

From Incapable "Angel in the House" to Invincible "New Woman" in Marlovian Narratives: Representing Womanhood in "Heart of Darkness" and *Chance*

Pei-Wen Clio Kao

National Chengchi University

WHEN ADDRESSING ISSUES of the Modernist arts and literature in the face of the "machismo aesthetics" of the male modernists, feminist critics choose to turn their attention to things "associated with the feminine" that have long been excluded or ignored by male critics (Felski 1995: 24). According to Rita Felski, modernity as a concept denotes the public sphere dominated by male-centered institutions, and enacts a rigid hierarchical distinction between the public sphere (masculinity) and private sphere (femininity), which distinguishes the male mastery of a "experimental, self-conscious, and ironic aesthetic" from the female indulgence in the "seductive lures of emotion, desire, and the body" (24). To dismantle the phallogocentric fixity of gender hierarchy, Felski encourages a "revisionist readings of the male modernist canon" on the part of feminist critics to cast new light on the importance of female experiences as well as women's modernity (24). Inspired by my predecessors' efforts to illuminate images of the feminine and to release the voices of female characters repressed by traditional scholarship concerning modernist literary text, this paper will re-read Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1899) and *Chance* (1914), focussing on the different representations of womanhood filtered through the eyes of the serial male narrator Charlie Marlow. Motivated by the feminist objective to restore the importance of the trivial, the everyday, and the mundane in the experiences of women (Felski 1995: 28), I shall present a critical perspective in which the representation of women and the feminine are fully explored and addressed, through the lens of female sensibility and sensitivity as well. As Nadelhaft has put it, "a feminist reading of Joseph Conrad is designed in large part to reclaim Conrad for women readers for whom he has been almost a clandestine pleasure, in the face of the male critical hierarchy and feminist

disapproval" (1991: 1) so that the pleasures for women readers of Conrad's works can be best enjoyed and savored from the new critical perspective of feminism.

Many critics of *Chance* have commented on the complex discussions of gender at work in the novel.¹ By comparing the representation of the female protagonist in this novel with Conrad's earlier evocation of the "Intended" in "Heart of Darkness," this essay explores the development of Conrad's response to contemporary literary tropes from that of the "Angel in the House" to the "New Woman." I shall argue that while the "Intended" belongs to the category implied by Coventry Patmore's famous poem, Flora de Barral in part sheds the patriarchal assumptions of the Victorian "Angel" and emerges with an identity more closely conforming to the ideals of the "New Woman." Nevertheless, a comparison of the two female images proves that their construction goes beyond the simplistic polar division of patriarchal passivity/feminist independence, which in turn demonstrates Conrad's insight into the complexity as well as profundity of womanhood.

The Construction of the Intended as "Angel in the House" in "Heart of Darkness"²

In her classic essay on the mechanism of gender and imperialist ideologies operated in "Heart of Darkness," Johanna Smith points out that Marlow's misogynistic vision of womanhood as an innocent and

¹ For example, Paul Armstrong questions the origins of the misogynistic claims and asks if they are "merely the dramatized opinions of a character" or "the author share[s] them" (1993: 151); while Gail Fraser contrasts the positive characterization of Flora with the portrayal of the feminist Mrs Fyne: by virtue of the "feminine/feminist dichotomy in *Chance*" the "femininity, a privilege" is designed to set a stark contrast to the "feminism, an attitude" and show Flora's romantic affair endowed with an "natural feelings" as an "inherent moral validity" (1992: 83).

² Much criticism of "Heart of Darkness" focuses on its biased representations of gender and race, denouncing the phallogocentric as well as Eurocentric ideology of the white male narrator/author. See Bette London (1989) to whom Africa is "a place of negations" with "its construction of the feminine as the foil to masculinity" (239); Nina Pelikan Straus (1987); Zohreh Sullivan (1989); Padmini Mongia (1993); and, for a radical feminist reading of the last drawing-room scene, Rita Bode (1994).

naïve being – dubbed as “angel in the house” – was shared by his Victorian contemporaries. The ideal Victorian woman is a figure needing to be protected and enshrined within the domestic sphere; the outside world of imperialist adventures is too harsh for her to survive and to understand. Smith spells out the psychological mechanism for the Victorian construction of the separate spheres which underlies Marlow’s discourse of womanhood. The ideology of the separate spheres is constructed to strengthen the workings of “masculine imperialism” that is safely distanced from the private sphere “too beautiful altogether”; in other words, the “the feminine sphere of ‘idea’ will prevent the masculine sphere of ‘fact’ from deteriorating” (1996: 180). In particular, Smith contends that Marlow finds in the characterization of the Intended the male projection of the sanctified motherhood, of the redeeming ideals of imperialism, which is in a way a fulfilment of Marlow’s “idolization” of imperialist ideology.

The widespread ideal image of “Angel in the House” was introduced in Coventry Patmore’s famous “domestic epic” *The Angel in the House* (1845–62), that celebrated the Christian moral and spiritual superiority of women who dominate the private sphere of “home” as opposed to the public sphere of the capitalist society ruled by men (Hogan and Bradstock 1998: 1). Similarly, John Ruskin’s essay “Of Queen’s Gardens” identifies exemplary ideology for Victorian womanhood that adheres to the philosophy of “separate spheres” in defining gender roles. Notwithstanding their apparent patriarchal ideology that confines women to the private sphere of the bourgeois middle-class home, both Patmore’s and Ruskin’s works betray ambiguous and self-contradictory connotations that may serve to disrupt the rigid ideology they appear to advocate. For example, the popular image of “Angel in the House” prompted by Patmore’s poem is not only confining and debilitating, as Virginia Woolf and a series of subsequent critics have argued, but is also to some extent “challenging” or “emancipating” as its impact on the “religious women” dedicating their works outside the confines of family to reach the world and the society has proved (1). On the other hand, although Ruskin insists that “woman’s true place and power” lies in home, he concedes that men exposed in the outer world are “wounded, or subdued; often misled” (2004: 159). This emphasis on women’s “power” and men’s vulnerability confirms the female niche in the role of a strong maternal figure, whose merits even exceed those of the male

counterparts in protecting the household.³ Despite his praise for essential qualities such as female chastity and her contribution to the family life, Ruskin does not negate the “changeable” nature of womanhood that shines as “variable as the light, manifold in fair and serene division” (159). This admission of the “changeableness” of womanhood indeed sheds light on its complexity that defies any fixed as well as imposed definition of a fragile and submissive “Angel in the House” without any other possibilities of self-development and self-transformation.

Various critics have seen in the Intended an image of the “Angel in the House.” To Hyland, for example, she “exists only as she is perceived by him [Marlow], as the good little Victorian woman” (1988: 10).⁴ I suggest that Marlow’s retrospective representation of his encounter with the Intended is fraught with ironic tones and dark visions. While the Intended is totally immersed in her mourning and glorifying of Kurtz’s past feats, Marlow is uneasy with the “darkness” enveloping their surroundings: “But with every word spoken the room was growing darker and only her forehead smooth and white remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love” (“Heart of Darkness” 123). This sentence shows Marlow’s innuendo against the patriarchal grip on Victorian womanhood, which had been cultivated to subordinate to a male-centred world. The “dark shade” penetrating the room is the “dark vision” of Victorian patriarchal ideology. Marlow’s skepticism concerns the dark underside of Victorian patriarchal power; he is revealing his position in the role of an interrogator instead of a conspirator. Hearing the Intended’s “low voice” now accompanied by the “whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness” Marlow remarked he could only “[bow] my head before ... that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her – from which I could not even defend myself” (124). This “triumphant

³ Within the ideology of separate spheres feminine domesticity becomes the indispensable base upon which the masculine adventure and business is founded. According to Susan Kent the nineteenth-century “Angel in the House” boasts an image of the “perfect wife and mother” to “provide a haven of peace and security, a repository of moral values” that illuminates the life of the male figures in an “industrial society” crushed by the “hardships of modern life” (1999: 154).

⁴ To Watt, Victorian ideology leaves her no option but to “[inhabit] an unreal world” (1979: 244).

darkness" is the debilitating evil power of patriarchy and imperialism, the dominant ideologies of which Marlow admits his failure to protect the Intended, and even to "defend myself."

The representation of female images in "Heart of Darkness" presents a stark contrast between the Intended who is associated with "sterile" life-in-death and Kurtz's African mistress who embodies the "passionate and fecund" life-force (Hawthorn 1992: 186). This contrasting imagery is symbolic of the difference between sterile "European idealism" and the "concentrated life" of the colonial land when untapped by imperialism (186). However, this diversity of the two women and the worlds they represent actually bears a "tragic" resemblance in Marlow's interview with the Intended that links her to a "tragic and familiar Shade ... stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness" ("Heart of Darkness" 125). Both women are abandoned by Kurtz and both are victims of the patriarchal ideology buttressing European imperialism. According to Jeremy Hawthorn, enshrining and isolating a woman in the ideal domestic sanctuary is as harmful as treating her "purely as the recipient of passion" (1992: 189). The juxtaposition of the two "stereotypes" of womanhood is designed to expose the "dehumanizing" effect of patriarchal ideology that divides woman into the extremes of "spirit and body" and deprives her of "full humanity that requires possession of both" (186). As for the idealism embodied in the Intended, it is "weak, unhealthy and corrupted," serving to reveal Marlow's criticism of imperialist and patriarchal ideologies (185). Instead of justifying the cause of imperialism as its "saving ideas," the idealism espoused by the diseased and sterile Intended becomes "disembodied idealism," merely high-sounding but insubstantial rhetoric "far from preserving the good, [which] may actually foster the bad" (185).

Marlow's lie to the Intended does not bring down the heavens in the end, which image is a parody of the apocalyptic tone of the imperialist rhetoric and patriarchal morals. Marlow whispers to himself: "It seemed to me the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle" while he was thinking Kurtz's deeds and intentions "too dark altogether" to tell the truth to the Intended (126). The apocalyptic tone is undermined here in Marlow's fantasy. It does not reveal any coming of patriarchal enlightenment or imperialist civilization. On the contrary, it turns out to be nothingness, an imposed blankness on the minds of the colonized and marginalized other – in this case the

female characters in the novel. Marlow's attempt to protect the Intended from the harsh and sordid truth about colonial enterprise and patriarchal manipulation couldn't resist the "too dark" power of the coupled authorities. It is too much for the Intended who Marlow futilely attempts to protect in the name of a paternalist knight. Marlow's awareness of the yoking of the two dominant ideologies that is "too dark altogether" in fact contributes to the destabilizing of patriarchal power rather than its flourishing. In his deconstructive reading of the novella as an "apocalyptic text," J. Hillis Miller's insight of the collapse of Western civilization and male enlightenment culture lends support to my interpretation of Marlow's anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal position in this final passage, despite of the fact we bear different agenda in mind. Miller contends that, in "Heart of Darkness," Conrad proclaims the end of Western civilization at large through an attitude of ironic distance endowed by the form of apocalypse: the novella in its apocalyptic touch demonstrates that "Western civilization," or "Western imperialism," is "hollow at the core" and the "conquest means the end of brutes" as well as "the end of Western civilization" (1996: 218).

Marlow's return to Europe offers insight into how his African journey has "enlightened" him. Back in the "sepulchral city" he feels intense revulsion towards the people on the streets for their arrogant confidence of white superiority and its commercial civilization: he is repulsed by "the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams" ("Heart of Darkness" 119). The life of these European citizens now seems an "irritating pretence" to Marlow after his experience of the brute realities of colonialism in Africa. Similar to the naïve Intended, who is the victim of patriarchal and imperialist ideologies, these ignorant Europeans are also victims of the imperialist ideology of "civilizing mission": blinded by their illusory superiority over the colonized people and ignorant of the horrors carried out in their name, they are incapable of self-knowledge and critical reflections. While Marlow resents the Intended's indiscriminating acceptance of imperial and patriarchal ideologies, and feels helpless towards her vulnerability to the dark side of these ideologies, he is impatient with European citizens generally: "I had no particular desire to *enlighten* them but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance" (242; emphasis added).

Ruth Nadelhaft encourages the feminist reader to maintain a critical distance in reading the novella in order to “[defy] the invitation of the narrative to disparage the Intended along with Marlow” (1991: 49). For Nadelhaft, Marlow’s lie has exposed the suffering of those “Angels in the House,” whose ensconced confinement in the “drawing room” is actually an accusation of the “entire imperial edifice” that impels them to “[suffer] at the hands of the agent of colonisation” (50). In a parallel fashion, Hawthorn’s aforementioned argument also confirms Marlow’s role as the “investigator” of the underlying imperialist as well as patriarchal ideologies that reduce women to the stereotyped roles either of “Angel in the House” or of the passionate dark lady.

Flora de Barral as the Real “New Woman” in *Chance*

The publication of *Chance* in 1914 signalled Conrad’s concern with the contextual background of “New Woman” issues and his sympathy with the political struggle of women. Fredrick R. Karl contends that “[r]ather than calling him a misogynist in this period, that is, by transforming Marlow’s statements to him, we find Conrad trying to reflect sympathetically the current conflicts of women, who were then so much in the news as they sought the vote just before the war” (1979: 743). The “New Woman” was the phenomenon of the *fin de siècle*, and the high-water mark of New Woman novel of 1894-95 had a huge impact on suffrage movement and local government.⁵ The social ambiance in Britain from 1908 to 1918 came to support women’s suffrage and to challenge “the ideology of separate spheres” that had established the firm distinctions between masculinity and femininity, and male and female, in “liberal practice” (Kent 1999: 262). The phrase “the new woman” first appeared in Sarah Grand’s 1894 article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” published in the *North American Review* to address what was wrong with the thinking behind “Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere” (Nelson 2001: ix). The stereotype of the “New Woman” was soon circulating around England: a female subject, educated at Girton College, Cambridge, riding a bicycle and smoking in public, subverting traditional definitions of womanhood and fights for the “emancipation” of women (ix). Variations on this theme could be glimpsed in novels like Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* (1898) and *The*

⁵ See Marshall (2007): 1-12.

Heavenly Twins (1893), and Iota's *A Yellow Aster* (1894). Most of the New Woman fiction was written by women, but there were still a number of male writers in this field, including Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and George Bernard Shaw (Nelson 2001: xii). Indeed, it was Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1889) that introduced the striking image of a heroine that influenced later-day representation of the New Woman, featuring a strong-minded woman who revolts against traditional ideology and strives for educational, economic, as well as political freedom. Flora's self-image as the "adventuress" who experiences and undergoes a lot both in the private sphere of home(lessness) and public sphere of the maritime domain demonstrates Conrad's sensibility toward the ideology of separate spheres and his tendency to challenge the idea of fixed spheres. Besides, Flora's rebellion or defiance against her father also says much about the spirit of the New Woman as a daughter in a struggle with the Victorian Patriarch. In Marlow's narrative the heroine looms as a fragile character seemingly cast as the "Angel in the House" who eventually proves to be a developing, enduring, stoic New Woman, in contrast to not only the ideal feminine role represented by the Intended but also the fierce feminist figure set in the image of Mrs Fyne.

According to Jeremy Hawthorn, *Chance* not only contains "anti-feminist elements" but also contains "an attack on myths concerning 'The Angel in the House'" (1992: 135). Susan Jones also argues that Conrad's ironic comments in *Chance* are levelled at "both patriarchal and feminist positions" (1999: 110). The narrative voices of both Marlow and the young Powell are sympathetic to the enduring and growing figure of the feminine Flora, a sign that indicates the author's sensitivity to the temperamental femininity of womanhood. Conrad's portrayal of Carleon Anthony is based on the image of the Victorian Patriarch, whose view of women is grounded on the image of "The Angel in the House" that entails his practice of "domestic tyrannizing of wife and children" (Hawthorn 1992: 135). Laurence Davies calls Carleon Anthony and Flora's father, Mr de Barral, the "deadly patriarchs," the "Kurtzians" who are "devotees of selfishness and imposture" (1993: 80). In Marlow himself and in the negative representation of the patriarchal figures generally, *Chance* offers "a rewriting of 'Heart of Darkness'" (80). In fact, Conrad's view of the complexity of womanhood does not stop with an attack of patriarchal ideology, rather he reveals his concerns through the seemingly anti-feminist and misogynistic Marlow: "A woman is not necessarily either a doll or an angel to me. She is a human being, very much like myself" (*Chance* 53). Through Marlow's words, we are to see

how the heroine Flora departs from the Victorian stereotype of “angel” or “doll,” and in the course of Marlow’s narrative how she develops into a mature New Woman. Jones reminds the reader of the elusiveness and in-determinacy of the character as well as the consciousness of Flora, totally beyond the comprehension of the male narrator’s attempting to grasp and understand her: “Her actuality, her presence, is always in question, she seems always ‘about to become’ ... rather than ‘being’” (1999: 105). It is Flora’s status of “becoming” rather than that of “being” that defines the complexity and depth of her womanhood in contrast to the patriarchal stereotypes imposed by the contemporary culture.

Over the course of Marlow’s narrative the psychological development and mental maturing of the heroine bespeaks her independent status as an individual subject rather than a victimized object. Instead of representing the passivity which Marlow attributes to womanhood – “a woman’s part is passive, say what you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom, of courage” (*Chance* 281) – Flora’s behaviour typifies the active energy of an independent “New Woman” of her day. From girlhood, she displays bold and daring conduct, as well as independent and indomitable mind, to defend her father, to challenge the cruel world: her letter to the Fynes “seemed to have a challenging tone – as if daring them (the Fynes) to approve her conduct. And at the same time implying that she did not care, that it was for their own sakes that she hoped they would ‘go against the world – the horrid world which had crushed poor papa’” (197). Flora’s decision to elope with Captain Anthony in the first place, in disregard of the objection of the Fynes, shows her strong mind as an independent new woman. She also provides spiritual as well as physical havens for the three important male figures in her life, Roderick Anthony, young Powell, and de Barral. She lends marital stability to the seafaring Captain Anthony; she nurtures the romantic sensibility and friendliness in the mind of the young Powell; and she promises her father a physical harbour after he has been released and lost everything. These are the behaviour of a protective rather than a submissive daughter. Especially in the final scene of Part Two, where she has another interview with Marlow, the reader is presented with “her passage from muted object to speaking subject” as a rewriting of the interview scene in “Heart of Darkness”: “Flora in effect takes command. It is her novel now and ... her romance. Marlow indeed continues to record what she says, but his presentation does not muffle her voice” (Davies 1993:

89). Here, through Marlow, Flora's voice is heard, the voice of a mature mind in its reflection and meditation upon life's meaning and the significance of her transformation and growth in throes. Flora reminisces on the torrential events of her life that have enriched and completed her whole being:

"I loved and I was loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear. All the world, all life were transformed for me. And how much I have seen! ... Yes, I have known kindness and safety. The most familiar things appeared lighted up with a new light, clothed with a loveliness I have never suspected." (444)

She survives it as a persevering and stoical heroine with strong will and strength: "I am not even sad now. Yes, I have been happy. But I remember also the time when I was unhappy beyond endurance, beyond desperation" (329). Jones suggests that, in *Chance*, Conrad challenges both the generic and gender conventions in the romance novel regarding the formula of reducing womanhood to an objectified victim to be rescued by a male saviour (1999: 102). Indeed, the story of Flora's psychological development undermines the binary structure of knight/damsel and subject/object, and instead presents a heroine offering a harbour to the seafaring and wayfaring male characters.

To consider Marlow's – and, in a way, Conrad's – ambivalent attitude toward womanhood in general and toward Flora in particular, we cannot ignore the fact that "[t]he novel seems in its very structure to exemplify the struggle of women to make their voices heard over, under and around a male discourse determined to give its own shape and meaning to the lives of women subjects" (Nadelhaft 1991: 110). This causes one to contemplate Marlow's role as the embedded narrator and Conrad's use of complex multiple narratives in *Chance*. Hawthorn questions the "contradictory" or "divided" characterization of Marlow in *Chance* and proposes the possibility that it might reflect the author's attitude toward the complicated "role and nature of women" (1992: 153, 154). Jones suggests that Conrad's use of multiple perspectives in the novel is intended ironically, to indicate the inaccuracy of male assumptions about women: multiple perspective and unreliable narration enable the author to establish a critical distance from his own narrative of a stereotyped womanhood "to comment on the social and literary practices which constantly define women in this reductive fashion" (1993: 67). For Andrew Michael Roberts, Marlow's act of narrating enables him to identify with "Flora's psychological trauma as a repeated victim" and go

beyond the misogynistic as well as patriarchal limitations of his own society (1993: 101). In fact, although he occasionally attributes passivity to womanhood, Marlow admits the stoical power of endurance and resilience entertained by the heroine Flora and inherent in all women as well. He says:

“Flora de Barral was not exceptionally intelligent but she was thoroughly feminine. She would be passive ... in the circumstances, where the mere fact of being a woman was enough to give her an occult and supreme significance. And she would be enduring, which is the essence of woman’s visible, tangible power. Of that I was certain. Had she not endured already?” (310)

And he adds with discernible respect: “Flora did not shrink. Women can stand anything” (352). To Nadelhaft, the novel “seems in its very structure to exemplify the struggle of women to make their voices heard” with Flora an admirable heroine “who at first appear[s] a predestined victim but later prove[s] strong” (1991: 110).

Jones also emphasizes Conrad’s appropriation of the Polish literary tradition employed by his early literary mentor Marguerite Poradowska. Conrad transforms the Polish Romantic trope of female self-sacrifice and female dependency into the images of “female heroism” in the story of Flora’s brave growth into mature womanhood and quest for her self-identity (1999: 97-98).⁶ We can discern Flora’s determination to “survive” – one is impressed by the courage and resilience of the suffering-all and weathering-all young woman. Davies affirms that Flora “claims a woman’s place at the centre of what had been in Conrad’s

⁶ Introducing the relationship between Conrad and Poradowska for the collection of their correspondence, John A. Gee and Paul L. Sturm point out how Poradowska’s “kindred soul” had satisfied Conrad’s “imperious hunger” for “intimacy and mutual confidence” (1940: xvi). Although the theme of female self-sacrifice distinguishes Polish romantic tradition, not all the women in the history of Polish Romantic literature are passive and dependent. For example, Adam Mickiewicz’s narrative poem *Grażyna* (1823) characterizes a “heroic woman” who goes to battle for the sake to save her husband, the Lithuanian prince Litawor. This romantic heroine is as active and brave as a valiant knight in her wonderful combination of the roles of “a wife” and “a commander” (Milosz 1969: 214). This image of a romantic heroine may be associated with Conrad’s delineation of Flora, who also combines the traits of the homely wife/daughter and the heroic adventuress.

literary world, a place for men – the space for roving, exploration, freedom” (1993: 88). As Mrs Fyne calls her the “heartless adventuress,” Flora herself consents, “So be it. I have a fine adventure” (444). In the spirit of the contemporary “New Woman,” Flora experiences her adventures and speaks out her story. As Nadelhaft’s affirmation of the heroine once again shows, we can approve that “Flora is a cheerful, hardy, poised and self-reliant young woman filled with a desire to love and to be loved, to experience her own sexuality and capacity for romance” (1991: 110).

Conclusion: A Male Writer’s Feminine Insight

Viewed through the lens of feminist criticism, Conrad’s works display the merits of a male writer ahead of his time, transcending the patriarchal and imperialist ideologies of his adopted country, in particular, and of Western Europe, in general. Conrad’s status as an *émigré* writer makes him stand out from the contemporary male writers in his addressing of the woman issues. The representation of women in Conrad’s fiction owes much of its profundity and uniqueness to the works of the Polish romantics, in particular to the ambivalent attitude toward female self-sacrifice and self-denial in the tradition of Polish romanticism (Jones 1999: 58). This may explain Conrad’s complex and sometimes contradictory representation of womanhood. Thus, while we have a story that acclaims the heroism of Flora who sacrifices for her husband and her father, we also have a tale that questions the naivety of a self-sacrificing fiancée for the sake of her beloved’s ambition shored up by the lies of the ideology of patriarchy and imperialism. Conrad’s art afford insight into the “becoming” of womanhood rather than its “being,” elaborating complexity and indeterminacy of womanhood negated or neglected by contemporary culture: “The ‘interest’ of his tale resides not in Conrad’s ability to show how woman is, but his grasp of how easy, and how erroneous it is to presume to know her” (131). Nadelhaft describes Conrad as a male writer who reflects back on the conventions of his own times through his striking employment of subject and form in his works, a merit strengthened by the fact that “Conrad wrote *through the critical eyes of women characters*” to examine the nature of “imperialism as the culmination of Western culture” (1991: 12; emphasis added).

From my re-reading of “Heart of Darkness” and *Chance* in the critical light of feminist perspective and through the resources of his

biographical background, I would argue that Conrad not only addressed, ethically and humanly, his own times but that he also illuminated times to come. With the literary and moral influences of his mentor Marguerite Poradowska and the literary legacy of Polish Romanticism, Conrad is able to create for his era a complex and profound image of the heroine with a feminine sensibility, and at the same time make a trenchant critique of the dominant patriarchal ideology of that era.

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