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The significance of female characters in Joseph Conrad's novels *Chance*, *Victory* and *The Rescue*

Význam ženských postav ve vybraných románech Josepha Conrada *Náhoda (Chance)*,  
*Vítězství (Victory)* a *Záchrana (The Rescue)*

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of the present work is to analyse the role of female characters in Joseph Conrad's writing and consequently to challenge his conventional image of a misogynistic writer. Three novels of his late period are chosen for close reading and detailed examination: *Chance*, *Victory* and *The Rescue*. All the three novels belong to the late period of Conrad's literary career which has produced a contradictory critical reaction among Conradian scholars. According to some critics this period shows signs of decline of Conrad's genius. Others, however, observe the woman's question as a new concern of the writer. Thus, the second chapter of the thesis summarizes critical approaches to women in Conrad's late novels. It illustrates the way they have developed and transformed from the beginning of the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty first century. The rest of the work is divided into three sections, each focusing on the analysis of one individual novel and its main female character. Each novel is considered separately in terms of its form and structure in order to demonstrate the way Conrad experiments with the genre of romance and other related forms. Consequently, we prove that he creates a parody of the genre and its effects. With the intention of determining the significance of the main female protagonists in these so-called romances we examine the means of their representation in the narrative. By analysing specific examples we show that seemingly idealised portrayal of women is not Conrad's unconscious perception of women but a carefully chosen technique. For instance, Flora de Barral embodies a stereotypical heroine in Victorian novels which is systematically subverted and ridiculed in the narrative by the author. Lena, on the other hand, becomes a mythical symbol of femininity and a woman's power. Finally, Mrs Travers demonstrates the influence of deceptive images of femininity on woman's consciousness. Although certain similarities are observed between them the study attempts to prove that each analysed woman has her unique value for the theme which Conrad explores in his late works. Therefore, it is not simply an idealised and romantic presentation of female characters that we find in Conrad's late novels but a profound and thorough study of a traditional presentation of women in fiction.

## Abstrakt

Hlavním cílem této práce je analýza role ženských postav v dílech Josepha Conrada a zpochybnění tradičního obrazu autora jako šovinistického spisovatele. Pro podrobnou analýzu byly zvoleny tři romány z jeho pozdního období: *Náhoda*, *Vítězství* a *Záchrana*. Všechny tři patří do pozdního období Conradovy literární dráhy, období, které se vyznačuje rozporuplnou kritickou odezvou. Podle některých kritiků toto období vykazuje známky úpadku Conradova talentu, nicméně jiní považují ženskou otázku za nový okruh spisovatelových zájmů. Z tohoto důvodu shrnuje druhá kapitola kritické názory o ženách v Conradových pozdních románech. Názorně sleduje, jak se ty názory rozvíjely a měnily od začátku dvacátého století do prvního desetiletí dvacátého prvního století. Zbytek práce je rozdělen do tří částí, z nichž každá se zaměřuje na analýzu jednoho specifického díla a jeho hlavní ženské postavy. Každý román je podroben samostatné analýze z hlediska formy a struktury, aby se ukázalo, jak Conrad experimentuje s žánrem romance a dalšími příbuznými žánry. Následně se dokládá, že autor vytváří parodie na milostný román a jeho účinky. Abychom určili význam hlavních ženských postav v těchto tzv. milostných románech, sledujeme způsob jejich zobrazení v příběhu. Na konkrétních příkladech ilustrujeme, že zdánlivě idealizované zobrazení žen není projevem Conradova podvědomého vnímání ženy, ale pečlivě zvolenou metodou. Například Flora de Barral reprezentuje stereotypní hrdinku viktoriánských románů, které se spisovatel vysmívá. Lena naproti tomu je symbolem ženskosti a ženské síly. Nakonec paní Traversová demonstruje vliv klamných představ o ženství na ženské vědomí. I když mezi nimi pozorujeme jisté podobnosti, tato práce se snaží ukázat, že každá zkoumaná ženská postava má pro téma, které Conrad sleduje ve svých pozdních dílech, svůj jedinečný význam. V Conradových pozdních románech tudíž nacházíme nejenom idealizované a romantické vyobrazení ženských postav, ale hluboké a důkladné zkoumání tradičního zobrazení žen v krásné literatuře.

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## 1. Introduction

Joseph Conrad is a British writer of Polish origin who is well-known for his novels depicting sea voyages and distant exotic lands. The world of ships and seamen is traditionally regarded to be a male dominion. In fact, it is believed that the majority of Conrad's characters are men whereas women appear in his novels as either random minor figures or as submissive passive creatures. For this reason, critics labelled Conrad a misogynistic writer. Additionally, for the sake of publishing success during his lifetime he was frequently presented to his readers as a former seaman and a foreigner who tells genuine sea stories about his colourful adventures<sup>1</sup>. This promotion resulted in the traditional misrepresentative image of Joseph Conrad as the realistic writer whose main concern is the examination of masculinity in challenging circumstances of exotic foreign lands. As he desperately wrote to his friend Richard Curle:

Of course, there are seamen in a good many of my books. That doesn't make them sea stories, any more than the existence of de Barral in *Chance* (and he occupies there as much space as Captain Anthony) makes that novel a story about the financial world. I do wish that all those ships of mine were given a rest, but I am afraid that when the Americans get hold of them they will never, never, never get a rest.<sup>2</sup>

Conrad perfectly recognised the impact of such misunderstanding on his reputation as a writer and subsequently on the way his readers will perceive his fiction:

Perhaps you won't find it presumption if, after 22 years of work, I may say that I have not been very well understood. I have been called the writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer – and also a realist.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from illustrating Conrad's resentment this statement enumerates the most popular critical approaches to studying Conrad's novels. Although modern studies demonstrate that his genius exceeds the limits of these individual classifications, it does not exclude the fact that some of his novels show some romantic, realistic and descriptive features.

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<sup>1</sup> Cedric Watts, *Joseph Conrad: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 115.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Curle, ed., *Conrad to a Friend: 150 Selected Letters from Joseph Conrad to Richard Curle* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company Inc., 1928) 148.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Hewitt, *Conrad: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952) 1

Therefore, the main purpose of this thesis is to try to reconsider Conrad's role as a novelist who in his late novels thoroughly explored the world of women and femininity. As it was already mentioned, female characters are present in the majority of Conrad's narratives either as minor figures or occasionally as main protagonists. However, within the limits of the present work it is impossible to cover all his novels and to study all his female characters. Hence, three following novels are chosen for close reading and analyzing of the main female figures. These are *Chance* published in 1913, *Victory* which appeared in 1915 and *The Rescue* which Conrad began to write in 1896 and finished only in 1920. The main section of the thesis will be divided into three chapters each analysing one of these novels. The narratives will be examined in the succession in which they are presented in the topic of the thesis. The reason for this choice is not only their publication order. The way they are organised shows a certain development in the presentation of female characters. Consequently, each novel and their main protagonists will be studied separately yet where necessary they will be compared to each other in order to illustrate particular common features they share.

The choice of novels for the present analysis is based on several principal reasons. First of all, all three novels belong to the late and mature period of Conrad's writing. Secondly, in contrast to other works each of them includes one prominent female character placed into the centre of its structure. There are of course other women portrayed as main characters in Conrad's novels yet nowhere else they become so essential for the structure of the novels. To begin with, *Chance* is impossible to ignore in the discussion of women in Conrad's works. It is the first novel which presents a female character as the main protagonist. Moreover, it is Conrad's last novel of Marlow's narration. His position in *Chance* is remarkably different from all previous novels. In general, *Chance* is one of the most successful and simultaneously the most controversial of Conrad's novels. On the one hand, it opens the question of women more than any other of his works. On the other hand, this novel indicates the beginning of intense critical debates about Conrad's writing talent. One group of scholars believe that *Chance* marks the end of his genius, while their opponents declare that *Chance* demonstrates a new phase in Conrad's creativity. *Victory*, however, portrays one of the most prominent and complex female characters in Conrad's literary career. The novel shows an admirable young lady who is ready to sacrifice her own life for the sake of love and her beloved's redemption. *Victory* is additionally the last book of his Malay series. Finally, *The Rescue* is the last novel of the so-called Lingard trilogy. Though Conrad started writing it long before many of his famous novels were published he finished it twenty three years later in 1920, after the publication of *Chance* and *Victory*. During this long period of time Conrad wrote more than



ten pieces of art some of which are generally considered to be his best. No matter what position critics take in regard to Conrad's late period, they usually admit that Conrad was developing as a writer throughout his life. For instance, *Almayer's Folly*, his first novel and at the same time the first book of the Lingard trilogy, is commonly believed to show writer's constant struggle with the language whereas later novels have no signs of it.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, *The Rescue* is significant for the present analysis for the reason that it combines Conrad's interests of the early period and his experimentation at the late stage of his life.

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<sup>4</sup> Wilbur L. Cross, *Four Contemporary Novelists* (New York: Macmillan, 1930) 20-21.

## 2. An Overview of Critical Approaches to Conrad's Female Characters

In the same way as Conrad's literary life is divided into several important periods, critical approaches to his writing can be grouped according to the way they changed from the beginning of the twentieth century to nowadays. Starting as extremely positive and naive studying of Conrad's late novels shifted towards really disapproving viewpoint, and ultimately ended in the middle position between those two extremes. Among Conrad's contemporaries prevailed a very friendly and slightly over-affirmative attitude to all his novels including the late ones. A good example of this is Conrad's friend and his biographer Hugh Walpole who greatly admired the writer's genius:

There is the mystery first of the man himself – the mystery that the son of a Polish nobleman should run away to sea, learn English from old files of the “Standard” newspapers when he was thirty, toss about the world as an English seaman, finally share with Thomas Hardy the title of greatest living English novelists [...].<sup>5</sup>

He further proceeds in saying that mystery of Conrad's novels puzzle readers to the same extent as the author himself. In order to understand his novels better Walpole briefly explores their themes, forms and characters. Unlike Henry James or later scholars who seriously criticised Conrad's narrative strategy in *Chance* as unnecessarily obscure, Walpole argues that generally it produces a positive effect except for the romantic scenes when distant narration disrupts connection between readers and the story. He supposes that they would be more persuasive if the author would allow us to get closer to his characters and not presenting them through several distant narrators. What is more important in Walpole's work is his attitude towards Conrad and his main female characters. He believes that Conrad's main secret is that “he is the poet, working through realism, to the poetic vision of life.”<sup>6</sup> It explains romanticised images of his heroines like Lena or Flora, for instance. This idealised representation makes them poetic symbols and universal characters. Thus, in future Walpole expects to see strong “critical reaction that always follows the surprised recognition of a new genius”<sup>7</sup>.

Nonetheless, some of Conrad's contemporaries had more critical attitudes to his late novels. Henry James, for instance, is famous for his disapproving analysis of Conrad's

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Walpole, *Joseph Conrad* (London: Nisbet, 1924) 1.

<sup>6</sup> Walpole, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Walpole, 119-120.

narrative method in *Chance*. He observes it as the waste of the author's great faculty and of the reader's precious time. He claims that romantic genre which Conrad employs in this novel demands a more simple narrative strategy and a better organisation.<sup>8</sup> However, it is not only complexity of structure that was criticised by Conrad's contemporaries. As a matter of fact, Virginia Woolf perceived considerable changes in writer's literary talent in his late novels:

[...] the world of Conrad's later period has about it an obscurity, an inconclusiveness, almost a disillusionment which baffles and fatigues. We lay hold in the dusk only if the old nobilities and sonorities: fidelity, compassion, honour, service – beautiful always, but now a little wearily reiterated, as if times has changed.<sup>9</sup>

Her unenthusiastic comment is believed to be the first step towards the idea of Conrad's decline during the last phase of his life.

One of the first critics who thoroughly analysed Conrad's literary heritage was Frank Raymond Leavis. He named Conrad one of the most influential writers of English novel and claimed his place in the literary canon. Generally, his notion of female characters in Conrad's writing is rather sceptical:

[...] Conrad for all his sophistication exhibits a certain simplicity of outlook and attitude. About his attitude towards women there is perceptible, all the way through his literary career, something of the gallant simple sailor.<sup>10</sup>

Leavis observes that women in his fiction are naive and melodramatic characters which have no power to arouse readers' interest. To prove Conrad's inadequate portrayal of female characters he briefly analyses *The Rescue* which according to him is so ineffectual that it "can't be even recommended as good boy's reading – though it offers little to adults."<sup>11</sup> The simplicity of this novel is what encourages him to claim that *The Rescue* belongs to Conrad's early stage. In contrast, his treatment of *Victory* is more favourable. This positive point of view is easily explained by the presence of a complex male protagonist in the centre of the narrative. Leavis carefully examines all minor and major male characters in *Victory* while Lena, Conrad's most complex heroine, is scarcely mentioned in his analysis. Her occurrence

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<sup>8</sup> Norman Sherry, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 270.

<sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1938) 228.

<sup>10</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962) 203.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

in the novel is important for him only in regard to the main hero's development. Finally, *Chance* is discussed mostly in terms of its technical features. Leavis admits that woman takes central position in this narrative and gives some details about her story yet he fails to offer any profound analysis of Flora as the character. Therefore, Leavis' study demonstrates initial point of view that Conrad's late novels are technically successful but his description of women is romantic and idealised.

Next decade, however, saw a radically new approach to Conrad's literary career, presented by Douglas Hewitt. The latter is nowadays considered to be Conrad's most rigorous and at the same time most enthusiastic critic. His critical analysis which appeared in 1950 became the most frequently quoted work about Conrad during the twentieth century. In his book, *Reassessment*, Hewitt highly appraises writer's genius and the impact of his writing on English literature. Likewise, he admits that the author was essentially misapprehended at his time and afterwards as the writer of "sea-stuff"<sup>12</sup>. According to Hewitt the main cause of this misreading is initiated by Conrad's choice of setting for his novels and short stories. In most of his works action takes place either at sea or on some exotic foreign islands. This feature in combination with the fact that Conrad spent several decades at sea provided a good foundation for the misleading image of the writer. Nevertheless, in his work Hewitt analyses *Chance* and *Victory* only to contrast these last financially successful yet disappointing novels to real masterpieces of Conrad's early period. *The Rescue* is omitted in his analysis completely. Hewitt divides Conrad's writing career into several stages stating that the period which includes all three novels presented in this thesis is the worst of the Conrad's writing career. He argues that *Chance* is a repetition of previous novels and that the novel essentially brings nothing new either to the reader or to the writer's development.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, he claims that in *Chance* and after it Conrad's writing starts losing its power and originality: "The later works show a retreat from the degree of awareness of the complexity of human emotion."<sup>14</sup> Hewitt seems to ignore completely the complexity of such characters as Lena and Heyst in *Victory*, for instance. His main complaint about last novels is that Conrad idealises his protagonists, both men and women. He considers that they appear too romantic, unrealistic and superficial. It is difficult to agree with Hewitt who bases his argument on the level of realistic portrayal of the characters as well as on the absence of evil qualities in them:

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<sup>12</sup> Hewitt, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Hewitt, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

He continually recurs in his later works to the figure of the woman of superlative purity and beauty, smirched by a world which is too gross or evil for her [...].<sup>15</sup>

First, Conrad never positioned himself as a realistic novelist. Secondly, both women and men in his novels show a certain degree of wrong qualities though not necessarily evil ones as characters of the earlier period. Nevertheless, Hewitt's viewpoint is noteworthy for the reason that it influenced the whole generation of critics and scholars in their exploration of Conrad's literary genius.

Another contemporary critic who supported Hewitt and further developed his thesis was Thomas Moser. Though repeating some of Hewitt's ideas Moser significantly contributed into studying of Conrad's heritage. For the present work, the most important is his discussion of Conrad's supposed "affirmation"<sup>16</sup>. He criticises those scholars who, like Wright or Leavis, believe that Conrad's late novels are illustrations of his newly discovered optimism. Moser, however, attempts to prove that this optimism has no positive effect on Conrad's later writing. On the contrary, it is a sign of his decline:

[...] in the later work Conrad evades the question of moral responsibility and passively acknowledges peace as man's greatest good. If this is affirmation, it rises not out of serene age but out of a desperate weariness.<sup>17</sup>

Similar to Hewitt, Moser asserts that Conrad's late novels are signs of his decline. However, unlike Hewitt he scrupulously examines them before making any conclusions. In the beginning Moser explores the structure of *Chance* and depiction of its characters. The most notable notion in his analysis is that *Chance* is a "feminine version of *Lord Jim*."<sup>18</sup> Moser compares the structures and themes of both novels concluding that both Lena and Jim go through the same type of experience. Both of them show development from passive unawareness to self-knowledge and active involvement. However, the major difference between them is that Jim experiences inner conflict of evil and good whereas Lena remains innocent throughout the whole novel. This is the reason why both Hewitt and Moser disregard Conrad's female characters. Most of them are portrayed as faultless creatures which remain

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<sup>15</sup> Hewitt, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Moser, *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957) 131.

<sup>17</sup> Moser, 178.

<sup>18</sup> Moser, 136.

untouched by world evil. Moser considers that sinfulness of every human being is the most prominent theme in Conrad's writing. Hence, the absence of this motif in later novels is what makes Moser and Hewitt think that Conrad's talent weakens in his late writing. Furthermore, Moser argues that Conrad repeated himself in his late novels. He identifies it as a "self-imitation"<sup>19</sup> or else "later Conrad's ineffectual imitation of early Conradese."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Moser's analysis of Conrad's heroines is generally more positive than Hewitt's. He finds Lena's and Flora's portrayal in several scenes successful and persuasive. In all other occurrences they are merely "objects of pity"<sup>21</sup> for him. According to Moser, sympathy is the only way to perceive them. In Conrad's dealing with his female characters in *Chance* and *Victory*, Moser sees "Conrad's inability to understand women, his tendency to sentimentalize female characterizations."<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Hewitt, Moser analysed *The Rescue* as the work that accompanied Conrad throughout his literary career. As a result, he asserts that Conrad makes his late male characters extremely simple and his female characters are just "obstacles to Conrad's creativity."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, critics of the 1950s demonstrated new approach to reading Conrad. They re-evaluated his major novels and marginalised his late novels. Although they showed signs of withdrawal from the limited conventional perception of Conrad as a sea-story writer, most of them stayed within the boundaries of a male discourse.

In the second half of the twentieth century the direction of critical thought concerning late Conrad started changing. Although critics continued referring to Hewitt's argument as the best authority they likewise established new course of studying. From then on, Conrad's late novels were analysed in terms of modernism and experimentation, gender and race, masculinity and sexuality. Jocelyn Baines, for instance, is an example of the transition from the conventional approach to a more recent stance. From the critical point of view, her analysis is in the middle between the previous decade marked by Hewitt, Moser and Guerard, and the following decade which would bring such critics as Jones, Kaplan and Hampson. In other words, her study combines features of previous critical works and of more advanced observations. Similar to earlier analysis, she criticises the narrative strategy which Conrad

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<sup>19</sup> Moser, 178.

<sup>20</sup> Moser, 177.

<sup>21</sup> Moser, 157.

<sup>22</sup> Moser, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Moser, 157.

employs in *Chance* and calls it “cumbersome technique”<sup>24</sup>. She considers *Chance* to be the worst of Conrad’s novels:

The characterization and action are, in general, almost completely lacking in subtlety and the climax is crudely melodramatic, which makes *Chance* the least profound, least satisfying of Conrad’s novels.<sup>25</sup>

Baines claims that apart from the awkward method and unnecessary presence of Marlow with his abstract irrelevant comments *Chance* is filled with references to women and feministic issues. She states that these ideas occur so often throughout the novel that this theme acquires ironical effect. Baines is the only one who notices that main female characters are rejected and humiliated by other women in their surroundings. For example, we can observe it in Flora’s relationship with her governess, with Mrs. Fynes, with a German employer or her relatives. She believes that Flora provokes other women by her femininity, liveliness and independence. Thus Baines acquires rather feministic approach to Flora’s presentation. The most surprising, however, is her treatment of *Victory* and its main female character. She admits that the novel offers a successful presentation of complex male characters. However, she completely diminishes the role of Lena in the narrative saying that

[..] she is a shadow, the least convincing of any of Conrad’s important women. She reacts merely as the situation demands and there is never any individuality in her words or her actions.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, in contrast to other critics who disregarded *The Rescue* Baines presents a profound analysis of this novel. She reconsiders the value of *The Rescue* as “a work of considerable merit.”<sup>27</sup> She claims that this novel is more intense in its studying of relationship between sexes than any other late novel including *Victory*. According to Baines, Mrs Travers is “one Conrad’s few convincing female characters”<sup>28</sup> who has an internal conflict between her socially appropriate exterior and her inner self. In fact, her distress reflects the clash of two cultures. Mrs Travers illustrates the difference between obsolete Victorian ideals and free spirit of savages. Therefore, Baines presents new remarkable ideas for future studies of women in Conrad’s fiction.

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<sup>24</sup> Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) 384.

<sup>25</sup> Baines, 389.

<sup>26</sup> Baines, 397-398.

<sup>27</sup> Baines, 417.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

The end of the twentieth century was marked by the appearance of extremely radical studies of gender and race in Conrad's writing. Although these views were extremely revolutionary most of them stayed within the boundaries of the Conrad canon ignoring the importance of his late novels for the discussion of gender. One of the noteworthy representatives of this period is Marianne DeKoven who in her book, *Rich and Strange*, presented a new feministic interpretation of Conrad's famous novels. For instance, she analyses *Heart of Darkness* as Marlow's "vaginal passage"<sup>29</sup> into the depth of Africa's "maternal womb"<sup>30</sup>. She sees Marlow as a part of aggressive imperialistic system that violates purity of the wild country. To prove her point she illustrates phallic symbols which are associated with Marlow and feminine images like water, darkness and depth connected with the description of Africa. Moreover, she argues that marriages in Conrad's novels are examples of misleading Victorian ideas of male-female relationship. In fact, most matrimonial relationships in writer's works are unconsummated which breaks a natural connection between masculinity and femininity:

It is through "the gift" of sexual intercourse that the wife, by allowing her husband access to her body, gives him access to the "faith and love" of the maternal stream of life.<sup>31</sup>

For DeKoven, Intended who is the most remarkable female character in *Heart of Darkness* is "a horrific representative of what Western culture has made of femininity."<sup>32</sup> She is nameless, weak and defenceless. She stands for femaleness destroyed by imperialistic patriarchal world.

In contrast to DeKoven's aggressively radical viewpoint, Susan Jones presented more positive and practical approach to studying women in Conrad's writing. Her analysis includes elements of biographical, narratological, social and certainly feministic criticism. Jones reconsiders Conrad's traditional image as a misogynistic author of sea tales. She attempts to prove that question of gender was topical for him throughout all his life. However, only in the late period he returned to this issue completely under the influence of new tendencies in society. For her argument, she chooses *Chance* as the best example of Conrad's public and writing success. Jones perceives this novel as an indication of a new course in Conrad's writing. To support her argument, she observes writer's connections with real women like his

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<sup>29</sup> Marianne DeKoven, *Rich & Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Ewing: Princeton University Press, 1991) 85.

<sup>30</sup> DeKoven, 95.

<sup>31</sup> DeKoven, 88.

<sup>32</sup> DeKove, 124.



mother or Marguerite Poradowska and their influence on his writing. Then she examines the inspiration which came from his Polish ancestors. Jones comes to conclusion that Conrad's description of female characters is influenced by Polish romantic literature. Nonetheless, the most significant part of her research is the formal analysis of *Chance* where she shows the importance of means that Conrad employs for the presentation of Flora. In this novel, Jones detects the influence of film production on visual images which Conrad's creates. Additionally, she discovers that Conrad experiments with various genres such as chivalrous romance, detective fiction, sensation novel and melodrama. Ironically using all these genres the author demonstrates how conventional presentations of female characters in fiction influence a modern attitude to women:

Conrad presents the 'abduction' as a trope of romantic fiction, as a means of showing the gap between Flora's equivocal sense of identity and her romantic representation, in which the storytellers make her into the victim of culturally defined assumptions about woman's passivity [...]. Conrad now draws attention to the aesthetic constructions of a civilised world, to its artful, rather than 'artless' tales, to the narratives of chivalry and romance that imprison the female protagonist in her ivory tower.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the writer experiments with the form of the novel employing his favourite method of multiple narrations and exploring limits of dramatic scenes. Jones comprehends all these examples as innovative features of the mature period in Conrad's literary life. According to Jones, these methods support her idea about positive changes in the writer's creativity. Jones' book includes another important issue about late Conrad. Most critics argue that at this period of time the writer wrote his novels in order to satisfy public expectation. Hence, they see *Chance* as a weak narrative written for his female readers:

It gives me the keenest pleasure when I find womankind appreciates my work, and in the story [...] I am treating my subject in a way that will interest women. I am treating my subject in a way that will interest women.<sup>34</sup>

On the contrary, Jones observes Conrad's awareness of his readership in positive terms. She confirms that at the beginning of the twentieth century Conrad became concerned with women's growing interest in reading. Likewise, she states that Conrad was aware of social and political changes in a woman's question. Thus by making Flora the main protagonist in

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Jones, *Conrad and Women* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 143.

<sup>34</sup> Watts, 115.

*Chance* he expanded the circle of his readers and concentrated on the issue of gender and sexuality. In contrast to other feminists, Jones embraces all Conrad's novels in her discussion of female characters. Certainly, the major part of her book is devoted to *Chance* and its analysis. However, she briefly discusses all other important female protagonists including Lena from *Victory* and Mrs Travers from *The Rescue*. Therefore, Susan Jones is the most important contemporary critic who carefully reassessed significance of Conrad's late novels and his female characters.

Another feministic but more contracted analysis of women in Conrad's novels is proposed by Carola Kaplan. The main argument of her work is that Conrad was extremely progressive in his study of women's roles in society:

Conrad creates powerful and independent female characters who help to undermine traditional patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality by effacing the boundaries between male and female and by blurring the distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual relationships.<sup>35</sup>

Though intending to present Conrad's most powerful female characters Kaplan disregards the heroines of his last novels. In her comments she mentions that Flora and Lena are remarkable examples of strong women yet for her research she chooses only female protagonists from Conrad's political novels. Thus, Kaplan's treatment of a woman's question is closely connected with political critique of Russia in Conrad's writing. Nevertheless, some of her points are universal for all Conrad's novels. First of all, Kaplan observes that most novels include triangles between two men and a woman. On the one hand, they illustrate a woman as a connecting power between men. On the other hand, Kaplan argues that this bond makes the woman stronger and more emancipated. Next, she claims that Conrad displays an ironical attitude to his male protagonists especially in contrast to his considerate treatment of female characters. All Conrad's women share sense of insecurity in the world ruled by men. For this reason, all women's actions are determined by their inclination to claim their right for voice and freedom. Kaplan states that women are conventionally placed into domestic sphere of a family life. This role of a mother and a wife limits woman's individuality. According to Kaplan, this is the reason why most Conrad's fictional marriages are failures. Thus he diminishes men's power over women and destroys traditional approach to male-female

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<sup>35</sup> Carola M. Kaplan et al., ed., *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century: Contemporary Approaches and Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 268.

relationships. As a result, he suggests a development of a new woman type which acquires such male characteristics as “courage, conviction, honesty, independence, even “virility.”<sup>36</sup> In conclusion, Kaplan declares that the writer, who was previously considered a misogynist, in fact prefigures upcoming changes in women’s roles and in relationships between sexes.

Robert Hampson offers the most appealing modern analysis of female characters in Conrad’s late novels combining some feministic, psychological and narratological approaches. He notices that *Chance* is the example of Conrad’s experiments with the genres of “detective fiction”<sup>37</sup> and “chivalric romance”<sup>38</sup>. The first one explains the complexity of the narrative strategy in *Chance* while the second one is used in order to examine the nature of masculinity. Hampson assumes that Conrad criticises chivalrous ideas of women by exemplifying Captain Anthony’s incapability to make his marriage legitimate. In other words, Anthony’s gentlemanly self-repression and Flora’s sexual inexperience lead to mutual misunderstanding and characters’ self-destruction. Hampson further declares that

[...] chivalric psychology actually finds erotic stimulation in the distress of the woman it presents itself as rescuing. The woman is thus ambiguously positioned as victim in the script of chivalric desire.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, Hampson discusses *Victory* in terms of the nineteenth-century influence. It appears that the narrative shows features of sentimental novel. In Heyst and Lena’s relationship Hampson observes destructive effect of Victorian models on a male-female relationship. He believes that

[...] under the influence of her Sunday lessons and Victorian constructions of femininity, she [Lena] writes a script for herself in which erotic feelings are displaced into idealistic self-sacrifice.”<sup>40</sup>

He remarks that difference of Heyst’s and Lena’s backgrounds, social statuses and education eventually leads to the tragic end of both characters. Hampson further notices that in *Victory* Conrad returns to the exploration of dramatic structure which can be detected in the way he presents dialogues between characters and their actions. Similar to his predecessors, he

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<sup>36</sup> Kaplan, 277.

<sup>37</sup> J. H. Step, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 143.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Step, 144.

<sup>40</sup> Step, 145.

emphasises Conrad's interpretation of masculinity and men's sexuality in contrast to formation of femininity and female sexuality in his late novels. Nevertheless, the prevailing attitude of Hampson's analysis is that all these novels demonstrate Conrad's continuous "concern with gender and sexuality"<sup>41</sup> which first became evident in his early novels but was utterly developed in his late works.

In one of his letters Conrad discusses Turgenev with his friend. He notices that Turgenev "brings all his problems and characters to the test of love"<sup>42</sup> This is exactly what Conrad does in *Chance*, *Victory* and *The Rescue*. His main male characters, those chivalrous men with a strong sense of duty and honour, are put to this test. Their male world of self-isolation is intruded by women who bring with them unknown feelings, emotions and sentiments. No wonder that in many scenes female protagonists are depicted as ghosts or visions which come from the different unknown world. Men like Lingard or Anthony can deal with all possible dangers of sea life yet they are unable to cope with their own feelings. On the one hand, women bring danger and mischief into this male world. This is how they are usually perceived in the context of sea and adventures. Captain Anthony's ship gets into dangerous situation because of his despair and apathy caused by difficulties of his marriage life. In *Victory* all men are ready to destroy and kill each other for Lena. Captain Lingard fails to rescue his friends from death as a result of Mrs Travers' deed. On the other hand, women embody that power that brings men back to life destroying their walls of emotional self-isolation. The analysis of main female characters in Conrad's selected novels will attempt to demonstrate the importance of women for the structure of the novels and generally for Conrad's critique of conventional female representation in fiction. Moreover, it will once again prove that Conrad is not indifferent to the question of female figures in literature. On the contrary, his relationship to them is very tender and respectful:

"Every woman with a heart and mind knows very well that she is an active partner in the great adventure of humanity on earth and feels an interest in all its episodes accordingly."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Step, 156.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life & Literature* (London: Dent & sons, 1924) 46.

<sup>43</sup> Watts, 116.

### 3. *Chance*

As it has been stated earlier in the thesis, *Chance* was the first novel that brought Joseph Conrad financial success and made him a very popular writer both on the British Isles and in the USA. Moreover, this is his first narrative that presents a woman as the main character, though certainly not the only one that portrays female characters as such. The analysis of critical approaches in the previous chapter attempted to illustrate all the diversity of views on Conrad's late works including *Chance*. Evidently, the prevailing viewpoint is Conrad's incapability to create "successful full-length portrait of a woman in any story of his."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the aim of this chapter is by analysing the most prominent features of the narrative to prove that Conrad's female characters are by no means marginal or ineffectual. On the contrary, they are essential for the experimental structure of the novel.

Some critics frequently confuse Conrad's attitude to women with Marlow's sceptical exclamations about female part of humanity. Others consider that author's voice is heard in occasional remarks by unknown "I". The former is used as a proof of Conrad's misogyny while the latter apparently demonstrates his gallant relationship to women. Both views are usually supported by facts from Conrad's personal life: his motherless childhood contradicts his tender relationship to his mother, his isolated life at sea and after it disagrees with his love stories and female friends. The choice of facts is always narrow and subjective. Nevertheless, it seems absolutely necessary here to study the question of female characters observing Joseph Conrad primarily as a very skilful writer, not simply a man.

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century are marked by some changes of public attitude to women, family, love and sexuality as the result of numerous events that happened throughout the Victorian era. They are undoubtedly reflected in literature which likewise undergoes certain transformations. This is not to say that writers of this period are focussed on social issues primarily yet they definitely react on the changing world around them in a very experimental, very unique manner. Belonging to "the most innovative" authors of the age Conrad also responds to these changes in his late works of fiction.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, at this time he already permanently lives in England and constantly develops as a writer.

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<sup>44</sup> J. B. Priestley, *The English Novel* (London: Benn, 1927) 70.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875-1914* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) 201.

Conrad's late novels including *Chance* are often blamed for features of romance and melodrama. Scholars prefer to perceive them as signs of weakening of Conrad's writing skills. They mention several instances of the author's genius in his late period yet they are usually observed as exceptions rather than examples of continuous tendency. Nevertheless, some very recent critics start exploring Conrad's novels in terms of social and subsequent literary changes brought by the turn of the century. For instance, in her book, *Conrad and Women*, Susan Jones insists that *Chance*

[...] represents yet another form of experimentation, one in which Conrad responded directly to his new marketing contexts with the projection of *Chance* as a romance novel for women readers of popular fiction. The narratorial shift from the concerns of textuality to an emphasis on the role of the female protagonist reflects Conrad's new focus on the constructions of gender and identity within circumscribed generic forms.<sup>46</sup>

As Jones further notices Conrad employs the whole variety of genres in this novel.<sup>47</sup> The most palpable one is romance which is presented by the story of a noble captain who rescues an unfortunate young lady, and who finds his love and happiness despite all the consequences and misfortunes. In addition, we can find features of medieval romance with chivalrous knights, a damsel in danger and fights with monsters. *Chance* also shows some elements of the sensation novel, with an immoral governess who plots to marry a young innocent girl to her protégé in order to get hold of her money. The story of Great de Barral, of his bankruptcy and ruin, with Marlow's comments on prison as a social institution that physically and morally destroys the man and his poor daughter, resembles Dickens's social novels. Moreover, there are Gothic features in the narration. For instance, there is an evil and mad father who lives in the dark part of the room behind the curtain torturing his daughter and attempting to kill his son-in-law. By employing all these genres and then by subverting them Conrad explores traditional representation of female characters in literature. Consequently, with humour and irony he demonstrates that none of them is satisfactory for the woman of the new century.

When such an experienced author as Conrad divides his novel into two chapters naming one of them "The Damsel" and another one "The Knight" it is inconsiderate to expect that he

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<sup>46</sup> Jones, 134-135.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, 104.

wrote an uncomplicated romance novel for women's entertaining. Quite the opposite, in this manner he sets an ironic tone for the whole narration. The damsel in distress is evidently the main protagonist Flora de Barral while the knight is Captain Anthony. Additionally, there are two other men who at some point in the novel attempt to take the role of a knight. The first one is Mr Powell who is very protective of Mrs Anthony against the ship crew. The second one is Marlow who pretends to be a detached narrator yet constantly intrudes into the story. Nonetheless, in the best traditions of the mediaeval romance the story depicts a very typical love triangle between chivalric Captain Anthony, his second mate Mr Powell who is very enthusiastic about the captain's wife and Flora who with some difficulties discovers feelings first to her husband, and afterwards to Powell. At first glance their interrelation is a parallel to a famous triangle of mediaeval romances between King Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere. Anthony's unfortunate death after some years of marriage only intensifies this allusion. However, Conrad destroys this traditional image of strong men rescuing weak women whilst searching for noble adventures. At the most crucial moment when the ship is endangered by a "monster" Anthony remains disinterested and Powell is incapable to light a fire. Ironically only Flora, supposedly a weak and passive woman, is capable to save all of them from death. Furthermore, Marlow who considers himself a knight by saving Flora from suicide eventually finds out that it was the dog which distracted her from the attempt. All other fiends in Flora's life either destroy themselves like her mad father or simply disappear forever without any external help. Therefore, by diminishing and ridiculing the role of men the narrative presents a new type of a self-sufficient woman who is capable of saving herself. Moreover, she becomes a saviour for men. It is Flora who rescues her father from humiliation, Anthony from isolation and Powell from self-destruction.

There is another evidence of Conrad's ironic treatment of the novel and its characters. That is his frequent allusions to William Shakespeare, the master of irony. One of the most obvious examples is a description of Captain Anthony and Flora in the final romantic scene of the novel. Flora is depicted as "a pale-faced child with big blue eyes and a red mouth a little open showing a glimmer of white teeth"<sup>48</sup> while Anthony has "something African, something Moorish" in his appearance. To make this love scene even more absurd the writer repeats this allusion to Shakespeare's *Othello* once again: "Powell [...] noticed Captain Antony, swarthy

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Chance: A Tale in Two Parts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974) 348.

as an African, by the side of Flora whiter than the lilies [...].”<sup>49</sup> Another palpable illustration of the reference is found in the most passionate scene between Powell and Flora when the girl helps him to save her husband’s ship from the catastrophe by igniting the flare. This fire becomes a symbol of awakening passion between Powell and Flora:

“Let me have the box,” said Mrs Anthony in a hurried and familiar whisper which sounded amused as if they had been a couple of children up to some lark behind a wall. He was glad of the offer which seemed to him very natural, and without ceremony – “Here you are. Catch hold.” Their hands touched in the dark and she took the box while he held the paraffin-soaked torch in its iron holder. [...] the flare blazed up violently between them [...].<sup>50</sup>

It is difficult to imagine more typical tragic scene: the “sardonic”<sup>51</sup> captain stands on deck while somewhere underneath in darkness his second mate experiences a very intimate moment with the captain’s wife. Furthermore, a mysterious ship that endangers the *Ferndale* is described as “the monster which seemed to take to itself the shape of a mountain shut its green eye without as much as a preparatory wink”<sup>52</sup> echoing Shakespeare’s notion that jealousy is a green-eyed monster.

The following passage likewise recalls the tradition of an idealised presentation of a young lady in love sonnets, which is so masterfully parodied by Shakespeare in his sonnets. Additionally, this piece of prose has a very clear poetic rhythm.

It might have been her pallor (it wasn’t pastry nor yet papery) that white face with eyes like blue gleams of fire and lips like red coals. In certain lights, in certain poises of head it suggested tragic sorrow. Or it might have been her wavy hair. Or even just the pointed chin stuck out a little, resentful and not particularly distinguished, doing away with the mysterious aloofness of her fragile presence.<sup>53</sup>

It is a straightforward mockery of Captain Anthony’s supposedly romanticised image of Flora. By this typical poetic description of the girl’s appearance Marlow makes the most loving scene in the book ridiculous and absurd. This is the only part of the novel which is narrated by Flora herself, a direct witness of all events, yet Marlow hardly restrains his smile

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<sup>49</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 351.

<sup>50</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 265.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 184.



listening to her. He actually ridicules every participant of the story constantly reminding the reader that the novel is not as simply romantic as it seems.

Marlow is probably the most important narrator presented in the novel who brings all the pieces of the narration together. However, his opponent, an unknown "I", repeatedly doubts Marlow's trustworthiness in his account and analysis of events. Moreover, this mysterious second voice emphasises the fact of Marlow's comic perception of Flora's adventures. These two voices also demonstrate two opposite attitudes towards women in literature. "I" seems more inclined to see an idealistic image of women while Marlow represents a very sceptical and cynical attitude to them. Therefore, Marlow's constant philosophical exclamations about Flora and women in general are not irrelevant and meaningless as some critics assume yet they are persistent reminders of Conrad's irony. For instance, this is what Marlow remarks on Flora de Barral's story:

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 vision? 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, the withered brightness of youth, a spirit neither made cringing nor yet dulled but as if bewildered in quivering hopelessness by gratuitous cruelty [...]. The passive anguish of the luckless!<sup>54</sup>

What is this statement if not a clear example of irony especially after he describes Flora's life as "a tragic-comical adventure".<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, though being very essential for narration Marlow's voice is not the most determinative. There are other narrators like Mr Powell, the Fynes, Franklin or even Flora herself.

By constant switching between narrators Conrad makes Flora's representation complex and ambiguous. There is no omniscient narrator in the novel who would give the reader a clear image of a simple fragile heroine as the genre of romance would demand. On the contrary, we are offered a variety of inadequate and contradicting pictures depicted by various narrators. Their reflections disagree with each other for the reason that most of them scarcely know the main protagonist. They simply project their own knowledge of women on Flora's

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<sup>54</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 259-260.

<sup>55</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 351.

image. For instance, experienced old seaman Franklin sees Flora as the girl “who had got gold of the captain”<sup>56</sup>. For him she is an absolute embodiment of evil that invaded the ship. In contrast, young and naive Powell perceives her as a harmless “jolly girl”<sup>57</sup>. For chivalrous Captain Anthony she is “the very face of the suffering world”.<sup>58</sup> Marlow whose voice is the most prominent in the narrative regularly changes his descriptions of Flora from a careless “rude”<sup>59</sup> girl to a passive poor victim, and then to a practical woman who uses her lucky chance in life. All these stereotypical pictures portraying Flora’s appearance illustrate narrowness of conventional female images in fiction. In other words, the author proves that idealised presentation of women in romances and melodramas make them ludicrously narrow and superficial heroines.

Conrad problematises interpretation of the main female character even more by turning from mediaeval traditions of women’s portrayal to a typical Victorian image of a female heroine. Jones assumes that Conrad ironically employs elements of the mediaeval romance in order to demonstrate “the conventionalised images of women that have developed out of that form, particularly those associated with Victorian reconstructions of medievalism.”<sup>60</sup> Hence, in one story the writer combines all the variety of themes developed by Victorian novelists. First, Flora is presented as a rich “princess”<sup>61</sup> who enjoys all the delights of life. She has servants, riding and drawing lessons, courting of “wonderful Charley”<sup>62</sup> and a horrible governess who is plotting against the innocent girl. However, all awfulness of the situation becomes absurd when the governess is revealed as an aging woman who strives for her last chance of love. Thus, Flora’s enemy is not a frightening brute but merely a disappointed woman who “had seen her youth vanish, her freshness disappear, her hopes die, and now she felt her flaming middle-age slipping away from her.”<sup>63</sup> Next moment, Flora de Barral is a poor daughter of a ruined man and a convict. This seemingly miserable story is ridiculed as well by the mere fact of absurdity of her father’s case:

As the grotesque details of these incredible transactions came out one by one ripples of laughter ran over the closely packed court – each one a little louder than the other. [...]

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<sup>56</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 225.

<sup>57</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 267.

<sup>58</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 284.

<sup>59</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> Jones, 114.

<sup>61</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 89.

<sup>63</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 95.

The Registrar laughed, the barristers laughed, the reporters laughed, the serried ranks of the miserable depositors watching anxiously every word, laughed like one man. They laughed hysterically – the poor wretches – on the verge of tears.<sup>64</sup>

Subsequently, unfortunate Flora is placed into the position of an orphan mistreated by her relatives who vainly hope to get some of her father's hidden riches. However, there is undoubtedly no money concealed by childlike Great de Barral. After Flora's escape from her ridiculous relatives she is given even a more conventional role. She tries to work as a governess which is the most popular position of the female protagonists in Victorian novels. The girl's master decides to make her his lover thinking "that he would be safe with a pretty orphan."<sup>65</sup> Eventually, she is thrown out from the house by a jealous wife. The whole situation between Flora and the German couple is once again presented as a ludicrous comedy. The wife accuses her of dishonesty because she suspects that Flora was seducing her husband while Flora with dignity accepts her guilt thinking that her hostess is mad because she discovered the truth about her criminal father. Finally, before she gets married Flora becomes a girl-friend of a masculine-looking feministic Mrs Fyne. This woman's ideas which she imposes on her young wards are mocked both by sceptical Marlow and inexperienced Flora who calls them "stupid talks"<sup>66</sup>.

Mrs Fyne represents not only a ridiculous caricature of feminism but also a representation of emotionally isolated Victorian women. Her detached relationship with her husband becomes an example of a miserable marriage in the best traditions of the Victorian era. Likewise, Mrs Fyne epitomises a possible extreme result of Flora's maturity:

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. One expected her to address Fyne as Mr.<sup>67</sup>

Flora, however, refuses to accept this conventional role. She escapes with Mrs Fyne's brother seeking for freedom and self-understanding. Their marriage is again a typical example from late Victorian novels. Initially, Captain Anthony takes a dominating position forcing Flora into marriage. Then misunderstanding between them brings misery into their lives. Finally,

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<sup>64</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 77.

<sup>65</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 156.

<sup>66</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 364.

<sup>67</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 45.

when Anthony surrenders by letting Flora go she is finally able to discover hidden feelings to her husband. Nevertheless, the ending is not as happy and conventional as most critics assume. Flora's husband dies saving life of her potential lover. Although there is an implication of a possible marriage between Powell and Flora at the very end of the novel they express only affection to each other without any certain matrimonial references. Furthermore, Flora of the final scene is a mature woman who is "brave enough"<sup>68</sup> to ask Powell about his feelings to her.

Therefore, by employing the variety of genres, themes and narrators with contradicting viewpoints Conrad creates a collective image of a woman as she is conventionally portrayed in literature. First, he explores various means of depicting female characters and their social roles in previous centuries. He shows that beautiful as they are these images are no longer satisfactory for modern fiction. Then he demonstrates female position in the nineteenth-century novels. He ridicules these portrayals for the reason that even though the century brings new possibilities for women they still depict female characters as victims and poor creatures. Thus, Flora becomes a heroine that stands on the edge between old and new traditions. On the one hand, she embodies all those conventional idealised female characters of the past. On the other hand, she demonstrates a tendency of the new century which goes beyond the limits of a marriage and a family life to the exploration of a female identity and femininity.

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<sup>68</sup> Conrad, *Chance*, 366.

#### 4. *Victory*

Both in temporal and thematic context *Victory* is the successor of the novel discussed in the previous chapter. Though showing a certain degree of transformation in the narrative structure the novel presents another portrayal of a remarkable female character. Furthermore, in this book Conrad persists in his studying of human consciousness, emotional isolation and the nature of male-female relationships. *Victory* is generally better accepted by critics than *Chance* for the reason that Conrad ostensibly returns to his old subject matter. Namely, he places a male character and his internal conflict into the centre of the narrative. For this reason, even entirely sceptical critics frequently include it into Conrad's canon. F. R. Leavis, for instance, asserts that *Victory* is "among those of Conrad's works which deserve to be current as representing his claim to classical standing [...]." <sup>69</sup> Thus, the purpose of the following chapter is to demonstrate that the importance of this novel exceeds the limits of a male discourse. As a matter of fact, it continues exploration of the issues raised in *Chance*. Although Lena in *Victory* is not the main protagonist she acquires the most essential role for the development of the storyline. Moreover, she proves to be the only power which is capable to redeem a man's soul.

In *Victory*, published immediately after *Chance*, Conrad continues to experiment with the genre of romance, exploring its origins and prefiguring its future. The main female heroine of this novel likewise stands on the border between the conventions of the old epoch and the freedom of the upcoming era. However, in this work the reference to mediaeval romances is not as remarkably intense as it was in *Chance*. There is certainly a damsel and a knight embodied by Heyst and Lena. She is a young unfortunate girl mistreated by the director of the orchestra and his horrible wife. Heyst is a sensitive man and a gentleman who in his attempt to defend the miserable creature eventually steals her from the malicious couple. Nonetheless, the close examination shows that the roles of the knight and the damsel are considerably modified, even in comparison to their counterparts in *Chance*. Heyst is undoubtedly sympathetic to injustice he encounters yet he is incapable of any action. He is not merely a passive man like chivalrous Captain Anthony who remains indifferent even when the danger is extremely close. Heyst is cynical and hesitant. He is scared to death by "the idea of competition with fellows unknown, with Schombeg the hotel-keeper." <sup>70</sup> Thus, this new knight

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<sup>69</sup> Leavis, 230.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Victory: An Island Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 67.

is no longer convinced that it is in his power to rescue the lady from the “horrible red-faced beast”.<sup>71</sup> On the contrary, the damsel acquires a dynamic role in this relationship. In contrast to Flora de Barral who surrenders to the unexpected aggressive pressure from Captain Anthony, Lena becomes an attacker herself. She takes a domineering position in her first conversation to Heyst:

“You do something! You are a gentleman. It wasn’t I who spoke to your first, was it? I didn’t begin it, did I? It was you who came along and spoke to me when I was standing over there. What did you want to speak to me for? I don’t care what it is, but you must do something.” Her attitude was fierce and entreating at the same time [...].<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, the major innovation of this novel is Conrad’s use of drama in the narrative. Those parts of *Victory* which concern Heyst and Lena’s relationship display features of drama. There is always a clear setting: the first meeting takes place in the Schomberg’s “concert-hall”; the second time they meet in the garden; then there is a forest on the island; and finally the tragedy happens in their house. Furthermore, there are a limited number of participants in the story and even outside it. Most scenes are presented by dialogues between the characters which are left unexplained. In other words, the reader is encouraged to “see”, “hear” and “feel”.<sup>73</sup> This drama has certain features of a tragicomedy. It is no wonder that *Victory* is sometimes compared to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Although Heyst is more often associated with Hamlet because of his indecisiveness and scepticism some critics observe a certain similarity between Heyst and Prospero who tumble “between destructive idealism and a violent reality, and between the pulls of the past and the present”.<sup>74</sup> The action of both *The Tempest* and *Victory* takes place on the island. Moreover, the last scene in *Victory* is similarly intensified by the powerful storm which accompanies the events of the last tragic night. Other elements of a tragicomedy include various misunderstandings between the characters, tragic state of the main hero and a comic treatment of “lower-class” figures.<sup>75</sup> The latter aspect, for instance, can be illustrated by Morrison’s tragic story which from its beginning till the end is described in a humorous and ironic manner:

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<sup>71</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 158.

<sup>72</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 64.

<sup>73</sup> Frederick R. Karl and Marvin Magalaner, *A Reader’s Guide to Great Twentieth Century English Novels* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963) 7.

<sup>74</sup> Karl, 91.

<sup>75</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., (Boston: Thomson Learning, 1999) 325.

Whenever a coast village sighted the brig it would begin to beat all its gongs and hoist all its streamers, and all the girls would put flowers in their hair, and the crowd would line the river bank, and Morrison would beam and glitter at all this excitement through his single eyeglass with an air of intense gratification.<sup>76</sup>

Morrison's business is a failure, his subsequent bankruptcy is ridiculous because the sum of his debt is too "insignificant"<sup>77</sup>, and even his death proves to be an absurd accident. His childlike and misfortune character to a great extent resembles Flora de Barral's father. There are other minor characters like Captain Davidson and Mr Schomberg whose images are ridiculed by the narrator. Nonetheless, it is not Conrad's intention to create a conventional tragicomedy. He explores its major elements and then breaks its rules in order to demonstrate his main argument.

There are two principal moments in the story where Conrad destroys the laws of tragicomedy and consequently of melodrama, which later developed from this genre. The first one is the position of the female character whereas the second one is the absence of a happy ending. In contrast to *The Tempest* where Prospero is the focus of the drama while his daughter Miranda has an inferior role, the situation in *Victory* is reversed. Though the novel begins as Axel Heyst's life story, the focus gradually shifts to Lena.<sup>78</sup> Towards the end of the narrative she becomes the most important character. Lena is no more an innocent weak young lady. She is courageous and powerful. She is the only one who knows about Ricardo's attempt to kill her, about his knife, about Heyst's defencelessness and Ricardo's plan to murder him. Furthermore, she is the centre of the intrigue. Her presence on the island provokes men to destroy each other for the reason of love and hatred to the woman. The significance of this female character is illustrated by the devastating storm which ceases only when Lena dies. As it was already mentioned, the narrative has a tragic end. This fact is the reason why many critics are indulgent about *Victory* and sceptical about *Chance* that has a relatively positive ending. Hence, all the characters in *Victory* are eventually dead except for the Chinese servant who stays alive and Captain Davidson who is merely an accidental witness. The latter acquires an important role at the end. Similar to Horatio in *Hamlet*, Davidson brings this tragic story into the world.

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<sup>76</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 12.

<sup>77</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 15.

<sup>78</sup> Karl, 92.

Another genre which Conrad employs and analyses in the narrative is Victorian melodrama. This genre has its origins in tragicomedy.<sup>79</sup> It explores universal themes of love and hatred, of evil and good. Melodramatic plays were very popular throughout the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century they ultimately developed into film melodramas. Nonetheless, Conrad shows this genre in all its ridiculousness by substituting the main elements of its structure. “The great-hearted”<sup>80</sup> hero is turned into a selfish and inert Heyst. “The heroine pure as the driven snow”<sup>81</sup> becomes an active shameless seductress. “The villains”<sup>82</sup> Mr John and Ricardo are deprived of their horrifying features. The former is described as a “merry skeleton”<sup>83</sup> while the latter acquires ‘the expression of a domestic cat’<sup>84</sup>. Morrison’s murder which is being discussed throughout the novel turns out to be a coincidental death from a very common illness. The love story is converted into the story of misunderstanding and self-sacrifice. Finally, the author ridicules the use of music in melodrama in order to intensify the emotional effect of a play.<sup>85</sup> In *Victory* music has an opposite effect:

The Zangiaco band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. One felt as if witnessing a deed of violence; and that impression was so strong that it seemed marvellous to see the people sitting so quietly on their chairs, drinking so calmly out of their glasses, and giving no signs of distress, anger or fear. Heyst averted his gaze from the unnatural spectacle of their difference. When the piece of music came to an end, the relief was so great that he felt slightly dizzy, as if a chasm of silence had yawned at his feet.<sup>86</sup>

Apart from experimenting with genres Conrad uses various modern technical devices for the examination of the female image in literature. It is commonly believed that Conrad’s late novels following *Chance* technically deteriorate. The major reason is supposed to be Marlow’s disappearance from the Conrad’s narrative strategy. It is true that Marlow is not directly present in *Victory* yet his ironical and philosophical voice is clearly recognised in the voice of the unknown narrator who gathers all pieces of the narrative together. Similar to

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<sup>79</sup> Abrams, 154.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 241.

<sup>84</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 278.

<sup>85</sup> Abrams, 154.

<sup>86</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 55.



Marlow he displays ironic attitude to all characters and generally to the whole story. This is how he starts the narration:

The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation proceeds liquidation. [...] These are very unnatural physics, but they account for the persistent inertia of Heyst, at which we “out there” used to laugh among ourselves – but not inimically. An inert body can do no harm to any one, provokes no hostility, is scarcely worth derision.<sup>87</sup>

Thus recalling the ironic mood of *Chance* the unknown narrator sarcastically judges individual characters and their behaviour. Similar to Marlow he gathers all the known facts and rumours, meditates upon them and with the help of his imagination and universal wisdom recreates the story of a woman’s triumph over man’s devastating passivity.

The allegorical tale of Heyst and Lena’s victory is framed into the realistic account of factual events reported by Captain Davidson. Part I of the novel presents two narrators both of whom reveal a certain degree of unreliability. Captain Davidson is trustworthy in the facts he recounts yet his extremely gallant and modest nature prevents him from observing the story in an adequate manner. The second narrative voice is more complicated. He is not personally acquainted with any direct participant of the account. His knowledge of the characters and their story comes primarily from tales and rumours that spread among seamen: “That was how it began. How it was that it ended as we know it did end, is not so easy to state precisely.”<sup>88</sup> He admits that he knows only some facts of this story while the rest of it is the work of his imagination. His telling shifts from the first person narration with all his “I”, “we” and “us” in Part I to the third person omniscient narration that presents the story from the perspectives of its main characters in Part II and Part III. The circle of the narrative is completed by Captain Davidson who emerges at the end of the novel to recount the details of Heyst and Lena’s tragic end. The story starts with facts and ends with them whereas the central part of it is merely a narrator’s vision. Therefore, the narrative moves from the sphere of reality into the realm of myth and a dream, and then again back to reality. The reader is

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<sup>87</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 62.

invited to follow this abnormal stream of consciousness<sup>89</sup> that wanders from the mind of one character to another one creating a modern symbolic myth of Adam and Eve.

The analysis of the novel's structure and strategy is essential for understanding of the main female character. Lena's function is often underestimated by scholars because of her seemingly flawless nature and a perfect beautiful appearance. They argue that Lena is another Conrad's typical romanticised heroine who is basically too virtuous and idealistic for this imperfect evil world.<sup>90</sup> However, this misapprehension is caused by the fact that critics commonly "apply the canons of realism to an essentially non-realistic book."<sup>91</sup> On the surface they observe a young innocent girl who is rescued from miserable conditions by humanistic Heyst and who eventually sacrifices her life to prove her love. Nevertheless, the examination of *Victory's* narrative strategy illustrates that Lena is a more complex character than it initially appears. It is not Conrad's purpose to create a lifelike portrait of a woman in a realistic novel. In the same way as his truthful story transforms into an imaginative dream, an unfortunate girl from "an ambulant ladies' orchestra"<sup>92</sup> becomes an intensely symbolic figure.

The most modern aspect of this novel is the use of myth. The exploration of "the mythological world" by such writers like James Joyce marks the development in fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>93</sup> In order to demonstrate the nature of Heyst and Lena's relationship the author chooses the myth of Adam and Eve as the foundation for his studying. By recreating this myth the writer brings to light the most popular subject in literature and simultaneously the source for the most traditional understanding of a male-female relationship. Furthermore, it is the basis for the most conventional attitude to women as originally inferior to men. Nonetheless, in his analysis Conrad re-evaluates the meaning of this myth and recreates it in a new modern way.

Similar to the first man and woman in the world Lena and Heyst live secluded in their small world. However, Lena and Heyst's island is not the Garden of Eden. Their so-called paradise shows signs of the end of the world, not of its beginning:

The black jetty, sticking out of the jungle into the empty sea; those roof-ridges of deserted houses peeping dismally above the long grass! Ough! The gigantic and

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<sup>89</sup> Karl, 6-7.

<sup>90</sup> Hewitt, 110.

<sup>91</sup> Baines, 397.

<sup>92</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 35.

<sup>93</sup> Karl, 35.

funeral blackboard sign of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, still emerging from a wild growth of bushes like an inscription stuck above a grave figured by the tall heap of unsold coal at the shore end of the wharf, added to the general desolation.<sup>94</sup>

This inaccessible and inhospitable island is the symbol of Heyst's lost soul. It is the embodiment of his emotional isolation. Heyst recognises "the original Adam" in himself "who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frame from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming of the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose."<sup>95</sup> His Chinese servant identifies him as "Number One"<sup>96</sup> which again relates Heyst to Adam who was the first man created by God. Furthermore, it is Heyst who gives a name to the girl whom he brings to his island. Intensifying the parallel between the Christian myth and their relationship Lena-to-be declares:

They call me Alma. I don't know why. Silly name! Magdalen too. It doesn't matter; you can call me by whatever name you choose. Yes, you give me a name. Think of one you would like the sound of – something quite new.<sup>97</sup>

Alma means both a "virgin"<sup>98</sup> and a "soul"<sup>99</sup> whereas Magdalen stands for a virtuous saint and a "fallen woman"<sup>100</sup> at the same time. This motif is being repeated throughout the whole novel. Lena is simultaneously sinful and pure, an innocent girl and a temptress. Likewise, Heyst meditates whether Lena is "just a little child, or whether [she] represent[s] something as old as the world."<sup>101</sup> It is remarkable that being extremely sceptical about religion Heyst names her "Lena"<sup>102</sup> which is in many languages a short version of Magdalene. This contradicting symbolism of her name reflects the ambiguity of Lena's role in relation to Heyst. Here the myth acquires a new meaning. The myth of Adam and Eve transforms into the myth of Christ and Magdalene.

Consequently, the symbolism of the main heroine becomes even more complex. She represents a conventional dichotomy between the image of an innocent virgin and a sinful

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<sup>94</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 35.

<sup>95</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 133.

<sup>96</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 141.

<sup>97</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 70.

<sup>98</sup> Conrad, *Victory* (Explanatory notes) 321-322.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 270.

<sup>102</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 143.

fallen woman. These two extreme views are reflected in her relationship with men in the novel. Schomberg calls her Alma because for him she is a symbol of purity and vulnerability. He believes that this girl is his only chance to change his life, that “she would have inspired him to success in a new start.”<sup>103</sup> He completely misunderstands her negative signals assuming that they are the signs of “feminine conventional silliness”<sup>104</sup>. For Ricardo, on the other hand, she represents an immoral woman, someone of his kind. Her silence and self-defence he misinterprets for a wicked nature of the girl. Both men judge her on the basis of her outer appearance and their knowledge of women. Both views prove to be false. Accordingly, Heyst is lost in his understanding of Lena. When he saves her from the hotel-keeper and the owner of the orchestra he sees her as his Eve whom he brings on the island. When Heyst becomes a witness of the scene between Lena and Ricardo he observes her as a sinful woman whose faults he can forgive because it is a part of her female nature.

Nevertheless, both myths are reversed in the novel. Lena does not bring Heyst to the Fall as Eve in the Garden of Eden. Whereas Eve succumbs to the Serpent’s temptation and persuades Adam to break God’s law, Lena saves Heyst from the Serpent, represented by Ricardo, and from death. She takes away Ricardo’s knife which for her symbolises evil and death:

She had done it! The very sting of death was in her hands; the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe, in her possession – and its head all but lying under her heel.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, unlike Magdalene whose soul is redeemed by Christ, Lena sacrifices her life to save Heyst’s body and spirit. This new Magdalene takes Christ’s role of self-sacrifice. In contrast to Eve who is created to become Adam’s partner and to Magdalene who asks for man’s forgiveness, Lena’s main purpose on the island is to awaken Heyst’s soul. Her emotional, intuitive and passionate nature stands for everything which Heyst has lost. She represents his female self. She is the embodiment of life and active energy. Having been deprived of all emotions by his father Heyst exists as a lonely detached observer incapable of any feelings. The fact that “he never killed a man or loved a woman”<sup>106</sup> proves that he lacks passion which is essential to any human being. Although Heyst fails to confess his love to

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<sup>103</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 77.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 299.

<sup>106</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 162.

Lena when she is dying, her sacrifice is by no means inefficient. Eventually her death brings him understanding of the worthlessness of his life: “Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love – and to put its trust in life!”<sup>107</sup>

As a result, the presentation of Lena in *Victory* demonstrates an extent of transformation which emerges in Conrad’s female characters. Though showing some similarity to previous female characters Lena is essentially different. Like Flora she is a poor parentless child mistreated by her surroundings. However, if Flora in *Chance* is incapable to recognise her feelings and sexuality until the very end of the novel, Lena is a completely different heroine. From the very beginning she is intuitively aware of her own female power. Moreover, her relationship with Heyst breaks all Victorian values of marriage and family. In contrast to Flora who is married to Captain Anthony long before she discovers any feelings toward him, Lena lives in a free relationship with Heyst. She is not looking for a wealthy and influential husband and a subsequent marriage. Lena explores the power of love and femininity. She becomes a symbol of love and life herself. Lena demonstrates that a woman cannot be simply presented as either a virgin or a fallen woman. She can be both good and bad. Her nature is more complex than it was traditionally described. Thus, Lena represents a prototype of a new modern image of a woman in fiction.

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<sup>107</sup> Conrad, *Victory*, 309.

## 5. *The Rescue*

As was mentioned earlier in the thesis, *The Rescue* was finished and published in 1920. This is his most extraordinary novel owing to the fact that Conrad was writing it nearly twenty four years. During this time the world saw such Conrad's novels as *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, *Nostramo*, *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness* to name just a few. Certainly, the writer did not devote all his time to *The Rescue* yet he was constantly returning to it during all these years.<sup>108</sup> It was his companion, his nightmare and his hope. No matter what he did, *The Rescue* was always present somewhere at the back of his mind. This is how Conrad explains why he eventually decided to finish it: "I am settling my affairs in this world and should not have liked to leave behind me this evidence of having bitten off more than I could chew."<sup>109</sup> Thus, *The Rescue* became the work of fiction that reflects Conrad's progress throughout his literary career. Although critical response to the novel was rather inconsistent, its value is still to be discovered. There are several reasons why critics generally exclude it from the Conrad's canon. First of all, it is the last book of the Lingard trilogy. Two other novels, *Almayer's Folly* and *The Outcast of the Islands*, are first two books that Conrad ever wrote. Both of them are observed as his first attempts in writing. Most Conrad's scholars agree that these two novels are illustrations of his early struggle with the English language and with the influence of French.<sup>110</sup> Hence, as a part of the series *The Rescue* is automatically considered to be an unsuccessful novel. The second reason for the exclusion is its fairly simple narrative strategy. Nevertheless, after more than twenty years of writing experience and success we expect that Conrad's language is not a problem in *The Rescue* any more. Likewise, the narrative strategy that Conrad employs in the novel has its positive effect on the development of the main theme. Therefore, the aim of this chapter not only to prove that Conrad's interest in women perseveres in his last years of life but also that his narrative technique effectively works for creating one of his most believable female characters.

In this novel Conrad continues his experimentation with the genre of romance. The beginning of the novel perfectly complies with it. There is a perfect hero, Captain Lingard, for a chivalrous romance:

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<sup>108</sup> John Dozier Gordan, *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941) 201-219.

<sup>109</sup> Norman Sherry, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 328.

<sup>110</sup> Walpole, 14.

[...] a true adventurer in his devotion to his impulse – a man of high mind and of pure heart, lay the foundation of a flourishing state on the ideas of purity and justice. He recognized chivalrously the claims of the conquered; he was a disinterested adventurer [...].<sup>111</sup>

The setting is exotic and somewhat magic. There are several heroic deeds to be performed. First, he must help his friends Rajah Hassim and Lady Immada to retrieve their kingdom. Secondly, he must save a woman on the yacht who is in danger of death. However, from the moment he goes on the board of that yacht romance starts changing into a tragedy. The laws of romance are continuously subverted in the storyline. Conrad creates and destroys signs of romance with the help of triangles that appear in *The Rescue* and his other novels.<sup>112</sup> For instance, *Chance* presents the simplest connection between Flora, Anthony and Powell. As it was shown earlier in the thesis, Flora's first action on the boat happens when she is placed between Powell and Anthony. *Victory* as well shows several triangles but the most crucial one is between Lena, Heyst and Ricardo. Likewise, when Lena finds herself between evil Ricardo and passive Heyst she suddenly becomes strong and determined. The tension between these two men gives her audacity and self-confidence. Finally, *The Rescue* likewise demonstrates a variety of triangles: Mrs Travers – Mr Travers – captain Lingard, Mrs Travers – Captain Lingard – Immada, Mrs Travers – D'Alcacer – Lingard, Mrs Travers – Carter – Lingard. On the one hand, conflicts within these triangles produce a melodramatic effect. For instance, relationship between Lingard and Mrs Travers can be initially seen as romantic love of an unhappily married woman and a chivalrous captain complicated by the presence of a jealous husband. On the other hand, all these triangles are subverted. In *Chance* romance is destabilised by ironic comments of the main protagonist Mr Marlow. In *The Rescue*, however, it is achieved by redistribution of power within the triangle. For instance, in the relationship mentioned above, Lingard turns into a weak and submissive man, Mr Travers transforms into an ill mad man and Mrs Travers becomes a powerful queen who rules the world of feeble men. Thus, the importance of these triangles is not merely to create a romantic atmosphere of love and adventure but also to change a woman's role in male-female relationships.

Generally, there is not so much of ironical attitude to women in this novel as it is in *Chance* and *Victory*. However, ironic tone can still be disclosed in the description of some minor male

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<sup>111</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Rescue: A Romance on the Shallows* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950) 15.

<sup>112</sup> Kaplan, 268.

characters like Captain Lingard's second mate, Mr Shaw, who is a pathetic and ludicrous caricature of an improper seaman. His character replicates Conrad's male figures from previous novels. He belongs to the early period of writing. Hence, it is not surprising that Mr Shaw appears only in the first half of the narrative, which is devoted mainly to Captain Lingard, while in the second one, which centres on Mrs Travers, there is no sign of him. There is one more character in *The Rescue* that displays somewhat ironic examination of other characters including Mrs Travers. This is Mr D'Alcacer who strongly resembles Marlow with his general comments and love for observation. Initially, his character is not very prominent, though already in the beginning we learn that his main occupation is observation of Mrs Travers and exploration of her nature. He is curiously watching the first meeting of Edith and exotic princess Immada noticing "that of all the women he knew, she [Mrs Travers] alone seemed to be made for action."<sup>113</sup> Moreover, D'Alcacer identifies Tom Lingard as "a knight"<sup>114</sup> who is going to win a kingdom for his princess. Thus he echoes Marlow who calls Captain Anthony a knight and Flora a damsel in distress. Similarly to Marlow, D'Alcacer contemplates about women:

Women worthy of the name were like that. They were wonderful. They rose to the occasion and sometimes above occasion when things were bound to occur that would be comic or tragic (as it happened) but generally charged with trouble even to innocent beholders.<sup>115</sup>

In the second half of the novel his character is more distinct. He becomes involved into the story and into Lingard and Edith's relationship in particular. Resembling Marlow D'Alcacer becomes the observer and simultaneously the participant of the story. Therefore, the fact that Marlow-like character is present in *The Rescue* proves that Conrad's genius was by no means perishing when he wrote his last works as Hewitt argued. On the contrary, it was flourishing in a new thematic field.

Similar to *Victory*, *The Rescue* is a third-person narration. In *Victory*, however, the narrator appears in the beginning of the novel as an unknown character and a first-person narrator before he transforms into a third-person narrator. In contrast, the narration in *The Rescue* is more straightforward. We are offered an external view of events with the narrator's occasional entering the minds of the characters. Thus, Conrad continues employing his

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<sup>113</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 121.

<sup>114</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 123.

<sup>115</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 256.



favourite method of multiple perspectives. It mainly concerns two main protagonists, Captain Lingard and Mrs Travers. Especially the latter one is often seen from the viewpoints of different men and one woman. For Lingard she is a goddess. Immada sees her as a witch. D'Alcacer observes in her "the prey of dreams"<sup>116</sup>. Finally, her husband considers her beautiful and mad. These different views of the woman show the way Conrad works with visual images.<sup>117</sup> If in *Chance* and *Victory* these various viewpoints demonstrate the reason why heroines are usually misinterpreted by other characters in *The Rescue* it shows the power of a moment on human consciousness. For instance, this is the scene when D'Alcacer overwhelmed by Mrs Travers' appearance declares that she has "the awfulness of the predestined"<sup>118</sup>:

Mrs Travers made a slight movement in her chair, raising her hands to her head, and in the dim light of the lanterns D'Alcacer saw the mass of her clear gleaming hair fall down and spread itself over her shoulders. She seized half of it her hands which looked very white, and with her head inclined a little on one side she began to make a plait.<sup>119</sup>

More than any other novel, *The Rescue* is rich with beautiful and powerful imagery revealing Conrad's poetic voice.

Apart from the means of visualisation he continues to explore drama technique in the narrative. The action never takes place directly in it. For the most part, it is simply discussed by characters. Ironically, all fights happen faraway from Captain Lingard, a knight and a warrior. All the active events like conflicts between the tribes, Mr Carter's attack at savages and even the death of Hassim and Immada are usually told by someone or written in a letter. With the exception of the moments when narration moves into character's minds, the story is presented in dialogues. For instance, the scene of great intimacy and emotions between Mrs Travers and Lingard happens near the Cage where her husband and d'Alcacer are kept. The description of the end of their conversation illustrates Conrad's use of a dramatic scene:

A bitter little laugh floated out into the starlight. Mrs Travers heard Lingard move suddenly away from her side. She didn't change her pose by a hair's breadth. Presently she heard d'Alcacer coming out of the cage. His cultivated voice asked half playfully:

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<sup>116</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 260.

<sup>117</sup> Jones, 190.

<sup>118</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 260.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

“Have you been had a satisfactory conversation? May I be told something of it?” [They exchange several unimportant phrases.] “Nothing of importance,” he said, courteously. Mrs Travers moved forward and he stepped to one side. Inside the Cage two Malay hands were hanging round lanterns, the light of which fell on Mr Travers’ bowed head as he sat in his chair.<sup>120</sup>

The theatrical effect is likewise is strengthened by the limited number of participants in every scene and by the language some characters use. There are usually no more than five characters presented in the scene while the crowd is introduced as distant voices and murmurs. Likewise, the language of savages is exaggeratedly theatrical: “Thy fear is as vain tonight as it was at sunrise. He shall not perish alone.”<sup>121</sup> Drama dialogues are mainly used for intimate scenes between Lingard and Mrs Travers. On the one hand, this device makes them ambiguous. In particular, when dialogues are abrupt and fragmentary real feelings are more implied than stated. On the other hand, it ironically creates an effect of artificiality of the whole situation. In other words, it intensifies the parallel between the story and a vision. As it will be argued later in the chapter, there are two parallel dreams happening in the narrative. The first one belongs to Tom Lingard whereas the second one is created by Mrs Travers’s imagination.

*The Rescue* is thematically divided into two main parts. The second half of the narrative suddenly shifts attention from Lingard to Mrs Travers. He is no longer the centre of events. Now all the light of the stage is directed on Edith. Likewise, all happening is seen from her perspective. There might be two possible reasons for this sudden change in the narrative. On the one hand, we may think that Conrad intentionally uses this technique as he did in *Victory* where the focus moves from Heyst to Lena in order to move power from a man to a woman. On the other hand, he wrote the second half of this novel more than twenty years after he had finished the first part. In this respect, this sudden shift may only mark the border between his old and his new writing. Nevertheless, it does not matter whether this change is conscious or unintentional. The fact that at this point the woman becomes the focus of his narrative supports the thesis of the present work. It proves that women became Conrad’s main concern in his late novels.

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<sup>120</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 254.

<sup>121</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 195.

Mrs Travers differs from all Conrad's previous two female characters. Obviously, she is nothing like Flora who is a young and inexperienced daughter of a prisoner. Likewise, Mrs Travers is different from Lena who is a lower-class child with life full of misery and injustice. She is superior to Mrs Travers in her self-awareness, femininity and emotionality. Moreover, Edith resembles Lena when she is ready to die to save Lingard and his soul. Whereas Flora's story is the one of maturity and self-assertion, Lena's is the myth of redemption, Mrs Travers's story is a vision of awakening. Therefore, this is a new type of a heroine. She is a married middle-aged woman. She leads an untroubled life of an upper-class lady. However, her marriage is false, her society is superficial and she is immensely "bored"<sup>122</sup> by observing it:

[...] I have been living since my childhood in front of a show and that I never have been taken in for a moment by its tinsel and its noise or by anything that went on on the stage.<sup>123</sup>

Similar to Heyst she is merely a critical observer to life and people around her. Both of them are sceptical and detached. This parallel is intensified by Lingard's incapability to understand what Edith means by this statement. Likewise, Lena fails to comprehend Heyst's weary philosophy. Moreover, there is social difference between both couples. Heyst and Lena are representatives of different social classes. Similarly, Mrs Travers belongs to the upper-class while Lingard is a lower-class man whose memories are "poverty" and "hard work".<sup>124</sup> The social divergence is one of the reasons of their mutual misunderstanding and eventual failure of their relationships.

The problem of the previous critical analysis of Mrs Travers is that she has been examined in relation to the main male protagonist. In this respect, she is observed as an evil woman who prevents heroic Captain Lingard from performing the act of honour. She is that obstructive factor that makes the man weak and passive. Nonetheless, if we consider Mrs Travers as an independent female character, especially as she is represented in the second half of the novel, than we will see a modern type of a female character comparable to Virginia Woolf's and other modernists' heroines. This is what her husband states about her personality:

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<sup>122</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 224.

<sup>123</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 252.

<sup>124</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 184.

It's my belief, Edith, that if you had been a man you would have led a most irregular life. You would have been a frank adventurer. I mean morally. It has been a great grief to me. You have a scorn in you for the serious side of life, for the ideas and the ambitions of the social sphere to which you belong.<sup>125</sup>

As a matter of fact, the whole story of Mrs Travers's relationship with Captain Lingard is her fantasy, which she generates in her mind during her long walks on the beach of an exotic island. Her situation resembles E. M. Forester's main heroine Adela who being impressed by the mystery of caves and fantastic stories about India has a hallucination of being raped by an Indian man. Likewise, Mrs Travers creates her dream of an exotic adventure provoked by her strong imagination, by incredible tales she heard about this exotic land and by the power of the moment:

As a young girl, often reproved for her romantic ideas, she had dreams where the sincerity of a great passion appeared like the ideal fulfilment and the only truth of life. Entering the world she discovered that ideal to be unattainable because the world is too prudent to be sincere.<sup>126</sup>

Certainly, it is not stated directly in the narrative that she is experiencing a dream. However, the references to a dream-like quality of the happening are present nearly on every page: "She had vanished utterly like dream; and the occurrences of the last twenty-four hours seemed also to be a part of a vanished dream."<sup>127</sup> All characters constantly ask themselves whether they are in a dream or in a real situation. Having met Captain Lingard and his exotic royal friends Mrs Travers's imagination produces the dream:

Her thoughts, like a fascinated moth, went fluttering toward that light – that man – that girl, who had known war, danger, seen death near, had obtained evidently the devotion of that man. The occurrences of the afternoon had been strange in themselves, but what struck her artistic sense was the vigour of their presentation. They outlined themselves before her memory with the clear simplicity of some immortal legend.<sup>128</sup>

"Her artistic sense" is the most significant element for understanding the heroine. At this point Conrad's drama interlaces with Mrs Travers's drama. That is to say, her dream is her

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<sup>125</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 223.

<sup>126</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 130.

<sup>127</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 175.

<sup>128</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 131.

own oriental play or an “opera”<sup>129</sup> as she calls it, where she is the main heroine. In this dream or “a show fit to make an audience hold its breath”<sup>130</sup> Mrs Travers is a queen. She is the centre of all events. She is powerful and active. Furthermore, the association with theatre is strengthened by the description of her dress. One of the most prominent symbols of the second half of novel is her Oriental clothes: “a blue check *sargon* embroidered with threads of gold”<sup>131</sup>, “wide white scarf of white silk embroidered heavily”<sup>132</sup>, “Malay’s woman’s light cotton coat with jewelled clasps”<sup>133</sup> and “a pair of leather sandals”<sup>134</sup>. She changes her European plain and strict dress to this rich Oriental clothing which implies several meanings. First, this dress seems to reflect a European idea about distant mysterious countries, which is often revealed in theatrical costumes for exotic characters on European stages. It supports the notion that this is a play which Mrs Travers creates in her mind. Secondly, her dress becomes a symbol of her liberation from the conventions of her society.

In the scene between Mrs Travers and her husband arguing about her look Conrad demonstrates a restricted position of a woman in Victorian society. It is remarkable that Mr Travers ignores the fact of growing affection between his wife and Captain Lingard. His major concern is her inappropriate behaviour and a shocking dress. The dress is indecent and vulgar for him for the reason that it displays some parts of her body which is absolutely against the norms of their society. His discontent is mainly provoked by Mrs Travers’s appearance which proves that women are considered only as the objects of seeing. An inner life of his wife and a miserable state of their marriage has no importance to him as long as they preserve their social image. In Mrs Travers’s dream this position is changed. She can openly confront her husband and even ridicule his beliefs:

[...] and then caught the direction of his lurid stare which as the matter of fact was fastened on her bare feet. She checked herself, “Oh, yes, if you prefer I will put on my stockings. But you know I must be very careful of them. It’s only one pair I have here. I have washed them this morning [...]. They are now drying over the rail just outside. Perhaps you will be good enough to pass them to me when you go on deck.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 248.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 220.

<sup>132</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 238.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 235.

<sup>135</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 229.

The narrative method of the novel allows the writer to create two levels of the narration. The first one is realistic which depicts the meeting of Mr Travers's yacht with Lingard's brig. Here Mrs Travers is a proper wife of her husband. She is passive and silent while Mr Travers has an argument with Captain Lingard. Both men are authoritative and determined. Their confrontation is a clash of different social classes, Mr Travers's upper class and Lingard's lower class. The second level is fantastic. It is presented by Mrs Travers's dream. At this point the roles within the triangle are reversed. Each member of this bond acquires precisely opposite qualities. Mrs Travers becomes energetic and resolute while her husband develops into a weak, ill and nearly mad man. Moreover, in this dream he is turned into an object of negotiation between Lingard and the savages. His main role in this part of the novel is being a voice which occasionally reminds everyone that all events are absurd and that it is merely his wife's dream.

Nonetheless, the main hero of Mrs Travers's dream-like play is Captain Lingard whom she likewise perceives as a performer in the happening: "It occurred to her that she had never heard a voice she liked so well – except one. But that had been a great actor's voice [...]"<sup>136</sup> The paradox of their situation is that each of them lives in their own dream. Mrs Travers experiences hallucination about love and an adventure whereas Lingard lives in the illusion that he will fight for some unknown kingdom. Thus, when these dreams meet they destroy each other. As a result, characters are brought back to reality. Lingard's dream is devastated by the power of fire thus echoing purifying power of fire in *Victory*. The explosion of his second ship with Rajah Hassim and Lady Immada on board is the symbol of his awakening from the realm of dreams.

Don't disturb me, Mr D'Alcacer. I have just come back to life and it has close on me colder and darker than the grave itself. Let me get used... I can't bear the sound of a human voice yet.<sup>137</sup>

Mrs Travers's dream ends when she walks alone on the beach leaving the "man of infinite illusions" to sit on Jaffir's grave. For both of them this grave symbolises the crash of dreams and illusions. In regard to the genre of romance, the ending is inappropriate. Love story is unsuccessful and there is no happy ending. Both the man and the woman are disappointed in

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<sup>136</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 342.

<sup>137</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 363.

each other. They move in opposite directions. She goes away to the “south”<sup>138</sup> while he moves to the “north”<sup>139</sup>. Nevertheless, if we consider this novel to be a story of human self-isolation rather than merely a romance, then the end is effective. Captain Lingard leaves the circle of the islands where he was lost and begins his travel into the real world. Likewise, Mrs Travers is emotionally awakened from her dream most probably provoked by her fondness to sentimental and romantic literature, theatres and operas. For the first time she is crying at the very end of the novel which brings her back to real life.

Therefore, it is not romance that Conrad created in *The Rescue* but the drama of disillusionment. Both Lingard and Mrs Travers are isolated in the world of their dreams before they meet each other. In fact, their relationship is not a love affair between a married woman and a romantic captain. This is a tragedy of human existence. Lingard lives in his dreams about great heroic deeds that will bring him more honour and respect. Mrs Travers, on the other hand, exists in her illusion of an ideal man and an idyllic relationship. Their idealistic dreams are caused by the misleading concepts of masculinity and femininity which originate in myths and legends and from century to century being reproduced in literature. As a result, Mrs Travers is incapable to deal with a real life and her marriage. Having not found reflection of her dreams in reality she becomes disappointed and isolated from society. Lingard likewise becomes a “king Tom” in his false reality while attempting to escape from the real world where he is nothing. Thus, on the example of Mrs Travers and Lingard Conrad demonstrates the influence of these deceptive models on human consciousness and correspondingly on inter-human relations. Furthermore, the structure of the novel mirrors the internal conflict of the woman between what is displayed and what is concealed. The realistic level reflects Mrs Travers external appearance and her social behaviour. The fantastic level, on the other hand, shows her inner world, her dreams and her longings. Once again Conrad proves that the two-dimensional superficial presentation of women is unsatisfactory for the new century. He demonstrates that a rich and beautiful world is hidden behind this social mask. It only waits to be revealed. In fact, it will be discovered by the next generation of writers in the twentieth century.

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<sup>138</sup> Conrad, *The Rescue*, 382.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The aim of the present thesis was to determine the role and significance of Joseph Conrad's female characters on the basis of his three late novels: *Chance*, *Victory* and *The Rescue*. By analysing critical approaches to studying Conrad's heroines we demonstrated that the issue of gender in his writing is a relatively recent subject matter. In other words, it is only a short time ago that women in Conrad's novels became central for his scholars. For most critics of the twentieth century Conrad was the author who magnificently explored the nature of masculinity and the influence of evil on human consciousness. Female characters in his novels, on the other hand, remained for them an uninspiring and predictable field of study. They were observed as typical examples of Conrad's romantic ideas about women and his complete ignorance in the given matter. Contemporary critics challenged this notion and opened a new area for discussion. Therefore, in the present work, we attempted to support the recent suggestion that Conrad was interested in a woman's question throughout his life and especially in his late period of the literary career. Moreover, we demonstrated that in his late novels he thoroughly explored the conventional presentation of women in fiction.

First of all, three selected novels were analysed in terms of their forms and structures in order to determine the position of female characters in them. The structural analysis demonstrated that Conrad's late heroines acquire the central position in the narratives even if it is not palpable in the beginning. For instance, though being initially marginalised Lena and Mrs Travers become the focus of the novel in the process of narration. Thus, we proved that Conrad was equally interested in studying male and female characters. Furthermore, the examination of the forms showed that Conrad experimented with the genre of romance in all three books. This genre proved to be the most popular form for presenting women in literature. Likewise, it was very successful among female readers. Nevertheless, Conrad's exploration of romance is not merely a considerate use of the most widespread genre with the intention to enlarge his readership but also a profound re-evaluation of the form as such. In all three novels the writer studied the development of the genre from the Middle Ages to the end of the Victorian era. Simultaneously, he showed the progress in portraying of women throughout the centuries. Conrad's novels followed and yet ironised many of the literary conventions. The reference to chivalrous romances, for example, is used for exploring origins of the genre and of idealised images of women. However, if mediaeval motifs are only ironically inverted in the narratives Victorian models, on the contrary, are displayed as absolutely absurd and disappointing. Thus, he confirmed that although romance significantly



developed from the Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century its structure remained limited for an adequate portrayal of a woman.

In the same way as Conrad subverted traditional forms of depicting women, with the help of multiple perspectives he created stereotypical portraits of ideal romantic heroines and then skilfully transformed them into modern self-reflecting female characters. In *Chance*, for instance, numerous narrators construct a conventional image of Flora as a poor and an innocent victim. However, none of the presented views are adequate in their description of the girl. All the traditional roles given to her are immediately diminished and ridiculed. Thus Flora represents a new type of an independent woman who is searching for her female self and for her position in life. Likewise, in *Victory* various men project on Lena two most influential and contradicting attitudes to women originated in the Christian mythology and developed in literature and art. The woman is viewed as either an innocent pure soul or as a sinful temptress; she is either a virgin or a fallen woman. Lena destroys both extremes revealing that she can be more than just a respectful lady or a disgraceful woman. She becomes a symbol of a woman's internal power. Finally, Mrs Travers reflects the effect of conventional models of womanhood on female consciousness. The conflict between her external appearance and her inner self produces a dangerous illusion in which she assumes it is possible to escape social restrictions and open her individuality. Hence, in his late novels, Conrad revised traditional literary ideals of women and suggested new models for exploration in the modern age. Therefore, Conrad's late novels are not signs of his decline but evidence of his interest in a woman's changing social role and its subsequent reflection in fiction.

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