms, with a sort of unconscious cynicism inherent in the truth of the ugly conditions of poverty. And whether because he was humane or because her voice included all the modulations of pathos, cheerfulness, and courage in its compass, it was not disgust that the tale awakened in him, but the sense of an immense sadness. (p. 64)

Lena shows a certain commonness or vulgarity in her
character in a dialogue with Heyst on the night following
the evening of their first talk after the incident in which
Lena was pinched. Embraced by Heyst, she tells him:

"I could see you were angry with that beast of a woman.
And you are clever. You spotted something at once. You
saw it in my face, eh? It isn't a bad face—say? You'll
never be sorry. Listen—I'm not twenty yet. It's the
truth, and I can't be so bad looking, or else—I will
tell you straight that I have been worried and pestered
by fellows like this before." (p. 69)

This confession—or boast—that she has been the object of
many lewd approaches is naturally rather repellent to Heyst,
who recoils a little from her embrace; she is surprised and
becomes angry, and Heyst "felt ashamed of his fastidious­
ness" (p. 70). Later in the novel Lena is painfully aware
of the barrier of Heyst's refinement which separates them:
"As if her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, un­
able to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his supe­
rior soul" (p. 270).

Lena represents civilization in two aspects: in her
vulgarity and, despite her vulgarity or commonness, in the
nobler sentiments of her desire for self-sacrifice. Like
Ricardo, she has her origin in the dregs of mankind (p. 252).
Conrad's narrator once calls her "a fiddle-scraping girl
picked up on the very threshold of infamy," but he also
acknowledges that she means to "try to rise above herself,
triumphant and humble; and then happiness would burst on her
like a torrent, flinging at her feet the man whom she loved"
(p. 290). She seeks to rise by a sacrificial act: she will
risk her life to obtain Ricardo's knife and present it to
Heyst. Mr. Jones refers to her and Ricardo as members of
the common herd for whom gentlemen (like himself and Heyst) are no match—yet whom gentlemen must condescend to use (p. 320). Before Heyst renames her Lena, the girl bore two names which suggest the dualism of her character as vulgar and stained by the world (the object of Heyst's scorn) and yet the possessor of the force of love, one potent means of human solidarity. The names are Alma (Latin, "cherishing, fostering") and Magdalen (the shameful woman of the streets).

As a representative of the ties of humanity, Lena exerted an appeal which is basically irrational. It is not her words, but the sensuous sound of her voice which wins Heyst, which transforms the ugly sordidness of her life to something fascinating and noble: "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 supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune" (p. 61). Heyst's father had destroyed his son's faith in life by means of a corrosive rational analysis of the vanity of human purposes. Heyst's adventures with Morrison, in which the isolated Heyst had experienced a quasi-involvement, had been markedly irrational; Morrison himself was possessed of absurd religious delusions and a foolish, unrealistic, and indulgent attitude toward the savages on the route of his steamer. When Heyst meets Lena he becomes involved with someone still more irrational and someone whose instincts constitute a sense of human unity which is still deeper than Morrison's unrealistic altruism.
Lena's "love and self-sacrifice" are called by the omniscient narrator "woman's sublime faculty" (p. 259). They are naturally and inherently feminine. She feels "in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice" (pp. 165-166). In her endeavor to get Ricardo's knife, Lena is obeying a noble desire which is futilely misled. She hopes to save Heyst—and thus deserve him—by capturing the brigand's weapon, the symbol of the evil threatening Heyst and herself. To do this she must overcome a strong irrational fear. The omniscient narrator explains this feminine fear earlier in the novel. Mrs. Schomberg, ordered by her husband to search the rooms of the three desperadoes, discovers many pistols and knives and becomes too frightened to continue her search, despite her husband's threats:

She was frightened of firearms, and generally of all weapons, not from personal cowardice, but as some women are, almost superstitiously, from an abstract horror of violence and murder. . . . The instinctive, motiveless fear being the most difficult to overcome, nothing could induce her to return to her investigations. . . . (p. 89)

It is this same abstract connection between weapons and evil that accounts for Lena's absurd obsession with Ricardo's knife as the focus of the evil facing Heyst and her. Something basic and instinctive is at work unconsciously in her mind: "She was not automatically obeying a momentary suggestion; she was under influences more deliberate, more vague, and of greater potency. She had been prompted, not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy" (p. 325). As a representative of the force of human
solidarity she is moved by an irrational, instinctive purpose, for human solidarity itself is not rationalistic. It depends ultimately not on reason but on feeling. Of course her feelings are entirely inadequate as guides to understanding the realities of her situation: in the moment when she captures Ricardo's knife (to her the embodiment of all evil), she is killed by Mr. Jones's bullet. Yet the practical inefficacy of her sacrifice does not negate its validity, which persists in the motive of her sacrifice.

Lena shows the same practical inefficacy and blindness to actualities as do many other women in Conrad's fiction. When Heyst first meets Lena he discovers that she actually does not know where on the globe she is located (p. 65). Her absurd and childish plan regarding Ricardo's knife is only a culmination of her impracticality. Yet Conrad displays the same ambivalence about Lena's impracticality as in his contradictory statements on male and female realism and idealism in the essays on Maupassant and C. Rogue Luffman (discussed in Chapter One). Despite Lena's inadequate sense of reality, Conrad in one passage insists that she is more realistic than Heyst. When she is brewing her scheme to get the knife she is careful not to let Heyst know her intention: "There was born in her a woman's innate mistrust of masculinity, of that seductive strength allied to an absurd, delicate shrinking from facts, which never yet frightened a woman worthy of the name" (p. 252).

Lena also exhibits the same ambiguity or duplicity which I have noted in other Conradian women earlier in this
study. One example of her duplicity lies in the discrepancy between Lena's pleasant voice and her words picturing to Heyst the squalid and abject poverty where she was spawned. Another example is the smile which she gives Heyst just after their first talk in the crowded concert hall. Heyst has just promised to "steal" her. As she leaves Heyst to return to the platform, he feels that they may have been observed by Schomberg, who has been hounding Lena. In order to make their tête-à-tête appear an inconsequential chat rather than the conspiracy it was, he tells her to smile at him as she leaves:

She obeyed with unexpected readiness; and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him; and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience. (p. 66)

Heyst learns later that her smile was prompted not really by his attempt at subterfuge, but by her genuine pleasure in his company and her hope of escaping from her miserable, lonely, and defenseless existence in Zangiacomo's all-woman orchestra.

Later in the novel Lena is false to Ricardo. In order to get his knife she encourages him to believe she is willing to betray Heyst and follow the criminal around the world as his doxy. But the narrator excuses this instance of her duplicity:

Duplicity--the refuge of the weak and the cowardly, but of the disarmed, too! Nothing stood between the
enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting there before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended her all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world. She was not ashamed of her duplicity. With a woman's frank courage, as soon as she saw that opening she threw herself into it without reserve, with only one doubt—that of her own strength. (p. 243)

Her ambiguity is as recurrent a motif in the novel as her duplicity. When Lena and Heyst have been only a short time on their island, Lena says to him, "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?" (p. 154). At the end of a stream of Heyst's banter Lena says, "You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently. I shall end by believing I am no good. . . . And then I won't be any good," she added with conviction. 'That I won't! I can only be what you think I am!' (p. 154). At an early point in their developing relationship, Heyst experiences a "physical and moral sense of the imperfection of their relations—a sense which made him desire her constant nearness, before his eyes, under his hand, and which, when she was out of his sight, made her so vague, so elusive and illusory, a promise that could not be embraced and held" (p. 183). She presents to Heyst a wavering and oscillating nature. At times she seems, like other female characters here treated, to possess opposite qualities, at other times to be empty of any qualities: "Her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force—or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete
Her ambiguity plays a rather significant role in precipitating the catastrophe. Just before Heyst's final interview with Mr. Jones, he and Lena eat a meal with Ricardo, who proposes that Heyst come to the desperado's bungalow for a talk with his gentleman, who is pretending to be ill. Mr. Jones intends to keep Heyst busy while Ricardo, as Jones thinks, will be ferreting out Heyst's loot, but Jones does not know that Ricardo plans to return to Heyst's bungalow, learn from Lena the whereabouts of Heyst's treasure, find the money, and desert Jones, taking the girl with him on a new life of high adventure. It would serve Lena's purpose to get Heyst out of the way so that she can be alone with Ricardo and perhaps capture the knife. This is the motivation for her scarcely perceptible nod, which Heyst, in his rather flippant and disdainful mood, takes for a sort of ominously instinctive sign that he should go along with Ricardo's questionable proposal. Ricardo says that his employer, Mr. Jones,

"Ain't at all well; and he can't make up his mind to go away without having a talk with you."

Heyst, looking up, met Lena's eyes. Their expression of candour seemed to hide some struggling intention. Her head, he fancied, had made an imperceptible affirmative movement. Why? What reason could she have? Was it the prompting of some obscure instinct? Or was it simply a delusion of his own senses? But in this strange complication invading the quietude of his life, in his state of doubt and disdain and almost of despair with which he looked at himself, he would let a delusive appearance guide him through a darkness so dense that it made for indifference.

"It can't be my life they are after," he said to himself. "What good could it be to them?"
He looked across the table at the girl. What did it matter whether she had nodded or not? . . . Her nod, imaginary or not imaginary, advice or illusion, had tipped the scale. (p. 301)

Despite the objective absurdity of Lena's act, Heyst seems profoundly impressed by the private and subjective meaning which Lena herself attributes to it. It may be that her abortive and foolish plan, in its end result, its effect on Heyst, transcends the pathetic naivety of its conception. It is possible to read the final portion of the novel as Heyst's tragic discovery of the meaning of Lena's courageous deed as an act of love and sacrifice, of the superficiality and ultimate wrongness of his philosophical detachment as a way of life and, in his last moments, of the reality of his involvement with Lena—which has been ultimately deeper than the skepticism imitated from his father—and of his communion, through Lena, with a world of purposive action and valid human feelings.

"Karain" and "The Return," the two stories to be examined in detail in this chapter, exemplify a particularly interesting and paradoxical role of woman in relation to the phenomenon of civilization. The female characters in these two tales function as the supporters and the betayers of the solidarity of society. Although solidarity in Conrad's fiction is often a quality of absolute, self-evident, and autonomous validity, the ultimate meaning of these feminine characters in their respective works nevertheless varies with the unsteady and ambivalent value of the societies they support or betray.
In the first of these stories Karain, the dashing and revered chief of an exiled Malay tribe, tells the narrator, an English gun-runner, how he accompanied his kinsman Matara on a journey to find Matara's sister and slay her for breaking her betrothal and running away with a Dutchman. The preservation of family honor demands her death, but Karain begins to dream of her, and during their long wanderings, unknown to Matara her spectre appears to Karain in a dream and soon becomes his constant companion, awake and asleep, sharing his hardships and cheering him on the way. When they find the sister and her Dutch husband, Karain, hardly conscious of his treacherous intent, kills Matara to save the girl. Her phantom has been his faithful friend, but his delusion of a spiritual bond with her is destroyed when the actual woman seems not to know him at all. From this time onward Karain is haunted by the enraged spirit of Matara, but his fears are soothed by the presence of an old sage who remains behind him with a sword, warding off the ghost by means of a spell. When the old man dies, Karain again falls victim to the hauntings of Matara's ghost and the guilt thereby aroused. Soon his torment has so unnerved him that he neglects his duties as chief and his plans to lead his people on an expedition to reconquer their lost land. He has disappointed their hopes and become a wandering hermit. Finally, in his desperation he tries to escape bodily from the ghost and from the culture whose law he had defied. He visits the English gun-runners secretly and asks to be taken to their land and accepted into the society of white men,
whose calm magic gives them control over many things and who never hear tormenting reproaches from the ghosts of betrayed friends. The Englishmen are appalled by this unburdening of primitive, superstitious fear and guilt, but one of them sees the fatal, human universality of Karain's yielding to the appeal of personal, subjective impulse, his subsequent rebellion against the laws which uphold a society's solidarity, and his impulsive betrayal of a friend. The other Englishmen admit their potential or actual kinship with Karain in this guilt, and, in a ritual of perhaps equivocal seriousness, one of them fashions a talisman of an English Diamond Jubilee sixpence, wrapped in a piece of a woman's glove and strung on a bit of ribbon, a keepsake from an English girl. Karain, recognizing the image of Queen Victoria on the coin, accepts the talisman as a powerful charm against his kinsman's ghost and leaves the English ship to resume his former confident and dashing leadership of his people.

Karain had been lured to commit a crime against the solidarity of his society by a delusive image of a woman who had flouted his tribe's mores; now it is the image of another woman, and the mystic symbols of femininity, which restore him to his place as a member of his society. He accepts Queen Victoria as the symbol, the embodied spirit, the cause, of the consistent solidarity of the white man's society, with its technological magic, its rationality, its calm and assured superior denial of the whispers of ghosts. A slight, equivocal hint of jocularity mars the seriousness of the tale;
nevertheless, it portrays dramatically the mystical potency of femininity as the destroyer and the restorer of civilized or of primitive society. Savagery and civilization are reconciled by this avowed similarity. Whether in a primitive or in a civilized environment, men acknowledge the mystical link between the nature of a society and the nature of its women—despite the superficial difference between Karain's exotic domain and the grey gloom and blank faces of the London streets with which the story closes.

Karain is quite aware of the importance of stability in a society. The present subjection of his people by the Dutch is the result of civil war among the four allied states of the Wajo nation. His experience has also shown him that women have much influence on the stability of nations and the instability of human hearts, for his own mother was competent and firm as a ruler of a small, semi-independent state on the island of Celebes, yet she displayed the same headstrong capriciousness in love as did Matara's sister: "He spoke of her with pride. She had been a woman resolute in affairs of state and of her own heart. After the death of her first husband, undismayed by the turbulent opposition of the chiefs, she married a rich trader, a Korinchi man of no family" (Tales of Unrest, p. 14). Memories of Karain's mother become confused in his mind with his rather hazy idea of Queen Victoria, in whom he shows a keen interest during his visits with the gun-runners: "He was fascinated by the holder of a sceptre the shadow of which... passed far beyond his own hand's-breadth of conquered
land... He could never know enough of the Monarch of whom he spoke with wonder and chivalrous respect—with a kind of affectionate awe" (pp. 12-13). Thus Karain's mother possessed the firmness, steadfastness, and confidence of a leader, which Karain admires in the English Queen; yet she also proved paradoxically just as unstable, irrational, and capricious as the sister of Matara. Karain's mother flouted audaciously the mores which she had earlier guarded as leader of her people, in the same way that Matara's sister betrayed her people's taboos: she followed her emotions and married a man whom the tribe deemed unsuited for her, an outsider.

The characterization of Matara's sister is careful to emphasize both of these contrasting tendencies. She is "the daughter of chiefs," (p. 30) "a great and wilful lady." She is something of an emblem of the pride and strength of her nation: "I had seen her once carried high on slaves' shoulders amongst the people, with uncovered face, and I had heard all men say that her beauty was extreme, silencing the reason and ravishing the heart of the beholders" (pp. 29-30). When she breaks her betrothal and runs away to the house of the despised Dutchman, her deed is a national calamity. "The people were dismayed" (p. 30). Matara, aware that his coast is patrolled by Dutch warships, fears to attack the Dutchman's fortified house to take his sister from the man and slay her as his tribe's law demands. He decides to wait until the threat lessens or his own nation's strength increases, but soon the Dutchman leaves the land, taking his
stolen bride with him. Karain, watching the man's ship go
down the river, sees the woman's action as a cruel betrayal,
an audacious rejection, of his country's way of life: "I
saw in the gloom within the enclosed space of the prau a
woman with streaming hair going away from her land and her
people" (p. 30).

The woman's act is so intensely willed, so fearless
and audacious, as to become for Karain more a source of won­
der than a cause for resentment and hatred. Her faithless­
ness completely denies her nobility, yet in her very faith­
lessness is an audacious courage, a strength of soul, an
awe-inspiring ability to cast off the support of superficial,
provincial, and narrow principles and find the justification
for one's behavior in the raw force of one's own ego, in
one's private and autonomous vision. The woman remains
noble in her possession of the courage to consider her own
desires as law. Her personality transcends morality in the
same way as does Kurtz' and, as Karain journeys with his
kinsman on their mission of revenge, the woman's deed loses
its moral meaning in Karain's mind and becomes no longer
infidelity or betrayal, but courage, self-sufficiency, an
utterly independent and therefore mysterious strength:
"Matara brooded by the fire. I sat and thought and thought,
till suddenly I could see again the image of a woman, beau­
tiful and young, and great and proud, and tender, going away
from her land and her people" (p. 32).

During Karain's journey with Matara, the woman's act
continually gains positive valuation in Karain's mind as he
sees more and more of the immensity and strangeness of the world, and as his own tribe's mores and his own strength of purpose lessens in validity and importance amid this immense world.

"The sea met us—the sea wide, pathless, and without voice. . . . We sailed south; we overtook many praus; we examined the creeks and the bays; we saw the end of our coast, of our island—a steep cape over a disturbed strait, where drift the shadows of shipwrecked praus and drowned men clamour in the night. The wide sea was all around us now." (p. 31)

The world which Karain discovers is baffling, uncertain, paradoxical. They land on the island of Java, where the "paths run straight and hard and dusty" (p. 31). The richness of the men there is contradicted by their lack of freedom: "Stone campongs, full of white faces, are surrounded by fertile fields, but every man you meet is a slave. The rulers live under the edge of a foreign sword" (p. 31).

Their mission of provincial justice makes them seem to most observers insane, and their purpose, Matara's disgrace, and the tribal law they are serving continues to lose significance for Karain. They ask the inhabitants if they have seen a Dutchman and Matara's sister:

"Some stared; others laughed; women gave us food, sometimes, with fear and respect, as though we had been distracted by the visitation of God; but some did not understand our language, and some cursed us, or, yawning, asked with contempt the reason of our quest. Once, as we were going away, an old man called after us, 'Desist!'" (p. 32)

The two travelers become lost in the foreign lands they search, and Karain, wandering in a maze of strange people and strange ways, becomes ideologically lost and disoriented from his nation's traditions and meanings:
We lost ourselves in the fields, in the jungle; and one night, in a tangled forest, we came upon a place where crumbling old walls had fallen among the trees, and where strange stone idols—carved images of devils with many arms and legs, with snakes twined round their bodies, with twenty heads and holding a hundred swords—seemed to live and threaten in the light of our campfire.

"We went West, we went East. We saw many lands, crowds of strange faces, men that live in trees and men who eat their old people." (pp. 32-33)

The wanderers practise a necessary duplicity, which probably compounds Karain's disorientation: "We bowed low in the courtyards of chiefs who were no better than slaves. . . . We lied, we cringed, we smiled with hate in our hearts. . . ." (pp. 32-33)

The mores of Karain's people become remote to him in his present state. Soon, distracted by hunger, exhaustion, and the incomprehensible world, Karain becomes the victim of a hallucination; the phantom of a woman seduces him to faithlessness. Still later both the principles of his people and his confidence in a phantom will prove to be illusory, and when Karain has finished his story, the narrator thinks to himself of the Malay's experience as a wandering "amongst illusions" (p. 40). The woman, whose act has already been of ambiguous meaning for him, a source of wonder as well as a sin against his nation's law, becomes more and more the symbol of a courage to be admired—the courage which can face an incomprehensible world unflinchingly because its source is in the simple and raw desire of the ego—not in provincial principles, which fail to interpret the immense, variegated, and contradictory universe and lose their feeble meaning outside the narrow bounds of a single territory.
Matara's sister is quite similar to Amy Foster in her ability to cope with an incomprehensible world, which foils a male character's efforts to interpret it. Also like Amy, she falls in love with an outsider whose ways are incomprehensible and detestable to her own people. But Matara's sister's strength of soul, her ability to live bravely without provincial interpretations, without "illusions," is not marred by Amy's animalistic dullness. It remains a positive attribute, a true and valid strength of soul.

Karain is visited by the phantom of this beautiful woman of his tribe, and he turns to her for courage for help against the dismaying, incomprehensible world which she herself has successfully braved. The woman faithless to his people's law becomes his loyal guide and support: "She never left me. . . . She was beautiful, she was faithful, and in the silence of foreign countries she spoke to me very low in the language of my people" (pp. 34-35). Just as several female characters, in the works treated in the first chapter, become the one meaningful object in an otherwise blank universe, so Matara's sister serves the same function for Karain, though it is an ideological or sociological confusion from which she saves him—not the metaphysical anxiety from which women momentarily save men in the works examined earlier.

The phantom's offer of help and courage is later revealed as a means of seducing Karain from his purpose; her transforming of the incomprehensible world into a world of meaning is quite temporary. "At night she looked into my
face. And she was sad! Her eyes were tender and frightened; her voice soft and pleading. Once I murmured to her, 'You shall not die,' and she smiled... ever after she smiled!..." (p. 35). On the night before they attempt to slay the woman and her husband, Karain, waiting with Matara behind a hedge bordering the Dutchman's yard, experiences deep anguish but is soothed in a dream by the phantom woman's compassion: "She bent her face over me... She was all mine, and no one could see her—no one of living mankind!" (p. 36). Karain's vision is of a woman's form superimposed on the meaningless universe: "Stars shone through her bosom, through her floating hair!" (p. 36).

When dawn comes, Matara breaks from the hedge and rushes at his sister, who stands in the courtyard with her husband. She shows herself faithful to the Dutchman whose strange life she has accepted and, paradoxically, faithful also to the ways of her own people: "Matara burst out of the thicket; before him the petals of torn flowers whirled high as if driven by a tempest. I heard her cry; I saw her spring with open arms in front of the white man. She was a woman of my country and of noble blood. They are so!" (p. 38). When Matara is killed, the woman betrays the confidence her phantom had instilled in Karain: she tells her husband she never saw Karain before—"after so many years, so many years of wandering, of companionship, of trouble, of tender words! Forgotten already!" (p. 39). And her phantom never appears again, leaving Karain disoriented in an empty universe more lonely and strange than ever before,
where the meaningless stars are unobstructed by her soothing image:

"I remember walking upon a broad path under a clear starlight; and that strange country seemed so big, the rice-fields so vast, that, as I looked around, my head swam with the fear of space. . . . The joyous starlight was heavy upon me." (p. 39)

It is chiefly through a careful juxtaposition of evocative images, scenes, and panoramas of Malays and Englishmen that the story makes its points: that, despite superficial differences between rational, technological Western civilization and the barbarous, superstitious Eastern way of life, these two societies are similar in their need for solidarity, in their dependence for solidarity upon a woman's steadfast firmness, and in the vulnerability of their solidarity to a woman's irrational caprice and audacious courage. The early scenes in which Karain and his Malay followers confront the Englishmen suggest a great gap between their societies. Chief and people and land seem as remote and separate from the narrator's own life and society as the figures and background of a Delacroix painting; the narrator constantly emphasizes the seeming unreality of the Malays and their way of life—they are too much like characters from a boy's adventure tale to be taken seriously:

They thronged the narrow length of our schooner's decks with their ornamented and barbarous crowd, with the variegated colours of checkered sarongs, red turbans, white jackets, embroideries; with the gleam of scabbards, gold rings, charms, armlets, lance blades, and jewelled handles of their weapons. . . . We remember . . . the murmuring stir of that crowd, brilliant, festive, and martial. . . . (pp. 3-4)

The recently-conquered domain of Karain's exiled people, a
narrow crescent of land bordered by mountains and a bay, is indicated by Karain with "a theatrical sweep of his arm."

In the sophisticated Englishmen’s view from their ship it seems in its ethnic remoteness uninhabited:

It was still, complete, unknown, and full of a life that went on stealthily with a troubling effect of solitude; of a life that seemed unaccountably empty of anything that would stir the thought, touch the heart, give a hint of the ominous sequence of days. It appeared to us a land without memories, regrets, and hopes . . . . (p.5)

The Englishmen can see no human meaning here, nor can they look upon the Malays’ formal and poetic speech, their exotic manners and dress as serious expressions, symbols, and forms of a culture, a meaningful, human, and communal life. They are merely exotic and incomprehensible colors, sounds, and gestures. Most void of meaning are the Malays’ exaggerated expressions of devotion to their chief and the lofty majesty with which he receives their homage: "Their movements hung on his lips; they read their thoughts in his eyes; he murmured to them nonchalantly of life and death, and they accepted his words humbly, like gifts of fate. They were all free men, and when speaking to him said, 'Your slave!'" (p. 4).

And Karain presented himself essentially as an actor, as a human being aggressively disguised. His smallest acts were prepared and unexpected, his speeches grave, his sentences ominous like hints and complicated like arabesques. He was treated with a solemn respect accorded in the irreverent West only to the monarchs of the stage. . . . (pp. 6-7)

The land and its ruler seem to be two equally false elements in a make-believe show; taken together they seem to be artificial scenery and richly-costumed actor.
With a Westerner's mistrust of formality, with a confusion of formality with hypocrisy which accuses his own society, the narrator is slightly uncomfortable and suspicious during his first interview with Karain: "He was ornate and disturbing, for one could not imagine what depth of horrible void such an elaborate front could be worthy to hide" (p. 6). The content of Karain's "horrible void" is later disclosed to the English narrator when Karain confesses his betrayal of his kinsman and his tribe for a woman, but at this first interview—and perhaps even later—the narrator fails to recognize that the covert falseness which disturbs him in Karain is not peculiar to this individual Malay guilty of a breach of solidarity, nor even to the whole violent and formal East, for it is the common condition of all human societies. He does not realize that all expressions and tokens, all manners and forms of all societies are, in a certain view, empty shams which hide a "horrible void"—that the stability or solidarity of any civilization is a surface effect, an illusion, precariously maintained against the chaotic force of a myriad of personal, subjective, egotistic impulses and illusions which compose that civilization—that even the informal and less elaborate expressions of allegiance which Westerners offer their own authorities and comrades become from time to time as empty as the words "Your slave" with which a free Malay addresses his chief. Nor is he mindful of the importance of woman's steadfastness and caprice for the maintenance and destruction of the illusory stability of every society. Until one of the narrator's
friends suggests that all men—even the gun-runners them­selves—might be as guilty as Karain of betrayal of friends and mores and as subject to the appeal of "illusions," the narrator considers Karain's strained and perhaps hollow maj­esty an ethnic and climatic condition: "He summed up his race, his country, the elemental force of ardent life, of tropical nature. He had its luxuriant strength, its fascina­tion; and, like it, he carried the seed of peril within" (p. 7). But the working out of the tale shows, perhaps some­what cynically, that the two contrasting societies are united, for in each the demands of social responsibility and the standards of personal honor are separate, distinct, and sometimes contradictory; that the individual's outward per­formance in a social milieu is often quite remote from his private moral life, and (for present purposes most signifi­cant) that women seem particularly potent in the development of a man's individual remorse and the betrayal of private loyalties on the one hand, and in the maintenance of the stability and efficiency of an entire society on the other.

The Englishmen's first view of the exotic and formal Karain among his followers is somewhat modified by later, more casual, nocturnal visits of the exiled potentate in the small cabin of the schooner. Nevertheless the two societies are still separated by a great gap, symbolized by the con­trast between the flashy and elaborate costumes of the Ma­lays and the ascetic and functional ship's cabin, filled with the drab paraphernalia of white men. Karain observes punctilious courtesy either by apologizing for bearing a
weapon among friends, or by placing his kris in his belt in an unbelligerent attitude, or by covering it with his hand. The white men, by contrast, are in very informal postures, sitting on tables, half-clad, and one of them fooling with a guitar. Still later, in the scene in which Karain comes to beg the white men either for a place as a member of their group, to return with them to their land, or for a charm bearing the strength of their unbelief to use against Mata- tara's ghost, Conrad heightens the contrast with an extended description:

He looked round the little cabin, at the painted beams, at the tarnished varnish of bulkheads; he looked round as if appealing to all its shabby strangeness, to the disorderly jumble of unfamiliar things that belong to an inconceivable life of stress, of power, of endeavour, of unbelief—to the strong life of white men, which rolls on irresistible and hard on the edge of outer darkness. (pp. 25-26)

Furthermore, Karain's confession seems to widen the gap between cultures. When his tale is ended, the Westerners pity their foreign friend's distress and torment, but they are appalled and embarrassed by Karain's implied kinship with them—Westerners who claim to live strictly in a rational, ordered, and actual world untroubled by the unseen: "The silence was profound," says the narrator, "but it seemed full of noiseless phantoms . . . in whose invisible presence the firm, pulsating beat of the two ship's chronometers ticking off steadily the seconds of Greenwich time seemed to me a protection and a relief" (p. 40). The Malay has made them aware, against their will, of the importance of the unseen in their own lives and in the lives of all human beings
and even of the illusory and ephemeral nature of all men's loyalty, for the narrator is forced now to think "of all the men that wander amongst illusions faithful, faithless ... of the invincible illusions that can make life and death appear serene, inspiring, tormented, or ignoble" (p. 40). The Englishmen shrink from the implication of their own society's dependence on phantoms and the precariousness of its solidarity, despite the ticking chronometers' steady assurance of its regularity. To comfort him the narrator tries to dismiss Karain's guilt as mere superstition. In so doing he shows that he does not believe the exotic and "simple" savage Karain capable of commitment to principles which would constitute a valid sense of individual honor and social responsibility. He cannot take Karain seriously, for he assumes, wrongly, that his belief in spirits, as well as his extremely formal bearing, proves a shallowness of conscience, a limited sense of honor and social responsibility. He cannot share Karain's fear of ghosts, and he tries to allay his superstitious awe at a hallucination, not realizing that Karain's irrational, unscientific superstition is to Karain inextricably connected with his remorse for the betrayal of his friend and the breaking of his people's law—with a moral concern which transcends both a superstitious and a rational view of life. The narrator is taken aback when Karain discovers in his effort to comfort him the insinuation of a shallowness of conscience:

"You must abide with your people. They need you, And there is forgetfulness in life. Even the dead cease to speak in time."
"Am I a woman, to forget long years before an eyelid has had the time to beat twice?" he exclaimed with bitter amazement. It was amazing. To him his life—that cruel mirage of love and peace—seemed as real, as undeniable, as theirs would be to any saint, philosopher, or fool of us all. (pp. 43-44)

The narrator is even more surprised by the occurrence which soon follows; it is a scene in which his own world, his own society, is shown to harbor phantoms, to be subject to disloyalty among its adherents, and to be the prey of woman's caprice and the care of woman's steadfastness. The youngest member of the group breaks the awkward stillness in the cabin following Karain's confession by fetching a box of keepsakes from his bunk and beginning a half-serious, half-cynical ceremony in which he bestows on Karain a charm to allay the power of ghosts and guilt:

We had never seen the box before. His hands hovered above it . . .

"Every one of us," he said with pauses that somehow were more offensive than his words—"every one of us, you'll admit, has been haunted by some woman . . . And . . . as to friends . . . dropped by the way . . . Well! . . . ask yourselves . . . "

. . . Karain's lips were parted and his eyes shone. We looked into the box.

There were a couple of reels of cotton, a packet of needles, a bit of silk ribbon, dark blue; a cabinet photograph, at which Hollis stole a glance before laying it on the table face downwards. A girl's portrait, I could see. There were, amongst a lot of various small objects, a bunch of flowers, a narrow white glove with many buttons, a slim packet of letters carefully tied up. Amulets of white men! Charms and talismans! Charms that keep them straight, that drive them crooked, that have the power to make a young man sigh, an old man smile . . . .

And it seemed to me, during that moment of waiting, that the cabin of the schooner was becoming filled . . . . All the ghosts driven out of the unbelieving West by men who pretend to be wise and alone and at peace . . . appeared suddenly round the figure of Hollis bending over the box; all the exiled and charming shades of loved women; all the beautiful and tender ghosts of ideals, remembered, forgotten, cherished, execrated; all the
cast-out and reproachful ghosts of friends admired, trusted, traduced, betrayed, left dead by the way—they all seemed to come into the gloomy cabin, as though it had been a refuge and, in all the unbelieving world, the only place of avenging belief. . . . (pp. 47-49)

Hollis finds the Diamond Jubilee sixpence bearing Queen Victoria's image, sews it to a piece of leather cut from a girl's glove, attaches it to a ribbon, and presents the charm to Karain, reminding him that the Queen is more powerful than a sorcerer who commands spirits. Hollis speaks to the Englishmen in their own language:

"She commands a spirit, too—the spirit of her nation; a masterful, conscientious, unscrupulous, unconquerable devil . . . that does a lot of good—incidentally . . . a lot of good . . . at times—and wouldn't stand any fuss from the best ghost out for such a little thing as our friend's shot." (pp. 49-50)

Thus the two contrasting societies are, beneath superficial differences, similar in their dependence on charms, their use of formulas in intercourse, and their fatal relation to woman as the support of social solidarity and the betrayer of personal loyalty. Karain, released from his guilt and fear, resumes his theatrical, majestic bearing: "For a moment he stood erect, one foot over the gangway, one hand on the hilt of his kriss, in martial pose; and, relieved from the fear of outer darkness, he held his head high, he swept a serene look over his conquered foothold on the earth" (p. 52).

Some years later, walking on a crowded street in London after his return from the East, the narrator meets Jackson, one of his companions who had heard Karain's confession and witnessed his rehabilitation. As the two men stand amid
waves of jostling humanity, they remember their adventures in the Archipelago. Jackson, who has just returned from there, wonders aloud whether Karain's story was true, whether he was indeed seduced by a phantom and did actually murder his friend—or if the whole thing was a mere dream—of Karain's or of his own. The narrator, who has been home in England several years, has no doubt about the unreality of Karain's entire story, and he directs Jackson's attention to the spectacle of the London crowd—evidently implying that the unavoidable, drab, reality, the deadly, ordinary, dull, and commonplace aspect of businesslike, "sane," Western society, a world without ghosts, somehow cancels Karain's loyalty to and betrayal of illusions; that it can negate the reality of his guilt and redemption; that it can testify to the unsubstantiality of his masterful gestures, the exotic dress and poetic and formal language of the Malay chief and his devoted people. This crowd in an ironic manner fits Karain's description of white men who "understand all things seen, and despise all else . . ." in a land "where every man is wise, and alone—and at peace!" (p. 44). It is a dead world, free from colorful and perhaps disturbing formality, from superstition, hallucinations, and remorse, but also empty of meaning, inhabited by human beings possessed of hollow wisdom and the peace of a spiritual void—each indeed alone in this society of autonomous lives, this society of zombies:

The fronts of houses, the sombre polish of windows, stood resigned and sullen under the falling gloom . . . . Innumerable eyes stared straight in front, feet moved
hurriedly, blank faces flowed, arms swung. . . .

. . . Two young girls passed by, talking vivaciously, and with shining eyes; a fine old fellow strutted, red faced, stroking a white moustache . . . a ragged old man with a face of despair yelled horribly in the mud the name of a paper. . . . (pp. 54-55)

Jackson agrees that the crowd tends to negate the existence or importance of fierce passions, seductive illusions, and relentless remorse; that the crowd is impressively real.

Yet he affirms the more intense reality of Karain's story. The narrator, now himself a part of the unexotic and blank populace, remains unconvinced and untouched by the impact of his own tale. He says of Jackson: "I think that, decidedly, he had been too long away from home" (p. 55).

Albert Guerard has found in "Karain" an important step in Conrad's gradual discovery of a congenial theme and method, and an early adumbration of Lord Jim, although he believes the story "ends in trivial anecdote" (pp. 89, 91). The tale does share with Lord Jim such elements as the essentially upright hero who slips into a crime of betrayal; his efforts to escape from remorse; his confession to his fellow men who partially accept him and sympathize with his torment, but remain ambivalent toward his deed. If the story is judged as mainly a treatment of this complex of elements, it is indeed trivial, for it is impossible to avoid the objection that Karain's guilt is made too profoundly serious, too real an experience of human torment under the stress of remorse, to be assuaged by a simple talisman. Lord Jim would not be the masterpiece it is, Jim's moral predicament would deserve no reader's attention, if Conrad had shown Jim
capable of being reassured with so facile a means of redemption. But it must be remembered that whereas Jim seeks to regain his honor—an ephemeral and evasive ideal—Karain seeks only to escape from the debilitating effects of his remorse—from the torments of Matara's ghost, which are to him by no means ephemeral but quite a real drain on his confidence and his ability to lead his people, to continue his assured pose, his majestic bearing, a spectacle which his people must see if they are to survive as a society. He runs from Matara's ghost, and he seeks a charm to ward off this aggrieved spirit, but when the narrator suggests that he can forget his crime itself, Karain assures him, with the vehemence of challenged pride and honor, that he cannot do so. He does not expect the restoration of his honor, but only the rehabilitation of his confidence. In this sense he lacks the naïve romanticism by which Jim believes a man of stained honor can be given a clean slate—the romanticism which the Lieutenant of the French gunboat immediately sees as childish wishful thinking and self-delusion. Karain is more realistic than Jim, and the character Hollis is more cynical in his belief that, when honor is gone—and it goes rather soon in life—one must go on living and doing one's duty, and the sooner one learns to live with stained honor, but with confidence, the better.

Hollis' talisman, and the words of the cynical ceremony in which he bestows it on Karain, indicate that the individual's conscience and the moral or quasi-moral demands of his society are two quite different things. His words also
imply that women play particularly significant roles in the betrayal of personal loyalties and in the stability of entire societies. He says that all those present have been the haunted victims of some woman's phantom. He says also that the spirit which Queen Victoria controls—the spirit of the great English nation—does a lot of good incidentally; that is, that strict moral justice is not its foremost concern. He says, furthermore, that this spirit—this society, this nation—would care nothing for the grievance of Matara's ghost; that is, that the betrayal and murder of one relatively insignificant individual can and should be overlooked with impunity if the society stands to risk in the slightest degree its stability. Karain is of great importance to his society's stability; therefore, his confidence must be preserved at any price. The "spirit" of a society is often more concerned with the appearances of stability, order, smooth organization of the entire group rather than with the strict personal morality of its individuals, and it is often willing to sacrifice personal honor and private remorse for expediency. In one sense Karain would be wrong to allow his private remorse to incapacitate him thoroughly for the fulfilling of his public duty.

The scene of the crowded London street portrays a society in which the smoothness of organization, the perfection of order, has become the highest good. Karain has been fortunate in obtaining, for the benefit of his people, some small portion of Western society's greater power and efficiency in suppressing individual feeling and ignoring things
unseen for the sake of the social order. Of course the extreme rigidity, the perfect and empty regimentation of the London crowd, like the Eastern potentate's extremely formal manner, hides a "horrible void," one perhaps more horrible than Karain's, just as its outer surface is more drab and repellent, more sombre and lifeless than the gestures, dress, and speech of the Malays. The story would seem to be another of Conrad's "choice of nightmares," for in both worlds individual feeling must, to some degree, be stifled for the stability of a society. Jackson chooses the colorful, exotic, and violent world of Karain; the narrator, who has not been away from "home" so long, chooses the drab London streets as the one reality.

Guerard sees the difference between Lord Jim and the earlier "Karain" to lie chiefly in the gun-runners' and the author's attitude toward Karain, which, he feels, is less sympathetic, less tolerant and ambivalent than Marlow's attitude toward Jim: "It is as though Conrad did not yet want to admit [at the time of writing "Karain"] that Lord Jim with his crime was 'one of us.' As Willems was only an outcast drifter, so Karain is only a superstitious native" (p. 91). But there seems a more basic difference: "Karain" is a more realistic, cynical, and perhaps sad story revealing the impossibility of reconciling the demands of personal ideals and feelings with the impersonal, expedient and inconsistent standards of a society seeking stability. "Karain" is about primitive and civilized men who, despite their differences as superstitious or rational beings, know
the difference between personal honor—which, once gone, can never be regained—and social responsibility, which must sometimes be maintained in spite of feelings of remorse at one's lost honor. *Lord Jim* is about a man who has tragically confused personal honor and social responsibility. The ending of "Karain" appears trivial only when the story is wrongly interpreted as a miniature *Lord Jim*, concerned with the redemption of a man of stained honor and naive if noble delusions. Its actual concern is a rather cynical recognition of the gap between honor and social responsibility and the crucial importance of woman for each of these very separate allegiances.

In "The Return" the society which a woman sustains yet betrays is not a tribe or nation, but a class; nevertheless, it possesses and consciously upholds certain principles and mores by which it identifies itself as a distinct group, a society within a larger civilization or culture. It is a wealthy, pompous, and spiritually empty middle class. Conrad's treatment of woman in a bourgeois society is examined also in Chapter Four, but I have chosen to discuss "The Return" in this chapter, in connection with "Karain" because, unlike the works discussed in Chapter Four, "The Return" has a male character who conceives of his way of life as an organized and systematic social philosophy, an ethic, almost a religion. Though he remains unconscious of the falseness and hollowness of his ideal, he considers it a sacrosanct creed demanding the loyal allegiance of its adherents. His shallow creed is either a confused perversion of valid
principles or is an attempt to justify his egotistic and cold greed by a subtle rationalization. The bourgeois villains discussed in the following chapter are less self-conscious; their perverse attitudes do not masquerade as morality, nor do they pretend to uphold the virtue of solidarity, as does Alvan Hervey in "The Return." Furthermore, the women in the tales discussed in the fourth chapter do not challenge this bourgeois solidarity, this fidelity among hollow men of commerce. They may rebel against the demands of a bourgeois villain, or they may condemn non-conformity, but their actions do not constitute the sustaining or the betrayal of middle class society.

Most critics agree with Conrad in regarding "The Return" as a failure and as outside the mainstream of Conrad's work in subject and in manner. For present purposes the crucial critical statements about the story concern the reasons for its failure, the conscious intentions of Conrad, his supposed unconscious antipathy toward his material, and the relevance of this failure and this antipathy to an understanding of Conrad's strengths and weaknesses as a novelist—particularly his strengths and weaknesses in treatment of female characters and the subject of love. Some critics have asserted that the story's hardly perceivable intention is to juxtapose the hollow bourgeois materialism, represented by its main character, with the true and substantial values of the life of passion, and that Conrad meant to champion and affirm the aspect of life which is more related to man's basic biological nature—specifically, man's
sexuality—and to condemn the narrow restraint or the hypocritical deception which would stifle or hide man's true nature for the sake of empty conformity, respectability, monetary gain, the safety of the herd and the benefits of a comfortable but impersonal, technological society (Guerard, pp. 97-98). In the opinion of some critics the story fails as a work of art because this affirmation, consciously accepted by Conrad as his theme, was antipathetic to his unacknowledged fear of sexuality; he failed to write an imaginative affirmation of love and sex because he feared sexuality and hated woman. The critic Thomas Moser interprets one of the scenes in "The Return" as a symbolic taunting of the male character's supposed impotence and a metaphoric destruction of him by the female character (Moser, pp. 75, 82). He also asserts that the scene reflects the author's own fear of impotence. The story so interpreted becomes for Moser and others the classical example of Conrad's incompetence when treating a sexual subject in fiction (Moser, p. 77). Other works which treat women and love are seen to repeat this pattern—an overt affirmation of love, sex, and femininity is thwarted and betrayed by Conrad's hidden misogyny and fear of feminine sexuality.

A different view of "The Return," which places emphasis on other matters than sexual repression, and which relates the story to a unified scheme of Conrad's work, is possible. I do not consider the glorification of sexuality as the intended subject of "The Return." I feel that the failure of the story is due to causes other than unconscious
fear of a sexual subject, and although I do not contend that the story is successful as a piece of fiction, I hold that its theme is identical with that of "Karain": the importance of woman as the sustainer and betrayer of a society, culture, civilization, or way of life. Here the female character upholds but also destroys the validity of the shallow life of the middle class. She is at first the living emblem of the male character's hollow values, and she later irrevocably destroys his empty faith. She herself callously—or perhaps bravely—continues to live by these empty forms, fully aware of their emptiness—just as Matara's sister puts aside the principles of her nation and audaciously braves an incomprehensible world of variegated and contradicting mores. The same indefinite, fluctuating, and wavering quality which informs the women characters in works discussed in the first chapter is apparent in Mrs. Hervey as she is contemplated by her husband, Alvan Hervey the "organization man." She is the speaking symbol of the repressed and superficial life of the moneyed class who deny all but materialistic values and who worship hollow respectability, for whom marriage is a partnership in which the participants agree to hide behind the poetic convention of "love" their true selfish desires for social prominence, for the approval of the conforming herd, and for material comfort. She wavers from this ideal of hollow respectability so far as to plan an elopement with her husband's associate, but returns to Hervey because of her feeble courage, her discovery of her lover's failure to appreciate her depth of soul, and her discovery that she
values the safe deception and pretense of her present life more than any real or supposed freedom of expression. Her near-elopement shatters Hervey's safe conception of life. He is disillusioned: passion, disorder, misfortune do exist and can destroy the perfect pattern of empty respectability which to him is life. In order to preserve a vestige of this respectability, he agrees to take her back and to hide this abominable mistake. But at one point in the tale, impressed by his wife's inscrutable silence, he suspects that she possesses some secret of existence, lying far beneath the superficial values of monetary gain and respectability: "the certitude immaterial and precious, the certitude of love and faith." The ideal grows in his mind until he seeks awkwardly to attain it by approaching his wife. She mistakes his advances for a hypocritical expression of love, or for evidence of his jealous curiosity, and screams, "This is odious!" He then decides that she lacks the secret, "the gift," that she will never possess it, and sees a vision of the total meaninglessness of human action, the total emptiness of the cosmos, the futility of both his former bourgeois materialism and any other social values. In this moment of truth, says the narrator, his conscience is born, but he fears this newly discovered, austere truth. He cannot give up his ideal vision of "the certitude immaterial and precious," and he seeks the comforting deception which his wife has always supplied him in their reciprocal sustaining of each other's delusions. She mistakes his questioning for prying into her affair with his associate. She becomes
enraged and rejects him. He looks into her eyes, sees again his vision of nothingness, and leaves the house, never to return.

The story fails because its action and characterization are inadequately developed and too weak to carry the theme which Conrad sought to present through it. The theme is often reduced to mere statement rather than imaginative dramatization and, most important, Hervey's sudden suspicion that his wife possesses the gift of "the certitude of love and faith" seems unmotivated, as does his sudden vision of nothingness. Furthermore, the narrator's attitude toward Hervey and his wife, although it suggests rich possibilities for ambivalence, never becomes clear enough to allow the reader to find his moral equilibrium. Finally, Hervey, like Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands*, never attains enough of the reader's sympathy to render his failures tragic.

The tale is structured around a sequence of crises of belief in the mind of Alvan Hervey; each new "illusion" or worldview which emerges is in turn stimulated and subsequently destroyed by his shifting interpretation of the nature of the woman who is his wife. Hervey's sense of the ultimate meaning of life, his values, his view of the cosmos, of truth and morality, quite often depends on some mere physical detail in his wife's appearance. In fact, his shifting focus of the world depends often on whether his wife's face is visible or hidden. Thus, in his attempt to unravel the mystery of life, Alvan Hervey peers at his wife many times during the tale. His first sight of her when she
returns suggests nuances of meaning in her aspect which he had previously overlooked—hints of some knowledge outside his creed of bourgeois respectability. The "dream" that she represents at his first sight of her is definitely not his habitually limited and stifled view of things:

She was the incarnation of all the short moments which every man spares out of his life for dreams, for precious dreams that concrete the most cherished, the most profitable of his illusions. He peered at her with inward trepidation. She was mysterious, significant, full of obscure meaning—like a symbol. He peered, bending forward, as though he had been discovering about her things he had never seen before. (Tales of Unrest, p. 139)

But one second later, when she lifts her veil, Hervey discovers in the dream she represents the narrow, confined safety, the barren conformity which has been his and her "dream":

She had lifted her veil. 

The spell was broken. He experienced a shock as though he had been called out of a trance by the sudden noise of an explosion. . . . he had the sensation of having come into this room only that very moment; of having returned from very far; he was made aware that some essential part of himself had in a flash returned into his body, returned finally from a fierce and lamentable region, from the dwelling-place of unveiled hearts. He woke up to an amazing infinity of contempt, to a droll bitterness of wonder, to a disenchanted conviction of safety. He had a glimpse of the irresistible force, and he saw also the barrenness of his convictions—of her convictions. It seemed to him that he could never make a mistake as long as he lived. It was morally impossible to go wrong. He was not elated by that certitude; he was dimly uneasy about its price; there was a chill of death in this triumph of sound principles, in this victory snatched under the very shadow of disaster. (p. 140)

Thus Mrs. Hervey fluctuates in meaning between an embodiment of dream in the positive sense and an epitome of the barren bourgeois illusion by which she and her husband, like the
members of the London crowd in the closing scene of "Karain,"
stifle private and personal feelings—things unseen—for the
sake of certain social standards. When she lifts her veil
she recalls Hervey to his usual state, his safe banality,
his modus operandi; she becomes the embodiment not of dream,
but of self-deception.

After restoring Hervey to the questionable safety of
his barren convictions, Mrs. Hervey gives him a look which,
by its sincere and painful emotion, strikes a tottering blow
at the conviction she has just restored—the conviction that
has been Hervey's standard belief, that pain and emotion and
passion do not exist, or are powerless to come into the
lives of successful barons of finance like himself. It was
a look that

had all the formless eloquence of a cry. It penetrated,
it stirred without informing. . . . It was anguish
naked and unashamed, the bare pain of existence let
loose upon the world in the fleeting unreserve of a look
that had in it an immensity of fatigue, the scornful
sincerity, the black impudence of an extorted confession.
. . . It was dangerous to one as would be a hint of un-
belief whispered by a priest in the august decorum of a
temple. . . . (p. 141)

To face the challenge of this look he summons all the
banal platitudes of his creed of social respectability.
With evident awareness of the ironic and superficial simi-
liarity of Hervey's words to his own acknowledged values,
Conrad has Hervey preach to his wife on the importance of
"restraint, duty, fidelity—unswerving fidelity to what is
expected of you," and explain to her pompously but with
rather weak reasoning that it is his altruistic faithfulness
to duty—not self-interest—which prompts him to take her
back, to avoid creating a scandal by exposing her intended infidelity. When he vows forgiveness, his wife bursts out laughing and goes into hysterics. He throws water in her face, and the resulting change in her features strikes him again as a portent, a revelation of some dark truth:

Her face was streaming with water and tears; there was a wisp of hair on her forehead, another stuck to her cheek; her hat was on one side, undecorously tilted; her soaked veil resembled a sordid rag festooning her forehead. There was an utter unreserve in her aspect, an abandonment of safeguards, that ugliness of truth which can only be kept out of daily life by unremitting care for appearances. He did not know why, looking at her, he thought suddenly of tomorrow, and why the thought called out a deep feeling of unutterable, discouraged weariness—a fear of facing the succession of days. (pp. 167-168)

But later, when she composes her features and assumes an undisturbed complacency, he is even more alarmed than he had been by the frank exposure of "that ugliness of truth." When they go down to dinner, Hervey is mistrustful of his wife's self-control. He is startled from his tense apprehension when she calmly begins to make small talk while they eat. Her ability to cover so completely her true feelings with a facade of neutral calm staggered him, and he is led to doubt the social meaning which he had read in her calm features for five years of married life:

He was looking at the candid eyes, at the pure brow, at what he had seen every evening for years in that place; he listened to the voice that for five years he had heard every day... That imposing, unthinking stillness of her features, had till then mirrored for him the tranquil dignity of a soul of which he had thought himself—as a matter of course—the inexpugnable possessor. Those were the outward signs of her difference from the ignoble herd that feels, suffers, fails, errs—but has no distinct value in the world except as a moral contrast to the prosperity of the elect. He had been proud of her appearance... and now he was shocked to see it
unchanged. . . . What went on within made no difference. What did she think? What meant the pallor, the placid face, the candid brow, the pure eyes? . . . What did she think yesterday—to-day; what would she think to-morrow? He must find out. . . . And yet how could he get to know? She had been false to him, to that man, to herself; she was ready to be false—for him. . . . And he would never know what she meant. (pp. 171-172)

Mrs. Hervey, like Matara's sister, has represented in her very aspect the ideology of a group. She has functioned for Hervey as something of an emblem or a repository of his values, but she has suddenly become false to these values. Hervey reaches a plateau of rhetorical rapture in his sermon on the self-evidence sacredness of the principles of his class: "'From a child you had examples before your eyes—you could see daily the beauty, the blessings of morality, of principles . . . . Rigid principles—adherence to what is right!'" (p. 157). Mrs. Hervey suddenly destroys his frenzied confidence with a remark which shows her complete skepticism, her doubt of the absolute truth of the mores of her group: "'What is right?' she said distinctly, without uncovering her face" (p. 159).

After dinner, in the drawing room, Hervey is still tormented by the puzzle, but his rambling speech and distraught pacing anger his wife, who removes the ivory fan shading her face and bursts out: "I did not come back for your forgiveness." Bewildered, he replies, "But if my love is strong enough. . . ." whereupon, enraged at his density, she breaks her fan and moves to the door. It is at this moment that Hervey's intense bewilderment so torments him that he is led to believe that she possesses the secret of life:
While he groped at her feet [for the pieces of her fan] it occurred to him that the woman there had in her hands an indispensable gift which nothing else on earth could give; and when he stood up he was penetrated by an irresistible belief in an enigma, by the conviction that within his reach and passing away from him was the secret of existence—its certitude, immaterial and precious! She moved to the door, and he followed at her elbow, casting about for a magic word that would make the enigma clear, that would compel the surrender of the gift. And there is no such word! The enigma is only made clear by sacrifice, and the gift of heaven is in the hands of every man. But they had lived in a world that abhors enigmas, and cares for no gifts but such as can be obtained in the street. She was nearing the door. He said hurriedly:

"'Pon my word, I loved you— I love you now."

It was through the pain of losing her that the knowledge had come. She had the gift! She had the gift! . . . He made a step forward, putting his arms out, as if to take her to his breast, and, lifting his head, was met by such a look of blank consternation that his arms fell as though they had been struck down by a blow. She started away from him, stumbled over the threshold, and once on the landing turned, swift and crouching. The train of her gown swished as it flew round her feet. It was an undisguised panic. She panted, showing her teeth, and the hate of strength, the disdain of weakness, the eternal preoccupation of sex came out like a toy demon out of a box.

"This is odious," she screamed. (pp. 176, 178)

This response wakens Hervey from his idealistic illusion about the nature of his wife, and he puzzles her with the remark, "You haven't the gift."

Thomas Moser has interpreted the scene just discussed as a symbolic representation of the female character taunting the male character's impotence. Professor Moser considers Mrs. Hervey's breaking of the fan a symbolic retort to her husband's exclamation, "But if my love is strong enough . . . ." He reads this act as her indication that it is not strong enough and that she is stronger than he is (Moser, p. 75). Moser sees the lurid red light in which these
actions occur and the other references to glaring light and heat as symbolic of an aura of feminine sexuality which he feels is loathsome and frightening to Hervey (Moser, pp. 74-75): "Far off, a lamp perched on a slim brass rod, burned under a wide shade of crimson silk: the centre, within the shadows of the large room, of a fiery twilight that had in the quality of its tint something delicate, refined and infernal" (p. 174). He sees Mrs. Hervey's pose before the fireplace as portentous of the same menacingly feminine quality; as she sits shading her face from the fire with an ivory fan, "the coals glowed without a flame; and upon the red glow the vertical bars of the grate stood out at her feet, black and curved, like the charred ribs of a consumed sacrifice" (p. 174). It would probably be more consistent with Conrad's typical presentation of femininity— as veiled in obscurity and ambiguity— to consider the breaking of the fan as foreshadowing Mrs. Hervey's final destruction of her husband's dreams or illusions and foreshadowing also his vision of nothingness. She has been using the fan to shade or hide her face, recalling her first appearance in the story, when her veiled face awakened Hervey's realization that she was the embodiment of all his cherished dreams and profitable illusions. Her unveiled face brought him back to the safe emptiness of his ordinary life. Throughout the tale, as Hervey vacillates in his views of his wife, as Mrs. Hervey shifts in meaning and value from a figure embodying bourgeois social values to a dream-shattering revelation, her covering and uncovering of her face is significant. The red
haze in which the scene occurs does not in my view represent a menacing aura of feminine passion and sexuality, but has the same symbolic meaning that mist has in many of Conrad's tales: uncertainty, mystery, enigma. The light in the drawing room is called an *infernal delicacy of twilight* not because it represents a sexuality which Conrad finds fiendish but because the enigma of the cosmos is in many of Conrad's tales a vaguely hostile incertitude, as the inscrutable earth-force was indefinitely antagonistic in "The Idiots." When Conrad writes of Mrs. Hervey: "She stood before him, tall and indistinct, like a black phantom in the red twilight," he is identifying woman with the inscrutability of the universe; he is not condemning feminine sexuality.

Richer than the symbolism of the fan and veil in this story is the typical Conradian symbolic play with darkness and light, relevant here to the theme of ambiguous and inadequate social values. When Mrs. Hervey enters the room at her fatal return, it seems to her husband that the flame of the gaslight flares up and fills the room with a scorching and blinding brilliance. The light in the room in which the fan-breaking scene occurs and in which Hervey glimpses his elusive ideal of "the certitude of faith and of love" is a red twilight. After he is repelled by his wife's "This is odious!" Hervey goes out into a hall to meditate on his newly discovered ideal. There in total darkness he realizes that his wife "had no gift," and that "to give her your thought, your belief, was like whispering your confession over the edge of the world. Nothing came back--not even an
echo. In the pain of that thought--and in the darkness--
"was born his conscience" (p. 183). This is the typical
vision of nothingness which comes to other Conradian figures
tormented by the puzzle of reality and of the nature of
woman, such as Jean-Pierre Bacadou.

At first the isolation which Hervey feels following
his vision of his wife's essential nothingness gives birth
to a stoic ideal:

It came to him in a flash that morality is not a method
of happiness. The revelation was terrible. He saw at
once that nothing of what he knew mattered in the least.
The acts of men and women, success, humiliation, dig-
nity, failure--nothing mattered. It was not a question
of more or less pain, of this joy, of that sorrow. It
was a question of truth or falsehood--it was a question
of life or death. (p. 183)

And the darkness, which contrasts with the dazzling light of
his wife's first entrance and with the red twilight of the
drawing room, becomes "the revealing night . . . the dark-
ness that tries hearts, . . . the night useless for the work
of men, but in which their gaze, undazzled by the sunshine
of covetous days, wanders sometimes as far as the stars"
(pp. 183-184).

The inscrutable silence of Hervey's wife in the draw-
ing room has led him to suspect that she possesses the se-
cret of the universe; her outburst "This is odious!" has
shown him that she lacks "the gift," that his dream is shat-
tered; now her emptiness has inspired his stoic belief that
nothingness, not "the certitude of love and faith," is at
the core of life and is the foundation for belief and action.
But he is unable to sustain this second newly found
orientation to life:

His conscience was born—he heard its voice, and he hesitated, ignoring the strength within, the fateful power, the secret of his heart! . . . He wanted help against the cruel decree of salvation. The need of tacit complicity, where it had never failed him, the habit of years affirmed itself. Perhaps she would help. . . ." (p. 184)

He rushes into his wife's room and is dazzled again by its brilliant light, but in her eyes he finds an "unfathomable candour" and "nothing within--nothing--nothing" (p. 184). She mistakes his desire for help against himself for a fit of jealousy and flies into a rage, whereupon he leaves the house, never to return.

Darkness in this tale evidently represents the enigma which is truth; light presents hypocrisy, deception, treacherously facile pretension. After his wife has shattered his hopes of finding the "certitude immaterial and precious," Hervey stands in his upstairs hall and watches a maid ascending from floor to floor, turning off lights as she locks the house. At first the darkness is linked with the incertitude, the unknown, the unexpected, which he has always believed could never affect the perfect and rigid pattern of his respectable life, but which now has done so: "The darkness of the hall seemed to cling to her black skirt, followed her, rising like a silent flood, as though the great night of the world had broken through the discreet reserve of walls, of closed doors, of curtained windows." The darkness is thus that which is hidden by discretion, deception, pretension; it is the part of life which Hervey had hitherto been able to deny. When Hervey wavers between his old commercial
values and the enigmatic appeal of the vague "certitude of love and faith," the narrator identifies Hervey's former commercialistic bourgeois, hollow creed with day and the enigmatic puzzle of his wife (which wrecks his safe and perfect life, but which holds out "the certitude") with night: "What of the night within his dwelling if outside he could find the sunshine in which men sow, in which men reap! Nobody would know" (p. 182). When total darkness has engulfed the house, his conscience is born; when he realizes that his wife is essentially a vacuum the darkness becomes no longer connected with the enigma of his wife, but identified with truth—with the truth that nothingness is at the center of his wife and that nothingness underlies the cosmos. Darkness is identified also with Hervey's stoic conscience, "a Divine wisdom springing full-grown, armed and severe out of a tried heart, to combat the secret baseness of motives" (p. 183). Total darkness, then, is associated with truth, with stoic recognition of the basic nothingness of reality; brilliant light, pallor, whiteness, is associated with pretentious deception: thus Mrs. Hervey's entrance after her fatal return is accompanied by a dazzling light; her deceptively calm demeanor during their dinner affects her husband as stifling heat, and the perfectly sculpted, precisely delineated and white, pale features of her face are belied by the hypocrisy of her assumed tranquility; thus when Hervey enters her room in the story's last scene he finds a dazzling light, but in the eyes of his wife an "unfathomable candour" and "nothing within—nothing—nothing." The
enigmatic and tormenting mixture of nothingness and seeming significance is associated with women in this tale, and this feminine enigma is often presented ironically in connection with a dazzling physical illumination.

The symbol of the statue on the Herveys' stairway landing embodies this meaning: "On the first floor landing a marble woman, decently covered from neck to instep with stone draperies, advanced a row of lifeless toes to the edge of the pedestal, and thrust out blindly a rigid white arm holding a cluster of lights" (p. 123). Note the ironic association of blindness with light; note the pretentiously dramatic pose of the figure. The duality of the woman character as the source and sustainer of her husband's respectable illusions, as the inspiration for his belief in "the certitude immaterial and precious" and the destroyer also of this illusion, is symbolized in the statue's blindness and in its dramatic thrusting forth of light. Note that Hervey's disillusionment concerning her possession of "the gift" occurs when he and his wife are near this statue: "After a moment he opened the door, and, on the landing, the sightless woman of marble appeared, draped to the chin, thrusting blindly at them a cluster of lights" (p. 177). Note also that at his wife's first entrance Hervey notes her statue-like quality - her solidity, substantiality, indestructibility. Furthermore, the features which so readily assume a false tranquillity are compared to those of a statue. Amazed at her calm facade, Hervey stares at "that marmoreal impassiveness, that magnificent stolidity, as of a wonderful statue by some
great sculptor working under the curse of the gods" (p. 171). There is the same mixture of light and darkness, of the pretense of light which ultimately brings on darkness or is associated with nothingness, in the symbol of the serving maid mounting the stairs with a candle. Earlier in the tale, during the dinner scene, the maids were in Hervey's view equally inscrutable as Mrs. Hervey herself:

They moved silently about, without one being able to see by what means, for their skirts touched the carpet all round; they glided here and there, receded, approached, rigid in black and white, with precise gestures, and no life in their faces, like a pair of marionettes in mourning; and their air of wooden unconcern struck him as unnatural, suspicious, irremediably hostile. (p. 173)

While Hervey stands in the darkened hall outside his wife's room, one of the maids ascends the stairs and extinguishes the lights, carrying a candle with her on her rounds. Like the statue, she is a light-bearer; but, corresponding with the statue's blindness, she brings darkness in her wake; it seems to mount with her, clinging to her skirt: "And on her track the flowing tide of a tenebrous sea filled the house, seemed to swirl about his feet, and rising unchecked, closed silently above his head" (p. 182). Thus the ambiguous mixture of pretentious light and ultimate, enigmatic darkness, the promise of an immaterial and precious certitude which is soon replaced by nothingness, the mixture of revelation and deception, inspiration and disillusion—the numerous implications of feminine duality—are paramount in the symbols of the statue and the maid as well as in Mrs. Hervey herself.

Although the life of conformity and materialism has often in modern fiction been condemned, parodied and
unfavorably contrasted with the life of passion, and although it is in this tale the object of Conrad's obvious scorn, "The Return" is not mainly a satire on "the hollow man," nor is its purpose to champion sexuality and the life of passion as a panacea, as the source of authentic self-discovery and self-expression, as the remedy for the psychological and spiritual ailments of contemporary man. Many modern novelists scorn the life of materialism and champion the life of passion, but surely a writer may disapprove of the bourgeois pattern without accepting sex as a panacea. He is free, in fact, to scorn an Alvan Hervey, yet present him somewhat sympathetically as an example of a man whose mores, once embodied in a woman, have been betrayed by the same woman. Conrad presents Hervey as destroyed not by his wife's sexuality, but by his wife's betrayal of his social values, by her calloused skepticism, and by the vision of nothingness that her skepticism inspires.

In "The Return" Conrad is less interested in satirizing Hervey's way of life than in presenting his inner experience of oscillating among several different worldviews—his original superficial materialism, his sudden belief in the existence of a "certitude immaterial and precious," and his momentary stoic nihilism. Conrad reveals the helplessness of Hervey when deprived of his "illusions" and the superior strength of his wife in living without such principles. Even though sexual passion of a sort may be the motive of the crime of Mrs. Hervey which destroys her husband's illusion of a life of rigidly perfect propriety, the conflict in
Hervey's mind is not between the values of his former stuffy propriety and those of the life of passion, or some orientation which de-emphasizes reason and is guided by impulse, passion, the basic and irrational part of human nature which is epitomized by the sex drive. In Hervey's mind the conflict is between the values of commercial success and some spiritual value which he inadequately represents to his own narrow mind as "the certitude immaterial and precious, the certitude of love and faith." Conrad is, in fact, less interested in the particular nature of the social ideals between which Hervey vacillates than in the vacillation itself, in the pathetic inadequacy of the human mind before the enigma of existence, and in the fascinating potency by which such trivia as the raising and lowering of a woman's veil, or the spectacle of a woman carrying a candle up a flight of stairs, may affect a human being's worldview or moral orientation. Conrad in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* has affirmed his belief in the moral importance of the visible world. This is the main tenet of his art, and, although "The Return" shows him failing to convince the reader of the moral validity of the physical phenomena of light and darkness, of the sight of a statue, of the raising and lowering of a veil, this aesthetic tenet should be remembered when a critic seeks to understand Conrad's intention—even in a work which is acknowledged as a miserable failure.

For the reasons stated above I feel that "The Return" is not an intended condemnation of materialism and glorification of passion which has miscarried because of Conrad's
fear of feminine sexuality; nor is the scene in which Mrs. Hervey drops the pieces of her broken fan and Hervey picks them up a symbolic representation of Hervey's sexual impotence, nor is voyeurism indicated by Hervey's lingering outside his wife's door as he contemplates the void at the center of existence. "The Return" is instead an attempt to treat in too cramped a space and with under-developed characters and action the theme of woman's strength in supporting and in undermining the solidarity of a society.

In view of the foregoing analyses of several of Conrad's works, it would seem that female characters are vital to Conrad's various expressions of this typical Conradian theme of civilization, and that they are more crucial to this important aspect of Conrad's fiction than has been widely acknowledged.
"A Smile of Fortune" is the first-person narrative of a young sea-captain's disillusioning experience in love and commerce on the island of Mauritius. He enters the harbor quite anxious and apprehensive: his ship's owners have given him full responsibility for arranging the chartering agreement for the return trip, and he is painfully aware of his unfamiliarity with the ways of shrewd businessmen. All commercial activities seem to him an unfortunate blight on the pristine purity and heroism of the seaman's calling. He is pleasantly surprised to be met, while still out in the harbor, by a fat and sleepy-looking man bearing the name of an influential merchant to whom his owners had written. The fat man, Mr. Jacobus, seems remarkably unassuming and gives the young captain valuable information about business in port, but it soon comes out that this man of brotherly and homey sentiments is not Ernest Jacobus the merchant but his brother, Alfred Jacobus the ship chandler. With remarkable cheek he has boarded the ship, bribed the steward to keep away the clerks of rival ship chandlers and has provided breakfast for captain and men gratis in order to drum up business for himself.

Later contacts with Jacobus strengthen the narrator's first impression of him as an unabashed money-grubber.
Judging from the reactions of prominent businessmen in Mauritius, Jacobus is also the focus of an obscure scandal. But when the young captain seeks an interview with his equally rotund and sleepy-eyed brother Ernest Jacobus, he finds the merchant so unkempt, vulgar, and insulting that, despite his wealth and favorable reputation, his ingratiating brother seems preferable. The young man is also quite shocked to discover that the mulatto youth, the office boy, whom Jacobus kicks and browbeats with cynical cruelty, is obviously his illegitimate child. Feeling quite offended, the captain storms from the merchant's office, but he soon learns that by the town's warped standards of morality Ernest is by far the more respectable Jacobus, for he is wealthy, and his sexual incontinence is "regular": A bachelor, he has no doubt fathered other illegitimate mulattoes, but has never caused an open scandal, as his brother has done. Alfred, despite the typical Jacobus appearance of fat, sleepy staidness, years ago became infatuated with a lady bare-back rider in a circus. His passion drove him to leave wife and daughter to follow her and her circus abjectly to Africa, where, after bearing him a daughter, the woman rejected him. His wife dead and his legitimate daughter married by a prominent doctor for her wealth, Jacobus returned shamelessly to his people in Mauritius and, instead of attempting to hide the scandal, maintained and cared for his illegitimate daughter just as if she had been born in wedlock. Later his mistress, now destitute and dying from a kick from a horse, comes to Mauritius demanding money from Jacobus, and he
offends the town again by taking her in. Since her death Jacobus has lived alone with his daughter, now eighteen, and a shrewish female relative serving as gouvernante, in a tightly-closed house with a large, walled garden. He is guilty in the perverse view of Mauritian society because, unlike Ernest's bastards, Alice is not a mulatto and has not been placed in a menial and low position; furthermore, Alfred Jacobus, unlike his brother, is not a rich and influential merchant. For this reason, no one of any social importance has seen Alice since she became old enough to put her hair up. She has lived a completely secluded life, seeing only her father, the aged gouvernante, and Negro servants. She knows the world only through newspaper accounts. Her father deals only with outsiders who care nothing for the gossip of Mauritius. He hopes to accumulate enough wealth to counterbalance the family's social stigma, to attract a husband for Alice, and to see her a respectable lady some­day; but the chances seem slim.

Albert Guerard has objected to the irrelevance of this introductory section of the tale, the first thirty-nine pages, as merely a mechanism used by Conrad to evade or postpone the sexual element, which comes into play later, in the meetings between the narrator and Alice. Actually the character of Alfred Jacobus, which Guerard finds uninteresting, is, even in this early section, crucial to the young captain's disillusioning experience. He is one of the chief representatives of the bourgeois values of which both he and his daughter are victims. Together Alfred Jacobus, his
brother Ernest, and the narrator's friend (who explains the Mauritians' irrational standards) represent the typical bourgeois attitude toward wealth, sexual continence, and the status of woman.

The aristocratic strain of the island's inhabitants, descended from the old French colonists, "all noble, all impoverished," give their women no better status than the feminine role among the more wealthy bourgeois. Their meaningless lives are epitomized by their women, who are "almost always pretty, ignorant of the world, kind and agreeable and generally bilingual; they prattle innocently both in French and English. The emptiness of their existence passes belief." The activities of the aristocrats, now of little importance politically, have become "a narrow domestic life" pursued in "dull, dignified decay," which their women, if not completely empty of drive, sometimes come to dominate. The family of "an ineffectual young man" whom the narrator had once aided with a loan of money for a passage home has now married him "to a woman nearly twice his age, comparatively well off: the only profession he was really fit for. But it was not all cakes and ale. The first time I called on the couple she spied a little spot of grease on the poor devil's pantaloons and made him a screaming scene of reproaches so full of sincere passion that I sat terrified as at a tragedy of Racine" (p. 35). His marriage exemplifies

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10 Joseph Conrad, 'Twixt Land and Sea (New York, 1924), pp. 34-35. This Doubleday edition is used for all references to "A Smile of Fortune" in this study.
the plight of the aristocracy, who have been forced to follow the bourgeois valuation of woman, marriage, and domestic life as a saleable commodity. Thus a young doctor who "wanted a lift in the world" accepted the deserted legitimate daughter of Alfred Jacobus, despite her father's scandal, since "there was a good bit of money from her mother, besides the expectations," and Ernest Jacobus wished to marry her "as advantageously as was possible in the circumstances" (p. 36).

This tale is not the only work in which Conrad portrays the disgusting lives of men who treat marriage and domestic life as commodities. His first two novels concern indirectly the plight of men who marry for positions of social respectability or monetary advantage. In Almayer's Folly Almayer marries a Malay girl whom Lingard has spared from a gang of pirates he has defeated in a sea fight. His marriage to her is his part in a bargain by which Lingard has established him as his agent on the secret river in Sambir, a region whose trade Lingard monopolizes. In An Outcast of the Islands (discussed in Chapter Three) Willems is in a situation quite close to that of the narrator in the present tale. Willems marries a woman on his boss's advice as a good business venture, but discovers that his boss has pawned off on him his illegitimate daughter and her whole tribe of lazy and penniless relatives. The first section of "A Smile of Fortune" is thus concerned with a subject which Conrad had earlier found a fertile ground for rather bitter comments on commercialized sex and domesticity. The final
section of this tale, in which Jacobus tries to involve the 
captain with his illegitimate daughter, is simply the logi-
cally developed climax. It shows in Jacobus a behavior 
quite interestingly consistent with his character as the 
first section reveals it. He represents the classic bour-
geois tendency to commercialize all aspects of life—especi-
ally man's basic, intimate, and natural feelings and desires. 
The criticized first section of the story exhibits Jacobus' 
infinite varied schemes, all of which fit the same pattern. 
His mercenary moneygrubbing masquerades as a genuine humane 
concern, as courtesy, liberality, generosity, homeyness. In 
bringing breakfast gratis for the seamen starved for shore 
food, his real concern is to capture a bit of business. Sea-
men have learned that whatever Jacobus seems to offer as 
lagniappe is included in his final bill. The delectable meal 
which Jacobus spreads makes the captain look upon him as "a 
man of human, homely sympathies" (pp. 8-9). He later brings 
the captain a bouquet for his table, professes a love for 
flowers, offers to have his workman install shelves round 
the captain's skylight and to procure for him an assortment 
of potted plants to fill them. His girth, his easygoing, 
rather melancholy, closed-lipped smile, his pride in his 
garden make Jacobus seem a thoroughly domestic creature wed-
ded to the pleasures of home life. His store boasts a sort 
of living room for sojourning captains, complete with potted 
plants, comfortable chairs, drinks, newspapers, and cigars— 
all evidently provided as a gracious gesture by the host. 
It is all merely a commercial gimmick, a "come-on"; he
reduces the noble sentiments of friendliness, human warmth, cordiality, love of domesticity, to the tool of mercenary greed and so drains them of their true meaning. He does not stop at commercializing so sacred a thing as death and bereavement: he arranges a funeral for a distraught captain whose infant has died at sea—and successfully obtains all the captain's business while his ship is in port. In his first talk with the narrator Jacobus advises him to attend the funeral—though he does not know the bereaved parents—evidently as a gesture which would prove worthwhile for business reasons. After the funeral the narrator meets an old-fashioned captain who voices the normal objection to Jacobus' character and to the bourgeois values his behavior exemplifies. His ship's figurehead, carved as a beautiful woman with arms extended as if she were swimming, has disappeared—slipped off the ship's prow without a sound far out at sea in the night. He reacts to this loss as a bereaved widower or a deserted husband. When the narrator suggests another figurehead might be easily procured: "The old boy flushed pink under his clear tan as if I had proposed something improper. . . . It was easy to see that I had never been shipmates with a figurehead for over twenty years. . . . 'I would just as soon think of getting a new wife. You're as bad as that fellow Jacobus'" (p. 19). And the old man pounces on the inadvertent suggestion of sordid and mercenary love in the narrator's choice of word:

"Procure—indeed! He's the sort of chap to procure you anything you like for a price. I hadn't been moored here for an hour before he got on board and at once
offered to sell me a figurehead he happens to have in his yard somewhere. He got Smith, my mate, to talk to me about it. 'Mr. Smith,' says I, 'don't you know me better than that?' And after all these years too! The way some of you young fellows talk--"' (p. 19)

The old man has absurdly misplaced his sentimentality, but his opinion nevertheless represents a just criticism of Jacobus' hypocritical preoccupation with domesticity. He sees beneath this a tactless, shameless, insensitive willingness to prostitute for mercenary gain those human feelings, desires, and needs which are normally held as sacred.

When his motives are challenged, Jacobus does not hesitate to admit the truth. In the "livingroom" of his shop he overhears a steamship captain, helping himself to a large supply of cigars, explain to the narrator that he is not taking advantage of the ship chandler's generosity--that Jacobus will pad his bill to cover all the small items which seem to be offered gratis. Jacobus strolls up, not the least offended, remarking placidly, "That's quite correct, Captain. . . . Here everything is bound to be in the way of business" (pp. 30, 32).

Like the twentieth-century ad-man, Jacobus does not overlook the potential of femininity, of sex, as a selling point. He is untiring in his attempt to persuade the narrator to buy a large quantity of potatoes from him to sell on his return to Australia, but the narrator is adamant in his antipathy toward commercial ventures. At his first repulse, Jacobus invites him, with seeming irrelevance, to his home, only ten minutes' walk from the store--ostensibly to see his beautiful old walled garden. "He added, with a certain
homeliness of tone: 'There's only my girl there!' (p. 32).

Despite Jacobus' epitomizing of the bourgeois pattern in several important ways, he is not the worst bourgeois villain on Mauritius. The island's moral life is a tangled web of hypocrisies, contradictions, and paradoxes. The pushing and ingratiating ship chandler seems to compare favorably with the respectable businessmen who have chartered the narrator's ship, who find it profitable to delay the departure of the vessel through underhanded means. They tell the narrator that the problem is in obtaining a supply of bags for their cargo of sugar:

"Their manager, the old-maidish, thin man, who so prudishly didn't even like to speak about the impure Jacobus, gave me the correct commercial view of the position. "My dear Captain"—he was retracting his leathery cheeks into a condescending, shark-like smile—"we were not morally obliged to tell you of a possible shortage before you signed the charter-party. It was for you to guard against the contingency of a delay—strictly speaking. But of course we shouldn't have taken any advantage. This is no one's fault really. We ourselves have been taken unawares," he concluded primly, with an obvious lie." (pp. 39-40)

In this first section of the tale the narrator and the reader as well are challenged by the difficult moral evaluation of the repulsive and suffering mercenary ship chandler against this sullied milieu. The prime importance of the section is the narrator's shift in attitude from condemnation to sympathy. And the reader must also judge the narrator's judgment, for, though it is more humane and more rational than the town's foolishly scandalized attitude, it is hopelessly and naively romantic. After the friend explains the town's position, the narrator says:
I had a conception of Jacobus and his daughter existing, a lonely pair of castaways, on a desert island; the girl sheltering in the house as if it were a cavern in a cliff, and Jacobus going out to pick up a living for both on the beach—exactly like two ship-wrecked people who always hope for some rescuer to bring them back at last into touch with the rest of mankind. (p. 39)

It is clear that Jacobus at first intends to get the sympathetic and naive young captain implicated somehow with his illegitimate daughter. He very likely hopes the captain will marry her, make her a respectable woman, and cleanse Jacobus himself from his social stigma. But it seems that even this urgent purpose becomes secondary in Jacobus' mind to his more basic mercenary impulse. Desperate to obtain certain bags necessary for his cargo and to end his ship's costly delay in port, the narrator accosts Jacobus in his store. When Jacobus suggests his home as a place for a private interview, it is quite likely that he is considering the possibility of catching the young man in a matrimonial trap: "His heavy, motionless glance rested upon me, placid as ever, the glance of a tired man—but I felt that it was searching, too. I could not imagine what he was looking for in me and kept silent, wondering" (p. 41). Jacobus leads him through the streets to his old home, shows him the elaborate garden, and introduces him to his taciturn daughter. Rather informally and scantily clothed in a thin amber wrapper, she sits deep in a wicker chair. Her mixture of sullen scorn and tragic loneliness, and her innocent suffering under a grotesque social stigma attract the narrator, and he pays frequent visits to her in the days that follow, sitting beside the silent girl and trying to break through her cold
reserve and mystery, which somehow command a fatal fascina-
tion. Jacobus is quite willing to leave the couple alone
for hours under the intermittent watch of the aged and impu-
dent gouvernante. Toward the end of the captain's stay in
port, Jacobus comes home early from the store. The young
captain, made desperate by the girl's reserve, has just at
that moment caught her in a tight embrace and is vehemently
kissing her, while she remains passive in his arms. She
suddenly begins to struggle and slips away, and the narrator
turns to find Jacobus in the doorway. The narrator is never
sure whether the father has watched the preceding scene, but
Jacobus enters, sits down, and picks up the shoe which Alice
has left in her flight. It would seem that Jacobus, having
found the captain kissing his daughter, would seize this
advantage to get the narrator to marry the girl, but he merely
sits and gazes at his daughter's shoe. The shoe seems
for the captain to recall the whole seductive fascination of
the mysterious woman, and he becomes loath to leave the house
without another sight of her. Jacobus, still scrutinizing
the shoe, renews his offer to arrange a deal in potatoes.
The captain refuses curtly and begins to leave. "He checked
my movement to rise by an austere, commanding gesture of the
hand holding that fatal shoe" (p. 73). Jacobus' gesture with
the shoe may indicate that, aware of the captain's attraction
to his daughter, he is tempting him, offering another sight
of her as bait in order to sign him up for a load of pota-
toes. It might also be a gesture threatening blackmail, for
he may have seen the captain in a compromising position with
his daughter and may intend to use this knowledge to coerce
him into a serious and binding commitment with her, unless
he agrees to the bargain in potatoes. This latter interpre-
tation seems probable from the captain's response:

"Mr. Jacobus," I pronounced slowly. "Do you really
think that upon the whole and taking various matters
into consideration—I mean everything, do you under-
stand?—it would be a good thing for me to trade, let
us say, with you?" (p. 73)

By "various matters" he evidently means his compromising
position with Alice. Faced with the choice between a pos-
sible husband for his daughter and a deal in potatoes, Jaco-
bus is divided between his desire for the social respectabil-
ity for which he has long waited and toiled and the deep-
running, basic mercenary impulse which is second nature to
him. The latter wins out:

I waited for a while. He went on looking at the shoe
which he held now crushed in the middle, the worn point
of the toe and the high heel protruding on each side of
his heavy fist.

"That will be all right," he said, facing me square-
ly at last. (p. 73)

Thus Jacobus ends by being true and consistent to the pat-
tern—the bourgeois commercialization of woman. In this
scene Jacobus' standard activity, the transforming of domes-
tic and intimate feelings into cash, which was seen in sev-
eral petty variations in the first section of the story,
reaches its culmination. (And therefore one cannot really
interpret the first section as irrelevant to this later
scene or in any way an attempt by Conrad to evade a sexual
subject.) Jacobus has gone to great trouble to bring the
narrator into a trap with Alice, for in order to procure the
bags, which were the initial bait to get the young man into his house, Jacobus has had to approach his brother Ernest, who has been hostile toward his outcast brother for years. Yet Alfred Jacobus, under the force of his strong and instinctive, though petty, greed, throws over his plan and turns his daughter's rather slim chance for a socially redemptive marriage into a deal in potatoes. This scene is a bitter portrayal of the paltry status of woman in a commercialized society.

Other aspects of Conrad's characterization of Alice are also interesting. Several of her characteristics have precedents in other Conradian women. Her slovenliness and untidiness recall Joanna Willems, another representative of woman degraded by bourgeois values and of the worst aspects of Western domesticity. Alice's hair, precariously piled on her head, is neglected and allowed to hang down in wisps on either side of her face. She shares Joanna's idleness, and her heavy-lidded eyes recall Joanna's generally sleepy impression. She wears scuffed leather slippers, carelessly stuck on her feet with the strap unfastened. She is dressed in a morning gown or wrapper much like Joanna's in its wrinkled condition, but unlike Joanna's in its seductive thinness. The narrator seems to find her slovenliness repugnant, but somehow, in its boldness, attractive.

The narrator is also ambivalent toward Alice's rather lethargic sadness. As the innocent victim of an arbitrary, cruel social stigma, she is a truly pathetic figure, but her pathos is spoiled by her rather ignoble pouting. To the
narrator she is both "peevish and tragic," perhaps because in her ignorance of the world she lacks the mature understanding which would give her resentment the rational appeal of an outraged principle or ideal. She has never discovered the true reason of her isolation. Her crabby old aunt has told her that they live in seclusion from the only people worth knowing because of something wicked her father has done years ago. She has only a superficial acquaintance with Europe through newspapers, which, in their concentration on crime, give her the deluded opinion that the whole outside world is full of thieves and murderers. She knows only the morally absurd little Mauritian microcosm and lacks a perspective from which to become aware of its absurdity. She knows as little of the true nature of evil as the girl in "The Informer" or the numerous female relatives of seamen in many of Conrad's works. Her shallow character is not equal to the tragic potential of her situation as an innocent outcast.

Nevertheless her silence and immobility, and her mixture of pathos and peevishness attract the young captain. She is similar to those female characters discussed in Chapter One whose indefiniteness or ambiguity is a source of mysterious fascination. She treats the captain scornfully, sitting rigid and staring into space, breaking her silence only intermittently to snap some peevish retort at the nonsensical banter and small talk with which he tries to evoke a smile from her. When the captain stays to dinner with her father and aunt, she refuses to join them, remaining alone
on her verandah overlooking the now darkened garden, deaf to the captain’s entreaties to come in. She even refuses to eat when the captain takes a plate of food out to her; yet every day he finds her sitting on the verandah as if she had been waiting for him, and he notices soon that she has begun to waver from her usual slovenliness and apply powder to her face in preparation for his visits. In his last moments with her she reveals her suppressed or hidden attraction to the captain. After he and her father have, in her absence, settled the curious deal in potatoes, and her father has left, the captain calls to her to return, but receives no answer. He awaits her on the porch until evening, when she comes looking for her shoe. His odd fascination with her has for some obscure reason waned. He fastens the shoe on her foot, bends down and kisses her forehead in a final leave-taking, and receives from her a fleeting kiss that just misses his lips.

Alice’s mysterious and suppressed attraction to the captain is related to her delusions about the outside world as a living nightmare of monstrous violence. Her aunt has told her that the seamen who are her father’s business associates are the lowest of the low, and that the captain is "just the sort of man who’s capable of carrying you off far away somewhere and then cutting your throat some day for your money" (p. 61). Alice asks the captain, on his last visit, what business between him and her father keeps bringing him to the house. When he teasingly replies that it may concern her, she suddenly goes into a fit of trembling.
He then urgently insists that he is soon leaving Mauritius and will do nothing at all to her, and she immediately reverts into a relaxed, unconcerned, almost contemptuous indifference, ignoring him. "With an easy, indolent, and in its indolence, supple, feline movement, she rose from the chair, so provocingly ignoring me now, that for very rage I held my ground within less than a foot of her" (pp. 68-69). This behavior so offends the captain as to evoke the vehement and belligerent embrace which her father interrupts. She preserves a merely startled and blank look throughout the duration of this embrace; yet, considering her tender farewell kiss, one may wonder whether she was not secretly disappointed to learn that he planned to do nothing at all, and whether her show of indifference was not assumed and calculated to bring about the very reaction it caused. Conrad leaves the girl's motivation ambiguous and obscured beneath her silence, immobility, and peevish display of scorn; but it is evident that the world of which she is so ignorantly afraid, which to her is a fantastic delusion of violence and gore, nevertheless exerts a positive and real fascination for this naïve young woman. She seems sincerely afraid of abduction—yet she is disappointed, despite her fears, when the captain insists he is innocent of any such intention. She is reminiscent of other women in Conrad's fiction who are fascinated by a violent world from which they are distantly isolated, and of which they have a wildly distorted conception. She recalls particularly the girl in "The Informer"—thoroughly engrossed in a doctrine of
violence, but fearful of the actual world in which commitments have physical consequences. She recalls also Lena in Victory, who blossoms under the challenge of a dangerous situation and longs to risk her life to save Heyst, yet has an absurdly simple conception of the real nature of the danger that faces them.

Certain qualities give Alice's situation the aura of a fairy-tale or fable. She is a beautiful woman shut up away from the world on a high verandah surrounded by profuse, sweet-smelling flowers. She is watched over by an old woman who tells her lies and increases her separation from the world by encouraging her in her scorn of men, just as the witch in many a legend changes a beautiful woman into a repulsive monster by means of a spell. Also like the heroine of a fairy tale, she is, though unconsciously, waiting for a man brave, loving, and valiant enough to break through her trance-like silence and immobility, to free her from her spell, and to lead her out of her isolation. In some aspects of the legendary atmosphere of her situation, and in her mixed attraction and abhorrence toward the world, Alice recalls Tennyson's isolated and ambivalent woman in "The Lady of Shalott." She has certain strong affinities also with the feminine type painted by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, several of whose works hung in one of Joseph Conrad's first homes, which he rented from Ford Madox Ford, grandson of Ford Madox Brown and nephew of D. G. Rossetti. Most of the women painted by this significant group of artists were figures from Scripture or from
legend—especially from medieval stories, and the painter strove to capture the magical and remote aura of the works to which they belong. They are especially noted for unusually profuse hair, a low forehead, and a meditative, innocent, and at times almost vacuous stare. They are portrayed frequently before a background of rich and variegated colors, which often gives the effect of a tapestry. These elements of the Pre-Raphaelite woman are evident in Conrad’s description of Alice Jacobus:

She occupied a low, deep, wickerwork arm-chair, and I saw her in exact profile like a figure in a tapestry, and as motionless. . . . For a time she did not stir, staring straight before her as if watching the vision of some pageant passing through the garden in the deep, rich glow of light and the splendour of flowers. (p. 43)

The narrator notes her low forehead, her “languid glance, passing into a fixed stare,” (p. 43) “the long eyes, a narrowed gleam of liquid white and intense motionless black, with their gaze so empty of thought, and so absorbed in their fixity that she seemed to be staring at her own lonely image, in some far-off mirror hidden from my sight amongst the trees” (p. 63). He is also fascinated by her hair:

It looked as though it had not been touched again since that distant time of first putting it up; it was a mass of black, lustrous locks, twisted anyhow high on her head, with long, untidy wisps hanging down on each side of her clear sallow face; a mass so thick and strong and abundant that, nothing but to look at, it gave you a sensation of heavy pressure on the top of your head and an impression of magnificently cynical untidiness. (pp. 43-44)

In one pose Alice resembles strongly the female figure, an epitome of youthful innocence, wrapped in a multi-wrinkled and tight-fitting gown in several allegorical paintings by
the Pre-Raphaelites: "She leaned forward, hugging herself with crossed legs; a dingy, amber-coloured, flounced wrapper of some thin stuff revealed the young supple body drawn together tensely in the deep low seat. . . . (p. 44).

Whatever fairy-tale or Pre-Raphaelite affinities Alice possesses, the narrator's strange fascination, and his sudden loss of interest, is a teasing question. After Jacobus interrupts the captain's and Alice's embrace, the two men talk privately, and the captain agrees at last to the deal in potatoes. Jacobus leaves to load the captain's ship with the potatoes, and the captain remains on the verandah. He calls Alice, but she does not return: "I did not call again. I had become aware of a great discouragement. I was mentally jaded, morally dejected. I turned to the garden again, sitting down with my elbows spread on the low balustrade, and took my head in my hands" (p. 76). Alice finally returns, limping in the gloom for want of her lost shoe: "I don't know why or whence I received the impression that she had come too late. . . . It was as if a supreme opportunity had been missed" (p. 77). When he hears her voice again: "It was her harsh, enticing whisper, subdued, not very steady, but its low tremulousness gave me no thrill now. . . . She was mysterious enough. . . . But where was the mysterious and provoking sensation which was like the perfume of her flower-like youth?" (p. 77) He feels "like wailing over the lost illusion of vague desire, over the sudden conviction that I would never again find near her the strange, half-evil, half-tender sensation which had given its acrid
flavour to so many days, which had made her appear tragic and promising, pitiful and provoking. That was all over" (pp. 77-78). He replaces the shoe on her foot and, telling her goodbye, bends down and kisses her forehead: "This was the moment when I realised clearly with a sort of terror my complete detachment from that unfortunate creature" (p. 79).

The precise nature of the captain's fascination with Alice is a matter of some complexity. Guerard and Moser have found it to be an impotent voyeurism, of which Conrad himself was unconscious. Guerard interprets the sexual element in this story so as to support the theory that Conrad was plagued by a strong and subconscious fear of impotence (Guerard, p. 58). Yet, although the captain's attraction to Alice is voyeuristic, it is not unconsciously so. On the contrary, the captain avows to himself that he takes pleasure in merely sitting beside Alice and looking at her seductive figure clothed in the revealing wrapper:

I was looking at the girl. It was what I was coming for daily; troubled, ashamed, eager; finding in my nearness to her a unique sensation which I indulged with dread, self-contempt, and deep pleasure, as if it were a secret vice bound to end in my undoing, like the habit of some drug or other which ruins and degrades its slave. (p. 62)

Certainly he confesses a perverse pleasure. Its perversity is by no means unconscious—the captain himself is conscious of its true nature, at least in retrospect, and the author is obviously conscious of it. To assume otherwise is to imply that Conrad intended the narrator and Alice to marry and live happily ever after, or at least to fall into "normal" love, but inadvertently was forced away from his
conscious creative intention by a subconscious neurosis concerning impotence. In short, this is to imply that Conrad wanted to write a very conventional love story, and to take him to task for not doing so. Conrad seems quite conscious of the prurient or perverse element in the captain's motivation; this element does not owe its existence in the story to Conrad's supposed sexual neurosis. The captain's perverse and prurient attraction to Alice constitutes his unrealized participation in the bourgeois concept of domesticity and sex as elements which can be treated as saleable commodities, which can be mixed with impersonal business matters. In this participation he falls prey to the commercialism which in the story's beginning he feared as an unworthy tainting of the pristine purity of the seaman's life—and he also succumbs to the warped sexual mores of men of commerce, of the bourgeois, which he had seemed to flout by his frequenting the Jacobus home. He agrees to buy Jacobus' potatoes in order to enjoy one more arousing view of Alice—and he makes the bargain knowing that the mercenary Jacobus will probably free him from his compromising position with his daughter and allow him another thrilling look at the girl if the captain will only buy his potatoes. Thus he fully intends to avoid a real and personal commitment with Alice but to obtain selfish and prurient pleasure in exchange for money. Furthermore, he has been drawn to Alice not because of any trait in the girl herself, but because of the fantastic quality of evil which the scandalized town has projected upon her. The young captain has defied
and rejected the Mauritians' absurd relative evaluation of Ernest and Alfred Jacobus, and he has gloried in his own superior sense of justice. He looks on his association with Alfred Jacobus the outcast as a victory in moral courage and individualism. But in the very act of flouting the town's taboo, he has accepted the town's branding of Alice as the offspring of a woman of shame. Alice is fascinated with the captain as a man from the bloody and sinful world for which she feels both fear and attraction. Ironically the captain reciprocates this mixture of abhorrence and desire in his attraction to Alice. Like the Decadent writers and artists of the late nineteenth century, he finds a combination of beauty and evil a peculiarly irresistible mixture. Many of the qualities he admires in Alice are mixtures of something attractive with something repellent; sometimes it is a completely repellent trait which attracts. Her voice is harsh, yet somehow seductive; her beauty is matched by her slovenliness, which he at times considers a purposeful and cynical untidiness which she is consciously flaunting. The evil quality which the captain enjoys in her is a subjective projection of the town's characterization of a stereotyped fallen woman. He confesses the subjectiveness of his attraction to her: "How weak, irrational, and absurd we are! How easily carried away whenever our awakened imagination brings us the irritating hint of a desire!" (p. 56). At one point he realizes that he has been drawn not by an objective attribute of Alice but by something he had self-teasingly "read into" her features: "That black, fixed stare into
which I had read a tragic meaning more than once, in which I had found a sombre seduction, was perfectly empty now . . . ." (p. 68). Several times his words explaining to himself the nature of his situation betray a love of evil for evil's sake—a perverse pleasure in a naively exotic concept of evil. He finds himself captivated by her aura as the daughter of a lustful woman; her heritage of evil gives her beauty a sort of spice. She has "the forehead of a goddess crowned by the dishevelled magnificent hair of a gipsy tramp" (p. 59). He dreads being deprived of an opportunity to "taste perversely the flavour of contempt in her indolent poses, drink in the provocation of her scornful looks, and listen to the curt, insolent remarks uttered in that harsh and seductive voice. As if my innermost nature had been affected by the action of some moral poison, I felt an abject dread of going to sea" (p. 65). After the loss of this self-stimulated illusion regarding Alice, the captain admits that she attracted him by a fantastic and carefully maintained suspicion of evil: he regrets "the strange, half-evil, half-tender sensation which had given its acrid flavour to so many days. . . ." (p. 78).

It is difficult to tell why his disillusionment occurs when it does; it may be that as his pity for her grows, his prurient and self-aroused attraction to her lessens. Or it may be that his physical contact with her has destroyed the efficacy of his ephemeral and subjective idea of her. It is quite probable that he suspects the purity of his motives after he has agreed to traffic in potatoes in order to get
another look at the scantily-clothed Alice. But it is clear that the disappearance of his desire is not caused by a fear of impotence. Instead, in his mind Alice has become divested of the exotic and vulgar evil meanings the town has projected upon her, and she is now a slovenly and empty-headed, pitiful young girl—not a magical and awesome goddess of evil. When he sees her without this fascinating illusion, he knows the depth of his detachment from the person she truly is; he sees that he has fallen prey to the town's concept of Alice in the very act of flouting it in his daily visits to her; and he realizes, finally, that he has no power to save Alice from the social stigma of the Mauritians, for only a true and personal commitment—not his curious and self-indulgent detachment—could do this. The fairy-tale or fable-like element in Alice's situation is thus turned to ironic use: The Prince Charming is unable to overcome the modern monster of bourgeois attitudes toward money and sex and is foiled in his attempt to save the captive and spellbound damsel.

On the homeward voyage the captain is tormented by remorse for his actions toward Alice and by the mundane problem of keeping the potatoes from rotting completely. When he arrives in his home port he finds his position quite lucrative: a drought has caused a high demand for root crops, and he is able to dispose of the cargo at three times its cost. He is thus guilty of a final commercialization of sex and woman.

Guerard feels that the story's ending "adds up with
editorial neatness the menaces of sex and life on shore" (p. 53). But it must be objected that it is not sex per se which is the menace, but rather sex tainted by bourgeois commercialism, by absurd bourgeois standards of sexual continence, and by the prurient bourgeois concept of sexual passion as exotically evil.

In "Falk" the prominent female character's status in relation to the commonplace bourgeois way of life is different from Alice's in "A Smile of Fortune." Here woman is not the passive victim of the bourgeois commercialization but stands for a vital and elemental force, which is a foil to the superficial and inadequate sentiments, values, and principles of the commonplace bourgeois. In this role she is somewhat similar to Doña Erminia in "Gaspar Ruiz," whose raw emotion of hatred in its simplicity and intensity contrasts with and almost overcomes the superficial and hypocritical purposes of idealists. However, the elemental woman in "Falk" is not as central to her story as Doña Erminia is to "Gaspar Ruiz." She is less crucial than a male character (a seaman who faces an extreme test of physical strength and will) in establishing the basic contrast of the work—between humanity's intense, natural drives and the hollow existence of the bourgeois.

The story is told by an unnamed narrator, one of a group of seamen who sit in a harbor restaurant, watch the ships pass, and swap yarns of heroic resourcefulness and endurance among men of their trade. The narrator is reminded of his story when he notices a woman on one of the
passing ships. He introduces the tale as not a heroic incident, but an absurd episode in his life. As the story develops, however, the reader sees that the tale does have its element of heroism, and that the absurdity is mainly caused by the clash between bourgeois, commonplace sentiment and a true man's insight into the actualities of life. The representative of bourgeois values is a German skipper whom the narrator, then serving his first command, once knew in an Eastern seaport. Contrary to the simple austerity of the ordinary seaman, this Schiff-führer exhibits a marked and pervasive quality of domesticity. He shares the physiognomy of many of Conrad's thoroughly-domesticated villains or comic-villains (such as Jacobus and Verloc of The Secret Agent): he is short and fat and has heavy eyelids. He does not look much like a seaman, but has instead "the simple, heavy appearance of a well-to-do farmer, combined with the good-natured shrewdness of a small shop-keeper."11 His domestic life consists largely of a never-varied and seemingly sacred ritual. While his ship is in harbor he finishes his shore business as early as possible, returns to the ship, and, like a tired shop-keeper, throws off his coat. His niece brings him his slippers and an embroidered calotte, and he sits in a chair on deck, puffing at a pipe with a curved mouthpiece. His ship seems to the narrator tainted by the use to which he puts it. It is known as a merchant vessel

11Joseph Conrad, Falk, Amy Foster, To-Morrow: Three Stories (Garden City, 1923), p. 7. This Doubleday edition is used for all references to "Falk" in this study.
all over the orient, but its domestic character seems to
have overshadowed the true quality of a ship. More a home
than a sailing vessel, it is inhabited by Hermann's large
family: a smiling and nodding, heavy Hausfrau, with tremen-
dous motherly arms continuously plunged in soapy water; four
ubiquitous children, a niece who serves as nursemaid. The
t stern windows of the ship look like the windows of a rustic
bungalow, and they are lined with pots of flowers and fitted
with white curtains for a homey touch. The ship is con-
stantly being scrubbed, and the family wash is often seen
hanging from the rigging while the vessel is in harbor. The
narrator ridicules the inappropriateness of the ship's name:
the Diana, suggesting virginity and speed in the chase. Both
attributes are belied by the large brood of children and the
squat form of the ship. The vessel suggests not only bour-
geois domesticity but also bourgeois complacency and the
false innocence and safety of naïveté.

This Diana of Bremen was a most innocent old ship, and
seemed to know nothing of the wicked sea, as there are
on shore households that know nothing of the corrupt
world. . . . There apparently no whisper of the world's
iniquities had ever penetrated. And yet she lived upon
the wide sea: and the sea tragic and comic, the sea
with its horrors and its peculiar scandals, the sea
peopled by men and ruled by iron necessity is indubita-
ably a part of the world. But that patriarchal old tub,
like some saintly retreat, echoed nothing of it. She
was world proof. Her venerable innocence apparently had
put a restraint on the roaring lusts of the sea. And
yet I have known the sea too long to believe in its re-
spect for decency. An elemental force is ruthlessly
frank. It may, of course, have been Hermann's skilful
seamanship, but to me it looked as if the allied oceans
had refrained from smashing these high bulwarks, un-
shipping the lumpy rudder, frightening the children, and
generally opening this family's eyes out of sheer reti-
cence. (pp. 10, 20-21)
Hermann's family epitomizes also the bourgeois trait of sentimentality, which is connected with the over-riding and essentially feminine trait of domesticity. The oldest Hermann daughter pretends that her rag doll is sick and in its last extremity. She constantly nurses it, or keeps it lying in a wooden box on deck; it is the care of "all the children, who greatly enjoyed pulling long faces and moving with hushed footsteps" (p. 21). The parents co-operate with their children in this obsession. "I suppose they were exercising and developing their racial sentimentalism by means of that dummy" (p. 22).

Hermann is also typically bourgeois in his petty preoccupation with money. During the entire time the narrator knows him, Hermann is constantly thinking out loud of the financial aspects of his plan to retire from the sea. He intends to sell the Diana in Japan and take the family back to Bremen by mailboat, second class, but he cannot work out in his mind a satisfactory arrangement by which all of them might require little enough cabin space to keep their passage fee down to an acceptable figure. The orphan niece is absolutely necessary to help with the large brood of children, but she swells their group to seven--just one too many to squeeze into a single cabin. This causes the petty Hermann to die many deaths of fretful financial consternation.

The foil to the bourgeois Hermann family and their way of life is the character Falk and his love for Hermann's niece, who is something of an earth-goddess in her sensual appeal. Before I consider the character of Hermann's niece,
it will be necessary to explore the implications of the character of Falk as a foil to the bourgeois values, since the niece is mainly a feminine interpretation of Falk himself. Following this discussion of Falk I will demonstrate the relative success and failure of this male and this female character as foils to bourgeois values.

Falk is the sole tugboat captain in business on the river where Hermann's and the narrator's ships are harbored. As such he has a lucrative monopoly in a harbor where the existence of a treacherous sand-bar makes it necessary that ships be towed out beyond the bar prior to taking on a cargo, which would cause a vessel to draw too much water for a safe passage over the bar.

An exceedingly quiet and solitary man of solid and noble physique, he is resented for his exorbitant rates for towage. He is also something of a mystery to the seamen of the port, for he never eats in public and never eats meat; his steward always brings his plate of rice and fish to his cabin and closes the door as he leaves. The descriptions of Falk constantly emphasize his physical power and give hints of a tremendous reserve of personal drive and sensual passion held in check. The captain imagines him as a centaur, a symbol of sexual passion:

It seems absurd to compare a tug-boat skipper to a centaur: but he reminded me somehow of an engraving in a little book I had as a boy, which represented centaurs at a stream, and there was one, especially in the foreground, prancing bow and arrows in hand, with regular severe features and an immense curly wavy beard, flowing down his breast. Falk's face reminded me of that centaur. Besides, he was a composite creature. Not a man-horse, it is true, but a man-boat. He lived on
board his tug... you could pick out far away down the reach his beard borne high upon the white structure, foaming up stream to anchor for the night. There was the white-clad man's body, and the rich brown patch of the hair, and nothing below the waist but the thwart-ship white lines of the bridge-screens, that lead the eye to the sharp white lines of the bows cleaving the muddy water of the river. (pp. 29-30)

The violence and driving power of his tug suggest sexual passion, and he is noted for the impetuous haste and force with which his boat drags a ship through the water. He later comes into the harbor before dawn and jerks away Hermann's ship without warning, ripping away some of its structure in the process, and the narrator thinks of the incident as the rape of the Diana. The incident does in fact have its motivation in Falk's sexual attraction to Hermann's niece. Though in love with the girl, he has hesitated to proclaim his feelings because he suspects Hermann will deny his permission to marry the girl if he learns of a certain "misfortune" in Falk's past—an occurrence of which Falk feels honor-bound to tell the girl and her uncle before the marriage is agreed on. Hermann is impatient with Falk's frequent but always silent visits, and in order to get Falk to declare himself he hints that the narrator is courting the girl and stands high in Hermann's favor as a prospective husband for his niece. Falk becomes intensely jealous of the narrator. His sudden towing away of the Diana beyond the sand-bar was a stratagem to gain time and put some distance between his rival and his beloved. He continues to visit Hermann's ship down the river and refuses to tow the narrator's ship to the same location.
This action is quite puzzling and maddening to the narrator, for he knows nothing of Falk's absurdly mistaken jealousy, and, as a young seaman already worried by a long delay in harbor on his very first command, he is ready to revert to violence or resign himself to despair. All the town, save the narrator, knows Falk's jealous motive, and at last the captain himself learns of it, manages to speak with Falk, and tells him the lie that he is already engaged. Falk asks him to speak to Hermann on his behalf, and the narrator agrees. The three men meet aboard Hermann's ship, but Falk takes this occasion to reveal the dreadful secret which he feels his future wife must know, the secret reason for his always private meals of rice and fish: he has eaten human flesh. Hermann flies into a rage, and the narrator advises Falk to leave. He meets Falk later and hears his narrative. He was first mate of a steamer bound from Europe to the Pacific isles by way of the Cape of Good Hope, when, some miles off the Cape, the ship suffered mechanical failure and began to drift off the trade routes. A large part of the food supply had spoiled and been jettisoned, and the crew now faced starvation. Hopelessness gradually conquered most of the men, and after their weak-willed captain committed suicide their solidarity and determination to continue a communal, organized shipboard life finally disappeared, leaving most of them the prey of an ignoble, squalid despair. Vestiges of vigor and hope remained only in Falk and the ship's carpenter, the first to mention the need now for the "final sacrifice"—for cannibalism. These two men
alone among the spectre crew had the courage to recognize the extremity of the situation and to see and adopt the extreme and unconventional behavior which survival demanded. They began a duel; Falk emerged victor and proceeded to rule the ship with the cold determination which his self-preservation required. All but Falk and three other members of the crew were dead when a whaler sighted the drifting ship, and after being rescued the other three all died.

"All died, all! under this terrible misfortune. But was I too to throw away my life? Could I? Tell me, captain? I was alone there, quite alone, just like the others. Each man was alone. Was I to give up my revolver? Who to? Or was I to throw it into the sea? What would have been the good? Only the best man would survive." (pp. 145-146)

Hermann, who has not undergone Falk's test, has a commonplace view of Falk's action: "According to his ideas no circumstances could excuse a crime—and certainly not such a crime. This was the opinion generally received. The duty of a human being was to starve. Falk therefore was a beast, an animal; base, low, vile, despicable, shameless, and deceitful" (p. 123). Hermann shows a bourgeois propensity to shrink from truth: "'Why tell?' he cried. 'Who was asking him?' It showed Falk's brutality because after all he had caused him (Hermann) much pain. He would have preferred not to know that such an unclean creature had been in the habit of caressing his children" (p. 124).

Hermann's attitude is governed by conventions and principles. His outraged decency is a matter of communal sentiments, whereas Falk's will to live is a naked and individual, unanalyzed force. The weakness of Hermann's
principles is shown by his sudden change of mind when the monetary significance of his niece's marriage to a cannibal is brought home to him: with the niece gone the family will be able to fit into a single cabin on their trip back to Europe; he will save half the money he would have paid for their passage.

Both Falk's hunger during his horrible experience and his desire for the girl are aspects of the same simple and elemental drive for self-preservation in the man. Falk's extremity of near-starvation is a rare experience. For most people the drives of hunger and sex do not exist so intensely in isolation from other motives and feelings, but are transmuted or sublimated in a thousand complexities of motive. In the narrator's explanation:

He had always wanted to live. So we all do—but in us the instinct serves a complex conception, and in him this instinct existed alone. There is in such simple development a gigantic force, and like the pathos of a child's naive and uncontrolled desire. He wanted that girl, and the utmost that can be said for him was that he wanted that particular girl alone. I think I saw then the obscure beginning, the seed germinating in the soil of an unconscious need, the first shoot of that tree bearing now for a mature mankind the flower and fruit, the infinite gradation in shades and in flavor of our discriminating love. He was a child. He was as frank as a child too. He was hungry for that girl, terribly hungry, as he had been terribly hungry for food. (pp. 126-127)

Thus the narrator interprets Falk's motivation, in his horrible experience on the becalmed ship and now in his love for Hermann's niece, as the simple desire for life which underlies man's more complex urges, obligations, purposes, endeavors. This interpretation explains the similarity and difference between Hermann and Falk. The same two concerns--
hunger and sex—are the basis of Hermann's own thoroughly domesticated and passionless life, but with Hermann these two drives "serve a complex conception"—they are sublimated and transmuted so thoroughly as to lose their essential nature, just as his ship has lost all trace of its original nautical essence and become a home. In Hermann the urges which preside over life are expressed in such commonplace, unimaginative, and utilitarian forms as the clothes flapping on the rigging of the Diana, the slippers of Hermann, the repulsive rag doll of the Hermann children. Hermann, like most of humanity, never sees the true essence and force of these drives as they exist unaltered by the rationalizing and elaborating action of the human intellect and commercial instincts, because he lacks the experience of hunger in its extreme: he fails to see the awesome dependence of life itself on these drives. He has experienced them not as a source and demand of life but simply as a matter of convention, habit, ritual.

The two drives of hunger and reproduction are constant referrants throughout the work. They are present in the setting in which the tale is told. The introduction wanders to the subject of prehistorical man's eating habits. The riverside restaurant and its waiter seem rather old, and the food is old and bad:

It was impossible to swallow any of that stuff. And indeed there was a strange mustiness in everything. The wooden dining-room stuck out over the mud of the shore like a lacustrine dwelling; the planks of the floor seemed rotten; a decrepit old waiter tottered pathetically to and fro before an antediluvian and worm-eaten sideboard; the chipped plates might have been disinterred
from some kitchen midden near an inhabited lake; and the chops recalled times more ancient still. They brought forcibly to one's mind the night of ages when the primeval man, evolving the first rudiments of cookery from his dim consciousness, scorched lumps of flesh at a fire of sticks in the company of other good fellows; then, gorged and happy, sat him back among the gnawed bones to tell his artless tales of experience—the tales of hunger and hunt—and of women, perhaps! (pp. 3-4)

Another bourgeois villain of the piece, the fawning, back-biting hotel-keeper Schomberg, is constantly preoccupied with food and ostensibly with providing a homelike, domestic atmosphere in a heathen land for nice young white men from Europe. He is offended by Falk's eating rice and fish and refusing to patronize his table d'hôte. He is essentially the same type as Hermann, but more repellent, and he shares Jacobus' commercialization of domesticity. His view of the nature of hunger and the place of eating among man's activities is as commonplace and tame as Hermann's.

It is the womanly trait of domesticity which seems to smother the true nature of these elemental drives, yet domesticity is most clearly associated with the two bourgeois comic-villains Hermann and Schomberg, who are male characters. Mrs. Hermann supplements her husband's effects as an epitome of bourgeois domesticity, but Hermann himself is more dominant in the mind of the reader as the symbol or example of the bourgeois domesticated man.

In Falk's confession of cannibalism Conrad portrays concretely the elemental force of hunger. He contrasts this with the petty and insignificant role it plays in Hermann's and Schomberg's lives, where it serves rather paltry, ignoble, unsavory, and needlessly complicated purposes.
Conrad deals less directly with sex as a second elemental force, probably because the standards of his age forbade a more direct treatment. His indirect method is analogy: he shows Falk's strength to will and determination, his obedience to the law of self-preservation, in satisfying his hunger for food, then asserts that his present hunger for the girl is as intense as this and exemplifies the same simple law: self-preservation, the desire of life. Conrad has found probably the only satisfactory manner in which the subject might have been handled in his own day. Nevertheless, the attraction of Falk to Hermann's niece is never quite as real to the reader as his hunger for food, because the latter desire is dramatized by a long and vivid narrative; the former is not dramatized, but must be inferred by analogy and by the suggestions of sexuality in the descriptions of Falk as a centaur, the powerful churning and thrashing and the animalistic force of his tugboat, and by the description of Falk's nervous, pent-up state just following his rejection by Hermann. The only overt, dramatic rendering of Falk's sexual attraction to the girl is given in a simple scene in which he has come aboard Hermann's ship to ask for her. She is inside the lighted cabin sewing, visible to the three men about to enter the cabin from the twilit deck.

Falk stopped short in the doorway. Without a word, without a sign, without the slightest inclination of his bony head, by the silent intensity of his look alone, he seemed to lay his herculean frame at her feet. Her hands sank slowly on her lap, and raising her clear eyes, she let her soft, beaming glance enfold him from
head to foot like a slow and pale caress. He was very hot when he sat down. (p. 114)

This portrayal of Falk's sexual feelings is impaired because Conrad depends on an unconvincing insistence upon the "intensity" of a look rather than dramatized action, dialogue, or the rendering of thought directly. The imaginative strain is apparent in such phrases as "beaming glance" and "pale caress."

Because of Conrad's less direct treatment of sex as an elemental force, the woman character in the story becomes less important. Falk's awareness of life in its most awesome, intense, and extreme conditions is gained not through a sexual but through a gastronomic experience, and although the analogy is frequently drawn between sex and hunger as two basic biological drives, the connections between Falk's ordeal and his desire for the girl remains rather tenuous.

The function of Hermann's niece as a character in this tale is to serve as a complementary or subordinate embodiment of the same force which Falk epitomizes—that life force which in its elemental simplicity contrasts with Hermann's dull domestic existence. She too, says the narrator, "was a servant of that life that, in the midst of death, cries aloud to our senses. She was eminently fitted to interpret for him its feminine side. And in her own way, and with her own profusion of sensuous charms, she also seemed to illustrate the eternal truth of an unerring principle" (p. 147). Yet, because the force of sex is connected only tenuously and suggestively with the other elemental
force, the reader remains unconvinced that this "life," in the quotation, has a "feminine side"—or that the niece as the feminine embodiment of the "life" is more than a mere symbol. She is a less believable character than Falk and less successful as a foil to the Hermann family because her quality of intense elemental life is portrayed not through the relation of an earlier concrete experience, some event parallel to Falk's experience, and not even through her speech or action during the events of present time in the tale (for throughout the whole story she remains silent, only sewing, caring for the children, and weeping for pity when Hermann tells her of Falk's cannibalism), but only through Conrad's descriptions of her as an ample-bodied, eternally youthful, yet mature nature goddess. She is probably present in the story for a mechanical reason: shadowy as she is, she is the occasion for the clash between Falk's elemental personality and the bourgeois sentiments of Hermann, which constitutes the basic ideational conflict of the story.

Conrad suffers a strain of imagination in his efforts to instill a pervasive vitality in the girl which is not attributable to any physical feature or mannerism and is never exposed in a dramatic scene. He quite frequently reiterates her substantiality and large proportions: "She was built on a magnificent scale. Built is the only word. She was constructed, she was erected, as it were, with a regal lavishness. . . . She was heavy, too, but that's nothing. It only added to that notion of permanence" (pp. 12-13).
Her hair is abundant, shining like precious metals, and plaited into a massive single tress that "reminded one of a club" (p. 13). He concentrates also on her silence and immobility and gives her a look of such natural confidence and ease (befitting a goddess) that he is aware of nearly making her appear inanimate:

Her face was big, comely, of an unruffled expression. . . . and her blue eyes were so pale that she appeared to look at the world with the empty white candour of a statue. . . . This girl's print frocks hadn't . . . a wrinkle; nothing but a few straight folds in the skirt falling to her feet, and these, when she stood still, had a severe and statuesque quality. She was inclined naturally to be still whether sitting or standing. However, I don't mean to say she was statuesque. She was too generously alive; but she could have stood for an allegoric statue of the Earth. I don't mean the worn-out earth of our possession, but a young Earth, a virginal planet undisturbed by the vision of a future teeming with the monstrous forms of life and death, clamorous with the cruel battles of hunger and thought. (pp. 13-14)

This passage shows Conrad's difficulties in imagining a female counterpart to Falk, a feminine epitome of the elemental force of life. The portrait he gives wavers uncertainly between a statue and a living person, and in the last sentence of the quotation he deprives his epitome of elemental force of any association with violence or with the natural urge of hunger: she represents an Earth prior to the present "cruel battles of hunger and thought."

Conrad's prose falls short of "magic suggestiveness" in his effort to hint at a je ne sais quoi quality of vitality in the girl: an "extraordinary sense of vigorous life . . . seemed to emanate from her like a perfume exhaled by a flower" (p. 14). Conrad continues to have trouble
distinguishing the superior and unruffled calm of her look from mere vacuity: she would "sometimes raise her pale eyes to look at me in her unseeing gentle way. Her glance was by no means stupid; it beamed out soft and diffuse as the moon beams upon a landscape—quite differently from the scrutinizing inspection of the stars" (p. 27). In the last simile he evidently means to suggest in the girl's look a natural awareness which surpasses mere intellect, but he falls into an abominable cliché in the attempt, as he does likewise in his description of her calm glory during the uproar of the Diana being towed suddenly from its mooring and pulled down the river: "Magnificent in her close-fitting print frock she displayed something so commanding in the manifest perfection of her figure that the sun seemed to be rising for her alone" (p. 44). Conrad tries to eschew particular details and present her quality of naturalness as an abstraction—to portray her not as an individual but as a symbol of femininity in its perfection. In his effort he spoils his prose, not only with clichés, but also with wordiness: "The flood of light brought out the opulence of her form and the vigour of her youth in a glorifying manner" (p. 44). Her vigorous life "made her beautiful with a beauty of a rustic and olympian order" (p. 14). Sometimes he descends to a rendition not of her directly but of her effect on the narrator—which is given with a jocularity, perhaps even a vulgarity, which lessens her dignity as an earth-goddess: "The first time I beheld her full length I surrendered to her proportions" (p. 12). "The girl was of the sort one
necessarily casts eyes at in a sense. She made no noise, but she filled most satisfactorily a good bit of space" (p. 62). Such expressions are perhaps more offensive in their insinuating jocularity, their assumed casualness, their false reticence, than the obviously lustful reaction of Schomberg, who remarks to the young captain that he (the captain) has certainly run his head disastrously against Falk: "'But for a fine lump of a girl, she's a fine lump of a girl.' He made a loud smacking noise with his thick lips. 'The finest lump of a girl that I ever . . . . I don't blame you, captain, hang me if I do'" (pp. 80-81).

Conrad's difficulties in characterizing realistically and convincingly an earth-goddess are surprising, in view of his successful characterization of women who reflect or epitomize nature or the cosmos in those stories analyzed in Chapter One. He seemed able to do there what this tale required: to create a woman character capable of functioning as a personification of the cosmos and at the same time as an interesting and convincing character in a dramatic situation, or in a summarized and retrospective narrative, or at least in a static description. The reason for the present failure lies in an important difference between the nature which Hermann's niece embodies and the nature epitomized by the female characters earlier discussed. Hermann's niece epitomizes a concept of nature which is simpler, less typical of Conrad, and in a sense less interesting. Amy Foster, Mme. Levaille, and Diamelten are connected with an ambiguous cosmos, a multi-valent nature which repeatedly shifts in
metaphysical and moral quality, which oscillates between meaning and non-meaning, now embodying and now eluding human values and interpretations. In "Falk" the phenomenon of nature does not torment man by ambiguously and obscurely seeming to shadow forth a meaning which transcends nature, as it does in many of Conrad's works. Here the nature with which the niece is identified is its own inherent, non-transcendent law--its forms and actions do not represent something else, but constitute in themselves a meaning: the meaning and the expression, the form and the content, are one. Matter is its own justification and does not require interpretation in accord with a transcendent, human meaning. In the stories treated in Chapter One nature at times hinted at or took on human meaning; in "Falk" the reverse is true: the two central male and female characters take on the meaning or law which is expressed in nature--or the law which is nature. The tormenting alternative offered the male characters in the tales discussed in Chapter One--between a hollow and completely meaningless universe and a universe hinting vaguely at human meaning--does not exist here, for the universe, though it possesses no transcendent or human meaning, is not therefore hollow. Its simple forms and actions are conceived as in themselves a meaning. Here matter and nature make no pretensions to consciousness--and yet they are not empty and forebodingly, disturbingly void. Their contemplation does not stimulate in the male hero a sense of devastating isolation. The senses here are mere senses--they deal with mere matter which hides no inner truth. Yet
the senses and their objects are not futile and meaningless. Their function is itself a meaning. Bare physical existence is a value in this story. It may be that Conrad found the simple concept of nature which underlies "Falk" less fascinating than his usual rich, ambivalent concept of a dualistic, wavering, mysterious cosmos, and that the failure of his characterization of Hermann's niece should be ascribed to an inability to sustain creative involvement in so simple a concept. When Falk begins to describe for the narrator the circumstances under which his powerful instinct led him into cannibalism, Falk shows that he assumes that a certain non-transcendent value and truth exists in the intensity of man's naked instincts, for in his view, the man capable of enduring the horrible "misfortune" by means of a stronger will to live, is the best man. Falk does not make the ordinary distinction between a forceful instinct and a moral value which that instinct, in the conventional view, should be made to serve. For him the dualism of human meaning versus phenomenal non-meaning does not exist. His criterion, at least in extreme circumstances, is the intensity of a man's instinctive will to live. The narrator shows the conventional confusion at Falk's equation of "toughest" with "best":

"It was a great misfortune. Terrible. Awful," he said. "Many heads went wrong, but the best men would live."

"The toughest, you mean," I said. He considered the word. Perhaps it was strange to him, though his English was so good.

"Yes," he asserted at last. "The best. It was everybody for himself at last and the ship open to all." (p. 131)
By the same token, just as the intensity of Falk's natural, instinctive drive constitutes a value (separate from moral value, but nevertheless a value), so the passive sexual attractiveness of Hermann's niece likewise is a value, and the narrator suggests it has equal validity with such other qualities in woman as beauty, intelligence, and kindness:

"The first time I beheld her full length I surrendered to her proportions. They fix her in my mind, as great beauty, great intelligence, quickness of wit or kindness of heart might have made some other woman equally memorable.

With her it was form and size. It was her physical personality that had this imposing charm. (p. 12).

Conrad's difficulty with the character of Hermann's niece is not the only aspect of "Falk" which puts the story outside the pale of his masterpieces. A certain laxness of imagination and of unity mars the work throughout. This laxness stems most likely from the uninteresting simplicity of Falk and of the concept of nature which underlies the story. Falk is of course a more interesting character than the silent and statuesque, nameless niece of Hermann, yet he is unique among male central characters in Conrad's fiction for his flat simplicity. Most of Conrad's interesting central characters—Kurtz, Lord Jim, Razumov—are far from simple. They are instead quite confused and perplexed by certain real or seeming dualisms and mysteries in life—they confuse altruism with opportunism, honor with social responsibility, or guilt with disgrace; like Arsat they are tormented by the inconsistency of human goals—they are seldom guided by the clarity of secure and unfailing, animalistic instinct. The interest which adheres to a few simple
central characters in Conrad's fiction is a humorous and ironic interest—as in the case of Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon." There are simple and safely unconfused men on the periphery of the hero's confusion in many of Conrad's works. Such men as the accountant in *Heart of Darkness* and the Lieutenant of the French gunboat in *Lord Jim* give a useful contrast to the central, confused hero. But by artistic temperament Conrad seems incapable of sustained involvement with a hero unerringly controlled by simple instinct.

Falk is not inherently interesting but depends for interest upon his contrast with Hermann (and Hermann's conventional conception and valuation of sacrifice and self-preservation). The story still loses interest because the conflict between Falk's instinct and the conventional man's sentiments is so nearly one-sided—the dice are obviously loaded against the ordinary moral evaluation of self-sacrifice and self-preservation. Hermann is too much a straw man and too much a comic character for the reader to take seriously his objections to Falk's cannibalism. Aside from Hermann's lame objections, Falk and his instincts remain by and large uncriticized, unchallenged by any different point of view in the story. For this reason Falk and his glorified instincts soon begin to bore the reader. It is true that man's instincts serve a vast web of complexities in the lives of most people—but these complexities are not necessarily as dully and fearfully culpable as in the lives of Hermann and Schomberg. The complex sublimation process, by which instincts and mature purposes become entangled,
confused, lost, and re-clarified usually constitutes Conrad's great subject. But in "Falk" Conrad tries to treat centrally and uncritically a man of flat and simple instinctive character, whose worldview is challenged only by the unintelligent, emotional sentiments of an obvious "hollow man." It is true that Falk himself feels some remorse for his cannibalism, but he seems by and large certain of the rightness of his actions aboard the becalmed ship of death.

Furthermore, the universe of "Falk" is one in which both natural elements and human instincts carry their own unappealable justification. It is a universe in which hardships might exist to be endured, but a universe without a hint of evil. It contrasts with the universe of "The Idiots," "Amy Foster," and other stories here analyzed, in which seemingly innocent obscurity may be a mask for unabashed malevolence, and in which human meaning and blank phenomena may be dangerously confused. It contrasts also with the universe of such masterpieces as Heart of Darkness, in which tropical nature is never quite free from a hint of anthropomorphic consciousness, of a malevolent purpose which leads Kurtz not to deeds like Falk's--justified by iron necessity--but to abominable lusts. The universe of "Falk" is incapable of inspiring the cry "The horror! the horror!" for it is essentially, by its own justification and in its own sense, a good universe. Cannibalism itself can be justified, since intensity of will excuses any action and is the criterion for all human behavior.

It is not surprising then, that the female character
in "Falk"--a tale quite atypical of Conrad in its concept of nature--falls short of the rich and interesting ambiguity of those female characters who reflect an ambiguous cosmos--whose earthy and animalistic instinctiveness is never without a hint of transcendent consciousness, just as nature, in Conrad's best works is never assuredly innocent of human meaning and never certainly pregnant with human significance.

In "Because of the Dollars" Conrad is concerned again with the rigid, conventional, hypocritical bourgeois attitude toward sexual continence. This tale, however, is less successful as a criticism of bourgeois values than the two stories previously analyzed because its characterization is too obviously contrived to serve a flat if unconventional moral meaning. In order to show the hollowness of conventional respectability, Conrad tells the story of a prostitute sacrificing her life for the husband of a prim and rigid bourgeois woman, a slave to a labelling moralism, who refuses to pity the dead whore's innocent young son or to honor her husband's moral commitment to protect the child. The tone of the story is unabashedly sentimental in its obvious insistence that there is good even in a shunned and downtrodden woman of shame.

The story is among the most sentimental, yet the most grotesque, of Conrad's works. In it a sea captain named Davidson, in the employ of a kind old Chinaman in an Eastern port, commands a small steamer. He has a silent, cold, and snobbish wife who scorns her husband's fellow seamen and other associates as low-class people and resents having to
live in a backward and tropical region. When the government recalls some old dollars to be replaced by a new issue, Davidson agrees to transport a large load of the obsolete coins for the many traders on his route. He has recently added to his list of stops a remote and isolated Malay village, where an old and faded whore, Laughing Anne, once the favorite of a wild old friend of Davidson's, now lives with her loafer paramour Bamtz and her young son Tony, hoping to end her weary life in a relatively secure and quiet old age. Davidson, moved to compassion for her and her child, has agreed to stop at the settlement regularly to pick up rattans and leave trading goods. Before leaving his home port, he tells a friend in a crowded café of his plans to carry the huge amount of money and to stop at the remote village. He is overheard by Fector, a one-time professional blackmailer of the type of Donkin in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, who plots with two cronies—a handless Frenchman and a nondescript half-caste Niclaus—to visit their old friend Bamtz, wait in his house for the steamer, and steal the money. Davidson's wife has a presentiment of evil and insists that he find a replacement for this trip, but this is impossible. When Davidson arrives at the village, he is suspicious of the newcomers, but, despite Laughing Anne's warning of the desperate, murderous determination of the handless Frenchman, Davidson does not believe that the four men have enough spunk to try to rob his ship—nor do they believe that the placid Davidson is anything more than a timid, conventional softy, unable to protect himself. In a back room in
Bamtz's hut where Anne's child lies ill, Anne manages to speak with Davidson without being overheard by the four men. She tells him that the Frenchman, who has taken her into his confidence, is armed—he has forced her to tie a metal weight to his right stump. She promises to warn Davidson with her characteristic and still beautiful, silvery laugh when the robbers set out toward his ship in the night. Davidson returns to his steamer, makes a dummy of wadded clothing in his hammock, spreads a sheet over it, and climbs into a nearby lifeboat to wait. He is not sure whether he has heard or only imagined hearing Anne's laugh, but soon he sees the Frenchman climb on board the ship, strike the dummy with his weighted stump, and, realizing the trick, run to the cabin where his henchmen are unpacking the money. In the ensuing gunfight Davidson wounds some of the robbers, but they all escape and run back to the settlement. Davidson hears the Frenchman's angry exclamation when he realizes that Laughing Anne has played him traitor. Davidson, seeing Anne in danger at the mercy of the vengeful derelict, and feeling that his hastily-conceived stratagem is to blame, leaves the ship to save the woman. He hears her screams as the Frenchman chases her round the hut in the dark; then her final scream is suddenly cut short. He stumbles over her body while pursuing and firing at the Frenchman. The significance of her sacrificial death dawns on him, causing him to feel "unmanned" by having a woman risk danger and die to save him. He gets the sick child from the empty hut and takes him to the steamer: "This life the woman had left
behind her appeared to Davidson's conscience in the light of a sacred trust:"

The next morning he takes Anne's body on board for burial at sea and finds the body of the Frenchman, killed by his random shot in the night. The other robbers have all disappeared. When he returns to his wife, bringing the child, he tells her the boy is the orphan of an old friend, fearing that the whole truth might cause her to worry dreadfully about the danger he has undergone. Her suspicions are naturally aroused by Davidson's flimsy story, and she soon learns from town gossip that the boy is the child of a whore. She accuses Davidson of infidelity, demands that the child be turned out, and so continually torments him with her cruel tongue that their marriage ends in a separation.

The prostitute's son, sent to the care of a religious order in Malacca, conceives the intention of becoming a missionary, and this "poor Davidson," who "in his placid way . . . needs affection" is "left out in the cold" (p. 211) in utter loneliness to the end of his days: "He will have to go downhill without a single human affection near him because of those old dollars" (p. 211). "This is the story that has spoiled Davidson's smile for him--which perhaps it wouldn't have done so thoroughly had he been less of a good fellow" (p. 211).

The contrast between Laughing Anne and Mrs. Davidson

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12Joseph Conrad, Within the Tides (Garden City, 1924), p. 205. This Doubleday edition is used for all references to "Because of the Dollars" in this study.
is the foundation for the story's statement about empty bourgeois conventions and true moral goodness. This central statement becomes paltry, insignificant, and unconvincing, not only because of inadequate and "flat" characterization of the two women, but also—and perhaps mainly—because of Conrad's uncertainty regarding the nature of Davidson. Before I discuss the two female characters as bourgeois hypocrite and honorable outcast, it will be necessary to examine Conrad's conception of Davidson to show his rather equivocal status in relation to bourgeois attitudes and values.

Many of Davidson's traits hint that he is essentially the same type as the bourgeois villains or comic villains in "A Smile of Fortune," "Falk," and other works, though he is presented here as a hero. He is a stout and thoroughly domesticated man, despite the narrator's insistence that he has "been around" in his day and associated with a "rowdy" group, including Harry the Pearler, evidently a rough and unscrupulous character who was once Laughing Anne's chief patron. Conrad is never quite able to unite Davidson's plump homeliness with his character as a man of action. He attempts to do so by having the narrator note that for a fat man Davidson possesses a very fine chin, indicating a strength of character which Conrad has already undermined by making Davidson, like Verloc, domestically fleshy and soft. He must remind the reader, when Davidson goes into action against the robbers, that many fat men are amazingly light on their feet. He gives Davidson, in addition to his domestic girth, the sleepy look of Verloc, Jacobus, and Hermann,
but insists that in Davidson this is a sign not of sleepy complacency and blindness to truth (as it is in the afore-named bourgeois comic-villains), but of astute mental activity: "His eyes, when his wits are hard at work, get very still as if sleepy" (p. 194). Davidson's bearing, like Jacobus', is very relaxed, unruffled, assured; one of the most frequent adjectives used of Davidson is "placid." Yet this trait also becomes transformed—into the "nerves-of-steel," masterly self-control of the stereotyped hero in the most conventional detective novel: "His outward placidity becomes only more pronounced if possible, the more reason there is for excitement" (p. 194).

Worst of all, and most unbelievable in regard to his character as a man of action, Davidson displays a scrupulous delicacy in all human relationships. He is too delicate to talk straight to a notorious loafer and an old whore. When he agrees to Anne's and Bamtz' plan for the steamer to call regularly at their village, "He thought of at first making some stipulation as to Bamtz behaving decently to the woman, but his exaggerated delicacy . . . restrained him" (pp. 183-184). He shows a rather misplaced and stupid delicacy toward his wife: he attempts to save her from worrying about his danger in the fight with the robbers—by giving a shad-owy explanation about the origin of the child he brings home, evidently not realizing that his flimsy story is a strong stimulus for her to worry and suspect him of infidelity. But such realities as a woman's sexual jealousy never seem to trouble the trivially perspicacious consciousness of


Davidson. Like the bourgeois villains in the two stories just discussed, he shows a refined knowledge of conventions and delicacies, but none of the awareness of the hard facts of life, none of the insights won by men like Falk through a test of physical extremity. Despite the narrator's insistence that Davidson has associated with wild and wicked men, Davidson shows an amazing disbelief in the existence of danger. When the prostitute tells him that the four vagabonds intend to rob his ship and to murder him if he resists, he somehow cannot take her warning seriously. Laughing Anne herself shows a more realistic view of the danger, and Davidson is quite right in blaming himself for his strange failure to heed both the whore's earlier warning and the laugh which was the agreed-on signal of the robbers' approach. Davidson seems justified in feeling "unmanned" by a woman's superior grasp of the situation and by her dying in order to protect him.

Davidson is unique among Conrad's heroes for his simple moral goodness. In the tale's beginning, the narrator points him out to his listener as "a really good man" (p. 169) and calls him a "scrupulously delicate soul... In short, he's thoroughly humane, and I don't imagine there can be much of any other sort of goodness that counts on this earth" (p. 171). Nowhere else does Conrad show admiration for conventional delicacy (which he regards as blindness and hypocrisy in "A Smile of Fortune" and "Falk") and for moral goodness which is unaccompanied by such supplementary qualities as a sobering experience with the realities,
an intense will, an awareness of life's complexity, a depth of soul. "Principles won't do," says Marlow in Heart of Darkness. The stupid Davidson, in his simple moral goodness, lacks these qualifying attributes, and as the tale progresses, the narrator shows he considers Davidson's naive blindness to real evil as a part of his moral uprightness. The spoiling of Davidson's smile, he says, would not have been so thorough, "had he been less of a good fellow" (p. 211). He evidently does not realize that Davidson's smile is spoiled by a conventional complacency toward danger and an amazingly dense misunderstanding of women.

Davidson's character is evidently the result of Conrad's strange attempt to make a hero of a stock Conradian type which he had never before presented in any other light than the comic or the contemptible: the bourgeois villain. Davidson never completely shakes off the qualities of a dull, commonplace, domesticated member of the herd. Because of his dichotomy, the intended moral roles and alignments of characters are spoiled. Davidson is intended to be the innocent victim and the unwitting flouter of the bourgeois creed of his quiet but latently shrewish wife—the man who overlooks bourgeois standards regarding sexual continence (for he feels that a dead whore's claim on his honor is binding, that her trust and sacrifice must be repaid) and who suffers under the cold and rigid moral stereotyping of the bourgeois woman to whom he is married.

Mrs. Davidson is less effective in her role as the bourgeois villainess because her husband, in his equivocal
and inconsistent status halfway between the man of action and the bourgeois villain, fails to offer enough contrast to his wife. He does not arouse the reader's sympathy when he foolishly shrugs off Laughing Anne's warning, or when with augmented and laughable stupidity he equivocates to his wife about the origin of the bastard he brings home.

The story suffers also from the unrealistic and unvarying perfection of Mrs. Davidson's vileness. The contrast between her and Laughing Anne would be more significant as a contrast between bourgeois wife's and outcast woman's perspectives if the two women were not presented as honorable whore and heartless matron. Mrs. Hermann functions much better as the foil to an unconventional woman (Hermann's niece) because Mrs. Hermann's repulsive bourgeois complacency is treated comically. When the Diana is being jerked from its berth, she is totally unaware of the danger and, not understanding English, responds to the narrator's frantic shouts and gestures with a sweet smile and a nod as the Diana barely misses striking the narrator's ship. Mrs. Davidson lacks the interest that any such qualifying comic trait would give her vileness. Nevertheless she exemplifies the typical haziness and obscurity which many women in Conrad's fiction possess. As with many other Conradian female characters, Mrs. Davidson's obscurity is not a flaw in characterization but is a necessary quality for the intended effect of her personality. Obscurity serves her shrewish malevolent purpose: it cloaks her evil in an aura of sweetness and passivity. The narrator says of her:
"We used to admire Mrs. Davidson from a distance. It was a girlish head out of a keepsake. From a distance. We had not many opportunities for a closer view, because she did not care to give them to us... Not that she ever said anything ungracious. She never had much to say for herself... What I noticed under the superficial aspect of vapid sweetness was her convex, obstinate forehead, and her small, red, pretty, ungenerous mouth... Most of us were fetched by her white, swan-like neck, by that drooping, innocent profile... The fellows here formed the opinion that Mrs. Davidson was a meek, shy little thing. She looked it, I must say. And this opinion was so universal that the friend I have been telling you of... wondered to me: 'Fancy Mrs. Davidson making a fuss to that extent. She didn't seem to be the sort of woman that would know how to make a fuss about anything.'" (pp. 175-176)

Nevertheless Mrs. Davidson, suspicious about the nature of the child Davidson brings home, "worked up her sense of wifely wrongs and of her injured purity to such a pitch that one day, when poor Davidson was pleading with her to be reasonable and not to make an impossible existence for them both, she turned on him in a dull passion and told him that his very sight was odious to her" (p. 210). In Mrs. Davidson's accurate presentiment of the evil outcome of her husband's trip there is a hint of the same mixture of opposite qualities which was noted in some of the female characters discussed in the first chapter of this study. She shows a strange awareness of evil, which suggests a morally compromising relationship with the wicked force of Fate, despite her wifely purity, her respectable domesticity, and propriety. She thus remotely suggests the female characters in "The Brute" who combine a complacent and normal domesticity with an uncanny awareness of evil or even a compliance with evil.

The character of Laughing Anne is treated with a
mixture of patronizingly sentimental praise for her basic soundness of honor and flippant scorn for her sordidness. With rather surprising vulgarity the narrator condescends to a pun on her profession as a prostitute. He wonders what drove her to take up with a loafer like Bamtz, but then realizes that "despair, like misfortune, makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows" (p. 180). When Davidson discovers her, a ghost from his bygone days with Harry the Pearler, her description is a strange mixture of the sordid, the grotesque and the pathetic. He finds her—a woman of the city streets—in a remote Malay village:

"He stared about with his mouth open and saw a white woman issue from the long grass in which a small hut stood buried nearly up to the roof. Try to imagine the shock: in that wild place that you couldn't find on any map, and more squalid than the most poverty-stricken Malay settlement had a right to be, this European woman coming swishing out of the long grass in a fanciful tea-gown thing, dingy pink satin, with a long train and frayed lace trimmings; her eyes like black coals in a pasty-white face. Davidson thought that he was asleep, that he was delirious. From the offensive village mudhole . . . a couple of filthy buffaloes uprose with loud snorts and lumbered off crashing through the bushes, panic-struck by this apparition." (p. 181)

Conrad clothes her in the garment worn by Joanna Willems and most of the women whom he intends to appear squalid, run-down, the embodiment of lethargic despair. When Davidson returns to the village and finds the wicked newcomers plotting the burglary of his steamer in Bamtz' hut, Laughing Anne appears still more squalidly pathetic:

"She laughed hysterically, out of the deep shadows between the gloomy mat walls. 'Ha! ha! ha!' The woman came forward, having little more on her than a loose chintz wrapper and straw slippers on her bare feet. Her head was tied up Malay fashion in a
red handkerchief, with a mass of loose hair hanging under it behind. Her professional, gay, European feathers had literally dropped off in the course of these two years, but a long necklace of amber beads hung round her uncovered neck. It was the only ornament she had left; Bamtz had sold all her poor-enough trinkets during the flight from Saigon—when their association began.

"She came forward, past the table, into the light, with her usual groping gesture of extended arms, as though her soul, poor thing! had gone blind long ago, her white cheeks hollow, her eyes darkly wild, distracted, as Davidson thought." (p. 192)

The narrator insists that Laughing Anne possessed an unusual steadfastness and consistency of character for a prostitute. He implies that her loose life has been a matter of luck and not of character: "The poor creature was ready to stick to any half-decent man if he would let her, but she always got dropped, as might have been expected" (p. 179). She takes her luck philosophically: on learning from one of her patrons that he intends to chuck her, go back to Europe and marry his betrothed, she replies: "'All right, I'm ready to go. We part friends, don't we?' She was always anxious to part friends. He looked rather glum at the moment of parting. She laughed and went ashore!" (p. 179). She has a sense of inward uprightness, but as she continually harps on her unjust sufferings, her resignation comes to resemble an ignoble abjectness of character:

"'You know I have always stuck to men through thick and thin till they had enough of me. And now look at me! But inside I am as I always was. I have acted on the square to them all one after another. Only they do get tired somehow. Oh, Davy! Harry ought not to have cast me off. It was he that led me astray.' . . . Harry was the only man she had loved. The others—

"She shrugged her shoulders. But she prided herself on her loyalty to the successive partners of her dismal adventures. She had never played any tricks in her life. She was a pal worth having. But men did get tired. They did not understand women. She supposed it had to be." (pp. 184-185)
She looks forward now to "going straight" with Bamtz: "No more paint and dyes for me, Davy" (p. 183).

Laughing Anne recalls the sentimentalized women of ill repute in the tales of Bret Harte. Her character as a prostitute is disappointing when compared with the more realistic prostitutes in Conrad's fiction. The governess of Flora de Barral is imagined with true and unsentimentalized tolerance and humaneness. She has an unflinching awareness of her physical decay and of her unflattering determination to hold a paltry specimen of a man by means of whatever sums she can get from cheating her rich employer, but she clings to her small and squalid life with almost noble resignation. The French mistress of the corrupt Costaguanan Minister of Finance displays a genuine professional pride and honesty when she turns away the delegate whom Charles Gould the elder has sent to buy her influence with the Minister: There are some areas of Costaguanan statecraft where even her charms, alas! are impotent—take back your money, my friend. Laughing Anne is unworthy of these more human and more genuinely respectable whores.

"Because of the Dollars" is a pot-boiler concerned mainly with a theme which Conrad had treated elsewhere with considerable success—the inadequacy of the bourgeois perspective in which a rigid sense of proprieties and conventions tend to blind men to reality. The story fails because of its naively simple characterization, its sentimentalized moral scheme, and the equivocal mixture of bourgeois domesticity and individuality in the central male character, an
uncertainty of characterization which suggests that Conrad was ambivalent in his attitude toward Davidson's placidity, his scrupulous delicacy, and his domesticity. The tale shows that Conrad was capable of repeating the virulent condemnation of domesticity which appeared in "The Brute," and of an unexpected sentimentalizing of a prostitute which recalls the shallow and sentimental pathos of Maggie Colchester's death in that story.

These three short stories show that Conrad saw woman as both the epitome and the victim of bourgeois values, and that he used a narrow, confining, and unimaginative domesticity as a symbol of the blandness and complacency of the bourgeois way of life. Although domesticity is a feminine trait, some of the most extreme advocates of domesticity in Conrad's fiction are male characters.

The foregoing discussion also shows that the success or failure of Conrad's characterization of women is not a matter extraneous to the overall success or failure of the stories themselves. Conrad is able to suggest successfully the varied nature of Alice Jacobus as the appealingly beautiful and innocent victim of a rigid and arbitrary social standard, as (in the bourgeois pattern of values) a saleable commodity, and as a lurid symbol of exotic evil. Her varied nature or ambiguity is crucial for the central concern of the story; her character becomes in a sense a register of the effects of a thoroughly commercialized society. The flaccidity of Conrad's characterization of Hermann's niece
is directly related to his lack of involvement in what must have seemed to him, on second thought, a rather jejune concept of the cosmos. The character fails to show the rich ambiguity of the female characters in such works as "The Idiots," "Amy Foster," and "The Lagoon." The women in "Because of the Dollars" are unrealistically flat and either hopelessly sentimentalized or uninterestingly perfect in vileness. This is less a matter of a temperamental antipathy toward women or a literary lacuna for them than it is one effect of Conrad's larger failure to convince himself of the sufficiency of bare, unsupplemented, and blind moral goodness.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If the foregoing interpretations are valid, it would seem that female characters have important functions in relation to several essential Conradian themes. The concept of a wavering and ambiguous cosmos, which has peripheral importance in most of Conrad's major works, is treated centrally in the tales discussed in Chapter One, where the ambiguity of woman epitomizes or is somehow linked with the ambiguity of the cosmos. Conrad's expression of the corollary concept of the illusoriness of human meaning likewise depends on his characterization of women as ambiguous. In the general pattern of these tales an aggressive and directive male character is perplexed by the absurdity, arbitrariness, or meaninglessness of phenomena; he is momentarily relieved from his epistemological or metaphysical perplexity by the meaning or order which a female character seems to give to the universe; finally he is debilitated and immobilized by a vision—caused in some way by a woman—of nothingness and the vanity of human purposes or "illusions." This theme is quite distinct from the Conradian theme of betrayal, guilt, and redemption, though the theme of an ambiguous cosmos and ephemeral human values often gives a metaphysical profundity to this theme of betrayal, which is concerned
more with the phenomenon of moral choice than with the basic and pre-moral question of the constitution of the universe and of the objective validity of human purposes. The tales considered in Chapter One should not be interpreted as weak adumbrations of the theme of Lord Jim or devalued for their failure to emphasize the phenomenon of moral choice. Furthermore, since ambiguity is central to the author's vision of reality in these stories, the shadowy quality sometimes apparent in the female characters who epitomize the cosmos is not a flaw in characterization, but contributes to the story's thematic statement on the human situation in a tormentingly uncertain and equivocal world. This is a significant theme in literature; its origin, for Conrad, lay in his inherently skeptical and pessimistic temperament, which, despite the sophomoric, subjective and contrived cosmic complaint in "The Brute," inspired more often a mature, controlled, masterful irony and ambivalence. In most of these tales the moral status of the woman character is as richly ambiguous as the moral meaning of the universe. As the cosmos becomes less mysterious and more definitely malevolent, so do the women characters—and the story tends to lose its richness. The author's attitude toward women in these stories is thus identical with his attitude toward the cosmos. Since the male hero's immobilizing disillusion at the end of these stories is a total psychological and spiritual condition unable to be summed up as emasculation, the author's attitude toward woman here cannot be construed as a fear of femininity, of sex, of emasculation, or of impotence. The
full richness of the stories precludes any such narrow interpretation.

The relative validity of idealism and realism or cynicism as human attitudes is a vital question in such works as *Nostromo*, *Lord Jim*, and *The Secret Agent*. The two short stories and the novel discussed in Chapter Two reveal the importance of women characters as extreme examples of shallow and unrealistic idealism and viciously amoral cynicism. A comparison of female characters in "The Informer" and *Under Western Eyes* shows Conrad holding two opposite attitudes toward the superficiality of feminine idealism. The works contrast the female characters' basic, natural, unconscious integrity with the surface ideologies which they profess. In some cases the woman's deeper nature is morally better, in other cases morally worse, than her superficial allegiance. In "Gaspar Ruiz" a woman's basic nature is stronger and more terrible than the idealism that inspires a whole nation. In *Under Western Eyes* this basic nature is a more valid compassion than the fanatical ideology with which it is tenuously connected. In "The Informer" woman's basic nature is no quality at all but mere emptiness, yet her very shallowness affords her a type of consistency and integrity of which the male characters, by their depth of involvement, are incapable.

A number of themes in Conrad's fiction are related to the concept of civilization—e.g., loyalty and betrayal, the moral contrast and similarity between civilization and savagery, the judgment of a civilization's values as significant,
hollow, provincial, foolishly rigid, or ignobly inconsistent. Female characters may symbolize the abstraction of civiliza-
tion or epitomize a particular civilization, especially in
contrast to a second society or people. They may also play
a paradoxical role as the supporters and the destroyers of
a civilization's solidarity. They may promote solidarity or
chaos through their seduction of a male hero to disloyalty,
through their encouragement of a man in steadfast loyalty,
or through their drawing an "isolato" back into the human
community.

In relation to Conrad's protest against the inadequa-
cies of bourgeois values, female characters, or the feminine
trait of domesticity, function as an index, register, or
epitome of bourgeois complacency, naivete and blindness to
reality. Female characters may be the advocates and perpe-
trators of the bourgeois way of life, or they may be its
innocent victims. The bourgeois concept of woman and all
other personal aspects of life as saleable commodities is
tellingly dramatized in "A Smile of Fortune," as is the lu-
rid and exotically prurient bourgeois concept of sexual pas-
sion and the rigid and arbitrary bourgeois notion of sexual
continence. "Falk" contrasts bourgeois values with the san-
er perspective of a man of action acquainted with the basic
human drives in their simple intensity, but the story and
the characterization of the chief female character suffer
through lack of imaginative author-involvement in the tale's
simple concept of natural instinct and its correspondingly
unambiguous view of the universe. "Because of the Dollars,"
another attempt at contrasting bourgeois values with the truer morality of an unconventional person, fails because of its sentimental and unrealistically simple moral division of characters and because of the equivocal nature of the central male character, whose bourgeois complacency, propriety, delicacy, and disbelief in the existence of evil disqualify his contrast with his morally rigid wife.

Conrad's attitude toward the women in these tales is too ambivalent and too complex to be considered uniformly misogynous. First, it is a feeling inextricably connected with his feelings about other matters—the nature of the phenomenal world and of ephemeral or steadfast human values, the nature of idealism and cynicism, of civilization, and the bourgeois way of life. Secondly, it is usually an attitude of profound ambivalence which gave richness, intensity, and wonder to the best of the tales here analyzed. Finally, his attitude toward woman shares the pessimism which pervades his feelings about most aspects of the human condition. If his view of human love is dark, if he saw it as an obscure, irrational adventure in which the ordinary perceptive and rational powers of mankind are ineffectual, this is hardly more pessimistic than his belief that all human purposes, though quite necessary if one is to get through life, are transient illusions—a belief expressed in "The Lagoon" and elsewhere. Furthermore, Conrad's pessimism on this matter is not the lonely and neurotic condition that some critics would interpret it to be. Conrad is definitely in the great Romantic tradition in seeing love and most other aspects of
the human condition as a momentary and unsustainable beatitude. He lacks, it is true, the Romantic's belief in a heaven where man's feeble joys are made permanent, but he is no more liable to the charge of a neurotic fear of sex than is the author of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." Nor does Conrad's choice of woman as the epitome of a basically ambiguous and irrational universe indicate an abnormal misogyny. Other writers and thinkers, such as Schopenhauer, have considered woman as closer than man to the "life-force" or the "Imminent Will," more bound up in the biological processes and less capable of detached reasoning. This view was prevalent among the ancients. It was naturally suppressed by the emancipation of woman in the nineteenth century and was re-interpreted and revalued to woman's favor when the intellectual revolution led by Freud and his followers had made a positive reassessment of man's non-rational aspect and had devalued reason. Prior to some final and universal judgment on the relative merits of man's rational and irrational aspects, it is impossible, while maintaining objectivity, to demand that Conrad's valuation of irrationality, non-directiveness, impulse, instinct, and of woman be revised according to the standards of Freud.

The works discussed in this study give no support to the theory that Conrad was plagued by a neurotic fear of sex in general, or of emasculation or impotence in particular, or that he was possessed of voyeuristic tendencies or pre-occupied with thoughts of incest, as some critics have claimed. It is clear also that the aesthetic shortcomings
of these stories do not result from any debilitating stress aroused by Conrad's consideration of a sexual subject. The voyeurism in "A Smile of Fortune" is quite conscious and purposeful, and it has a definite role in the thematic statement of the story. It did not slip inadvertently into a tale which Conrad had intended as a conventional love story, as some commentators seem to believe. Men stare at women in Conrad's stories not as sex fiends but as men tormented and lured by an ambiguous cosmos whose ambiguity is reflected in a female character. The immobile state into which many of Conrad's male heroes fall at the end of their stories is not a condition of emasculation but a state of profound disillusionment regarding the nature of an empty cosmos or hollow human ideals and purposes.

This is not to claim artistic perfection for the stories here analyzed. Some of them reveal glaring faults. The basic flaw in "The Brute" results from an extreme and unanalyzed statement of typical Conradian pessimism. Characterizations there are flattened and events contrived in order to force the story to express a jejune complaint against the Cosmic Joke. Other problems represent conventional faults which an author of unquestionably sound sexual adjustment might make: embarrassing sentimentality; flat characterization which evokes conventional, stock responses; a tendency of a character to function woodenly as a mere abstract symbol rather than a living person. But usually the success or failure of the female characters is bound up inextricably with some aspect of the basic imagining of the
story. For two examples: In "Falk" the female character is as uninteresting as the simple and unimaginative concept of the phenomenal world; in "The Idiots" the female characters are as interestingly ambiguous as the tormentingly and lur-ingly ambiguous cosmos.

Ambiguity or duplicity is the most constant trait of femininity noticeable in the stories here analyzed. It is a quality capable of wide variation and of a number of divergent moral effects, from the passive Amy Foster to the terrible Doña Erminia. In some characters this duplicity constitutes hypocrisy, as in Mrs. Colchester and Miss Blank in "The Brute." But hypocrisy itself is capable of many permutations, from Kurtz' fiancée's simple winking at evil, to the compound and basically guiltless duplicity of the girl in "The Informer," to the vicious treachery of Doña Erminia. Duplicity can be quite innocent in a character like Nathalie Haldin, whose native compassion is more valid than her self-deluding and unauthentic enthusiasm for revolution; she is basically much better than she realizes.

Woman's duplicity is in many instances a quality of her relation to the real world. Thus Amy Foster is superficially and momentarily subject to the appeals of imagination, which imposes a meaning on bare reality; yet she is basically as empty and meaningless, as blank, as the void of reality itself. Maggie Colchester is a woman and therefore, according to the assumptions of the tale, totally incapable of functioning in a world of danger, and she dies by her unwillingness to accept this fact; yet her perverse and
and irrational obstinacy gives her a kinship with the malevolent and vicious cosmos which kills her. Mrs. Colchester is a woman thoroughly given to domestic pleasures, but she betrays at times an insidious complicity with a cruel and brutal evil force. Alice Jacobus is dreadfully and unrealistically frightened by the evil and violence of the world, but just as unrealistically and pruriently fascinated with her exotic vision of its wickedness. The personality of Mme. Levaille is thoroughly pervaded by the spirit of pagan Nature in her easy prosperity, her ubiquitous commercial fecundity, and her venerable robustness, but she is a scrupulously regular and devout Catholic. The list could be extended almost indefinitely. Conrad evidently never resolved the question of woman's nature and of her relationship to the realities; instead the question seems to have been a perpetual stimulus to his imagination and a source of intensity in the best of the works here discussed.

The present critical consensus regarding Conrad's women characters seems to be that they have little importance in his fiction—that his characterization of woman has no real effect on the great Conradian concepts, subjects, and themes, that Conrad's novels form an imagined world in which femininity has no noticeable existence, or only a negative or perhaps even pathological value. In introducing his essay on Conrad, Douglas Brown lists, among Conrad's few certain limitations as a novelist, the fact that his work
"offers few triumphs of feminine portraiture." \(^\text{13}\) (p. 119) The statement may be true within certain limitations—obviously Conrad paints no feminine portraits in the manner of Jane Austen. Yet the statement is offered without elaboration, qualification, or substantiation, indicating that the writer assumes the consensus on Conrad's women to be—as it evidently is—an unscrutinized, unexamined, and passive agreement that Conrad's failure as a novelist in this aspect of life is so immediately obvious and self-evident as to require no demonstration. The only careful examination of Conrad's female characters published to date is in Thomas Moser's *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*, wherein the author holds that the greater importance of female characters in Conrad's later work and the lessening interest in moral choice are two chief causes of Conrad's decline as a novelist. Yet the present study has found that in several of Conrad's early minor short stories, and in a number of early and late novels, women are central and the moral choice is absent, yet the pieces show a lively, mature and involved imagination. Contrary to Moser's hypothesis and to the consensus on Conrad's women, these works treat themes which, if secondary in importance to the moral choice, asserted an intriguing and imperative demand on Conrad's artistic imagination and inspired some of his profound statements on the human condition.

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Title of Thesis: Joseph Conrad's Female Characters in Selected Fiction

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Date of Examination:

May 26, 1967