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Capturing Experience: Marlow's Narrative about Women in Joseph Conrad's "Lord Jim" and "Chance"

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CAPTURING EXPERIENCE:
MARLOW'S NARRATIVE ABOUT WOMEN IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S
LORD JIM AND CHANCE

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This essay takes up a question which has been a vexing one for critics of Joseph Conrad: his characterization of women. The two novels addressed--Lord Jim (1900), regarded as one of the supreme achievements of Conrad's early years, and Chance (1913), a popular success at the time of its publication but a work thought by many critics to exemplify a waning of Conrad's artistic gift--share two central unifying features which, taken together, provide the point of departure for this study: both novels demonstrate an attempt on Conrad's part to deal with the issue of feminine experience and both are mediated by the male narrator Marlow.

Marlow's problematic representations of Jewel and Flora constitute the focus of this essay. The nature of Marlow's interactions with Jewel and Flora and the relationship between his observations about women and the actions taken by the women themselves are closely examined. Marlow's attitudes towards women, as they have developed from Lord Jim to Chance (and with reference also to Heart of Darkness), are also explored for continuities and discontinuities. Marlow's limitations as a narrator and as an observer of women, it becomes clear, need not prevent us from seeing the active roles taken by both Jewel and Flora, an issue not adequately emphasized hitherto in Conrad criticism.

Both Flora and Jewel are endowed by Conrad with courage and strength of character consistently devalued or obscured by Marlow's narrative strategies. But the conflict between Marlow's narrative sleight of hand and the undeniably positive qualities demonstrated by these women suggests that we should be cautious about circumscribing Conrad's artistry too quickly by assuming, as many critics do, that Marlow constitutes a spokesman for him. Such critics, citing Conrad's supposed misogyny, make the easy and reductive assumption that Marlow's problematic relations with women reflect those of the author. Yet, once Conrad's women characters are recognized as possessing the admirable qualities of initiative, courage and resolve, once they are regarded as active subjects in their own right rather than merely as passive objects adorning the masculine world, then such easy associations between Marlow and Conrad must begin to evaporate.

CAPTURING EXPERIENCE:

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LORD JIM AND *CHANCE*

INTRODUCTION

"I can't tell you how relieved I am to be done with the book," Joseph Conrad wrote of Chance to his agent Pinker in June 1913:

> I have been very anxious--but I am so no longer. It's the biggest piece of work I've done since Lord Jim. As to what it is I am very confident. As to what will happen to it when launched--I am much less confident. And it's a pity. One doesn't do a trick like that twice--and I am not growing any younger--alas! (Jean-Aubry 2, 145)[1]

Thus Conrad himself associated Lord Jim and Chance as two of his most challenging and significant works. These novels share two central unifying features which, taken together, provide the point of departure for this essay: both novels demonstrate an attempt on Conrad's part to deal with the issue of feminine experience and both are mediated by the male narrator Marlow.

Conrad's characterization of women has been a vexing issue for critics. Longstanding and influential critical work has typically dismissed Conrad's female characters as undeveloped, stereotyped or destructive. In his psychoanalytic study of Conrad's works, Bernard Meyer suggests that "[i]n a number of Conrad's stories the source of the disturbance of the hero's equanimity is a woman who arouses in him long-dormant emotions which he is now

helpless to resist, and which in the course of time will lead to his undoing" (Meyer 271). Meyer argues that Conrad's personal history, in particular the loss of his mother at an early age and his apparent difficulty in relationships with women (even misogynist tendencies), gave rise to problems in dramatizing healthy relationships between the sexes. A similar view is expressed by Thomas Moser in his now classic study Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline. Moser, who refers to love as Conrad's "uncongenial subject," locates the beginning of the writer's artistic decline at the moment he attempts to deal with love as a central issue. Moser is clearly troubled by the new artistic focus on women's experience represented by Chance. "Why," he wonders, "did Conrad cease those explorations into moral failure in the masculine world that had enabled him to achieve artistic success?" (Moser 102). Referring to the later fiction beginning with Chance, Moser poses the following questions: "How can a writer as complex and profound as Conrad have written these stories?...Can a writer suddenly stop writing serious books and begin to turn out work indistinguishable from popular trash?" (106-7). Given these questions, with their marked associations of the "masculine world" with the "complex and profound," and the feminine world with the banalities of "popular trash," it is not surprising that Moser virtually dismisses the women characters of this period, including Flora de Barral in Chance: "Of the heroines there is little to be said, except

that they are in distress. All are young and beautiful; all are victims of unhappy pasts." (103-4). Perpetuating this negative view of Conrad's female characters, Gordon Thompson asserts in his 1978 article "Conrad's Women," that "Conrad's women are destroyers of their men; they bring not only the vision that makes life worth living but the fatal commitment as well--the commitment to a dream that renders man vulnerable and makes his worldly failure certain" (450).

Recent critical work on Conrad, distinguished by a new emphasis on issues of gender, has begun to challenge such views. In her article, (over which, it must be said, the earlier criticism still casts something of a shadow), Susan Brodie argues that "[e]ven when love fails or ends in suffering, Conrad consistently assigns to woman the clear vision and sense of responsibility that lead men, if momentarily, to a heightened understanding of life's potential richness" (149). Although focusing not on feminine experience but on Marlow's development over the course of the four works in which he appears--'Youth,' Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance--Herbert Klein asserts that Jewel "has a far more realistic vision of the world than Jim" (150). In Klein's view, Jim rather than Jewel is responsible for his own fate: through his "rigid idealism," Klein argues, Jim "destroys himself and the lives of those close to him" (151).[2] Marlow's role in mediating the image of women presented has also begun to receive attention. Of Marlow's narrative function in Heart of Darkness and Lord

Jim, Ruth Nadelhaft points out that "[t]hrough Marlow's incoherence and inadequacy, Conrad encourages the reader to perceive the authenticity of the individual woman's action in the world and conception of the world" (Nadelhaft 59).[3]

Chance has begun to generate renewed critical interest, although female experience in the novel has not yet received the attention it deserves. Rather than seeing Flora as pursuing a quest of her own, some recent critics have argued that she is a passive object inspiring masculine self-realization. In an article highlighting the function of Marlow's narrative in Chance, Andrew Michael Roberts emphasizes masculine rather than feminine experience: "What Marlow is exploring," he asserts, "is not so much the nature of women as the nature and psychological significance of his own ideas of the feminine; hence he is exploring the divided and unstable constitution of masculinity" (Roberts 96). Lending too much weight to Marlow's self-referential commentary, Roberts pays insufficient attention to the experience of Flora. Referring to Flora as "the prize" in a "sustained contest" among men, Roberts passes too lightly over Flora's centrality to the novel, suggesting simply that "the right to be something other than a passive object of other people's desires and wills would seem to be the prize for which Flora herself is contending" (91). Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan shares this view that Marlow's self-examination is the focus of Chance. She argues in her book Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper that it is Marlow,

rather than Flora, who constitutes "the real protagonist of the novel" (Erdinast-Vulcan 157). For Erdinast-Vulcan, Flora is a passive "grail" for which the three actively seeking "knights," Anthony, Powell and Marlow, contend.[4] Rather than considering Flora's personal struggles against adverse circumstances to be the focus of the novel, Erdinast-Vulcan sees Flora as merely the agent through which Marlow himself is rehabilitated during the novel: through Flora, "who seems to defy the cynicism with which he has tried to shield himself," Marlow "gradually comes to recognize his own responsibility for Flora's life, as he moves from the role of passive observer to that of participant" (165). Such arguments, which constitute Flora as object rather than subject, are reminiscent of the views of Grace Isabel Colbron, an early critic who observes in her 1914 article "Joseph Conrad's Women": "The women are there, of course; but they are always the passive factor, never the active or positive force. It is not <u>their</u> development, <u>their</u> psychology, which matters in Joseph Conrad's books. They are there just as one more, possibly often the most potent, force of nature, acting on and influencing the development of the male protagonist--never because of themselves or of what may happen to them."[5]

In contrast to these views, two critics have recognized Flora's strength of character and capacity for assertiveness, although neither explores in detail, as this essay does, the narrative strategies by which Marlow

attempts to transform Flora's strengths to weaknesses and her successes to failures. In her book Conrad's Rebels: The Psychology of Revolution in the Novels from *Nostromo* to *Victory*, Helen Funk Rieselbach states that "in many ways, Flora seems incredibly strong" (99). However, Rieselbach portrays Flora as an essentially dark and unpleasant figure, one with "a tremendous store of resentment and hostility" (99), one who shows her ingratitude by "oppos[ing] the formidable Mrs. Fyne, who has been her mentor and faithful friend, when she elopes with Anthony" (99), and finally, one who, "having been pronounced unlovable, does indeed become so" (111). Moreover, although Rieselbach is observant about the "often contradictory and sometimes clearly false" (87) appraisals made by Marlow about various characters, women in particular, she does not attend to the specific ways in which Marlow tries to obscure Flora's assertive nature. Unable to decide about the nature of these inconsistencies, she attributes them not to an artistic strategy on Conrad's part but to an artistic lapse: "it is not clear," she asserts, "that Marlow is meant to be an unreliable narrator; he seems to have insisted on becoming one in spite of Conrad" (90).

In her feminist reading of Chance, Ruth Nadelhaft similarly recognizes Flora's capacity to assert herself. Nadelhaft goes further than Rieselbach in her understanding of Marlow's role in the narrative as it relates to Flora: "Flora's ability to communicate her youth, her energy, and

her 'pluckiness' serves her despite [Marlow's] determination to constrain her" (116). Nadelhaft, however, does not pursue in any detail the strategies by which Marlow attempts to render Flora a passive figure.

Marlow's narrative presence in both Lord Jim and Chance raises questions about the ways in which we are to view the female figures rendered by Conrad. While Marlow claims repeatedly that Jim "was one of us," he is unable to make such an identification with the women he encounters. Moreover, his personal experience with women, while sometimes obliquely hinted at, appears to be limited and his perspective, therefore, is primarily that of an observer. Marlow's interactions with Jewel and Flora in particular are relatively brief.

Marlow represents these women as by turns helpless, unconscious of what they are saying or doing, mysterious, and pathetic, yet their actions reveal on closer scrutiny that they are endowed with a strength and complexity which Marlow is often unable or unwilling to countenance. In the figures of Jewel and Flora, Conrad brings to life two women whose courage and capacity for decisive action emerge repeatedly as correctives to the veil of false impressions behind which Marlow seeks to obscure them. We should not, in examining the narratives, allow Marlow's personal project to render indistinguishable the strengths of the women with whom he engages. Marlow's limitations as a narrator and as an observer of women should not prevent us from seeing the

active roles taken by Jewel and Flora in these works. A separation of Marlow's often self-referential commentary from the actions, motives and feelings of Jewel and Flora is crucial to an appreciation of their strengths and to an understanding of Marlow's narrative function as it relates to women within each text. If we can bring into greater focus the experience of women in these works, then Marlow's obvious sexism can be regarded as having a more limited place in a complex narrative strategy employed by Conrad. Once we acknowledge that the positive feminine attributes of Jewel and Flora effectively counterbalance Marlow's misguided notions about women, then the argument for interpreting the narrator's views as those of Conrad is necessarily rendered less convincing.

I. LORD JIM

"For my part, I cannot say what I believed--indeed I don't know to this day, and never shall probably."

(Lord Jim 194)

When Marlow begins to narrate to his male listeners the story of Jewel and Jim's love, he admits how little he truly understands of a woman's perspective on the world:

> I ask myself with wonder--how the world can look to them--whether it has the shape and substance we know, the air we breathe! Sometimes I fancy it must be a region of unreasonable sublimities seething with the excitement of their adventurous souls, lighted by the glory of all possible risks and renunciations. (169)

Marlow here betrays his sense of an unbridgeable gap between his own perspective and that of women. Consigning women to an abstract, otherworldly region of experience, Marlow implicitly denies the need to understand them.[6] Moreover, by suggesting that for a woman "glory" is to be found in "risks and renunciations,"[7] Marlow establishes at the outset a justification for the masculine idealism that will be embodied in Jim's ultimate decision to leave Jewel behind.

Marlow's first vision of Jewel conveys an almost literal image of the Victorian angel in the house:

> the flitting of a white form within the house, a faint exclamation, and a childlike but energetic little face with delicate features and a profound, attentive glance peeped out of the inner gloom, like a bird out of the recess of a nest. (170)

Nina Auerbach points out in Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth that the infantilization of women, a habit in which Marlow indulges here with Jewel, constituted a "central Victorian symbol of woman's social incompetence and mysterious powers" (140). To Marlow's mind, Jewel's movements, barely audible voice, and childlike face render her diminutive, insubstantial, and birdlike. He will use this last image again later in reference to Jewel's perceived "invincible ignorance" (192), figuring her as "a small bird beating about the cruel wires of a cage" (192). Unable to dispel Jewel's fear of abandonment, to "soothe her frail soul" (192) as he puts it, Marlow will compensate for his own "impotence" (192) by taking control of her symbolically. Marlow's description of Jewel when she intercepts him to speak of Jim, similarly fails to do justice to the true essence of her character:

> I was immensely touched: her youth, her ignorance, her pretty beauty, which had the simple charm and the delicate vigour of a wild flower, her pathetic pleading, her helplessness, appealed to me with almost the strength of her own unreasonable and natural fear. She feared the unknown as we all do, and her ignorance made the unknown infinitely vast. (188)

The combination of physical beauty and supposed helplessness is one Marlow finds extremely--and consistently--appealing in a woman.

Marlow also invests heavily in what he believes to be Jewel's ignorance and unworldliness: "she had no conception of anything" (187), he observes. Yet, using a strategy he will later repeat with Flora, Marlow substitutes ignorance and helplessness for what he himself is unable to understand about Jewel.[8] Reflecting on her gaze at him, he wonders "What is it that moves there?....she was more inscrutable in her childish ignorance than the Sphinx propounding childish riddles to wayfarers" (187). The interplay of "childish ignorance" with the devouring gaze of a female monster provides an index to Marlow's intolerable confusion about Jewel's identity.

Marlow is not equipped to endure Jewel's revelation of the horrifying abuse suffered by her mother at the hands of Cornelius. Repeating to his male auditors Jewel's words that she "did not want to die weeping" (190) Marlow recalls how

> [a]n inconceivable calmness seemed to have risen from the ground around us, imperceptibly, like the still rise of a flood in the night, obliterating the familiar landmarks of emotions. There came upon me, as though I had felt myself losing my footing in the midst of waters, a sudden dread, the dread of the unknown depths. (190)

Here the "unknown" turns out to be a world which makes Marlow's own ignorance appear "infinitely vast" (words he has used earlier to describe Jewel's supposed naivete): this is the world of emotional attachment and suffering with which Jewel--and her dead mother--have been intimately familiar. Marlow's confrontation with the violent

victimization wrought upon Jewel's mother forces him to lose his emotional coordinates. Unlike Jewel, Marlow refuses to confront head on what he does not understand. Thus, Jewel's story brings him to the brink of an emotional chaos for which he is unable to find words:

> It had the power to drive me out of my conception of existence, out of that shelter each of us makes for himself to creep under in moments of danger, as a tortoise withdraws within its shell. For a moment I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still--it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly. One must--don't you know?--though I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated for a second or two beyond the pale. (190)

This is a crucial moment for a discussion of women's experience because it exposes not simply Marlow's inability but his refusal to fully contemplate female suffering. Marianne DeKoven suggests that Marlow achieves during these critical moments an "understanding [of] the oppression of women" (171), but such understanding seems impossible after only "a second or two beyond the pale." Any understanding of which Marlow might be capable seems doomed by the mode of suppression in evidence here. Although Marlow admits that his world--that ironically "sunny...arrangement of small conveniences"--is a male construct, he lacks the will to explore any alternative world views.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the anger and frustration Marlow expresses toward Jewel during this exchange are projections of his own doubts about Jim, doubts

which Jewel's anxieties reinforce. In his attempts to convince Jewel--and himself--of the integrity of Jim's promises, he recalls getting swept up in the defense:

> From all the multitudes that peopled the vastness of that unknown there would come, I assured her, as long as he lived, neither a call nor a sign for him. Never. I was carried away. Never! Never! I remember with wonder the sort of dogged fierceness I displayed. (193)

Marlow is wrong, of course, and Jewel's fears are borne out. As a result of his encounter with Jewel, Marlow all but recognizes this inevitability, referring later to the "demoralisation of my utter defeat in my encounter with a spectre of fear" (197). As he says after parting with Jewel: "I had admired [Jim's] energy, his enterprise, and his shrewdness. Nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans, his energy, and his enthusiasm..." (195).

Using the words "sign" and "call," Marlow echoes Jewel's language even as he attempts to deny the significance of her voice. Suspecting Marlow to be hiding from her a secret about Jim's past, a secret she fears will ultimately lead Jim to desert her--as her mother was deserted--Jewel makes an impassioned appeal to Marlow:

> "You all remember something! You all go back to it. What is it? You tell me! What is this thing? Is it alive?--is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel. Has it got a face and a voice--this calamity? Will he see it? will he hear it. In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me--and then arise and go. Ah! I shall never forgive him. My mother had forgiven--but I, never! Will it be a sign--a call?" (191-92)

When Jewel speaks these words her eloquence strikes Marlow as a "miracle," yet it is not surprising that he finds a way to construct her utterance as indicative of her ignorance:

> A sign! a call! How telling in its expression was her ignorance! A few words! How she came to know them, how she came to pronounce them, I can't imagine. Women find their inspiration in the stress of moments that for us are merely awful, absurd, or futile. To discover that she had a voice at all was enough to strike awe into the heart. (192)

The will to control and suppress the woman's voice is evident not only in Marlow's condescending observation that Jewel possesses a voice "at all," but also in his disparaging generalization that women are inspired by moments men would rather forget. These statements constitute desperate attempts to explain away as irrelevant the eloquence he is clearly moved by and unable to adequately explain for himself.

Marlow repeats Jewel's words--"a sign, a call"--more than once. With the first echo, Marlow tells of the assurances he gave to Jewel that "neither a call nor a sign" (193) for Jim would ever come from beyond Patusan. Expressing his relief at leaving Patusan, Marlow uses these words again to describe the sensation he feels as he looks out over the landscape: "The girl was right--there was a sign, a call in them [the sky and sea]--something to which I responded with every fibre of my being" (201). Most significantly, Marlow silently appropriates Jewel's language again at the end of the novel when he affirms that Jim's fate meant "tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism" (253). Far from convincing us of Jewel's supposed ignorance, Marlow's use of these memorable words constitutes an

implicit acceptance of their power. Moreover, the prophetic nature of Jewel's language is emphasized through Marlow's repetitions of her words, repetitions which demonstrate how he himself comes to believe in their veracity. Jewel's foresight is effectively dramatized by the evolution in Marlow's usage of these words from an assurance that they are incorrectly associated with Jim, to a final statement of their perfect appropriateness in describing Jim's destiny. In contrast to Jewel's eloquence we must also remember Jim's conspicuous inarticulateness, which Marlow acknowledges but just as often attempts to compensate for. "He was not eloquent," Marlow admits, "but there was a dignity in this constitutional reticence, there was a high seriousness in his stammerings" (152).[9] Following in Marlow's path, one critic finds a certain poignancy in what he refers to as Jim's "touching inarticulateness" (Watt 321). Thus while Jewel's eloquence is regarded condescendingly by Marlow as a "miracle," Jim's lack of it is celebrated as a sign of profound depth.

Jewel's endurance of Cornelius's abuse raises another disturbing spectre with which Marlow must wrestle in his narration: female self-sufficiency. Jewel's confident refusal of Jim's melodramatic offer to do away with Cornelius demonstrates her power to defend herself. As Marlow observes: "She said--Jim told me impressively--that if she had not been sure he was intensely wretched himself, she would have found the courage to kill him with her own

hands" (176). Jewel's confidence is modulated, however, by an empathic nature which enables her--as she reveals to Jim--to understand that Cornelius is far more miserable than she. The chivalric sensibility shared by Marlow and Jim and so invested in the fantasy of rescue is stopped in its tracks by Jewel's disarming personal strength. Marlow handles this obstacle narratively by attempting to cast Jewel's strength as weakness: "It seemed impossible to save her not only from that mean rascal but even from herself!" (176). Turning Jewel into her own worst enemy, Marlow's construction carries with it the implication that her unwillingness to be rescued renders her suffering of little consequence. As Nina Pelikan Straus has argued (in connection with the Intended in Heart of Darkness): "Male heroism and plenitude depend on female cowardice and emptiness" (135). Yet, as becomes clear, it is Jim, not Jewel, who needs to be saved.

Discussing the extent to which "relationships...are experienced differently by women and men," Carol Gilligan argues that a woman's moral understanding is intimately tied to her "embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationships" (8-9) and is characterized by an emphasis on responsibility. Gilligan's studies demonstrate

> the existence of a distinct moral language....[a] language of selfishness and responsibility, which defines the moral problem as one of obligation to exercise care and avoid hurt. The inflicting of hurt is considered selfish and immoral in its reflection of unconcern, while the expression of care is seen as the fulfillment of moral responsibility. (73)

Gilligan's framework illuminates both Jewel's decision regarding her stepfather, and later on Flora's in connection with her similarly abusive father. Here, Jewel's tolerance of Cornelius constitutes a moral judgement based on a feeling of responsibility for the welfare of others, a feeling which grows developmentally out of the close connection experienced with her mother. Marlow's devaluation of Jewel's empathic nature arises from his inability to understand and appreciate this feminine orientation toward care and connection.

Marlow's description of the abuse inflicted on Jewel by Cornelius exemplifies the way in which masculine ineffectuality masquerades as sympathy. After rendering the horrible scenes of confrontation between Jewel and Cornelius, telling of how he would "declaim filthy denunciations at her back," torment her with epithets about her dead mother, and finish off by "pick[ing] up a bit of dry earth or a handful of mud...and fling[ing] it into her hair," Marlow concludes: "The endlessness of such a subtly cruel situation was appalling--if you think of it" (176). While Marlow communicates his horror of Jewel's situation, his use of the conditional "if" betrays once again his refusal to actively contemplate her experience. Marlow similarly attempts to explain away Jim's avoidance of Jewel's plight:

> Jim would have enjoyed exceedingly thrashing Cornelius within an inch of his life; on the other hand, the scenes were of so painful a character, so abominable,

> that his impulse would be to get out of earshot, in order to spare the girl's feelings. (176)

In the face of such "abominable" scenes, Jim's imagined heroism dissolves into real passivity. Viewed in light of his previous vow to "'stop [Cornelius's] game'" (176), Jim's ineffectual response to Jewel's actual suffering renders such promises empty. Jim's words, as they concern his intentions to protect Jewel, are simply inconsistent with his actions. Marlow's understanding and tacit affirmation of--indeed his excuses for--Jim's inaction demonstrate clearly the masculine retreat from the realities of female experience.

Jewel's strength, wisdom and courage emerge forcefully in her discovery of the plot to assassinate Jim. Marlow's intent in revealing this part of the narrative is at odds, however, with Jewel's assertiveness. As he reminds us, "this is a love story I am telling you now" (181), and such a love story requires that Jim play the role of "knight" and Jewel that of the "maiden." Marlow's chivalric construction of Jewel and Jim's love is made explicit in his later reference to them as "knight and maiden meeting to exchange vows amongst haunted ruins" (189). That Jewel is truly responsible for preventing Jim's assassination is evident: it is Jewel who discovers the plot to murder Jim, she who awakens him and places in his hand the revolver used to subdue the assassins; it is she who tells Jim when to enter the storehouse, and who illuminates the storeroom enabling the still sceptical Jim to see the murderers. Finally, it

is Jewel who tells Jim when to shoot.[10] Marlow's strategic emphasis on Jim as a leader similarly obscures Jewel's rightful place in these events: while Jim "range[s]" the prisoners "in a row," and orders them to "'March,'" Jewel's position is literally on the margin: "at the side the girl, in a trailing white gown, her black hair falling as low as her waist, bore the light. Erect and swaying, she seemed to glide without touching the earth" (184). Marlow fails throughout this scene to directly acknowledge Jewel's significant understanding of Realpolitik and the extent to which her decisive action is responsible for the successful outcome. In contrast to Jewel's vigilance, Jim lies asleep as the attempt on his life is being plotted around him. Jim's dreamy "slumbers" provide a neat metaphor for the illusions he entertains about himself, what Marlow calls his "passive heroism" (64). Later, these same dangerous "slumbers" lead indirectly to his death after Dain Waris is ambushed and murdered by Gentleman Brown while Jim again lies asleep.

The structural placement of the storehouse scene in the narrative obscures Jewel's central role in elevating Jim's stature within Patusan. Although the plot against Jim's life is uncovered by Jewel--and thwarted--before Jim's assault on Sherif Ali's camp, this fact is concealed by Marlow's description of events out of chronological sequence. Relating the episode of Jim's defeat of Sherif Ali before Jewel's discovery of the plot to assassinate Jim,

Marlow suppresses the importance of Jewel's role in saving Jim's life, a rescue which enables Jim to wage the successful campaign against Ali and, ultimately, to become "Tuan" Jim to the people of Patusan. The significance of Jewel's role is further reinforced by the fact that Jim's plans for the assault on Sherif Ali's stockade are secured only hours before the assassination attempt. Marianne DeKoven acknowledges rightly that the "stunning, redeeming, heroic defeat of Sherif Ali could not have occurred without Jewel" (DeKoven 168), yet she fails to see that Marlow's strategy in arranging the episodes is to suppress that conclusion while focusing instead on Jim's heroism:

> The narration of Jim's Patusanian triumph unfolds toward Jewel. We get the story of Jim's war against Sherif Ali before "the story of his love" that precedes that war chronologically. This narrative positioning heightens the effect of the storehouse episode, making it, rather than the rout of Sherif Ali, the dramatic culmination of Jim's success. (169)

DeKoven's explanation of this non-chronological sequencing thus accounts for only part of Marlow's narrative strategy--that concerned with emphasizing "Jim's success." Although correct in recognizing Marlow's overall purpose at this point--to tell the story of "Jim's union with Jewel" (DeKoven 168)--she does not recognize that Marlow's conception of their love, framed out of a chivalric masculine fantasy peopled by knights and maidens, is aimed both at exalting Jim's ambiguous heroism and denying the validity of Jewel's strengths.

Marlow's account of Jewel once she leaves Patusan, rather than recorded as part of the narrative proper, is rendered in the cover letter (one of "three distinct enclosures," 205) sent to the "privileged man." This separation of Jewel's fate from the rest of Jim's story constitutes another structural manoeuvre intended to marginalize her experience and to muffle her dissenting voice. Like the letter from Jim's father, in which, as Marlow notes, there was "nothing...except just affection" (207), the separation of Jewel's destiny from the narrative proper mirrors Jim's ultimate rejection of temporal love and connection in favor of his "exalted egoism" (253). The attitudes expressed by Jewel about Jim's end defy the masculine constructs Marlow has erected, even if ambivalently, to support Jim's destiny as a romantic individualist. Jewel's unwillingness to forgive Jim, to act the proper role of maiden--a role in which Marlow has cast her--whose self-sacrificial "tears, cries and reproaches" promise greater heroic stature to a knight who has met his "fatal destiny" (249), shakes at Marlow's defenses of the masculine pursuit of "truth." As he writes to the "privileged reader": "I affirm nothing" (206). Jewel's rejection of such defenses, her insistence, in the face of Marlow's protests, that Jim "was like the others" (213), prompts Marlow to strike her unsettling views from the official narrative.[11]

Jewel's first words to Marlow upon his arrival at Stein's and discovery of Jim's death dramatize and summarize the fundamental rift between masculine and feminine experience presented in the novel: "'He has left me,' she said quietly; 'you always leave us--for your own ends'" (211). In Jewel's view and, more importantly, her experience, male "ends" (an apt double entendre signifying, in Jim's case, both goal and death) are intrinsically self-seeking and dishonest ends. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert, "to many late nineteenth- and early twentieth century...women...men appeared as aggrieved defenders of an indefensible order" (4). Confronted by Jim's "superb egoism" (251), as Marlow puts it, Marlow is at pains to convince Jewel that the purpose underlying Jim's abandonment of her is defensible. In the face of Jewel's "inaccessible" (211) grief, Marlow feels again the impotence he had earlier felt in Patusan when confronted by Jewel's fears that Jim would leave her. "[One] felt," he says, "that nothing [one] could say would reach the seat of the still and benumbing pain" (212). Similarly, just as he had been rendered speechless by the "imperturbable monotone" (190) with which Jewel had earlier related the story of her mother's despairing last moments, so too Marlow remains silent and uneasy during the first of two encounters with Jewel at Stein's, her inexplicable "indifference" seeming "to defy time and consolation" (212). "I was glad to escape," he admits.

Jewel's revelations of events in Patusan prompt Marlow to engage in a narrative strategy he has used previously (and will use again with Flora in Chance). After hearing all Jewel has to say, "listening with amazement, with awe, to the tones of her inflexible weariness" (212), he observes: "She could not grasp the real sense of what she was telling me, and her resentment filled me with pity for her..." (212). Projecting onto Jewel his own deficient understanding of her perspective, Marlow discredits her account as one more sign of her ignorance and lack of self-knowledge. That he is unwilling to come to terms with Jewel's subjectivity is evident from his use of the word "resentment." Jewel's subjectivity is so disturbing to Marlow, her views so threatening to the romantic "inscrutability" (253) with which he has endowed Jim, that Marlow ultimately takes refuge in Tamb'Itam's account of events. Following the description of Jim's meeting with Gentleman Brown, Marlow openly articulates his strategy and motives; from here, he explains,

> we see Jim amongst them [the people of Patusan], mostly through Tamb'Itam's eyes. The girl's eyes had watched him, too, but her life is too much entwined with his: there is her passion, her wonder, her anger, and, above all, her fear and her unforgiving love. Of the faithful servant, uncomprehending as the rest of them, it is the fidelity alone that comes into play; a fidelity and a belief in his lord so strong that even amazement is subdued to a sort of saddened acceptance of a mysterious failure. (237)

Marlow's purpose is clear: to suppress the voice whose revelations are bound up with "unforgiving love," while promoting the perspective of a "faithful servant" whose

"fidelity" can be relied upon to cast Jim in the most favorable light possible. Given several opportunities to glimpse through Jewel's eyes "how the world can look to them [women]" and to ponder "whether it has the shape and substance we know, the air we breathe!," Marlow remains firmly and designedly shut off from the deeper understanding of feminine experience available to him. Moreover, in contrast to the attempted letter enclosed in the packet to the "privileged man" in which Jim makes no account for himself or his actions by which the world might judge him, Jewel is articulate and open with Marlow, providing so many of the painful details of her experience that he suppresses most of them: "I haven't the heart to set down here such glimpses as she had given me of the hour or more she passed in there wrestling with him for the possession of her happiness" (249). So opposed is Marlow to rendering Jim's unfaithfulness to Jewel--an unfaithfulness in which he is himself implicated by virtue of his own promises to Jewel that a "call for Jim would never come"--that he refuses to admit further details of Jewel's despair to Jim's story.

Jewel's refusal to absolve Jim of his responsibility to her renders his intended personal heroism of ambiguous value. In the face of Marlow's pleas on behalf of all men, Jewel remains unyielding: "'You must forgive him,' I concluded, and my own voice seemed to me muffled, lost in an irresponsive deaf immensity" (213). Powerful enough to disrupt Marlow's usually confident voice, Jewel's

immoveability is a testament to her strength of will. The image of Jewel presented by Marlow at the end of the narrative constitutes one final attempt to neutralize that strength: "the poor girl," he observes, "is leading a sort of soundless inert life in Stein's house" (253). As Nina Auerbach argues, "the physical weaknesses wished on [women by men], were fearful attempts to exorcise a mysterious strength" (8). Marlow's recognition of Jewel's "mysterious strength," latent in this haunting statue-like image marked by immobility and silence, prompts him to admit that the significance of Jim's death is not clearcut but is rather compromised. As Marlow rightly observes, Jim "goes away from the living woman" for what is only a "shadowy ideal of conduct" (253).

Marlow's ambivalence about Jim's fate at the end of the novel is telling. His encounters with Jewel raise his doubts about Jim's "enterprise" (195) and about the masculine ideology of which he has sought to make Jim the embodiment. Marlow's uncertainties about the meaning and value of Jim's destiny, so aptly conveyed in Marlow's final question "'Who knows?,'" reveal the power with which Jewel's challenges to this seemingly impenetrable masculine code have hit their mark. Such uncertainties as those Marlow is finally left with constitute an eloquent expression of Jewel's strength of will, a strength, in the end, incapable of suppression.

II. CHANCE

"...I may venture to say that it is Flora de Barral who is really responsible for this novel which relates, in fact, the story of her life." (Author's Note, xxxi)

Conrad explicitly stated that, in writing Chance, he had "aimed at treating my subject in a way which would interest women."[12] Yet, Marlow's observations about women in Chance have so troubled some critics that attempts have been made to argue that he ought not to be viewed alongside his earlier incarnations. Laurence Davies suggests, for example, that "In trying to make sense of Marlow [in Chance], we need to forget the lessons learned in reading Heart of Darkness or Lord Jim. We have to take him less seriously" (Davies 87). A similar view is expressed by Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan who argues that the "Marlow of Chance is radically different from the honest, bluff, and essentially trustworthy Marlow of 'Youth,' Lord Jim, and Heart of Darkness" (154). The subtle continuities between the characterization of Jewel and of Flora, however, suggest an organic connection between the sea-going Marlow of Lord Jim and the land-locked Marlow of Chance.[13]

As with Jewel, Marlow's interaction with Flora from their first speaking acquaintance reveals him to be condescending and inappropriate. Although he claims, to the unnamed narrator who introduces him, that Flora's appearance at the edge of the quarry gave him a "turn" (43), Marlow reacts to her danger not with seriousness and sympathetic understanding but with unkindness and misplaced indignation. Marlow's perception that what he calls her "perfectly mad trick" (43) is "for no conceivable object!" (43), demonstrates a strategy he has used in Lord Jim and uses again in Chance: the substitution of feminine ignorance for his own failure to understand feminine feelings, motives or assertions.

Flora's assertion that she is free to be as "reckless" (45) as she pleases reveals the subjective nature of Marlow's commentary. As Marlow admits:

> I was nettled by her brusque manner of asserting her folly, and I told her that neither did I [see why she shouldn't be reckless] as far as that went, in a tone which almost suggested that she was welcome to break her neck for all I cared. This was considerably more than I meant, but I don't like rude girls. (45)

Marlow's angry objection to what he perceives as Flora's rudeness, however, is motivated by a smarting ego, for as we learn he "had been introduced to her only the day before--at the round tea-table--and she had barely acknowledged the introduction" (45). Ruth Nadelhaft accounts for Marlow's tone here by arguing that he "snarls with an irritability that suggests an investment on his part in her passivity rather than in her attempts to solve the problem of her

life" (111). Such an explanation, however, fails to account for Marlow's bruised ego, so central to this moment and, in a more subtle way, to others throughout the novel. Moreover, at this point, Marlow knows little about the "problem of [Flora's] life." The subjective dimension of Marlow's reactions to and commentary on women constitutes a subtext throughout Chance which must be considered as a modification of his observations.

Marlow's treatment of Flora during their walk from the quarry back to the Fynes' cottage similarly demonstrates a distinct lack of sympathetic understanding. He not only cajoles Flora, covertly attempting to divine for his own purposes whether her appearance at the edge of the quarry carries with it the "implication of unhappy love" (45) but he also presumes to advise her of her selfishness by telling her that "some regard for others should stand in the way of one's playing with danger" (45). Marlow's presumptuous statement is not only ill-timed, it is misplaced. As Flora reveals later, it is precisely her "regard for others"--for the Fyne dog, but more importantly for her father--feelings in which Marlow believes she must be lacking, that do prevent her from a suicidal leap. Marlow's own selfishness, rudeness, and presumptuousness in the face of Flora's obvious distress, compromise him early on as a credible judge of women's experience.

During their meeting "On the Pavement" in London, Flora challenges Marlow's construction of the events surrounding

her suicidal appearance at the edge of the quarry. Cast by Marlow as high on the cliff "tempting Providence" (201), Flora flatly rejects his formulation of her motives and seeks to set him straight: "I was not there," she insists, "to tempt Providence, as you call it....I did not mean to leave anything to Providence" (202). Objecting not only to Marlow's inaccurate description of her motives, but also to the language with which he articulates them, Flora demonstrates her unwillingness to be misrepresented. Similarly, Flora thwarts Marlow's attempts to cast himself as her heroic rescuer. Revealing that he told the Fynes "you were saved by me. My shout checked you..." (201), Flora responds first with a gesture: "She moved her head gently from right to left in negation," Marlow reports. Then, speaking "rapidly" (202) and forcefully, Flora tells Marlow: "No, it wasn't your shout. I had been there some time before you saw me" (202). Marlow's strategy here--and it is a failed one--is to rob Flora of all agency by transforming her into a helpless female whose distress he is anxious to appear to have alleviated. Refusing to surrender his chivalrous fantasy, Marlow attributes Flora's explanation of her motives and actions not to his own misreading but rather to her desire to put the incident behind her. "She wants to forget now," he convinces himself. "And no wonder. She wants to persuade herself that she had never known such an ugly and poignant minute in her life" (201). The irony that it is Marlow rather than

Flora who is engaging in an act of self-persuasion is cannily underscored by his observation that "'After all...things are not always what they seem'" (201).

Marlow's persistent refusal to acknowledge Flora's true feelings is evident again when the topic of suicide reemerges at his own prompting. Having wrongly understood Flora's belief that she is not a "very plucky girl" to be grounded in her sense of cowardice for not going through with the suicide attempt, Marlow hints once again that it was his voice which drew her back from the precipice. Looking at him understandably with "defian[ce] and "ang[er]"--"something of that old expression" (213) Marlow calls it--Flora reiterates for the second time her denial of his formulation:

> "That's not what I mean. I see you will have it that you saved my life. Nothing of the kind. I was concerned for that vile little beast of a dog. No! It was the idea of--of doing away with myself which was cowardly. That's what I meant by saying I am not a very plucky girl." (213)

Marlow's determination to prove Flora the helpless object of a heroic male rescue prompts him to revisit the issue one last time toward the end of their interview. When Flora explains to him that it was of death rather than life "that I was thinking while Captain Anthony was...speaking to me" (232) in the garden, Marlow's response suggests a self-satisfied belief in forcing from Flora an inadvertent confession. Undeterred by Flora's previous efforts to correct his misapprehensions about her and to clarify her feelings and motives, Marlow affirms: "'when he stood before

you there, outside the cottage, he really stood between you and that. I have it out of your own mouth. You can't deny it'" (232). Recognizing Marlow's intransigence on the topic, Flora accedes graciously and diplomatically: "'If you will have it that [Anthony] saved my life, then he has got it'" (232). She makes it clear here that while Marlow is free to perceive her as he likes, she is in no way committed to such a perception herself.[14] Yet, even in the face of Flora's repeated assertions, one critic suggests that "Flora's suicide attempts are thwarted twice--first by Marlow's voice...and then by Anthony's interception" (Erdinast-Vulcan 171). The critic Paul Armstrong similarly neglects Flora's protestations: "Marlow's shout," he argues, "prevented her suicidal jump" (158). Armstrong's observation that Marlow's "shout...is emblematic of the lack of reciprocity in their relationship," is a curious one since Flora clearly remonstrates against Marlow's formulation of her motives. Although Marlow is unable to accept Flora's explanations, they nonetheless engage in an exchange on the issue. Views such as these which take Marlow at his word fail singularly to account for Flora's actions and utterances. And although Julie Johnson has suggested in her reading that Marlow, like Anthony and Powell, appears to be a "quester with all the avidity of a knight seeking the Grail" (Johnson 226), Flora still remains--on the evidence of her own actions and assertions--an unwilling "damsel" and far from the "passive vessel"

(Chance 119) Marlow elsewhere calls her. Like Jewel, Flora is the object of Marlow's entrenched chivalric attitude, an attitude which blinds him to feminine strength, assertion and initiative.

Marlow's insistence to the narrator on the intimacy he established with Flora during their exchange outside the Eastern Hotel--an intimacy based on his presumed knowledge of her suicidal thoughts--is undercut by the brusque manner of his reaction when she herself alludes to their shared secret. Speaking to the male narrator, Marlow not only refers to the "tentative, uncertain intimacy" that "was springing up between us two" (207) but he also speaks of how they two, although "strangers," "had dealt with the most intimate and final of subjects, the subject of death" (209). "It had," Marlow asserts, "created a sort of bond between us" (209). Yet when Flora herself draws attention to their secret shared knowledge, when she confesses to Marlow that "'You are the only person who knows...who knows for certain'" (234), Marlow initially fails to pick up on it and then attempts to deny it: "'Why can't you leave that alone?' I remonstrated, rather annoyed at the invidious position she was forcing on me..."(234). Although Marlow is able to boast of this intimacy to the male narrator at a distance and at a physical remove, Flora's avowal of the same is irritably pushed aside by Marlow during their actual encounter. His reaction reflects the contradictions within

his narrative between the representations and the realities of his exchanges with women.

Flora's strength of character is often bewildering to Marlow. His references to her strength are made either in negative terms--or they are admitted, only to be swiftly undercut with images of her destitution. While speaking of the Fynes' treatment of Flora, Marlow remarks on her "obvious lack of resignation" (62), a grudging way of saying that she is determined. Referring to Flora's demeanor during their encounter in London he comments on the "total absence of humility" (205) she evinced, thus appearing to criticize her self-possession. Marlow's remarks demonstrate his narrative determination to neutralize many of those moments in which Flora's insight and courage are evident.

What Marlow finds most striking about Flora during their exchange in London is her "composure" (207), a trait shared by Jewel and always a source of uneasiness for Marlow where women are concerned. Marlow's strategy for handling his lack of understanding is, once again, to project it onto a woman: it is Flora, therefore, who is made to appear deficient in self-knowledge and unable to foresee the consequences of her actions: "One could not tell," he proposes, "whether she understood what she had done. One wondered. She was not so much unreadable as blank" (207). What Andrew Michael Roberts has called a "curious mental manoeuvre" (93) on Marlow's part in this passage constitutes

a recurrent narrative strategy whereby Marlow's own shortcomings masquerade as those of a woman.

On rare occasions, Marlow's misrepresentations of Flora's character are held in check by flashes of genuine perceptiveness. Such moments remind the reader that although his wrongheadedness is more often on display, Marlow is not entirely without an appreciation of Flora's positive qualities. More importantly, however, Marlow's occasional insights serve to heighten the overall misguidedness of his perceptions and the ultimate failure of those narrative strategies with which he seeks to deny Flora the strength she so clearly manifests.

Flora's strength emerges and blossoms as she experiences different roles through the novel. As companion to the shallow Bournemouth lady, who "could not bear to have for a companion any one who did not love her" (179), Flora is admirably unable to summon up the false sentiment which would fulfill her employer's desire to be loved. Helen Rieselbach argues not only that the "old lady is made uncomfortable by Flora's lugubrious manner--she feels Flora does not have an affectionate nature," but she also affirms as "most certainly true" (98-99) the lady's appraisal of Flora. Rieselbach misses the point, however, that the lady's desire to be loved by her paid companion is essentially shallow, a quality Flora certainly recognizes. A revealing comment made later by Marlow--and one demonstrating his insight into an important aspect of

Flora's character--accentuates Flora's determination to avoid such insincerity: "No one in the world cared for her, neither those who pretended nor yet those who did not pretend. She preferred the latter" (220). Flora's experience with "those who pretended" to care for her, namely her former governess and Mrs. Fyne, makes her unwilling to deal in false emotion. After experiencing the venomous rejection by her governess, who had been to her, in Marlow's words, "the wisdom, the authority, the protection of life, security embodied" (117), it is understandable that Flora should not only be equipped to spot the signs of insincerity but also be on guard against them. Flora's accurate assessment of Mrs. Fyne's feelings toward her demonstrates her ability to sense such insincerity: "I think she never liked me" (232) she tells Marlow, a fact corroborated by Mrs. Fyne herself (138). Flora's own sincerity is remarked on several occasions. Once again evincing a commendable perceptiveness about Flora's nature, Marlow notices the "directness" of her words (233) as well as the "candour" in her looks (205, 234). When Flora disabuses Anthony about her identity, her directness and desire for truth are manifest: "She swerved, came distractedly right up to the gate and looking straight into his eyes: 'I am not Miss Smith. That's not my name. Don't call me by it'" (223). As Powell observes later, Flora was "always ready to look one straight in the face" (314).

Flora's employment as a governess brings to light the maternal and caring aspects of her nature so patently lacking in her own former governess and in Mrs. Fyne.[15] As a governess, Marlow concedes, Flora was "very attentive" to her young charges, yet he finds it inconceivable she should know anything of pedagogy: "If she taught them anything it must have been by inspiration alone, for she certainly knew nothing of teaching" (180). Flora's success, however, suggests the inaccuracy of Marlow's appraisal. That she was not daunted by her role as governess is evident from a letter written to Mrs. Fyne and reported by Marlow: "She was being, she wrote, mercifully drugged by her task" (180). The use of the word "drugged," here connoting forgetfulness, suggests Flora's success at focussing her energies outside of herself as well as engaging her young pupils. Flora's gift with children is especially significant given that the "difficulties which governesses had with their young charges were a well-known occupational hazard" (Peterson 8). Marlow's further attempt to diminish her accomplishments with children is reflected in his remark on the "mere pittance" (197) Flora earned as a kindergarten assistant.

Flora's sense of responsibility to the undeserving de Barral emerges forcefully in the remorse she feels at having considered taking her own life. As she says to Marlow, she believes her thoughts of suicide to have been "cowardly," "mean," and "cruel" (213). Her sense of concern and responsibility for the well-being of others is initially

reflected in the reasoning which prevents her from leaping at the quarry: she is afraid for the Fyne dog whom she believes might follow her over the edge. Carol Gilligan's observation that the moral understanding of women is inextricably linked to the issue of "care and responsibility in relationships" (73) can help shed light on Flora's acute feelings of shame and guilt, as it did earlier in connection with Jewel's experience. Her own suicide, Flora believes, would constitute an act of cruelty and one in conflict with her deep sense of responsibility for de Barral's welfare.

Flora's strength in the face of paternal abuse is immediately called into play with the release of de Barral from prison. In the cab on the way to the Ferndale, Flora refuses to endure her father's reaction to her marriage and must then restrain him physically from getting out into the street:

> Without hesitation Flora seized her father round the body and pulled back--being astonished at the ease with which she managed to make him drop into his seat again. She kept him there resolutely with one hand pressed against his breast.... (366)

Marlow's offhand conjecture about Flora's feelings during these violent moments fails to capture the emotional intensity of her experience: the "generosity of Roderick Anthony...must have brought home to Flora de Barral the extreme arduousness of the business of being a woman" (365). To this Marlow adds the impersonal and generalized observation that "[b]eing a woman is a terribly difficult trade since it consists principally of dealings with men"

(365). Flora's strength contrasts sharply with Marlow's own fear of prisons. "When I pass one of these places," Marlow openly avows, "I must avert my eyes. I couldn't have gone to meet de Barral. I should have shrunk from the ordeal" (352). His fear is based on abstraction, however, as he readily points out: "I know so little of prisons" (352). Marlow observes that "Flora did not shrink" (352), but swiftly undercuts this admission of her superior courage with a generalization which transforms her strength into passive endurance. "Women," he asserts, "can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life" (352). Speaking in convenient generalities, Marlow dismisses Flora's courage as just another example of feminine failure.

Flora's lighting of the flare which averts the collision of the Ferndale attests to the crucial role she plays not only in her own fate but in the fate of everyone else--all male--aboard the ship. Like Jewel's, Flora's ability to act promptly, decisively and without fear for herself demonstrates both her courage and her resolve. Yet Marlow describes this episode in a way which strategically fails to capture Flora's bravery. Rather than emphasizing her active participation, Marlow speaks admiringly of the "[w]onderful self-restraint" (320) Flora shows in remaining below deck during the incident. It is not in her action that Marlow discerns Flora's "pluck" (320) but in her perceived lack of it. His tenacious refusal to countenance Flora's initiative

is further underlined by his observation that to remain below deck "was not stupidity on her part" (320).

Flora's actions during these tense moments are reminiscent of Jewel's efforts to avert the assassination of Jim and are similarly underrated by Marlow. Just as Jewel illuminates the inside of the storeroom for Jim, so Flora lights the flare used by Anthony to signal the oncoming vessel. In both scenes, the woman heroically furnishes the light by which a potentially tragic situation, one in which a man is unable to act decisively, is averted. Both Anthony and Jim react to the woman's involvement with disbelief. In each incident Marlow's description fails to do justice to the actions taken by a woman.

Flora's defining moment in Chance is her refusal to be released from her marriage with Anthony. Having previously experienced the rejection of so many, here Flora takes a firm stand against the dissolution of her marriage: "'You can't cast me off like this, Roderick. I won't go away from you. I won't--'" (430). In this public declaration of her love for Anthony, made before her father and Powell, Flora gives voice to feelings she is no longer able to suppress even for what she believes to be the good of her father. As she later explains to Marlow, "I did not want to hold out any longer against my own heart! I could not!" (444). Yet, Marlow describes Flora's declaration of love for Anthony in terms which diminish the active nature of her gesture.

Marlow's description of Flora transforms her into a virtually lifeless form:

> Mrs. Anthony's hair hung back in a dark mass like the hair of a drowned woman. She looked as if she would let go and sink to the floor if the captain were to withhold his sustaining arm. (430)

This image of the "drowned woman,"[16] which resembles the final image of an "inert" Jewel (Lord Jim 253), constitutes another attempt on Marlow's part to "exorcise a mysterious strength" (Auerbach 8) from a woman who has so undeniably manifested it.[17] Here Marlow not only empties Flora of will, but he reanimates with her energy the almost lifeless Anthony, whose "vitality" has been "arrested," during the course of the voyage (396). Flora's assertiveness is thus transformed once more into an anomalous moment by Marlow. Moreover, in contrast to Andrew Michael Roberts's argument that "sexual desire, sexual feelings, and sexual jealousy are brought into play in the novel around the figure of Flora but largely between men" (Roberts 99, author's emphasis), Flora's declaration to Anthony must be regarded as one of sexual desire. It is, thus, Flora's act that initiates the long-postponed consummation of the marriage.

Marlow's pronouncements about women throughout Chance--among them that being passive is a woman's lot and "endurance" her source of "power"--are challenged by Flora's ability to take decisive action. The happiness she finds in life at sea is manifest in her final exchange with Marlow: "'do you know how beautiful it is, how strong, how charming, how friendly, how mighty...'" (445). The masculine world of

the sea characteristic of Lord Jim is transformed into a home which allows Flora to live "loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear" (444). Endowed "with a heart and a mind" (Letters 4, 531-2) like the women to whom Conrad appealed in writing Chance, Flora stands out as a woman who has found herself through struggle and determination and who has her whole life ahead of her.

CONCLUSION

The examination of Marlow's narratives in Lord Jim and Chance exposes as inadequate his attempts to capture women's experience. While the dynamics of these narratives suggest Marlow's tenacious efforts to control the impression of women conveyed, his strategies, once revealed, demonstrate the compromised nature of his project. Once we are able to reveal the limitations of Marlow's narratives about women, especially the extent to which they are driven not by superior knowledge and understanding but by personal motives and masculine prejudice, then it is possible to bring feminine experience into clearer focus.

Both Flora and Jewel are endowed by Conrad with courage and strength of character consistently devalued or obscured by Marlow's narrative strategies. But the conflict between Marlow's narrative sleight of hand and the undeniably positive qualities demonstrated by these women suggests that we should be cautious about circumscribing Conrad's artistry too quickly by assuming that Marlow constitutes a spokesman for him. Many critics, citing Conrad's supposed misogyny, make the easy and reductive assumption that Marlow's problematic relations with women reflect those of the author. Such critical positions take for granted that the

women characters are artistically flawed. Considering many of Conrad's women characters to be destructive influences on men, Bernard Meyer takes the position that the Marlow of Chance, a "stuffy, cantankerous, and opinionated man, given to sweeping generalizations and particularly to intemperate misogyny" (235), is clearly expressing the views of the author toward women (238-39n). Similarly Thomas Moser, who regards Conrad's women as conveniently dismissible stereotypes, argues that "Marlow's comments on women and Conrad's characterization of Mrs. Fyne in Chance both seem to evolve from unconfessed misogynistic feelings" (160). Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, in keeping with her view that Marlow rather than Flora is the true protagonist of Chance, suggests that in this novel Marlow is "so much more representative of his author...than he had formerly been" (154). Once Conrad's women characters are recognized as possessing the admirable qualities of initiative, courage, and resolve, once they are regarded as active subjects in their own right rather than merely as passive objects adorning the masculine world, then such easy associations between Marlow and Conrad necessarily begin to evaporate.[18] The acknowledgement of the separate identities of Conrad and his most memorable narrator makes possible a fresh understanding of the interactions between Marlow and the young women of Lord Jim and Chance. Such interactions, it becomes apparent, are more than simply the products of a neurotic imagination. Conrad's creation of two women who

consistently defy the entrenched Victorian attitudes expressed by Marlow attests to the author's capacity for bringing to life strong and genuine women characters unwilling to yield passively to masculine prejudice and misrepresentation.

In a letter to the New York Herald (and printed as part of a publicity article on 14 January 1912, a week in advance of the publication of the first installment of Chance) Conrad avowed:

> I don't believe that women have to be written for specially as if they were infants. Women as far as I have been able to judge have a grasp of and are interested in the facts of life. I am not speaking of mere dolls of course. Such exist--even in a democracy--just as dummy men exist. But any woman with a heart and mind knows very well that she is an active partner in the great adventure of humanity on this earth and feels an interest in all its episodes accordingly. (Letters 4, 531-32)[19]

While Jewel's tragedy is precipitated by a masculine rejection of such an "active partnership," Flora's success exists in her penetration of the masculine ethos of the sea where she experiences the "fine adventure" (Chance 444) hitherto the province only of men. Published at a time when the agitation for women's suffrage (a cause which Conrad supported in principle)[20] was reaching its most violent crescendo, Chance reveals Conrad's exploration of a compromise for women between the conservative Victorian chivalries as represented consistently through Marlow from Heart of Darkness to Chance, and the radical doctrines supported by the feminist Mrs. Fyne. As Laurence Davies argues, "In Conrad's vision, the new theories are as

compromised and as incapable of right action as the old chivalry" (Davies 83). Flora constitutes the embodiment of Conrad's compromise between the extremes represented on the one hand by Marlow's "old chivalry" and on the other by Mrs. Fyne's "new theories." Flora's success, in Conrad's eyes, is in her rejection of both the conventional and the radical. As Marlow rightly observes, she and Anthony were "outside all convention" (Chance 210).

The similar narrative strategies employed by Marlow in his interactions with and observations about Jewel and Flora attest to a continuity between the Marlow of Lord Jim and the Marlow of Chance. Such a connection extends to Heart of Darkness, where Marlow's later attitudes towards women are easily discernible in outline form. Over the course of these novels, as Conrad moves women closer to the center of his artistic canvas, so too are Marlow's attitudes towards women revealed in greater detail. Always present in Marlow's character, these attitudes become increasingly apparent as Conrad's preoccupation with feminine experience unfolds.

With Chance, the final work in which Charlie Marlow appears and the only one of the Marlow stories to place a woman at the center, Conrad inaugurated a new period in his artistic life: "looking freshly at the world," he was now "venturing into new territory" (Davies 84). Yet, through the complex narratives woven by Marlow in both Lord Jim and Chance, narratives which seek unsuccessfully to conceal,

undermine and diminish the strengths of Jewel and Flora, Conrad pointedly demonstrates that rigid gender categories and biases are not only damaging to the individual but they are inadequate in accounting for the complexities of human nature.

NOTES

[1] Although Conrad's remarks imply that he believed his work, "when launched," might be misunderstood or unappreciated, Chance was an immense popular and financial success, exposing him to the wider (female) public he apparently sought to attract and freeing him from the financial difficulties which troubled him endlessly during his earlier years. As Cedric Watts points out, "in Great Britain alone, 13 200 copies would be sold within two years of publication, and American sales were undoubtedly higher" (Watts 114). Chance's popular success has continued to baffle observers and critics. Frank Doubleday, publisher of the American edition of Chance, noted in his 1926 memoirs: "I should have said it was the most unlikely book to make a success with the public of all [Conrad's] long list. But...critics as well as readers took up Chance as they had not done with any other of the Conrad volumes. It was quite a success and I think we sold eight or ten thousand copies, which was astonishing for Conrad at that time" (Doubleday 123). More recently, Cedric Watts has suggested that "[a]nyone who reads it today may well have difficulty in seeing why it should have been so decisively successful" (114). With the opening line of his 1993 article on Chance and women readers, Laurence Davies continues to register such sentiments of bewilderment : "In the literature on Chance, a reliable source of surprise is that so unlikely a book found so many admirers" (75).

[2] In an important discussion of Lord Jim, Marianne DeKoven characterizes Jewel as an "exceptional woman" (167) and argues that her "agency" is central to the success of Jim's military defeat of Sherif Ali in Patusan. Focusing more exclusively, however, on "feminine sexual imagery" than on feminine experience, DeKoven asserts that "femininity" constitutes the "destructive element" (161). "Jewel herself," DeKoven states, "is figured [in the novel] as the destructive element" (171).

Other noteworthy discussions of gender issues in Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness include those of Nina Pelikan Straus and Padmini Mongia. Both of these critics emphasize the exclusion of women from the inner circles of "secret knowledge" (Straus 134) so closely guarded by men. In addition, both critics perceive Marlow's sexism to be, at its source, that of the author.

[3] In her article on Heart of Darkness, Valerie Sedlak argues similarly that Marlow's limited perceptions about women render his narratives about them necessarily flawed and inadequate. Unfortunately, the promise of Sedlak's thesis is not well borne out in her discussion of the work.

[4] Erdinast-Vulcan draws here on an article by Julie Johnson entitled "The Damsel and Her Knights: The Goddess and the Grail in Conrad's Chance" (see list of "Works Cited").

[5] Reprinted in Carabine ed., Critical Assessments 1, 511-14. Originally printed in the Bookman (New York) 38, (January 1914) 476-79. This article is cited also by Davies (77n), although he does not discuss the content specifically.

[6] As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe in No Man's Land, Marlow's perspective on women was not uncommon: "to many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century men," they state, "women seemed to be agents of an alien world that evoked anger and anguish" (4). Elaine Showalter extends Gilbert and Gubar's point in her more general observation about women in Sexual Anarchy (here quoting from the work of the historian Carole Pateman and the feminist critic Toril Moi):

> [W]omen have traditionally been perceived as figures of disorder, "potential disrupters of masculine boundary systems of all sorts" [Pateman]. Women's social and cultural marginality seems to place them on the borderlines of the symbolic order, both the "frontier between men and chaos" [Moi], and dangerously part of chaos itself, inhabitants of a mysterious and frightening wild zone outside of patriarchal culture. (7-8)

[7] These "risks and renunciations" are similar to what Marlow later admires in Flora as "endurance": in both cases Marlow's patronizing tone suggests a covert justification for compromised male behavior.

[8] Andrew Michael Roberts notices Marlow using a similar strategy in Chance. As he observes, "Marlow repeatedly attempts to constitute femininity as an Other in terms that associate it with passivity, with covert action, with a threatening natural force, or with the enigmatic and unreadable, but...these strategies are repeatedly subverted as such qualities become associated with Marlow himself, with other male characters, or with a generalized human nature" (Roberts 94-95).

[9] Marlow's observations about Jim's inarticulateness are not limited to one instance. Speaking about Jewel and

Jim standing at the edge of the river after the assassination attempt on Jim's life, Marlow observes: "He did not tell me what it was he said when at last he recovered his voice. I don't suppose he could be very eloquent" (184).

[10] The image of Jewel illuminating the storeroom strikingly recalls the painting made by Kurtz in Heart of Darkness. In Lord Jim, Jewel is described as having "thrust the light through the bars of the window....her bare round arm extended and rigid, [was] holding up the torch with the steadiness of an iron bracket" (182), while Kurtz's painting, noticed by Marlow at the Central Station, is described thus:"...I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre--almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister" (Heart of Darkness 54-55). In spite of the similarities of these two images, the differences in effect are manifest. In particular, while the light in the painting casts a "sinister" shadow across the face of the blinded subject, Jewel's illumination results from her vigilance and, though associated with a "sinister" plot against Jim, is the means by which she prevents Jim's murder. Thus, an image of a passive, blinded woman virtually comes to life in the character of Jewel, whose active vigilance and intervention in a potentially tragic situation make her the antithesis of the female figure in the painting.

[11] Although he protests that Jim is not "like the others," Marlow suggests as much by implication when he remarks on the likeness between Jewel and her mother:

> I cannot help picturing to myself these two, at first the young woman and the child, then the old woman and the young girl, the awful sameness and the swift passage of time, the barrier of forest, the solitude and the turmoil round these two lonely lives, and every word spoken between them penetrated with sad meaning. There must have been confidences, not so much of fact, I suppose, as of innermost feelings--regrets--fears--warnings, no doubt: warnings the younger did not fully understand till the elder was dead--and Jim came along. Then I am sure she understood much--not everything--the fear mostly, it seems. (169).

Marlow's observation of the "awful sameness" between mother and daughter tacitly suggests his belief in a resemblance between Jim and the man who years earlier abandoned Jewel's mother. Although he wants deeply for Jim to be a unique individualist, Marlow nonetheless classes him as "one of us" and as part of "mankind itself, pushing on its blind way, driven by a dream of its greatness and its power upon the

dark paths of excessive cruelty and of excessive devotion" (212). Marlow's reflections about Jewel and her mother point to his capacity for comprehending the suffering of women, yet his observations about "mankind" suggest that such sufferings, brought on by the "excessive cruelt[ies]" of men, are justified and must be endured by women if men are to fulfill their individual and collective destinies.

[12] Letters 4, 531-32. (The Karl and Davies edition of Conrad's letters will be cited in the text as Letters, followed by volume and page numbers.) This letter was incorporated into a piece about Conrad published in the New York Herald, in January 1912, just prior to its serialization of Chance.

[13] This connection extends to include Heart of Darkness, as Marlow's views on women expressed there readily attest: "It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be" (39). Such a view is ironic, however, given the role played by Marlow's aunt--that "dear enthusiastic soul," as he calls her condescendingly--in securing for him the position he desires: "I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work--to get a job....She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy. I got my appointment--of course; and I got it very quick'" (34). Like Jewel to Jim and Flora to Anthony (and Powell), Marlow's aunt is instrumental to him at a crucial moment. Through her social and political connections, Marlow's position is procured and thus, she is indirectly responsible for his travel to the "heart of darkness" and his momentous encounters with Kurtz. Similarly, the chivalric impulse Marlow demonstrates later towards Jewel and Flora is evident initially in his lie to the Intended concerning Kurtz's last words. These attitudes achieve more generous expression in Marlow's interactions with Jewel and Flora.

[14] Rieselbach refers to Marlow's "insistence that he has been responsible for saving Flora from suicide" as "absurd" (103-4).

[15] Marlow refers to Mrs. Fyne on several occasions as "governess," a reflection perhaps of what he perceives to be her lack of maternal warmth with her own children.

[16] Marlow uses this image on two earlier occasions; both describe what Flora sees when she gazes at herself in the mirror. The first instance occurs when Captain Anthony is showing Flora the Ferndale for the first time: "In a dim inclined mirror, Flora caught sight down to the waist of a pale-faced girl in a white straw hat trimmed with roses, distant, shadowy, as if immersed in water, and was surprised

to recognize herself in those surroundings" (265). In the second of these instances, she has just experienced an attack on her husband by de Barral: "In the greenish glass her own face looked far off like the livid face of a drowned corpse at the bottom of a pool" (384). Each of these instances is associated with Flora's identity as Anthony's wife. In a strategic move designed to diminish Flora's sexual assertiveness, Marlow uses this image for the last time (as cited in the text) at the moment her identity as Anthony's wife is resolved.

[17] See also above, p. 26.

[18] There are critics who believe Marlow to be an artistic creation rather than a mouthpiece for Conrad's own feelings and unconscious prejudices. These include Watts (80), Nadelhaft (112-13) and Jones (73).

[19] Also quoted by Watts (115-16), Armstrong (153), and referred to by Davies (88).

[20] As Davies points out, Conrad publicly supported the right of women to vote: "To take his presentation of the self-contradictory Zoe Fyne as his final word on women's issues would be to ignore--for example--his support for women's voting rights made public in The Times on 15 June 1910. When he expressed misgivings about the Women's Suffrage (or Conciliation) Bill, it was not its principle that worried him but its chances of getting through a Parliament not much given to equity or reasonable argument" (Davies 78-9). In a letter written to Laurence Housman dated 11 May 1910, prior to the appearance in The Times of the "memorial...directed to the Prime Minister [and] urging him to back the Women's Suffrage Bill" (Letters 4, 327n), Conrad voiced his support for the cause:

> With the greatest sympathy for the object I cannot share the beautiful optimism of the memorial. Justice and moderation have never yet recommended a cause to the heads of parliamentary absolutism. One could expect more on these grounds from the servants of a simple autocrat, I imagine. I would augur better from the step, with which I associate myself unreservedly, had we been able to frame our request in the lurid language of menaces. But that unfortunately is impossible. We are too few for that, and truth to say of no particular weight in this literature-loving but not very discriminating community.
>
> After 30 years attentive watching of the old-established and the only genuine Parliamentary Institutions it seems to me that the shortest road to success for women's suffrage would be in its being made a party question on any ground under heaven except that of justice. But this is mere theory and most

unwillingly held at that. Nothing would please me more than to find myself utterly wrong in the light of facts. (Letters 4, 327; emphasis mine)

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