

**THE CENTRIFUGAL DISCOURSE OF
MYTH:**

***WOMEN AND THE 'SAVING ILLUSION' IN SELECTED
WORKS OF JOSEPH CONRAD.***

BY

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Submitted to the Faculty of Arts in fulfilment or partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English at the University of Zululand

**KWADLANGEZWA
1997**

PROMOTER

EXAMINER1

EXAMINER2

Acknowledgements

The whole dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

The reference system I have used is a modified version of the Harvard system. A comprehensive list of references is to be found at the end of the dissertation. This includes only those works which have had a direct bearing on the study, and so does not represent the full reading undertaken for it.

I would like to express appreciation to my supervisor, Professor M. Hooper, for her expert guidance, patience and, above all, kindness at a time of great pressure of work; to the management, my colleagues and friends at Edgewood College of Education for their support and encouragement; to my supportive friends; to my long-suffering husband, friend and ever-present computer consultant, David, whose support and belief in the project have made it possible; and to my wonderful children Clare, John and Andrew, whose understanding and patience went way beyond their years.

It is finally to my most loved family that I would like to dedicate this dissertation and all the work that went into it.

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TEXTS: Joseph Conrad

The following texts have been used in the thesis and all references will be to these editions.

1978. *Almayer's Folly*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1974. 'Amy Foster' in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Typhoon, Falk and Other Stories*. (ed) Norman Sherry. London: Dent.
1947. *The Arrow of Gold*. London: Dent.
1949. *Chance*. London: Dent.
1978. 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *'Twiixt Land and Sea*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1974. *Heart of Darkness*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1980. *Lord Jim*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1979. *Nostramo*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1970. *Notes on Life and Letters*. London: Dent.
1978. *An Outcast of the Islands*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1946. *A Personal Record*. London: Dent.
1978. 'The Planter of Malata' in *Within the Tides*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1949. *The Rescue*. London: Dent.
1949. *Romance*. London: Dent
1980. *The Secret Agent*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1956. *The Shadow Line*. London: Dent.
1978. 'A Smile of Fortune' in *'Twiixt Land and Sea*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1966. *Under Western Eyes*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1963. *Victory*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Abstract

The primary aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the women characters in Joseph Conrad's works function in the narratives to present a 'saving illusion' which is in contrast to masculine existential despair. The women characters are characterised by 'being' not 'becoming'. They are also frequently associated with that which is stable because it is fixed, and with notions of courage, faith and fidelity. These notions constitute the 'saving illusion' for male characters who are threatened with moral collapse when illusions fail. The representation of the women characters as 'saving illusion' arises from a mythology of 'woman' which inheres in masculine imagination. In the terms of myth theory, Conrad's women characters can be said to offer the male characters the life-affirming possibilities that traditional myth does. The representation of the women characters as myth functions as a competing discourse with that of authoritative masculine discourse. The women characters' discourse is thus centrifugal in that it resists the centripetal, unitary discourse of male characters, and demonstrates that narratives are essentially heteroglossic rather than monoglossic. Women's discourse can either comply with or resist the way they are defined by male characters. Depicted as silent, passive and iconic, the women characters are also frequently attributed with unwavering commitment and fidelity. However their discourse seeks to resist such constructions. Mythologising women renders them 'other', and the underlying suspicion and awe that leads to their mythologising renders them objects in the relationships of knowledge and power. Women characters have their existence in patriarchal structures which bear a resemblance to colonial structures. Mythologised women are similar to colonised 'other' in that both serve to demarcate the space of the coloniser. Like the colonised subject, women are frequently associated with 'chthonian' forces of nature which the coloniser regards as threatening, uncontrollable and in need of taming. As mythologised, colonised 'objects', the women characters are in a state of ontological arrest; hence they do not participate in an exchange of knowledge because they are symbolised by it. A study of the women characters in the novels will reveal that they play significant roles in the mythologies of male characters, providing a 'sustaining illusion' which counters masculine disillusionment.

CHAPTER ONE: *Representations of Women*

She listened to me, unreadable, unmoved, narrowed eyes, closed lips, slightly flushed face, as if carved six thousand years ago in order to fix forever that something secret and obscure which is in all women. Not the gross immobility of a sphinx proposing roadside riddles but the fiercer immobility, almost sacred, of a fateful figure seated at the very source of passions that have moved men from the dawn of ages (*The Arrow of Gold*, 146)

The subject of my thesis is Conrad's women characters; the ways in which they are constructed in the narratives, and the ways they can be read. I have chosen the above passage from *The Arrow of Gold* as a touchstone for my argument, because it contains some of the features, ambiguities, and definitions that spark critical response to Conrad's women. I am not suggesting that the character of Rita de Lastaola, the listener in the above passage, is representative of all of Conrad's women characters. Neither am I saying that all male characters see women characters the way Monsieur George sees Rita. However, her mythologised figuration here as iconic, mysterious, desirable and unknowable is useful in indicating the features that I believe are present in varying degrees in the women characters.

Readings of Conrad's women characters are varied but fall along clearly demarcated lines, so there is much debate to be engaged with. Although at this point I do not intend to undertake a close textual analysis of all of *The Arrow of Gold*, I would like to interrogate the above passage, as a means of indicating some of the key aspects which are relevant to the characterisation of women, and as a means of entering into debate with critical commentaries on them. In doing so I shall be drawing on a number of Conrad's other novels as examples. I am using this strategy as a point of entry and an ordering device hence my reference to critics will not be exhaustive. A comprehensive explication of key issues cannot be completed in this way; thus, in setting out the hypothesis which will follow, I shall offer a more detailed analysis of the major areas that the thesis will cover and the strategies to be employed. However,

the following brief textual analysis of this passage will serve to foreground and define the boundaries of my own argument about the women characters, and locate my position in the critical debate before I focus closely on the novels to be used as case studies. Chapter Two will set out the hypothesis to be tested, define key terms, and describe critical instruments which I shall be employing in the thesis. The case studies will follow.

Before beginning my analysis, I would like to offer an example of a gendered reading which I have found useful as a point of departure, which categorises Conrad's women characters in a list of types. My reading of Conrad's women leads me to discern certain characteristics that can be seen to some degree in all of them, though I resist the use of stereotypes which constrain their definition. Watts, in *A Preface to Conrad* (1993:178-180), has constructed a type list of Conrad's male and female characters. Watts acknowledges that type lists are problematic. He takes to task feminist critics who seek to castigate the works of Conrad for their stereotyping of women, yet he readily asserts that readers can discern some recurrent types and that females in his list are usually defined in relationship to males. He has constructed the following list of the types of women characters that he sees in Conrad's work:

1. The Exotic Seductress - associated with the fecund jungle, potent, primitive and possibly vengeful. e.g. Nina, Kurtz's jungle consort.
2. Noble Idealists - romantic, they preserve their faith in their men but are essentially ignorant of the world, e.g. Antonia; Kurtz's Intended; Natalia.
3. The Statuesquely Beautiful Object of Male Desire, e.g. Mrs Travers; Seraphina.
4. The Seemingly Subjugated - unhappy pasts, subdued but sometimes surprisingly independent, e.g. Winnie Verloc; Flora de Barral.
5. The Lady Almoners - disillusioned, they still try to make the world a better place, e.g. Mrs Gould; Natalia Haldin.

This list constitutes a range of characters, each constructed, as Watts sees them, around a central characteristic. I do not believe that typing the women characters in this way goes far enough to negotiate the narrative space which they occupy, nor does

it allow for an examination of the woman's discourse in its own right, as being separate from the men's. Watts qualifies his type-list with the statement that "a stereotype is a manipulable simplification of a more complex original" (1993:183). I agree with Watts that the women characters do seem to be constructed around characterising traits, but the analysis needs to go further than that. The issue of woman's voice in the narratives must extend the focus beyond the boundaries of character traits. What I resist in Watts's list is the idea that character can be categorised in this way; it is his notion of character, perhaps, that needs to be unpacked. (I shall offer a fuller explication of the issue of 'character' in Chapter Two.) Watts's listing is uncritical of the assumptions underlying the construction of these types. However I believe that Conrad's women characters arise out of a mythology about women. Hence I wish to take issue with Watts: reducing the women characters to types in a list facilitates a premature dismissal of them as no more than types. In my analysis of the passage given above, I intend to point to different aspects of the women characters and to the responses of a range of critics to them. Watts sees Conrad's women characters as clustered around certain traits. I shall look at representational aspects of their characterisation which can, to some extent, be seen in almost all of the women characters.

1.1 Woman as Listener.

The narrator of *The Arrow of Gold* says of Rita, "She listened to me". The first characteristic of significance is that the woman in this passage is a listener not a speaker. While this figuration depicts the woman as silent, by implication it indicates the possibility of her having a voice. The narrative moment focused on here represents Rita as a silent listener. The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives, as one of the definitions of silence *the state of not being mentioned*, and I would like to use this notion as a defining aspect of the representation of the women characters. The foregrounding of male experiences and epistemologies in the narratives frequently results in the experiences of women characters remaining unmentioned. An extreme example of this silence is in *Romance*, in which life and death experiences requiring

fortitude and forbearance (for example in the cave when Juan and Seraphina are close to death from hunger and thirst) are narrated in terms of masculine experience only, Seraphina being almost entirely silent throughout their ordeal. Using this definition, I would also argue that silence in women, whether it is literal silence of not speaking or the state of not being mentioned, defines woman as 'being' (or as not being) rather than as 'becoming'. By this I mean that women's identity is portrayed as fixed rather than as a part of an ontological process, whereas men's identity is regarded as in a state of flux.

Male characters in Conrad's novels are frequently characterised by the process of 'becoming', of seeking an identity, and it is the absence of this process in the representation of the women that constitutes part of their silence. This masculine desire for self-identification is seen in action or in speech, such as in the compulsion to tell. A number of Conrad's male characters feel compelled to 'speak' their identity. Jim feels compelled to justify himself to Marlow, who is himself a story-teller. Decoud and Razumov both are driven by the desire to write everything down in journals or letters. However, woman's silence can nevertheless constitute its own narrative.

A review of critical commentaries will illustrate that a number of critics, especially feminist critics, have examined the ways in which the women characters are silent in the narratives or struggle to find a voice. Based on the theories and terminology of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), my reading of Conrad's women characters is that their discourse is a 'centrifugal' one which at times is articulated through silence (as is the case with characters like Amy Foster and Winnie Verloc); at times seeks to engage with the 'centripetal' male discourse (for example Emilia Gould and Lena); and at times resists the male discourse (as do Mrs Fyne, Flora de Barral and also Lena). The use of Bakhtin's terms 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' will be justified further on, but in the interim, I shall define 'centripetal' as referring to a unitary, authoritative discourse, and 'centrifugal' as referring to a discourse in resistance to it. For the male characters, the women's discourse represents hope, fidelity, passion and devotion in contrast with male discourse of greater 'knowledge' and disillusionment.

Continuing with the issue of silence as it relates to the women characters, I shall briefly review the work of Compton (1988), who has taken up the issue of non-verbal communication and has seen how it operates in both men and women characters. He argues that by stressing the character's presence by silence, their mobility or immobility takes on significance. This is powerfully illustrated by Kurtz's African woman, whose silent vigorous gesture of extending her arms to the sky is both eloquent and threatening to Marlow.

Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky...A formidable silence hung over the scene (*Heart of Darkness*, 88).

Hooper (1992) asserts that silence has a symbolism of its own and cannot necessarily be read as 'saying nothing'. The gesture of this woman is a case in point. Her movements have an autonomy that must be recognised. They communicate powerfully, and the silence that follows is indicative of the resonance of the gesture.

Compton's point is true of a number of the women characters, as their immobility gives greater significance to their silence, suggesting that they are rendered as mythologised and transfixed. For example, the silent immobility of Mrs Schomberg in *Victory* is a potent articulation of her fear of her husband and her resignation to play a feminine role of being seen and not heard. Although she speaks and, in the part she plays in helping Lena escape, speaks crucially, her predominant silence enables others to define her in any way they wish. Davidson remarks, "Fancy anyone having a talk with Mrs Schomberg!...Why, she looks too stupid to understand human speech and too scared to shoo a chicken away. Oh, the women, the women! You don't know what there may be in the quietest of them" (*Victory*, 55). Constructing the women characters as silent enables others to write their identities. Lena in *Victory*, whose discourse seeks as it were to silence itself and to align itself with Heyst's, declares "I'll be anything you like" (375). Definition by the 'Other' works both ways sometimes. In *Victory* for example, Heyst also tries to take definition from Lena in wishing he had her capacity for a saving cosmology.

Hooper (1992) has examined the issue of silence, arguing that silence can constitute a narrative within the text. Language as a trope is foregrounded in her analysis of the story 'Amy Foster', and the eponymous woman character is seen to be defined by her silence as much as by her speech. Silence and the act of speech are both significant tropes in the story. Not only is Amy's silence an important aspect of her discourse, she is also objectified in the narrative. This objectification reinforces the 'authority' of the narrator to define her. Amy's lack of physical beauty appears to constitute for Dr Kennedy a justification for his somewhat scornful attitude to her. She is bluntly described by the frame narrator as having a "dull face, red, not with a mantling blush, but as if her flat cheeks had been vigorously slapped" (107). He concludes that she is "a dull creature" with an "inertness of mind - an inertness that one would think made it everlastingly safe from all the surprises of the imagination" (107).

Yet the narrator turns out to be partly wrong about Amy's "safety from surprises of the imagination". Contrary to expectations, Amy falls in love with the castaway, Yanko, with an all-consuming love that the narrator describes as "resembling the unaccountable terror of a brute" (110). His scorn for Amy's plainness and dullness is visible in words like "No wonder that Amy Foster appeared to his eyes with the aureole of an angel of light" and "He must have taken her for a 'gracious lady' " (124). In all these descriptions, Amy is objectified by the observation of the narrator.

On the issue of objectification, Roberts (1993c:10) observes that in the Author's Notes to his novels, Conrad often identifies with male characters, leaving the woman character as an object of shared observation or pursuit. I tend to agree with this assertion and believe that objectification is often articulated by stillness and passivity, especially in non-Western women characters. Notwithstanding the fact that the enforced silence of Yanko, a non-Western male character is a crucial aspect of his representation as alien, he is described frequently in terms of movement. The narrator comments on his "rapid, skimming walk", "his manner of leaping over the stiles", and uses verbs like "leaped", "struck", "shooting" and "jumped" to describe his movements. Amy, on the other hand, is frequently portrayed as inert.

The reader registers a significant difference between Amy's and Yanko's silences in the narrative. A striking feature of Yanko's character in the story is the fact that his enforced silence and his later use of his own language is articulated as a discourse in its own right. When not communicating with the narrator, he articulates himself through music, outbursts of gaiety and sign language, but the reader is made aware throughout the story of his longing to communicate through understandable speech. Amy's silence in the story, by contrast, is a result of the insistence of the narrator on interpreting her, and denying her a discourse.

Yanko's eagerness to speak takes him from "anxious baby talk", to "quick fervent utterance" to "unearthly language". His communication with their child in his own tongue, "so that he could [one day] have a man to talk with in that language" (137), frightens Amy by her exclusion from it. "I am so frightened. He wanted me just now to give him the baby. I can't understand what he says to it" (139). So frightened is Amy that she leaves him when he is dying and crying out in his own language for water, receiving the harshest judgement from the narrator for doing so. However, the narrator's interpretation of Amy needs further investigation.

The narrator's view of Amy, is, I think, an undeniably gendered one. He is unable to interpret her as a woman and mother, and portrays her character in terms of silence rather than speech. In addition to derogatory descriptions of her physical appearance, Kennedy indicates from the outset that Amy's speech is problematic and an issue of objective interest to him. She has a "slight hesitation in her utterance" and "a sort of preliminary stammer" (108). She even "fell in love silently" (110). These indications of reticence of speech are predictive of the silence that will follow Yanko's death, when she "says nothing at all" (141). Kennedy's narration engages in a subtle indictment of Amy's character throughout so that her desertion of Yanko, which is in part responsible for his death, is portrayed in a harsh light. Her silence after Yanko's death is presented by Kennedy as evidence of the shallowness and inconstancy of her attachment to him.

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 (142).

Hooper argues that what emerges in the story is that Amy's silence is crucial to Kennedy's narrative. She suggests that Kennedy's narrative attempts to compensate for his failure to protect Yanko's social existence in the community. Amy, however, has both participated in the events that he describes and survived to form part of the present of the narrative. She is therefore able either to rebut or confirm Kennedy's story. For this reason Amy is silenced in Kennedy's narrative so that she will not challenge the version of Yanko's tragedy that Kennedy offers. This reading of Amy's silence is a resistant one which is offered to counter the "morally convenient" reading that Kennedy's narration offers. Hooper asserts:

The real 'other' in Kennedy's story is not Yanko, but Amy; and it is her opposition of silence to his narrative that makes her so. The object lesson remains clear: we need to recognise Kennedy's partiality and treat it with some circumspection. Rather than accept his version of Amy we need to read her silence as an act of its own (1996:11).

Her reading has focused on an issue with which I shall be dealing in this thesis, namely centripetal and centrifugal discourse in the narratives. While Amy's silence in Kennedy's narration serves to objectify her character for scrutiny by the reader, it also provides the narrative space for Kennedy's voice to assert itself as the centripetal voice, the voice of authority. Amy's silenced voice in the story competes with his definition of her, and is thus centrifugal in function. I shall give a full gloss of these terms in Chapter Two.

Language and silence are two things which indicate difference, in much the same way as the polarities of gender do. To portray women characters as silent is to foreground this difference and to fix the woman as 'Other'. Kristeva puts it this way, "if there is no 'absolute', what is truth, if not the unspoken of the spoken...that can be imagined only as a woman" (1986:153). Paglia (1992:5-25 and *passim*) argues that woman's "difference" is represented in the way that their identity is fused with the "chthonian" force of nature, while man is associated with intellect and reason. She asserts that the woman's stability of identity is a great obstacle to the man whose quest for identity

she blocks. I agree that this can sometimes be the case with Conrad's women characters. However, I shall be arguing that woman's stability of identity can also constitute a 'saving illusion' for the male character(s), as it is her very unchangeability and unwavering commitment that can act as a moral standard for the disillusionment of the male character. Paglia's point holds, however, when women are directly linked with nature. Nature is often portrayed as that which masculine 'culture' must overcome, and women characters, for example in *Heart of Darkness*, are frequently associated with nature, not culture. Kurtz's African lover ("like the wilderness itself" 87) is an example of a woman character whose stability of identity is a block to the quest for identity of the male; she is portrayed both as silent, fixed in her representation, and associated with the ungovernable jungle which the male colonialists seek to tame.

With this point in mind, I would like briefly to use the post-colonial paradigm put forward by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) as a way of interpreting both the silence of women in the texts and in critical commentary, and the re-emergence of woman's voice in both. These writers suggest that the post-colonial text does not create meaning but indicates a shifting range of possible meanings. The post-colonial text's capacity to 'mean' is circumscribed by the post-colonial silence that cannot be overwhelmed. It is this silence, they suggest, that links all post-colonial texts (187). This model encapsulates my reading of the silence of Conrad's women characters, in that a reading of the women characters suggests a range of possible meanings. I would also like to draw on Bonney's reading of 'blank space' here. He suggests that primeval emptiness is constructed in Conradian texts as a feminine space, whose semantic openness invites cerebral colonisation (1991:109). The silent space in which woman is often located is a space which seems to the male characters to cry out for definition, even though definition is elusive. What will be seen is that if male characters cannot read women characters, then they 'read' their silence and attribute to it their own meanings, as is the case in the quoted passage above. The silence of Conrad's women characters indicates, like the post-colonial text, a range of possibilities, a blank space as it were, that male characters may 'colonise' and interpret.

However, the woman's voice struggles to be heard. The emergence in recent years of critical commentary that seeks actively to hear this voice is similar in my view to what Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin see as the post-colonial shift from destructive cultural encounter to acceptance of difference. My thesis seeks to 'hear' the discourse of the women characters, and to identify the silences that exist in their discourse partially as constructs of male imagining.

A further discussion of the concept of discourse will be given later in the chapter. My examination of the discourse of women characters will be based on the assumption that narrative is essentially multivocal. Looking at contrasts and tensions that are built up in the text through a dialogical relationship between the male and female principles enables a more complete view of the issues that the novels raise. My case studies will draw on Bakhtin's notions of centripetality and centrifugality of discourses (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two), and will be centred around the 'centrifugal' woman's voice and the way it challenges and resists, or complies with the 'centripetal' unitary authoritative male voice and other voices. Voice will be seen to be an important signifier, at times metonymically representing woman. Woman's discourse will also be seen to seek to define a woman's own identity, in resistance to definition by male narrators or characters, and to mark out its own space in the narrative.

1.2 Woman as Unreadable Text.

The woman character in the passage from *The Arrow of Gold* is described as "unreadable". Critical opinion is divided as to whether Conrad's own understanding of women was limited - hence the construction of inscrutable women characters - or whether he understood that women were frequently misread, and hence portrayed this misunderstanding in his work.

Moser (1957), for example, argues that Conrad's attempts to characterise women were largely unsuccessful. He sees what he believes is Conrad's fear of women reflected in images of male sexual abasement before women. He goes so far as to suggest that Conrad's early work, which, in his opinion, reflects the treatment of romantic love as 'uncongenial', is far greater in quality than the later work in which Conrad attempts to present love 'affirmatively'. He thus sees Conrad's change of attitude towards the issue of love as weakening his work. He states, "the later Conrad's hostility to feminine self-assertion results in the immediate destruction of his women as soon as they embark on a plan of action" (1957:162). This switch, according to Moser, signals Conrad's decline. Bernard Meyer (1967), drawing on incomplete knowledge of Conrad's childhood and marriage, formulated the theory that Conrad was intensely frightened of women and, because of the early loss of his mother, was inclined to project onto women terrifying powers of destructiveness and abandonment. Like Moser, he reads Conrad as expressing fear and distrust of women's sexually devouring natures. Conrad's long and apparently satisfying relationship with his wife Jessie (Conrad's critics were sceptical but Conrad himself expressed no overt dissatisfaction) was a source of mystery to Meyer. Somewhat later, Guerard's argument concurs with Moser's. He speaks of Conrad's "devaluation of women and of love". In his reading, "sex is implicitly a menace...and the imminence of embrace or its consummation can call forth some of Conrad's gloomiest writing" (1979:54).

Such theories tend to assert 'ownership' of Conrad's psyche, staking a male territorial claim to his life and work and the place of women in it. Yet anyone familiar with Conrad's correspondence with Marguerite Poradowska would admit that his letters show a rather sensitive understanding of women, not least as a result of this close friendship. It is this masculine annexation of Conrad by critics and the location of women outside this inner circle that sparks Straus's notion of 'secret sharing' among men, in the novels and among critics. Bross's argument, although earlier than Guerard's, reflects a changing viewpoint that acknowledges the ambiguities in Conrad's treatment of women. He discusses Conrad's "genuine ambivalence toward a trait (fidelity) which [he] had come to consider particularly feminine" (1970:45).

This changing focus is reflected also in Schwartz's assessment that "While there is some truth to Moser's contention [that Conrad was unsuccessful in his characterisation of women because he was afraid of them], it is an hyperbole that has become an accepted shibboleth" (1982:36).

Brodie takes as her starting point a belief that "There persists...the notion that Conrad overly idealizes his women and succeeds in producing 'real' portraits of men only" (1984: 141-2), a notion with which she disagrees. Others endorse this assumption for different reasons. Thompson says that the novel contains "irreconcilable points of view in sexually stereotyped characters" (1978:461) and Hyland suggests that "it is generally established that women were an inhibiting factor in Conrad's writing" (1988:4). I am not convinced that this is true. A growing body of critics (Orlich (1981), Brodie (1984), Straus (1987), Dilworth (1987), Nadelhaft (1991), Navarette (1993) and Bode (1994) form something of a new tradition, mainly feminist though not necessarily female, whose criticism focuses on duality from the perspective of gender: its dramatic portrayal of the dialectical relationship between male and female principles.

While a pivotal feature of this criticism is the male/female issue in the texts, the critics of the 'new tradition' differ widely in their response to the 'readability' of the women characters. Feminism itself is becoming increasingly fragmented; differences of opinion divide critics, and consensus increasingly eludes them. Stimpson in *Where the Meanings Are: Feminism and Cultural Spaces* (1988) sees such differences among feminists as healthy and argues not for consensus, but for tolerance of fragmentation. That feminist criticism is splintering in this way is a sign that, as a movement, it has come of age.

Orlich (1981) is a feminist critic who uses psychoanalytical theory to underpin her hypothesis. She tentatively departs from the idea of woman as 'Other', arguing that, for example, Lena in *Victory*, like the Biblical Magdalen figure, experiences a gradual deepening of authentic love which transcends sex and loves the very being of

the other. She sees Lena's sacrificial love as love in its purest form; a love which "nourishes the latent human capacities within [Heyst] and draws him into a gradually deepening experience of authentic love with its final consummation by fire" (1981:71). Much feminist criticism resists such readings because of the way they present woman's experience as defined by the relationship with the male. Later feminist criticism sees the 'consummation by fire' not as victorious but as Lena's tragic enactment of the gender role she is anxious to perform. For example, Heywood sees her death as "the furthest logical extension of self-renunciation. To enact the definition of 'true femininity' she must give her very life up for Heyst" (1994:15). Vanderwielen's reading argues strongly against the patriarchal representation of women in *Victory* and the way that the novel's ending has been read:

In the end, then, Lena...has proved how very well she can 'stand by a man'. Operating under a patriarchal ideology, she considers herself pre-eminently victorious - she has consummated the ideal of herself as the embodiment of feminine nothingness, the emptiness which holds itself fundamentally open to masculine domination (1994:209).

Brodie's view, however, is that a balance has been lost in gender criticism. She writes that "insofar as an antithesis exists between masculine and feminine (as between skepticism and idealism), it is a natural part of human nature in general and reflects the duality inherent in the human experience itself" (1984:142). Fraser uses this type of assessment to test her argument that *Chance* is Conrad's "realistic attempt to explore the feminine perspective" (1992:88). She suggests that Conrad uses the texts to explore woman's nature; that his method is dialectical and that he used the fiction as a 'testing ground' for his exploration of the nature of 'woman'. Bode, taking as her point of departure the assumption that male and female characters have been unequally characterised, sets out in her argument to restore the balance. She argues that Conrad's women characters are frequently powerful and tend to exercise control over the male characters. In her analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, she suggests that "The separate female space, which, according to Marlow, the women inhabit, becomes by the novella's end the dominant one, drawing within its parameters the male characters as well" (1994:20). Such criticism attempts to reconcile polarities and resist the figuration of woman as a negative trope in the narratives.

Not all critics have welcomed feminist criticism and its readings of the women characters. Watts (1993) cautions feminist critics not to become 'ideologically narcissistic', by belabouring past works that do not reflect contemporary ideological preferences or prejudices. His view seeks for balance, however. He readily admits of feminism's achievement in that it revealed "the appalling extent to which masculist (sic) assumptions had hitherto been accepted as generally valid" (1993:180), but argues that "feminist critics who oppose the principle of stereotyping when it concerns female characters sometimes espouse that very principle when ... they envisage in the texts the demeaning features they wish to castigate" (1993:182). Watts appears to believe that he needs to defend Conrad's works from unjust feminist attack. Yet he concedes that a feminist attempt to expose strategies of power is something Conrad himself might well have applauded.

However, Conrad's portrayal of women is not seen as demeaning by all feminists. Ruth Nadelhaft is one feminist critic who does not see Conrad's women in this way. Nadelhaft believes that male critics frequently take male characters' criticisms of women characters as Conrad's own. In doing so, she believes, they fail to make the distinction between author and text, and dismiss as mad, possessive or venomous women characters who articulate female and feminist criticism of the patriarchal world of the Conradian protagonist. *Chance*, with its complex structures of narrative, can be seen not, as Watts asserts, as 'markedly anti-feminist', but as an example of an ironic treatment of gender issues. Critical reviews of the time reveal that *Chance* was well received by men and women alike. It did not alienate women readers, maybe because some women at the time were anti-Pankhurst anyway, and would have agreed with Marlow in his scorn of the feminist movement. More recent critics, reading the dialogue between Marlow and the narrator in the context of Marlow's own caution with women, have seen the novel as an exposure of the limitations of a particular male point of view. The detached narrative voice provides an ironic context for Marlow's words. The narrator often manifests an irony which mediates the contempt and fear of feminist issues associated with Mrs Fyne and Flora de Barral expressed by Marlow, the focaliser.

Nadelhaft's overview of recent feminist criticism, which in part agrees with Watts's view of feminist critics, is useful here:

feminist criticism...generally does not allow for much critical approval of male authors as they choose to portray female characters....a feminist reading of Joseph Conrad is designed in large part to reclaim Conrad for women readers...in the face of male critical hierarchy and feminist disapproval (1991:1).

Nadelhaft's generalisation about feminist criticism is mildly tendentious as her own purpose is to reclaim Conrad for feminist critics. However, I agree with the distinction she draws between author and text, and the text's narrator(s) and author. She asserts that blurring these distinctions results in a reading in which "Key women characters who articulate female and even feminist criticism of the patriarchal world of the Conradian protagonist are...dismissed as devouring, mad, possessive, and venomous, as though the characterisations come directly from the author" (1991:3-4).

I agree with Nadelhaft that if the notion persists that it is not possible for women to be recuperated from male writing, as she believes feminism suggests, much of what has been written by male authors will inevitably be overlooked, and the valuable aspects of male writers like Conrad will become even more inaccessible. The issue of women characters in male writing is admittedly a problematic one. Nadelhaft offers a solution to the problem of recuperation of the woman through the combination of powerful critical tools like biography, (the 'knowable' historical text), with literary criticism to rescue the voices of the many strong women characters who speak against patriarchal culture. Reading through the author's life to the text can, she asserts, combine sophisticated techniques of deconstruction with a reading of history. Such a reading will also discount male critics, who have themselves been shaped by values and value systems of patriarchy, and who tend to read into the women characters their own fears and loyalties, attributing them to the author as a matter of course. This empowered reading will acknowledge the benefits to women of male writing and reclaim greater textual freedom for the women characters.

For woman readers to look to literature for images of themselves which will contribute to their ability to analyse and to change the world, Conrad's novels

provide a range of heroic possibilities. The written texts, if cleared from their surroundings of patriarchal criticism and masculine ownership, provide for modern readers analysis which can be empowering (1991:8).

I agree fully with her assertion that Conrad's novels provide a range of heroic possibilities. I shall elaborate further on this point in my discussion of the concept of "Hera". While I agree in principle with her argument, I fear that laying claim to Conrad's history in this way could lead to misreadings similar to Meyer's, who also used biographical information, spuriously I believe, to arrive at his assessments of Conrad's work.

Heywood (1994) confronts directly the notion of woman as unreadable text. She sees *Victory* as grappling with the idea of sexual difference as constituted in relation to romantic love. She regards Conrad's text as positing a definition of 'Woman' that is "conventional enough to infuriate any feminist reader" (1994:9). In *Victory* Heyst sees 'something inexplicable' in Lena which is, for Heywood, the mark of difference. What constitutes difference is that which cannot be named. The woman character is unreadable because she is written differently. She would be readable if the right language were known. I shall argue that women are unreadable because they resist the process of mythologisation in masculine imagination.

I suggest that masculine attempts to read women characters are carried out as acts of definition of women characters. Sexual difference requires oppositional definitions of both masculine and feminine, and a text like *Victory* illustrates that men and women characters are both unreadable texts for each other; neither can fix the identity of the other. Women characters are 'unreadable' for male characters in other texts too; for example in *Chance* women are essentially unreadable for Marlow even though he insists on interpreting them in his own way. What is shown in such a text is not necessarily, as Heywood suggests, that the writing of women makes them unreadable. I believe rather that Conrad illustrates the process whereby male characters and narrators attempt to read women characters and are largely unsuccessful. The misreading is exposed to the reader. *Victory* is a clear case which shows the attempts of both Lena and Heyst to read each other, yet male assumptions

that regard the woman as successfully 'read' can be seen in others of Conrad's works. An interesting case in point is 'Freya of the Seven Isles'.

The narrator of 'Freya' sets out with a conscious intention to present Freya as a woman character who can easily be read, implying as he does so, that here is a character who has none of the mystery and fragility that unnamed others might associate with women.

No exertion seemed to distress her. I have seen her land from the dinghy after a long pull in the sun (she rowed herself about a good deal) with no quickened breath and not a single hair out of its place. In the morning when she came out on the verandah for the first look westward, Sumatra way, over the sea, she seemed as fresh and sparkling as a dewdrop. But a dewdrop is evanescent, and there was nothing evanescent about Freya. I remember her round, solid arms with the fine wrists, and her broad, capable hands with tapering fingers (Penguin 1978:135).

The questions that are immediately generated in my mind are 'whose notion of woman is the narrator resisting?' and 'who does the narrator imagine he is addressing?' I would argue from conceptions of women that inhere in the text that the answers to both questions imply male readers with male notions of woman. Freya is frequently regarded as having 'woman's' capacities for things. Generalisations about women, and how like them she is, abound in the narrative. "Freya, being a woman, kept a better hold of the mundane connections of this affair" (140). She has self-reliance "and the general unwillingness of women - I mean women of sense - to make a fuss over matters of that sort" (160-1). Underlying the quoted passage from *The Arrow of Gold* is also the assumption that women are fragile and unathletic. Freya, however, is presented in terms of an implied difference from fragile, 'evanescent' women; a representation which is contrived to underline the narrator's authority in reading her. Thus, while she is presented as the same as all women, she is also different from them. What is clear is that the narrator bases his 'reading' of Freya on assumptions about women which he takes to be fully authentic, and fails to see that the basis for this reading is a store of generalisations about women. For this reason, perhaps, Freya's death at the end of the story is a total shock to him. I do not see Freya as invincible, thus her death is tragic rather than shocking.

The point is that the narrator is sure he can read all women and Freya accurately. The issue of reading character is a pivotal one. The reader is told that Freya is decisive and perceptive:

Here you have the sanity of feminine outlook and the frankness of feminine reasoning. And for the rest, Miss Freya could read 'poor dear papa' in the way a woman reads a man - like an open book (149).

Thus the narrator reads Freya and is sure that she reads men. "...with that mysterious knowledge of masculine nature women seem born to" (180). However, what is manifest in the narrative is the degree to which gender 'narrates' the story. The narrator 'reads' his own view of her, and she is depicted as 'reading' the view of men that he thinks she has. What the reader is aware of is that there could be a difference between the way Freya 'reads' men, and the narrator's view which represents her as reading men. Elbert argues that "'Freya' is the key to Conrad's confusion about gender roles" (1994:35) and, while I find Elbert's reading of the story somewhat acerbic, I am inclined to agree with the above assessment. The reason for much of the confusion in 'Freya', in my view, is the narrator's insistence on his ability to read Freya ("My eyes alone could detect..." 145), even to the point that he accounts for what she thinks (165); a view which is ultimately 'sabotaged' by his own mythologised views of women.

Freya is presented as refreshingly strong and assertive, yet this characteristic is also seen as destructive to men. The narrator's view of her is sympathetic because of his affection for her, but he nevertheless portrays her in terms of her power over the men in her life. His description of her shiny hair, which "seemed to give out a golden light" (135), and upon which she could sit, at times compares it with a helmet: "On the biggest boulder there stood Freya, all in white and, in her helmet, like a feminine and martial statue with a rosy face" (147). Her bearing and manner seem to vacillate between demure and Amazonian; she looked straight "with her wide-open, earnest eyes and the dimple of a smile on her cheek...and then she became very resolute and threatening" (137-8). There is an ambivalence in the narrator's definition of Freya which hints at both his fear and his admiration of her. She is to him both warrior and

temptress. Her Amazonian, warrior-like bearing is reinforced in a dramatic scene where she is depicted playing on the piano during a thunderstorm.

Then, with the lowered rattan-screens rattling desperately in the wind and the bungalow shaking all over, Freya would sit down to the piano and play fierce Wagner music in the flicker of blinding flashes, with thunderbolts falling all round, enough to make your hair stand on end; and Jasper would remain stock still on the verandah, adoring the back view of her supple, swaying figure, the miraculous sheen of her fair head, the rapid hands on the keys, the white nape of her neck (137).

She is fearless and passionate, and her association with Wagner immediately calls up images of riding Valkyries, which reinforces her figuration as warrior. In this scene she appears to exploit her power as spectacle. Her potency is also transmitted in other ways. Speaking to the narrator about Jasper, she tells him that she has “tamed him a bit” (145), and the narrator says of her that “it could not be unpleasant to her to be told of her power” (146). This ‘power’ is shown to be gleefully exercised against all the men in her life, and her ridicule of Heemskirk is particularly harsh. Not only does she slap him and laugh at him, but she also torments him with jealousy by openly showing affection to Jasper when she knows Heemskirk is watching. What appears to me to underpin the narrator’s description of her is the same fear that Moser suspects of Conrad: fear of male abasement before female sexuality.

The view of the narrator is a particularly male one in that his definitions are based not on his conceptions of ‘the woman’ but on ‘woman’. He presents Freya as threatening to men because she can control them. Thus the story illustrates a male reading of woman. The male focalisation of Freya and the events in which she is involved make her almost inaccessible. It is perhaps only in her death that she speaks clearly as this is the one act that escapes the final judgement of the narrator. While he offers reasons for her death, in that she was “vanquished in her struggle with three men’s absurdities” (208), her death from a broken heart seems somewhat incongruous with the view of her character that the narrator has offered: that of a powerful temptress who could gain mastery over men.

Freya...Hey! You Scandinavian Goddess of Love! Stop! Do you hear? That’s what you are - of love. But the heathen gods are only devils in disguise, and that’s what you are, too - a deep little devil. Stop it, I say, or I will lift you off that stool (172).

Elbert points out that, in his response to Freya, Heemskirk's maddened fury is echoed in male readers' reaction to the story. Quoting angry responses to the story's publication, she questions the reason for this male fury: "Why do male characters as well as male readers feel impatient, abandoned, or enraged at the end of 'Freya'?" (1994:39). She cites Conrad as being equally enraged by the story. Elbert, like Moser, suggests that it is male abasement before the feet of the female that is the problem for male characters and readers alike. What is finally presented to the reader is a male view of a woman who enjoys her power over men, is predisposed to tame and mother men and who is finally destroyed, according to the narrator, by self-doubt. Elbert argues that the narrator is engaged in a competitive strategy with Jasper to win Freya's love and that, when he does not succeed, he finds himself alone in the centre of a woman's universe which he misreads.

It is clear to me that male characters in the story misread Freya and subsequently feel betrayed and impotent when she cheats the narrator and reader of closure. Freya's father persists in maintaining idealised notions of how she will never leave him because she is too sensible to love Jasper that strongly. Heemskirk suffers a deserved but nevertheless devastating humiliation for his misreading. The narrator's misreading of her character is illustrated right from the beginning of the story.

I can't say I felt sorry for Freya. She was not the sort of girl to take anything tragically. One could feel for her and sympathize with her difficulty, but she seemed equal to any situation (145).

The narrator's own view of Freya as almost threateningly fearless and in control is finally a tragic misreading of her character. His reading of her character and of the love she has for Jasper is generated by admiration of her strength and fear of her power over men like Jasper, and she assumes heroic, even invincible proportions in his imagination. That she should die from an illness brought on by sorrow at Jasper's death is a completely unexpected end as far as these men are concerned. Finally, given the terms of the male narration, her death from love is a fitting end for one who had been a threat to male potency.

In the case studies, I shall also examine the extent to which the women characters are inscribed to reflect comprehension of 'woman' as assumed by male narrators and implied male readers, according to roles and definitions ascribed to them by patriarchal systems. I shall argue that women are mythologised in the narratives and that a defining feature of their mythical status is their unreadability.

1.3 Woman as Object.

In the quotation cited at the beginning of the Chapter, Rita is described in the passage as having "narrowed eyes, closed lips [and] slightly flushed face", all details which locate her as the focus of the narrator's gaze. Conrad's women characters are frequently placed at a distance from the focaliser in the narrative, for objectification and description by male narrators and characters. However, as Hooper has pointed out, "being 'object of the male gaze' is at most only half the story of any woman" (1997:5) In terms of Watts's list of stereotypes, characters like Seraphina and Mrs Travers would be categorised as 'Statuesquely Beautiful Object of Desire' (1993:180). Of course, only certain women characters fit this category. Yet I would suggest that objectification is a feature of all the women characters. They are frequently depicted in a series of dramatic poses, in doorways, on decks, between trees, and so on. Extensive description of minute details of appearance and sound tends to silence the discourse of the women characters by distancing them from the focaliser as objects of the male gaze. This distancing locates the women within a mythology of 'woman', and puts their discourse 'out of reach'. At significant moments male characters respond to the sound of a woman's voice rather than the words it utters. The women characters are presented as having sensory effects on the male characters, which define their existence in the narrative as object to the male subject. When they cease to speak, they cease to exist - as it were. When Antonia Avellanos in *Nostromo* presents her political views to Decoud, he is preoccupied with the movement of her throat and the sound of her voice, thus drawing attention to her as object of gaze and hearing, rather than as speaker. Axel Heyst is similarly

distracted when Lena speaks; he urges her not to stop, as the sound of her voice, rather than her words, is persuasive.

Mrs Travers in *The Rescue* is frequently portrayed as an object of desire, as Watts suggests. However, Watts indicates only the aspect of desire in his category, whereas because of her desirability, she has enormous power as well. D'Alcacer, for example, is happy to admit her sexual power and to see it as justification for anything she might choose to do.

She would talk exactly as she liked, and even incredibly, if it so pleased her, and make the man hang on her lips. And likewise she was capable of making the man talk about anything by a power of inspiration...Women worthy of the name were like that (*The Rescue*, 311).

Lingard initially views her at a distance as an object in a vision. "He was uncertain of himself...but he was very certain he wanted to look at her" (211). When he does so, the effect she has on him is overpowering. "Lingard looked in unconscious ecstasy at this vision, so amazing that it seemed to have strayed into his existence from beyond the limits of the conceivable" (214). His reaction to her objectified, powerful presence is awe and dismay. "It was impossible to guess her thoughts, to know her feelings, to understand her grief or her joy. But she knew all that was at the bottom of his heart" (214).

What becomes apparent though is that Mrs Travers resists objectification as a beautiful vision and seeks herself to mythologise and romanticise her life by substituting her old identity for a new one, in which she can live out her fantasies of myth and legend. She refuses to remain an objectified vision for Lingard, but enters his narrative. "Suddenly, in a flash of acute discernment, she saw herself involved helplessly in that story, as one is involved in a natural cataclysm" (163). When Lingard says "I've cut you off from the rest of the earth" (156), her entry into his narrative is complete. She feels herself "shut off from the world alone with Lingard as if within the four walls of a romantic place and in an exotic atmosphere" (283).

At times it appeared no more actual than a tradition; and she thought of herself as of some woman in a ballad...To save the lives of Mr Travers and Mr D'Alcacer was more than a duty...it was an irresistible mission (216).

Mrs Travers is seen by both male and female characters as an object of desire and power. Immada reproaches her: "You are a cruel woman! You are driving him away from where his strength is. You put madness into his heart" (234). Like Lingard, Immada looks on Mrs Travers as almost supernatural - "it seems to me she does not live on earth - that all this is witchcraft" (242). Lingard is spurred on to new acts of heroism by her, but he is also brought into subjugation to her sexual power over him. "It seemed to him he had been all his life waiting for her to make a sign" (230).

Finally, Lingard rejects the enchantment that she offers him. He realises that he has wished for the moon, the unattainable Paradise itself, in her, and that his original purpose has been put aside. "He had lost touch with the world...He had no thought. He was in the state of a man who, having cast his eyes through the open gates of Paradise, is rendered insensible by that moment's vision to all the forms and matters of the earth" (415). His life is ultimately ruined by his encounter with her. He cannot recapture his love for his brig, he cannot have Mrs Travers and he cannot replace his experience of Paradise with anything that holds meaning for him. All of his life becomes "profound indifference". The only course left to him, when the Travers' yacht bears south, is to give the strangled command "Steer north" (469).

As is the case in 'Freya of the Seven Isles', the male world with which this novel begins is weakened by the end of the novel. Shaw and Jorgensson are proved right. Having a woman 'in tow' can only lead to trouble. Lingard is left to patch up the 'kingdom' of the ship as best he can. Paglia maintains that male bonding and patriarchy are the only recourse in the face of woman's power and this is clearly true of a number of Conrad's works, including this one. *The Rescue* was his last novel, and it is interesting to see what form his final woman character takes. To the last his novels portray male narrators and characters who manifest both fear and awe of women like Freya and Edith Travers. Yet through characters like Emilia Gould, Antonia Avellanos and Lena, as I will show, male characters also manifest their

reliance on women's capacity to sustain hope and belief. Women characters provide the 'saving illusion' for masculine experience, for example in the case of Almayer, and in their absence, masculine despair and disillusionment often result.

Malek Alloula in *The Colonial Harem* (1987:57-9) examines the issue of objectification, and indicates that the 'gaze', as a signifier of this process, can nevertheless be subverted by the object. He uses the motif of the veil to indicate the process at work. While the colonial gaze demands transparency, the veil refuses it and so subverts its omnipotence. By presenting only a tiny orifice for the eye, the returned gaze of the woman- dispossesses the masculine gaze of its mastery. This can be seen with Conrad's non-Western women. Conrad's depiction of 'non-European' women is perhaps more objectified than his portrayal of white women. On this point Mongia suggests that "Conrad's native women become the nexus where the discourses of imperialism and patriarchy coincide" (1996:131). Non-Western woman is more closely associated with the ungovernable natural forces that colonialism has sought to subdue. I would suggest that the returned gaze characterises the point at which woman as fixed object becomes woman as associated with the chaotic and threatening. It is the return of the gaze that resists and disconcerts the mastery of the male gaze.

An episode in *An Outcast of the Islands* will illustrate this point. Willems remarks of Aissa:

Look at her eyes. Ain't they big? Don't they stare? You wouldn't think she can shut them like human beings do. I don't believe she ever does. I go to sleep, if I can, under their stare, and when I wake up I see them fixed on me and moving no more than the eyes of a corpse...The eyes of a savage; of a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay. They hurt me! I am white! (270-71).

There is an interesting subversion described in this passage. On the one hand Aissa is objectified as a figure of inferior race, savage, even animal, and on the other she 'speaks' from behind the veil of her silence, challenging Willems' objectification of her. Fraser (1992:136-7) contends that in this story, Aissa mythologises Willems in order to control and master him, and that her 'work' is to colonise him. His shrieked

declaration of race seems to be an attempt to overwhelm the threat that this alien object poses.

Such resistance is also seen in the African woman at Kurtz's station. Like the other Africans in the narrative, she is a symbolic location for certain qualities - the primitive, the enigmatic, the natural. As such she is objectified and symbolised. The late nineteenth-century conception of Africa as a region of darkness and fear reveals itself in Marlow's portrayal of her. She is characterised less by detail than by the force of her presence. Thus objectified, she is presented as both fixed in a state of being and as threatening, in that she represents the forces of nature. However, her silent 'cry', articulated by the thrusting forward of her arms, is a challenge to Marlow's assumptions about her. She will not remain object by keeping silent but resists definition by him. She 'speaks' through gesture and returns the colonial gaze that has objectified her.

I would suggest that the 'gaze' of the masculine character in Conrad's texts in a sense demands the transparency of the objectified woman character, so that, on the one hand, she can be defined and interpreted, and on the other, she can have mystery attributed to her. Rita, in the passage above, embodies a mystery "as if carved six thousand years ago in order to fix forever that something secret and obscure which is in all women". Her statuesque inscrutability is a 'veil' beyond which the gazer cannot see. Nevertheless this character attempts to define her by association with the source of all passions since the beginning of time.

The tendency of masculine narrators and characters to objectify women characters and define them in terms of representation, has been taken by certain critics, among them Straus (1987), Roberts (1993a) and Fincham (1996), to imply a masculinist coterie within which male assumptions about women are shared. Straus, in "The Exclusion of the Intended from Secret Sharing in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1987), directs her criticism at homo-centric criticism of Conrad's works. She defines that coterie as including male characters, male narrators and male critics. She does

not directly implicate Conrad the writer. I agree with this scrupulous demarcation as it would be inadvisable to implicate Conrad in that coterie as a matter of course. She specifically addresses the 'exclusion' of women, arguing that the focus on male concerns by critics is a 'secret sharing'. She sees a complicity between writer and critic in excluding the women characters from what she calls "mainstream male experience". Her focus is the woman reader and she asks, "Must the woman reader neutralize her awareness of gender so that her reading becomes 'objective' in the way that male readings supposedly are?" (1987:123).

The scant attention to the women characters that Straus criticises can be seen in minor examples like Raskin's dismissal of the women in *Heart of Darkness* as "the stereotype of the Black and white sisters" (Raskin's capitalisation) (1971:161). Raskin may well dismiss these women characters as stereotyped, but he does not support this claim or interrogate their characterisation, assuming perhaps that his readership is one that will share his views. Schwartz, in his analysis of *Victory*, comments:

The narrator is proposing that the salvation of the race lies in women because contemporary life shows that men have forfeited the right to moral leadership and because it is women more than men who have retained the necessary passion and energy. None the less, because his view of women is so different from *ours*, his interpretation of character is often at odds with *our* reading of the scene [my italics] (1982:72).

The implied authority of 'our' and 'ours' in a gendered reading like this is astonishing and, in my opinion, endorses Straus's notion of a 'secret sharing' among male critics. The discrimination that Schwartz is making here is not just between narrator and reader; it is also between two sides of a gender issue. Schwartz has blurred the distinctions between the implied reader, other readers and himself as reader, and concluded that the view of women suggested by the narrator will be 'universally' resisted by all readers. By this, he implies that this readership is homogeneous. The point is that there is no one reading that suffices equally well for men and women. Mary Eagleton is of the view that "there is no non-theoretical space for women to inhabit" (1986:x) and I tend to agree with this conclusion. There is no neutral ground.

Roberts also acknowledges a 'secret sharing' of male assumptions in the texts; he terms it a "covert fellowship of fear and desire in relation to the feminine" (1993b:97). Roberts, too, is speaking here of male critics and male experience. It is problematic to do this without implying sexism on Conrad's part. And yet keeping a focus on the narrative and its structures enables clearer distinctions to be made. For this reason I find myself agreeing with Nadelhaft's subtle reading that defends Conrad's portrayal of women. She insists that narrator and author are separate, and views Conrad as an author who maintains some distance from his material; who assigns attributes to his narrators which many critics have misguidedly taken to represent the author himself. Lothe's focus on the significance of Conrad's narratees endorses this point. The statements made by a narrator like Marlow, frequently resound in the ironic space of the narratee who may or may not respond to them; the effect is still to set the narrator's discourse up for scrutiny by the reader, however. To assume that Conrad and the narrator are one person then, is to fail to discern the subtle workings of the narrative structure. A close reading of the texts, with a sensitivity to their polyvocality, will illustrate that they offer a number of views of women, not one of which could neatly be said to represent the author's. For example in *Chance* it is difficult to decide whose views on women are Conrad's - the frame narrator's or Marlow's? Claiming knowledge of an author's attitudes by reference to those of one of his characters seems to me simply reckless.

1.4 Woman as Icon.

Rita is presented as "unmoved...as if carved six thousand years ago...not the gross immobility of a Sphinx proposing roadside riddles but the fiercer immobility, almost sacred, of a fateful figure". Women characters who are depicted in this way are fixed at a point from which their enshrined identity can be viewed and understood. The association of the women with icons and statues serves to render them mute. The statue is a powerful image which defines the women characters as emblematic and lifeless. Miss Moorsom in 'A Planter of Malata' is described "as though she had been

a being made of ivory and precious metals changed into living tissue” (1978:21). The monument to which Rita is being contrasted above, the sphinx, is significant because of its association with timeless, frozen mystery, bearing with it all the unknowable conundrums of that which pre-dates modern civilisation yet endures, transfixed, in the imagination. It is these qualities of the iconic that I believe are crucial to conventional notions of femininity, and which can be seen in Conrad’s women characters.

The depiction of women as iconic arises primarily out of a mythology about women, which exists, I would argue, in masculine imagination. Hyland suggests that the idea of the ‘feminine’ is:

primarily a construct of patriarchal ideology, for its purpose [is] to locate women away from the active but corrupting world of work and commerce to protect the superior morality they [are] supposed to embody. A woman defined in this way could have no interest in ‘truth’ as it relates to confrontation with the reality of the outside world (1988:5).

He argues that notions of femininity which construe women as fragile and vulnerable and unable to exist outside ‘civilization’ constitute a self-protective view “that allows men to evade a genuine appraisal of feminine need, to escape back to the safe world of masculine friendship. It maintains the exclusion of women from the male homosocial group” (1988:5-6).

In similar vein, Roberts suggests that male notions of chivalry and misogyny are complementary. Transfixing a woman as iconic locates her in a feminine space whose activities are defined by men. Such marginalising mystifies the woman, leading not only to attitudes of chivalry and the belief that women are damsels in need of rescue by male knights, but also to homophobic obsession about the unfitness of women for a masculine world. This is shown by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Having declared that women should be ‘out of it altogether’ (meaning the male world of action and exploration), he enacts this belief by deliberately lying to the Intended. The Intended is perhaps the most idealised representation of ‘iconic’ woman that is to be found in Conrad’s works. She is depicted as imbued with the imagery of inner light, mystery

and purity. When Marlow meets her, it is as if he is dealing not with a woman at all but with some mythic spirit from a world of light. She “floats” towards him in the dusk “as though she would remember and mourn forever” (106). She has in full measure the qualities that Conrad’s women characters frequently embody - “a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering” (106). These attributes transform her for Marlow into a Madonna-like angel of light - “this fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow”, who is also here associated with death by her “ashy halo” (106). (This aspect will be taken up a little further on.)

The point that needs to be emphasised here is that relegating women to iconic status reinforces masculine patriarchal strength. Believing women to be ‘sacred’ and vulnerable provides a mandate for the delimitation of male space and female space. “We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, *lest ours gets worse*” (my italics) says Marlow (in *Heart of Darkness*, 69). Women are placed in a double bind by this representation. They are diminished because they are ‘out of it’, and are kept out because this is the only way to protect the male world from getting worse. The Intended’s assertion, “I have survived”, is rendered trivial, both by comparison with the horrific drama of survival that Marlow has just endured and which Kurtz has not survived, and by her representation as ethereal and unreal. Her triumphant cry that “no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best” (107) is a pitiful confirmation that “it is queer how out of touch women are”, that they do live in a world of their own which is “too beautiful altogether”. Significantly, though, as the room grows darker, the iconic force of her image intensifies: “only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the inextinguishable light of belief and love” (107). Is the light becoming brighter, or is the ‘ashy halo’ surrounding her head to be linked with the dead Kurtz? Perhaps it is the lie about Kurtz’s fidelity hanging over their heads which causes a transmutation of the icon that she appears to be into something less ‘sacred’ - the whiteness of her forehead resonating with the ball of ivory that is Kurtz’s head. Marlow describes Kurtz as “a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances” (105), and the reader is left with the impression that Kurtz and his Intended are two sides of the same ‘ivory’ object, she the light and he its shadow. Her final heart-stopping scream of “inconceivable

triumph and of unspeakable pain” (111) seals the lie so totally, that Marlow half expects “that the heavens would fall on [his] head” (111).

However, it is not necessary to blame Conrad for the inadequacy and diminution that arises from the use of iconicity in his representation of women. Reading the character of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* as separate from Conrad as Nadelhaft urges us to do enables us to see that the inadequacy of the women in the novel reflects the inadequacy of Marlow’s conception of women. In *Chance*, Marlow attempts a similarly iconic portrayal of Flora de Barral, but she resists this characterisation and seeks to tell her own story in terms of her strength not weakness - strength which Marlow initially fails to recognise.

1.5 Woman as ‘Chthonian’ Mystery.

The woman character, Rita, is ‘vested’ with a quality in addition to her humanity. She is portrayed as embodying the ‘almost sacred’ mystery of a ‘fateful figure seated at the very source of passions that have moved men from the dawn of ages’. Like a vestal of the temple, she seems to be privy to mysteries and truths, the arcane knowledge about human passions from which men are excluded, because it is she who is associated with the shrine, not they. She is ‘seated at the source of passions’ dating back to the ‘dawn of ages’, which suggests that she is an interface between temporality and infinity, rational man and passionate woman, nature and culture. Yet in depicting her as custodian of mysteries which men are denied, it is possible that the reverse is being implied; that she is excluded from knowledge of which men are the custodians. The issue of ‘secret sharing’ among men has already been introduced. Using Rita as a point of departure, I would like to refer briefly to critical debate which has pivoted around two key issues: ‘woman as chaotic nature’ and ‘woman as excluded from existential knowledge’.

It should be evident that women characters are frequently associated with earth and the ‘chthonian’ (Paglia 1993) or subterranean, unordered forces in it. I have chosen to

use Paglia's term as it denotes the force of nature more than nature itself. The penetration of nature and the subjugation of its 'force', semiotically constructed as rape, has been addressed by post-colonial theory in ways that associate colonisation with genderisation, and sees woman's subjugation in patriarchy as correlated with colonialism's imposition of Western culture on 'primitive' places. Woman is to colonised subject what patriarchy is to colonialism. The process of colonisation is posited as a subjugation of that which is frightening and potentially ungovernable to forces of order. Fincham suggests that "actions of the colonised threateningly proclaim the existence of an unread - and unreadable - world beyond the coloniser's capacity to decode" (1996:52). Woman's 'mystery' is therefore associated with the potentially destructive force of passions, which are in turn, in a text like *Heart of Darkness* for example, associated with nature. The association of colonisation with genderisation necessitates a further distinction, that between Western and non-Western women characters, because they are constructed differently. For example, while the African woman and the Intended in *Heart of Darkness* are united in their love of Kurtz by the single gesture of extending their arms as if they are reaching after a retreating figure, their characterisation is different in almost every other significant way. Similarly, women characters are paired and contrasted elsewhere, in Conrad's Malay novels, for example: Nina with her mother in *Almayer's Folly*, Joanna with Aissa in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and Edith Travers with Immada in *The Rescue*.

An interesting character who is presented as an interface between West and 'non-West' is Nina in *Almayer's Folly*. She represents for Almayer, through her Western blood and education, the possibility of his escape from the Pantai coast to the 'civilisation' of Europe, which is presented here and elsewhere as the locus of power. This power is embodied in the character of the trader, Lingard. *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Rescue* all have Lingard as a central figure, who carries the power of the colonial West, and whose presence signifies a world of possibilities beyond the colonised world of the East. The imagery associated with him in the narrative accords him the status of a demi-god:

Knowing nothing of Arcadia - he dreamed of Arcadian happiness for that little corner of the world which he loved to think all his own...he, Lingard - knew what

was good for them...He would make them happy whether or no, he said, and he meant it. His trade brought prosperity to the young state, and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for many years (201).

For Almayer, the passage to that power is through Nina. Nina is the child of a Western father and an Eastern mother, and thus appears to be a fusion of Western and Eastern woman. "During those ten years the child had changed into a woman, black-haired, olive skinned, tall, and beautiful, with great sad eyes, where the startled expression common to Malay womankind was modified by a thoughtful tinge inherited from her European ancestry" (27). All of Almayer's dreams of a happier life away from his hated wife are focused on his beautiful daughter, and the iconic image that he has of her provides him with the illusion that with her he can escape his unhappiness. "Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again" (7). The contrast that is drawn in the narrative is between Nina, who is beautiful, educated and kind, and her Malay mother who is wild, aggressive and malicious, and who was almost forced on Almayer by Lingard. Through the imagery used, it is clear that Nina's Western beauty accords her mythic status as a character greatly to be desired and admired, whereas Mrs Almayer has only the savage voice accorded her by the narrator, a voice which reinforces her presentation as colonised inferior. The narrator's representation of her when Nina is snatched away from her mother to be educated in Singapore, does not convey the power of the grief she so plainly feels. It is as if her race denies her the right to a more sympathetic and sensitive portrayal.

Nina is usually dressed in white clothing, which is frequently associated in Conrad's novels with purity and feminine mystique, which sets her apart visually from her surroundings. She is described as having an inscrutable expression "as if facing something invisible to all other eyes" (17). She is objectified in the narration by a motionlessness which fixes her for the scrutiny of the observer. These qualities mystify her character and her father is almost awe-struck by her: "he stood silent by his daughter's side looking at that enchanting vision" (19).

In the early stages of the story, Almayer sees Nina's beauty as arising from her Western roots. However, his view of her is shown to be an idealised one which seeks in due course to mask her Eastern heritage. After all, the lieutenant who dines with Almayer, thinks "she was very beautiful and imposing ... but after all a half-caste girl" (103). In spite of Almayer's dreams for the two of them, and his tendency to acknowledge Nina's 'white' blood only, she comes to manifest a more naive primitiveness than her father wishes her to have. She chooses to identify with her mother's culture and rejects the 'white' world of her father as scornful, unheroic and unromantic. In spite of his efforts to give her a 'superior' Westernised education and upbringing, she is attracted to the Malay prince Dain and rejects her father's urging to leave with him. Almayer views her European ancestry as her saving grace, and rejects her when she chooses to marry a Malay, believing her decision to be a rejection of himself and his dreams for both of them.

Once she meets Dain and decides to leave with him and stay with her own people, she seems to escape both Almayer's control of her life, and his construction of her identity. Her presentation in the narrative is transformed and she is described less in terms of mystery, and more in terms of an identification with nature and primitivism: "her soul, lapsing again into the savage mood, which the genius of civilization working by the hand of Mrs Vinck could never destroy" (57). Without the mystique of 'Europeanness' through which Almayer sees her, she becomes to him merely a 'half-caste woman' (149), identified with her 'inferior' Malay heritage, and not with his 'superior' European blood.

Nina had been for Almayer what Jung terms a '*femme inspiratrice*' - "his faith in her had been the foundation of his hopes, the motive of his courage, of his determination to live and struggle, and to be victorious for her sake" (155). Without her the despair of his life consumes him as his dream of an idyllic future with her comes to nothing. However, it is not only Nina that he believes himself to be losing. It is identification with a superior culture, a dominating economic power to which he wishes to lay claim, using Nina as the commodity of exchange in his proposed strategy. His

inspiration is removed and he can no longer live in the illusion that he will become wealthy and happy. Nina has been the controlling part of this mythology and he cannot understand why she resists his definition of her. She cries: "You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions" (145). Almayer's conception of his daughter is based on race alone. While she is an extension of his European self and therefore the world that he aspires to, she can be mythologised as the representation of his dreams away from the wife and home that he despises. He does not see Nina as separate from himself, but as a part of himself, a part of his dream. Without her, illusion leaves his life. It is not so much the departure of his daughter as the departure of his myth that finally incapacitates him.

Krenn, in *Conrad's Lingard Trilogy: Empire, Race and Women in the Malay Novels* argues that Conrad has created Malay women characters who are credited with primitive vitality, intuitive knowledge and sincerity, while his white women in the same novels are insincere. I would argue that the Malay women, like African women, are more closely associated in the texts with nature, and that the traits that might be conventionally associated with nature in colonial thinking are those Krenn specifies. In a sense, Krenn's attempt to justify Conrad's treatment of non-Western women leads her to a similar kind of racial stereotyping to that for which others have criticised Conrad.

Women characters in Conrad's works are frequently attributed with inscrutable mystery as well. Critics like Straus (1987), Hyland (1988), Navarette (1993) Fothergill (1996) Fraser (1996) and Mongia (1996), have suggested either directly or indirectly that woman's mystery can be seen as an index of male fear/awe of woman/nature, and of male need to define masculinity in terms of a male construction of female identity. Mongia, for example, writes, "The pervasiveness of figurings of the colonial space as feminine is clear" (1996:121). She cites Helen Carr, who writes: "in the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as women. Both are seen as part of nature, not culture, and with the same ambivalence" (in Mongia 1996:121). Paglia and Mongia are of the same view as Carr. They suggest that connections between women and nature in Western

thought have a long history, and have contributed to the inscription of women in culture as 'Other'. Mongia states:

Against this association is the link between culture and the masculine, the male power to order and control versus the female region of chaos and excess waiting to be mastered (1996:121-2)

The association of the woman with mystery from 'the dawn of ages' might seem to some readers, male perhaps, to be complimentary and to offer an empowered portrayal of women, but, as these critics point out, such depiction is based more on suspicion than trust. As I have already suggested, portraying woman as mysterious also fixes her in a state of 'being' where she does not need a voice to articulate her identity because it has already been ascribed to her. Male ascriptions of female identity facilitate the mythologising of women in terms of male imagination. As is the case with Freya, women are sometimes presented as sexually threatening; in other texts, they are also portrayed as devoted, capable of belief, and constant. The basis for these portrayals, I suggest, is their definition by masculine experience.

Citing Marlow's use of knowledge in *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*, Mongia suggests that knowledge is linked to power - that "the two are conjoined in [the] scientific, cultured, and reasonable male figures" (1996:123). In 'Amy Foster' one could find both an exception to and an example of this idea in the characters of Yanko and Kennedy respectively. Yanko's lack of knowledge of the local language is disempowering; however, because he is a male character he has right of access to the male domains of power and knowledge. The locus of power in the story is Dr Kennedy who interprets the characters and events according to ways which serve his interests, and with considerable sympathy for Yanko.

In colonialism, which is regarded by a number of critics as a model for patriarchy, all knowledge is useful because it translates into power over the ruled. As indicated earlier, Straus argues that such knowledge implies a 'secret sharing'. Citing *Heart of Darkness* as her example, she suggests that, in Conrad's fiction, truth is the possession of men and is hidden from women. Her criticism is not confined to male

characters and male narrators in the texts, but is extended to male critics as well. She argues that female access to *Heart of Darkness* is problematic, as the text is not only concerned with the kind of mainstream male experience associated with Western high art, but invites identification with the heroic consciousness represented in it. A woman's reading, she suggests, could be rendered uneasy by this masculinist tradition and thrown off its responsive centre.

Although the woman reader may attempt to take as much pleasure in Conrad's art as does the male reader, this pleasure is aborted by the fact that Marlow represents a world distinctly split into male and female realms - the first harboring the possibility of 'truth' and the second dedicated to the maintenance of delusion. 'Truth', then, is directed at and intended for men only (1987:124).

I agree with Straus's reading. Yet I would take issue with her use of the verb 'exclude' in the title of her polemical article, as this implies an act of authorial intent which I find unlikely. Roberts has set out the terms of this argument as a paradigm within the narrative. In *'What Else Could I Tell Him': Confessing to Men and Lying to Women in Conrad's Fiction*, he picks up Straus's claims that women are excluded from knowledge. He speaks of the fact that:

epistemology is inflected by gender in Conrad's work; [hence] the ways in which knowledge, ideas about knowledge and symbols of truth are differentially distributed among male and female characters (and implied readers) and the ways in which such knowledge, ideas and symbols are themselves used to set up, construct, reinforce or modify gender differences (1993c:8).

Roberts examines Conrad's position as a literary Modernist, and suggests that woman's experience of Modernity is significantly different from man's. One of the main reasons for this, he believes, is the "availability to men of certain sorts of experience and knowledge, and the exclusion of women from these" (1993c:9). He postulates a paradigm of symbolic structure of which the key terms are *women*, *men*, *knowledge* or *truth*, *confession* or *revelation*, *lying* or *concealment*. He sees this symbolic structure as corresponding with an ideological structure of Conrad's time. I have found his model very useful in shaping my own view of gendered power relationships within the narratives. His paradigm has provided a useful framework within which to structure my reading of the polyvocality of texts, and the ways in which discourses compete with one another for authority. According to this paradigm, knowledge, (both factual and existential) is sought, shared, competed for

and circulated among groups of men, including the implied author, narrators, listeners and male readers. This circulation, he suggests, is facilitated by the exclusion of women from such knowledge, combined with the male tendency to objectify women within it.

Thus, in *Heart of Darkness*, in Roberts' reading, Marlow identifies the Intended symbolically with a truth that he cannot share with her: he must lie to her. Knowledge, in the male world of the novel, is a valued commodity and women are excluded from the space that knowledge occupies. Applying the same logic, he argues that if women are symbolically identified with truth, the possibility of women's gaining possession of the truth exists as a focus of fear and desire. Male desire, he suggests, is seen as a bonding device within a matrix of inter-male relationships involving sharing and appropriation of power. In this system, women function as objects of exchange and shared desire, and are used by male structures to maintain sexual barriers. They represent the object of knowledge, not the subject-position of power; they are that which is exchanged or controlled.

In conclusion, my reading of the women in Conrad's works will suggest that women are associated with mystery not knowledge, nature not culture and secrecy not openness. In this Chapter I have shown that the underlying suspicion and awe that leads to the mythologising of women renders woman as object in the relationship of knowledge and power. In the Chapters to come I shall explore these notions. The women characters are frequently associated with that which is stable because it is fixed, and with notions of courage, faith and fidelity. These notions constitute a 'saving illusion' for male characters whose lives are threatened with collapse because of their incapacitating despair. As objects, the women characters are represented in a state of ontological arrest; they do not participate in an exchange of knowledge as they are symbolised by it. Ultimately, woman's discourse must either comply with or resist the way that she is defined by male characters. I also aim to show that the woman's representation as myth functions as a competing discourse with that of the authoritative male discourse.

Before embarking on my case studies, however, in the Chapter that follows I wish to offer further explication of the hypothesis that my thesis seeks to test, an explanation of the critical instruments to be used, and an elaboration of the key concepts that underpin my arguments.

CHAPTER TWO: *Women, Myth and Discourse.*

1. The Hypothesis to be Tested.

In the above analysis, I have attempted to mark out the areas in which my arguments will be developed. The central focus of my thesis is the discourse of the women characters and the way in which their discourse serves to embody mystery, idealism, hope and belief. This specific focus on the women characters is, by implication, a kind of 'counter focus' to that of other critics who have in various ways dealt with the issue of despair, both in Conrad himself and in his male characters. My reading suggests that the women characters in Conrad's novels represent the possibilities of hope, and the renunciation of despair. While I have already stated that my arguments are based on my reading of the texts and not on 'knowledge' of Conrad's authorial intentions, I believe it would be remiss not to cite Conrad's own utterances on the subjects of 'belief' and 'despair'. In the following extracts, I aim to indicate key issues that are dealt with in the narratives, and on which my thesis is based.

In the Author's Note to *Within the Tides*, Conrad writes of a

romantic feeling of reality ... in me an inborn faculty ... which must have been very genuine since it has sustained me through all the dangers of disillusion (1978:9).

On another occasion Conrad writes:

What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well - but as soon as you know of your slavery, the pain, the anger, the strife - the tragedy begins (in Baines 1960:529-530).

In *A Personal Record*, he argues that:

the ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even of reason itself seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation

cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view - ... never for despair!
(92).

And on the subject of thought, he concluded that the contemplative life is:

to drag the ball and chain of one's selfhood right to the end. That's what one pays for the devilish and divine privilege of Thought; - so that in his life it is only the Elect who are convicts - the glorious company of those who understand and groan, but who tread the earth amidst a multitude of phantoms with the gestures of maniacs [and] the grimaces of idiots (in Watt 1980:29-30).

The extracts above suggest polarities of meaning. On the one hand there is the 'romantic' feeling of reality, which sustains Conrad through the dangers of disillusion, and on the other there is the notion that thought and knowledge commit the individual to an awareness of tragedy from which there is no escape, except through illusion. The Elect suffer from their awareness of tragedy, while the rest of humanity is cocooned in illusions which protect it from tragic knowledge.

A number of critics have engaged in extensive commentary on the representation of existential despair in Conrad's male protagonists. It is known that Conrad was significantly influenced by the writings of Schopenhauer, and this influence is manifest in his novels through the nihilism of male protagonists like Axel Heyst. Hillis Miller (1966), Thorburn (1974) Cox (1974) and Watt (1980), are among critics who have regarded the work of Conrad, (like that of Joyce, Yeats, Pound and Thomas), as signifying a change in literary approach from what they see as the Romanticism of the nineteenth century. Watt speaks of Conrad's "sensitiveness to the fundamental social and intellectual conflicts of his period...his basic intellectual assumptions were very similar to those of the most original and influential thinkers of the last decades of the nineteenth century" (1980:ix-x). No one term seems to define these writers other than as 'Modern'. What seems to characterise much of this writing, as I see it, is an experience of nihilism which questions what the above critics (especially Thorburn) regard as a Romantic perception of God as visible in the objective world. Later in the nineteenth century, this view of God, according to the critics mentioned, was increasingly seen as unacceptable, and was replaced by a view which synthesised the subjective and objective worlds, and by a doubt that God

existed at all. Subsequently, a solipsistic view could be seen to develop in terms of which the outside world is seen as the object of the subject's thinking power; things 'exist' only because they are thought of as existing. Conrad expressed such views to Cunninghame-Graham:

There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and fleeting appearance (1970:70-1).

This view is especially significant in Axel Heyst's conception of the world in *Victory*.

More recently, Bohlmann (1991) has set out to define Conrad's 'Modernism', arguing that Conrad's work offers evidence of a powerful existentialism which foreshadows and resonates with the work of existential philosophers including Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Marcel, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. Bohlmann reads existential texts as centring on the view that "every individual must bear ultimate responsibility for his free actions amid an indifferent world into which chance has thrown him without any absolute guide to right conduct" (1991:xiii). In his view, Conrad approaches the tensions between 'limited' man, and the indifferent universe he inhabits, and focuses on man as subjective interpreter of his world. The feelings that he sees Conrad foregrounding are alienation, despair, nausea and anxiety, which are experienced in man's quest for selfhood. Arturo Follico in *Art and Existentialism* suggests that similar feelings articulate the sense in which 'Modern' man/woman can be seen. He speaks of "the nihilism, the vacuity, the despair, and deathly mechanization and depersonification of the existing man of our time" (1962:130). Conrad's own observations echo these conclusions, and yet insist on the sustaining of an 'undying hope'. He repeatedly shows, through such characters as Nostromo, Heyst, Jim, Razumov, Kurtz and many others, that when illusions fail, a kind of moral collapse occurs. In his personal writings, Conrad postulates that the universe is absurd and cruel, that the aim of creation is not ethical, but he also frequently articulates his belief that despair must be resisted, and that hope and belief are the ethical responses to the uncertainties of 'Modern' life. In my reading, then, his statements (quoted earlier) about the absurdity of the universe appear to contradict his beliefs about the necessity for hope.

The answer to this apparent contradiction lies, I believe, in a balanced reading of Conrad's men and women characters, in whom the irreconcilable notions of despair and hope are reconciled. Readings of Conrad which deal with his Modernism and existentialism tend to focus almost exclusively on the experiences of male protagonists. While it is true that male protagonists articulate despair, it is significant that women characters are frequently associated with undying hope and belief, and it is the possibility of hope and courage, articulated by the women's discourse, that resists masculine despair. A woman character's capacity for hope and belief is, in my view, heroic. For reasons which I shall offer a little further on, I choose to label a woman character who sustains these qualities, a "Hera".

One reading which does specifically confront the issue of gender and Modernism is that of Roberts who states, "If we see one reason for Conrad's importance as being his representation of the epistemological position of the subject of modernity, then the gendering of that subject may crucially determine the form of modernity which he represents" (1993c:9). I agree with this, and my focus in this thesis is on the fact that the women characters have a separate discourse from the male characters, and that the women's discourse does not articulate Modern despair. My reading is a 'counter-reading' in that it foregrounds the role of women characters in these texts, and the way they are constructed in Modernist ontologies. It is also a feminist one, which suggests that the women characters' function in the novels is to demarcate male space and experience, and to exist in the narrative as part of a paradigm of polarity, in which male experience is counterpointed with female illusion. I would hypothesize that the women characters are mythologised in the construction of the narrative in ways which run counter to male negativity, fear or despair, and that this representation constitutes a competing woman's discourse in the novels. I see this polarity as the manifestation of Conrad's own view of existential duality: the experience of despair countered by the ethical obligation to sustain hope. In *Notes on Life and Letters* he writes:

It must not be supposed that I claim for the artist in fiction the freedom of moral Nihilism. I would require from him many acts of faith of which the first would be

the cherishing of an undying hope; and hope, it will not be contested, implies all the piety of effort and renunciation (1970:8).

I shall argue that the women characters, as they are represented in the novels, are constituted in terms of a mythology that is characterised in varying degrees by idealism, mystery, silence, nature, love, hope, and fidelity. They do not form part of the 'Elect', for whom 'moral Nihilism' is a possibility. Mythologising women, locating them outside the terrain on which the struggle for selfhood is played out, provides the texts with the dualities, the 'antagonisms', which Conrad attempts to reconcile.

It seems clear to me that a reading of Conrad's texts is incomplete without a full engagement with the gender dialectic. In his introduction to the issue of *The Conradian* (1993) dedicated to gender issues, Roberts explains that more recent Conradian criticism is seeking to resist the process of inclusion and exclusion, domination and subordination. Using the example of a criticism of *Lord Jim* which makes no mention of Jewel, he says:

we do need to tell, not only what (we think) Jewel is to Jim, but also what she is to us, what Jim is to us, what Conrad is to us ... attention to ideas of gender and gendered structures and images within Conrad's work brings the position of the reader and the manner of reading into question. We are led to reflect on the critical discourse surrounding Conrad's texts The political force of a discussion of gender in literature is as much directed towards readers as towards the writer (1993a:vii).

I believe that there is a sharp contrast in the texts between the women characters, on the one hand, and male protagonists engaged in ontological dilemmas of a profound order, on the other. The women characters are not shown to examine their reality in the same way that the male characters do. Conrad's women are associated with mystery not knowledge, nature not culture, and secrecy not openness. I shall contend that the women's discourse seeks to resist the way that it is defined by male characters. I acknowledge also that there are instances where the women's discourse complies with masculine definitions; in *Victory* for example, Lena invites Heyst to define her. I aim to show that the representation of women as myth functions as a

discourse which competes with that of the authoritative male discourse. Clear gender lines are drawn that need to be engaged with.

In my review of aspects of Conrad's women characters, I argued that Conrad's women characters are excluded from existential knowledge. I suggested that the women characters are frequently presented in a state of being, rather than of becoming, and that their identity is defined by male characters and narrators. My observations lead me to infer that the discourse of the women characters, which I read as centrifugal and resistant, articulates the belief, courage and hope which Conrad associates with sustaining illusion. I shall argue that the presentation of women characters in male narration embodies these positive qualities and is based on mythologies of women which are complex and ambivalent. The disillusionment, despair and tragedy that Conrad asserts to be the fruit of Thought is articulated in male discourse, which is centripetal and authoritative. I believe that the women characters in the novels fulfil the function of sustaining illusions in the face of disillusion and help create a belief in 'a meaningful place for man in a world oblivious to his presence'. These are the key issues with which my arguments will engage.

My approach to the issue of women's discourse will be made through a model or schema. As I have mentioned earlier, Roberts' ontological paradigm has been extremely useful to me in helping me construct my own. My approach is a bipartite one which takes the discourse of the women characters as centrifugal, and the discourse of the male characters as centripetal. This model of investigation will be used to test the hypothesis that the woman's voice is part of an ontological paradigm, and therefore that her discourse is loaded to fulfil that function. The women's discourse in Conrad's novels articulates a world view which is antagonistic to that of the male protagonists, and supplies romantic hope as an alternative to Modern despair. Her discourse is part of the elaborate myth which counters existential angst. This is, broadly speaking, the model according to which the thesis will proceed. My

model is by no means rigid; I recognise the need for flexibility as I proceed, and I acknowledge that some texts might resist this model.

At this point, perhaps, the notion of 'discourse' needs further explanation.

2. Gender, Discourse and the Role of the Reader.

2.1. 'Heteroglossia' - Polyvocality and Discourse.

The term 'discourse' has been used loosely to describe a 'voice' in a narrative. Genette (1980) suggests that a narrative is an oral or written 'discourse' which undertakes to tell of an event or series of events. An analysis of narrative discourse, in his view, implies a study of relationships. Bakhtin, upon whose theories my own notion of discourse is based, defines discourse simply as 'utterance'. The common defining notion of the term appears then to be that which is 'told' or 'spoken'. In *The Dialogical Imagination*, Bakhtin writes that "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (1981:262). Each of these voices can be termed a 'discourse'. He states that the linguistic significance of an utterance is to be understood against a background of language, while the meaning produced by the reader is to be understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme. He writes:

the word exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property; many words stubbornly resist ... they cannot be assimilated into his/her context, and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. (1981:294).

The extent to which words resist appropriation because they fall out of context, is an indication of the difference of viewpoint of various speakers and readers, and one of the reasons for this difference must often be gender. Saussure used the word "langue" to denote an idealised system of language, the "blueprint" in the collective brain. In the terms suggested by Bakhtin, the "langue" of the novels should be seen as a multivocal construction, not as a single discourse, articulating one point of view, such

as “the author’s”. For Bakhtin, views, intentions, conceptual frameworks, historical imperatives, all articulated through language, comprise the discourse matrix, or the “langue” of the novel.

Since language is permeated with the accents and intentions of others, there are many voices or “heteroglossia” in any text, not one authoritative dialect or “monoglossia”. Thus a male discourse in Conrad’s novels, although central or dominant, is only one of the discourses, and a woman’s is another. A central, dominant discourse, in Bakhtin’s terminology, is called “centripetal”, referring to “linguistic unification and centralisation” (1981:270-1). The discourse of the non-central “Other” is termed ‘centrifugal’. Bakhtin’s theory of language argues that at the heart of language is a struggle between centrifugal forces of language, which resist and seek to separate, and centripetal forces of language which seek to cohere. He believes that the most complete and profound reflection of these forces at work is the novel. He suggests that this dichotomy is not a simple binarity (1981:269) it is a fragile phenomenon, changing with the moment. Bakhtin states:

Unitary language constitutes ... an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is not something given [*dan*] but is always in essence posited [*zadan*] - at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding (1981:270).

The function of centripetal discourse is to centralise and unify, setting itself up as the True Word. And yet:

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified ... into languages that are socio-ideological Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear ... the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well (1981:271-72).

Just as no discourse is neutral, no reading is neutral either. The interpretive communities receiving the text are by no means unanimous in their reading of meaning in the text. This concept of polyvocality and resistant discourses is useful

because as a model of reading, it foregrounds more than one voice, encourages diverse readings, and highlights dialogical structures in texts, or as Carroll (1983) calls them, narratives and counter-narratives. In the novels I have chosen to study, and the discourses I have chosen to foreground, the centripetal discourse articulates despair and disillusionment, while the centrifugal discourse articulates hope and faith in an ordered universe. The centrifugal discourse thus arises from a mythology concerning women that counters existential angst.

Bauer and McKinstry have adapted Bakhtin's theory of dialogics, which posits the social nature of utterances, to a feminist critical practice. Such a feminist dialogic approach can enable the reader or critic to pinpoint and foreground the moment at which a gendered, authoritative voice is resisted by other voices. They argue that by highlighting these moments of conflict, one can critique and disrupt oppressive ideologies. In their introduction to *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*, Bauer and McKinstry write:

The conflict of discourses in a novel, the inevitable polyvocality of a genre that reproduces language as a web of communications between narrator and narratee, speaker and listener, character and character, and even (implied) author and (implied) reader, does reveal the dominant discourse At the same time, however, the novel's polyvocality can indicate potential resistances to oppressive conventions in interpretive or discourse communities - such as an individual character's response to that social dictate, or a disapproving tone (1991:4)

The object of a feminist dialogics is not to produce a feminist monologic voice as a dominant voice to replace the patriarchal voice, but to create a dialogics that recognises the indivisibility of power and discourse, the ideological dominance of monologism, and the inherent multivocality of texts. My focus will be the discourse of the women characters as a separate discourse from that of the men characters, but also as part of a dialogue which qualifies a homocentric view of Conrad's work. Examining the discourse of the women characters as different from that of the male characters, but nevertheless essential to theme and meaning, enables a fuller understanding of the texts. Contrasts and tensions built up in the text through a dialogical relationship between the male and female principles enable a more complete view of the issues that the novels raise.

However, having established my aim of examining the woman's discourse, it must be said that there are significant problems in looking at a woman's discourse in writing by a man. This is an area of concerned debate for feminist criticism. For example Shoshana Felman (1986) posits the notion of the "Critical Phallacy" and looks at the question of the woman's "voice" both in texts and criticism. She asks: "if 'the woman' is precisely the Other of any conceivable Western theoretical locus of speech, how can the woman as such be speaking in this book? Who is speaking here, and who is asserting the otherness of the woman?" (1986:36). She raises the question of whether the woman's discourse in the novel is a voice speaking 'as' a woman or 'in place of' a woman. Is the voice speaking the language of women or the silence of women? Maggie Humm puts it another way:

It is tempting not to ask the obvious questions. If 'the woman' is absent in male discourse, how can she speak in books? Who is speaking, and who is asserting the Otherness of woman? If woman's silence and absence constitutes her feminism, how can she ever speak in the name of women? (1986:69).

The problems that I have with regard to these issues are precisely those mentioned by Felman and Humm; I also find problematic the underlying assumption in much feminist criticism that the authenticity of women cannot be accurately represented in male writing. For me it comes back to the question of narrative structure and the role of the reader in the reading process. If the reader takes the text and not the writer as the starting point, the reading that results is informed by the many features that the reader brings to that process. The reader's own 'reading' of the writer's background and socio-historical location and of the writer's conformity or resistance to current ideologies at the time of writing, blended with the reader's own background and standpoint on critical debate, etcetera, all combine to produce a particular reading of a particular text at a particular time. My reading will focus on sexual difference, and the way that sexual difference intervenes in the act of reading. A useful example of a reading in which sexual difference has intervened is Andrew Roberts's reading of *Chance*. The sensitivity he articulates as a male reader to issues of gender in the novel is reinforcement for me that issues of gender are perhaps better dealt with as they apply to reading text than to writing it. The reading and writing of texts is

automatically gendered and so attempts to recuperate the 'authentic' woman from masculine writing seems to me to beg the question.

One of my motives in pursuing this study is my involvement in the field of tertiary education, and hence my interest in the way texts are taught and the way they are read by pupils and students. As Achebe has pointed out, Conrad's works are part of 'permanent' literature, and as such carry considerable authority. His novels are often set at high school level, and for the feminist critic, interested in the reading process, the didactic effects of prescribing texts in which men and women appear to be differentiated into dominant and subordinate need to be carefully assessed. My concern is thus a moral one. With the growth of awareness of changing perspectives, it is crucial to examine critically areas that carry an implicit "stamp of approval", such as the school textbook. Much mainstream Conradian criticism has dealt with women characters as idealised and peripheral and it is this view which has largely been perpetuated in schools in this country. I am interested in the ways in which learners produce meaning in texts that have been prescribed for them by the same authorities that set and mark the public examination. In my experience, the view of Conrad that has generally found favour, as reflected in the type of questions set in the public examination, is the view that foregrounds the male protagonist's experience as reflecting all Modern, human experience. That the woman character does not share this experience in the text is not questioned. I believe it is important to contribute to a wider debate at school level too, and to challenge prescribed texts in new ways, so as to question enshrined perceptions about race, gender, and other issues.

2.2 The Role of the Reader.

In *The Role of the Reader* (1979), Umberto Eco states that:

an 'open' [freely interpreted] text cannot be described as a communicative strategy if the role of its addressee (the reader, in the case of verbal texts) has not been envisaged at the moment of its generation qua text ... its foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process (1979:3).

I would agree with this argument, as what is finally in question is the interpretive process, the position of the reader and the manner of reading of the texts.

In 1966 in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Susan Sontag attacked traditional criticism which, in her view, simply erected another meaning on top of the literal one. She argued that in fact the process of interpretation did not take place as a timeless activity, but was firmly rooted in the historical context of the critic. Arguments like hers drew attention to the issue of the subjectivity and/or objectivity of the reading process. Counter arguments, particularly from structuralists and, later, post-structuralists, were offered which suggested that, if interpretation was always subjectivity-driven, it could become meaningless. While their viewpoint has some validity, both structuralist and post-structuralist readings are inclined to decentre the subject, the 'I', and promote a retreat into the code of language. Meaning, then, is understood only in terms of the play of difference within syntagmatically, linguistically constituted systems of signs, organised in the flow or context of language use. Krieger points out that "what tends to occur in structuralist and post-structuralist traditions of thought is the disappearance of the referent altogether" (1987:164). The 'I' is a linguistic 'shifter', a linguistic term like any other, which gains meaning by use. Thus he argues for a subjectivity in reading in which the 'I' and 'me' gain significance from the act of reading. The prime vehicle of meaning is the reader, the conceptual centre, not the linguistic code embodied by the text. I do not regard the text as autonomous. Different readerships read in different ways. It behoves educators to understand this, as there is a measure of social responsibility in the recognition that school pupils can be vulnerable to the dictates of their teachers, and care needs to be taken in the way meaning in texts is understood and taught.

In a similar vein, Iser in *The Act of Reading* (1978) sees the role of the reader as that of interpreter, and focuses on the interaction between text and reader, describing the act of reading as a series of elementary activities which are activated by the text. He rejects completely the notion that there is one 'meaning' to be correctly unearthed by the interpreter/reader and suggests that meaning can never be 'detachable'; it is only 'meaning' when it is grasped within a frame of reference. Iser says of the reader that:

the activity stimulated in him [sic] will link him to the text and induce him to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text. As text and reader thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies, and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced (1978:9-10).

Eco endorses this idea, stating that the reader is “an active principal of interpretation ... a part of the picture of the generative process of the text” (1979:4). It is the concept of reading as composition, as meaning produced within a particular context, suggested by Sontag, Eco, Iser and Krieger, that I shall be using in my analysis. With Straus and other critics, I believe that a reading of Conrad’s works need not involve a ‘secret sharing’ or an identifying of author and character as ‘one of us’, but rather a process located within a particular context and informed by a number of factors which are brought to the reading situation, not least of which is gender. However, reading is clearly not only gendered but is, among other things, racialised as well. From different viewpoints, Conrad’s oeuvre provides a strong basis for critiques of gender and race, on which readings can choose to draw. It is the discourse, both critical and textual, regarding gender that will be my focus.

At this point, I would like to offer definitions of terms that I shall be using in my analysis.

3. Narrative and Character.

In my approach to the analysis of narrative structures, I have chosen to use the framework suggested by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1994). According to this framework, the terms ‘story’, ‘text’ and ‘narration’ denote different things. ‘Story’ refers to narrated events reconstructed in chronological order, ‘text’ to what the reader reads, and ‘narration’ to the process of production of the narrative. The ‘narrator’ is regarded as the speaker in the text. The act of narration implies the existence of a fictional or real narratee. The

perspective or prism of the narrative agent through which the narrative content is filtered, is called the 'focaliser'.

Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between focalisers and narrators. A focaliser is a character through whose 'point of view' the story is mediated. She prefers the term 'focalisation' over 'point of view' because 'point of view' sounds only visual, whereas 'focalisation' implies cognitive, ideological and emotive orientation as well. The focaliser 'sees', and the narrator 'speaks'. Both of these characters are what Rimmon-Kenan calls "narrative agents". A narrative agent is capable of both seeing and speaking and sometimes simultaneously. A narrator may also undertake to tell what another character sees or has seen. Such a narrator of events is called the 'frame narrator', in that his or her narration is the frame within which another narration takes place. Thus in *Chance* there is a frame narrator in the novel who does, from time to time, respond to Marlow's story, even though the principal focaliser of events is Marlow. The frame narrator's act of narrating the story of another character is itself a focalising of these events. Lothe in *Conrad's Narrative Method* (1989) notes that in Conrad's novels the narrator is often, though not always, an experienced, older male figure, while the focaliser is less experienced. No act of narration is truly 'impartial'. In *Chance*, for example, the different focalisations and narrations need to be viewed separately as each provides a different perspective on a central issue, namely 'women'. It is thus inaccurate to read the narrative voice as necessarily Conrad's, as some critics do, and to infer that attitudes expressed in that novel on the subject of women are necessarily his.

Seymour Chatman (1978) suggests that there are six participants in the narrative transaction: real author, implied author, narrator, narratee, implied reader and real reader. This model is endorsed by Lothe and appears to me the most useful, as it effectively demarcates the functions of the different narrative agents in the narrative. Even though not all of Chatman's terms will be used, his kind of structural approach is extremely useful for my purposes; for example, in *Nostromo*, cognisance is taken of the role of the implied reader in the narration. In *Chance*, different narrative voices are looked at, and the mediating effect of the frame narrator (not Chatman's term) as

narratee of Marlow's narration is examined. It is useful to recognise, as Lothe does, that the Conradian narratee, though often addressed, is frequently quiet, as if preserving a meditative silence. The presence of such a listener in the narrative can serve to render ironic the utterance of a speaker.

Having set out the terms of the hypothesis, and having defined the different agents in the narrative process, I shall elaborate on the notion of 'character'. According to Rimmon-Kenan, "character is a construct, put together by the reader from various indications dispersed throughout the text" (1994:36). She discusses characters in terms of their perceived 'fullness', citing Forster's (1927) earlier model of 'flat' and 'round' characters as useful in distinguishing different types. She also refers to Ewen's model (1971 and 1980) which suggests a classification of characters as points along a continuum rather than according to categories. Ewen suggests three (parallel) axes to this continuum: complexity, development and penetration into the 'inner life'. On the basis of this, Rimmon-Kenan asserts that "allegorical figures, caricatures, and types are not only simple but also static, and can thus also occupy ... one pole on the axis of development" (1994:41). These characters need not be limited to one trait but are often minor, serving some function beyond themselves. "At the opposite pole", she says, "there are fully developed characters" (1994:41).

Conrad's characters are considered problematic by some critics. According to Baines (1960) and to Brodie (1984), his characters are somewhat inaccessible. Baines comments that Conrad is "not primarily interested in character, and certainly never for its own sake ... the significance of the characters lies in what they reveal within the context of a certain predicament, not in what they are" (1960:439). According to Brodie "rarely do we come to know his characters fully; rather we gain a heightened awareness of the singular controlling feature of their personalities" (1984:142). Taking a purely 'mechanical' view of Rimmon-Kenan's character model, character is one construct in the story, arrived at largely by assembling character indicators along the way and inferring traits from them. And yet they come alive in the reading - it is the reading that brings the characters into 'being' - and in that sense we come to 'know' them. Thus I feel that Baines is not fully acknowledging that character is

embedded in the story, and ‘being’ a character and ‘revealing’ things as a character can be seen as the same thing. I also find Brodie’s suggestion problematic as gaining a “heightened awareness of the singular controlling feature of their personalities”, or in Rimmon-Kenan’s terms reading their ‘indirect presentation’, can surely be said to be part of the process of getting ‘to know [Conrad’s] characters fully’. Both writers seem to me to be implying that characters have a life outside of the text that could be known more fully if only the author had written more about them. This view seems to be based on a kind of neo-Platonism which assumes that there is an ideal world which the text represents. A reading that takes characterisation beyond the bounds of the printed word and acknowledges doing that is perhaps less problematic than a reading that finds textual characterisation limited. Finally, it is with the printed words and the spaces in between that the reader has to do.

Conrad’s women characters are my primary focus. My reading will show that Conrad’s women are represented as “being” rather than “becoming”, and “being” in a state of indefinite ontological arrest. As I have mentioned, my intention is not to interrogate sexism on the part of Conrad. As Roberts says:

I do not believe that it is very illuminating to isolate an author’s apparent attitudes and beliefs from their socio-historical context and to judge him or her by the extent to which they conform to our own (1993a:vii).

Ultimately, it is with the text not the author that the reader should engage. Conrad’s texts have also been problematic for some critics because of his narrative style with its different narrators, chronological shifts and modulations of tone. Conrad’s writing did not receive great acclaim until the publication of *Chance*, a novel which has been largely ignored by male critics, yet is receiving increasing attention from women critics who are interested in its treatment of feminism. As I will go on to show, the novel has foregrounded women characters and feminism, and the extent to which women are mythologised through male discourse. Characterisation through mythologisation is a concept which broadly underpins my reading of Conrad’s women characters. Thus it seems apposite to elaborate at this point on what has informed my notion of a *mythology*.

4. Myth and Mythologies.

The concept of myth has come to have varied meanings, nearly all of which have some bearing on the way Conrad's women characters are, in my view, 'mythologised'. Barbour, in *Myths, Models and Paradigms* (1974), suggests that, in 'primitive' culture, myth

- i) is a dramatic narrative of a primordial event,
- ii) guarantees the meaning of life,
- iii) portrays a saving power,
- iv) provides a paradigm for action
- v) is enacted in ritual.

I hope to show that this broad schema is a useful means of looking at Conrad's women characters, whom it is possible to see as in some ways 'guaranteeing' the meaning of life by portraying a kind of saving power for the male protagonists. Rita in *The Arrow of Gold* is an extreme example, and Lena in *Victory* is a practical case in point. They also provide a paradigm for action; for example, Decoud's sense of Antonia functions this way.

A number of myth critics, whose ideas I shall briefly review here, have commented on the relationship between myth and its applications in literature and elsewhere. Vickery, in *Myth and Literature* (1966), speaks of myth's functioning to "create a meaningful place for man in a world oblivious to his presence" (1966:ix). This function is served by Conrad's women characters. In *Myth and Literature*, Righter speaks of myth as "one of the perennial fantasies that return to mock mankind with the promise of an earthly happiness eternally unfulfilled" (1975:2). This definition correlates well with Rita's representation as mysterious and being at the 'source of all passions'.

Johan Degenaar in 'Understanding Myth as Understanding' (1983), gives a definition of primeval myth as simply an explanation of phenomena. This pre-scientific myth he sees as facilitating understanding. While myth appears to be changing in its function in highly sophisticated societies, he argues that its essential purpose of facilitating understanding is unchanged. Degenaar regards myth in literature as "the schema of the imagination which succeeds in highlighting in a metaphorical way central issues about the meaning of life" (1983:63). This view sees myth as an ordering principle, which also therefore facilitates understanding. Both he and Righter see the relationship between original myth and myth as ordering principle in literature as dialectical. Righter refers to this dialectic as "the imaginative reciprocity of poem [for example] and legendary matter" (1975:30).

My view of the mythologising of women does not necessarily draw on specific myths, although characters like Lena are clearly likened to the Biblical figure of Mary Magdalen, and Flora de Barral is likened to a damsel in a knight's tale. However, the idea of myth as an ordering principle, a schema of the imagination, helps to explain the way in which Conrad's women characters, no matter how their personalities differ, seem to be constructed from within a fantastic view or schema of 'woman'.

Fantasy can be said to function in literature in much the same way as myth, according to Wolfe (1982). Wolfe states that fantasy writers create an imaginary counter-structure or counter-norm. Thus what is needed for fantasy is another order of reality from that in which we exist. "Fantasy authors ... achieve a balanced tension - perhaps more properly a dialectic - between cognition and effect" (1982:11). This dialectic operates in *Nostramo*, for example, where Emilia Gould is on the one hand, portrayed as an idealist like her husband, with the intellectual's grasp of politics, and on the other, depicted as a fairy embodying fantasy and myth.

In *The Archetypes of Literature* (1966) Northrop Frye states "The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth is the archetype" (1966:93). He identifies the

central myth in literature as the quest-myth. However his table of myth patterns in literature deals almost exclusively with the hero figure. If one looks at male characters only, the quest-myth in Conrad's work can be readily studied. I suggest, however, that archetypal patterning, emerging from a mythology about woman, is seen in the women characters as well. The matching of men and women characters in the narrative completes an ontological paradigm.

Using the framework of myth criticism and the hypotheses of myth critics, one can proceed on the assumption that the mythopoeic faculty is inherent in the thinking process. Myth can be seen as a matrix out of which literature emerges, providing concepts and patterns to be used both to write and interpret literature. Righter says that myth is "the embodiment of human aspiration and its appropriate form" (1975:3). According to this definition, myth can be said to represent a dream, in a world of ugliness, of which the individual is capable.

In an essay entitled 'An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's *Nostromo*' (1969), Rosenfield suggests that the mine and the silver of Sulaco provide a mythic world which helps the reader to define human experience within the 'Conradian universe'; it is this mythic world of superstitions and images which sanctions the political scene and provides a link with the natural world. Rosenfield speaks of a 'universal conventional alphabet' on which the writer draws to enlarge particular experience. However, she makes no mention of the myth in relation to the women characters, for example Emilia Gould. I would suggest that it is the women who constitute this mythic world in Conrad's work. Motifs of fairy tale, myth and legend abound around the women characters. An approach like Rosenfield's, which uses the notion of 'archetypes', tends to be based in some way on Jung's original notion of archetypes.

4.1. Archetypes

While my discussion will not focus specifically on archetypal analysis, I feel it is necessary to examine the concept of 'archetype' and define my position relative to it.

In my discussion of myth, the term 'archetype' is used to describe the mythical 'original' which, according to Degenaar, is assumed to be transformed in literature. Theories of 'archetype' are based largely on the conceptions of Carl Jung. According to Jung the life of the human spirit, manifest in the psyche, must evolve in accordance with certain principles and forms which must be related to all other levels of human existence. If these principles or forms were to be dissociated, life could not continue. Jung uses the term 'archetypes' to designate these forms. He suggests that there is a common matrix of psychic existence which he terms 'the collective unconscious'. The archetypes represent the forms and pathways in which our psychic existence is enacted, and exert a powerful influence over individual development. de Laszlo, commenting on Jung's theories, writes:

It is the archetypes which from times immemorial and in true recognition of their ever-present dominance have been elevated to the ranks of deities and heroes. The sequences of events which constitute the life histories of these beings are the stuff which is woven into the patterns of our mythologies. Such mythologies, therefore reflect in an immediate and spontaneous manner the inner distinctive life of the psyche (1959:xvii).

In the Jungian sense, the term 'archetype' will be used to refer to an inherited image which is part of the collective unconscious. It is an 'original' image, similar to a Platonic 'form'. This concept differs from the concept of 'stereotype', which denotes a standardised image or shared conception (not 'original'), and is also taken to constitute part of a mythology in that it refers to an idealised conception. Jung writes:

Every man carries with him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint or 'archetype' of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman Even if no woman existed, it would still be possible, at any given time, to deduce from this unconscious image exactly how a woman would have to be constituted psychic ally The same is true of the woman Actually ... it is rather the image of 'men' (plural), whereas in the case of the man it is rather the image of 'woman' (singular). I have called this image (man's of woman) the 'anima' Woman has no anima, no soul, but she has an animus Most of what men say about female eroticism, and particularly about the emotional life of women, is derived from their own anima projections and distorted accordingly (1959:540).

Jung also suggests that there are certain types of women who seem to be made 'by nature' to attract anima projections, and he calls them 'the anima type'. These women

are generally 'sphinxlike' in that they are equivocal, have an intriguing elusiveness and an indefiniteness that is full of promises. He asserts that:

a man can create for himself a 'femme inspiratrice' by his anima projection. But more often than not it turns out to be an illusion Ideas that underlie the anima projection ... are in essence spiritual contents, often in erotic disguise, obvious fragments of a primitive mythological mentality that consists of archetypes (1959:542).

While I do not believe that women are actually the way that Jung suggests, I believe that in Conrad's fiction they are represented by certain masculine points of view in that way. Certain male protagonists and narrators do create for themselves a '*femme inspiratrice*' which is an illusion of their own imagination. The mythologisation of women is seen to a certain extent throughout Conrad's work. Rita for example, in the opening passage is described as sphinx-like, and she is presented in a kind of 'erotic disguise'.

However, Jung's theories are delivered as a male voice of authority and there is no acknowledgment in his writings that his is a gendered view of things. While Jung's paradigm of archetypes is regarded as definitive by many critics, a number of feminist critics are resisting Jung's theories, finding Jung's genderisations unacceptable. Knapp (1987) is such a critic. In *Women in Twentieth Century Literature: A Jungian View*, she suggests that projection of idealization or revilement onto the feminine principle answers a need within individuals, societies and nations. She states that this projection, while it appears to be describing others, is in fact an act of ascribing qualities owned by the projector onto others. She argues that it is crucial for unconscious inscriptions to be made conscious in order for them to be understood and used in a positive manner. She reasons that this will stop the denigration of women, which she believes has been the result of negative projections onto women for centuries. As I have suggested earlier, this argument becomes particularly relevant when dealing with younger readers. Knapp's point is that

When experienced unconsciously, both anima and animus can wreak havoc; when sentient, they can not only be a source of inspiration, but can lead to a greater understanding in human relationships by opening the door onto the deeper layers of the psyche - the collective unconscious (1987:4-5).

She challenges Jung's 'benevolent patriarchy' which holds that 'Eros' or the principle of feeling, is dominant in women, and 'Logos' or the power to discriminate, is dominant in men. I agree with her that such gender categorising needs radical questioning, even though the underlying principles might be useful. She argues for Jung's anima/animus model to be released from gender, and sees it rather as depicting a basic androgyny which reveals new and dynamic modes of behaviour. She suggests a fluid system, which transcends gender typology and stereotypical thinking. The collection of essays of which Knapp is the editor, looks at all types of women, "not only as they affect the male primarily (though this is also explored) but as they live out their own lives as women" (1987:7).

In *The Heroine in Western Literature: The Archetype and her Reemergence in Modern Prose* (1991), Powers also takes issue with Jungian analysis from a feminist perspective. Powers suggests that there is no archetypal pattern which traces the activities of the heroine in literature. With Righter, Vickery and others, Powers believes that it is to myth that Western culture has turned for evidence of archetypes, for example the archetype of heroism which, she contends, is constructed in terms of gender.

In her appraisal of Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1972:2-5), she notes the implication that heroism is possible only for men. According to Powers, Campbell acknowledged that there was very little scholarly analysis of female archetypes, yet there is an abundance of female characters in myth. Heroism, she asserts, is an outgrowth of a seminal conception of divinity. Greek mythology, for example, offers limited opportunities for female heroism and thereby denies that divinity can be feminine. Powers examines the role of women in myth, finding them to have no voice, to be enigmatic and even to be part of that which the hero must overcome, as Paglia also suggests. She concludes that the women in myth are props in the hero's drama who, if they play a central part in the narratives, learn to operate within the restrictions of patriarchy, behaving 'appropriately' and being deferential.

Powers questions Jung's assertion that mythology is the "inviolable wellspring" of information about ourselves. She states that after Jung and the propagation of his theory of archetypes, mythology came to be regarded as sacrosanct, containing absolutes from which it was believed no human being could escape. Archetypes came to replace religious prescriptions. The problem, as she sees it, is with feminine archetypes which have arisen out of what is largely a silent body of mythological women. In mythology woman's experience has largely been inferred by male narrators who define and interpret woman's experience, not voiced by women characters themselves. For example, images of victimisation or injustice to women are not generally articulated through a woman's discourse, but are filtered through masculine narration. In her view, this is the reason for the absence of an autonomous heroine archetype.

Powers looks at the earliest tribal belief systems and sees a continuum in the development of consciousness, beginning with conceptions of tribe, then divinity and eventually heroism, thus moving from the group to the individual. She suggests that gender polarity enters the continuum later and that all tribes initially conceive of divinity as female. If early conceptions of divinity were female and conceptions of heroism proceeded from conceptions of divinity, then, she infers, early myth did feature the goddess/heroine as a central figure. Powers suggests that goddess myths have been revised and embellished over time, resulting in a deprecation of the goddesses.

In her introduction to Bolen's *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (1985:x), Gloria Steinem also expresses grave reservations about feminine archetypes because of what she sees as manipulation of the archetypes in the service of patriarchy. This manipulation, she believes, predates Jung by many centuries. Enshrinement of characterisations from myth explicated through a male experience which is labelled 'archetypal' is, in her view, mere contrivance. Steinem cites narrative devices such as rape, marriage and suicide as devices that are deliberately used to represent the helplessness of women in the face of male superiority. She suggests that retellings of myths are not revelations of the archetypal feminine, but

rather prescriptions for the gender system. In her reading, the 'archetypal feminine' is a myth within myth.

In her work *Sexual Personae*, which deals with female figures throughout history, Camille Paglia (1992) conducts the kind of scholarly analysis of female archetypes that Campbell felt was missing. She looks at what she sees as the intersection of nature and culture, locating it at the point where morality and good intentions fall to 'primitive urges'. She sees Western culture as attempting to defend itself against nature and to control nature, and claims that, with the evolution of power roles in myth, women came to be associated with nature and therefore with that which is to be feared and contained. She sees tragedy, for example, as a specifically western construction, in which the western will sets itself up against nature and dramatises its inevitable fall as a universal, which to her it is not. In the mythology which underpins Western culture, Paglia sees the 'male game' as the achievement of heroism by the male protagonist.

This is not always the case in Conrad's novels. The male protagonists are not necessarily 'heroic', but their experience of transcendental despair is one from which the women characters are always excluded. From a review of some of the male Conradian critics, one can infer that women characters are often regarded as peripheral, while the male protagonists' part in the narrative is routinely portrayed as fundamental. This inference would bear out Powers's and Paglia's views that the hero's story in Western literature is told as if it were universal. In analysing the women's discourse in Conrad's novels, I shall be investigating it not only as part of an ontological paradigm that is connected with the male discourse, but also as a separate, significant discourse. In her introduction to *Joseph Conrad* (1991), Nadelhaft argues for reading Conrad's women as "authentic women characters who speak in recognisable accents to a new generation of readers" (1991:2). I agree. The woman's discourse is not residual, as some critics might suggest, but a discourse to be examined in its own right.

The notion of myth that I have found most inclusive and therefore most useful is that of Roland Barthes. In *Mythologies* (1993), he looks at the operation of mythology in examples of mass culture. Barthes's concept does not contradict or radically depart from the concept of mythology suggested by previously mentioned myth critics, but goes further, in my view, in linking the idea of myth with contemporary icons and images. Through a collection of essays, ranging in subject matter from wrestling to Marilyn Monroe, he suggests that a mythology is a mystification which transforms whatever it is applied to. This mystification is for Barthes summed up by the term 'what-goes-without-saying'. Yet, paradoxically, he sees myth as a language, and his appraisal of popular culture is an attempt to define contemporary myth in a methodical way. He acknowledges that, in looking for significant features of mythology, he could be reading his own significances into his field of study. Thus he could be bringing his own 'mythology' to the examination of mythology. It is the concept of mystification in mythology's processes which I find useful, as Conrad's women characters are frequently described by narrators in terms of their mystique. Much of their potency seems to derive from the fact that they are inscrutable. In 'A Smile of Fortune' for example, the narrator describes Alice as being "like a figure in a tapestry, and as motionless" (1978:47). He is bewildered by "the black depths of her fixed gaze" (58). Miss Moorsom in 'The Planter of Malata' is similarly inscrutable. "The expression of the eyes was lost in a shadowy mysterious play of jet and silver" (21). Her inscrutability is linked with power - "She was tall and supple, carrying nobly on her straight body a head of a character which to him appeared...pagan, crowned with a great wealth of hair...all that mass of arranged hair appeared incandescent, chiselled and fluid, with the daring suggestion of a helmet of burnished copper and the flowing lines of molten metal" (20). The character here has been imbued with a powerful mystique which is conveyed by the imagery.

I acknowledge that in viewing Conrad's women characters as constituting a mythology in the narrative, I might, like Barthes, be unconsciously reading my own mythology into the narrative. Deconstructing the mythology in a text does indeed involve a 'demystification'. The attempt to interrogate the construction of Conrad's women characters as mythological is an attempt to demystify their place in the

narratives. In examining the women characters, I shall assume that myth is a mode of signification conveyed by a discourse. As I have asserted earlier, I believe that the discourse of the women characters is loaded or 'decorated' as Barthes puts it, to fulfil the function of constituting a promising world which counters despair and disillusionment. Barthes (50-53) quotes Baudelaire as having believed that Women are inevitably accorded the status of myth, they do not pass into and out of it. There is some truth to this rather cynical assumption. However, it implies male authorship and readership. Woman writers do not necessarily accord their women characters the status of myth; neither are all readings supportive of Baudelaire's view.

With Powers, Steinem and Paglia, I do not hold Jung's patterns to be true reflections of woman, hence cannot personally support Jung's conception of the female archetype. Having said that, my reading of Conrad's women characters suggests that they are represented in the narratives in terms of a mythologised view of women which is partly in line with Jung's archetypal patterns of woman, (whether these patterns are explicated through male experience or not) also with a wider notion of mystification. In examining the women characters as representations of archetypal women in masculine focalisation, I have no wish to judge whether Conrad was or was not serving the interests of patriarchy. My concern is with a demystification of the women characters in order to reveal the myth as myth. The stories to which Western culture, and indirectly Conrad, turn for evidence of human archetypes deal with individual experience which we associate with the hero and not the heroine. I see such mythological construction as a narrative device which juxtaposes the experiences of the male characters with that of women characters, and provides the narrative with the possibilities of feminine hope, belief and illusion in the face of masculine lost hope and scepticism.

4.2. The Concept of 'Hera'

In contemplating the question of female heroism, it occurred to me that there was no satisfactory term to describe the female hero. I find the term 'heroine' unsatisfying as

it is essentially a feminisation of a masculine concept and thus cannot stand alone without its implied gender counterpart. The term 'heroine' also carries with it connotations of peripherality as it implies a diminution of an assumed male attribute. The 'heroine' is a female 'imitation' of the male hero. 'Hero', on the other hand, has other gender implications and implies narrative centripetality and male heroic action, so cannot comfortably be applied to women characters unequivocally. As a result, I wish to formulate my own term for the representation of women which foregrounds their heroic qualities, namely "Hera". For me, the term describes heroic attributes which are found in a number of the women characters in Conrad's novels, for example, Natalia Haldin, Antonia Avellanos and Lena. Although the term in a sense denotes a feminisation of the concept of heroism, the word is also the name given to the goddess of women and marriage in Greek mythology and so is somewhat fortuitously appropriate. I wish to examine the women characters in the novels I have selected in terms of heroic qualities like self-sacrifice, unfailing integrity, loyalty and honour in addition to investigating aspects of myth. The term 'Hera', while not repeatedly used in my discussion, has enabled me to conceptualise and foreground these aspects of heroism and recognise the woman's significance in the narratives.

5. The Selection of Texts.

In order to do justice to my hypothesis, I have selected for study texts which will support as well as test my views. My intention is to provide a variety of readings that will both illustrate and challenge them. Because of their complexity and density, Conrad's narratives will, I suspect, soon challenge any tendentiousness on my part. Reference will be made to other short stories and novels where appropriate.

The novels which I have chosen for close study, and which I will deal with in chronological order, have a range of settings and themes. They are: *Nostramo*, *The Secret Agent*, *Chance* and *Victory*. Each of these novels has women characters whose discourses function in different ways.

Nostromo deals with a mining enterprise in South America, which is the fulfilled dream of Charles and Emilia Gould. A study of the women characters in the novel will reveal that they are constructed more as a backdrop to masculine experience than as foregrounded characters, and that their discourses articulate courage, fidelity and hope. Both Emilia Gould and Antonia Avellanos play significant roles in the mythologies of male characters, providing a 'sustaining illusion' which counters masculine disillusionment.

While *The Secret Agent* is a 'political' novel, the major issues of the novel are dealt with within the domestic world of the narrative, and Winnie Verloc functions as a standard of primitive morality against which the hypocrisy and degradation of masculine politics is measured. In this novel she herself sustains illusions which ultimately fail.

Chance is a multivocal text, in which feminine and masculine discourses compete for authority on what it is to be 'woman'. *Under Western Eyes* is generally regarded as central to Conrad's treatment of the issue of feminism. However, I have decided to focus on *Chance* rather than *Under Western Eyes* because its treatment of feminism is a particularly challenging one and illustrates more clearly a polyvocal approach to the issue of feminism. Also, the political issues which are negotiated in *Under Western Eyes* will be dealt with in *Nostromo* and *The Secret Agent*. A dedicated case study on *Under Western Eyes* therefore seemed unnecessary.

Finally, *Victory*, in my view, illustrates better than any other of Conrad's novels the way that the woman's discourse functions to provide the 'saving illusion' which counters masculine angst. Lena's discourse initially 'speaks' the language she imagines Heyst wants to hear. However, she later takes control of her own identity and decides which action to follow, sacrificing her life to save his.

In this Chapter, I have tried to show that the women characters in Conrad's novels are constructed in terms of certain attributes - silence, passivity, mystery and an association with nature. I have also suggested that their function is often to represent a perspective of hope and fidelity, which is in contrast to the more negative experience of male characters. The first of my case studies, *Nostramo*, will illustrate this. Both Emilia Gould and Antonia Avellanos are portrayed in ways which associate them with belief and idealism, not despair and disillusionment.

CHAPTER THREE - *NOSTROMO*

But I shall never forget thee. Never! (*Nostramo*, 462).

My first case study is *Nostramo* which was published in 1904, a year after *Romance*. Like *Romance*, *Nostramo* is set in South America, but it differs substantially from *Romance* in the issues it confronts. The foreign setting of *Nostramo* is a significant context for the ironic examination of imperialism and the projection of English values (the desire to uplift, educate and bring justice to others) on to other, less 'civilised' cultures. Through its representation of imperialism's 'altruism' as mere fairy tale, the novel exposes imperialist ventures as venal and destructive. It is therefore not an endorsement of the missionary-like stance affected by imperialism's staunchest champions, but an indictment of its sanctimonious pursuit of profit.

Public issues provide a wider context for an examination of the notion of personal fidelity, and the degree to which 'saving illusions' are necessary to private endeavour. The great imperialist machine is a backdrop to the lives of the individual players, and the darker realities that follow in the wake of 'material interests' are seen to impinge not only on nations but on individuals.

A crucial aspect of this theme is the significance of women in imperialism, showing the ways in which women constitute a part of the mythology of economic and political idealism which underpins imperialist ventures. The women characters, as part of a mythology, have a crucial function - they represent the noble ideals of love and fidelity. My approach to the women characters is threefold: firstly, to demonstrate that they provide the narrative with an ideal of fidelity which contrasts with the failure of masculine commitment; secondly, to show that women represent a 'saving illusion' of idealism for the pragmatic male characters; and thirdly, to examine the way they provide imperialist ventures with a mythology which makes masculine

action possible. To illustrate these points, I shall use the examples of Linda Viola, Antonia Avellanos and Emilia Gould.

In *Nostromo*, a gendered reading is not as foregrounded an issue as it is for example in *Chance* and *Heart of Darkness*. The gender of the frame narrator is not stated, although the context (his friendship with Captain Mitchell for example) implies a masculine narration. Gendered issues of response and reading are not directly invoked, as the narratee in *Nostromo* is the implied reader. Whereas, in *Heart of Darkness* and *Chance* for example, there are multiple narrative levels, with a frame narrator telling another's story, in *Nostromo* the narrator addresses the implied reader directly.

Jocelyn Baines recounts that Conrad had told Ford Madox Hueffer, with whom he collaborated in the writing of *Romance*, that *Nostromo* was to be in the "Karain class of tales" (1986:345). However, the reality turned out to be different. The novel is not a "Malay" novel but is set in the fictional South American republic of Costaguana. However, inasmuch as Costaguana is "a land full of intrigues and revolutions" (11), it bears a resemblance to the 'Karain class of tale' about 'native uprisings' in the Malay Archipelago. It also ends with a renewed outbreak of fighting. Goonetilleke (1990) suggests that, no matter what its setting, Conrad's work shows a keen understanding of the self-interested economic motives which are a primary factor in imperialism, and the self-interested political considerations which come a close second. The political dynamics Conrad analyses in his novels are general; in *Nostromo*, he illustrates his belief that no political system is effective without individual, personal change. Conrad expresses this view in a letter to his left-wing friend Cunninghame- Graham:

Into the noblest cause men manage to put something of their baseness; and sometimes when I think of You [Conrad's capitalisation] here, quietly, You seem to me tragic with your courage, with your beliefs and your hopes. Every cause is tainted: and you reject this one, espouse that other one as if one were evil and the other good while the same evil you hate is in both, but disguised in different words Alas! What you want to reform are not institutions - it is human nature. Your faith will never move that mountain (1905:68).

The original idea had come in the form of an anecdote about a ruffian who had stolen a lighter of silver. The aspect of the story that sparked the novel is the fact that “he was implicitly trusted by his employers” (9-10) and this had made it easier to steal the silver. The man was never suspected because his reputation had remained intact and no-one would have believed him capable of such a breach of faith.

Thus it is the betrayal of trust and the loss of fidelity that is the kernel of the story. On this premise a novel of complex personal, public and political concerns was constructed. In *Notes on Life and Letters*, Conrad speaks of acts of faith, of which the first is “the cherishing of an undying hope” (1970:8). I shall argue that the central determining issue in the novel is the notion of fidelity and hope, and that the examination of this issue is a gendered one; masculine fidelity fails and women’s fidelity, encapsulated in a mythologised view of women, remains constant. Captain Mitchell expresses great admiration for Antonia at the end of the novel for this reason: “Those who thought she would give way to despair were mistaken” (393). The women characters therefore carry the moral weight of the narratives. Their constancy is vital to the economic and political action of male characters, and provides a conceptual frame within which masculine ambivalence is structured.

Nostromo is the first novel of Conrad’s political trilogy, followed by *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. In the “Author’s Notes”, Conrad speaks of *Nostromo* as “the most anxiously meditated of longer novels” (1979:9) following *Typhoon*. Cedric Watts regards it as Conrad’s greatest novel and accounts for Conrad’s confidence to write the novel as coming partly from sufficient funds, and partly from the fact that Hueffer (Ford Madox Ford) was ready to complete the story should Conrad be prevented by illness or death from doing so. Kermode hinted that Ford had written “quite a bit” (1997:17) of the novel and was more useful to Conrad than he has been given credit for.

Critical approaches to *Nostromo* have been varied, ranging from character and theme-based receptions, to Marxist political readings. Robert Penn Warren (1951),

argues that the novel is an elaboration of the conflict between the ideal and the real. Berthoud sees the novel as confronting the reality of social interaction. Johnson (1971) regards the novel as a study of identity and self-image as a source of value, and therefore deliberately made to be pseudo-political. For him, political manoeuvres and ideals are seen as masks used to disguise and reveal the true source of value, the self. Fleishman asserts that, in this novel, in which the forces of imperialism and capitalism, nationalism and socialism are brought into play, politics impinges on every point of individual and social life. Critics like Knapp Hay and Fleishman (1967) have engaged with the politics of the novel as 'theme', whereas later critics like Parry (1983) and Collits (1989), have problematized the meaning of 'political' in relation to Conrad's writing, and critiqued its analysis of early twentieth-century politics.

However, the viewpoint with which I most strongly agree is Mongia's (1996). Mongia argues that it is women who are the colonised spaces in Conrad's novels. "Native women become allegories for geographical regions. White women reflect domestic spaces which are fragile, beautiful, and removed from the active world of men" (1996:121). This is certainly true in the case of Emilia and Charles Gould. ("he [Charles] seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, her sick mothers") (190). She argues that as the novels are framed in the conventions of adventure fiction, they marginalise and stereotype women. She sees women (and colonised men) as a consistently negative trope associated with passivity and threat, part of nature not culture. Paglia has argued this point as well, maintaining that colonial spaces have been represented in Western culture as female spaces for conquest and penetration. She agrees with Mongia that masculinity is equated with culture, learning and restraint.

Before I embark on a textual analysis of *Nostromo*, I feel it will be useful to locate Conrad's work in the wider context of the debate on imperialism and the part his works have played in resistance to it or perpetuation of it. Not only *Nostromo* but other of Conrad's novels, for example the Malay novels, have been critiqued in terms of their location in this debate, thus I would like to establish my position on the

matter at this point, as it informs my entire approach. Important critical debate has centred around Conrad's approach to the politics of colonial enterprise and 'political' readings of *Nostramo*, which I shall shortly look at, tend to reflect opinions vis-à-vis imperialism, capitalism and the exploitative power of Western finance.

For the Marxist critic Raskin (1971), silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale. "Silver is everywhere in the novel" (1971:171) - silver horses, buttons, spectacles, crosses, clouds, rings, etcetera. Raskin sees the fictional Costaguana as the land of silver which is robbed by every international power. Parry writes, "To bring political criticism to Conrad's writings is not to isolate the 'sociologically significant' aspects of the novels, ...the primary concern of such analysis is to understand the relationships between literature and history at the level of a work's formal, literary structures" (1983:6). Eagleton (1976) asserts that the novel has an 'absent' centre, because, while its unifying principle is the silver, the events relating to it had no coherent historical intelligibility, and thus the novel's relation to its ideological context is laid bare. Carabine (1992) states that in *Nostramo*, Conrad "examines the attempt to graft Western capitalist enterprise, cultural norms, and political institutions, upon the stock of a peasant, superstitious, economically underdeveloped country" (1992:632).

Other critics have read the novel as an exploration of political, imperial issues, as well as dealing with the characters as players in the imperial enterprise. For Hawthorn (1992), *Nostramo* is the last and most self-conscious work in which the marriage of idealism and imperialism is explored. He sees idealism as rendering a service to imperialism and being destroyed by it in turn. Hawthorn's view partly agrees with Eagleton's in that he suggests that the other novels which deal with imperialism, *An Outpost of Progress* and *Heart of Darkness* provide the reader with no theory "as to what the dominant and determining motor force of history is" (1992:203), but that "*Nostramo* insists at length that it is not the consciousness of human beings which is primary in this movement, but other non-human forces: 'material interests'" (1992:203). Chon, employing a sardonic, postmodernist approach, asserts that "The narrative apparently operates in terms of such stereotyped ideas as material interests,

religious interests, aristocratic temperament, and the interests of the people as they are embodied in the characters. Such 'inferior' techniques may be interpreted as regression to older fictional conventions of the eighteenth century or even of the Medieval or Renaissance period(!)" (1995:57). Very few critics seem to share her view of 'material interests' as 'stereotyped' or Conrad's techniques as regressive. I do not share her world-weary attitude, but believe, with Berthoud, that the novel is one of Conrad's finest achievements.

However, in the sense that Costaguana is presented as morally vacant and culturally primitive, I partly agree with critics like Collits who argues that Conrad's writings tend to perpetuate myths about colonialism and imperialism. White (1993) points out that from a late twentieth century perspective, Conrad's efforts to demythologise imperialism seem rather modest, and Parry rightly admits that, in spite of Conrad's distaste for the colonial writings of Haggard, Kipling and others, his own writings do have affinities with those he despised in their use of racial stereotypes, the attachment of moral valuations to cultural particularities and the construction of foreign places as 'other'.

Before I deal with the women characters, I wish briefly to outline the context in which their fidelity is made manifest. The novel is presented as a fifty-year history of a fictional country entirely of Conrad's creation, Costaguana, which lacks the institutions and policies to achieve lasting stability. Its inhabitants are largely simple, poor people though there is also a strong aristocratic body of conservative Blancos whose cultural identity has more in common with Europe than with local culture. Costaguana's "fabulously rich mine"(44), the creation of Charles and Emilia Gould, is the pivot of all activity in the country. The justification for the mining enterprise, by the Goulds and the American financier Holroyd, is that the mining enterprise in Costaguana, and the foreign capital invested by the Americans, will bring stability and prosperity to the local people and profit to the mine's investors.

However, this aspect remains little more than a myth; Costaguana is locked into a yoke of poverty. The silver that Gould mines, that should ultimately uplift the locals, is swiftly removed to Europe. The silver is perhaps the rawest form of the kind of riches that motivate imperial enterprises - it is cold, naked, raw wealth that needs only to be wrenched from the ground and transformed ultimately into money. The mine uproots the Indians, destroys their tribal life and brings a new awareness of the power of labour. Seduced by the promise of riches - "it was only a matter of price" (43) - the local people surrender to a system which creates a new aristocracy of workers; once peasants, they are transformed by the capitalist venture into miners who are unionised and who strike. To the degree that the novel exposes their exploitation, I agree with Carabine's summation of the novel as "the attempt to graft Western capitalist enterprise, cultural norms, and political institutions, upon the stock of a peasant, superstitious, economically underdeveloped country" (1992:632). From letters that Conrad wrote it can be surmised that he had a relatively low opinion of North America, seeing it as the arch-capitalist society dominated by the pursuit of the silver dollar. He wrote to Cunninghame-Graham that when the Americans cry 'Fiat Lux' [Let there be light], "It will be only the reflected light of a silver dollar and no sanctimonious pretence will make it resemble the real sunshine" (1905:84). The novel illustrates Conrad's view that no political or economic venture can bring about advantageous change to a country if it is not accompanied by a change of heart of the individuals involved. He was intensely sceptical of political movements, believing that society could, at best, simply hold in check the tendency to chaos and disruption.

This is evident in *Nostromo*. Costaguanan society is seen to be a community of individuals constantly locked in action and reaction. The development of material interests is a simultaneous development of greed. The post-Guzman Bento era of relative peace and material stability under Ribiera is the breeding ground for the military Montero usurpers, who covet the mine. The later downfall of the Monterist regime removes that source of tyranny, though in the uneasy peace which follows when Sulaco secedes, there is little difference in the relative prosperity of the lower classes. The existence of wealth in Costaguanan society is shown to bring with it a delineation of those who control the mine and those who are controlled by it. The

seeds of a future proletariat uprising are dormant in the new republic from its inception. The closing of the novel sees a discontented working class organising itself under the very leadership of those who helped to topple the Monteros - Antonia Avellanos, Father Corbelan and Nostromo himself, alias Captain Fidanza. The ultimate irony in the novel is that in bringing about an independent Sulaco which should provide the necessary peace and stability for material interests to thrive, the conditions for a future revolution are simultaneously created. By the end of the novel there is growing hostility to the Gould enterprise, and the story ends with the expectation of further political uprising.

Mongia suggests that Conrad's fiction reveals "an indelible fascination with romance and adventuring that no amount of affinity with high culture could erase" (1996:124). In this adventure mode, transactions of power take place between men, and women function as tokens of this exchange. In such a mode, women exist only to demarcate masculinity. My reading is that the presentation of the women characters in this 'adventure' story is itself a gendered one. The focalisation is masculine and women characters are presented in terms of the characteristics of a mythologised view of women that serves masculine interests, namely fidelity, beauty and honour. While gender is not foregrounded in *Nostromo*, the novel is nevertheless demarcated along gender lines. Earlier critics concur with this argument even if their views arise out of thematic analyses not gender theories. For example C.B. Cox states that

Nostromo presents at least two irreconcilable points of view. At one extreme there is a profound scepticism which pervades the descriptions of landscapes and people, and which seems akin to that of Decoud when he commits suicide; at the other extreme this pessimism is countered by the human and moral claims most finely represented by Mrs Emilia Gould (1974:154).

Hawthorn's reading is most apt: "a woman's idealism allows a man to become a ruthless servant of imperialism - an adventurer - while pretending to himself and others that he is inspired by selfless and disinterested ideals" (1992:211).

While my reading foregrounds the women characters, much has been written about Conrad's handling of colonial and imperial issues. I offer an examination of this issue

here because it informs the entire case study. Critics like Parry (1983) believe that Conrad set out to expose and interrogate colonial practice, and others, like Collits, (1989) argue that Conrad exploited colonial settings as narrative spaces that were themselves colonised. Collits regards the island of Samburan in *Victory*, for example, as just such a space, where Heyst and Lena conduct their romance as ‘unconscious racists’ oblivious of the locals; the narrative locating itself in a colonial context which is inhabited by Easterners, but controlled by Westerners. It must be acknowledged that while *Victory* is set in the Malay archipelago on the island of Samburan, there is a ‘Westernness’ to it which is much more overbearing than that which features in the other ‘Malay’ novels. The story is peopled principally with Europeans. The same can be said of *Nostromo*. Almost all the main characters are characterised by their Westernness. Conrad wrote that although the novel was set in South America, it “is...concerned mostly with Italians”; yet the novel is filled with a cosmopolitan mix of races and nationalities. I tend to agree with Raskin that “*Nostromo* contains the whole world” (1971:170). The Goulds are English, Nostromo and the Violas are Italian, Decoud is more French than Costaguanan, and even Antonia Avellanos and her father are portrayed more in terms of their cosmopolitanism than their Costaguanan identities. The Railway officials are British and the capital behind the mining venture is American. None of the significant characters in the narrative is truly ‘local’.

Costaguana is also presented as morally vacant and culturally primitive, hence Collits’s argument that Conrad’s writings tend to perpetuate myths about colonialism and imperialism. It is this ‘vacancy’ which enables the setting up of a mythical England by the Goulds. *Nostromo*’s South American setting is thus significant in helping to problematize the question of cultural identity. The novel certainly takes its title from an Italian; however, American money and English culture are powerful players in the narrative as well. One of the novel’s notable characteristics is the foregrounding, through male characters, (primarily Gould), of English values and behaviour. This is notwithstanding Conrad’s equivocality on the issue of British imperialism. Spanish South America is, to a greater or lesser degree, portrayed as being less politically and economically stable than English society, and, in Gould’s

view, in need of 'higher' ideals, principles and capitalist actions to restore order and bring control to a disturbed situation. Prominence is given to the English identities of characters in the novel by their own words in the narrative, and by the responses of other characters to them. Fleishman suggests that the Gould casa is a 'mythical' England. To the local peasantry the Goulds are mere "foreigners". To others, their Englishness is a significant characteristic.

On the one hand, the reader sees Conrad's endorsement of that which is English. Signora Teresa accuses Nostromo of wanting "to be first with these English" (32). "Giorgio Viola had a great consideration for the English" (38). There seems to be an undeniable approval of English culture and 'gentlemanly' conduct in a number of Conrad's works, and in *Nostromo* the person who epitomises English behaviour and values is Gould. The aristocratic Blancos of Sulaco automatically class the English Goulds with themselves. Even though Gould does not have an English accent when speaking Spanish, rides a horse no less skillfully (though he does use English saddlery), does not dress very differently from the local gentry, he is noted as being English in everything he does. He is known simply as 'the Ingles' (51). Gould's father "remained essentially an Englishman in his ideas" (65), that is, by implication, in his love of liberty and hatred of oppression. In answer to Sir John's question as to what sort of man Gould is, the engineer-in-chief replies simply: "He's English . . ." (47). Gould is contrasted in significant ways with other male characters in the novels, and the concept of "Englishness" is seen to be linked with worth and integrity. In fact these values are not specifically English; they are linked also with Gould's class. In renouncing his country, Costaguana, Decoud renounces not so much a place as a set of values with which he can no longer identify, these values being identical to those of the English gentry. Deference to the superiority of English values is seen elsewhere in Conrad's writing too. For example, one of the characters in *Romance* says that Kemp "speaks the truth like a Briton" (276). Kemp's lover, Seraphina, says "But I am a Spaniard, and I believe in my lover's honour; in your - your English honour, Juan" (333). There are many other examples throughout the novels.

On the other hand, the reader is made critically aware of the prevailing conviction that colonial ventures, in which Britain engaged more than any other nation at the time of the writing of the novel, were economic and social 'crusades', ostensibly motivated by the English desire to stabilise and uplift 'primitive' communities by the development of material interests. In terms of its dominant ideology, I would argue that imperialism involves the assumption by the dominant group of their positions as natural, ethical and permanent; and that colonialism has been practised as a racial and national mission or service to a noble cause, whose end was to be the achievement of law and order and progress in 'primitive' places of the earth. These justifications are shown to be precisely what motivates the American capitalist, Holroyd, in *Nostromo*:

And as long as the treasure flowed north, without a break, that utter sentimentalist, Holroyd, would not drop his idea of introducing, not only justice, industry, peace, to the benighted continents, but also that pet dream of his of a purer form of Christianity (203).

The fact that imperialism arrogantly annexed the moral high ground is perhaps its most reprehensible aspect. The sublimation of global ambition as messianic destiny leads to the desire for total annexation of the physical environment, and the subjugation of all that is to be found there, in order to gain economic rewards first and institute Western political institutions second. However heinous the relentless building of the British empire might seem now, it must be acknowledged that numbers of British people believed, as Emilia Gould did, in the missionary aspect of imperial ventures, which held that developing a moneyed economy in a 'primitive' community would increase its stability, prosperity and ultimately the quality of life of its inhabitants. In this definition, it is clear that imperialism itself has to be cloaked with a missionary purpose, and in this novel, Emilia Gould functions to sustain this mythology for Charles Gould. This functioning will be explored in greater depth later.

In Conrad's works, women are a necessary presence in imperialist ventures because they carry the mythology surrounding imperialism. The Intended in *Heart of Darkness* is an idealised case in point. In *Nostromo* Gould can embark on the rehabilitation of the mine only once he has romanticised the venture, and to do that, he needs Emilia to mythologise the context in which his venture will be undertaken.

Nostromo exposes the myth behind imperialist ventures like Gould's, and underlines the great cost to individuals that result from them. My argument will centre around both the political aspects, reflected in Costaguana's unstable political situation, and the economic aspects. I shall look at the way Decoud's politics are a direct result of the inspiration Antonia's idealism provides for him, and the way that Emilia Gould's commitment is a necessary part of the mythology surrounding the mining enterprise.

The viewpoint on imperialism with which I most strongly agree is Mongia's (1996), who argues that women are the colonised spaces in Conrad's novels. "Native women become allegories for geographical regions. White women reflect domestic spaces which are fragile, beautiful, and removed from the active world of men" (1996:121). This is certainly true in the case of Emilia and Charles Gould. ("he [Charles] seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, her sick mothers") (190). She argues that because the novels are framed in the conventions of adventure fiction, they marginalise and stereotype women.

Before proceeding with these ideas, I would like to recapitulate the theory of myth suggested by Barthes in his collection of essays on contemporary myth, *Mythologies* (1993), and discussed in Chapter Two. Barthes sees myth as "the decorative display of 'what-goes-without-saying'" (1993:11). It is the hidden and yet it is the obvious. Myth is a language, a semiology, a "type of speech" (1993:109). It is defined not by the object of its message but by the way it utters its message. That which constitutes myth, therefore, is that which invests a silent, closed existence into an oral state - oral in the sense of being open to appropriation by society. An object which has become mythical has been adapted to a certain type of consumption, having social usage added to pure matter. The language of mythology is understood in terms of its semiological system of signs which leads to explanation and meaning. With this in mind, it is worth looking at the characterising epithets given to the main women characters. Emilia Gould is spoken of as a fairy and an angel. Antonia Avellanos appears to Decoud in his dying moments as an iconic statue. The dead Teresa Viola is, for Nostromo, a spirit with as much power over his thinking as she had when alive,

while Giselle Viola is an inaccessible treasure. The reader, then, is presented with images related to illusion, allegory and the mystical world that take their definition from a mythical context.

A significant 'sign' in the characterisation of the women characters as devoted, 'pure' and mythologised is their frequent depiction monochromatically, the effects of the sharp black or white resonating with mystique and drama. This representation is reminiscent of Daisy and Jordan in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, who appear to be able to fly around the room (1969:42). They too dress in white. In scenes of what could be described as magic realism, these women characters appear almost surreal, with the enchanting ability to move in and out of reality at will. My reading of this is that women characters are part of a mythology in the narrative which frames the actions of the men characters.

Bearing in mind Rimmon-Kenan's schema, in terms of which characters can be defined according to their position on a continuum of complexity, Conrad's women characters could, because of the representational aspects of black and white, be seen as having little complexity. One of the effects of this is to invest these characters with a set of signs, vested in the monochromatic images, which lead the reader to read them differently from the men. The monochrome effect constitutes a mythical overlay, 'what-goes-without-saying', and may be understood by the reader to suggest a symbolic representation in addition to other meanings. Parry speaks about the

contradictory constellations of meaning produced by the fictions' chiaroscuro of light and dark. An obsessive motif in all Conrad's writings where it signifies a multitude of polarities, the iconography of black and white in the colonial novels is integral to the texts' dramatisations of the cultural differences, moral antagonisms and metaphysical antinomies apprehended by the western imagination as structural to the colonial situation. It is a commonplace that in western thought the contrast between black and white has for centuries stood for the good, true, pure and beautiful as opposed to the evil, ignorant, corrupt and atrocious (1983:5).

The depiction of women characters in white calls up the same associations with purity and goodness that are inscribed in race issues. And yet the women characters in Conrad's novels are not always dressed in white. Both Winnie Verloc in *The Secret Agent*, and Amy Foster are customarily dressed in black and are not associated

with purity or innocence. Neither are they always depicted monochromatically. When we are first introduced to Emilia Gould, the vivid colours of her clothing set her apart from the crowd, indicating that contrast is a feature of her woman's characterisation, as well as mythical connotations related to black and white as Parry suggests.

Both Carabine (1992) and Hawthorn (1992) have pointed to the ways in which women characters have been mythologised in *Nostromo*. Carabine suggests that Nostromo's subjection to the claims of the silver on his consciousness renders love impossible, his subjection to the treasure being too powerful for love to overcome. Furthermore, he suggests that the object of Nostromo's love, Giselle, is in fact no more than a lifeless embodiment of a woman, fed by fantasy and legend not reality, and that a love relationship can only really exist in his imagination as a fantastical dream, because it would threaten his hold over the future, and ultimately of the silver. I do not entirely agree as Nostromo reaches a point where his attraction to Giselle is stronger than his greed for the silver, and he is prepared to sacrifice it to have Giselle. "He flung the mastered treasure superbly at her feet" (443). Yet his adoration for Giselle is represented in his imaginative figuration of her as a "jewel in a casket" (443), and she is conceptualised like a competing treasure; she is described as having "coppery glints...on the wealth of her gold hair...Her forehead had the soft, pure sheen of a priceless pearl" (437) and possessing a voice like "the tinkling of a silver bell" (438). In addition the reader recognises that Giselle is at least initially indifferent to Nostromo's love, caring only for his compliments.

In contrast to Nostromo himself, devotion and fidelity are the key components of the construction of the women characters in this novel and vignettes of womanly devotion are found throughout. Fidelity is a framing context for the narrative's structure. It seems to trace a ring around the narrative. For example, as Dr Monygham approaches the island in the police launch, he "heard the name [Nostromo] pass over his head" (463). The woman who is devoted to Nostromo is not Giselle but Linda Viola, whose devotion to Nostromo is articulated by her ringing voice at the end of the narrative promising never to forget him, that is in sharp contrast to the failure of Nostromo's fidelity to his superiors and his theft of the silver. Although Giselle

inspires Nostromo's dreams of wealth, it is Linda who loves Nostromo unconditionally.

Linda's character is passionate and strong. From childhood she has been fearless, and while her sister Giselle is "timid" Linda's eyes are full of "intelligence" and "meaning" (36). She loves Nostromo from an early age and it is 'understood' by her mother Teresa Viola that the two will marry. However, Nostromo does not love Linda, and he only agrees to marry her to expunge his guilt for not fetching a priest to the dying Teresa: "And so the soul of the dead is satisfied" (436). He finds Linda's love for him somewhat cloying, not least because he associates her with the dead, demanding soul of her mother:

'Ever since I felt I lived in the world, I have lived for you alone, Gian' Battista. And that you knew! You knew it... Battistino'
She pronounced the name exactly with her mother's intonation. A gloom as of the grave covered Nostromo's heart (436).

Her love for him is unconditional and self-abasing. "I was yours ever since I can remember. I had only to think of you for the earth to become empty in my eyes... The world belongs to you and you let me live in it" (436). Her willingness to entitle him to sanction her existence is similar to Lena's in *Victory*. In that novel, Lena accords Heyst the right to define her. However, Lena is loved whereas Linda is not. Linda's voice, speaking of love, is "torturing for the man [Nostromo] at her side" (436), because it is not she but her sister who is mythologised in Nostromo's mind.

The example of Linda Viola illustrates an ideal view of personal loyalty. On a more public level, the character of Antonia Avellanos presents a picture of political idealism, and her fidelity both to her ideals and to her memory of Decoud is a significant aspect of the novel. At the time she meets Decoud, revolution is fomenting in Costaguana and she has fixed political ideas regarding solutions. Yet these are not the focus of her representation in the narrative; what is foregrounded is the way she functions as the inspiration for Decoud's politics - she becomes the backdrop for the discovery of his tentative idealism. Through the foregrounding of Decoud's politics and the sidelining of hers, she is ultimately transformed into an icon of unwavering

idealism in his imagination, and remains fixed in that figuration to the end of the narrative.

This iconic figuration is a crucial aspect of the mythologised view Decoud has of her. Antonia exists in Conrad's own mythology as a representation of his first love. In the Author's Note to *Nostramo*, the prototype for Antonia is described by Conrad as having been the object of Conrad's and his friends' desire; she was looked up to as "the standard-bearer of a faith ... which she alone knew how to hold aloft with an unflinching hope" (13). She is dramatically described as "an uncompromising Puritan of patriotism with no taint of the slightest worldliness in her thoughts". These words convey a faint hint of hyperbole, even melodrama, perhaps because it was the author "who had to hear oftenest her scathing criticism of [his] levities - very much like poor Decoud" (14). The imagery used to describe this "girl", with its "holding aloft" and "standard bearing", is reminiscent of images of liberty, fraternity and equality figured as Woman, in Romantic paintings of revolutions. As such Antonia offers a vivid encapsulation of the "Hera" figure identified in Chapter Two. She is "the only one capable of inspiring a sincere passion in the heart of a trifler" (13). Not only that, but Conrad's boyhood love is "absorbed in filial devotion ... with a lingering, tender, faithful glance" (14). For the Author of the Note, she is a relic of the past for which he yearns nostalgically, a Romantic dream of the faith and patriotism of which intellectually audacious man is incapable. Conrad wryly admits, "She did not quite understand - but never mind" (14).

Mongia's argument that women characters in Conrad's fiction demarcate the masculinity of male characters is true of Antonia as well. Antonia's fidelity and idealism are the resistant discourse to Decoud's scepticism and disillusionment. In terms of the narrator's descriptions of her, Antonia has an independent spirit, flouts social conventions which she finds restricting, and has the courage to define herself in defiance of Sulaco society. All that redeems her in the eyes of the Sulaco matriarchs is her devotion to her father:

Whenever possible Antonia attended her father; her recognised devotion weakened the shocking effect of her scorn for the rigid conventions regulating the life of

Spanish-American girlhood. And, in truth, she was no longer girlish. It was said that she often wrote papers from her father's dictation, and was allowed to read all the books in the library. At the receptions... Antonia could hold her own in a discussion with two or three men at a time. Obviously she was not the girl to be content with peeping through a barred window at a cloaked figure of a lover ensconced in a doorway opposite (133).

And yet in spite of her obvious intellectuality, she is presented in the narrative as little more than icon. Roberts's suggestion was that women characters are excluded from male knowledge in Conrad's novels, because, as objects of male desire, they are excluded from the exchange of knowledge among males. Antonia is depicted in this way: she is both the object of Decoud's desire, and she is excluded by the narrator from the incisive way in which male characters are seen to understand Costaguanan politics. Her understanding seems to go little further than idealism.

Yet Conrad's political woman is not necessarily naïve or iconic. Before proceeding further, I wish to look briefly at the character of Natalia Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*, who closely resembles Antonia, in order to show the extent to which Antonia is a mythologised representation of Conrad's political woman. While Natalia is similarly idealistic, she resists relegation to the world of myth. Natalia's idealism is more robust and she has a greater degree of understanding of the high cost of politics in the lives of individuals than Antonia. Both Antonia and Natalia are described as tall, grave and self-possessed but Natalia is more manly, almost androgynous, while Antonia is an example of feminine beauty. Bernard Meyer sees Natalia as a strong masculine figure with bisexual appeal. She has "something more than the mere grace of femininity. Her glance [is] as direct and trustful as that of a young man" (91) and the grip of her hand has an "exquisite virility" (104). Both women are reputed to be learned and serious. Natalia manifests a courageous faith in universal accord and reconciliation, which is similar in its resolve to the narrow idealism of Antonia. Yet Natalia's discourse articulates an understanding of the waste and suffering that necessarily accompany the triumph of the accomplishment of ideals:

Try to imagine its dawn! The tempest of blows and of execrations is over; all is still; the new sun is rising, and the weary men, united at last, taking count in their conscience of the ended contest, feel saddened by their victory, because so many ideas have perished for the triumph of one, so many beliefs have abandoned them

without support. They feel alone on the earth and gather close together (*Under Western Eyes* 310).

Natalia Haldin's conviction is more credible than Antonia's because she is more pragmatic. Compared with Natalia's realism, Antonia's implacability in the face of Decoud's implorings for her to leave Costaguana and return to Europe with him, seem rather illogically idealistic. By contrast Natalia's politics resist any charge that they are simplistic. "The whole world is inconceivable to the logic of strict ideas. And yet the world exists to our senses and we exist in it" (117). This kind of pragmatic solipsism is absent from Antonia's discourse and the result is that she appears more representational than real.

A significant factor in Natalia's life is the circumstances in which she grew up. Natalia's politics have developed under much more hostile conditions than Antonia's and Natalia has also had the experiences of her brother and mother to draw on. It is also true that she is to some extent, inscribed in the mythology of male characters. The teacher of languages, the narrator of the tale wistfully concludes:

It is hard to think I shall never look any more into the trustful eyes that girl - wedded to an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears (*Under Western Eyes*, 310).

Adams writes that "Conrad's man is the modern, guilt-ridden existential exile, facing moral dilemma without the crutch of religion; his women help him to come in out of the cold of moral isolation into the imperfect world of men where answers are temporary and relative... Both Conrad's and Dostoevsky's women remain eternal figures in what is still a man's world" (1974:124). My reading is in full alignment with this view, as the capacity for devotion to men is a significant feature of the characterisation of Conrad's women characters.

Her convictions are also grounded in an overtly more pragmatic, centred experience.

Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions...There is only a handful of cruel - perhaps blind - officials against a

nation...in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders (*Under Western Eyes*, 116-7).

These words echo Conrad's own words that political movements do not achieve their ends because of the failure of the people who effect them. Natalia's politics, like her appearance, are associated with masculinity, yet her strength cannot be defined only by this association. Adams (1974) suggests that her role as Razumov's confessor sees her developing into a symbol of love and unity. In her meetings with Razumov, she is the aggressor, talking to him, touching him and engaging him with her eyes. Powerless to resist her, he finally confesses to her. While these details draw the focus to her physicality, she is not objectified by them to the same degree as Antonia.

Natalia's political views are cynically pragmatic, yet overriding her distrust of political systems is her inextinguishable belief in the power of love: "there must be many bitter hours! But at last the anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love" (*Under Western Eyes*, 310).

Like Natalia, Antonia is heroic, stoical and trustworthy. She is also beautiful, and the mix of all these factors invests her with a powerful mystique. Sulaco society has long been fascinated with Antonia. "The beautiful Antonia" (133) as she is known in Sulaco, has a full figure, a grave, oval face and full red lips. Her beauty is not the only quality which invests her with power, however. Unlike Emilia, she is no child-woman ("she was no longer girlish" 133) but combines beauty with a formidable intelligence. While these qualities constitute a powerful presence, she is regarded by others of her class to be lacking the humility to want to attract a Sulaco man: "with her foreign upbringing and foreign ideas the learned and proud Antonia would never marry" (133). Antonia is characterised predominantly by her capacity to believe in ideals and in the men she loves. Her father relies on her devotion and she gives it unstintingly, in this way modifying the shock with which the Sulaco ladies react to her liberated ways. She is thus set apart because she neither conforms to accepted social practice

for single ladies of class, nor trades with the implicit gender currency which her beauty assigns her by using it to get herself a desirable marriage partner.

After the introduction of her character, as reader I anticipate that Antonia will play a significant role in Costaguana politics. She has had a foreign upbringing, and has had a liberal education. She “often wrote state papers from her father’s dictation” (133) and in conversations she “could hold her own in a discussion with two or three men at a time” (133). She is described as possessing the utmost integrity of feeling and a “perfectly calm openness of manner” (138). The narrator recalls an incident in Antonia’s youth which illustrates the seriousness with which she approached matters even then. She is sixteen and offended by Decoud’s pose of fatuous boredom because it is so lacking in purpose. She is:

youthfully austere, and of a character already so formed that she ventured to treat slightly his pose of disabused wisdom. On one occasion, as though she had lost all patience, she flew out at him about the aimlessness of his life and the levity of his opinions (137).

By the time Decoud meets her again, this austerity has matured to a substantial intellectualism, and the seriousness of the political situation in her country weighs heavily on her mind. My expectations then are that her liberated intellect and informed political convictions will play a significant role in the narrative. Her character has the potential to articulate a lively discourse. Yet this is not the case. From the time of Decoud’s arrival in Sulaco, her discourse is slowly silenced by the increasing love and awe he feels for her. Her political ideals are eclipsed by the transformation of his cynical dilettantism into sentimental idealism.

In order to see the powerful effect Antonia has on Decoud’s thinking, the reader will find it useful to examine his sceptical pose on his return from the “boulevards of Paris”. When the narrator introduces him to the reader, he scathingly outlines Decoud’s background, foregrounding Decoud’s skeptical opinions of Costaguana, the country of his birth. It is a country he sees as nothing more than an “opera bouffe ... screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe” (134-5).

Up to this point in the narrative, the reader has been presented with the fairy tale vision of the Goulds and the political idealism of the zealous Antonia, and it is against their discourses that the scepticism and macabre humour of Decoud's 'opera' is foregrounded. To this point, Decoud appears to be nothing more than an effete dilettante. The narrator describes him as "an idle boulevardier", and his life as one of "dreary superficiality ... covered by the glitter of universal blague" (134). His "Frenchified - but most un-French - cosmopolitanism [is] in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority" (134). He adopts the pose of the vastly amused observer of Sulaco politics, finding governments generally "a thing of exquisite comicality to the discerning mind" (135). The narrator is scornful of his pretentiousness and lack of patriotism, and dismissive of his attempts to pass himself off as a worldly Parisian.

At this point Decoud has no significant romantic relationship with a woman. His Parisian circle appears to have been made up of male intellectuals and his cynicism has been untempered. The inauthentic sham of his adopted identity, with all its implied sophistication, is criticised ruthlessly. His pose appears to have been taken too far; he will not express a genuine feeling without masking it with an affectation of disinterest. "He had pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature" (135). The presentation of Decoud in this way is significant because he is soon to meet an integrity of faith which he has not believed possible, in the character of Antonia, and at that meeting "Martin Decoud, the adopted child of Western Europe, [feels] the absolute change of atmosphere" (138).

After the initial meeting with Antonia in the square, during which he registers her transformation into an intelligent, sophisticated beauty, he begins to undergo a change of mind, and the process of figuring her as icon begins. He finds that his attempt to deride the country's politics is an affront to her convictions. "It is the great cause. And the word you despise [patriot] has stood also for sacrifice, for courage, for

constancy, for suffering” (162). Her view that causes are worth fighting for, that Costaguanan politics is not merely an ‘opera bouffe’ arrests his derision. Her attacks disconcert him so greatly that he feels “his familiar habit of ironic thought fall shattered against Antonia’s gravity” (166). The intensity of her passion moves him to the point that he finds himself falling in love with her, and developing a feeling of awe before the imperative of her zeal: “He was moved in spite of himself by that note of passion” (138). While he does not believe himself capable of such guileless idealism, the mere possibility that it exists adds another dimension to his life. “Antonia! I have no patriotic illusions. I have only the supreme illusion of a lover” (164). Discarding his prior superciliousness, he allows himself to become caught up in her patriotic fervour and agrees, against his more cynical judgement, to take on the editorship of the *Porvenir*.

The narrator suggests that there are elements of romanticism and idealism in Decoud’s nature, which contrast with his ironic detachment, and are mobilised by his love for Antonia. The same man who has cynically declared that “government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to the discerning mind” and that no “man of ordinary intelligence can take part in the intrigues of *une farce macabre*” (135) finds that, once he is passionately engaged with Antonia, “Here on the spot it [is] not possible to dismiss their tragic comedy with the expression, ‘*Quelle farce!*’ ” (153). Antonia has functioned to mythologise for him the Costaguanan political scene about which he has before been only cynical. Costaguanan politics now “acquire[s] poignancy by Antonia’s belief in the cause” (153), although the crudeness of her beliefs still distresses him. He finds himself “*forced* by his infatuation for Antonia” (153) into a growing interest in things Costaguanan. His innately sceptical reaction to this is to reinterpret the illusions by which he can motivate himself. “He soothed himself by saying he was not a patriot but a lover” (153). He knows enough about “the genuine impulses of his own nature” not to attempt patriotism - his cynicism will not allow it. Such an attempt would be an illusion that he could not sustain, whereas the image of a lover, pursuing politics for the greater prize of the woman he loves is sustainable.

This view of Decoud's political motives is not shared by all critics. Carabine, for example, maintains that Decoud changes his mind politically because he is moved by the pathos of Costaguanan politics. This is clearly not the case as Decoud is a most reluctant zealot. He discovers he is "angry with himself" (153), not at falling in love with Antonia, but with finding himself having to relinquish his chosen pose of fence-sitting cynic. He feels she has "seduced his attention" (159). His only way forward is to keep his focus fixed on his love for her. She wishes his focus to be Costaguana. "Did you say I lost sight of the aim? I have only one aim in the world" (156). While Decoud's focus is Antonia, the narrative's focus is almost exclusively Decoud. The promise of a clash between two characters who are both passionately involved and politically opposed is subdued. Decoud's love for Antonia takes on an aspect of worship, and Antonia's discourse is slowly submerged in his figuration of her as icon.

With the foregrounding of Decoud's intellectual struggle, Antonia appears rather naïve in comparison. Against the backdrop of her political idealism, Decoud demarcates his own political position and interrogates his existential philosophy. His is the central voice in their exchanges. She embodies for him idealised noble political conviction which seeks the moral and material upliftment of the people, and conveying a mythical possibility of the success of revolutions. Her idealism, then, functions not in its own right as a competing political voice, but only as it is inspirational for Decoud. He cannot transform fully. He is the only character in the narrative who admits to his selfish reasons for wanting to facilitate the independence of Sulaco from the rest of Costaguana. Quite simply he wishes to save his skin and marry Antonia.

The switch from cynic to patriot lover is made possible by the fact that Antonia is transmuted, in his perception, into a place in his mind where cynicism and disillusionment cannot reach - the location of his mythology. Intellectually he cannot ignore what he knows, and subscribe to her politics, which he thinks she practises "in blind deference to a theory of political purity" (158), but he can be in awe of the idea of her. As icon, she energises his inert will to make an act of commitment. While at

the Casa Gould, he jocularly discusses his probable fate at the hands of the 'gran bestia' Montero. With teasing nonchalance he declares, "I shall go to the wall" (157). Her heartfelt reply, "Martin, you will make me cry" (157), shatters his composure and reproaches his indifference. "He remained silent for a minute, startled, as if overwhelmed by a sort of awed happiness, with the lines of the mocking smile still stiffened about his mouth, an incredulous surprise in his eyes" (157). It is only the integrity of her genuine concern that can penetrate and overpower the strength of his cynicism. What is foregrounded in the scene is the dramatic developments in Martin Decoud's consciousness, with Antonia's objectified presence as a backdrop. Applying Barthes's concept that the mythical component of things resides in what is consumed or understood by the consumer, but not said by the producer, Antonia's concern for Decoud here takes on a far greater value for him than mere solicitousness. "The value of a sentence is in the personality which utters it, for nothing new can be said by man or woman; and those were the last words, it seemed to him, that could ever have been spoken by Antonia" (157-8).

What is significant in Antonia's characterisation is that her political convictions are mostly transmitted to the reader through the narrator, Decoud and other masculine narrative voices, rather than through direct speech. Her politics serve more as a backdrop to the transformation of Decoud's scepticism than a driving force in local affairs. In all, Antonia says very little in the narrative and she is frequently objectified in Decoud's detailed descriptions of her. The narrator focuses closely on Decoud's perception of fine physical details which charm him, and sights and sounds which constitute her presence. The reader is made aware of her lips which move rapidly, the "agitated life of her throat" (159), and the stillness of her limbs. Decoud "drank the tones of her even voice", lowers his eyelids while she talks and yields as if to an enchantment. Her speech appears to him to be "waves of emotion ... from her heart to pass out into the air" (159). "She fascinated him". The effect of this objectification is that the reader's focus is diverted from what Antonia is saying to its effect on Decoud.

Antonia's iconic representation is constructed, not in his intellect, but in his imagination and through his senses. (He "looked steadily at Antonia's profile", 155). The narrator frequently represents her in a series of poses: "Antonia took up her usual place...with a rigid grace in her pose and a fan in her hand" (153). She is portrayed at significant points in the narrative like a statue, which is of course silent and frozen, yet emblematic ("Antonia, posed upright in the corner") (139). She is objectified by this representation, with the result that the thrust of her discourse is silenced. In scenes involving both characters, the focalisation is Decoud's, and the reader is offered not her thoughts, but his.

As part of the mythology of the men characters, the effect of the women characters is most greatly felt when they make a direct impact on the senses; only then can certain illusions be sustained. This engagement with sensory characteristics rather than intellectual ones is an area which could be explored as a separate study in its own right. If women are presented in the narrative by means of appearances and sounds, which are all impressions on the senses, then it is understandable that, in the women's absence, their effect on the men characters is lost. In the absence of Antonia on the island, Decoud is incapable of believing the things he had recently allowed himself to believe.

This effect is seen in other novels as well. The relationship between Axel Heyst and Lena in *Victory* is conducted primarily through sensory gestures. In that novel, to be discussed later, the imagined voice of Heyst's father is set against the mellifluous, seductive tones of Lena, indicating the clash of impulses that ultimately destroys Heyst. When Lena's voice is silent, or if she is not present, Heyst's conception of her diminishes, and he lapses into cynicism.

Decoud's response to Antonia is similar to Heyst's. When Antonia speaks to him, occasionally, her sheer sagacity "would break the charm" and "replace the fascination by a sudden unwilling thrill of interest" (159). His interest is unwilling because his conception of Antonia is not primarily as a scholar of politics, and he is not

accustomed to hearing intelligent utterances from women. His detachment from the world of passionate ideals is most decidedly a scepticism about 'feminine' thinking too. He believes that feminine thinking represents the illusions that the more intelligent masculine mind must reject as foolish and he is irritated by "that inexplicable feminine obtuseness which stands so often between a man and a woman" (166). While he loves Antonia and his senses are overwhelmed by her presence, he is not persuaded by her politics, or prepared to ascribe too much substance to her idealistic thoughts: "She irritated him... But he overcame his vexation at once" (166).

Some women hovered, as it were, on the threshold of genius, he reflected. They did not want to know, or think, or understand. Passion stood for all that, and he was ready to believe that some startlingly profound remark, some appreciation of character, or a judgement upon an event, bordered on the miraculous (159).

Decoud, like Gould, constructs his image of women on the basis of archetypal perceptions, seeing them as inhabiting a world that is more passionate than intellectual, more idealised than sceptical, and more fantastic than real. For Conrad's men characters then, like Marlow, Travers, Ivanovitch and many others, negotiating relationships with women involves calling on perceptions of women generally, rather than understanding them individually.

As his relationship with Antonia develops, Decoud finds that his need of Antonia becomes so strong that his political aspirations are moulded around it. "I cannot part with Antonia, therefore the one and indivisible Republic of Costaguana must be made to part with its western province" (185). Berthoud asserts that he has idealised his love for Antonia into a sustaining illusion that motivates action, and provides him with a nourishing myth which his ironic detachment cannot supply.

Fundamentally, he remains dangerously ignorant of the 'genuine impulses' of his nature. His very love for Antonia, which Conrad analyses with the utmost precision, is the emotion of a subjectivity that stands, as it were, beside itself. This curious self-alienation is perhaps most tellingly revealed in his declaration of love to her: in his mouth, the normal phrase 'love you' becomes: 'I have only the supreme illusion of a lover' (1978:110).

However, it is precisely because the convictions he has developed arise out of his mythologised view of Antonia that he cannot sustain ideals when he is away from her. On the fifth day of Martin Decoud's isolation on the Great Isabel, the accumulated effects of sleeplessness, inactivity and sensory deprivation lead him to lose faith in his own individuality. "Solitude from mere outward conditions of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and skepticism have no place" (409). Having no defences against the weight of his solitude, "the spoiled darling ... journalist ... lover ... was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed" (408), he struggles to maintain the will to live when everything seems to point to the futility of it all. Having been the most penetrating critic of Gould's political and moral mission to Costaguana, he finds that every human being needs to "find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence" (409), and that without it, he ceases to want to live. Ironically, he had said to Emilia Gould, "I cannot endow my personal desires with a shining robe of silk and jewels. Life is not for me a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale" (187). Yet, when forced to confront the truth of his personal motives, he sees that he has endowed them successfully for a time with a 'shining robe' in the person of Antonia. The 'robe' is a myth, as the image suggests; it does not last as it is a mere illusion of the senses.

Decoud is made weak by his loss of faith; and the thought of Antonia's unwavering strength of vision haunts him. His image of her as icon looms over his collapsed self, and he is tormented by the belief that he has not lived up to her standards - "he could not face her...it had occurred to him that Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself" (409). Without his icon to sustain his commitment to life, to politics and to his future, he falls "victim [to] the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity" (412). The narrator remarks that Decoud had "no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations" (195). So long as his sensations of Antonia, the sights and sounds of her, are real to him, and his sensory conception of her continues to be reinforced, he could sustain his 'faith' in existence. But like Heyst in *Victory*, when he is deprived of the sights, sounds and speech of others, he begins to doubt his own reality.

Acknowledging that he needs a sustaining illusion to motivate himself to stay alive, he realises he no longer has one. Without an illusion to cling to, “all exertion seemed senseless” (409). Antonia alone gives him the illusion that life has meaning, but the icon of Antonia Avellanos is now but a memory. She appears in his imagination as “gigantic and lovely like an allegorical statue, looking on with scornful eyes at his weakness” (409). The universe now seems for him a “succession of incomprehensible images” (409) and to escape the despair, he shoots himself and falls unnoticed into the Placid Gulf “whose glittering surface remained untroubled by the fall of his body” (411).

In the background to this drama is the fixed image of the icon, Antonia, who remains unchanging, faithful to her ideals to the last. Mongia argues that women are the colonised spaces in fiction and, in *Nostromo*, Antonia functions in the narrative in much the same way as Achebe (1976) sees Africa as functioning in *Heart of Darkness*: as a backdrop for the moral collapse of one man. By the end of the novel, Antonia’s representation is almost exclusively in terms of her fidelity to her ideals and to Decoud. My expectations of her character remain disappointed. Instead of a focus on her participation in the new republic, the narrative voice of Captain Mitchell, for whom she is an iconic object of desire, presents his listener with a picture of an acolyte at the shrine of her dead lover:

The marble medallion in the wall, in the antique style, representing a veiled woman seated with her hands clasped loosely over her knees, commemorates that unfortunate young gentleman who sailed out with Nostromo on that fatal night, sir. See, “To the memory of Martin Decoud, his betrothed Antonia Avellanos.” Frank, simple, noble. There you have that lady, sir, as she is. An exceptional woman...She has been blamed in many quarters for not having taken the veil. It was expected of her. But Dona Antonia is not the stuff they make nuns of (393).

In this representation, her character has now moved beyond the narrative, as it were, to being fixed as a figure in the medallion. Her iconic figuration is fully realised.

Significantly, Antonia does not ever acquire the knowledge of the circumstances of Decoud’s death. Like the Intended in *Heart of Darkness* she is ‘protected’ from the

truth. As Roberts suggests, knowledge of the despair that haunts the imagination of the intelligent man, is shared among the male author, the male narrator and male characters in the story, not the women. Antonia's fidelity to Decoud's memory, and to her political ideals, which had been lovingly appropriated from her father's rhetoric, is presented as enshrined intact to the end of the story. She is still the standard-bearer of the faith that male characters cannot sustain. She is the Hera, the mythical icon of human trust and fidelity, to which male action aspires but, because of its darker knowledge, cannot attain.

At the beginning of this case study I outlined a threefold approach to the issue of the women's characterisation. Through the example of Linda Viola, I have demonstrated women's capacity for unconditional fidelity. Through Antonia Avellanos I have illustrated the way that feminine political idealism functions in an iconic capacity as a 'saving illusion' for masculine pragmatism. In my examination of Emilia Gould, I shall interrogate the woman's role in providing a mythology that makes masculine action possible. I shall also demonstrate that being trapped in a mythology exacts a high price in the personal life of the mythologised woman.

Emilia, the 'good fairy' in *Costaguana*, is perhaps the most obviously mythologised woman character in Conrad's oeuvre. The association of her character with images of fantasy and myth are so numerous and so foregrounded, that the reader is led to question the reasons for it. Fairies are often associated by their size, their generic representation in stories, and their frequent association with fragility, vulnerability, goodness and innocence, with children. When an adult woman character is represented as a fairy, the full child-like association is made. Why is it necessary to the narrative for her character to be constructed this way? Before answering this question, I wish to examine the concept of 'fairy' to illustrate the implications of her construction in these terms.

Warner, in an interesting specific study of fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1995), explains that the word 'fairy' indicates 'wonder' or 'fairy tale'. It is derived

from the word *fata* (fate) which refers to a goddess of destiny. She sets out a number of features of fairy tales. Conventionally, the fairy tale is set in a remote place. This facilitates anonymity and lack of particularity of characters, and serves to objectify the fictional world. She states:

On the whole fairy tales are not passive or active; their mood is optative - announcing what might be. Imagining the fate that lies ahead and ways of dealing with it. The genre is characterized by heroic optimism...The prodigies are introduced to serve this concealed but ever-present visionariness of the tale, and serve it well by disguising the stories' harshly realistic core: the magic entertainment helps the story look like a mere bubble of nonsense from the superstitious mind of ordinary, negligible folk (1995:xvi-xvii).

Warner is here outlining essential characteristics of fairy tales which I find useful because these features clearly shape the setting up of the Gould venture in the 'remote' place - Costaguana. The fairy tale functions firstly to imagine the way ahead and provides a way of dealing with it through heroic optimism. It thus embodies what *might* be. Secondly, prodigies serve the concealed visionariness of the tale; by overlaying the story with magic, they disguise the tale's harsh core.

Decoud points out that Gould "cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale" (214-5). Why is Gould's story constructed as a fairy tale, with Emilia as the resident fairy in the myth? The reason is that imperialist motives in the pursuit of material interests, are too venal to be the stuff that young men's dreams are made of. Gould's primary reason for returning to Costaguana is not to uplift the people. However, the idea of upliftment is romantic and appeals to his sentimentalism. When he is preparing for their return, he visits abandoned mines because "their desolation appealed to him like the sight of human misery" (61). It is then that into the "magic formula there entered hope, vigour, and self-confidence, instead of weary indignation and despair" (61).

However, the missionary aspect to capitalist ventures like Gould's is myth - at best the mere "ray of hope" in a money-making venture. Imperialism's ostensible motive is disinterest, but this motive is as much a lie as the subversion of truth is to Kurtz's

Intended; it is nothing but fairy tale, as Conrad has shown most ruthlessly in *Heart of Darkness* and in *Nostromo* too. The portrayal of Emilia Gould as a fairy in a myth of Charles Gould's own making is a powerful indictment of his ultimate self-interest, and the indifference of profit to the lives of ordinary people. Dr Monygham, in a bitter acknowledgement of the cost of the mine, states:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in moral principle. Mrs Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back (419).

By this stage, however, Charles Gould has ceased to care whether the mine will uplift the Costaguanan people or not. He has long divested himself of the mythology that made the original idea a reality.

Hawthorn (1992) maintains that Conrad was interested in fairy stories, having written one himself, and he suggests that this informs the writing of *Nostromo*. Hawthorn has examined the presence of archetypal fairy tale constructions in the narrative of *Nostromo*, and relates that Conrad either wrote or translated a fairy tale himself some time near the beginning of his literary career. The tale is entitled *The Princess and the Page* and is described on the title page as being for 'grown-up princesses'. The story is of a page who sacrifices himself so that a spoiled and ungrateful princess may live. What is interesting is that the page's love is selfless and idealised, not the princess's. Hawthorn suggests that the ironies in *The Princess and the Page* and the archetypal situations to be found in fairy tales generally are used in *Nostromo*. Clearly the archetypal princess living in an enchanted world is Emilia Gould, while the adventurer is her husband Charles.

To understand Emilia, it is crucial to interrogate Charles and his motives for resurrecting the mine. With this in mind, I shall examine the way fairy tale functions in the narrative and the way it enables Charles Gould's grand adventure. In Warner's schema, fairy tale has two functions: it provides a way of dealing with the future through heroic optimism; its visionariness is overlaid with magic to hide its harsh

core. I shall illustrate that Charles needed to mythologise both his young private life and his public ambition. Decoud is the one character in the narrative who perceives the extent to which the transmutation of reality into mythology is an essential part of Charles's life. Ironically Gould does not understand the modus of his own life; he states repeatedly that he is not sentimental:

Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interest. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security it demands must be shared with an oppressed people (81).

However, Decoud understands that Gould "cannot exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire or achievement" (184). The first aspect of his life that he needs to idealise is his "mournful and angry desire for action" (66) once his father dies, after a long struggle to make the silver mine viable. Decoud is right - Gould needs to mythologise every impulse before he can act on it, and significantly, at the point at which he begins to idealise his motives, Emilia enters his narrative to 'imagine the way ahead' with heroic optimism.

Emilia transforms everything in Charles Gould's life into a fairy tale. Her 'magic' operates in three ways: firstly, she gives his personal life a sheen by being the unconditionally approving audience for everything he does; secondly, Emilia transforms their casa into a mythical English castle, giving him, as English gentleman, an enchanted context in which to operate; and thirdly, Emilia provides the mining venture with a mythologised overlay that enables her husband to continue to see his enterprise as a mission rather than a profit-making venture, and transforms his adult life into an adventure.

When Charles Gould asks Emilia, who is dressed in white, whether she loves him enough to marry him and live with him in a foreign country, she replies that:

She did. She would.... And immediately the future hostess of all the Europeans in Sulaco had the physical experience of the earth falling away from under her. It vanished completely When her feet touched the ground again, the bell was still ringing in the valley (64).

This amusing piece of magical realism is effective in that it heightens the sense of her elation and, more importantly, locates her in a mythologised context as a child-like fairy. Emilia is filled with excitement at the prospect of 'a strange life' and she dreams of "a future in which there was an air of adventure, of combat - a subtle thought of redress and conquest" (66). Her excitement is intoxicating to Charles and enables him to idealise his plans. Without her present, the effect is lost. "He left her to walk down the hill, and directly he found himself alone he became sober" (66). The narrator comments early in the narrative that the Goulds' idea of rehabilitating the mine had presented itself to them "at the instant when the woman's instinct of devotion and the man's instinct of activity receive from the strongest of illusions their most powerful impulse" (73). Gould's motives for returning to take up the mine are twofold: firstly, to vindicate his father's death in mournful and angry action, because "action is consolatory" (66); and secondly to "make a serious and moral success" (66) of the enterprise.

In his essay 'Novels and Children' (1993), Roland Barthes speaks ironically about the mythology surrounding women, suggesting playfully that the role of women is to play at being men but not to be men, and to live under the gaze of men, never far from them. I believe that Charles Gould sees Emilia's role as being near him, supporting his endeavours, and lending his efforts the enchantment of her faith in him. All of these functions will feed Gould's egocentricity, not fulfil her own life; the image of her as a fairy is tragically apt then - her only function is to enchant his existence. This point is demonstrated by Gould's conception of their venture - it took on the "flavour of a gruesome Arabian Night's tale" (60). It is this imaginative fascination with the adventure that reveals for Decoud: "the sentimentalism...that will never do anything ... unless it comes ... clothed in the fair robes of an idea" (203). Ironically, while Emilia's figuration in the narrative is as fairy, Charles himself has not outgrown the child-like need for everything to be enchanted.

From the outset Emilia is zealously supportive of him as he had "struck her imagination from the first ... his unsentimentalism ... a sign of perfect competency in

the business of living” (53). Her belief in the moral purity of the mining venture invests what is essentially a materialist project with an overlay of sanctity. The “little lady” believes that the “puerile and bloodthirsty game of murder and rapine” (53) to save the country can be replaced with peace and the development of a stable economy. Her passionate belief in his ideals gives the magic glow to Gould’s idea, and satisfies the hunger of his imagination for a heroic exploit played out under the gaze of an adoring partner. The death of his father detonates his ambition and her consent to witness his achievement makes his dream of heroism possible. His need is to slay the dragon that slew his father and to create a new identity for himself. However, he wants her support and inspiration, not her partnership.

When they first planned the venture, Emilia appears to Charles to be intelligent (“the suggestion of universal comprehension” 50), but it is apparent to the reader that Gould is not looking for an intelligence to match his own. Nadelhaft argues that though Conrad’s male characters may patronise the intelligence of the women, their author does not. She contends that Conrad has created relationships between men and women who are equally committed to affecting the life of the world outside the marriage. I agree with her viewpoint; Emilia is equally committed to the life outside their marriage as Charles. From the early days of the mine’s activities “she had seen it all from the beginning” (98), she would be ‘up to the mountain’ with Charles, “accompanying her husband all over the province” (82). Her tragedy is that Charles excludes her from this life. Charles “imagined that he had fallen in love with a girl’s sound common sense like any other man” (50), but it emerges that his reason for marrying her is not only her intelligence, but her ability to support unquestioningly his desire to mine the silver, and to create a domestic world away from the ambit of the mine. It is left to the reader to infer whether Gould’s notion of ‘sound common sense’ includes Emilia’s acceptance of the role he wants her to play. Emilia’s understanding of the political realities of Costaguana are perhaps more acute than her husband gives her credit for. She, like Decoud, sees the situation as “a comedy of naïve pretences, but hardly anything genuine but her own indignation” (53). She does understand the appeal that this adventure has for Charles as she shares in his desire for self-actualisation through this venture.

Brodie contrasts Emilia and Charles Gould with respect to their attitudes towards material interests, Emilia never being distracted, as Charles is, by the fascination of an idea. Thus her ideal remains untainted by Charles's growing personal obsession with the silver. Her motives are not materialistic whereas his are. What becomes clear to the reader is that the mine is not going to civilise Costaguana. "Mrs Gould, an orphan from early childhood and without fortune, brought up in an atmosphere of intellectual interests, had never considered the aspects of great wealth...even the most legitimate touch of materialism was wanting in Mrs Gould's character" (73).

Emilia is unconscious of the mythologising role she plays, believing that, in Costaguana, they would set up the mine together. Initially, the couple are described in terms of joint motives and actions, ("What should be perfectly clear to us ... is the fact that there is no going back...We are in now for all that there is in us") (81). Having committed herself to this bold venture, she is an ever-present reminder of the heroism and integrity of his life. She 'demarcates' his story in the narrative, ("He simply went on acting and thinking in her sight" 62), and her continued support of his dream is assumed. Initially Gould's vision demarcates hers. ("he had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions" 81). She is taken to Costaguana because her mythologised presence provides the decorative display to his activities.

This aspect endorses Mongia's point that in Conrad's novels white women reflect domestic spaces which are fragile, beautiful, and removed from the active world of men. The domestic space that Emilia reflects is an enchanted place in which she is the fairy who has the magic power to transform their home into a mythical England.

The Englishness which Emilia creates is rooted in a mythology about England, in which English courtesies and charm are practised. Conrad's writing frequently manifests his understanding of the mythologised view of England that was taken to the colonies. In *Nostromo*, England becomes a mythical entity in Emilia Gould's hands, (she inhabits her casa "like the lady of the medieval castle" 68) as she

transforms her casa into a little patch of England, where English people with English courtesies, rituals and notions prevail. Charles Gould is above all “English” and his wife is the “English Senora” (50). “Carlos had all the English qualities of character with a truly patriotic [to Costaguana] heart” (53). The concept of Englishness that the Goulds bring with them to Sulaco is not anchored in a place but in a mythology - in idealised notions of fair play, justice and refinement.

The mining enterprise is a joint venture of American money and English expertise, and both parties hope that mining and the foreign capital invested by the Americans, will bring stability and prosperity to Costaguana. It is important, therefore, for the smooth running of the project for visitors to Sulaco to be cordially received. Emilia’s gift in creating a mythical England in Sulaco is useful here. The Goulds entertain railway officials from London who soak up the Gould hospitality because it gave “the feeling of European life on a background of ... exotic surroundings” (43). Emilia’s skill as hostess is vested in acts of superlative kindness and generosity, and in her ability to create a “home away from home”. The railway workers find the Gould hospitality “beyond all praise” (47) and “The stateliness of ancient days lingered between the four high, smooth walls, tinted a delicate primrose-colour” (55).

Thus her ‘magical’ skill, as the ‘fairy’ in Charles’s story, is transformative, because she changes her territory into an enchanted enclave, where visitors, both local and overseas, can dream, for a moment, that they inhabit the world they would like to inhabit, a world they believe has passed forever, and not the one beyond the doors of the casa. “Don Jose chose to come over at tea-time because the English rite at Dona Emilia’s house reminded him of the time when he lived in London as Minister Plenipotentiary to the court of St James” (54).

She is the ideal wife in that she plays the domestic role perfectly. She is rendered more charming to her male visitors by the fact that her manner conveys the illusion of inordinate devotion to men. A common gesture of hers is to turn her face “with the silent enquiry of slightly widened eyes and the merest ghost of a smile, a habitual

movement with her, which was very fascinating to men by something subtly devoted, finely self-forgetful in its lively readiness of attention" (139). The narrator's tone here is subtly ironic, as the reader is made aware, by the objectification of this social exchange, of its charade-like aspect; the men believe what they think they are seeing and Emilia provides the dramatisation of the kind of woman they want to see.

Emilia's dreams of happiness are also anchored in a mythology; one of a vision of shared life in Costaguana, with the intimacy of marriage and the fidelity of her husband as the reward for any sacrifices made along the way. "Inspired by an idealistic view of success" (68), she plunges herself into selfless, tireless activity. Events are "purified to her by the fire of her imaginative purpose." (132). Although I have argued that this novel does not specifically invoke a consciously gendered reading, the narrator's irony on the subject of Emilia's domestic life has implications for my woman's reading. On the one hand he employs an irony of tone which undermines the fantastic representation of Emilia. On the other he articulates a genderisation which leads the reader to conclude that the women characters are defined by an archetypal notion of woman.

It must not be supposed that Mrs Gould's mind was masculine. A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency A woman's true tenderness, like the true virility of a man is expressed in action of a conquering kind (67).

The reader is uncertain whether statements like this are to be read ironically or not. My reading is that the male narrator is not free from the male tendency to mythologise women himself, even though he frequently draws attention to the mythologisation of Emilia's character in the narrative. The 'conquering' that is referred to here implies that Conrad's women characters have a potent side in that they wield power over men. This is perhaps reflected in Charles's statement that the best of his feelings are in his wife's keeping.

In Sulaco, Emilia is successful in carrying out her side of the mission, which is to create an enchanted world for Charles, and to demarcate his masculinity. "Emilia's intelligence being feminine led her to achieve the conquest of Sulaco" (67), and the Spanish ladies are "amazed at the tireless activity of her body" (68). She launches

herself sentimentally into her role as wife as if she is complying with an unwritten statute that the condition of happiness is to be found in small acts of domesticity, “the intimate felicities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe” (420). Emilia’s dainty acts to all visitors to her casa constitute her part in ensuring the realisation of Charlie’s dream. The narrator wryly states of such visitors, “Perhaps had they known how much she was inspired by an idealistic view of success they would have been amazed at the state of her mind” (67).

Emilia’s role is precisely that of a fairy in a fairy tale. She transforms Gould’s venture into a fairy tale in that she represents ‘what might be’, overlaying his future with optimism. However, as his desire for the silver becomes an end in itself, so his need for the transforming magic of his wife decreases. Clare Rosenfield suggests that the silver, which is associated with corruptive potential, replaces other symbols of truth, for example his wife. In *Paradise of Snakes*, (1967), she speaks of the silver as providing the mythical context for his life. I believe that it is his wife who provides this context.

Once Emilia has set up ‘England’ in Sulaco, and launched her husband on his ‘Arabian night’s tale’, she begins to find that the venture is not a joint one. She finds herself increasingly restricted to her domestic space. Her isolation is dramatically portrayed in the narrative through her representation as fairy. We see that she has the fragility and diminutive stature of a fairy and that much of what she does is “little” or “small”. She dispenses “small graces of existence”, and has a “little capable air of setting her wits to work” (50). She has a “little head and shining coils of hair” (55) and she is “gracious, small and fairy-like” (103). This diminution disempowers her character in the narrative by portraying her as locked in a child-like state, and playing childish domestic games.

The stateliness of ancient days lingered between the four high, smooth walls, tinted a delicate primrose colour; and Mrs Gould, with her little head and shining coils of hair, sitting in a cloud of muslin and lace before a slender mahogany table, resembled a fairy posed lightly before dainty philtres dispensed out of vessels of silver and porcelain (55).

The accumulated fairytale images of good fairies, castles, enchantments and purity create a magical context for Emilia which is almost comical. However, the humour is dark, and is informed by her personal experience of loss at the emptiness of her marriage. Warner argues that the bloneness of the fairy tale beauty and her predominant quasi-mystical image of light and vitality is one of the most potent and recurring symbols in the fairy tale genre. The accumulation of images of fairies and angels coupled with her resilience and strength as a supportive and loyal wife tend to depict Emilia to the reader as a child-woman. What is illustrated is that Emilia is perceived in this representational way by the male characters around her, especially her husband. The emphasis in the representation is on her child-state not her woman-state. "That slight girl ... had the fastidious soul of an experienced woman" (64). However, as I have mentioned, the narrator's tone is subtly ironic, and when this irony is registered in her representation, the effect on my reading is to question his purpose. The narrator's irony, which is sometimes overt, and sometimes carried by the absurdity of the image, serves to foreground her representation for scrutiny. She thus appears to me as imprisoned within her representation, and her cry "Why don't you tell me something?" (178), is a cry for escape from that silent prison.

As time passes, Charles Gould's obsession with his mine grows, and the altruistic ideals which mythologised the enterprise are forgotten. Emilia comes to see that she cannot assume that his part of the marriage bargain is to reciprocate her devotion to him as he increasingly excludes her from his daily life. Her sadness comes from the fact that she has been excluded from what she hoped was to be a joint adventure, in which together they would achieve their high ideals.

His future wife was the first, and perhaps the only person to detect this secret mood which governed the profoundly sensible, almost voiceless attitude of this man towards the world of material things. And at once her delight in him, lingering with half-open wings like those birds that cannot rise easily from a flat level, found a pinnacle from which to soar up into the skies (61).

However, she does not understand that Charles is going to exclude her from his life. She is unaware that his control will carry a heavy price for her.

The fate of the San Tome mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with

misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver bricks, erected by the work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers, and the feeble old men, mere vestiges of the initial inspiration (190).

The 'action of a conquering kind' has been his and she has been left with no heroic exploits to achieve, only the domestic role that has been prescribed for her by her husband and by Costaguanan society.

As the fairy in Charles Gould's romantic adventure, Emilia is also nothing more than the waiting princess in his castle and the mythologised custodian of his sacred ideals. However, while the fairy tale remains intact for Charles Gould, the fairy in the tale becomes more tarnished and tired as her husband withdraws his love from her. His ideals, initially formed without real knowledge of the situation in Costaguana, are rapidly transformed once the enterprise is underway, and it is only through Emilia's continued belief in his integrity, the maintenance of his 'English' space and continued fidelity to the original dream that he can sustain his own. The cynical Decoud sees through Gould's idealism to the price Emilia has had to pay for it:

I knew what he had in his mind; he has his mine in his head; and his wife had nothing in her head but his precious person, which he has bound up with the Gould Concession and tied to that little woman's neck (203).

As the business venture becomes more demanding, it is increasingly obvious that it cannot be executed without bribery, exploitation and suffering. Hawthorn argues that Conrad saw clearly that there were two sides to the term 'adventure' - the glamorous side and the dark underside of cruelty and plunder. In *Notes on Life and Letters*, Conrad writes:

The mere love of adventure is no saving grace. It is no grace at all. It lays a man under no obligation of faithfulness to an idea and even to his own self. Roughly speaking, an adventurer may be expected to have courage, or at any rate may be said to need it. But courage in itself is not an ideal (189).

At the point in the narrative at which Gould feels the increasing demands of the enterprise, encounters the darker side of his adventure, a side which he had never

discussed with Emilia. Because Gould relates to his wife as a fairy-like figure of goodness, he reveals less and less of the harsher realities to her, but “simply [goes] on acting and thinking in her sight” (62). He is “the most anxious and deferential of dictators” (64), and this pleases her as it “affirmed her power without detracting from his dignity” (64); the power, that is, to provide the moral sheen to his ambition. Her generous faith in what he does far outlives his missionary zeal. As Decoud observes, “Do you think he succeeded by his fidelity to a theory of virtue?” (158). What begins as a sympathetic partnership soon devolves into a solitary exploit.

Having been helped by her to romanticise and idealise his enterprise until it takes on the enchantment of an adventure, he appears later not to need her at his side as he has before. Once the mine is fully functional, he becomes too absorbed in its running for the missionary aspect to matter. Her misgivings about continuing with the mine are silenced by his will:

‘Ah, if we had left it alone, Charley!’

‘No,’ Charles Gould said, moodily; ‘it was impossible to leave it alone’ (180).

It is not long before the narrator reveals the extent to which the mine, and the political, economic and social leverage that it gives Gould, have replaced Emilia as the love of his life. The mutation of Gould’s vision causes the people of Costaguana and Emilia herself to fade into the background of his enterprise, and Gould to become the solitary foregrounded subject of it. Martin Decoud, writing to his sister, sardonically observes, “those Englishmen live on illusions which somehow or other help them to get a firm hold on the substance” (203).

Gould’s growing obsession is a reflection of his commitment to his surrogate love. Barthes suggests facetiously that “the eternal statute of womanhood” (1993:50) is that women are on earth to give children to men. In the Gould marriage it is not Emilia who gives children to her husband, but her husband who, in a bizarre role reversal, presents her with silver offspring. When the first silver ingot is produced, there is the same eager anticipation and tenderness usually reserved for the birth of a child:

“[Emilia] had laid her unmercenary hands, with an eagerness that made them tremble...upon the first silver ingot turned out still warm from the mould” (99). The flow of the silver down the gorge is almost seminal. Gould’s life is bound up with the “one endeavour to keep unchecked the flow of treasure he had started” (132). Poignantly, reminding the reader of her childlessness, the narrator remarks, “Mrs Gould had no mine to look after” (132).

As a chasm develops within the marriage, so their relationship becomes increasingly beset by silences. Having assumed early that his wife understood and shared his vision, Gould’s disposition becomes taciturn.

‘Ah, if one only knew how far you mean to go,’ said his wife, inwardly trembling, but in an almost playful tone.

‘Any distance, any length, of course,’ was the answer, in a matter-of-fact tone, which caused Mrs Gould to make another effort to repress a shudder.

She stood up, smiling graciously, and her little figure seemed to be diminished still more by the heavy mass of her hair and the long train of her gown (179).

What is illustrated in this passage is the distance that has developed between them. Gould maintains a destructive silence with her which excludes her from knowledge of the truth about the mine and his reasons for continuing the enterprise, and separates them by a “wall of silver bricks” (190). The narrator comments that Gould has an almost “voiceless attitude ... to the world of material things” (61).

Initially the shared understanding of events is expressed most articulately in a public silence. “She understood his voiceless reserve” (144) as she had learned at “his school of uncompromising silence” (145). However, the silence which initially indicates an intimate shared understanding, later becomes the silence of distance - imposed by the separation of the silver bricks. His silences, which “have as many shades of significance as uttered words”, (175) no longer constitute a language of love to his wife, but rather exacerbate her isolation in a silent world where the only outlets for her loving disposition are her schools, hospitals and friends. Her anguished cry “Why don’t you tell me something?” (178) is an appeal to break the silence not only about the mine, but the barrier of silence which has been erected between them. Gould’s reply, “I thought you had understood me perfectly from the first ... I thought we had

said all there was to say a long time ago. There is nothing to say now" (178), indicates the extent to which he relies on the continued devotion of his wife to his ideals and to his person, and reveals just how completely he has excluded her from his life.

Gould's silence is an indication of the exclusion of women from knowledge that frequently occurs with Conrad's women characters. Roberts argues that knowledge is circulated among men but withheld from women. He writes:

the sharing and appropriation of power and knowledge...has characteristically functioned in modern Western society through the setting up of powerful barriers between sexual and other forms of inter-male relationship. Women...have been used to maintain such a barrier so that male desire is channelled through women. This involves the exclusion of women from subject positions of power (1993c:12).

Hawthorn suggests that "Gould no longer has anything to say to his wife, for the assessment of the human implications of what he does is irrelevant to [their] development" (1992:216). I agree with this statement as, with or without Emilia's idealism, Gould is going to continue to work the mine, because his personal success and sense of worth depend on it. He has decided to put his faith in action alone. In doing so, he believes that no further investment in the contract between his wife and himself is necessary, because the premise on which their marriage is predicated is irreversible at this point. Hawthorn asserts that "From the beginning Charles Gould is cut off from the reality of his wife by his imagination ... his [mind] is corrupted by fairy tales" (1992:215). The romanticising appeal of it to his imagination is all that he needs from their relationship.

What saves the marriage for Emilia is partly English convention, and partly her continued faith in her husband. Like an archetypal lady in a medieval castle she waits for the return of her knight. Her belief in the integrity of his ideals is unwavering. He remains for her "perfect" (428) in all that he does and she will not see his enslavement by the silver as corruption, merely as misplaced energies. Even at the end of the narrative she insists on sustaining the fragments of the initial illusion. It is,

after all, the loss of her husband at her side that she mourns: “Never; not for one short hour altogether to herself” (428).

Decoud observes that “It’s part of solid English sense not to think too much” (164), and, while this comment can be seen as arising from the cynicism which is often characteristic of Decoud’s discourse, it proves a useful defensive strategy for Emilia. In spite of her exclusion from his life, her devotion to Gould is uncompromising. She subdues penetrating insight and resists any impulse which would appear disloyal.

Her apparently selfless capacity for loyalty and belief brings tears to Dr Monygham’s eyes, and provides for both him and Charles Gould the abiding illusion that inspires their behaviour. To the end of the narrative these men are spared Emilia’s bitter realisation that her dream has cost her dearly. Only to another woman, in what Nadelhaft describes as the woman’s ability “to communicate rapidly and subtly with one another in a kind of shorthand conversation” (1991), does she reveal any of her disillusionment with masculine fidelity. Her one spoken moment of bitterness towards men occurs when she is comforting Giselle Viola on Nostromo’s death, “Console yourself, child. Very soon he would have forgotten you for his treasure” (459). It is the silver that robs women of the devotion of their men. “Let it be lost forever” she says (458).

While “material changes swept along in the train of material interests...other changes more subtle, outwardly marked, [affect] the minds and hearts of the workers” (413). By the end of the narrative, Gould’s moral illusion is shown to be just that; a groundswell of protest erupts among the locals against the exploitation that has led to the unequal distribution of wealth. By then Emilia no longer shares his thoughts.

Monygham observes: “There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests” (419). Gould has ceased to believe or care one way or the other. He continues with the project because its success depends entirely on him. He alone holds the weapon that can sway revolutions in favour of the survival of conservative

capitalism, and ultimately the realisation of his personal ambition. Decoud notes that “it must remain inviolate or perish by an act of his will alone” (207).

Emilia still believes that her husband is “the visible sign of the stability that could be achieved on the shifting ground of revolutions” (166). Her illusion that he is perfect, although the silver is ultimately destructive, is sustained to the end. When Dr Monygham cynically observes that “the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back”, she cries out against this, “as if hurt in the most sensitive part of her soul” (419). It is finally the silver which she sees as culpable, as the tempter. In her imagination she sees a vision of “the San Tome mine hanging over the Campo ... feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government” (427).

The fairy tale does not have the expected happy ending. One of the last descriptions of her depicts her as a used, weary fairy, “robbed of all the intimate felicities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe” (420) - as if her magic has run out and her capacity to infuse reality with the enchantment of dreams has ceased to function:

Small and dainty, as if radiating a light of her own in the deep shade of the interlaced boughs, she resembled a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours (520).

At the end of the narrative, when she reassesses her marriage, she concludes that it has been “a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a grief lived through” (427). Her role in the marriage is ultimately reduced to a mere show. Her husband has a new love.

Carabine suggests that “Gould ... is perfect while he feels no inner division” (1992:640). His story reveals that as he is increasingly required to engage with the

pervasive corruption surrounding the mine, so he separates himself from his wife and the vision they had shared in order not to divide himself. It is her place in the domestic world away from Charles that she cannot tolerate. Without children, there are to be no more Goulds to continue the Concession, and the bleakness of her future is crushing:

An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work all alone in the Treasure House of the World (428).

Gould has not been faithful to her, but has betrayed the terms of their original ideal. Yet contrasted with this betrayal, Emilia remains faithful to his image. For her, the Charles that she holds in her imagination is undivided, sound and has unfailing integrity to the last. Her Charles is still “perfect - perfect” (427).

While Emilia has been represented as a fairy in a fairy story, this representation is not the way the reader finally sees her. The novel offers a poignant portrayal of the entrapment that domestic confinement and good deeds can constitute for a woman. The narrative’s focus has frequently foregrounded her suffering, and her mythologised representation as fairy serves rather to heighten the tragedy of her life than diminish it. Her mythologisation has finally not hidden the harsh core of an essentially profit-driven venture. The high cost of the mine has been exacted not only from the inhabitants of Costaguana, but also from the ‘little fairy’ whose power to enchant, and whose unfailing fidelity to an idea, has made the whole venture possible.

Carabine suggests that the novel ends on a melodramatic note and adds that “few readers have been prepared to defend the ending of the novel” (1992:639). Hawthorn’s view is that Conrad’s women contribute, through their idealism, to the destruction of their relationships with the men they love in that their support is inspired by an idealistic vision of what the actions of the men can entail. I agree in part with Hawthorn; however, I do not believe that women’s relationships are destroyed by their idealistic vision. Women’s discourse is centrifugal in the narratives, and to suggest that their idealism destroys their relationships because it

demands too much, fails to register that the construction of women in an idealised way arises from masculine mythologising of women. Masculine mythologies, at some or other point, fail to provide sustaining illusions, and are therefore destructive.

In conclusion, I have argued that the foreign setting of *Nostramo* is a significant context for the examination of imperialism and other issues. The novel demonstrates the significance of women in imperialism, showing the ways in which women constitute a part of its mythology. I have argued that the women characters are denied existential knowledge and are presented as mythologised. As such they serve the purposes of the male characters in demarcating their masculinity and providing sustaining illusions in the face of disillusionment.

It is clear that the women characters are located in a mythology which is 'other' and demarcates the narrative space for the male characters to fill. With the exception of the minor character Giselle Viola, the women characters are devoted and supportive of men characters. I have argued that this capacity for consistent devotion arises out of a mythology that serves particular ends. Women as good fairies or enshrined icons are represented through the centrifugal discourses of the women characters who offer idealised possibilities of faith and integrity to male characters.

Linda Viola continues to love Nostromo after his death. Antonia is shown to sustain her ideals to the end of the narrative. She does not take religious orders but is shown, in a reversal of their earlier roles, as enshrining the memory of Decoud in her imagination. Emilia Gould never does confront her husband with disillusionment or reproach. Despite her confidences to Dr Monygham, she remains faithful to the ideal of the Gould Concession and its master.

This array of devoted woman believers inhabits the mythology which inspires the actions of the men. Centrifugally, like a framework of icons, the devotees, Linda, Emilia and Antonia are excluded still, at the end of the narrative, from the existential secrets of the emptiness underlying illusions. The novel ends with a proclamation of devotion in the cry of the betrayed Linda Viola. Symbolically, as the lighthousekeeper

on the island, she keeps the flame in the darkness. Even though her Gian Batiste has secretly paid court to her sister, her love for him remains unchanged. Her cry of fidelity, in the closing moments, seems to seal the narrative with the affirmation of the ideals of fidelity and love. In resistance to Nostromo's infidelity, she collects all her pain and love into a "true cry of undying passion" (463). "But I shall never forget thee. Never!" (462).

In my next case study, *The Secret Agent*, I shall argue that the woman character, Winnie Verloc, is the bearer of the ideals of devotion and commitment, notwithstanding the fact that she finally kills her husband. I shall suggest that her act is a breaking of the silence in which her existence has held her, and that the lack of ironic treatment by the narrator is an indicator of the high regard in which he holds her capacity for devotion.

CHAPTER FOUR: *THE SECRET AGENT*

From a certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama (*The Secret Agent*, 181).

My next case study is *The Secret Agent*, which was published in 1904, three years after *Nostromo*. Like *Nostromo* and *Under Western Eyes*, *The Secret Agent* is regarded as one of Conrad's "political" novels. The reason I have chosen this novel is that the violence in the domestic world of the woman character, Winnie Verloc, most characterises the violence in London at the time of the threatened anarchist sabotage campaign. Through her story the political themes of the novel are carried, and it is her character which contrasts most strongly with the corruption of the anarchists themselves.

The writing of the novel was begun in 1906 during a time of convalescence for Borys, Jessie (who was pregnant at the time) and Joseph Conrad in Montpellier, France. Jeffrey Meyers (1991) has offered a biographic reading of the novel. He believes that Conrad's misery at this time, coupled with his disappointment at the luke-warm public reception of *Nostromo*, accounts for the bleakness that pervades the novel throughout. Meyers believes that because of his mature age of almost fifty, Conrad was embarrassed at Jessie's pregnancy, and resented the prospect of another mouth to feed which would distract him from his work and put more strain on his already stretched finances. Meyers sees many parallels between Conrad's life at the time and aspects of the novel, reading characters like Winnie's mother and Stevie as representing Jessie and Borys. He asserts that the hostility directed at these characters was Conrad's own hostility towards his wife and child. Informed as they are by meticulous and exhaustive biographical research, Meyers's criticisms of *The Secret Agent* provide an interesting perspective on the novel. Yet his salacious relishing of all aspects of Jessie Conrad's life which show her in a bad light or set her up for

ridicule, (he especially dwells on instances which involve her falling or being dropped because of her excessive weight), plus his insistence on Conrad's infidelity to her during the marriage, might lead the reader to see an undisguised antipathy to Jessie in particular and to women in general as informing his critical work. In spite of this, I do not feel that his assessments are therefore to be dismissed.

In his 'political' novels, *Nostramo*, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*, Conrad does not present society in terms of an organic whole. Western civilisation, which for the Victorians is perhaps permanent and right, is in these novels exposed as unstable. The society of his novels is politically riven with conflict. Reflecting changing early twentieth century political thinking, which manifested itself in Marxist-influenced movements like the Fabian movement in England for example, the society of Conrad's novels, whether in South America, Russia or England, is shown to consist of different classes, which are in conflict and which have different aims and values. And yet Conrad's view of politics is far more humanistic than the Marxist one. Conrad seems to me to be demonstrating enduring, 'universal' political principles as he sees them, in which all political practice is ultimately doomed to failure because of the fallibility of the people who practise them. What is especially manifested is the degree of self-interest that underlies political movements. This is articulated clearly through characters like Martin Decoud, Verloc and others. Conrad wrote to Cunninghame Graham that "every cause is tainted ... you reject this one, espouse that other one as if one were evil and the other good while the same evil you hate is in both, but disguised in different words What you want to reform are not institutions - it is human nature" (1905:68).

One of the tenets of the Marxist argument is that it rejects the assumption that 'human nature' determines political development, and sees historical determinants as far more centrally active in the dynamics of politics than individual strengths and weaknesses. My reading of Conrad's political novels is that he suggests that human corruptibility is the abiding weakness of all political movements. Cedric Watts believes that Conrad is politically 'janiform', being in some respects very

conservative and in others keenly radical, in a way that seems almost anarchistic. On the one hand he appears to support the idea that a continual review of political movements is necessary, and on the other he damns political changes as ineffective in changing the lot of society's members. With socialists, Conrad saw that society is constructed in strata of those who control wealth and those who are controlled by it. Of socialism he said:

The International Socialist Association are triumphant, and every disreputable ragamuffin in Europe feels that the day of universal brotherhood, despoliation and disorder is coming apace and nurses day-dreams of well-plenished pockets amongst the ruins of all that is respectable, venerable and holy (Watts 55-6)

These sentiments clearly inform the writing of *The Secret Agent* with its collection of seedy anarchists bent on destroying society and plundering the spoils from its ruins. The narrator of the novel remarks that "The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds" (73). However, Conrad reveals a sense that some radical thinkers are well-intentioned, if wrong. Conrad's closest literary friendship was with the pioneer socialist, Cunninghame-Graham. Although well-known for his militant left-wing politics, Cunninghame-Graham's politics did not persuade Conrad. His cynicism about the efficacy of political movements is seen in his rebuttal of Cunninghame-Graham's doctrines:

You with your ideals of sincerity, courage and truth are strangely out of place in this epoch of material preoccupations. What does it bring? What's the profit? What do we get by it? These questions are at the root of every moral, intellectual or political movement. (1969:68).

Conrad was critical of the politics both of his homeland and of his adopted country. His vision of coming social disintegration in England is seen in his claim that

Socialism must inevitably end in Caesarism. The whole herd of idiotic humanity are moving in that direction at the bidding of unscrupulous rascals and a few sincere, but dangerous, lunatics (In Watts 1993:56).

Conrad's understanding of dissatisfaction with existing political structures is clearly manifested in his political novels, yet he also shows his view of the futility of attempts to make meaningful changes through the pursuit of political ideals, and the

dangers that arise from misdirected political zeal. In my view, he makes no overt ideological statements in the novels. Through the narrators in these novels, his view seems rather to reject political ideology as a panacea for human suffering, and to treat much of the political zeal with irony.

In *Under Western Eyes*, while the Russian psyche could be said to be the villain of the novel, the West is not posited as a viable alternative. Geneva is portrayed as sterile, and its democratic institutions as lifeless. The arrival of Haldin at Razumov's rooms is an ironic event, which is not peculiarly Russian it could have happened anywhere. It is an act of the same order of coincidence as the collision of the *Patna*, or the arrival of the trio on Samburan. To Mikulin, Razumov says:

I know I am a reed, but I beg you to allow me the superiority of the thinking reed over the unthinking forces that are about to crush him out of existence (80).

What is suggested is that there are much more sinister forces at work than mere politics. While political change will not be effective in Conrad's view because the individuals themselves do not change, he also suggests that chance events are the wildcard factors that cannot be plotted in. Stevie's stumble detonates not only the bomb but all the events around the political theme. The anarchists are finally shown to be in thrall to mere acts of chance.

The narrator in *The Secret Agent* is a sceptical, scornful, detached character whose narration is saturated with irony, and whose treatment of masculine politics in the novel is scathing. He views London as a maelstrom of decadence, violence and irrationality far beyond the control of its inhabitants. However, sincere political conviction, when it is articulated by women characters like Antonia Avellanos in *Nostromo* and Natalie Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*, is treated differently from male convictions and is seldom treated ironically. This is a crucial element of my discussion and, in interrogating this factor in the previous chapter, I attempted to show that the women characters represent idealised aspirations articulated through a centrifugal discourse which are congruous with the mythologised function they serve, namely to represent a mythology founded in illusion, against which the disillusioned

centripetal discourse of the male characters is juxtaposed. Their political views are often narrated rather than stated, locating their discourse as 'Other' rather than authoritative and central. In *Nostramo*, the political views of Antonia Avellanos are articulated more through the narrator and Martin Decoud than directly. An exception to this approach is perhaps Natalia Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*, who expresses her own political beliefs in the narrative. Winnie Verloc in *The Secret Agent*, does not fit neatly into this category as she has no interest in politics. Nadelhaft comments that "Winnie is the true anarchist, for she has learned to have no faith in systems of social organisation, all of which have ignored her or let her down" (1991:99), yet her sincere devotion to her brother is presented as a significant contrast to the questionable political convictions of the male characters in the story. In *The Secret Agent* it is not ultimately political convictions which are being examined. All viewpoints are treated with scepticism. What is the focus here, I believe, is a number of the male characters' self-indulgent and flabby amorality, which attempts to cloak itself in the spurious respectability of political conviction. I believe Winnie's character functions as a standard against which masculine egocentricity is found to be culpable, in the same way as in *Nostramo* the ardour of Antonia Avellanos is set up as a standard of idealised political zeal, impracticable but admirable.

In the political novels, political issues act more as catalysts to the interaction of individuals with each other, than as ends in themselves. The inefficacy of political ideologies and movements to bring about meaningful, constructive change is articulated through the centripetal discourse of the male characters, while the illusion of commitment to an ideal, whether of a political or a domestic nature, is articulated through the centrifugal discourse of the women characters. The centrifugal positioning of their discourse, its location as 'Other' rather than the authoritative voice in the text, underpins the fact that this discourse articulates an illusion. I shall argue that this element in the novels constitutes a mythology which informs the beliefs of the male characters. A pessimistic view of political change is shown again and again. As one system is broken down it is replaced by another which brings no greater advantage than the one before. Watts comments that, "like Cunninghame Graham, Conrad had a keen eye for the ways in which impressive phrases and

slogans might mask the ruthless acquisitiveness of individuals or of nations” (1993:58). In all three of the novels mentioned, political ideology is negated and the reader is left with a sense of a cyclic motion of revolution and counter-revolution, one arising from the other, which reminds the reader of Stevie’s endless drawing of circles, whose “confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos” (46). Costaguanan society in *Nostramo* is also seen to be a community of individuals constantly locked in action and reaction. With the downfall of the Monterist regime, the relative peace which follows when Sulaco secedes brings no improvement in the relative prosperity of the Costaguanans. The seeds of a future uprising are dormant in the new republic from its inception and the closing of the novel sees a discontented working class organising itself for further revolt. The irony is that with independence the conditions for a future revolution are simultaneously created. In *The Secret Agent* a similarly bleak political view is presented. Both the ideology of the anarchists and the attempts of the police to protect society from them are shown throughout to be self-seeking and spurious.

However, where the two novels *The Secret Agent* and *Nostramo* differ markedly is in their setting. After the contrasts of light and dark in *Nostramo*, the wide spaces of the gulf, the Higuerota and the plains which dwarf the activities of the individuals in the story, the characters in *The Secret Agent* are claustrophobically closed in by an overurbanised, decaying structure which seems to have an absurd, aquatic life of its own. The violence here is not set at a remove from the English hearth to a South American republic, an African trading post or a Malaysian jungle. Here the violence is at home in the streets of London. In *The Secret Agent* there are no glowing icons. The setting is a stagnant city whose inhabitants appear to have lost the ability to see beyond its gloom. It is the place where Winnie lives an equally murky existence, in keeping with the dark opaqueness of the city itself, where things do not bear looking into. The characters in the novel are surrounded by gloom. The menace is made that much more terrifying by the fact that it is domestic, at the door so to speak. However, the menace for Londoners is not, as Vladimir puts it, the “people whose aim is to drive them [the English] out of their houses to starve in ditches” (33). The menace is the darkness which Conrad believes lies underneath the surface of all things. The

grotesqueness of the city of London is reinforced throughout the novel. London is portrayed as a place of savage farce, “the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies” (21). People die but the city lives on. The portrayal of the city calls to mind Conrad’s view of the universe as a knitting machine which “knits us in and knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions - and nothing matters” (in Watts 1969:56). London appears malevolently indifferent to the fate of its inhabitants. Early in the novel, the narrator presents a telling glimpse of the flimsiness of Verloc’s home as a fortress against the menace of the city:

Then after slipping his braces off his shoulders he pulled up violently the venetian blind, and leaned his forehead against the cold window pane - a fragile film of glass stretched between him and the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man Mr Verloc felt the latent unfriendliness of all out of doors with a force approaching to positive bodily anguish (1980:54).

In the London of the novel, with its ‘latent unfriendliness’, the inanimate are invested with a degree of life, while the people are inert. For example the pianola plays by itself, the parlour rolls like the sea and Verloc’s hat takes refuge under the table. Even the houses stray from their locations occasionally. Contrasted with this is the indolence of characters in the novel: Verloc who had the “air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed” (14), Winnie’s mother, who has a “motionless being” (16), and Michaelis, who speaks with a “voice that wheezed as if deadened and oppressed by the layer of fat on his chest” (40). This macabre disjunction between the animate and the inanimate is portrayed in a most chilling way when Ossipon sees Verloc’s dead body. It is Verloc’s hat which impresses itself on Ossipon’s consciousness, and it is by its imposing, almost malicious presence, that Ossipon realises Verloc is dead. The hat seems ready to start a new life as a collector of alms, while its owner lies dead next to it - “rim upward, it lay on the floor before the couch as if prepared to receive the contributions of pence from people who would come presently” (230).

The dehumanising circumstances in which the inhabitants of the city live is reinforced by the political stance of the anarchists themselves, whose objective is the

destruction of organised society and the ultimate reconstruction of a new order. However, the anarchists are characterised in such a way as to prevent any faith in their credo, as their political stance is portrayed as a convenient way of avoiding work, relationships, commitments and paying for accommodation.

While characters in the novel are indeed corrupt, the heart of the darkness is the city itself. The narrator speaks ironically of Westminster as “the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets”, and yet the sun struggles to penetrate to the heart of it. Conrad exposes the advancement of this Empire in *Heart of Darkness*. The London of the Author’s Note is reminiscent of the London described at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*, ‘one of the dark places of the earth’. It is a place which is barely lit by a bloodshot sun, an abyss beyond the reach of light. The narrator’s irony about the heart of the glorious Empire is reinforced by numerous references to the city of London as a dark place of “slimy dampness” (217), which, for example, “is sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss” (218). The collective imagery of murkiness and darkness conveys the sense that vision of all kinds in such a place is difficult. Vladimir points out that the people of London have their sensibilities blunted. When the Assistant Commissioner makes his way through London streets past “the Italian restaurant - such a peculiarly British thing” (117), he ponders on the fate of the enigmatical people whom he is ostensibly protecting. “The few people passing in that direction vanished in one stride No footsteps echoed. They would never be heard of again” (118). The darkness engulfing the city swallows them and buries them for ever.

The linking, through images of darkness, of the heart of Africa with the heart of London suggests parallels in the colonial paradigm between the colonies and home. James (1996) sees both class control and colonialism as twin forces aimed at subduing potential threats to ‘civilised’ society. He likens the working classes in London to the colonised races in Africa, seeing the exploitation of the lower classes as analogous with the colonisation of other races. In that the ‘savages’ need to be ‘civilised’ according to colonial policy, the workers are regarded as being in need of control by the same authorities. A variation of this approach, which I shall examine in

more detail further on, is the feminist approach to colonial issues which sees women as the 'colonised'. Fincham (1996), for example, sees women as the correlative to the colonised races, and as that which is controlled and defined by the coloniser.

While I support this view, and have illustrated its validity elsewhere in this study, the case of Winnie Verloc is complicated by the fact that she voluntarily imposes a form of control on herself, in order to maintain security and stability at home. However, her motive for doing this is not self-serving but to please Verloc and thereby protect her family. In one sense, Winnie Verloc could be said to conform on a fundamental level with the approach to the women characters dealt with in previous chapters. However, the characterisation of Winnie also resists this approach. Firstly, she is not characterised by idealism as, for example, Antonia and Emilia are. She is blind to Verloc's depravity because she wants to be, not because she idealises him in the way that Emilia does Charles, or Lena, Heyst. Secondly, her motives are not "pure" or naive, as the Intended's, Emilia's or Antonia's are. Her marriage to Verloc involves a conscious effort on her part to deceive him, in this way ensuring the survival of herself and her dependents. Her motives are, I believe, primal rather than pure, noble yet expedient. So completely does she achieve this deception that Verloc's attempt at consoling her on Stevie's death, "What would it have been if you had lost me?" is uttered with the sincerity of the truly deceived.

However, Winnie is not the only one to find the marriage useful. Verloc lives his life on the basis of the illusion that he is loved for himself. It is this assurance which enables him to feel entitled to involve Stevie in his sabotage enterprise, not realising the importance of the boy to his wife. He uses his status as a respectably married man to disguise his supposed anarchistic sentiments ("Anarchists don't marry...It would be apostasy" (38) says Vladimir), to cloak his subversive activities in respectability and to provide himself with sexual and domestic pleasures. His motives for using the marriage are entirely self-seeking, whereas Winnie's are not.

The Secret Agent is arguably Conrad's most pessimistic novel and is a brutal indictment of the destructive potential of politics. Baines argues that there is no principle of contradiction in the novel, no resistance and no moral positive. He feels that the irony is unrelieved, but this is not the case as I shall shortly illustrate. Other critics argue that the darkness of the novel is unremitting. Ruth Nadelhaft comments:

This novel is almost universally described as savagely ironic. There is virtually no critical departure from the received wisdom which declares that the world of *The Secret Agent* is a world almost totally without morality, where ethical standards and personal loyalties are absent (1991:96)

However, the world of this novel is not without morality, ethical standards and loyalties, in spite of what critics say; these qualities are to be found in the women characters, principally Winnie Verloc and to a lesser extent, her mother. While the kind of 'pure' devotion represented by Antonia Avellanos and Linda Viola in *Nostromo* is not seen in this novel, nevertheless Winnie and her mother sustain their loyalties to their kin and establish bonds with others. By contrast, few bonds of comradeship exist among the inhabitants of this murky city. And yet, such bonds as there are among human beings, such as those between Winnie, Stevie and their mother, ultimately provide no protection for any of them. Much critical discussion fails to attend to the place of Winnie Verloc in the story. I consider it essential to acknowledge that Conrad places Winnie Verloc at the centre of the novel. Nadelhaft puts it this way:

Only when we read this text, in concert with those which precede and follow it, as part of Conrad's long analysis of the centrality of domestic relationships to the success or failure of political and moral systems, do we read it properly (1991:100).

There is no doubt that the world of the novel is a dark, friendless place and that, in such a world, 'moral' behaviour becomes more difficult. Conrad has repeatedly suggested in his writing that, above all else, fidelity and loyalty are redeeming qualities. He wrote to Cunninghame-Graham that "For the great mass of mankind the only saving grace that is needed is steady fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart in the short moment of each human effort" (1969:70-1). In *The Secret Agent* 'light' in the darkness is embodied by a character who does show 'steady fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart': Winnie Verloc.

Conrad states in the Author's note, that when conceiving of the story initially, out of his image of the darkness of the city of London, Winnie emerged like a flame, as the central, determining factor in the story, in sharp contrast to the dark ugliness of London. Conrad outlines how the idea for the story took shape in his imagination. Describing the novels' genesis, he speaks of a 'mental change' from thoughts of vast South American landscapes, in which "strange forms appeared and claimed attention as crystals will do by their bizarre and unexpected shapes" (10). Out of this 'smithy' the form of the novel begins to emerge. Of its ominous setting he says:

Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light ... darkness enough to bury five million lives (100).

Light itself is buried in this city and all its souls are buried alive. Conrad relates that once these ideas had taken hold, an impulse to write a story intensified. He writes that out of the dark shapelessness of the original idea, a flame appeared and grew bigger. The flame is Winnie Verloc:

Irresistibly the town became the background Endless vistas opened before meIt would take years to find the right way Slowly the dawning conviction of Mrs Verloc's maternal passion grew up to a flame between me and that background, tingeing it with its secret ardour and receiving from it in exchange some of its own sombre colouring. At last the story of Winnie Verloc stood out complete... .This book is that story The figures grouped about Mrs Verloc and related directly or indirectly to her tragic suspicion that 'life doesn't stand much looking into' (10).

What is significant to me is that the only light in this picture comes from the flame of Winnie Verloc's maternal passion for her retarded brother. Thus, even though the novel is overwhelmingly bleak, there is a pale source of light and it emanates from the woman character. Again, devotion, which here has its roots in a battered childhood, is presented as a standard that contrasts with bleaker and more sinister aspects of the novel. The picture presented above is one of contrast; between light and dark, and between Winnie Verloc and everyone else.

As London is the centre of the Empire, Winnie is the centre of the novel. In establishing this, my approach to this case study will be twofold; it will look at Winnie's story as the central focus of the narrative, and at the use of irony by the narrator to reinforce this focus. The first point I shall establish is that, notwithstanding its title, the novel is Winnie's story. I believe that such a reading takes full account of the author's stated purpose, and provides coherence to the many aspects of the novel's structure. I shall proceed on the basis that the Author's Note is to be taken as a key to a reading of the novel, and that Conrad's insistence that this is Winnie's story is to be taken seriously. I believe that the other characters are grouped about her with specific structural significance. I am aware that the author's declaration to the reader on the facing page that *The Secret Agent* is "a Simple Tale" is possibly the earliest example in the novel of his ironic approach, and that therefore the Author's Note is to be read with the possibility of irony in mind. However I believe that Conrad's account of the genesis of the novel is a compelling aspect of the novel and I intend to base my argument on it. Foregrounding the character of Winnie Verloc therefore seems to me the most appropriate way of reading the text.

Conrad recounts that the idea for the novel came from hearing of the botched plot to blow up Greenwich Observatory. His informant had casually remarked that the fellow who had carried the bomb was "half an idiot. His sister committed suicide afterwards" (9). What struck him was the "criminal futility of the whole thing, doctrine, action, mentality ... and ... the contemptible aspect of the half-crazy pose as of a brazen cheat exploiting the miseries and passionate incredulities of a mankind always so tragically eager for self-destruction" (8). What is manifested in these words is principally the pity that the author feels for the exploited and for their misery. Conrad himself was a victim of political exile and could be said to be endeavouring to expose the dangers of political lunacy. I intend to demonstrate that the centre of the novel is the domestic world of the Verlocs, while the political ambit of anarchists, police and patrons orbits this centre. In the words of the Assistant Commissioner, "From a certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama" (181).

In his Author's Note Conrad states that:

Even the purely artistic purpose, that of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as pity (p11).

Conrad's deliberate use of an ironic method through the narrator is the second aspect on which my approach is based. The narrator's treatment of the anarchists and a number of other male characters as well is characterised by a savage irony. Conversely, there is a telling absence of irony in much of the narration which deals with Winnie and all that concerns her. I believe that the use of irony or the absence of it in the novel is a crucial pointer to the way in which the character of Winnie Verloc can be read. Winnie's modus of not looking into things too much because they do not bear looking into is not presented ironically as an indolent evasion of responsibilities, but as a voluntary myopia which provides an illusion of surface manageability. For Winnie it is a saving illusion. She cannot analyse things, but she can look out for Stevie.

The lack of irony enables the reader to pity rather than scorn her. This contrast is most markedly seen when Winnie stabs her husband. The tonal difference sets Winnie apart from the other characters, enabling the reader to read her character quite differently, more in terms of a flame in the darkness than as another feature of that darkness. In *Under Western Eyes*, Sophia Antonovna says to Razumov:

Remember that women, children, and revolutionists hate irony, which is the negation of all saving instincts, of all faith, of all devotion, of all action (1966:279).

The above words are especially true of the characterisation of Winnie Verloc in that it is never the intention of the character-narrator to negate her faith and devotion through the scorn of his irony. The narrator does not spare the 'revolutionists' his irony because they are a group of shams. However, the sincere attempts at protection of kin by Winnie and her mother are not ironically probed. Her devotion to Stevie is the dominant influence in her life, making her similar to the Intended in *Heart of Darkness*, Emilia Gould in *Nostromo*, Lena in *Victory* and a number of other women characters. The illusion that life can be reduced to this plane of existence is treated almost as sacrosanct by the narrator. And yet her illusion that she and her family are

safe in Verloc's hands is shown to be a tragic mistake. On the one hand the lack of irony renders Winnie's concern for others as genuine and authentic. On the other, she is seen as harbouring a set of inauthentic illusions. Thus Winnie is in a profound way both authentic and a representative of illusions at the same time.

I shall illustrate that Winnie Verloc is the centre of hope in the narrative, not only because Conrad says she is, but also because the narrator's irony is mostly suspended when dealing with her life. Few critics have not remarked on the use of irony in the narrative, but this usage needs to be teased out more closely. A reading which does not distinguish between the narrator's *different* usages of irony, such as Baines's, masks a significant indicator which has an impact on theme and characterisation. The problem with such a reading is that Conrad and the narrator are fused into one character. Thus, an overall authorial intention is read into the tone of the narrative. I do not believe that this is apt. Not only does Baines fuse writer and narrator, but also himself as critic and implied reader. For example, he says, "the reader is constantly on the verge of accepting his [Verloc's] point of view, and sympathises with him" (1960:401). My reading does not sympathise with Verloc at all. The narrator, as a specific narrative construct, recounts passages of Winnie's life with a telling absence of irony (although she herself is unwittingly ironical), putting aside his usual sceptical frame through which most other action in the narrative is focalised. The purpose is, I believe, to foreground through Winnie's story the very moral positive which critics like Baines think the novel lacks - integrity.

Winnie's story is largely presented through the focalisation of the narrator. Much feminist criticism has tackled this aspect of literary production (narrative focalisation), finding the 'first person realistic narrative' to be ideologically appropriate to feminism. Such criticism has tended to direct its focus at works where there is an identification of author with protagonist, and of both with women. *The Secret Agent* should therefore be vulnerable to the objection that the story of the women characters is told by a (presumably) male narrator.

However, my reading of the novel does not leave me unsatisfied with the telling of Winnie's story. On the contrary, the narrator displays a greater sympathy for Winnie than any other character. She is the moral and tragic centre of the narrative. I do not feel, as a woman reader, that her character suffers a significant disjunction between what she 'is' and what she is said by the narrator 'to be'. For example, a scene from the end of the novel, where Winnie is guilty of murder, and might therefore no longer merit sympathy, illustrates the difference between the narrator's treatment of Winnie and his treatment of the male characters. Masculine attempts to stereotype her in terms of insulting images, such as Ossipon's fear of her 'degeneracy' at the end of the narrative exist side by side with more poignant observations such as "She was the most lonely of murderers that ever struck a mortal blow" (218). Ossipon's image of her as "twined round him like a snake ... death itself" (234) does not damn her, because of the ironic context in which his thoughts are uttered. Through subtleties of the narrator's tone, the reader's sympathy is fully engaged here with Winnie not Ossipon, notwithstanding the fact that she has just murdered her husband. Ossipon is clearly intent on stealing her money and abandoning her. His greed and complacency at the ease with which he will exploit her for sex and money provide the context for his fear of her. His fear simply provides further evidence of his cowardice. Even her cry "Tom, you can't throw me off now... Not unless you crush my head under your heel" (218) which forges a link between her and the serpent in the garden of Eden, is not contrived by the narrator to establish her as a serpentine figure. Her words serve rather to foreground Ossipon's contempt and fear of women which has enabled him to exploit them so readily, and his self-serving desire to save his own skin. The filtering of the scene through the focalisation of the narrator enables multiple meanings to be explored here. Thus the 'translation' of Winnie's story by the narrator, in this novel, is not an unduly problematic issue for my reading of it.

Conrad's own statements about the genesis of the novel posit Winnie as the moral positive in the novel. Stott, in 'The Woman in Black: Race and Gender in *The Secret Agent*' (1993), regards it as very significant that Winnie emerges in Conrad's imagination out of the darkness that becomes the city. Her argument focuses on the fact that Winnie Verloc is a figure in black, and she sees this aspect of her

characterisation as emerging from an atavistic mystery shown by Conrad to be associated with women characters and characters of other races. In previous chapters I have endeavoured to show how Conrad's women characters are often bearers of light, in their dress, their physical attributes or in the imagery associated with them. Here there is no such radiant figure. In this milieu, there are no fairies dressed in white, glowing white foreheads or nubile maidens flitting in white veils through the trees. In this novel the images of sacrifice and devotion, manifested principally through Winnie Verloc, are grim, dark and practical.

Stott states that her intention is to show how "interacting late-nineteenth century discourses of sexuality and race, seen as part of the hegemonic system maintaining imperialism ... are disrupted within *The Secret Agent* as part of a sustained internal interrogation of imperialism and its dominative, panoptical strategies" (1993:39-40). In doing this she takes issue with theories of criminology which are based on analysis of physiognomy or a belief in the atavism of the criminal type, and finds the theories of Nordau, Lombroso and others to be unsustainable by the text. These theories, she suggests, arise from an ideology which is bent on justifying imperial occupation and exploitation. Out of such attitudes Stott sees the emergence of the belief ultimately in white racial supremacy. Criminological theory which transfers its gaze from racial stigmata to atavistic stigmata on the body of the European criminal to show how deviant types can be identified within western civilization, should, she believes, be seen as part of the complexity of colonial discourse and imperial ideology. For her, *The Secret Agent* addresses itself to this translated 'anthropology' as part of an internal interrogation of the strategies of imperialism.

In Conrad's imaginative genesis of the novel, Stott sees the emergence of Winnie Verloc as metonymic, similar to the emergence from a set of images of other non-European woman characters in other texts. She likens the atavistic mystery of Aissa, the non-European woman in *An Outcast of the Islands*, whose secrets will be uncovered by the white man, to the atavistic mystery of the western criminal. Aissa, for example, 'emerges' for the white trader, Willems. The process begins with the first stir of his senses when Willems registers a movement in the trees. Under

Willems's startled gaze, the flash of white and colour becomes a woman. Similarly in the Author's Note to *The Secret Agent* there is a gradual metamorphosis of the flame into a fragmented apparition, a collection of images. The flame that appears to stand between the darkness and his vision becomes the figure of Winnie. As Aissa is blurred in the foliage of the jungle and appears as an apparition of itself with its promise of metonymic meaning, so too, according to Stott, Winnie Verloc appears out of the vision of the monstrous city, almost a representation of it.

Stott believes that Conrad needs to keep this vision at arms-length to prevent engulfment - Winnie represents for Conrad, she believes, the threatening devourer of the creator. She sees Conrad's having to "fight hard to keep at arms-length the memories of ... London in [his] early days, lest they should rush in and overwhelm each page of the story" (11), as a figuration of the creative engulfment that the author fears. For Stott, Winnie is the metonymic figure which represents the black space that is London. Thus to decipher the darkness, is to decipher Winnie herself. I take a different view of Winnie's position in the text. I agree that she is a figure in black and therefore allied with and in a sense emerging from the blackness of the landscape of the city. However, I do not see her as representative of it. Her 'flame' of maternal passion is a crucial index of the small yet significant degree of resistance that she brings to the darkness of the city. Like Conrad's other women characters, her devotion is spotlighted; she is another example of the woman of Conrad's mythology, represented as having the ability to exercise a commitment to a belief, person, ideal, when centrally located male characters are shown to be incapable of sustaining this.

An area not covered by Stott's argument which I plan to pursue is the degree to which Winnie's silence in the novel reinforces Stott's assertions on hegemonic systems which sustain imperialism. Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin assert in *The Empire Writes Back* that silence is the "active characteristic linking all post-colonial texts" (1989:187). Given that their definition of 'post-colonial' covers "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (1989:2), Stott's argument provides an interesting point of departure for further

debate on the question of Winnie's silence and its place in the ideology of imperialism.

Fincham likens Winnie Verloc to the colonised subject: Winnie "can also be interpreted in the light of current colonial theory to indicate a relationship similar to, but not identical with, the colonised subject" (1996:50). For Fincham, "Her transition from protectress of domestic property to violator of domestic security, which results in her being defined as a criminal is similar to the process whereby the colonial subject is invested simultaneously with power and menace. She uses Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry (quoted in Young), to illustrate Winnie's position in the power relationship with her husband.

If control slips away from the colonizer, the requirement of mimicry means that the colonized, while complicit in the process, remains the unconscious and unwitting agent of menace - with a resulting paranoia on the part of the colonizer as he tries to guess the native's sinister intentions (1990:147-8).

Fincham's point is illustrated in the murder scene in *The Secret Agent*, when Verloc tries unsuccessfully to 'guess' Winnie's intentions. As will be shown later, his failure ever to have understood his wife's motives for being in the marriage leads to his own destruction.

In spite of the fact that Conrad ends his Author's Note by reiterating that his intention in the novel is the "telling of Winnie Verloc's story to its anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness, and despair" (12), certain critics have responded more to the politics of the novel than its characters. These critics have not seen the novel as Winnie Verloc's story. The Marxist critic Jonah Raskin, sees the novel as an unflattering portrait of national English types, whose chief intention is to shake English security on "their tidy little island" (1971:207). For him the principal force of the novel is the manifestation of the spectre of international anarchist terrorism which continues to haunt houses, offices, parks and streets. He believes, however, that the novel which really sets Russia against England is *Under Western Eyes*, "a Russian story for Western ears" (1971:207). While Raskin does not elaborate on this point, his mention of 'ears' instead of 'eyes' draws attention to the narrator and the idea of

telling a story through a character's focalisation, rather than just the reading of it. I agree with him that the novel is an exposé of self-serving posturing and its dire consequences for a community which harbours extremists in its midst. However, politics alone, as Baines recognises, is not enough to hold the novel together.

In his biography of Conrad, Jocelyn Baines declares that *The Secret Agent*, unlike other novels by Conrad, lacks a unifying theme and that, when carefully examined, "falls apart into a succession of only superficially related scenes" (1971:408). For Baines, Winnie arouses neither pity nor concern until she is betrayed by Comrade Ossipon. He believes that Winnie is on too low a level of creation/evolution for her self-sacrifice to be seen as anything above animal instinct. For Baines, "there is no tragedy because there is no sense of waste" (1960:38). Feminist critics, like Nadelhaft, believe that such disparagement reduces a woman's life to the level of the instinctual behaviour of the non-human. It is the reading of the novel that is problematic for feminist critics, not the writing as Watts suggests.

Jacques Berthoud (1978) sees *The Secret Agent* as an examination of the contrast between life at home and life abroad. He takes as his starting point Conrad's own contrast (given in the Author's Note), between the continent of South America, the 'reflector of the world's light' (10) and the 'monstrous town' of London. For Berthoud the character in *The Secret Agent* whose chief function is to highlight this contrast is the Assistant Commissioner, whom he sees as a diminished Charles Gould. The Assistant Commissioner has been obliged through a society marriage to exchange a career in the colonies, which would have suited his 'adventurous disposition', for a career in Scotland Yard. Through this character, Berthoud develops his hypothesis that "maladjustment, which the novel emphasises in a variety of ways, has one major function: to highlight the degree of organisation, integration, institutionalisation, *socialisation* even, reached by the society that stifles him" (1978:132). Berthoud sees the Assistant Commissioner as slipping society's cramping and frustrating clutches when he stalks Verloc in the rainy darkness, like a hunter after his prey in the jungle. Berthoud sees society as surviving "on the strength of its members' capacity to disregard the madness and despair that infects them"

(1978:138). The only character who is not distorted and blinded in this way, in his view, is Stevie whose sight is unclouded because he is a congenital simpleton. Winnie and her mother are seen as characters whose lives illustrate the inappropriateness of the conservative tendency in England at the time to turn a blind eye to suffering. While I agree with Berthoud that Winnie is 'blinded' and 'distorted' in that she lives a deliberate lie, I contend that the motive for the lie, the protection of her kin, eclipses the deceit and sets her apart, morally, from the anarchists and other characters in the narrative.

Contrary to Baines's reading, my reading of *The Secret Agent* sees Winnie's story as the unifying element in the novel. A critic who also chooses to take Conrad's Note literally, seeing the preface as the most revealing one that Conrad ever wrote, is Daleski (1977). Daleski takes as his starting point the assumption that "This book is *that* story" that is, Winnie's. In approaching the novel this way, he rightly points out that both reader and critic are confronted with two problems (144-5). The first problem is to define the way in which a novel, which is nominally about a secret agent who is at the centre of the action, is actually about the agent's wife. Gurko has a ready answer to this problem. He suggests that Winnie is as much a secret agent as Verloc is, thus for him the title would not necessarily denote Mr Verloc at all. The second problem is to establish a relation between Winnie Verloc's story and the other stories in the narrative, for example Stevie's, the professor's, the police's and so on, which also centre around the Greenwich Observatory explosion. I intend to focus my discussion around two issues that I believe can be said to be dominant themes in the narrative. In looking at both of these, I shall endeavour to show that Winnie's story is the one that most significantly articulates the issues at hand. Thus, while the narrative is nominally about her husband, it is Winnie whose story articulates the major themes. While her character is very different from the male characters in the narrative, in crucial ways she is linked thematically with them, and thus there is a strong relation between her story and theirs.

Two central issues which involve all the main characters in the novel are safety and work. The first theme which I believe links the different elements of the novel is that of 'work'. Before looking at Winnie's story and the way in which her story relates to others in the narrative, I wish to focus on the male characters (other than her retarded brother Stevie), in order to show how her story 'shines' like a flame against their indolence and egocentricity, especially that of the anarchists'.

One of the ways in which these differences is shown is through the relative physicality of the different characters. Compared with Winnie's shapely form and physical energy, the anarchists who frequent her parlour are characterised by obesity and indolence, signifying from the outset their successful evasion of labour. Her husband is "burly in a fat-pig style" (20), "he had embraced indolence from an impulse as profound as inexplicable" (19) and he has "an air of having wallowed all day in an unmade bed" (20). Such repulsive images of his heaviness and laziness abound throughout the novel, reinforcing the corrupt way that he earns his living - trading in secrets and betrayals, but exerting no physical energy in the process. Michaelis, the "ticket-of-leave apostle" is so fat that his "voice wheezed as if deadened and oppressed by the layer of fat on his chest" and he has a "semi-transparent complexion [as] though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar" (40). There is a heavy-handedness in the narration which serves to offend the reader. Compounding this distasteful picture is the fact that Michaelis relies on handouts and patronage from a wealthy socialite to survive. His political activities are directly dependent on her patronage as, without it, the luxury of writing about his destructive ideology would have to be replaced with earning a living.

Karl Yundt's body is a formless collection of "deformed gouty swellings" (41) and his words are mere whimpers of "worn-out passion" (41). He had never "as much as raised his little finger against the social edifice. He was no man of action" (45). He too relies on a woman, whom he had years ago enticed away from a friend. Not only is he a picture of laziness; his lack of fidelity to bonds between friends is set in

marked contrast to the tenacious commitment of Winnie to her family. His life depends on “the snarling old witch” (48) who provides the essential supports that make his political indulgences possible. Comrade Ossipon is, by contrast, robust and slim. His mop of yellow hair and his leering almond-shaped eyes give him an appeal which he uses to full advantage to attract gullible women. While he is not fat, he is shown to ‘feed off’ the women that he attracts. “As to Ossipon, that beggar was sure to want for nothing as long as there were silly girls with savings-books in the world” (48). His ‘work’ consists of using his charm to hunt down new sources of finance. The professor suggests to Ossipon that he stay close to Winnie when Verloc is presumed dead, as it is common knowledge that Verloc has money saved. At the end of the narrative, Ossipon’s consent to help Winnie escape to France is motivated purely by greed, and he finally does steal her money.

Much has been written about Conrad’s belief in work and duty as safeguards against the incoherence of life as he saw it. In this regard, the unwillingness of the group of anarchists to undertake any ‘respectable’ work whatsoever can be seen as a powerful indictment of their parasitical role in the narrative. Again, Winnie’s story articulates significant statements on this issue. The reader sees this in the scene when Winnie she watches Stevie and Verloc disappear up Brett street. As Winnie watches, she feels contentment: “Might be father and son” (154). The irony of her words is unconscious, and she little knows that her happiness is the last she will ever feel on Stevie’s behalf. Contemplating the past few years and the choice she has made to marry Verloc, she thinks:

Mr Verloc was as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life. She was also aware that it was her *work*. And with peaceful pride she congratulated herself on a certain resolution she had taken years before. It had cost her some effort, and even a few tears (154).

Her ‘work’ is to look out for Stevie and she is prepared to labour hard to achieve that end. In striking a ‘bargain’ with Verloc, she undertakes to mind her own business, keep his house and share his bed, in return for the safe passage through life of her difficult brother. Such work is presented in the narrative as noble. I do not agree with Baines’s dismissal of Winnie as corrupt and therefore not tragic. Such a reading fails

to acknowledge the narrator's unironical summing up of Winnie's life. "It was a life of single purpose and of a noble unity of inspiration, like those rare lives that have left their mark on the thoughts and feelings of mankind" (183). The weight of Winnie's devotion to her brother, coupled with her silent endurance of a life with an indolent man she does not love, having foregone her chance of happiness with the butcher boy, overwhelms any claim to moral distaste that her deceit of Verloc might engender.

The second linking theme in the novel is 'safety'. For some critics, Raskin for example, the novel is principally about the issue of safety. The story, which centres around the attempted destruction of the Greenwich Observatory, can be seen as an attempt to shake English complacency about the presence of terrorists in their midst, and force them to safeguard their safety more effectively. In looking at the various characters and their relation to this issue, it is clear that Winnie's is the story that articulates the search for safety in the most significant way. That this search is a futile one is the centre of tragedy in the narrative. Again, I shall examine the male characters initially in terms of their relation to the theme of 'safety' in order to provide a backdrop to the collapse of Winnie's 'saving illusion'. In the same way that women characters elsewhere in Conrad's novels have been fused with a desire to serve and devote themselves to others or to a cause, their function in the novels being inscribed in terms of a mythology about women, so Winnie is shown to be the single character in the narrative whose quest for safety is worthily motivated. The attempt, selfish or otherwise, to secure safety is visibly present in the stories of most of the other characters; yet it is Winnie's story which articulates this aspect most poignantly and forcibly in the novel. As I shall show, in most other cases the quest for safety is exposed as rooted in venal motives.

All of the main male characters are linked in some way to the issue of 'safety'. Amongst the villains, Vladimir, for example, would like to eliminate all political radicals to ensure the safety of the planet. He is similar to the professor in his neurotic readiness to exterminate those who displease him. (The professor is described as having "a frenzied puritanism of ambition" (73), a description which is also true of

Vladimir). Vladimir sees all liberal political orders as conniving at the political crimes of radical thinkers. In his capacity as Russian ambassador to the court of St James, he hopes to rid England of the anarchist elements which foment trouble in exile there, in the hope that Russia, ultimately, will be protected from their acts of sabotage. He says, "England must be brought into line This country is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty" (33). His ultimate hatching of the plot to blow up Greenwich Observatory is not only an attempt to shake English complacency, but also an attempt to demonstrate his own potency. Like the professor, he is gratified by the facility that explosives provide to demonstrate his power. His political megalomania is linked with a powerful egocentricity which manifests itself in conceit and vanity. Vladimir is "something of a favourite in society" (25). He is shown to be proud of his fine looks: "he had the advantage of seeing his own face, clean-shaved and round, rosy about the gills, and with the thin sensitive lips formed exactly for the utterance of those delicate witticisms which had made him such a favourite in the very highest society" (290). He believes that the middle classes are 'blinded by an idiotic vanity' and yet Vladimir himself has a vanity which is overweening. His elaboration of the scheme to blow up the Observatory fills Verloc with despair because it displays so much ignorance "as to the real aims, thoughts and methods of the revolutionary world He confound[s] causes with effects ... assume[s] organization where in the nature of things it [does] not exist" (330). Verloc does not protest the lunacy of the plan, which is clearly little more than the ranting of a conceited fool, because he realises, with Vladimir, that "it would be infinitely safer for [him] to follow carefully what [he is] saying" (34). In his impassioned tirade on the apathy of the English middle classes, Vladimir manifests his own secret fears of all ordinary people, who disgust him with their obesity, their stupidity and their naive politics. His statements about the common people betray his arrogance and distaste: he finds Verloc to be "unexpectedly vulgar, heavy, and impudently unintelligent. He [looks] uncommonly like a master plumber" (31). Vladimir regards "artists - art critics and such like people [to be] of no account ... all the damned professors are radicals at heart", and for him the mechanic is "the embodiment of fraudulent laziness and incompetency" (31-2). The narrator presents Vladimir as a character

intent on preserving a life of delicacy and privilege, for the sole purpose of perpetuating an order which suits his needs. His concern for others is palpably absent.

The presence of the police in the novel is a significant one, both because they resist the activities of the anarchists, and because they are characterised as similar in significant ways to the criminals they hunt. Scotland Yard are shown to have created a matrix of spies and informers to keep them aware of illegal activities, and secrets are traded in the name of the safety of society. However, their motives, too, are shown to arise more from the hope of personal gain than from a desire to secure the safety of a nation of people. This is clear in the characters of Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner. In this they are little different from the anarchists themselves. The narrator sceptically comments that Inspector Heat “could understand the mind of a burglar, because, as a matter of fact, the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer” (76). The week before the bombing, Heat assures a high official that no outbreak of anarchist activity will be forthcoming. “If ever he thought himself safe in making a statement it was then” (75-6). In giving this assurance, he “had spoken thus in his consciousness of being the great expert of his department. He had gone even so far as to utter words which true wisdom would have kept back” (76). Heat’s promotion is very rapid because of just such ‘wisdom’ and the narrator makes it clear that the preservation of English safety is what the pleasantness of his life depends on. What is foregrounded is an egocentric motive rather an altruistic one. The Assistant Commissioner is similarly self-seeking. His relationship with the patroness of the “ticket-of-leave apostle” Michaelis, because of his aristocratic wife’s close association with her, prejudices his execution of justice. At all costs he feels he must keep Michaelis clear of blame because his own standing in social circles depends on the favour of the patroness. In a darkly comical race to get to Verloc first, Heat and the Assistant Commissioner pit their wits against each other, the one determined that Michaelis will be blamed and Verloc saved, and the other equally determined on the opposite. The result is a parodic expose of ‘justice’ at work.

The anarchists themselves live in a state of precarious safety from arrest in which their individual rights are to some extent protected in English society. They enjoy the patronage of the rich and influential and they take care in their subterfuge to go undetected. Michaelis enjoys the safety provided by a rich aristocrat who likes to surround herself with interesting people, of whom Michaelis, she believes, is one. Karl Yundt's safety lies in his obvious impotence to do harm. His toothless mutterings about "No pity for anything on earth ... and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity" (43) pose no threat, but resemble rather "the excitement of a senile sensualist" (43). Like Yundt, Comrade Ossipon is politically impotent. He lacks intellectual prowess, having "a glance of insufferable, hopeless dense insufficiency which nothing but the frequentation of science can give to the dullness of common mortals" (46). A significant irony is the fact that Ossipon subscribes to Lombroso's theory about the physical attributes of the criminal deviant, yet he himself looks rather different from Lombroso's Western, civilized man. "The disdainful pout of Comrade Ossipon's thick lips accentuated the negro type of his face" (49). I agree with Stott that Conrad examines and exposes the spuriousness of Lombroso-type anthropology, and it is through the irony of the narrator that 'scientific' theories of criminal deviance are parodied. The anarchists are shown to be traders in the basest of impulses. Instead of being active in ways that would bring about positive change, they feed on the "sinister impulses which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity and revolt" (48). Far from bringing any measure of safety to the society they wish to destroy and rebuild, they are shown to be egocentrically pursuing cheap acclaim by mouthing fearful statements signifying nothing at men's clubs and in faded leaflets. The professor is in his own way seeking a kind of peace through his mad incendiary habits. The narrator wryly comments that "in their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries are perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind - the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience" (73). The fact that he is so short of stature is indivisibly linked to his maniacal love of the power that carrying explosives can give him. Schneidau (1991) suggests that his explosives act as a substitute phallus which he displays and uses to pleasure himself.

It is clearly a case of the explosives providing the masculine potency that he is afraid he otherwise lacks. "By exercising his agency with ruthless defiance he procured for himself the appearances of power and personal prestige" (73). His safety is assured by the close proximity of a detonator with which he can blow up both himself and whoever comes too close to him. The irony is that his ultimate guarantee of safety lies in self-destruction.

Verloc, like Charles Gould who "could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale" (184), justifies his dubious activities by believing that he is protecting society. He sets out for the Russian Embassy on the fateful morning of his interview with Vladimir surveying "through the park railings the evidence of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury" (20). His illusion is shattered when he is required to blow up a symbol of the class he is trying to protect. The narrator ironically comments that he is "moved by the just indignation of a man over forty, menaced in what is dearest to him - his repose and his security" (48). He is the character who machinates for his safety in the most devious of ways. He secures for himself an income from the Russian Embassy by informing them of the activities of the anarchist group he has infiltrated, and he maintains his immunity from arrest by tipping off Inspector Heat of Scotland Yard whenever he has information to trade. However his chief claim to safety is through his marriage to Winnie. In answer to Vladimir's question on how he earns a living, he mentions his wife and the shop, to which Vladimir replies:

Your what?... Married! And you a professional anarchist too! But I suppose it is merely a manner of speaking. Anarchists don't marry. It's well known. They can't. It would be apostasy Couldn't you have managed without? This is your virtuous attachment - eh? (38-9).

Verloc's 'virtuous attachment' is what guarantees his disguise. Ossipon says of Verloc, as if it is something of note, "He was regularly married you know" (68). Verloc's marital status sets him apart from the others and accords his life an appearance of normality. There is an air of predictability about him because, like most other Englishmen, he has taken a wife in tow. That Verloc should be married is

a matter of great surprise and interest to Sir Ethelred and the Assistant Commissioner too, because men in Verloc's precarious line of business would, they believe, be better off without such responsibilities. This aspect of Verloc's life renders him, on the one hand, more complex to them, and, on the other, more knowable, as they too are married.

'Yes, Sir Ethelred A genuine wife and a genuinely respectably, marital relation ... his wife would not hear of going abroad. Nothing could be more characteristic of the respectable bond than that,' went on, with a touch of grimness, the Assistant Commissioner, whose own wife, too, had refused to hear of going abroad. . . 'From a certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama' (181).

Verloc feels that he gives Winnie much in return for their marital arrangement. Not only does he "gather everything (wife, mother and son-in-law) as it came to his broad, good-natured breast" (18), but he also "loved his wife as a wife should be loved - that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief possession" (149). Verloc's motive for spying is money, easy money, and his venality is emphasised by his view of his wife as another of his material possessions. The narrator's irony is obvious here, underscoring Verloc's egotism and self-righteousness in justifying himself as a good husband.

Verloc's sexual desire for his wife is also a significant part of the marriage bargain, and constitutes, for Winnie, part of the bondage that she views her marriage as being. After killing Verloc, she laments to Ossipon:

Seven years - seven years a good wife to him, the kind, the good, the generous, the -
And he loved me. Oh, yes. He loved me till I sometimes wished myself - Seven
years. Seven years a wife to him. And do you know what he was, that dear friend of
yours? Do you know what he was?...He was a devil (223)

Winnie's omissions articulate forcefully the sexual repulsion that she felt for her husband, and emphasise the self-sacrificing nature of her devotion to Stevie. Schneidau sees sexuality as providing a "consistent subtext throughout the novel" (1991:113). For example Stevie's desire to take the cab horse and cab driver to bed with him are seen by him as subtle forms of it. Winnie's final murder of Verloc is, for him, as if she is avenging the death of her murdered lover. The terrorists live off women and "their own pornography of violence" (1991:114). He suggests that from

the opening chapter, when it is apparent that both revolutionary tracts and pornographic material can be obtained at Verloc's shop, a pattern of motifs is used to imply that "revolutionary propaganda is a particularly loathsome variety of pornography" (1991:108).

Our first meeting with Winnie in the narrative is when she enters the shop. "Winnie Verloc was a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips" (14). Her voluptuousness is a feature which has enabled her to secure an 'advantageous' marriage with a wealthy man who will take her family in "tow". The conceit of Verloc on gaining Winnie for a wife is that he never doubts that he is loved for himself. He never recognises Winnie's opportunism. Rather his own weakness for women is evident. Once before he had allowed a sexual weakness for a woman to land him in jail. Now he has secured the sexual services of a woman for life.

Ironically his marriage is his undoing, and his attempts to hide within the safety the alliance provides lead directly to his own destruction. After Stevie's death his reactions to Winnie's grief are narrated with heavy irony, articulating precisely the degree of vanity and self-delusion of which he has been guilty throughout the marriage. Verloc is prepared not to be 'bitter', he expects his wife to be "very much upset, but he wanted her to pull herself together" (189). Her prolonged distress disturbs his comfort - "the storm-tossed spirit of Mr Verloc longed for repose" (195). After all "he had come home prepared to allow every latitude to his wife's affection for her brother" (189), and he generously feels prepared "to take her in his arms and press her to his breast, where compassion and impatience dwelt side by side" (190). The fact that he magnanimously "nourished no resentment against his wife" (192), reveals the extent to which he secretly believed her to be to blame for the whole inconvenient episode. His lack of understanding of the situation is exquisitely distilled in the patronising injunction "What you want is a good cry" (196). Her silence is defined by her husband to his peril. His belief that he is loved for himself remains intact to the end and he dies without knowing the reason that Winnie kills him.

Schneidau sees the murder scene as a “bizarre, anticipatory parody of *Othello*, and Winnie as a submissive Desdemona who turns into a Clytemnestra” (1991:109). The entire scene is for him bitterly comic. Schneidau suggests that Winnie’s silence is her main sexual appeal for Verloc; it enables him to see her, too, as *provocateur*. On this basis Schneidau suggests that it is her continued silence before she murders him that arouses him in a “fatally miscalculated erotic summons to her” (1991:113). I disagree. Verloc’s ‘fatal miscalculation’ is that he believes he can arouse Winnie out of her silent grief, because his deluded vanity still assures him that he is loved ‘for himself’.

‘Come here’, he said in a peculiar tone, which might have been the tone of brutality, but was intimately known to Mrs Verloc as the note of wooing (212).

Secure in the belief that this will succeed where all other strategies have failed, he uses his last resort to shake her out of her uncomfortable silence - his offer of conjugal favours. When Verloc calls her to come, the years of sexual submission seem to reach their own climax and she fears he will engulf her completely. Winnie indicates that the sexual aspect of the marriage was one she endured rather than enjoyed, and his mating call at this point, reminding her of all she has endured for the now murdered Stevie, is the detonator to her rage. When he calls, she automatically “start[s] forward at once” (212), but as she passes the table she arms herself with the means to silence all calls. His call is his last. Now that her need for the marriage is over, his overture gives her the impetus to kill its source. No longer “a loyal woman bound to that man by an unbroken contract” (212), her final freedom is from the sexual bondage that she had submitted herself to seven years previously for Stevie’s sake. With the rage of one who has been raped, “Into that plunging blow, delivered over the side of the couch, Mrs Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns” (212). With the blow, she kills the means whereby she has hoped to secure the safety of her family. Her sacrifice is in vain; Verloc has not cared for Stevie, and, ironically, by marrying Verloc, Winnie has achieved the very opposite of what she had committed her life to: the protection of Stevie.

The instrument of death, the knife, is an image that links Winnie in this novel to Lena in *Victory*. However, Winnie's actions are in sharp contrast with the those of Lena, who sacrifices her life to disarm the man she knows will kill her lover. While Lena disarms death, Winnie is an agent of death. Yet her representation in the novel is not as murderer but as protector. From the earliest references to her character, her protective nature is manifested: "he [Stevie] could always...run for protection behind the short skirts of his sister Winnie" (17). Throughout her story, the narrator presents an image of Winnie in which her loyalty and protective instincts are principally foregrounded. When she talks of Stevie, she is transformed:

That ardour of protecting compassion exalted morbidly in her childhood by the misery of another child tinged her sallow cheeks with a faint, dusky blush, made her big eyes gleam under the dark lids. Mrs Verloc then looked younger; she looked as young as Winnie used to look, and much more animated than the Winnie of the Belgravian mansion days had ever allowed herself to appear to gentlemen lodgers (56).

Winnie's story of self-sacrifice contrasts completely with the self-serving lives led by most of the other characters in the narrative. Contrasted with her justifiable pursuit of security, all other attempts at preserving safety seem reprehensible. Nadelhaft speaks of the "transparent cadence of hurt and pathos" (1991:100) in the narration of Winnie's life. H.M.Daleski labels Winnie's story *A Tale of Two Boats* because of the narrator's use of this image to describe her choice of marriage partners. Her life can be described in terms of the choices she has made: to serve her own wishes and needs, or to put aside her feelings for the sake of Stevie and her mother. This choice is made at a time of her life when she has just begun to experience love and joy for the first time. Into the story of her life comes

a young man wearing his Sunday best, with a straw hat on his dark head and a wooden pipe in his mouth. Affectionate and jolly, he was a fascinating companion for a voyage down the sparkling stream of life; only his boat was very small. There was room in it for a girl-partner at the oar, but no accommodation for passengers. He was allowed to drift away from the Belgravian mansion while Winnie averted her tearful eyes. He was not a lodger. The lodger was Mr Verloc, indolent and keeping late hours, sleepily jocular of a morning from under his bed-clothes, but with gleams of infatuation in his heavy-lidded eyes, and always with money in his pockets. There was no sparkle of any kind on the lazy stream of his life. It flowed through secret places. But his barque was a roomy craft, and his taciturn magnanimity accepted as a matter of course the presence of passengers... Mrs Verloc pursued the visions of

seven years' security for Stevie loyally paid for on her part; of security growing into confidence, into a domestic feeling, stagnant and deep like a placid pool (197).

In the above passage the pain of Winnie's choice is poignantly articulated through the reference to the loss of the sparkle on the stream she chooses. Elsewhere in the narrative her pain is poignantly articulated. Her loneliness when she parts from her mother is narrated with a clarity of tone and a complete absence of the mocking irony that characterises much of the treatment of the male characters. Her loss is dealt with in images of loss and absence - "Mrs Verloc, becoming acutely aware of the vacant place at her right hand..." (145). Other passages dealing with her childhood delicately articulate this same pain and pathos:

She remembered brushing the boy's hair and tying his pinafores - herself in a pinafore still; the consolations administered to a small and badly scared creature by another creature nearly as small but not quite so badly scared (183).

The details of the story are told with pathos and sensitivity, allowing the reader no strategy with which to distance herself from the pain described. As a touchstone for the development of the theme of safety, Winnie's story of devotion and sacrifice, unironically told, is, I believe, central to the narrative. The failure to secure safety in English society is not articulated through the presence of anarchists in that society, but through the inability of a woman to maintain the safety of her family in her own home.

It is not only Winnie who makes sacrifices to secure safety in the narrative. Winnie's mother, although a minor character, is similarly selfless in her efforts to secure the safety of her children. When Winnie marries Verloc, "Her son-in-law's heavy good nature inspired her with a sense of absolute safety. Her daughter's future was obviously assured, and even as to her son Stevie she need have no anxiety" (16). Her feelings of security are articulated here with a degree of dramatic irony: finally, both her children die as a result of the marriage. Her perception later that Stevie is becoming troublesome causes her to leave the Verloc home, where she had occupied "the two back rooms" and seek shelter in a home for publicans' widows. Her departure is a selfless act of sacrifice as it is entirely motivated by concern principally

for Stevie and, indirectly, for Winnie. Her belief that “he was difficult to dispose of, that boy” (17) is a darkly ironic pun on the ease with which he is finally disposed of, both by the explosion of the bomb he is carrying, and the summary scraping of his remains into a rubbish bag. Her concern for her children is an echo of the sacrifice that Winnie makes for her family she is not foregrounded in the narrative. However, as Nadelhaft comments, “the heroism exemplified by Winnie and her mother...illuminate the darkness of a life that does not bear much looking into” (1991:101).

Thus Winnie’s story, and to a lesser extent her mother’s, articulates the theme of safety more poignantly and directly than any other. With regard to this theme, I would suggest that an essential tragic element of the novel is that the search for safety is a futile one; no safety is to be found in the dark world of the narrative. In the final analysis the least safe place is the home.

Schneidau also sees the domestic theme as the central theme of the novel but from a different perspective from mine. For him the source of violence is the home itself. He describes the clash of the two Verlocs, who were “so constantly at antipodean cross-purposes that they were not even aware of it” (1991:106), as a clash “that overshadows the machinations of dynamitards, *agents provocateurs*, and secret police” (1991:106). For him the central thrust of the narrative is the “nihilistic potential in every household” (1991:106). While this is true, I see Winnie as sincerely contriving to keep such potential at bay, not as an agent of it. My reading is more in line with Nadelhaft’s who writes of “the unique capacity of the individual woman, the domestic act, to express the ethical meaning of the novel” (1991:100).

Winnie’s self-sacrificing attempts to secure the safety of her family ultimately come to nought, but her story is narrated with an absence of the irony which characterises the rest of the novel, leading the reader to see her story as the centre of the novel, with others set ironically against hers. Winnie’s discourse and her silence in the novel are a part of her attempt to secure safety for her kin. The narrator’s voice is the

centripetal voice of authority in the text, and through his focalisation we learn of Winnie's motives and thoughts. Her discourse is significantly centrifugal in that her story is largely 'translated' by the narrator. In his article "Eurybessie: Non-Verbal Communication in Conrad" (1988), Crompton examines the ways in which communication is often articulated by a departure from habitual behaviour, so that motion in a habitually still character denotes a meaning, and so on.

In a rather different context, Hooper, in her thesis *The Silence at the Interface: Culture and Narrative in Selected Twentieth Century Southern African Novels in English* (1992), examines the issue of silence as discourse. She looks at South African literature from a post-colonial perspective and poses the question of whether the character of Margaret Cadmore, in Bessie Head's *Maru*, deploys silence as an act of resistance to being narrated.

In some ways this is true of Winnie Verloc, as her speech is silenced by an act of her own volition. Her discourse is communicated firstly through the contrast of her silence with the speech of others, and secondly by a breaking of that silence after years of withholding speech. When faced with the choice of screaming or silence to articulate her grief on Stevie's death, she instinctively chooses silence as a more articulate form of expression. "Winnie's philosophy consisted in not taking notice of the inside of facts" (121). In a sense, she 'narrates' her own life through her silence. In another context, the narrator in *Under Western Eyes* articulates the value of silence: "Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality" (11). Winnie's avoidance of language is an attempt to escape a negotiation with a reality which she will not examine, namely a marital relationship with a man she does not love. The narrator describes this marriage as "an existence created by Mrs Verloc's genius; an existence foreign to all grace and charm, without beauty and almost without decency" (198).

From an opposite point of view, Epstein, in "Trusting in Words of Some Sort: Aspects of the Use of Language in *Nostramo*" (1987) looks at the ways in which

“words act as a buffer to diminish the authentic experience of ‘the chaos of dark thoughts’” (1987:17). He cites passages from *Lord Jim* to illustrate how words sometimes, in Conrad’s novels, “belong to the sheltering conception of light and order” (1987:17). He implies here that words can constitute a ‘saving illusion’ from darker realities. For Winnie, however, it is silence that provides her ‘sheltering conception’ against ‘the chaos of dark thoughts’, providing her with the illusion of safety so long as she avoids the engagement with meaning that language requires. While Winnie might well be attempting to avoid confronting irreconcilable aspects of her life, her choice of silence also has a kind of integrity to it, as if she did not wish to compound her deception of Verloc any further by dissembling. Her silence is therefore, in a sense, an ‘honest’ silence.

Winnie’s voluntary silence in her marriage has an underlying tension; it can be maintained only while she exercises control over it. Her determination not to apprehend or understand has made silence possible. In *Under Western Eyes*, Natalia Haldin, like Winnie, is characterised often by a silence that speaks of control. The narrator of that novel remarks of Natalia that “It was the stillness of great tension. What if it should suddenly snap?” (112). Just such a tense stillness characterises Winnie Verloc. Once her silence is shattered by the news of Stevie’s death, “she look[s] round thoughtfully, with an air of mistrust in the silence and solitude of the house. The abode of her married life appeared to her as lonely and *unsafe* (my italics) as though it had been in the midst of a forest” (165). The significant point here is that her marriage has finally rendered her unsafe. The whole point of marrying Verloc was to protect Stevie, and now Verloc has been the direct cause of Stevie’s death. The betrayal of her trust in Verloc and the fear that this betrayal brings into the home, the very centre of the Empire, is the most forceful manifestation of the danger that lurks in society. If the home is not safe then nowhere is. Her carefully maintained silence to keep the ‘boat’ afloat, as it were, becomes impossible. When it does break, her rage and pain are disgorged in the act of slaughter of her husband. In stabbing her husband she unmuzzles herself and relieves the “pent-up agony of shrieks strangled in her throat, of tears dried up in her hot eyes” (201). The ‘loudest’ articulation of Winnie’s feelings is through the thrust of the carving knife into her husband’s reclining,

corpulent breast. Her habit of avoiding scrutiny into things is forcibly eliminated by the imperative nature of what she has done. For the first time “Mrs Verloc who always refrained from looking too deep into things was compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing” (201).

Winnie’s use of language is the one area in the marriage over which she feels she has total control. Hooper speaks of “the importance of the subject [in the text] whose autonomy can very readily be expressed in silence” (1992:210). In this sense, Winnie expresses what little autonomy she has through her choice of minimal speech. Similarly, Margaret Cadmore’s ‘voice’ is “not restricted to the discursive realm but can develop a medium of its own” (1992:207), Winnie’s voice in the narrative is articulated through her silence. Margaret Cadmore’s medium is art. For Winnie it is first silence and later an act of ‘eloquent’ violence. Winnie “put her trust in face values” (134) on the strength of her belief that life doesn’t bear much looking into. Not only does her silence protect her from engaging with the ‘meaning’ of her life, it also shields her from any unwelcome scrutiny of her words by her husband. The narrator remarks: “Curiosity being one of the forms of self-revelation, a systematically incurious person remains always partly mysterious” (193). Her chosen silence can thus be seen as a conscious decision to reveal as little of herself as possible; she becomes, in a sense, invisible. This provides her with a measure of safety from scrutiny. The success of her marriage - the creation of her ‘genius’ - depends on her being able to maintain the edifice within the parameters of non-verbalisation of the terms of that marriage. Verbalisation, later in the narrative, destroys the edifice as the truths about the Verloc’s respective lives are revealed for the first time. The extent to which their lack of communication has held together their relationship is manifested. She has been silent about her motives for marrying him, while he has been silent about vast tracts of his life during the marriage. She is revealed to have made “a bargain the mere suspicion of which would have been infinitely shocking to Mr Verloc’s idea of love” (210). He reveals that he was “not a chap to worry a woman that’s fond of me. You had no business to know” (193). While their sentiments are hidden from view, a pretence of marital union is possible.

When Stevie's death is revealed, the fact that she is a "woman of very few words" (199) initially protects her from a discussion with Verloc who generally accepts her silences. As the truths about their marriage begin to surface, however, so Winnie's continued silence in the face of Verloc's need for verbal soothing, begins to irk and finally to frighten him. Eventually her silence overwhelms his small ability to sympathise with her grief. He tries to threaten her into speech:

'You have a devilish way of holding your tongue sometimes,' he began again ... 'I am not so easily put out as some of them by your deaf and dumb sulks. I am fond of you. But don't you go too far' (194).

His words signal a new short-lived era in their marriage, going "far beyond anything that had ever been said in this home" (195). Winnie still does not reply but the silence and avoidance of dialogue on all but the most superficial of issues, which had held the alliance together, is now broken. The blank wall of Chapter Eleven which repeatedly displays no writing on it, now starts to fill, as it were, with her words, her silent words. So strong is the sense that meaning can be read in the silence between them, that "Mr Verloc glanced over his shoulder. There was nothing behind him: there was just the whitewashed wall. The excellent husband of Winnie Verloc saw no writing on the wall" (195). The silence powerfully articulates the change that he now begins to feel but cannot understand. He cannot understand that with the death of Stevie and the breaking of the silence in her marriage, "Mrs Verloc was a free woman" (192).

Fincham suggests that Winnie's position in the marriage is similar to that of the colonised subject, in that there is no existence outside the colonial framework. The space within the home that Winnie has occupied is also a colonised space. As Fincham and others have suggested, patriarchal systems are reflected in colonial systems, and the colonised subject is located in a position like that of the wife/mother in patriarchy. She is a 'sign', a part of a system of exchange which allocates her particular functions and spaces. Winnie has played this role in Verloc's life in that she kept his house and provided a front for his political activities. Her act of killing Verloc is clearly insurrection in the colonies, an act of escape from patriarchal

entrapment. Fincham speaks of “the domestic tyranny which silences and finally annihilates Winnie” (1996:52). I would suggest that once Winnie destroys the tyrant, she breaks her own silence as well. Her short-lived freedom is not predicated on silence as her marriage was. Once the ‘bargain’ is over, Winnie’s decision to leave her husband is fused with her dogged resolve to abandon or sustain her own silence, and thereby to control her actions:

She commanded her wits now, her vocal organs; she felt herself to be in an almost preternaturally perfect control of every fibre of her body (197).

However, her new-found freedom from the bondage of her domestic life brings her none of the sense of purpose and lasting control that she had hoped it would. “Mrs Verloc the free woman[’s]” 211) new engagement with ‘things’ causes her to recognise her isolation. “She was the most lonely of murderers that ever struck a mortal blow. She was alone in London” (203). Ironically, in abandoning her silence, her new life makes her feel less safe than ever. Like Nostromo and Decoud in *Nostromo*, Heyst in *Victory* and many other male characters in Conrad’s novels, once her illusions fail her, she is faced with moral collapse:

Mrs Verloc entertained no vain delusions on the subject of the dead. Nothing brings them back, neither love nor hate. They can do nothing to you. They are as nothing.

However, unlike male characters, her disillusionment is incomplete. She is able to revive, albeit temporarily. The loss of ‘safety’ brings a new sense of desperation for Winnie. She discovers that there is no defined space outside her marriage. Unable to chart her own way, she submits to the next ‘coloniser’ who appears - Ossipon. Tragically, she can find no other mode of operation than suicide or complicity in a new relationship of power. Having taken control of her own life, she is now in a freefall with little idea where to turn. She has to find a new safe haven, and she is also desperate to avoid the consequences of what she has done. Her immediate thoughts of suicide are delayed when she meets Ossipon, and she willingly surrenders control of her life to him. Her words begin to flow untrammelled. He is surprised at her new “palpably resolute character” (205). The flood of her speech dismays him but he reasons that “women often talked like lunatics” (208). The significance of all this is that Winnie had equated silence with safety. Having learnt as a child that silence was

her best defence against her father's rages, her only way of coping with the prospect of marriage to Verloc was a retreat into silence, and a world where meanings could be kept at bay. When she is with Ossipon she feels she can trust him, she believes his glib words about loving her, and her trust is seen in her willingness to talk. Her renewed trust gives her a renewed impulse to live.

When Ossipon approaches Winnie believing her to be yet another "silly girl with a savings book", he is unprepared for the fierce strength of her resolve and her adamant appearance. Once Ossipon realises she has killed Verloc, he is "excessively" terrified of her, seeing her as degenerate, snakelike - death itself. Later, when he has disposed of her in the carriage, and he hears of her suicide, he is "menaced by this thing in the very sources of his existence" (246). By its very force the "madness and despair" of her act renders him impotent and afraid. Like all the other anarchists, his life has been indolent and Winnie's desperation to live therefore seems frightening.

In the end, Winnie struggles to give life up. "All her strong vitality recoiled from the idea of death" (220). The manifestation of all that energy finally disempowers Ossipon and he quails before it. He finds himself no longer able to pursue his old conquests, and his confidence in his glib speech, "whose note used to be an unbounded trustfulness in the language of sentiment and manly tenderness" (246), is unnerved. Not only his close brush with the 'insanity' that he has feared all his life accounts for his fear, the confrontation with the raw energy of Winnie's desperation to live haunts him as well. Ironically it is Winnie, the 'colonised' who is finally shown to have tremendous power over Ossipon. It is his head which is under her heel as it were. She destroys him in a sense. No longer able to prey upon silly girls, he takes to "marching in the gutter as if in training for the task of an inevitable future" (249). Contrasted with this useless wasting of time, the narrative ends with a formidable display of a struggle in Winnie between the impulses of life and death: she wishes desperately to live, but also wants to escape the gallows by taking her own life. Confronted by her energy, Ossipon recognises that, unlike all of them, her engagement with daily life is more authentic than theirs had ever been.

Comrade Ossipon knew that behind that white mask of despair there was struggling against terror and despair a vigour of vitality, a love of life that could resist the furious anguish which drives to murder and the fear, the blind, mad fear of the gallows (247).

Finally, Winnie is lethal compared with the impotent fumbblings of the anarchists. Their pretensions are as nothing compared with her power to follow through the commitments she makes. Gurko believes Winnie, who conceals from her husband, from the reader, and from herself the depth of energy and the submerged violence of feeling that erupt at the end, to be “as much the secret agent emotionally as Verloc is politically” (1979:222). Yet the dark reality of her story is that she cannot find the means to secure safety any more than anyone else in the novel. Her story articulates most forcibly that in its dark world, no safety exists.

In conclusion, I would like to look briefly at a radically different reading of the novel from my own, to highlight the tenets of my argument. Albert Guerard regards the final scene of the novel as immensely amusing. “The farcical collision of Mrs Verloc and Comrade Ossipon, is an even greater success [than the comical murder scene]” (1979:230). His reading of the novel is that it is both ‘easy’ and ‘entertaining’ and he views much of the narrative as high comedy. For this reason he concludes:

The macabre comedy is so successful, and Ossipon’s growing horror and disgust so vivid, that it effectively destroys much of our sympathy for Winnie (1979:230).

For the reasons given above, I cannot agree with this reading. It is itself a travesty of the domestic theme which is so central to the novel’s structure. Reducing the character of Winnie to a role player in a farce misses her essential function in the narrative, and a reading of the novel as principally comic allows a distancing of the reader from what are poignantly tragic elements. Winnie’s story demonstrates more forcefully and tragically than any other element in the novel that the world of the novel is an unsafe space; that noble, selfless execution of duty is no protection; and that bombs and ideas are impotent compared with the horror and destruction of betrayal at the hearth, which is at the very centre of that world.

CHAPTER FIVE: *CHANCE*.

I am speaking here of women who are really women (*Chance*, 281).

My next case study is perhaps the most challenging of all those undertaken in this thesis, and will test most stringently the parameters of my hypothesis. As was mentioned in my introduction, I have decided to use *Chance* rather than *Under Western Eyes* as a case study of Conrad's examination of feminist issues. Not only was *Chance* a challenge that I could not resist, but the novel enabled me to look at an interplay of different discourses more complex, I believe, than what is found in *Under Western Eyes*. It is true that in the latter novel, the discourses of characters like Peter Ivanovitch and Natalia Haldin both articulate different perspectives on feminist thinking, but this issue is interrogated in a more complex way in *Chance*. Political issues are dealt with in the chapters on *Nostromo* and *The Secret Agent*, and mythologised women characters are examined throughout the study. I felt that my purposes would be adequately served by referring to *Under Western Eyes* in relation to other works so a dedicated case study therefore seemed unnecessarily repetitive.

My analysis of *Chance* will focus primarily on the concepts of the 'feminine' and the 'feminist' in this novel. This will involve looking at a matrix of competing discourses, and examining the extent to which a myth framework (of chivalry, knights, damsels) functions in the construction of the woman characters. I shall suggest that Marlow's conception of a 'real' woman equates with a mythologised notion of a 'damsel', and that his assessment of the different women characters is made in terms of this conception.

In my discussion, the term 'damsel' will be used to refer to the conception of a young woman (women who are no longer 'young' are subjected to mild derision from

Marlow) who is passive, vulnerable and in need of some kind of rescuing. The term arises out of a mythology of chivalry, concerning medieval knights and the young 'ladies' whom their heroic deeds aimed to rescue and impress. The significant implication attached to this conception is that the women in this myth framework, because of their vulnerability and passivity, function to demarcate and define masculine behaviour. This conception diminishes women as it denies women their own heroism, and foregrounds dependence rather than strength. In my approach to the women characters, I shall examine the extent to which Marlow assesses Mrs Fyne, the governess and Flora as 'damsels'. What will be shown is that Marlow's views of Mrs Fyne and Flora changes as he gets to know them, and as he is prepared to accommodate his judgements of them within a wider conceptual framework.

In addition, I aim to illustrate two points made in previous chapters, namely that Conrad suggests that ideologies are ineffective in bringing about constructive change in people's lives, and that there is a measure of self-interest in all ideological beliefs. The aspects of the novel that I shall be examining are the use of a multi-narratorial approach; the centrifugality and centripetality of different discourses, and the extent to which they compete with one another in their articulation of what it is to be 'woman'. I shall look at Marlow's concept of the 'real' woman, and at the construction of the character of Flora de Barral as a 'real' woman compared with other women characters in the novel. My approach then is a multi-faceted one.

There are two versions of *Chance*, the serialised version which appeared in the New York Herald in 1912, which had advertised the story as being for female [sic] readers, and the novel version which was published in 1914. I shall only be referring to the novel version. The serialised version features the frame narrator as a novel-writer, while the novel version is unspecific about his occupation. Siegle (1984) has speculated as to reasons for this difference - I do not feel it necessary to do so. Unlike the narrators of other novels, the narrator of *Under Western Eyes* for example, who is significantly both a Westerner and a teacher of languages, the frame narrator of *Chance* the novel has no distinguishing characteristics which qualify his narration, so I shall make no reference to the serialised version as a contrasting text.

When the novel was published, it marked the beginning of a new era of financial prosperity for Conrad. It was a resounding success. Various reasons have been put forward to explain this. Some critics feel that the return to the 'sea-story' pleased Conrad's readers however, this is doubtful as most of the novel is set on land. The more likely reason is that the novel's focus is women, and that the novel was published at a time when women's movements like the Suffragettes were gaining popularity. Watts believes that it was a combination of a good advertising campaign which portrayed the book as a love story for female readers, and its topicality. Conrad had said "It's the sort of stuff that may have a chance with the public. All of it about a girl and with a steady run of references to women in general all along It ought to go down" (Watts 1993:37). However, I am not aware of any research which has ascertained how many of the novel's many purchasers were women.

While its public reception was favourable, its critical reception was less enthusiastic, especially because of its complex narrative structure. Henry James objected to the obtrusiveness of the narratorial voice(s):

The particular difficulty Mr Conrad has 'elected' to face . . . [is] his so multiplying his creators ... as to make them almost more numerous and quite emphatically more material than the creatures and the production itself in whom and which we by the general law of fiction expect such agents to lose themselves (1914:273).

He regarded Marlow's narration as a "prolonged hovering flight of the subjective over the outstretched ground of the case exposed" (1914:278). Many older collections of criticism exclude *Chance*. Until recent reprintings of the novel, for example OUP's 1988 reprint, it was difficult to acquire a copy. If one looks at the Conradian 'canon' outlined by some critics, *Chance* often has no place in it. Berthoud, for example, in *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* does not give space to a commentary on *Chance*, not seeing it as a significant feature of the 'major phase', although the novels chronologically on either side of it, *Under Western Eyes* (1911) and *Victory* (1915), are dealt with in detail. Thus, in the past, the novel has received modest critical acclaim.

These days, the novel is coming more and more 'into its own', with increasing numbers of feminist critics, for example, giving the novel extensive attention. Paradoxically it is the novel's complex narrative structure which at least partly accounts for its growing popularity now. Narratological analysis has received increasing attention in the post-Modern age, with an examination of different discourses in narratives facilitating a variety of readings by different reading constituencies. Such changes in focus are reflected in critical reception of *Chance*. Whereas in 1979 Guerard sees the novel as marking the beginning of Conrad's decline, if not collapse, corresponding with Conrad's physical and mental fatigue, by 1992 Fraser is more positive, speaking of Conrad's "realistic attempt to explore the feminine perspective" (1992:88). Four out of eight of the articles in *The Conradian: Conrad and Gender* (1993) are devoted to discussions of *Chance*. The shift in interest appears to have come about with the increasing focus on women's issues. The women characters in the novel are both interesting and problematic, and women readers and critics have found new areas of interest to explore. Not least is the fact that in this novel Conrad challenges feminism itself.

In the sense that feminism as an ideology is interrogated, the novel could be said to be 'political' in the same way as Conrad's other 'political' novels are. Feminism emerges in the novel as no more efficacious than anarchism, republicanism or any other ideology in achieving positive change. This is not to say that Conrad was therefore anti-feminist, as some critics have suggested. Davies (1993) quotes Conrad as saying that "any woman with a heart and a mind knows very well that she is an active partner in the great adventure of humanity" (1993:78). I would argue that the novel examines the question of the unequal treatment of women in a patriarchal society. Conrad had made his support for women's voting rights public in *The Times* of 15 June 1910, thus he could not reasonably be said to be attacking feminism in the novel. However, on numerous occasions the narrator of the novel, Marlow, does attack feminism, and the 'Fyne school of feminism' is shown by both Marlow (and to a certain extent Mrs Fyne herself) to be rather unscrupulous, advocating a contempt for others' feelings that is injurious to both sexes. Like Peter Ivanovitch in *Under*

Western Eyes, Mrs Fyne is portrayed as being self-seeking and suspect in her feminism. This view of her ideology is intensified by Marlow's focalisation.

Mrs Fyne's feminist discourse is a significant centrifugal discourse in the narrative, especially as it relates to and competes with the narrative representation of women and women's issues, but her views on feminism are shown to be a reaction to personal suffering, rather than ideologically motivated. ("Mrs Fyne's mental attitude towards society with its injustices...is almost vengeful" 187). In Marlow's perspective, Mrs Fyne's feminism is essentially her (understandable) reaction to an abusive, autocratic patriarch. The articulation of her feminist convictions coincides with her escape from the paternal home. Marlow believes Mrs Fyne's 'disciples' are also meeting their own personal needs rather than objectively espousing a doctrine: "She [Mrs Fyne] answered to some need of theirs. They sat at her feet" (42). Mrs Fyne appears to need to be surrounded with acolytes at her feet, and "she could not bear to have...any one who did not love her" (179). In his view, not only are her beliefs a projection of her own personal anger against her father onto a male world, but provide a convenient front for lesbian liaisons Marlow believes she carries on with her proteges ("Mrs Fyne would be gone to the bottom of the garden with the girl-friend of the week", 42).

While this view of Mrs Fyne's feminism is largely from Marlow's focalisation of her, her own attitudes sometimes substantiate his view. Mrs Fyne's resistance to Flora's marriage to her brother shows both a lack of compassion for either, and a rather contemptible hypocrisy - she herself has eloped with Fyne. It was Mrs Fyne who advocated a woman "taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence" (59) until that short cut turned out to be marriage to her brother. Mrs Fyne also appears to be more affronted that her disciple, Flora, acted on her own without her guidance, than genuinely opposed to this expedient marriage. Marlow refers to her reaction to Flora's elopement as "her eminently feminine occupation of thrusting a stick in the spokes of another woman's wheel" (151). The question of what is 'eminently feminine' here, as in other parts of the novel, is central to the polyvocal nature approach in the novel to matters of gender. For Marlow, the irony of

the matter lies in the fact that, while Mrs Fyne advocates 'no mercy' when women are seeking to find their place in a 'man-mismanaged world', she feels quite differently when it is her own brother who is supposedly being exploited in this way.

However, while feminism and injustice to women are interrogated, it must be remembered that it is principally through Marlow's perspective that this is done. Though the novel focuses significantly on the injustices of gender, it is not unequivocally through the arch-feminism of Mrs Fyne that this issue is articulated. The biased male narration is itself a means of articulating injustice against women. I agree with Erdinast-Vulcan (1992) that, instead of trying to rescue the 'substance' of the material from under the shadow of Marlow, as James suggests, one should "go along with it, and suspend the 'law of fiction'", as the failure to distinguish "between frame and substance, narrator and protagonist, in this novel is a crucial misconception of its theme" (1989:51-2).

The gender issue is complex though, as Roberts has pointed out. A male narration of a feminist's story immediately sets up the possibility of resistance by woman readers. Roberts's belief is that the text implies readers of both genders. His diffidence about his reading of the novel ("As a male critic, I feel that I am not in a good position to write about the subject-position implied for woman readers of the novel", 1993b:91) nevertheless bears testimony to the explicit gendering of the reading process that is entailed by this text. Roberts does not feel that he can make statements about the novel without this qualifier. His critical position is further complicated by the fact that, as a male critic, he feels unwittingly compromised by the complicity between men about women that the text stages. Bearing in mind the charges of male exclusivity in *Heart of Darkness* made by Pelikan Straus, Roberts declares "What I find in *Chance* is a secret sharing of male ignorance" (1993:97). His view is that the novel illustrates a covert "fellowship of fear and desire in relation to the feminine" (1993b:97).

From a feminist point of view, the reader could argue that *Chance* is one of the most significant of all of Conrad's novels. Its subject is a woman, Flora de Barral, and the narrative deals specifically with her story. However, I would argue that the novel is not so much about the life of Flora de Barral as about a male interpretation of her life and circumstances. This interpretation has its own complexities and ambivalences. The narrator of Flora's story is Marlow, who tells an anonymous frame narrator about her life and the lives of other characters in the narrative, from the information he has pieced together from first-, second- and third-hand accounts. Before *Chance*, Marlow had not been used as a narrator for some time in Conrad's novels. In Gurko's irreverent words, "Marlow had been dug out of mothballs where he had reposed for ten years and given a last tour as a narrator" (1979:197). Marlow had come to be associated with a more exclusively male world than a world inhabited by women, and especially not by feminists. Critical readings of his character, which his narration of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* have facilitated, are in this novel radically different for some commentators. Bernard Meyer remarks:

the early Marlow is a thoughtful, troubled man endowed with a remarkable capacity for sympathy and understanding...[Marlow of *Chance* is] transformed into a stuffy, cantankerous, and opinionated man, given to sweeping generalisations and particularly to intemperate misogyny (1969:162).

The debate about Marlow's misogyny is one I wish to explore. Moser (1957) observes that the later Marlow shows none of the conflict of moral judgement and inherent sympathy that the earlier did, and seems to have no rapport with the story or sympathy with the characters. Guerard comments that "the Marlow of *Chance* has ... come as far as possible from the Marlow who lied to protect Kurtz's Intended" (1979:258). However, in my view the Marlow of the earlier novels also displays cynicism, ambivalence and divided thinking like the Marlow of *Chance*, not only sympathy and morality as Moser suggests. A characteristic aspect of Marlow's story in *Heart of Darkness* is his irony and his use of grotesquely comic images to defuse the horror, for example the description of a papier-mâché Mephistopheles holding a single candle in the dark (37). The Marlow of *Chance* is certainly characterised by misogyny, but these charges can be made about the earlier Marlow too, whose declaration that the women should be "out of it altogether" is surely misogynistic.

The earlier Marlow was certainly not sympathetic towards women. His lie to the Intended can be interpreted as misogyny rather than sympathy.

However, the reader should also note that the later Marlow is cynical about men as well. He finds Mr Fyne just as ridiculous as Mrs Fyne, calling him 'little Fyne' throughout the narrative, and most scathingly "an accident called Fyne" (36), and his attitudes towards other men are ambivalent and cynical. Captain Anthony is "a good soul. That's nothing very much out of the way" (36), Powell "had been at the bottom of his heart surprised that all this had not greeted him with songs and incense" (9) and even the narrator is "a chivalrous, masculine beggar" (53). However, it must be said that Marlow is generally more forgiving of men; for example his assessments of Mr de Barral are less harsh than of the governess who is similarly unscrupulous.

The imagery that Marlow uses to describe de Barral's financial ventures tends to soften the impact of the scurrilousness of his schemes, and, later, his selfishness in wanting his daughter to forego happiness and look after him. "He [de Barral] caught in the street the word of the time and harnessed it to his preposterous chariot" (78). The chariot associates him with a dreamer living out a mythical adventure. When de Barral is tried, Marlow remarks, "When placed in the dock he lost his steadiness as if some sustaining illusion had gone to pieces within him suddenly" (82). Marlow's narration suggests that a measure of sympathy is due to de Barral because he has been acting under the influence of a "sustaining illusion" which crumbled, leaving him defenceless. While de Barral's "sustaining illusion" is not directly linked with a woman character as is often the case in Conrad's novels, he is nevertheless shown to operate in terms of an illusion. de Barral's collapse occurs when the illusion fails. In this study I argue that male characters are shown to need a "sustaining illusion", and that, when they no longer are able to sustain illusions, despair and collapse result. However, Winnie Verloc is an exception as she too sustains illusions, and despairs when they fail. Women characters are more frequently shown to represent a "sustaining illusion" in men's lives. Later in the novel, de Barral clings to his daughter as if she alone is able to restore an "illusion" for him, and make a purposeful life possible.

Given these qualifications, what could account for any shift in the characterisation of Marlow? Perhaps the fact that Conrad had started and abandoned *Chance* as early as 1898, yet completed the novel with relative ease between 1911 and 1912, labelling it his 'quickest piece of work'. Clearly the writing process had undergone some changes. The early story had been called "Dynamite" originally, illustrating Conrad's focus at the time on adventurous sea stories, and was to be about a ship carrying a cargo of dynamite. The Marlow of such a tale might not have struck critics as very different from the Marlow of other novels. The later version of the story is very different, and sees Marlow on land, contemplating the nature of women rather than engaged in 'masculine' exploits. I believe that *Chance* is representative of Conrad's shifting focus, as the works that follow are increasingly concerned with male/female relationships. Conrad's last novel, *The Rescue*, is, above all, a love story. Thus it is quite congruous that the later Marlow reflects Conrad's increasing focus on the relationships between men and women.

The later version of *Chance* does have some of the original features, for example the *Ferdale* in *Chance* has dynamite in its hold. But the focus of much of the later narrative is the 'landed' character of Flora de Barral and the Marlow of this tale is not located in an exclusively male world. The Marlow of previous novels told his stories either at sea, or to fellow sailors on board a ship. The later Marlow lives his life on land and is compelled to engage in social relationships with others, no matter how strong his nostalgia for the seafaring life (he still speaks of himself as "we at sea", 3). I believe that his cynicism, cantankerousness and misogyny arise from the fact that he is, from the outset, out of his element, in unfamiliar territory, and having to apply values and behaviours that are appropriate to sea-life to life, on land. He has to adapt to a milieu for which he is ill-equipped. Setting and context are thus crucial to a reading of his narration. The frame narrator observes sympathetically of Marlow:

From year to year he dwelt on land as a bird rests on the branch of a tree, so tense with the power of brusque flight into its true element that it is incomprehensible why it should sit still minute after minute. The sea is the sailor's true element, and Marlow, lingering on shore, was to me an object of incredulous commiseration like a bird, which, secretly, should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying (33-4).

Thus a recognition of the cynicism and mockery of his narrative style should be qualified by a recognition of his restlessness and dissatisfaction at being 'beached' - which supplies an informing context for the entire narration. The reader should not necessarily take his pronouncements at face value. For this reason I do not agree with Davies, who declares:

Marlow is, after all, the central mystery for anyone concerned with the readership of *Chance*. Why would anybody, man or woman, particularly woman, want to take this cynical windbag seriously as any sort of authority on human nature In trying to make sense of Marlow, we need to forget the lessons learned in reading *Heart of Darkness* or *Lord Jim*. We have to take him less seriously (1993:86).

Erdinast-Vulcan provides an alternative reading to Davies's. She suggests that *Chance* is the story of Marlow's recuperation. "If he is to go back to the sea, his true element, he must regain his lost faith, re-engage in the 'fictions' which he has denounced, and become a character - rather than an amused spectator - in his own story" (1992:394). Thus seeing Marlow as out of his element accounts for the differences that a reader might register in his character from one narrative to another.

Whether Conrad conceived of one character, Marlow, whom he would use as a consistently constructed narrator throughout, or whether the Marlow of each narrative is a fresh construction has occasioned critical debate, but it is not the prime issue of this thesis. In my reading, the Marlow of *Chance* is a perfectly logical extension of the earlier character, and I find it quite consistent that a retired sailor, who resents his retirement, should lack the sympathy and geniality of his younger, happier days.

At the beginning of the novel, Marlow appears still dismayed and disgusted at the ways of land-lubbers. "If we at sea ... went about our work as people ashore high and low go about theirs we should never make a living", he asserts. He is "astonished to discover that the educated people were not much better than the others", and believes that "This universal inefficiency of what he called 'the shore gang' [can be] ascribed in general to the want of responsibility and to a sense of security" (3-4).

I shall argue that the world of the ship represents for Marlow an exclusively male world, as Pelikan Straus has suggested, from which women and everything that they represent for him are excluded, and that the world on land, unfamiliar and, to him, chaotic, is best represented for Marlow as a world containing women, who are also 'alien' to his experience. His response to a world which is ambivalent and, he fears, unknowable, is to gender it - the gendering serving to shape it in a different way for him into 'us' and 'them'. For Marlow, to gender his world is not to engage in overt misogyny as the mate, Mr Franklin, does. Marlow insists on being, above all, a 'gentleman'. I suggest that he calls on a mythology of women, in terms of which 'real' women are damsels, and that, with fixed notions of gender in place, he believes he can understand the landed world of men and women.

The gendered thinking of those at sea is shown in a number of Conrad's novels. In *The Rescue* for example, Lingard is warned that having a woman 'in tow' can only lead to trouble - "Women are the cause of a lot of trouble" (22) says Shaw. At the beginning of *Chance*, Powell recalls his feelings on discovering that the captain of his first ship, Captain Anthony, has brought his wife on board with him.

I'd heard fellows say that captain's wives could work a lot of mischief on board ship if they happened to take a dislike to any one; especially the new wives if young and pretty The best of them were a nuisance (31).

The perspective here is of a male world in which women have no part; all they can be is a nuisance. (The irony of course is that Powell falls in love with this particular 'captain's wife'.) Powell is changed when he is in contact with Flora. "I suppose there must be a sort of divinity hedging in a captain's wife (however incredible) which prevented him applying to her that contemptuous definition in the secret of his thoughts" (289). Once he has met Flora and registered her powerful attractions, his sense of security is shattered. "The very sea ... the unchangeable, safe sea sheltering a man from all passions, except to its own anger, seemed queer ... where the already effaced horizon traced no reassuring limit to the eye" (292). As the jolt to the ship shook 'Lord' Jim's sense of assurance so the proximity of Flora shakes Powell's. The world of the ship is not secure while she is in it.

Powell's disquiet is a much milder reaction than Franklin's, whose repressed sexuality, after years of looking after his mother - "I dare say if she had not lasted it out so well I might have gone and got married" (300) - finds an outlet in venomous outbursts against Flora, whom he sees as "that white-faced, black-eyed" witch doing "devil-work" (304-5). His jealousy at the possibility of the consummation of the marriage, coupled with his fear of losing his captain to 'the other side' is channelled into a primeval fear of witchcraft. "Well, I have heard tell of women doing for a man in one way or another when they got him fairly ashore. But to bring their devilry to sea and fasten on such a man!" (305). This extreme view is not echoed by Marlow; a significant part of the novel deals with Marlow's sympathetic view of Flora's presence on board. Qualifying his view is, of course, the fact that, when he tells Powell's story, he now lives on land and has become more accustomed to the presence of women. Thus his 'misogyny' is pale in comparison with that of Powell and Franklin, and he does not display the same fear of women's uncontrollable power.

The Marlow of *Heart of Darkness*, in a masculine world of action and 'facts', states:

It's queer how out of touch women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact that we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over (61)

In *Chance* Marlow surrounded by women *on land*, says:

The women's rougher, simpler, more upright judgement, embraces the whole truth, which their tact, their mistrust of masculine idealism, ever prevents them from speaking in its entirety We could not stand women speaking the truth. We could not bear it. It would cause infinite misery and bring about most awful disturbances in this rather mediocre, but still idealistic fool's paradise in which each of us lives his own little life the unit in the great sum of existence. And they know it. They are merciful. (144).

Examining the above passages will reveal one crucial difference between the Marlow of the first passage and the Marlow of the second. In the first passage, women are posited as living in a fool's paradise, in the second men are. Both passages suggest

two possibilities: those who see the 'whole' truth and those who believe an illusion, but the genders have switched from the earlier to the later novel.

This poses an interesting problem for my hypothesis, which claims that women characters are characterised as blindly sustaining saving illusions, and that male characters come to "see" the whole truth. In *Chance*, by contrast, Marlow states that "nothing can beat a true woman for a clear vision of reality" (281). Yet, while he says they have clear vision, he does not practise this belief. A number of instances indicate that he frequently believes the contrary to be true. For example, he certainly does not believe that Mrs Fyne, with her "little book", sees reality clearly. His statements throughout the novel need to be read in the light of their narrative context. Marlow's generalisations about the 'feminine' are made to a male friend, the frame narrator, who does not altogether share his views on women and challenges them, finding many of them unreasonable and incredible. He frequently laughs at the preposterousness of Marlow's statements, and his resistance to Marlow's ostensible misogyny often takes the form of incredulous outrage. Thus the frame narrator's discourse challenges the authority of Marlow's discourse and the reader is led to do the same. Hence, the reader is brought to question whether Marlow really does think all women see clearly, or whether, in spite of his statements to the contrary, he still unconsciously assumes that men's view of truth is authoritative.

This possibility underlies Roberts's argument that there is a collusion amongst male characters in the novel about women. More importantly, Marlow sees some women like Flora de Barral as 'real' women and women like Mrs Fyne as not the genuine thing. Which woman sees truth more clearly? Marlow claims to have "a clear notion of woman" (353), and it is this generalised notion that he calls upon. Marlow's notion of a 'real woman' is an archetypal woman, a 'real' woman of his own mythology. Jung's notion of archetypes is useful here to illustrate the conception of women that prevails in some masculine thinking - that there is an absolute conception which constitutes 'woman'. Jung suggests that "An inherited collective image exists in man's unconscious, with the help of which he apprehends the nature of woman" (1959:160). This notion suggests that there are characteristics common to

'womankind' which are reflected in masculine understanding of women. Yet the notion of women which informs Jung's theory is a mythologised one. Like Jung, Marlow engages in gendered stereotyping, assuming that certain qualities are inherently female and other qualities are male. Thus it is an idealised notion of 'woman' which exists in masculine consciousness.

Marlow contradicts himself frequently throughout the narrative, and so his statements (above) need to be viewed with suspicion. He regards not only a male world as a fool's paradise. Elsewhere he speculates that:

an Irrelevant (sic) world would be very amusing, if the women would take care to make it as charming as they alone can, by preserving for us certain well-known, well-established, I'll almost say hackneyed, illusions, without which the average male creature cannot get on ... the danger would be of the subjugated masculinity in its exasperation, making some brusque, unguarded movement and accidentally putting its elbow through the fine tissue of the world of which I speak (94).

A world of female creation, he claims, would be an 'irrelevant', insubstantial world - made of 'fine tissue'. Presumably Marlow believes that only through female subjugation of males can such a world come into being. It is clear in the narrative that on matters relating to female power, Marlow is at his most ironic, flippant and seemingly confident. An obvious conclusion to be drawn is that this is the one issue which frightens him most, and against which he feels most need to pit his defences of scorn and wit.

For Marlow, women are linked with the mysterious, the uncontrollable and the disordered. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow heard in the voice of the Intended "the ripple of the river, the soughing of trees swayed by the wind" (77), linking her woman's voice with the natural forces he has seen in the untamed jungle. The masculine world of the traders in *Heart of Darkness* is one in which women are regarded as 'Other'; they are associated with the jungle, not with civilisation. In *Chance*, Marlow implies that an exclusively masculine world is no longer particularly interesting. The mysterious ambit of women now holds fascination for him. Like Lingard in the novel that follows *Chance*, Marlow goes beyond the secure world of the ship and ventures into the uncharted territory of relationships with women.

However, he still asserts that they are an unknown force. In an attempt at self-justification, he declares, "If women were not a force of nature, blind in its strength and capricious in its power, they would not be mistrusted" (327). The power that he ascribes to women is almost comical:

You will say that this force having been in the person of Flora de Barral captured by Anthony... Why yes. He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him - very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it?... He has got to be mighty careful with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder (327)

This definition of women as having inordinate power contradicts his definition of women, especially Flora, as passive. The representation of women as untamed, mysterious nature is increasingly being addressed by feminist critics; the most radically illuminating criticism on this subject is offered by Camille Paglia. She argues that Western culture has made an attempt to contain, if not control, nature. To link woman with nature is thus to link her with that which needs to be contained and controlled. Perhaps this is why Marlow in *Chance* insists that a 'real' woman is passive:

I was certain that she must at least be passive; for that is of necessity the part of women, this waiting on fate... Flora de Barral was not exceptionally intelligent but she was thoroughly feminine. She would be passive And she would be enduring, which is the essence of woman's visible, tangible power (310).

Marlow repeatedly associates femininity with mystery, passivity, with threatening natural forces, and with the unreadable. Yet this tendency of his is frequently subverted as these characteristics come to be associated with Marlow himself and with other male characters whom Marlow claims he can read.

The novel thus seems to illustrate Marlow's own examination of female ontology, or, as Klein (1988) and Roberts (1993b) put it, it illustrates a heuristic narration which seeks to explore and discover the nature of femininity. In a sense it is a voyage into the unknown, as Marlow's voyage in *Heart of Darkness* is. As Marlow seeks to 'know' women, so his understanding and attitudes keep changing, and he frequently

finds himself to be more 'feminine' than he realises. This 'knowledge' compounds the context in which his stereotyping and generalisations of gender are made. When he allows women to speak for themselves, his attitudes change. Once he acknowledges Mrs Fyne's decency, he begins to like her. At the end of the novel, when Flora speaks for herself, Marlow sees her strength, and thus liberates her from the limited definition that his 'chivalrous' thinking has given her.

At the beginning of this thesis, I argued that women characters in Conrad's fiction are presented as unreadable. For much of *Chance*, women are unreadable for Marlow. In the case study of *Victory* that follows, I shall argue that while Lena is an unreadable text for Heyst, constituting an impenetrable, incomprehensible presence for him, he is also unreadable to her, and his male assumptions about her, which are manifested in the narration, are challenged. For this reason I have insisted on seeing Conrad and his narrator as separate. Seeing the one as an extension of the other, as critics like Guerard have done, masks the subtle resistance that is set up by the different discourses.

In my introductory chapters, I outlined the concepts of discourse that I shall use as instruments to examine the text. At this point it might be useful to reiterate these concepts. I recounted earlier that Bakhtin's theory of language argues that at the heart of language is a struggle between centrifugal forces of language, which resist and seek to separate, and centripetal forces of language which seek to cohere, and that he believed that the most complete and profound reflection of these forces at work is in the novel. He does not see this dichotomy as a simple 'binarity'; but as a fragile phenomenon, changing with the moment. Bakhtin states:

Unitary language constitutes ... an expression of the centripetal forces of language. A unitary language is not something given [dan] but is always in essence posited [zadan] - at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding (1981:270).

The function of centripetal discourse is to centralise and unify, setting itself up as the True Word. Yet this discourse operates in the midst of a heteroglossia. Bakhtin says:

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified ... into languages that are socio-ideological... Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear ... the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well (1988:272).

This concept of polyvocality is useful in analysing texts, because, as a model of reading, it foregrounds more than one voice, encourages diverse readings, and highlights dialogical structures in texts.

These concepts can usefully be applied to narrative to recuperate women's voices from texts as Bauer and McKinstry (1991), for example, have done. They suggest that a feminist dialogics can enable the reader or critic to locate and foreground the point at which a gendered, authoritative voice is resisted by other voices. They argue that by highlighting these moments of conflict, one can critique and disrupt oppressive ideologies:

The conflict of discourses in a novel, the inevitable polyvocality of a genre that reproduces language as a web of communications between narrator and narratee, speaker and listener, character and character, and even (implied) author and (implied) reader, does reveal the dominant discourse At the same time, however, the novel's polyvocality can indicate potential resistances to oppressive conventions in interpretive or discourse communities - such as an individual character's response to that social dictate, or a disapproving tone (1991:4)

The object of a feminist dialogics is not to produce a feminist monologic voice as a dominant voice that is a reversal of the patriarchal voice, but to create a dialogics that recognises the indivisibility of power and discourse, the ideological dominance of monologism, and the inherent multivocality of texts. From this standpoint, I intend to examine the ways in which discourses compete in *Chance*. I have chosen to use the term 'compete' as I believe that there is a strong degree of resistance between the centripetal and centrifugal discourses. Nadelhaft puts it this way:

The novel seems in its very structure to exemplify the struggle of women to make their voices heard over, under and around a male discourse to give its own shape and meaning to the lives of women subjects (1991:110).

She argues that the tension between discourses is such that even women critics like Rieselbach and Brodie have failed to register the full impact of the male narration on the novel's women characters. Marlow is not the only narrator in the novel. The frame narrator, to whom Marlow tells his story, is the primary narrator in the novel, although he is not omniscient in the way that Marlow sometimes is. It is Marlow who recounts dialogue which he was unlikely ever to have heard from anyone, for example between Flora's governess and the 'cousin', not the frame narrator.

I shall argue that Marlow's discourse in *Chance* posits itself as the centripetal discourse, as a unitary language articulating matters regarding women. However, it takes place in the midst of a heteroglossia; there are competing women's discourses in the narrative, those of the governess, Mrs Fyne and Flora. Their resistance to the centripetal discourse constitutes their centrifugal nature, as they set themselves against the dominant, unitary discourse. The centripetal discourse articulates both chivalry and misogyny, which I believe are complementary impulses. At other times, a wistful mystification of women is shown. Flora de Barral's is a competing woman's discourse, since in her actions she seeks to demonstrate her strength and assertiveness, while Marlow's speech denies these qualities.

The narrative style of the novel is complex to say the least. The novel has different narrative levels, with the frame narrator narrating Marlow's story which is itself a story told to him by others. Schwartz labels it 'baroque', while Davies sees the complex narrative shape as mirroring a web-like female story rather than a phallic and Aristotelian male story. I am doubtful of Davies's gendered distinctions as they assume absolutes about what 'women's' and 'men's' stories are. In the sense that Conrad has located his story within a mythical framework, it is 'baroque' or highly ornamented, in this case with mythical imagery. As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, I wish to focus on the chivalric frame of reference which Conrad uses as a significant pattern of signifiers indicating the ways in which the reader can identify

the characters in the narrative. In this text, for the first time, Conrad uses chapter headings and divided the novel into two parts, "The Damsel" and "The Knight". These names suggest to the reader that the tale will meet the expectations set up by the mythical romance story of knight rescuing damsel in distress. The damsel of course is Flora de Barral while the knight is Captain Anthony.

What is inscribed in this construction of Flora's plight is the fact that women (the damsels in this type of myth) are at a tremendous economic disadvantage in that they have so few options of earning a living if there is no knight to rescue them. Also, they do not have the option of refusing the knight's services. Their dependence on men is therefore mandatory. My reading of the women characters sympathises with their efforts to resist the child-like dependence that is imposed on them by such 'chivalrous' thinking. There are different ways in which they do this: Mrs Fyne writes feminist polemic to enlighten women about their plight, the governess exploits Flora, hoping to get her money by marrying her to her 'cousin', and Flora marries Anthony to avoid poverty and shame.

Marlow bases his notion that women are passive on the belief that women are 'damsels' in need of rescue by knights. He does not acknowledge that 'chivalrous' attitudes oblige women to play the passive role, not nature. Both Marlow and Mrs Fyne recognise women's dependence: "I've never had such a crushing impression of the miserable dependence of girls ... any man - could have gone to break stones on the road or something" (172) she says. Marlow agrees. "Women can't go forth on the high roads and by-ways to pick up a living even when dignity, independence or existence itself are at stake" (172). However, while they acknowledge the same truth, they infer different things from it. For Mrs Fyne, this situation is the motivation for her feminism, for Marlow. It confirms his belief in women's passivity. Mrs Fyne's words remain for Marlow a mere 'tirade', which he interrupts when it denies the passivity of women. Mrs Fyne's resistant discourse makes no initial difference to the way he conceives of women. His acknowledgement of women's economic dependence does not temper his judgement of the governess; neither does he allow it to explain Mrs Fyne's feminism. He insists on seeing Flora as a 'damsel' in need of

rescue, and applauds her decision to marry her 'knight', Captain Anthony, to secure the future of her father and of herself. For most of his narrative, Marlow appears to need to construct his world along given lines. Only after Anthony's death can he see Flora's strength.

I wish to suggest that the notion of 'damsel' reflects Marlow's idea of a 'real' woman. All three of the women characters, Mrs Fyne, the governess and Flora will be analysed in terms of the ways in which Marlow defines them according to this notion, and the degree to which they resist such definition.

The fact that Marlow frequently makes misogynistic comments and denigrates women has led some critics to conclude that the novel itself is a scathing attack on women. Moser is one of the critics who comes to mind. However, this view fails to recognise the resistance of the frame narrator to Marlow's pronouncements. The narrator provides the ironic foil to Marlow's diatribes on women's ways, undermining the virulence of his words. This resistance is significant firstly because it is a male voice challenging the centripetality of the attitudes expressed about women, and secondly because it draws attention to the extremity and unreasonableness of Marlow's feelings. Two examples should suffice:

" 'Sensation at any cost' is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power - the kind of thrill they love most . . ."

"Do you expect me to agree with all this?" I interrupted.

"No it isn't necessary," said Marlow feeling the check to his eloquence (63).

and:

"It's true that you will find people who will tell you that this terrific virulence in breaking through all established things is altogether the fault of men And you may make such answer as you can - even the eminently feminine one, if you choose, so typical of the women's literal mind ... and it shall be a funny world, the world of their arranging ..."

I raised my hand to stop my friend Marlow. "Do you really believe what you have said?" (93).

The frame narrator's opposition provides a context within which Marlow's pronouncements can be critiqued by the reader. His irony frequently serves to debunk

Marlow's sweeping generalisations. The tone of these exchanges, though, is often humorous and each engage in light mockery of the other.

Marlow tries to use the frame narrator and other male characters as foils for his ruminations, and appears at such times to be assuming that his views about women are shared by them. They are shared to some extent. Also, the frame narrator's resistance is limited to relatively few instances, giving Marlow space to develop and project his own internal conflicts relatively uninterrupted. And yet this resistance provides a crucially wider context through which Marlow's narration is received. We are told early by the narrator that Marlow pursues matters "in a peculiar manner between jest and earnest" (23) and this warning qualifies much of what Marlow says. Thus it is clear that the novel offers a much more complex approach to women than simply expressing 'Conrad's/Marlow's' misogyny. The frame narrator's resistance undermines Marlow's acerbity, illustrating the feelings of loneliness, sadness, frustration and disillusionment that often seem to prompt his comments. The reader is thus distanced from Marlow's narration by this significant centrifugal voice, which resists and competes for the authority of the text. Tonal shifts of a very subtle nature also cast the frame narrator in an interrogative light. While recounting how Flora is confronted by the governess and struck with horror at her hostility, Marlow quite patronisingly claims that "Luckily, people, whether mature or not mature ... are for the most part quite incapable of understanding what is happening to them" (117) of course by implication he excludes himself from the dictum. The narrator's ironic reply is a mockery of Marlow's self-assurance.

"But we, my dear Marlow, have the inestimable advantage of understanding what is happening to others," I struck in. "Or at least some of us seem to. Is that too a provision of nature? And what is it for? Is it that we may amuse ourselves gossiping about each other's affairs? You, for instance, seem —"
 "I don't know what I seem," Marlow silenced me (117)

The raillery between the two men helps temper the degree of seriousness with which we are to receive the narration. Their humour and camaraderie are ingredients of their speech acts. More importantly, they show that Marlow's pontifications are uttered as

part of a debate about women, and not in isolation. Much of what Marlow says is designed to irk his listener, whom he insists is a champion of women:

Today I have been simply trying to be spacious and I perceive I've managed to hurt your susceptibilities which are consecrated to women. When you sit alone and silent you are defending in your mind the poor women from attacks which cannot possibly touch them (94).

The nature of a debate enables the listener or reader to draw conclusions for herself. For this reason, Marlow's construction of Flora de Barral's character can be seen as arising from a discourse among other discourses.

Before I begin to analyse the women characters in the narrative, I wish to foreground two key passages in which Marlow states some generalised beliefs about women and their place in the scheme of things so as to exemplify the centripetal discourse, the unitary discourse which sets itself up as a voice of authority.

And this is the pathos of being a woman. A man can struggle to get a place for himself or perish. But a woman's part is passive, say what you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom, of courage. As a matter of fact, almost all women have all that - of their own kind. But they are not made for attack. Wait they must. I am speaking here of women who are really women. And it's no use talking of opportunities, either. I know that some of them do talk of it. But not the genuine women. Those know better. Nothing can beat a true woman for a clear vision of reality; I would say a cynical vision if I were not afraid of wounding your chivalrous feelings As to women, they know that the clamour for opportunities for them to become something which they cannot be is as reasonable as if mankind at large started asking for opportunities of winning immortality in this world, in which death is the very condition of life (281-2).

And beginning with Flora de Barral, in the light of my memories I was certain that she at least must have been passive; for that is of necessity the part of women, this waiting on fate which some of them, and not the most intelligent, cover up by the vain appearances of agitation. Flora de Barral was not exceptionally intelligent but she was thoroughly feminine. She would be passive (and that does not mean inanimate) in the circumstances, where the mere fact of being a woman was enough to give her an occult and supreme significance. And she would be enduring, which is the essence of woman's visible, tangible power (310).

The frame narrator presents one resistant discourse to Marlow's narration. Significant other voices exist in the narrative as well, which, by their gendered nature, resist 'truths' uttered about women. The discourse of women characters especially is centrifugal and resistant.

Marlow makes several claims here. Firstly, 'real' women are passive and not made for attack; secondly, to be feminine is to be passive; thirdly, women have a clear vision of their place; fourthly, they have an 'occult' significance; and fifthly, the ability to endure is woman's power. These assertions about women constitute Marlow's idea of a 'real' woman. This is a useful concept for him, because it sets out with authority to define a quintessential creature. Then any exceptions to this generalised view are not 'real' women. Yet these notions of women constitute a mythology about women, either Marlow's own, or a set of assumptions he shares with other men. It will be clear that it is Marlow's, not Flora's, insistence on a chivalrous attitude towards 'helpless' women that constructs her as a 'damsel' and not a strong woman.

Luyat (1986) goes so far as to suggest that women characters in this novel verge on the grotesque, as they are caricatured rather than characterised. She uses as her example the farcical search for Flora de Barral's body, when the Fynes know full well she has run off with Captain Anthony. Her argument is that the other women characters who threaten the security of the idealistic female heroine, in this case Flora, are depicted as flamboyantly grotesque, as instigators of tragedy. The marvellous and the fantastic make full use, she believes, of the theatrical potential of tragi-comedy, an element picked up frequently by Marlow himself. He sarcastically questions Fyne "whether...[they] were engaged in a farce or in a tragedy" (55). Finally he concludes it is neither. Elements of the grotesque are contiguous with elements of myth in that both make use of archetypal figurations.

In this thesis, I have addressed the issue of myth, arguing that the construction of the woman characters is, in significant ways, based on a mythology about women. To recap, my framework is drawn from a number of theories concerning myth: Vickery's theory of myth, Jung's theory of archetypes especially as these relate to women, feminist readings of Jung, for example those of Knapp and Powers, and more contemporary notions of mythology, like Roland Barthes's. Jung suggests that these archetypal constructions arise because "An inherited collective image of woman

exists in a man's unconscious, with the help of which he apprehends the nature of woman" (1959:160). Knapp deconstructs this notion, seeing collective images as relating more to personality types than gender. Within this framework, the reader is able to identify Marlow's 'real' woman, Flora, the way he constructs and interprets her character, and the way other discourses compete with this conception. My analysis will illustrate that with two notable exceptions, only women who match his notion of passivity and vulnerability are considered 'real' women. It is these women who have 'occult significance'.

In a chapter fairly early in the novel, the first woman character that the reader meets is Mrs Fyne. Through his acquaintance with the Fynes, Marlow is able to tell Flora's story. Since it is Marlow who articulates the women's stories, they are given few opportunities to speak for themselves; thus, to look at their discourse when it occurs is to look at the ways in which they resist Marlow's telling. Mrs Fyne actually says relatively little; her character, words and actions are generally sifted by Marlow's narration. We are told, for example, that "Miss Anthony's views of life were very decided" (37). Having met a man who "held solemn views as to the destiny of women on this earth" (37) she found the courage to escape from her tyrannical father "by throwing herself into the arms, the muscular arms, of the pedestrian Fyne" (39). To the extent that she was damaged by her relationship with her father (who was a "savage sentimentalist" and a "terror" 38) and needed rescuing, she meets the requirements of the chivalric notion of the 'damsel in distress' - "she too seized a chance of escape" (39) - by marrying Fyne. She is in a similar predicament to Flora. However, she is quite clearly neither passive nor vulnerable, and therefore has no need of the kind of patronising chivalrousness which is Marlow's customary response to women.

Marlow describes Mrs Fyne in terms of attributes which resist his idea of femininity:

A something which was not coldness, nor yet indifference, but a sort of peculiar self-possession gave her the appearance of a very trustworthy, very capable and excellent governess; as if Fyne were a widower and the children not her own, but only entrusted to her calm, efficient unemotional care (41-2).

It is clear that Marlow notices and dislikes her self-possession (the opposite of passivity) as much as her feminism. This is confirmed when he says: “how well I knew those appearances of a person who has ‘made up her mind’. A very hopeless condition that, especially in women” (157). She does not fit his paradigm of the ‘real’ woman because she will make up her own mind, and so she is constructed as an aberration. Later he will grudgingly respect and like her for the part she plays in Flora’s rescue, (as a knight would a damsel) and this serves to temper his judgement of her. Yet even then, he will not acknowledge that ‘chivalrousness’ is not only a masculine attribute. In the context of Flora’s abuse at the hands of her governess, Mrs Fyne’s being likened to a governess is a telling indicator of Marlow’s dislike for her, and his comments about her verge on the derogatory: “That woman was flint” (52). Yet he believes that she is basically harmless, a woman for whom “the cutting of bread and butter appeared...the most dangerous episode” (56) and that she and her husband make “a good, stupid, earnest couple” (57).

If one looks at Marlow’s statements (quoted earlier) about women, one perceives that his image of a woman is of a character who shows sympathy and warmth and is essentially passive - a damsel. At one point he comments wistfully to the frame narrator: “Perhaps if I had had a helpful woman at my elbow, a dear, flattering, acute, devoted woman...” (136). His view of a ‘helpful woman’ is constructed in terms of what she will do for him, not what she is. For Marlow, what a ‘real’ woman *does* and what she *is* are the same thing. For this reason, because Mrs Fyne lacks sympathy warmth and passivity in Marlow’s view, his representation of her lacks the respect that a ‘real’ woman would merit:

She [Mrs Fyne] was frowning in the effort as you see sometimes a child do (what is delightful in women is that they so often resemble intelligent children - I mean the crustiest, the sourest, the most battered of them do - at times) (171).

While Flora is portrayed as an intelligent, delightful child, Mrs Fyne is a puzzled, ugly child, but a child nevertheless. She is also associated by implication here with

sourness, crustiness and age, (“Mrs Fyne was of mature years for all her unwrinkled face” 137) implying that she is both mean and beyond prettiness.

Marlow’s preoccupation with physical appearance suggests that his denigration of her is as much because of her feminism as her lack of feminine appeal. His resistance to her self-possession and lack of ‘femininity’ is seen in descriptions of her androgynous appearance which imply that she attempts to look like a man as well as act like one. She wears “blouses with a starched front like a man’s shirt, a stand up collar and a long necktie” (39) has a “smooth-cheeked face of masculine shape” (59). Her coat is cut “like an army mess-jacket” and, he concludes, “there are many youthful subalterns...who resemble Mrs Fyne” (137). However, notwithstanding her earlier chivalry towards Flora, he is appalled at her handling of the affair between Flora and her brother, finding it ‘unreasonable’ and ‘unmasculine’. (“How should you have liked it if anybody had tried to interfere between you and Mr Fyne...?” 161) She is therefore, for him, neither feminine nor masculine but an uneasy combination of impulses which he cannot understand.

His discomfort with Mrs Fyne’s non-conformity with his idea of femininity finds expression in a derogation of her intellect and authenticity as well - “She had no knowledge of the world. She had got hold of words as a child might get hold of some poisonous pills and play with them for ‘dear, tiny little marbles’ ” (61). Her ‘woman’s cleverness’ is to him ‘perfectly diabolical’ in its attempts to brainwash and control others, and lacks the understanding of the true intellectual. “Women don’t understand the force of a contemplative temperament They feel instinctively that it is the one which escapes best the domination of feminine influences” (155). However, instead of being struck by Mrs Fyne’s lack of understanding, the reader is struck by Marlow’s lack of understanding of her because she escapes stereotyping.

Marlow’s fear of the ‘domination of feminine influences’ is revealed time and again. His discourse is frequently resisted by others’ on issues relating to a woman’s place. The frame narrator frequently challenges him, and Mrs Fyne is determined to voice

women's plight, while Marlow is equally determined to silence her voice and assert his own view of women over it. He appears convinced that Mrs Fyne most wants ascendancy over men, and only when he can reassure himself that this will not happen does his anxiety subside:

After the first shock, you understand, I recovered very quickly. The order of the world was safe enough. He was a civil servant and she his good and faithful wife (59).

However, Mrs Fyne's discourse at no time articulates a hatred of men or a desire to see them subjugated. Marlow simply insists that this is so: "All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own...Because in such completeness there is power - the kind of thrill they love most" (63). More to the point is the fact that she shows no deference to his masculinity, and this clearly affronts him. He is also piqued when her many attractive young companions ignore him - "As to myself, I was made to feel that I did not exist" (42) - and his recourse is to see Mrs Fyne as sexually deviant. "She always walked off directly after tea with her arm round the girl-friend's waist" (43). By seeing her as an aberration, he defines her, and believes he has understood her. She is not passive, vulnerable or feminine, and so she is not for him a 'real' woman.

So uncomfortable does she make him feel, that after contact with her he frequently feels intensely, cosmically, alone. Leaving her house one evening, he is confronted by "one of those dewy, clear, starry nights, oppressing our spirit, crushing our pride, by the brilliant evidence of the awful loneliness ... of our globe" (50). "I ... bowed to Mrs Fyne and went out of the cottage to be confronted outside its doors by the bespangled, cruel revelation of the Immensity of the Universe ... the earth seemed to me more profoundly asleep - perhaps because I was alone now" (61). I would suggest that he cannot cope with Mrs Fyne because he does not know how to behave towards such women. A chivalrous approach is only suitable with damsels. Thus the subversion of the social world which he feels he knows, by a feminist, who seems to preach that men are the enemy, causes him intense feelings of isolation and bewilderment.

Since Mrs Fyne is clearly a woman who *is* “made for attack” (281) she does not fit his stereotype. The phrasing of her words often has an authority which irks Marlow - “It’s what I’ve said” (57) - she says dogmatically. Her discourse resists his in a way that challenges his notion of how women should speak, that is that they should defer to masculine authority. “The aggressive tone was too much for [Marlow’s] endurance” (58). Her discourse is to Marlow “like a steel trap going off” (58) and his response to this is to derogate all that she stands for. He decides that she is deluded in her subscription to naive doctrines and therefore lacks “a clear vision of reality” because she will not see that “a woman’s part is passive, say what you like” (281). Her argument that it is not necessary for a woman to show more consideration than others gives Marlow the justification to label her convictions “naive atrociousness”. He dismisses her doctrine as “not political ... not social It was a knock-me-down doctrine” (59) concluding that it advocates that “no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruples should stand in the way of a woman” (59). His harshest judgement of this doctrine is the ironic rejoinder that it entails “things not fit for a man to hear” (59). Her discourse appears to Marlow unseemly as it displays “an extraordinary fullness of assumed responsibility” (57). He feels she has “an aggressive tone” (58) and appears to be the controlling partner in the marriage. He finds her resistance to his view of things astonishing. “Her answer knocked me over...I confess that I went down flat” (58). In his view her disagreement with him constitutes female rebellion and he is displeased with the image of femininity that she presents. “I was not delighted with her. What affected me was not what she displayed but what she could not conceal” (152). To him she is merely “clamouring” for an opportunity to be what she cannot be, a man.

The element of Mrs Fyne’s doctrine that speaks for redress is dealt with scornfully, sarcastically and parenthetically - “(who by the mere fact of her sex was the predestined victim of conditions created by men’s selfish passions, their vices and their abominable tyranny)” (59). In a sense Marlow’s scepticism is well-founded: Flora de Barral, for example, is a victim of conditions created not only by her father’s vices but by the tyranny of her governess - a woman. However, Mrs Fyne’s insistence that women are unwilling victims and therefore forced to be passive antagonises

Marlow. Her attempts to present women's right to choice are lost on him. "She [Flora] has chosen to disappear. That's all" (58) she says. Marlow is outraged at the idea of Flora exercising her will in this way and will not believe it. "The devil she has ... with her air of an angry victim" (58).

Marlow appears quite alarmed at all this feminine assertiveness, and his defence is to humour women. His dismissal of Mrs Fyne's "little book", "a sort of handbook for women with grievances (and all women had them)" (65) ostensibly amuses him greatly, but his reaction of mirth is an affectation designed to mask his sense of threat. Generalising about women's propensity to feel aggrieved, thereby trivialising the subject, has the same purpose. His repeated assurances to the narrator that the world is still "safe" (for example 59,63) illustrate the degree of threat that he believes strong women pose. Marlow is intimidated by strong women and his reaction to the self-assured Mrs Fyne is evidence of this. He does not understand her, she does not conform with his mythologised image of 'woman' and so he resorts to a stereotype of a lesbian, aggressive woman to define and understand her. While he acknowledges that her feminist writings are aimed at an audience of women, he nevertheless reacts to the idea of them as if they constitute a personal attack on himself.

However, my resistant reading sees Mrs Fyne in a more positive light. She manifests great feeling both in her concern for Flora de Barral, and in the channelling of her energies into writing a book that is designed to help exploited women. Resisting Marlow's representation of Mrs Fyne, as I think we need to, does not imply that his distaste for her is entirely unjustified. As Bauer and McKinstry have pointed out, a feminist dialogic does not aim to replace a patriarchal monoglossia with a feminist one. Notwithstanding her concern for Flora, Mrs Fyne is after all a 'snob' and, for the reasons given earlier, she does not strike the reader as a particularly compassionate person. However, what is interesting is not whether she is heartless or not, but the fact that she resists the assumption that all women ought not to be. "Why should a girl be more considerate than any one else? More than any man for instance?" (58). Marlow's subsequent timidity is comical: "Of course I exclaimed at this, not very

loudly it is true, but forcibly” (58). Her pronouncements on this issue directly resist Marlow’s views on women, and he is “knocked over” by her audacity.

My reading is that her feminism, while not without a self-seeking element, is mainly designed to enlighten other women, not to threaten men. Her feminist discourse is the voice of a woman who has chosen to resist the exploitation to which men, like her father, may subject her and other women. Her overtures to Flora are not the attempts of a female warrior to gain ascendancy, as Marlow fears, but a display of concern towards an exploited, abandoned woman with whom she can feel sympathy. Her discourse, articulated in her writing as well as in her speech, thus competes with Marlow’s in the portrayal of the feminist woman.

Flora’s governess is treated with similar contempt by Marlow, and she is likewise given little opportunity to speak for herself, with her words largely being reported by him. While his contempt for her may be justified because of her gratuitous cruelty to Flora, Marlow’s outrage at her seems to extend beyond issues of morality, (“an artificial, heartless, vulgar-minded woman with the lowest possible ideals” 73) to a sense that she has betrayed her gender by her behaviour. “When a woman takes to any sort of unlawful man-trade, there’s nothing to beat her in the way of thoroughness” (93). As with Mrs Fyne, Marlow suggests that the governess has improper sexual tastes, especially for a woman of her age: “She was nearly forty (“an age in itself terrible” 101) and harboured a secret taste for patronizing young men of sorts” (73). The use of the word “patronizing” is clearly a euphemism to suggest sexual proclivities. The intention behind the recounting of this kind of salacious detail, as with Mrs Fyne’s implied lesbianism, is to invoke conventional notions of correct female sexual behaviour, and to intensify negative responses to these characters by adding sexual deviance to the list of their ‘unfeminine’ attributes. This reveals how far assumptions of ‘real’ feminine behaviour inform his thinking.

My feminist reading sees the governess, like Mrs Fyne, as not passive but taking an active role, morally or immorally, in determining her own destiny. Against a

background of nineteenth-century feminine disempowerment, the governess's unscrupulousness can be seen to be an understandable, practical attempt to gain economic security. Because Marlow fails to acknowledge the extent of women's dependence in a patriarchal system, he is enraged by this display of female assertiveness and action, especially given his belief that women think men's weakness and wickedness make such action necessary.

In significant ways, Marlow finds the governess to be typical of her gender. "There was something of women's highly practical sanity and also of their irrelevancy in the conduct of Miss de Barral's amazing governess" (94). At this point in the narrative the governess has just introduced her 'nephew' to Flora and it is the elaborate scheme to defraud Flora that Marlow is beginning to relate. Her scheme is elaborate and determined: "there's nothing to beat her in the way of thoroughness" (93). Given the context, his use of seemingly complimentary phrases like "amazing practicality" and "thoroughness" is ironic, as he sees the scheme as the governess's attempt to take charge of her circumstances through theft, ("a most sinister plot under her air of distant, fashionable exclusiveness" 90) and thus to resist the passivity which he believes is part of her lot - "the secret of her envenomed rage [was] not against this miserable and attractive wretch [Flora], but against fate, accident and the whole course of human life" (103). He sees her as having the "trick of a perfect lady" but "the soul of a brigand" (93). His statements here appear to be part of an imaginary war in which he feels the honour of men is under attack: "It's true that you will find people who'll tell you that this...is altogether the fault of men" (93). This sense of threat perhaps accounts for the frequency of his pronouncements about women and their supposed need to acknowledge their passive role.

In the sense that neither women are 'passive', Marlow sees Mrs Fyne and the governess as having a great deal in common. He states that Mrs Fyne:

resembled a governess of a conventional type. Only, her mental excesses were theoretical, hedged in by so much humane feeling and conventional reserves, that they amounted to no more than mere libertinage of thought; whereas the other woman, the governess of Flora de Barral, was, as you may have noticed, severely practical - terribly impractical. No! Hers was not a rare temperament, except in its

fierce resentment of repression; a feeling which like genius or lunacy is apt to drive people into sudden irrelevancy. Hers was feminine irrelevancy. A male genius, a male ruffian, or even a male lunatic, would not have behaved exactly as she did behave. There is a softness in masculine nature, even the most brutal, which acts as a check (100-1).

The two women are linked by the image of 'governess' and by their unscrupulousness. And yet, as I have mentioned earlier, Mr de Barral has far more in common with the governess than Mrs Fyne, because he too is unscrupulous and exploits others, yet Marlow is not as harsh in his judgement of de Barral as he is of the governess. Part of the reason for this is the fact that women characters, who are located within a mythology about women, frequently represent a 'sustaining illusion' for male characters. When they abrogate their function, as Mrs Fyne and the governess appear to do, they are judged harshly. This judgement is harsh because they are not damsels in Marlow's reckoning, and do not behave as such. The point is that Marlow's assessments of these two women are contrived to fit the assumptions about women to which he insistently subscribes. In this thesis, I have argued that women provide a 'sustaining illusion' for male characters, enabling the male characters to ward off despair while comforting illusions are present. 'Damsels' fulfil this function in Marlow's mythology, in that they imply the need for masculine heroism, and demarcate masculine authority. When Marlow meets women who are not damsels, he is perplexed by them and appears to be driven to interpret them in particular ways, both to himself and the frame narrator, in an effort to reorder his world. The frame narrator's objections to Marlow's reading of the governess's motives, (to hold the young man's affections with the promise of Flora's money), are answered with a self-assured generalisation: "You expect a cogency of conduct not usual in women" (103). Generalising about women, for Marlow, is itself a kind of sustaining of illusions.

The governess is clearly not one of Marlow's 'real' women, because she chooses to vent her rage against her circumstances. Whereas Marlow is willing to see Flora de Barral as needing the financial security of marriage to Captain Anthony, he is scathing in his judgement of the governess because she took it upon herself to secure her circumstances, instead of yielding to the passivity which he believes is essential

to *being* a woman. My feminist reading of the governess's character is more understanding of a woman who resists the servile position in which a patriarchal economic system has kept her, with no other means available to her to pursue financial security.

And yet, Marlow's concept of the 'real woman' resists itself in significant ways. His 'real woman' is passive and vulnerable, concerned with 'Irrelevant' traits which he does not associate with masculine 'knights'. Though he claims to speak 'as' woman, he does not claim to speak 'for' woman. At times he reluctantly admits his ignorance about women to the narrator: "You know more women than I do... You make it your business to know them - don't you?" (158). Yet in contrast with characters like the "hopelessly masculine Fyne", he claims to have a feminine part to himself too - "that small portion of 'femininity', that drop of superior essence" (146). He is careful to draw a distinction between 'feminism' and 'femininity'. "Observe that I say 'femininity', a privilege - not 'feminism', an attitude. I am not a feminist. It was Fyne who ... had adopted that mental attitude" (146). His conception of 'femininity' as a 'privilege' illustrates his idealised conception of it, whereas 'feminism' has a negative connotation for him. His derogation of Fyne as a feminist is coupled with the charge that Fyne is also "hopelessly" masculine, "bound and delivered by it" (146).

In claiming to be part woman, Marlow is unaware of the way in which he is drawing on a stereotype of women which he understands to represent women *per se*, and is thus demonstrating his manifest misunderstanding of women. Having charged Mrs Fyne with aggression, the governess with unscrupulousness and Flora with passivity, he is clearly conscious of the differences in 'femininity' between them. He speaks of 'femininity' as if it is an absolute, but his claim to a portion of femininity is opportunistic, arising from an attempt to justify to the narrator his less than chivalrous opinion of Flora de Barral - "I thought of her as a minx" (53) - and to give credence to his statements about women, as if they emanate from an inner female wisdom. On the one hand he tries to draw the narrator into a male conspiracy which shares its misunderstanding of feminine mystique, and on the other he tries to lay

claim to an understanding of women on the grounds of the 'woman' within him. "But there is enough of the woman in my nature to free my judgement of women from glamorous reticency" (53). A portion of which woman does Marlow claim to possess? He claims that "A woman is not necessarily a doll or angel to me. She is a human being very like myself" (53). Yet, despite the evidence of his own experience, I believe that the 'woman' Marlow is referring to is an archetypal woman, a 'real' woman of his own mythology who is always passive and 'irrelevant'. His image of woman suggests a mythologised view similar to that suggested by Jung, who asserts that woman's 'intuitive capacity' and 'feeling' "has been a source of information about things for which a man has no eyes" (1959:158). Marlow's claim here is that he does have the female 'eyes' to understand women.

Knapp rightly points out that such gender stereotyping is unstable, and that "when not restricted to gender, Jung's ... archetypes depict a basic androgyny which reveals new and dynamic modes of behaviour" (1987:6). In creating a narrator whose statements are repeatedly interrogated and undermined, Conrad is himself challenging such gender stereotyping. Clearly there are thinking women as well as feeling, intuitive men, one of whom Marlow claims to be. Constructing paradigms of behaviour which are delineated primarily along gender lines involves Marlow in a difficult exercise, in which women who do not fit his paradigm are constructed as Other, and men who lay claim to intuition and feeling need to justify their non-masculine behaviour. The problem is that Marlow does not reconcile the women whom he knows with the mythologised 'woman' by which he measures feminine behaviour. Mrs Fyne's 'decency' makes no difference to his prejudices about women. What he fails to see is that decency is not masculine, any more than passivity is feminine. Drawing gender lines locates human traits in ways that they will ultimately resist. For example, on the issue of chivalry, Marlow's definitions sabotage themselves. He says:

As to honour - you know - it's a very fine mediaeval inheritance which women never got hold of. It wasn't theirs. Since it may be laid as a general principle that women always get what they want, we must suppose they didn't want it. In addition they are devoid of decency. I mean masculine decency All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power (63).

And yet, in spite of his assertion that women are “devoid of decency”, Mrs Fyne’s rescue of Flora de Barral, the act of a chivalrous being, impresses Marlow with the decency of it. “It would have been so easy to have done nothing and to have thought no more about it. My liking for her began” (138). He feels that her “patient immobility by the bedside of that brutally murdered childhood did infinite honour to her humanity” (139).

The issue of chivalry has been gendered in the construction of the narrative, with one part being labelled “The Damsel”, the other, “The Knight”. If one takes the novel’s divisions to signify developments of plot, then the first part of the novel represents Flora’s distress and need for rescue. This distress follows after she has been financially ruined by the fraudulent dealings of her father, separated by death from a beloved mother, and subsequently exploited and abused by the mercenary governess in whose care she is left. The knight who rescues her is Captain Anthony who, opposing the wishes of his family, enters into a sacrificial, celibate marriage to give her shelter and care. His sacrifice is seen in the fact that although he loves her, he will not ‘desecrate the temple’ by consummating the marriage. Significantly, Marlow likens Flora to “a temple violated by a mad, vengeful piety” (99). It is this temple that Marlow believes he has had the chance to look into (311). The reader is reminded of this image when Anthony won’t “destroy” and “break” the inner sanctuary that he believes Flora’s fragile psyche to represent.

Anthony is not the only male character who is interested in Flora. Both Marlow and Powell show varying degrees of attraction to her. Thus he is not the only knight. What the text sets up is a collection of knights, all engaged in the pursuit of chivalrous honour. They are searching for a Grail, or seeking to penetrate the ‘mystery’ of women, (“it’s as well not to come too close to the shrine” says Marlow (353), “you pass by and wonder what mysterious rites are going on in there,”) (311), or seeking to carry out a rescue of a damsel in distress, for example Flora de Barral.

Johnson identifies three knights in *Chance*, Anthony, Powell and Marlow, whose counterparts in Arthurian legend she believes are Galahad, Percivale and Bors. All three knights travelled in search of the Holy Grail, and all three were successful in different ways. Whether Conrad invokes these intentionally or not, remarkable parallels are certainly discernible between the two tales. Anthony, like Galahad, dies after completing his quest, Powell, like Percivale, sees the 'Grail' only after the death of Anthony/Galahad and Marlow, like Bors, returns to tell the tale. However, I am not convinced that these three characters are the only 'knights' in *Chance*. Mr Franklin, the mate, has also sacrificed his life to 'serve' an ideal, to look after the one woman he can revere, his mother. In a chivalric sense he has become the custodian of a temple of his own making. The narrator, too, could be seen as a knight. He is 'accused' of chivalry by Marlow on occasion, and protests a chivalrous attitude to women: "Upon my word, Marlow ... I wouldn't use an ill-sounding word about women" (281). His most chivalrous attributes, in my opinion though, are the patience and tolerance that he shows in his relationship with his friend, Marlow. In addition, it is not only male characters who engage in chivalric rescue operations; Mrs Fyne is courageous and compassionate in the way that she gives Flora sanctuary. Marlow himself is moved to admiration: "this was a perfect Fyne. Compassion - judiciousness - something correctly measured I had a mind to shout 'Brava! Brava!'"(141). But it is Johnson's three knights who are clustered around Flora and who are all, in different ways, in pursuit of her. This chivalric frame of reference is shown finally to be inadequate to articulate the way that knights react to damsels' 'distress'; or to convey fully the dynamics in the relationships between men and women.

Other mythical echoes resonate in the text. Flora has the same name as the Roman fertility goddess and her name recalls *The Tempest*. This association with myth is an important feature in her character, especially as it relates to the mythological framework of the novel: Flora being likened not only to the Christian Grail symbol, but also to a pagan fertility goddess, gives her character dual aspects of purity and sexuality. Watts does not include Flora de Barral in his Conradian gender type of "Statuesquely Beautiful Object of Male Desire" (1993:180), but I would argue that

she is represented as an object of desire because of her fragile beauty on the one hand and the power of her sexuality over the male characters on the other.

In *Chance* male response to women is frequently characterised by duality and ambivalence. Marlow, for example, cannot decide whether he is dealing with a tragedy or a comedy. He frequently foregrounds Flora's fragility and vulnerability, yet also expresses his belief in the disordering, destructive power of femininity. Female sexuality is associated by Marlow and other male characters like Franklin and Powell with that which is chaotic and to be feared. Marlow articulates this ambivalence:

Mainly I resent that pretence of winding us round their dear little fingers, as of right ... It is the assumption that each of us is a combination of a kid and an imbecile which I find provoking - in a small way; in a very small way ... I am not a women-devouring monster ... I hope there's enough of a kid and an imbecile in me to answer the requirements of some really good woman eventually - some day (150).

An extreme manifestation of a perception of female duality is seen in the mate's pathological fear of the sexuality of women (referred to earlier) and his contradictory insistence that "A woman must be looked after" (300). When the mate discovers that his captain has married, his fear is of some evil presence on board that will destroy the ship; yet, away from the ship, he dedicates himself to service of his mother ("if it comes to that, I say, give me a mother", 300). He too could be likened to a knight keeping himself 'pure' from corruption, in the service of a barren ideal. As in *The Secret Agent*, sexuality is a significant subtext in this novel, manifesting ambivalent attitudes to women, and highlighting the differences between private and public responses. The marital 'embrace', resisted by Captain Anthony, comes to symbolise a subjugation to these dark impulses for the mate, but an invasion of Flora's 'spiritual fragility' (332) for Anthony. Flora is tragically unaware of either of these male responses, believing Anthony's choice of celibacy to be a rejection of herself. Roberts sees misogyny and chivalry as being the two sides of the same coin:

Both attempt to fix and essentialize female identity in accordance with male conceptions or fantasies of the nature of women. While the idealizing, chivalric conception is superficially more complimentary, it can be an even more efficient tool of oppression. The ideal woman is required always to behave in accordance with what a man imagines to be an ideal pattern, and her humanity is thereby denied (1993b:101).

The focus of my approach to Flora's discourse in the novel is threefold: her presentation as passive, therefore a 'real' woman, the extent to which she is 'mythologised' through representation in dramatic poses, and the ways in which her discourse competes with male discourses in the novel. In the extracts given earlier, Marlow states that it is woman's role to wait, and that a real woman understands this. He decides that Flora "must have been passive" because she 'waited on fate'. In his interpretation of her in this way, he declares that she is 'thoroughly feminine'. Roberts suggests that Marlow's role in events in fact resembles the role he seeks to ascribe to women: overt passivity. Yet he lays claim not to passivity, in his definition of part of himself as feminine, but intuition. The irony is that he repeatedly misunderstands the women characters, especially Flora de Barral, and in his observation of events is passive rather than active, observer rather than facilitator. Both Roberts and Jones (1993) emphasise Marlow's voyeuristic role in the novel, a role which is taken by other male characters too. Powell, for example, has 'looked on' on board ship, spied through skylights and related events to Marlow. Linking the idea of 'looking' with the image of the 'temple', Marlow states:

A young girl, you know, is something like a temple. You pass by and wonder what mysterious rites are going on in there, what prayers, what visions? The privileged man, the lover, the husband, who are given the key of the sanctuary do not always know how to use it. For myself, without claim, without merit, simply by chance I had been allowed to look through the half-opened door and I had seen the saddest possible desecration (311).

An analysis of a scene which occurs very early in the narrative, when Marlow's assessment of Flora as 'damsel' is fixed, will illustrate all three aspects of my approach to Flora. This is the scene in which Flora is standing on the edge of the quarry, supposedly contemplating suicide. When Marlow sees her, she is on the edge of a hundred-foot drop. The image that shakes him is ethereal "The hem of her skirt seemed to float over that sheer awful drop" (43). The experience upsets him, leading him to think of the "foolhardiness of the average girl" (43). The reader sees immediately that Marlow regards the girl as foolhardy because she is careless of her dangerous situation. He does not acknowledge the possibility that she has chosen to be so close to the edge, but rather reads her position in terms of his stereotyped

notions of female passivity. When the Fyne's dog will not come to her call, the conversation which develops gives Marlow the chance to question her about her actions. She replies: "I don't see why I shouldn't be as reckless as I please" (45). This irks him because he considers it rude (it is said with 'considerable contempt'), and because he regards a reckless attitude as distasteful in girls. He finds her self-possession irritating, linking it with Mrs Fyne's feminist injunction to girls not to consider others in their behaviour. However, when he notices that her eyelashes are wet and that she is clearly very unhappy, his reaction changes dramatically.

I don't know how to say it - well - it suited her. The clouded brow, the pained mouth, the vague fixed glance! A victim. And this characteristic aspect made her attractive; an individual touch - you know (46).

She appears to him as an iconic figuration, as if painted in a dramatic pose, and it is to this "attractive" picture of vulnerability that he responds. Once she is transformed into a victim, she becomes interesting. Marlow has no sympathy with rude girls, but victims call forth a ready response of chivalrous behaviour. Her unhappiness leads him to link her proximity to the cliff-edge with a suicide bid, which he regards as a passive act, "the outcome of mere mental weariness - not an act of savage energy but the final symptom of complete collapse" (183), because, as a woman, she has no means to change her destiny and so chooses rather to end her life. Flora is dramatically portrayed in this scene as a distant hem floating over a cliff. The drama of the scene invests her character with a 'what-goes-without-saying' overlay of mythology, as her identity is merged with the identity of 'victim'. Marlow sees her character as having been "fated to be always surrounded by treachery and lies stifling her every better impulse, every instinctive aspiration of her soul to trust and to love" (174-5). Regardless of the fact that he has recognised a strength in her, he insists on seeing her as weak, regarding her as "poor Flora" from then on. Enabling her to speak for herself at this point would negate the passivity which he finds fascinating in her. Interpreting her instead of reporting her words enables him to keep the myth in place, and her characterisation as a victim in his story enables him to portray himself (and other men) in a chivalrous light.

Marlow believes himself to have saved her from death, a view which pleases him, yet this is shown not to be the case. Although he insists on seeing her as a girl, she is an adult woman. When she speaks she manifests a strength and assertiveness which Marlow has registered on first meeting her, but which his narration has attempted to deny. Her discourse struggles to resist his. "I see you will have it that you saved my life. Nothing of the kind. I was concerned for that vile little beast of a dog" (214). When she challenges the illusion that he saved her, he discounts her words, dwelling rather on her child-like appeal and ignoring her maturity. Her attractiveness as victim is only intensified.

But lowering her glance unexpectedly till her dark eyelashes seemed to rest against her white cheeks she presented a perfectly demure aspect. It was so attractive that I could not help a faint smile I caught myself grinning down at that demure little girl. I must say too that I felt more friendly to her at the moment than ever before (214).

Whether Flora is exploiting her demure looks and purposefully arousing Marlow's sympathy, or whether he only interprets her posture as a demure pose is uncertain. My focus is not primarily on Flora's reactions, feelings or words here, but the dramatic representation of her that is captured in the pose of appealing, innocent child. Jones asserts that we never get to *know* Flora completely. "Her image is trapped in a hermeneutic web as the narrators ... offer endless interpretations of what a woman is" (1993:66). This web of interpretation operates by imposing the plot of a mythologised romance on the story of the heroine, so that she is accorded the status of 'damsel' and they the role of knights.

However, as I argued earlier, reading of characters brings them into being; in that sense we come to know them. I see Flora's discourse as resisting Marlow's interpretation of her, and that resistance is an essential part of her character. Mongia (1993) recalls Joan Steiner's work on the connection between Conrad and Gothic romance tradition, suggesting that the Gothic shares many elements with adventure and romance. Brantlinger calls the genre that connects adventure with the Gothic 'Imperial Gothic', as it facilitates the expression of "anxiety about the waning of opportunities for heroic adventure" (1988:239). I would suggest that elements of his 'Imperial Gothic' model can be seen in this novel. In fact a range of fictions could be

constructed to serve the purposes of the male characters in their attempts to represent the 'feminine'. Here Marlow invests Flora's story with the elements that he believes his male audience will find interesting and acceptable. Presenting her as the dramatic 'damsel' in the chivalric tale objectifies her for observation and interpretation by the story-teller. Her story is therefore modified and altered to fit the expectations of male myth; it is fictionalised. It thus becomes a metafiction within a fiction.

Not only is the chivalric 'story' imposed on Flora by Marlow, the frame narrator sees another adventure fiction being acted out in her story.

This is like one of those redskin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way. I have always loved such stories. Go on (311).

The narrative reveals a sense of identification between the male characters in their shared lack of understanding of women and their inability to engage with women through any medium other than that of their male idealizations and prejudices. Erdinast-Vulcan terms this identification 'surrogacy', seeing Marlow as a 'surrogate' for Conrad as well, as he attempts to regain the faith that he lost when he gave up his seafaring life. The faith that Erdinast-Vulcan speaks of appears to be a 'cosmic' faith rather than a faith in people or the social world; it is the kind of faith that Lena embodies for Heyst in *Victory*.

Erdinast-Vulcan sees Marlow's telling of Flora's tale as therapeutic, leading to a renewed affirmation of faith. She sees his encounters with Flora de Barral, which engage his sympathy, leading him to shed his cynicism and develop an affirmative attitude which ends his story. She states that Marlow is "fully and painfully aware of the essential relativity and fictitiousness of man's 'truths' and values, and the illusions which he must uphold in order to preserve a semblance of order and purpose in an amoral and indifferent cosmos" (1992:392). While I agree in part, my reading goes further than this. I believe that Marlow deals not only with a more general faith in the order of the cosmos in his narrative, but with a 'faith' in his conceptions of men and women as well. The construction of Flora's character in his narrative is in

terms of the way he wants to see her, and the way that he wants to see men in relation to her.

Marlow has entrenched an image of Flora in his story which allows her to have been saved by him. The romanticising of this incident is a necessary development of his presentation of Flora in terms of his mythologised view of women. This version renders her passive, in the same way as seeing her as a temple 'freezes' her in the narrative. She becomes the fixed, still point towards which and around which the male narration moves, in its efforts to 'gain entry' as it were. Interpretation of the character comes to be equated with knowledge of the mystery and possession of the temple. By sustaining this image of women, Marlow provides himself with the illusion that he understands women, and therefore male/female relations. 'Understanding' gives him a kind of ontological assurance as his own location within a social network is made clearer for him. I do not see a clear progression from cynicism to faith in his narrative, but rather a wrestling with images of women which do not quite fit the reality he encounters. If he does experience a therapeutic renewal of faith, then a necessary part of it involves affirming his own notions of masculine and feminine behaviour. Constructing the women characters in terms of a chivalric code of knights and damsels, for example seeing Flora as a vulnerable child/woman who needs chivalrous men to rescue her, is part of this process. The change of heart towards Mrs Fyne and later Flora de Barral is more likely to result from an awareness of how the women themselves resist his definition of them, and of how they assert themselves. Mrs Fyne is decent in spite of Marlow's prejudice towards her, and he honestly acknowledges that. Flora proves herself to be active in her part in the marriage, not passive. After Anthony's death she shows herself to be strong and assertive, qualities the earlier Marlow could not see. He thus comes more to grips with 'women' than Erdinast-Vulcan concedes.

Roberts states that "men who have little knowledge of women but a clear notion of 'woman' represent a force for oppression, since they are unwilling to allow women to be anything other than passive screens onto which male 'clear notions' are projected" (1993b:101). This argument is substantiated quite clearly when Marlow, speaking of

Mrs Fyne's objections, reflects on Flora's inability to take care of herself and her need for a man to rescue her, hence her plan to marry Captain Anthony. "In other words, ... she [Mrs Fyne] can't forgive Miss de Barral for being a woman and behaving like a woman A woman against the world has no resources but in herself. Her only means of action is to be what *she is*" (188). However, he does not apply this dictum to the governess because she has not engaged his sympathies as Flora has. Flora's departure with Anthony is to Marlow a 'triumphantly feminine' transaction as it involves female passivity and male activity, whereas Mrs Fyne's feminism, which advocates female activity, isolates men from the picture, denying them opportunities for heroism. Flora's triumphant transaction proves her passivity to Marlow and establishes her as a 'real' woman.

The mythological framework through which Flora's story is told separates her from other women characters in the narrative because in Flora's story a significant dichotomy between representation and being exists. The governess and Mrs Fyne are described and interpreted by Marlow in terms of their actions and beliefs, whereas Flora is frequently presented in a series of dramatic poses. Flora's youth is partly the reason for this (women of forty, like the governess, are of a 'desperate age'). Apart from likening young women, to temples and shrines, Marlow gives Flora an iconic quality similar to photographs and portraits in his dramatic, posed representation of her. She hovers at the edge of the quarry, she is caught in an arrested moment at the doorway of Anthony's cabin or is seated in "a deep high-backed armchair" (443). There are numerous references to her paleness, her startling blue eyes, her pointed chin and her wraithlike figure. Light falls on her in different ways and she is often described as emerging or retreating. Powell recounts:

Mrs Anthony had on a dressing-gown of some grey stuff with red facings and a thick red cord around the waist. Her hair was down. She looked like a child; a pale-faced child with big blue eyes and a red mouth a little open showing a glimmer of white teeth. The light fell strongly on her as she came up to the end of the table She hardly affected one like a child, I remember (423-4).

This distancing and objectifying treatment competes powerfully with Flora's own voice. The gap between her representation and her being is significantly widened by

it. Flora's centrifugal discourse in the story struggles to be heard against a number of masculine discourses. Thus while Marlow is attempting sympathetically to tell Flora's story of isolation, abandonment and rescue, his narration repeatedly seeks to silence her discourse and define her according to his own mythologised view of women; her story is rather different from Marlow's version of it. It seems to the reader as if 'possession' of her mystery by interpretation is important to him; his inability to interpret her leads him to associate her enigmatic quality with blankness. "She was not so much unreadable as blank; and I did not know whether to admire her for it or dismiss her from my thoughts as a passive butt of ferocious misfortune" (93). As Jones (1993) points out, Flora is seldom self-dramatized, but is defined and redefined by male narrators. Yet frequently Marlow fails to define her; she becomes an unreadable text for him and so he attributes no meaning to her.

It is not only Marlow's discourse that silences her. Fyne's imperceptiveness, Powell's innocence and Captain Anthony's idealism all reflect their lack of real understanding of her. Their identification with each other in these terms produces a powerful cluster of voices against which Flora's voice must struggle to be heard. Her husband Anthony's own mythologised view of women and his misguided chivalry, which leads him to abstain from consummating the marriage, almost succeed in silencing her:

'Let us go on board. We'll talk there,' he said. 'And you will have to listen to me' ...At first she did not understand. Then when she understood that he was giving her liberty she went stiff all over, her hand resting on the edge of the table, her face set like a carving of white marble. It was all over. It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible ... (334-5)

Her reaction to her 'liberation' is sadness and resignation, which Anthony misreads as indifference towards him.

'That fellow Fyne has been telling me the truth. She does not care for me a bit.' ... Flora on her side with partial insight (for women are never blind with the complete masculine blindness) looked on him with some pity; and she felt pity for herself too. It was a rejection, a casting out; nothing new to her (342).

What is illustrated here, through Marlow's omniscient narration, is the lack of understanding between Flora and her new husband. Neither character can articulate

clearly the reasons for his or her own behaviour. Ironically, Anthony's rescue of Flora leads not to her 'liberty' as Anthony hopes, but to her entrapment. "Where could she escape from this? From this new perfidy of life taking upon itself the form of magnanimity" (336). The problem is that he treats her as he believes his mythologised woman should be treated, as if she were fragile and sacred. She is "the captive of Anthony's masterful generosity" (423).

Far from feeling secure, as he believes she must, "She felt how she had always been unrelated to this world. She was hanging on to it merely by that one arm grasped firmly just above the elbow" (337). Her discourse is thus silenced by pernicious chivalry, both Anthony's and her own - "She felt bound in honour to accept the situation for ever and ever" (341).

Mutual misunderstanding imposes silence on both Anthony and Flora. Only once Anthony feels he has lost the battle to keep Flora can he successfully express his love for her. When that happens, he conveys authentic feelings, unmediated by notions of expected male behaviour: "the utter falseness of his ... aspirations ... had come to him with an overwhelming force, leaving him disarmed before the other's mad and sinister sincerity ... I who have said I could never let you go, I shall let you go" (429). While this is not a declaration of love, it is an affirmation of his love for her and she responds to it by giving voice to her own feelings for him. She is aware of the imprisoning silence that has held her up to this point. "I felt as though I were on the rack and not allowed even to cry out" (443-4), but his demonstration of love liberates her to find expression: "I did not want to hold out any longer against my own heart" (443). The authenticity of his discourse breaks her silence and "next minute a cry came out from her heart, not very loud but of a quality which made not only Captain Anthony ... but also the more distant (and equally unprepared) young man [the eavesdropping Powell], catch their breath" (429-30). Significantly, her desire for a consummation of the marriage is not articulated by her but by Powell, who has sympathy for her and speaks for her to Marlow. The effect of this, in my reading, is threefold: firstly, it illustrates Powell's concern for her. Secondly, it silences Flora at a crucial moment in the narrative, and thirdly, it reflects Powell's own desire to be

chivalrous. In cloaking a delicate subject with propriety, he protects the 'damsel' from directly voicing thoughts on the 'taboo' issue of sex in marriage. Powell says:

Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily shop short of the - the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. (426-7).

It is at Flora's instigation that the "marital embrace" takes place. This negates the claims of passivity that are made in representations of her character.

From this point, the narrative is filled with her voice. "Mrs Anthony's voice reached Powell's ears" (430) and "the low convulsive sobbing of Mr Smith's daughter was the only sound to trouble the silence" (430). Increasingly after this, Flora succeeds in defining herself as a figure of strength and not as a vulnerable child. When Powell goes to tell her of Anthony's death, he dreads inflicting such cruelty, yet she "was a brick" (440), and "it was she who was helping me to pull myself together" (441).

After the suicide of her father and the heroic death of her husband, once there are no more knights to 'take care' of her, Flora tells her own story. She acknowledges to Marlow that when she had written to Mrs Fyne, "[she] was feeling reckless and...wrote recklessly", but goes on, "What did I know of life then? Nothing" (443). There is a self-assurance and assertiveness in these words which are completely inconsistent with the image of damsels, temples and shrines. "I really believed I was selling myself, Mr Marlow. And I was proud of it" (443). In giving her a voice and allowing her to speak, Marlow releases Flora from the myth in which his narration has trapped her. Her voice has broken the silence that Marlow imposed upon it; it has escaped his mythology. Once she matures in Marlow's eyes, she is no longer presented as insubstantial, passive and child-like. As a grown woman she has lost for him some of her mystery. "Flora came down to the garden gate to meet me, no longer the perversely tempting, sorrowful wisp of white mist drifting in the complicated bad dream of existence ... she was now her true self" (442). Her 'true self' is still the construct of Marlow's imagination, but she articulates a strength and assertiveness which Marlow has not acknowledged before. She says:

I have had a fine adventure The finest in the world! Only think! I loved and I was loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear. All the world, all life were transformed for me. And how much I have seen! (444).

It is striking that her discourse resembles that of Tennyson's *Ulysses* rather than that of Ulysses' wife Penelope, who remains at home while Ulysses travels the world. Marlow's final assessment of her is that she is "brave" (446).

Although Flora's discourse successfully competes with other voices towards the end of the narrative, for much of the narrative it is a centrifugal discourse in competition with Marlow's. The unitary, centripetal voice is Marlow's, which, as Bakhtin says, finds itself at every moment opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. Nadelhaft asserts that Flora disappears at Marlow's will and only returns when he is ready to allow her to. Yet, by the end of the narrative, Flora's voice has asserted itself and is unmediated by Marlow's reportage of it. Marlow's initial antagonism in the face of the assertive woman and his desire to see Flora as a victim manifest his insistence on his own notions of woman. However, I would suggest that Marlow's narration is an epistemological act, in which, in seeking to penetrate the mystery of women, he makes discoveries about men and women which temper his gendered thinking. By the end of the narrative Marlow displays a softening of attitudes and an acknowledgement of women's strength. Little is left of the acerbic cynicism of the earlier Marlow. The narrative ends with Marlow urging Powell to 'seize his chance' with Flora. The subsequent sarcastic grin on the face of the frame narrator when he hears this, ("What on earth are you grinning at in this sarcastic manner?" 447) is an acknowledgement of Marlow's affection for the couple, and gently alludes to Marlow's romanticism in spite of his assertions to the contrary.

To conclude, my reading has suggested that by using a complex narrative strategy in this novel Conrad has offered different perspectives on matters concerning women. Not all women characters in *Chance* are constructed from within a myth framework, yet all the women characters are measured against a mythical norm. The governess and Mrs Fyne are constructed outside this framework, underlining their

characterisation as Other. Marlow believes that a semblance of order is maintained by the upholding of certain illusions which frame and structure his perception of the world around him. Yet Marlow does not only seek the assurance of cosmic order. He needs a sense of faith in his fellow human beings as well. In order to understand his fellow beings and his relative location in their world, he must construct both them and himself in particular ways. For this reason, the women of his mythology provide a passive foil to the action of male knights, sustaining a comforting illusion of the necessity of male heroism and strength.

Until Anthony's death, Flora is constructed in Marlow's narration as a passive, vulnerable, desirable child/woman, a damsel in a myth. She is largely portrayed in a state of 'being', not 'becoming'; only after she speaks for herself is her character shown to transform. Her strength had always been there, but only when Marlow is ready does he acknowledge it. What the novel serves to illustrate is not Conrad's misogyny, as some critics have maintained, but his increasing understanding of the isolation and dependence of women within male-dominated societies. Perhaps it is indeed for this reason that after *Chance* Conrad and Marlow part company.

Whereas my study of *Chance* has shown that Flora's discourse struggles to assert itself in the narrative, succeeding only when she is no longer surrounded by dominant male characters, in my reading of *Victory* I shall show that Lena's discourse does not set out to resist the centripetal voice of Axel Heyst. Rather she seeks to align her discourse with Heyst's, according him the right to define her. In *Victory*, I shall examine the character of Lena and the ways in which she is the quintessential mythological woman, whose discourse not only seeks to align itself with that of the male's, but also articulates the possibility of faith in the face of masculine despair.

CHAPTER SIX: *VICTORY*.

When you don't see me, do you believe that I exist? (*Victory*, 183).

My last case study, *Victory*, is the one that will most clearly illustrate the tenets of my hypothesis. Gurko suggests that “*Victory* is a teeming warehouse of materials, a kind of one-man summary of Conrad’s collected works” (1979:213). Not surprisingly then, this novel offers the richest and most illustrative example of a centrifugal discourse of myth articulating a sustaining illusion. The woman character in this novel, Lena, fulfills my reading of Conrad’s woman characters as having this function. The centripetal discourse in this novel is Axel Heyst’s, articulating a struggle between a paralysing intellectualism which numbs his will to act and negates all faith in cosmic order, and an urge to involve himself emotionally and practically with his fellows. While his is the authoritative voice in the novel, it is set against two significant other discourses: his father’s, which sustains his scepticism, and Lena’s, which entreats him to engage, to love and to have faith. However, while Lena’s discourse articulates a ‘saving illusion’ for much of the novel, ultimately it does not ‘save’ Heyst from death.

My approach to this novel will involve an analysis of Lena’s discourse as a centrifugal discourse voicing faith in love based on her ‘knowledge’ of God - which Heyst regards as mere illusion, but which he yearns to be able to believe himself. In its imperative to love, her discourse resists the scepticism of the discourses of Heyst and his father, and, in the accomplishment of her ‘passionate purpose’ at the end of the narrative, it is ultimately victorious. The way that Heyst defines Lena’s character, once he has taken her to live on his island, will be seen to arise from his archetypal notions about women, and to be steeped in mythical references.

Narrative strategies referred to in previous chapters are apparent in this novel too. Frequently Lena, like Flora and Antonia, is represented in a series of dramatic poses which serve to objectify and distance her. At times in the narrative she is little more than a voice, and a curious process of transubstantiation renders her substantial or insubstantial for Heyst, according to whether she is speaking or not:

The fleeting weight of her body on his knees, the hug around his neck, the whisper in his ear, the kiss on his lips, might have been the insubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts (231).

Heyst does not seem able to decide whether she is real or not. Perhaps because of this peripheralising of her character, some critics have found it problematic to ascribe the 'victory' of the title to her.

In his 'Note to the First Edition', Conrad expressed his concern about the name of the novel, the writing of which was completed in 1914 on the eve of the first World War. He was afraid that the public would think he was deliberately trying to capitalise on war-time optimism. Both in his 'Note to the First Edition' and his 'Author's Note', he is at pains to point out why the novel was given the title of *Victory*. He states that while writing the novel, although he had 'lived longer' with the character of Heyst, it was at the character of Lena that he had "looked longest and with the most sustained attention" (1963:15). The inspiration for her character came while he was at a bar in the tropics, from which the strident noise of a little family orchestra was emanating. The character in the orchestra who attracted his interest was a young girl, whose complete detachment from her surroundings fascinated him. The girl struck him as having the numb indifference of a sleep-walker, but she also struck him as representing a picture of 'dreamy innocence'. Her stoical reaction to the painful pinch she receives from the pianist impresses him so much that "when the moment came for her meeting with Heyst I felt that she would be heroically equal to every demand of the risky and uncertain future" (17).

Conrad states that the girl's detachment surpasses even Heyst's aloofness, an observation about which I have yet to see critical commentary. Numerous critics have dealt at length with Heyst's detachment, yet none that I have seen has interrogated Lena's initial detachment, and the way that she abandons detachment for emotional engagement. I will argue that this is a significant aspect of Lena's story, because it is her story which articulates a 'saving illusion' for Heyst, in its belief in the value of human involvement. The centripetal discourse, Heyst's, is a discourse of excessive reflection and paralysis, but Lena's discourse offers the possibility for Heyst to move from detachment to attachment. Conrad insists that the 'victory' of the title, a victory of decisive, life-saving action, is hers. The issue is complex, however, as the narrative ends on a most unvictorious note - with Captain Davidson's final word, "Nothing".

Although *Victory* is set in the Malaysian islands, it cannot neatly be called an 'Eastern' novel in the way that *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Rescue* can, because, apart from Wang, all the main characters have, at some time, travelled eastwards from Europe. The element of migration is perhaps best summed up by Mr Jones's comment that he is the world itself come to pay a visit. And so, while the novel is set on the island of Samburan in the Malay archipelago, its 'Westernness' is much more marked than in the other 'Malay' novels. This is partly due to the fact that the story is peopled principally with Europeans. Characters in the narrative include the Swedish Heyst, the English Lena, the English Jones, the Spanish Ricardo and Pedro and the German Schombergs. Wang, the Chinaman, is the only notable Eastern character in the story. Tanner points out that, apart from Wang, they are all 'intruders'. The act of migration from the West to Samburan is an important *leitmotif* in the narrative, illustrating the futility of Heyst's attempts to preserve his isolation on the island. The setting of *Victory* is a colony of islands, and, as with Conrad's other 'colonial' novels, reveals ambivalent judgements about European colonisation.

Critical opinion on this point varies. Braun, who spent much time in Indonesia researching the historical background to Conrad's Eastern novels, believes that Conrad ignored the 'official' picture in his writings, never using the name 'Dutch

Indies', and maintained a distrust of the Dutch version of the history of the region, preferring to concentrate on "the real, specific cares of the aboriginal inhabitants, their traditions, their myths, and their scale of values" (1978:14). Braun sees this as Conrad's "more clear-sighted, more humanistically broadminded and more honest" (1978:14) view. He resists claims that Conrad had a biased colonial view of events, finding his version "historically exact and amazingly verifiable" (1978:14). Likewise, Parry sees Conrad's writing as "divesting colonialism's heroic age of its eminent reputation" (1983:40). Collits has a far less forgiving view. He asserts that Conrad's colonial fictions coincide with the exploitative spread of the capitalist system into non-capitalist or primitive capitalist areas of the world. He sees Conrad as using colonial space in a new way. Writing as he did from his experiences in Southeast Asia, Conrad, according to Collits, chose "to colonize a new territory for English fiction" using the Malay Archipelago as a blank space for the narrative to fill, "incorporating the daily life of its inhabitants into a pre-existent European realism" (1989:303,319). Collits's view arises from a specifically politicised reading. The fact that the life of Wang, and of the other invisible islanders for that matter, is treated so slightly is for Collits evidence of the profoundly Eurocentric view adopted in the novel. He writes, "What *Victory* does recognize ... and insinuates as a resonant discord into the 'innocent' discourse of the popular romance, is that racism lies at the very heart of imperialist ideology" (1989:320). He believes that Conrad has drawn on conventional racism towards the East, seeing it as a place for 'going native' and a space for "guilty libidinal investment" (1989:310). In my view, Collits fails to make a sufficient distinction between authorial point of view and character's focalisation. Heyst's 'racism' is not the same as Lena's. She realises soon that Wang is not the man to fear. Heyst's underestimation of Wang's effectiveness and overestimation of Wang's threat to himself and Lena are significant aspects of his focalisation of events on the island. He manifests not only a European view of Orientals, as Collits suggests, but also an aristocrat's view of servants and a recluse's view of human presence. Fusing his view with Conrad's blurs the distinctive features of Heyst's discourse. For Collits, the setting of *Victory* is necessarily political because, for the 'unconscious racists' Lena and Heyst, "these islands and waterways are a non-place, a simple setting for life's romantic adventures" (1989:318). As Hooper points out,

this argument is similar to Achebe's: that Africa is set up by Conrad to provide the narrative space for the moral collapse of one European. Collits views the novel from a Marxist perspective; other approaches have seen imperialism as drawing boundaries of quite another kind. Mongia, for example, whose views have been dealt with in previous chapters, suggests that women characters, not specifically Lena, in Conrad's Eastern novels, are the colonised spaces.

Goonetilleke disagrees that Conrad has used the island setting as a space to colonise, thereby reinforcing colonialism. His view is that "Conrad's Continental experience and acquaintance with imperial milieux in the East and Africa enable him to bring a much greater knowledge of *realpolitik* into fiction than most English novelists" (1990:8). He sees evidence of Conrad's deep understanding of local politics, in South America and in Asia, but states that finally it is also "necessary to appreciate the part-Continental, part-British pressures which impelled Conrad to write in the way he did" (1990:9). Like Braun, he believes that Conrad tried to make his novels suitable for Western readers, and to give the settings 'general significance' in reflecting life not on Samburan exclusively, but in the Malay Archipelago as a whole. Braun comments on the issue this way: "It is also no paradox that he could show the English and the Dutch, old hands of the East, the different face of the eastern people. Otherwise his books probably would not have interested anybody in England" (1978:14). Writing as an Asian, Goonetilleke concerns himself more with authenticity of description than political implications, while Braun is interested in historical veracity. These views accord with Benita Parry's, whose seminal work *Conrad and Imperialism* (1983) argues that Conrad's work does not endorse imperialism, but rather interrogates it in ways that would challenge the readers of his day. She writes:

Conrad in his 'colonial fictions' did not presume to speak for the colonial peoples nor did he address them, and if his aloofness is registered in portraits of iconic figures posed against archetypal landscapes, it also spared his writing the excess of that sentimentality joined with paternalistic proof which was a characteristic feature of the nineteenth-century colonial novel... the authentic rendering of imperialism's dominant ideological categories is undercut by illuminations of the misrecognitions and limitations in a form of cognition which saw the world in black and white and admitted only a restricted area of reality to its purview (1983:1-2).

A more significant aspect of *Victory's* setting is that the major part of the narrative takes place on an isolated island, (Conrad was reading Bradley on *The Tempest* and *Hamlet* at the time of writing, and some critics have made significant connections between the three works). *The Tempest* seems to have been an informing design of the novel, whether consciously or unconsciously. In an as yet unpublished article, Hooper has also drawn comparisons with other archetypal island novels: *Robinson Crusoe* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*. She argues for a more neutral view of the novel's setting than Collits, suggesting that the island should be seen as a frame for the incarnation of whatever powers and struggles that Conrad locates there. I would argue that the 'frame', in its delimitation of a particular space, does not imply oblivion of other socio-economic spaces around it, or a 'banishment' of the 'colonized natives' (as Collits suggests), but rather the specific focus of the perceiving eye. Images recur which blur the background and highlight only the central characters. The island has an anonymous kind of aura. Lena "really had no definite idea where she was on the surface of the globe" (69) and Heyst "can't even tell where [they] are" (142) - which emphasises the drama not the setting. "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 as arid as the sands of Sahara" (70). What reinforces this framing technique is the fact that the island is desolate - "dead as Julius Caesar", Davidson calls it. "No words could do justice to the conditions of life on Samburan. A desert island was nothing to it" (46). Thus the events on the island take place against a blank background, highlighting features of the foreground and framing events within that focus. I would take Hooper's idea further, and suggest that it is largely the Heystian focalisation that constitutes a frame within the frame, and that the focal point of that frame is the deictic 'here' of the narrative. The island is the frame within which the frame narrator focalises events, but within that frame is the focalisation of Heyst himself, for whom things only seem real when he can hear or see them, as if they pass in and out of his sensory frame. Because of this focalisation, for example, Wang 'evaporates' rather than 'moves'.

The image of the frame structures the reading in a way that connects logically with the framed picture of Heyst's father, whose 'voice' seems to emanate from its wall and attempts to fill the greater frame of Heyst's space on the island. Competing with this voice is the voice of Lena, who is sometimes in the 'frame' and sometimes outside it. Taking this idea as an instrument of analysis also provides a context for the appearance and disappearance of other characters; Wang ("vanishing out of existence rather than out of sight", 143) and the trio of intruders (who promptly disappear from sight the minute their presence has been reported) move in and out of the field of Heyst's focalisation.

This view is Heyst's, whose discourse is the dominant one in the narrative. It is necessarily 'tunnel-visioned', as he attempts to live a solitary life and ignore the presence of others, excluding them from his 'magic circle', and resisting engagement with other people. Like an adult Little Prince, or a Prospero, Heyst sits on his small island smoking a cheroot in company with the smoking volcano in the background. His isolation is itself placed in a larger frame when the narrator reminds us that "An island is but the top of a mountain ... surrounded ... by ... the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe" (19). From this imagery, the narrator suggests that Heyst is above the flow of human engagement, as the island is above the sea. He has assumed the position of voyeur of life, in the centre of his enchanted space, away from the world which his philosopher father has told him is corrupting and dangerous.

The frame narrator of this island tale is a character who has heard the story from Captain Davidson, but who, for most of the narrative, is omniscient. His tone is cynical and melancholy, detached too, like the character of Axel Heyst. He knows the outcome of the narrative before he begins his narration and this knowledge informs his interpretation of events. His character is decidedly different from Captain Davidson, whose story he is telling. Davidson is "placid", "polite"; he is, the narrator says, "the most delicate man that ever took a steamer to and fro among the islands", with a "humanity...no less strong and praiseworthy" (52). In many ways this double

narration embodies the characteristics of Heyst himself, a cynical detachment on the one hand, and a compassionate humanity on the other.

However, as Hooper points out, in this novel the process of narration is not explicitly problematised or foregrounded. While the frame narrator provides a context for the action, the narration is superseded by the voices of Heyst and Lena. At the beginning of the narrative the frame narrator introduces Axel Heyst as a character whose “persistent inertia” (19) renders him harmless and insignificant in the eyes of those who know him. The narrator locates himself as one of them: “we ‘out there’ used to laugh among ourselves” (19). The frame narrator tells Davidson’s obtuse but nonetheless compassionate story. While Davidson expresses sympathy and kinship with Heyst and Lena, the frame narrator displays a far more cynical approach to events. He himself has little direct knowledge of events on the island, yet at times he has an omniscient view of the intimate relationship between Heyst and Lena - as if at some point the frame narrator’s discourse and Heyst’s own seem to merge. The construction of Lena’s character is presented as a Heystian act rather than an effort of the narrator, and yet at times she perceives more about a situation than Heyst. The polyvocality of the text is its most significant feature, as it highlights contrasting and changing perspectives. As Heyst recognises, “there is a quality in events which is apprehended differently by different minds or even the same mind at different times” (184).

From the outset the island is veiled from outside view and local gossip depends on Davidson for its source. The very success of Schomberg’s calumny is due to the fact that no-one really knows any different. Hooper argues that both text and narration are characterised by ambivalences, equivocation and ambiguity (1997:2-5). I agree with her resistant reading of Collits, that Samburan is not a non-place, but the location of events whose meaning is neither directly nor explicitly defined.

The approach I intend to take will see Heyst’s discourse as centripetal. While Heyst’s discourse of scepticism, detachment and indecision is foregrounded in the narrative,

powerful centrifugal discourses are also present, of which Lena's discourse of faith, commitment and the will to act, is finally the most powerful. This discourse sets a sustaining illusion against Heyst's scepticism, and her discourse articulates the 'victory' of the title. One of the ways in which the centripetality of Heyst's discourse is made evident to the reader is through his sense of the physical insubstantiality of other characters. The character of Wang, for example, is frequently described as if he were an apparition rather than a person, his movements suggesting "a process of evaporation rather than of movement" (143), and Mr Jones seems to him corpse-like, barely human. Heyst's father's influence is a voice which competes for control of his behaviour, the father himself being dead. The discourse of Heyst's father competes for centripetality in that it asserts itself as the True Word, urging Heyst to live a Schopenhauerian life of excessive intellectualisation. Likewise Lena's corporal existence is called into question from time to time in the narrative. When Heyst is with her, he feels "enveloped in the atmosphere of femininity as in a cloud" (166). Frequently her existence for him is reduced to a voice alone. Yet Lena's discourse resists his, urging Heyst to love her and draw emotionally close to her.

Nadelhaft suggests that the splitting of emotion and intellect is a characteristic of male behaviour in Conrad's novels. She sees this arising from "the Western male's fear of great emotion", and manifesting itself in a number of Conradian characters and narrators. This "creates an incapacity [in the male] ... to enter the experience of women who are so critical [to the narratives]" (1991:102). Heyst's choice of the reflective rather than the emotional response will be shown to be an insurmountable impediment in his relationship with Lena, as his character can neither understand nor express feelings of love for her. In intimate moments, his response is divided. "In his soul and in his body he experienced a nervous reaction from tenderness. All at once, without transition, he detested her. But only for a moment" (161). He appears torn between tenderness for her and rejection of the claim her love is making on him. Lena interprets his inability to declare his feelings as a lack of feeling on his part. " 'You should try to love me!' ... if he loved her, he had never told her so in so many words. Simple words! They died on his lips" (166).

As a background to Lena's role in the narrative, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on the Heystian world into which she enters. The image of Heyst that the reader gets at the beginning of the narrative is that of a man who is attempting a state of pure contemplation. Within Heyst's narrow view of the world from Samburan, (one which, Collits notes, he has failed to see is actually populated), the voice of his father whom he loved is the one to which he attempts to pay allegiance. His father's injunction to "cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity Look on - make no sound" (133), is appropriated as his life's philosophy. What is obvious to the reader, though not immediately obvious to the character, is that he does not have the contempt for the world that his father had. He seeks out human company. His existence on the island is evidence of an earlier engagement with another human being, who had needed his help - Morrison. Three years of his father's teaching at a 'plastic' and impressionable age were not enough to change permanently the characteristics of his nature. He finds that "it is easier to believe in the misfortune of mankind than in its wickedness" (165), and realises that "There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all" (132); that "the oldest voice in the world" is not easily suppressed. Action, "the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth" (132), is instinctive to him: "He was hurt by the sight of his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness" (133).

His detachment is therefore incomplete. However, unlike Winnie Verloc, he does not fully surrender himself to engagement with another being, but holds back, torn between the will to engage and the security of aloofness. At times he doubts the authenticity of his detachment. "Something in me thinks - something foreign to my nature" (252). Up to the point that he meets Lena, Heyst is sure that he can maintain his distance from others by transcribing emotional behaviour into rational activity, and so remain a disciple of his father's teaching. He aims to do this not only by reflection but by inertia, choosing not to act.

However, Heyst's enchantment with Lena's voice coupled with his sexual desire for her, proves irresistible and leads him away from aloofness and into the world of

action. When he approaches Lena about the pinch she receives, her challenge “what are you going to *do* about it?” (my italics) (65), leaves him nonplussed. His aloofness has not afforded him “inward joy and the true peace of heaven”, yet he cannot successfully abandon aloofness and successfully embrace a relationship with Lena. “He was not used to receive his intellectual impressions in that way - reflected in movements of carnal emotion” (164). While he recognises that action lost Adam his paradise, and that action is a hook “baited with the illusions of progress” (132), he too has been caught “like the silliest fish of them all” (132).

At this point in the narrative, Lena portrays a more complete picture of detachment than Heyst. Like Heyst, she is the product of her father’s teaching. Maternal memories have for her as well as Heyst been largely suppressed. Her sole link with her mother is the knowledge that she had abandoned husband and daughter. In Lena’s view, her mother’s abandonment accounted for her father’s drunkenness. This background accounts for Lena’s passionate need for commitment from Heyst, and his assurance that he will not cast her out as he seemed to do to Morrison. Vanderwielen suggests that Lena inherits her mother’s guilt, “as if it were her legacy”, and that “Lena’s whole life has been spent trying to expiate for that female crime of abandonment” (1994:203). For Vanderwielen, Conrad has created in Lena a character who is “anxious to perform her gender” (1994:202). I agree in principle with this view as there is evidence in the text to support it: “I know I’m not much account; but I know how to stand by a man. I stood by father ever since I could understand” (76). Her commitment to Heyst to ‘stand by’ him goes further than loyalty. She also takes full responsibility for his decision to take her to his island. “You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you” (255). And finally, she asserts her love and devotion to her rescuer as her very reason for being. However, I have difficulty in fully accepting Vanderwielen’s gender-prescribed reading because it implies that the same author who (she says) created a woman character only in terms of stereotypical notions of women, could at the same time have ‘owned’ the kind of female knowledge necessary to the performance of gender roles. In Vanderwielen’s reading Lena is a real person, not just a construct in the text: she sees Lena performing in ways about which the author is unaware, and she thus critically constructs a character with a life

independent of the text. In Said's terms, Vanderwielen would be expecting too much 'world' and conceding too little 'text'. If there is a psychological explanation for Lena's behaviour, I would suggest that it is her fear of abandonment that unconsciously dictates her behaviour, not her need to expiate her mother's.

Without her father to provide for her, Lena supports herself by performing in a travelling orchestra. The degradation that this entails has caused her to become totally detached. Conrad speaks of this detachment, that so impressed him with its courage and stoicism, in his Author's Note. From this detached standpoint Lena controls her life. On meeting Lena, Heyst surrenders decisions to her. "Pray command me" (66) he says. Her voice mesmerises him and exerts a subtle power over him, and he is ready to do anything she asks.

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 ... the mere vibrating, warm nobility of the sound, found its way into Heyst's heart (66-7).

What is striking is the fact that Heyst responds to her emotional appeal in a sensory way, rather than an emotional one. While he is attracted to her physically, it is the sensory pleasure of her voice, which includes "all the modulations of pathos, cheerfulness, and courage in its compass" (68) that prompts his rescue of her. As a character who has a "taste for silence" and is attuned to "the music of the spheres" (61), he is extremely sensitive to sound. The sound of the Zangiaco orchestra has offended him to the point where he perceives a suggestion of brutality in it, and feels that they are "murdering silence" (62). Thus when he meets Lena, although he is moved to compassion by her plight, it is to her voice that he is principally responding:

The girl's 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 (68).

The frequent references to voice as metonymically representing Lena confirm the centrifugal location of her discourse, and suggest that her characterisation is more mythical than real. For Heyst, she is a sound that reminds him of a reality that he has evaded, and, later, a point of view which he has eschewed. Like Wang, she moves into and out of Heyst's consciousness. In this state of enchantment with her 'physiognomy' and voice, and compassion for her fate at the hands of predatory men like Schomberg, he takes her to his island for safety. Having 'done something' he declares to Davidson that "now [he has] done with observation" (54). Her smile "had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience" (71). The act of rescue is a singularly unreflective act. As Davidson says, "Those dreamy spectators of the world's agitation are terrible once the desire to act gets hold of them. They lower their heads and charge a wall with an amazing serenity" (68). On Samburan, Lena's voice has to compete with the 'voice' of Heyst's father for his attention. Her primary need here is to 'matter' to one person. Her cry that "they are too many for me" (69), is accompanied by the sad realisation that she has "no one to care if I make a hole in the water the next chance I get or not" (69). The 'many' will not care whether she lives or dies, only whether she co-operates with them. Thus, her desire is for 'one' at least to care. She sees Heyst's rescue of her as the evidence of that care. However, once on the island she receives no assurance from him that this is so: "till then she had never felt herself swinging between the abysses of earth and heaven in the hollow of his arm. What if he should grow weary of the burden?" (157).

The rescue of Lena is reminiscent of Christ's rescue of Mary Magdalen from her tormentors, this being just one of many echoes of stories, myths and legends in the novel. However, not only this association mystifies and objectifies Lena. As will be discussed, Heyst himself invests her with mystique and inscrutability, the more so because he finds her unreadable. Gurko cynically touches on the mythological context in which the narrative takes place.

For the symbolists the novel is replete with magic circles, enchanted islands, purgative fires, hints of a struggle between God and Satan, and running references to the garden of Eden myth complete with original sin, fertility rites, passion week, and judgement day (1979:213).

While Gurko includes these details in the context of his ‘something-for-everybody’ argument, he nevertheless usefully and economically points to the many aspects of the narrative’s mythological context. Mythology is indeed a significant subtext in the narrative. Gillon quotes Conrad on Dostoevsky: “the base from which he [Dostoevsky] starts - Christianity - is distasteful to me” (1980:51). This is an interesting disclaimer as a subverted Christian frame of reference clearly informs this narrative. Notwithstanding Conrad’s distaste for a Christian base, Christian metaphors are used in the narrative to articulate the opposition between Heyst’s twentieth-century disdain for religious needs and Lena’s comforting illusion that a benevolent creator exists. The narrator makes numerous references to the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve and the loss of Paradise, providing a comparative narrative frame through which the reader views Heyst’s loss of his own paradise. This paradise, Hooper asserts, is characterised by createdness rather than perfection. A tenuous but nevertheless unavoidable association is made in the rhyming of Heyst’s name with *Christ*, the redeemer descendant of Adam, who saves Mary Magdalen from execution. Lena’s name is an abbreviated variant of Magdalen, the name of the redeemed Biblical harlot. Like the Biblical Mary, Lena is portrayed as a fallen woman who finds her redemption at the hands of a man who rescues her from her tormentors - “a poor London girl playing in an orchestra, and snatched out of the humiliations, the squalid dangers of a miserable existence, by a man like whom there was not, there could not be, another in this world” (162-3). However, at other times she appears far more like Eve in the Paradise Lost story: “Woman is the tempter” (255) she says. The trio of Jones, Ricardo and Pedro are an ironically unholy trinity. The discourse of their leader, Jones, resonates with Biblical echoes related to Satan and the fall of the angels. “Having been ejected, he said, from his proper social sphere because he had refused to conform to certain useful conventions, he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth” (258). And there is something parodically Supreme in his declaration “I am he who is” (257).

Yet there is little coherent structure to this mythological paradigm. Jones does not fear the ‘Christ’ figure Heyst, he fears women, his supposed ally in the Biblical

paradigm. The character of Heyst is neither an unfallen Adamic figure, nor a sinless saviour. In fact, in the sense that Lena gives him the right to 'create' her, he is both creature and creator. Lena's words, not Heyst's, at the end of the narrative echo the resurrected Christ. She believes she has achieved a "tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love" and she dies "convinced of the reality of her victory over death" (290). In terms of the paradigm of *Paradise lost*, 'sin' would be equated with 'action' in the narrative as it ultimately leads to the arrival on the island of the evil trio and the destruction of paradise. Yet the narrator comments that 'action' is a characteristic of the unfallen Adam; thus the Biblical paradigm subverts itself. Collits has a different reason for believing that the creation allegory ambushes itself as mastercode:

in its post-Victorianism ... it soon appears that the genesis/creation myth is shadowed by an equally potent, but complicating or even cancelling one, Darwin's theory of evolution And once the rug is pulled out, it becomes impossible to hold even to a clever and complex version of archetypal reading (1989:313-4).

Perhaps the narrative achieves an acceptable blend of the Adam and Eve story and theories of evolution. Gurko (1979), Schwartz (1982) and Tanner (1986) have interrogated the extent to which Darwinian theories of evolution have informed the novel. The predatory trio can perhaps be said to represent various evolutionary stages: with Pedro barely comfortable on hind legs (he is frequently referred to as an ape, and with his fangs, beard and little bear's eyes, is "delightfully natural", 95) manifesting no capacity for reflection whatsoever, the cat-like Ricardo (a wildcat turned into a man, 95), managing with difficulty to contain his "suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long" (210), and Jones who is presented as 'evil intelligence'. The character of Jones is, in this regard, an evil parody of Heyst himself, who is portrayed as evolved so far that thought has replaced action almost entirely.

'I am so recent that I may call myself a man of the last hour - or is it the hour before last? I have been out of it so long that I am not certain how far the hands have moved since . . .' He glanced at the portrait of his father (258).

This 'last hour' is in Jones's phrasing, a 'soft' age, indicating the replacement of the energy of action with the inertia of thought. In the fusion of evolutionary and the

paradise-lost subtexts, it is possible to read the entry of sin into paradise as correlating with the development of reason in apes. The corruption of Adam and Eve takes the form of eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. From that point on, their behaviour is no longer spontaneously innocent, but is preceded by reflection and choice. The development of reason in apes appears to bring with it its own awareness of good and evil and the potential for choices.

There are no obvious pointers in the narrative as to Lena's location on an evolutionary scale. Either she does not feature in this subtext, or, given her simple faith and belief in prayer, she could be read as representing a pre-twentieth-century, primitive need for worship and belief in a deity. One of the reasons that accounts for the fact that Lena does not 'fit' into the evolutionary paradigm, is perhaps that her character, when on the island in this 'Paradise', represents faith, and a saving illusion that emotional engagement is preferable to intellectual detachment. Her character is inscribed in terms of a mythology about women, that their innate desire is to serve unto death the man that they love. Bross suggests that

the attitude towards femininity [in Conrad's novels] ... is not a total rejection of woman *per se*, but rather a genuine ambivalence towards a trait [feminine faith] which Conrad had come to consider particularly feminine. In presenting his concept of the ambiguous Kurtzian act of belief, ... Conrad depends largely upon his characterisation of women (1969:45).

I agree with Bross that the capacity for belief is presented through the women characters, yet this belief is articulated as a saving illusion, warding off paralysing despair, not as a viable option, or practical alternative, for disillusioned male characters. Nadelhaft argues that the "characters and conditions of the women in these texts constitute a complex criticism and alternative to the cultural values lived out by the male characters whom Conrad treats with such regular irony" (1991:96). I agree with her. It is on the basis of such a mythology, for example, that Verloc believes he can seduce his wife into forgiveness. As part of a 'myth', Lena does not represent an evolution or development of "the habit of profound reflection ... the most pernicious of all the habits formed by civilized man" (12). The narrative is not an allegory, but is rich with allegorical and mythological echoes which inform the narrative in significant ways. Lena's discourse arises out of a mythology about

women which informs her characterisation. Numerous generalisations about women are articulated by various characters in the narrative. Ricardo says “With women there are no half measures” (202), and the narrator says “before this eminently masculine fussing she felt the woman’s need to give way, the sweetness of surrender” (224).

Vanderwielen examines the novel in terms of what she sees as stereotypical roles that are culturally prescribed for women to play:

the damsel who affirms the knight’s worth by providing the occasion for him to display his prowess; the crucial maternal emblem of fecundity and life; the empathic female who exists only to give love and to be loved (1994:201).

In my discussion of *Chance*, I have shown that this argument is especially true of that novel. Damsels and knights are the foregrounded mythical elements in the novel, and Marlow’s discourse reveals the belief that ‘real’ feminine behaviour affirms the masculine prowess of knights. Lena’s discourse arises from this mythological subtext in this novel, and yet finally it is Lena who displays prowess. She is the ‘knight’ who disarms death and whose worth is affirmed in a heroic act.

Part of Lena’s mythological construction for Heyst arises from the way she sustains an ‘illusion’ about the existence of God and His concern for man. Through the resistance of Lena’s discourse, and to some extent Morrison’s, to Heyst’s discourse of religious scepticism (“it is by folly alone that the world moves” 150), issues of faith are interrogated. Heyst’s religious scepticism is evident in his humorous response to Morrison’s belief that he (Heyst) was divinely sent to him. “What you call fun came afterwards, when it dawned on me that I was for him a walking, breathing incarnate proof of the efficacy of prayer” (169). Lena, by contrast, manifests a child-like faith which arises from simple notions that the Creator sees every sparrow that falls and cares for each one. However, Heyst’s reply employs an unassailable logic: “whatever truth people told you in the old days, there is also this one - that sparrows do fall to the ground, that they are brought to the ground” (259)

(that is, whether the creator cares or not). Belief, to him, is a saving illusion that there is a presence who cares; to Heyst, believers are “victims of the Great Joke” (150).

Lena’s belief is something that he wishes at times he could accomplish, but he regards himself as too ‘recent’ for that. He cannot see cause and effect as supernatural. Lena’s fear that the arrival of the trio - “this trouble, this danger, this evil, whatever it was, finding them out in their retreat, was...some sort of punishment” (254) - is countered with derision. “What on earth for? ... I venture to think that God has nothing to do with such a hospitality and with such a guest” (254-8). The narrator’s own gloom and cynicism are also present throughout, pervading the narration so as to present Lena’s beliefs as nothing but illusions. His descriptions of the island setting with its heat which is “pregnant with fatal issues” (163) are pervaded with gloom and menace, and provide a malevolent backdrop to Lena’s professions of faith, as if to belie her words:

Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom. Heyst cast an indifferent glance at the ill-omened chaos of the sky... ‘That does not look much like a sign of mercy,’ she said slowly (256).

There was something cruel in the absolute dumbness of the night. The great cloud covering half the sky hung right against one, like an enormous curtain hiding menacing preparations of violence (269).

However Heyst at times also displays a wistful yearning for a belief system. Confronted by his impotence to save the two of them from the malevolence that the trio represents, he regrets “that he had no Heaven to which he could recommend this fair, palpitating handful of ashes and dust” (262). In their conversations about faith, the contrast between his conception of Lena as ashes and dust and her conception of herself as spiritual is evidence of the dichotomy between his scepticism and her ‘saving illusion’.

The arrival of Lena on Samburan signals a change in Lena and in Heyst’s perception of her. Like Marlow in *Chance*, Heyst constructs a ‘damsel in distress’ differently from a ‘damsel’ in other circumstances. He is flirtatious and gallant in the bar of

Schomberg's hotel, but often formal and distant on the island. When Heyst meets her, Lena is a woman who is noticeably detached. Once he is kind to her, she becomes a woman seeking attachment who is prepared to risk herself by trusting in his fidelity to her. "Don't you throw me over now If you did, what should I do? I should have to live ... but you would have done a thousand times worse than killing a body" (74).

I agree with Hooper that critics who dismiss Lena as predominantly silent and passive have tended to take early descriptions of her as definitive. Baines for example dismisses Lena as a 'shadow' and Brodie speaks of Lena's 'shadowy presence'. I believe that it is not that Lena is 'shadowy' but that her existence is something that is repeatedly constructed and reconstructed in the text. This act of creation and recreation is crucial to her discourse in the narrative. Does she exist within Heyst's frame or is she just a dream? As she attempts to know him better, so her uncertainty about his response to her intensifies. Her own sense of reality becomes increasingly dependent on Heyst's sense of it: "I can only be what you think I am" (142). This uncertainty is significantly different from her sense of reality once she has decided to disarm Ricardo. Thus, her statement to Ricardo - "I'll be anything you like" (287) - is made ironically, from a position of strength not uncertainty.

Not only Lena seeks a sense of reality from Heyst. He too attempts to find a sense of reality for himself in her presence. When she asks: "What more do you want from me?" his reply "The impossible" (158), is, I believe, an articulation of his desire for her to make his life seem real to him, and to affirm the view that he has of himself, not the view that Schomberg and others might have. His tentative trust in her affection increasingly affirms his own existence, so that "that human being so near and still so strange, [gives] him a greater sense of his own reality than he [has] ever known in all his life" (151). He realises that when she is out of his sight she is "elusive and illusory, a promise that [cannot] be embraced and held" (167), and so he is increasingly struck with "a sense which [makes] him desire her constant nearness" (167). The sense of reality which both seek in the other is defined by their mutual conception of the word 'here'. Their relationship is almost predicated on their constant need to locate each other: "Where are you?"... "I am here" (140). What is

foregrounded in their relations with each other is their awareness of spaces, between them and around them. Hooper suggests that the deictic 'here', that which for Collits is a colonised space, is the 'here' of immediate experience, not the counterpoint of the distanced and distancing 'there'. I agree with this. 'Here' becomes the location of a sense of fixed existence for both Lena and Heyst. 'Here' is where Heyst stops drifting, and 'here' is where Lena has escaped the 'too many'. When she is reminded by the sight of the sea from the top of the hill of the world beyond Samburan, and therefore beyond Heyst, the "empty space was to her the abomination of desolation" (144). She seeks psychologically to close the space between herself and Heyst. "When I say, I, of course I mean we" (145). Thus the space between them comes to signify a metaphysical horizon between reality and shadow. What is within the frame of Heyst's, and less frequently, Lena's, focalisation exists, and what is not is rendered uncertain.

Soon after their arrival on the island, this sense of spatial and existential location and dislocation is illustrated:

'Were you thinking of me?'
 'I was wondering when you would come out,' said Heyst, still without looking at the girl ... She remarked after a pause:
 'I was not very far from you.'
 'Apparently you were not near enough for me.'
 'You could have called if you wanted me,' she said. 'And I wasn't so long doing my hair.'
 'Apparently it was too long for me.'
 'Well, you were thinking of me anyhow. I am glad of it. Do you know it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!' (142)

In my view the idea of reality being a focalised construct in *another's* eyes, a kind of post-solipsistic ontology, ('I think therefore I am' becomes 'You think I am therefore I am'), is suggested here - as if Lena is recreated afresh each time Heyst is aware of her presence.

When Lena is with him, Heyst does not doubt the advisability of his actions in bringing her to his island; however, when he is alone, he is plagued by a mood of 'grim doubt'. His ambivalence is registered by Lena and causes her frequently to seek

assurances from him, assurances which he cannot give. Her insecurity undermines her sense of self and she increasingly surrenders to him the right to construct her identity. She has given him the opportunity both to name her - "Yes, you give me a name. Think of one you would like the sound of" (76) - and to ascribe an identity to her - "I can only be what you think I am" (142). This doubt about the nature of her existence reinforces the reader's idea that the world of Samburan is the world of Heyst's focalisation. What appears within his focal frame exists and is heard. Thus for her it appears as if he alone has the ability to prescribe her existence. Sensing that he cannot see or sense her, her discourse seeks to insist on his acknowledgement of her existence. "Every time she spoke to him she seemed to abandon to him something of herself" (143). When she is silent he loses the sense of her: "with his hand on the back of the girl's chair and within a foot of her person ... [Heyst] had lost the sense of her existence" (184). This suggests that Heyst has constructed Lena in a dream world where sometimes she exists, with all the promise that a relationship with her involves, and sometimes she does not. However, not only Lena's existence is uncertain. Everything in Heyst's world has a dreamlike quality as well:

All the objects in there - the books, the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very portrait on the wall - seemed shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of never closing his eyes again (288).

Heyst attempts to listen to the opposite voices of his father and Lena, yet he is unable to act on either. He remains inert in the face of the threat from the trio. His inability to act stems from his inability to exert his will. Receiving different messages from different voices is not enough. He cannot make the voices real - they remain illusion-like. While the message articulated by his father's voice is more familiar, it is Lena who is physically present in his world. Yet she, too, is uncertain and inscrutable. Because of this, when he is with her, he cannot 'read' her. He then avoids trying to do so and allows himself the experience of sensual pleasure from her presence instead:

her eyes raised to him, but as unreadable as ever. He avoided looking into them for that very reason. He forgot himself in the contemplation of those passive arms, of those defenceless lips (165).

By contrast, Ricardo does not see Lena this way. When she resists his attack, his first words to her are: “You have fingers like steel... You have muscles like a giant”, (212). That Heyst cannot read Lena is perhaps indicated by the fact that he sees her as ‘passive’ and ‘defenceless’, which her disarming of Ricardo later in the novel illustrates to be clearly not the case.

Heywood, in “The Unreadable Text: Conrad and ‘The Enigma of Woman’ in *Victory*” (1994), posits that the text grapples with the idea of sexual difference as constituted in relation to romantic love. Through the inaccessibility of the woman to the man, Woman becomes unreadable text. This view is supported by the narrator’s observation that “That girl ... was to him like a script in an unknown language, or even more mysterious; like any writing to the illiterate” (166). Thus Heyst feels that he could understand her if he could decipher her, if he knew the right language. The issue is not straightforward, however. While Heyst feels he cannot read her, it is not only Lena he cannot ‘read’, but intimacy of any kind.

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces. He used to come out of her very arms with the feeling of a baffled man (235).

Having withdrawn from human contact for so long, and had no relationship with a woman before, he lacks the knowledge and the will to engage with her. “I have refined everything away by this time Nothing’s left but disgust” (238). The problem is that Heyst has fused an intellectual with a carnal response, and he is unsure of where his responses to her arise.

Heyst stood the frank examination with a playful smile, hiding the profound effect these veiled grey eyes produced - whether on his heart or on his nerves, whether sensuous or spiritual, tender or irritating, he was unable to say (146).

The end-product is still not the emotional response which Lena craves and which would make her ‘real’ for him. In moments of physical intimacy, “there still lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome” (159). Their mutual unreadability leaves them both uncertain of the other. Heyst is unreadable for Lena as well:

When the curtain had fallen behind her, she turned her head back with an expression of infinite and tender concern for him - for him whom she could never hope to understand, and whom she was afraid she could never satisfy, as if her passion were of a hopelessly lower quality, unable to appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul (239).

I am not convinced that this confusion arises from sexual difference alone. Lena has no understanding of the extent of Heyst's emotional detachment or the effect his father's teachings have had and continue to have on him. The context in which Heyst's father's voice 'speaks' to him is one from which she is excluded, thus she is obliged to interpret his sudden changes of mood and response in her own way. Not knowing the philosophies of Heyst's father, Lena knows nothing of the fastidiousness that prevents Heyst from making any demonstrations of affection, or his fear of the pain that can result from letting down one's guard. ("When one's heart has been broken into in the way you have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter", 158). Having abandoned her own detachment from things ("the girl went on rapidly, as if nothing could stop her now", 139), and having put her trust in him, she does not know how to read his reticence. He, on the other hand, has denied himself experience of relations with other people for so long that he is unable to understand how to behave towards this 'girl' "with whom he did not yet know how to live" (151). Interpreting his distance from her as lack of feeling, she tries ever harder to prove herself worthy of his love.

Vanderwielen sees Lena's efforts to prove her love for Heyst as a firmly entrenched affirmation of "the patriarchal dictum that woman exists solely to satisfy the demands of a man" (1994:205). Her final summation of the narrative is that Lena has "consummated the ideal of herself as the embodiment of female nothingness, the emptiness which holds itself fundamentally open to male domination" (1994:209). However, comparing characters along such boldly drawn gender lines blunts the subtleties of their construction and excludes other readings. My expectations of women's characters in the narratives are predicated upon the view that Lena's discourse, along with other women characters' discourses elsewhere, articulates a 'saving illusion' in resistance to male despair and scepticism. Vanderwielen's judgement seems unduly harsh, overlooking the fact that the function of the women

characters is quite specifically to resist the discourse of the male characters and to articulate an ideal possibility. This function will be more clearly seen in a closer examination of the Schopenhauerian philosophy of detachment in resistance against which Lena's voice speaks.

The voice of the senior Heyst, which resists that of Lena, is clearly Schopenhauerian in its influence. It is well-documented that Conrad read extensively into Schopenhauer's philosophy of nihilism (Baines (1986), Tanner (1986) and Meyers (1991) to name a few). Tanner suggests that *Victory* offers "a dramatic testing of a man pervaded, and perhaps perverted, by Schopenhauerian philosophy; and a demonstration of how, amidst the contingencies of actual, acted, life, such a philosophy could be found hopelessly, fatally, wanting" (1986:127). I agree with this argument entirely, and would go further to suggest that it is through Lena's discourse that the shortcomings of the philosophy are shown. Tanner quotes Schopenhauer as saying:

He ... who has attained to the denial of the will to live however poor, joyless, and full of privation his condition may appear when looked at externally, is yet filled with inward joy and the true peace of heaven ... in entering the state of pure contemplation ... we become, as it were, freed from ourselves ... how blessed the life of a man must be whose will is silenced Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has finally conquered entirely, continues to exist only as a pure, knowing being, the undimmed mirror of the world. Nothing can trouble him more, nothing can move him, for he has cut all the thousand cords of will which hold us bound to the world, and, as desire, fear, envy, anger, drag us hither and thither in constant pain, he now looks back smiling and at rest on the delusions of this world Life and its forms now pass before him as a fleeting illusion, as a light morning dream before half-waking eyes, the real world already shining through it so that it can no longer deceive (1986:127).

The basic argument here is summed up in the words of the senior Heyst 'Look on - make no sound' (133). The narrative foregrounds the division that Heyst experiences between the voice of his father, which preaches scepticism and isolation and exhorts him to stand on the bank and remain uninvolved, and the 'enchanted' voice of Lena, appealing to him to become more deeply involved with her. Heyst's own Adamic voice urges him to 'act', yet another part of him believes that "all action is bound to be harmful" (53). His father's injunction to remain aloof has appeal for him because "In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without

suffering...invulnerable because elusive" (78). Contrasted with this is the appeal of Lena's love which renders him vulnerable to suffering: "I am so anxious about you that I can't keep away from these infernal scoundrels. And only two months ago I would not have cared" (235). Both voices appear to him illusions and he engages with them only when they speak; his father's voice seems to speak from its frame on the wall, and Lena's is only 'real' when she is literally in his presence, in her absence he doubts her existence. A scene in which Heyst is reading his father's works, illustrates this division most effectively: "It seemed to him that he was hearing his father's voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm in the illusion" (164). As he lowers the book, Lena's voice is heard above his head, a competing voice urging engagement. "You sit there as if you were unhappy... You should try to love me" (167-8).

When they do not 'speak', Heyst is divided between the two impulses, for life or for isolation. I will go on to argue that, because he does not embrace his relationship with Lena and commit himself to loving her, by omission he tacitly chooses to follow his father's voice, with devastating consequences.

From the very beginning of Heyst's acquaintance with Lena, he responds to her in an objectified way, registering aspects of her appearance and her voice more than her character. When she speaks to him, he does not listen to what she is saying as much as to the sound of her voice:

She seemed to be talking low of some wonderful enchantment, in mysterious terms of special significance. He thought that if she only could talk to him in some unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer beauty of the sound, suggesting infinite depths of wisdom and feeling (157).

Tanner remarks, "it is quite clearly a sexual involvement, no matter how his 'impulse' towards her is rationalised as compassion or sympathy" (1986:119). Registering the pleasurable effect of the sound of her voice is an intensely self-conscious act for Heyst - "His mind, cool, alert, watched it sink there with a sort of vague concern at the absurdity of the occupation" (67). His objectification of her leads also to a cynicism about the effects women have on men like himself: "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” (71). His response is also his stock response to all people, namely correct and exquisite courtesy. This formality is a useful distancing instrument for Heyst as it enables him to erect barriers between himself and others that more spontaneous behaviour would not. Heyst realises the limitations of this demeanour as, when faced with Morrison’s distress, he saw that “Consummate politeness is not the right tonic for an emotional collapse” (29). Here too, Heyst is confronted with a situation in which courtesy is not enough for Lena’s dilemma. She wants him to *do* something. In his impulsive act of offering to take her to his island, an “incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion” (57) Davidson calls it, he fails to envisage the enormity of the emotional engagement that the act implies. She realises instantly that a relationship with him will not be easy as they have little in common. “What could I ever talk to you about?” (76). His reply is characteristic of the way in which he will continue to elide his focus from her ‘being’ to herself as object, as voice. “Don’t let it trouble you Your voice is enough. I am in love with it whatever it says” (76). Lena is made aware from this point that he does not and cannot ‘know’ her as long as it is only to the look and sound of her that he responds. “You see, you weren’t there, and I couldn’t tell why you had gone away from me” (187). Until he foregoes the distance between them, which is sustained by his formality and fastidiousness, she feels she must increasingly penetrate his frame of consciousness and remind him of her presence, both the sight and the sound of her. Not only does her love for him seek to ‘know’ him and exact a response, her gratitude to him seeks to reward his rescue of her, by an act of sacrifice.

Hooper resists the reading of critics like Brodie who see Lena as having ‘no being in and of herself’, but as being a character who is looked at rather than someone who speaks, and I am inclined to agree. Heywood speaks of her ‘indefinable physiognomy’, while Baines sees her as ‘shadowy’. Hooper is right to point out that we do not always have access to Lena’s consciousness. Lena’s physical reality is not shadowy, it is present or not present. She is frequently the object of Heyst’s gaze and he registers minute details about her appearance, but I would argue that Lena’s discourse seeks to resist this response to her, and that her decision to make an act of

sacrifice to him is her decision to make her existence real, to be heard not only listened to, and to repay his kindness to her. Not being able to exact the declaration of love from his lips, she *acts* her love for him in response to his *act* of love, albeit an act of *agape* not *eros*, as Orlich (1981) defines them. Her realisation that she does not 'exist' when he does not see or hear her calls forth an increasingly impassioned attempt to confront him with her presence. "She felt in her innermost depths an irresistible desire to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice" (152). This act would impress herself upon his life. Although she is not entirely aware of the effect her voice has on him, she is aware that she is metonymically represented to him by her voice and not her words. This sense is confirmed by him:

'When you don't see me, do you believe that I exist?'
 'Exist? Most charmingly! My dear Lena, you don't know your own advantages.
 Why, your voice alone would be enough to make you unforgettable!' (183-4).

The question that Lena could also have asked Heyst is "When you don't hear me, do you believe that I exist?"

With the arrival on the island of the trio, the lack of understanding between Lena and Heyst increases. However, their arrival gives Lena the opportunity to put into action what was before a mere impulse - to act out her love for him in some act of sacrifice. While Heyst tries to prevent Lena from knowing about the trio, she seeks to devise a plan that will keep the two of them safe from Jones, Ricardo and Pedro. Heyst's failure to realise fully the danger that they are in is manifested by his failure to ask the trio the question which Lena had asked of him - "Why are you here?" She is "never in doubt of the nature of her danger" (212). In the face of this threat, Lena has an intensified knowledge of her being 'here' and is energised and empowered by this to act:

She was no longer alone in the world now...she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her - the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path (212-3).

Contrary to Heyst's skeptical belief that "all action is bound to be harmful...That is why this world is evil upon the whole" (53), Lena articulates an opposite view, seeing action as her most effective and eloquent means of showing her love for him: "his danger brought a sensation of warmth to her breast" (220). Her vision of the threat is clear and unambiguous:

Nothing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity. It seemed to her that the man sitting before her was an unavoidable presence, which had attended her all her life. He was the embodied evil of the world...She was appalled by the situation; but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and feeling that she had brought this on his head, faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own (217).

The narrator's description of her existence as an 'enchanted dream' substantiates her function as 'saving illusion' in contrast with the harsh 'reality' of Heyst's scepticism. However, Lena's presence is imposed more forcefully in the narrative from the arrival of the trio, manifesting the desirability of love and action in contrast with Heyst's paralysis and fastidiousness. The focus increasingly moves from the sensuousness of her body to the strength of her 'valiant' arms (221), her 'brave soul', her 'courageous' eyebrows. She becomes the Hera of the narrative taking command of events and endeavouring to save them both: "a thrill went through her at the sudden thought that it was she who would have to protect him, to be the defender of a man who was strong enough to lift her bodily" (224). Her desire to protect him suggests strength not passivity. Bode suggests that "Conrad's women seem to exercise a control over the male characters" (1994:20). While this is not quite true in the early stages of the novel, later, when she sees that it is she who must protect them, she does 'control' his behaviour so that she can get Ricardo (and his knife) alone.

Vanderwielen argues that Conrad has created a character in Lena who is "desperately anxious to perform her gender - and her most frustrating obstacle is Axel Heyst's stolid unwillingness to perform his" (1994:202). I agree with this view up to a point, as I believe that Lena's character arises out of a mythology about women inscribed in both literature and culture. An example of this in *Victory* is the role Lena perceives she can play to save the lives of herself and Heyst:

all her energy was concentrated on the struggle she wanted to take on herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. Had she known of some means to put him to sleep for days she would have used incantations or philtres without misgivings. He seemed to her too good for such contacts, and not sufficiently equipped (230).

While the narrator's construction of her here can be read as reinforcing stereotypical view's of women's desire to sacrifice their all for the sake of their significant 'man', she is also asserting her voice in the text at this stage. The view of events that we have now is hers; Heyst's impoverished view of the danger and escape are marginalised. In taking charge of events, "it is the female protagonist, not the male, who insists in reproducing the patriarchal model... In the end, then, Lena has...proved how very well she can 'stand by her man'...she has consummated the ideal of herself as feminine nothingness" (1994:204-9). Thus, for Vanderwielen, the central issues of the narrative are gender-prescribed. I do not believe that matters are this simple. For one thing, Vanderwielen makes no distinction between the writer and the narrator. As indicated before, I agree with Nadelhaft that that distinction needs to be made. She states:

It is part of the unthinking determination of gender-based identity which causes or allows male characters to devalue, ignore, or patronise the particular strengths, intelligence, and endurance of the women. Regular analytical comments from the omniscient narrator suggest that the author constructs some distance between the characters' perceptions of the women and his own (1991:95).

Vanderwielen's way of reading events is only one of a number of ways. In taking decisive action, Lena has taken back, as it were, the process of defining her own identity. Action is, for her, empowering. "Mistress of herself from pride, from love, from necessity, and also because of her woman's vanity in self-sacrifice" (227), she has a new sense of her reality as it is being defined by decisive action and sacrifice. While my reading balks at the myth of 'woman's vanity in self-sacrifice', which is assumed as reality by the narrator here, I would nevertheless argue that taking charge of her identity and executing steps to protect the two of them is heroic. Thus her discourse in the narrative does articulate a saving 'illusion' compared with Heyst's inertia. While he feels that "It's pretty clear that I am not fitted for the affairs of the

wide world" (232), she feels that she is someone "whose mind had remained for so long in doubt as to the reason of her existence. She no longer wondered at that bitter riddle, since her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate pride" (264).

I have argued that Lena's is a discourse which articulates the 'illusion' that there is a God; that action is not ultimately destructive; and that it is better to love than to resist love. These views are all opposed to the ways in which Heyst defines himself. In the sense that Lena's views are presented as 'illusions' not 'truths', Lena's centrifugal discourse does resist Heyst's, and does articulate myth not reality. However, having asserted her will, and acted to save them by wresting the knife from Ricardo, she is finally unable to save them as she dies in the attempt. Hers is, in a sense, a Pyrrhic victory as her life is lost at the same time. Furthermore, even her act of self-sacrifice does not wrest the confession of love from Heyst's lips.

In the heat of her triumph, Heyst is initially suspicious and distant:

He would have pitied her, if the triumphant expression of her face had not given him a shock which destroyed the balance of his feelings...No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon. I was a disarmed man, I have been a disarmed man all my life as I see it now. You may glory in your resourcefulness and your profound knowledge of yourself; but I may say that the other attitude, suggestive of shame, had its charm. For you are full of charm! (288-9).

To the end of her life, Heyst never does make the commitment to her that she desires. He does not even understand or trust her love for him. When he finds her with Ricardo, he immediately suspects her of duplicity. Although he later discovers that she has sacrificed her own life to save his, even at the moment of her death he is silent, "cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of life" (291). Earlier she described him as "a man like whom there was not" (162-3). Now he answers her question - "Who else could have done this for you?" - with the reply, "No one in the world" (291). She dies believing that his declaration is imminent - "he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart - for ever!" (291). Heyst's

act of rescue has been repaid with her life. Yet he still cannot declare love for her, and she dies “seeking his glance in the shades of death” (291).

My reading of the narrative is that the decision to abandon the stance of detachment and to become ‘attached’ to another human being, which Heyst incompletely attempts, is articulated centrifugally to Heyst through Lena’s discourse, and represents for him merely an illusion that this is possible. In the light of her ‘triumphant’ end, the reader might well ask what purpose Lena’s victory finally serves. Was her victory simply the last laugh in a Cruel Joke? Collits writes that the last word of the novel, “Nothing”, appears as such a willful foreclosure of whatever hopes the reader may have had in a possible resolution of the impasse between Lena and Heyst that this section cannot be taken as realism at all. Hooper (1997:10) argues that Lena’s impact on the narrative world of the novel requires its own ending; that it requires a retreat into a reality that finally eludes us. I believe that Lena is victorious as she wrests the knife from Ricardo and disarms death. More importantly, it is what Lena represents in the narrative that is ultimately victorious.

Only in her death does Heyst realise the truth of Lena’s discourse, that faith is not a destructive illusion, and only after her death does he realise fully the bankruptcy of his father’s teachings. Tanner quotes Schopenhauer as saying (1986:127-9) that the only deliverance from our existence is through the complete denial of the will to live. Lena’s death is a victory of the force of love over the force of that kind of nihilism. Yet while her act is victorious, her voice is finally silenced in the narrative, and in the ensuing silence, Heyst finds his own ‘true’ voice, an undivided voice, which he articulates in his admission to Davidson - “Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life!!” (293). Lena’s death brings a breaking of his own silence about the central issues of his life. Davidson recounts, “ ‘I won’t tell you what a time I had with him afterwards. He *talked* to me’ (my italics)” (292). The barrier that prevented his declaration of love to Lena, is finally lowered after her death. His torrent of speech to Davidson, which speaks for itself now that both Lena’s and his father’s voices are silenced, is an affirmation of his final complete abandonment of the principle of detachment.

Heyst's remorse that he had not done so at an early age is an admission of the victory of the idea of action over detachment.

The realisation comes too late. Having been faced with Lena's perceived triumph of life over death, which he could not fully understand, and having failed to be able to tell her, even in death, of his love for her, he acknowledges the failure of the choices he has made. But without her, the realisation is empty. With the death of Lena and the silencing of her voice, he sees the necessity of silencing that 'other' voice too. He enacts the woe that he says is due to the man who has not learned early to hope and to love. His only recourse is to burn all evidence of the 'voice' to which he listened too long, and the evidence of his own failed life, himself. Significantly, it is the delicate Davidson who concludes the narrative, allowing the reader a distance from events, afforded by the simplicity of the narration. Davidson's own ignorance of the circumstances leading up to this point leaves the interpretation of matters to the reader.

To conclude, I suggest that Lena's victory is the victory of the idea that she represents in the narrative over the idea that has dominated Heyst's life. It is the capacity to put trust in life that is shown to be the triumphant principle of the narrative. Lena's sacrifice is evidence of the kind of love that Heyst could not believe in, a love that can entirely dedicate itself to the life of another. Yet, while the victory is indeed Lena's, nothing remains by the end of the narrative to vindicate her triumph. Davidson's words end the narrative with the bleakness and gloom which pervades the narrative throughout - "There was nothing to be done there ... Nothing!"

CONCLUSION

The focus of my thesis has been the function of the women characters in selected works of Conrad. I have aimed to show that the discourse of the women characters is associated with a 'illusion' that counters masculine angst, and that the characterisation of women arises out of a mythologised view of women. The sustaining of a 'saving illusion' has been seen to be not an exclusively male function; Winnie Verloc for example attempts to maintain domestic stability by a conscious myopia which is, for her, a 'saving illusion'. The women characters are largely fixed in a male mythology which sees them as representative of noble ideals of love and fidelity on the one hand, and frightening chthonian nature on the other. The women characters have their existence within patriarchal structures which bear a resemblance to colonial structures. I have shown that, where women characters are concerned, setting is not a significant issue for them because in patriarchal structures they are regarded as 'Other' in the same way as the colonised, wherever they are, from South America to the very heart of Empire - London. They are located in the narratives in a separate female space that can be colonised, revered, feared and desired, but which serves principally to demarcate masculine space.

I have argued that women's discourse is centrifugal in the heteroglossia of the novel, and that it often seeks to assert a voice by which it can define itself; Flora de Barral's is a notable example. In other cases, for example with Antonia Avellanos, no such resistance is articulated. Lena in *Victory* is seen to attempt to align her discourse with Heyst's and accord him the right to define her.

I have based my arguments primarily on the texts and my responses to them, and to critical debate about them, because I believe that it is the negotiation of the text by the reader that produces a meaning. In doing so, I have avoided arguments predicated on 'ownership' of Conrad's psyche, such as Moser's. I do not know the full extent of

what Conrad's response to women really was. Critics are certainly divided about it. What my reading has suggested is that Conrad's works manifest an understanding that male/female relationships are powerfully complex. His novels engage with gender problems and attempt to negotiate with varied perspectives on male and female identity and the ways that they are inscribed in culture. One of these perspectives sees women as mysterious and unknowable and attempts to 'read' them as calling up assumptions about gender, power and knowledge that are fraught with ambiguities and perplexity. Conrad's male characters, who are portrayed as acquiring destructive knowledge which is denied the women characters, seek to mythologise alternative notions of hope, love and fidelity in representations of women, which often take the place of the women themselves. Women are thus objectified, distanced and inscrutable, remaining largely transfixed in their representational figurations, their personhood suppressed.

Masculine response to and negotiation with women characters can be read in a generalised way, but there are differences from text to text in relationships between men and women characters; between narrators and characters; and between men characters themselves. My analysis has drawn a number of conclusions about the women characters, all of which, in some way or another, point to the mystery with which Conrad's male characters have invested them.

Finally, my reading of Conrad's novels sees the women characters' heroism and courage as noble attributes. Their capacity for devotion to ideals and to those they love is admirable. Yet to limit women to these attributes is to mythologise them. In his incisive portrayals of mythologised women, which illustrate the lack of understanding and entrapment that can result from idealised representations, Conrad subtly exposes the divisiveness of gendered thinking. I believe he knew that not only men drag the ball and chain of their selfhood right to their end; women also pay for the devilish and divine privilege of Thought.

I began this study with a quotation from *The Arrow of Gold* and I find it useful to conclude with another. Appropriately, I believe, the last word in the thesis goes to a woman character, Dona Rita in *The Arrow of Gold*, who speaks for herself on the complex subject of women:

I told him plainly that to want a woman formed in body and mind, free in her choice, independent in her thoughts; to love her apparently for what she is and at the same time to demand from her the candour and the innocence that could only be a shocking pretence; to know her such as life had made her and at the same time to despise her secretly for every touch with which her life had fashioned her - that [is] neither generous nor high-minded; it [is] positively frantic (210-11).

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