Sixth Chapter

Though Conrad avoids assigning crucial roles to women in the important works written during the initial phase of his literary career, he allows them to play major roles as he moves along. Consequently, in his later works some women appear as the custodians of traditional moral values and much more important than that, as agents of men’s spiritual and moral transformations. Noting this revolutionary change in his attitude A. J. Guerard writes: “In the early work, women were to be protected from the dark truth, and from the corrosive power of cynical masculine understanding. They were left with their fond illusions and told true lies. But now in certain passages the roles appear to be reversed; men must be protected from the realism of women.” Being healthier, steadier and nobler than men, the beautiful, loving, loyal, courageous and self-sacrificing women draw these islanders leading isolated, narrow, self-centred and irresponsible lives out of their isles, (Conrad, like Donne, firmly believes that no man is an island, that every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main). confront them with their follies, imbalances, mistakes and deep-rooted wrong notions and help them to restore their mental and moral balances gradually. A close examination of a number of major texts will help us to confirm the above hypothesis.
Axel Heyst, the ordinary son and fairly loyal intellectual disciple of an eminent yet widely-ignored expatriate Swedish philosopher, the sometime manager of an unsuccessful commercial enterprise named the Tropical Belt Coal Company, and above all, the central character in Conrad’s *Victory*, is ‘a queer chap’ (p20), ‘an unaccountable individual’ (p54) (of over thirty five years of age) leading a life unconnected with ‘earthly affairs and passions’ (p61), with workaday realities of quotidian life in which ordinary mortals revel. His strange nature and stranger life-style are due to his first-hand and regular exposure to his father’s extremely pessimistic, nay, life-negating philosophy for a period of three ‘plastic and impressionable’ (p87) years. Taking the cue from his versatile father (philosopher, writer, stylist and man of the world) the eccentric son consciously opts for an aimless, wandering life ‘...like a bird that never had a nest’ (p40), for an unattached, floating existence like a man living on an island or on the highest peaks of the Himalayas with clouds and an indolent volcano to keep company. Inspired by the teachings of his father who was ‘...a destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs’ (p150) and ‘a bitter contemner of life’ (Ibid.) he considers life as a lamentable or despicable game in which truth, love, ambition, work are but counters and regards the world as a theatre of the ludicrous, ‘an amusing spectacle’ (p153) in which he tries not to play any role whatever, but on which he looks from a safe distance like the wise. Under the influence of the self-same philosophy, he strives to refrain from all forms of action, of self-
assertion (which in his father's opinion, are invariably tempting and harmful),
struggles hard to refine practically all his feelings away, fights shy of violence
even under the strongest provocation, namely, self-preservation and never
dreams of failing in love, the consolation of which is, in his father's words, the
most cruel and the most subtle. His personal behaviour is of a piece with his
unusual attitude to life, mankind and universe. For example, unlike the common
run of men, he has 'a taste for silence'(p68) and solitude which he has been
able to gratify for years because of his life in the silent and secluded Samburan
islands. A habitually serious person, his speeches are characterized by an
unmistakable undercurrent of delicate raillery, of subtle playfulness. At bottom
a kind, sympathetic, sincere man, he is unapproachable and '...incapable of
outward cordiality of manner'(p30).

Of course, on the basis of our foregoing discussion we must not jump to
the conclusion that Heyst's detachment from human affairs is total, that his
heart is never swayed by human emotions, that his soul never thirsts for human
company, that he never performs any action, never asserts and exerts himself.
The author tells us in no uncertain terms that neither by temperament nor by
vocation is Heyst a 'hermit'(p40). During the initial phase of his nomadic life in
the archipelago, he used to go away either in the direction of New Guinea or in
the direction of Saigon to break away from the enchantment of the islands and
to meet fellow human beings (from a distance presumably) since ‘...the sight of his kind was not invincibly odious to him’ (Ibid.). Again, being a sympathetic and humane man, his heart goes out to a cornered man like Morrison whom he helps to buy his trading vessel back from the Portuguese authorities and with whom he forms a tie subsequently. It is at Morrison’s instance that he gets involved in a commercial enterprise and indulges in a ‘...sudden display of purposeful energy’ (p35) for a while. Even after the collapse of this venture, his detachment from the world of human affairs is not total. To transact some personal business with a Sourabaya-based company with which he has a long connection, he comes out of his self-imposed exile. But barring these exceptions, his is, generally speaking, a life of inertia, of non-attachment, of purposelessness, of excessive contemplation and minimal action, of careless simplicity and it remains so till the occurrence of a rare and decisive event in Heyst’s life, namely, his rescue of a girl named Alma alias Magdalen. This event which is an outcome of Heyst’s voluntary (though uncharacteristic) self-assertion can be accounted for by his natural sympathy for the ‘expressively harassed, dejected, lonely’ (p72) human beings. The sight of an odious outrage perpetrated by a person on another helpless person arouses his sympathy, his natural instinct for co-operation. The act of Mrs. Zangiacomo, wife of Mr. Zangiacomo (the owner of the ladies’ orchestra where Alma works as a violinist) pinching Alma appears to him as one such detestable act of
persecution. Naturally, Heyst steps in and plays his role as a rescuer. Later on, Alma’s cynical account of her miserable past awakens in him a sense of ‘immense sadness’ (p76). But apart from feeling sympathetic and sad, the long-suppressed primal man in Heyst feels interested, for the first time in his life, in the physiognomy of the teenaged girl. Her well-formed arms, attractively-shaped head, prettily-crossed feet awaken his faculty of observation. He notices her physique with such absorption that he loses touch with his surroundings for the time being. Her glance of frank tenderness leaves a profound impression on his heart; her thrilling voice seduces him; her smile ‘...gives him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience’ (p79). He feels ‘...the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman’ (p80). Now, this surely represents a great change in Heyst whose life was ‘totally detached from feminine association’ (p61) before his meeting with Alma. Conrad tells us: “Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly, sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness. But now he was troubled, a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision” (p80). Of course, his old reflective self, which is a product of his father’s systematic training and which is very active at this stage, engenders the feeling in his mind that he has engaged himself ‘...by a rash promise to an action big with incalculable consequences’ (Ibid.). He is assailed,
by all sorts of doubts about his companion’s mental state. But his doubts are laid at rest temporarily and he is deeply moved by her firm embrace. As far as Lena is concerned, she finds Heyst a total antithesis to Schomberg (the German hotel-keeper and her tormentor) and, therefore, ‘pleasant’ (p75). His friendliness, polished manner, polite and soft words (all novel experiences for Alma, a social underdog familiar with the seamy side of life) give her a special delight. Mortally afraid of facing Schomberg alone in the immediate past, she is ready now to take on the hostile world since Heyst, her source of courage and strength, cares for her. Burying her nightmarish past forever, she is ready to start her life afresh. After a long time, she admits she feels ‘disposed to smile’ (p85).

Thus, though Heyst and Alma’s responses to the initial phase of their interactions beginning with the first meeting and culminating in their elopement vary widely (Heyst’s old ascetic and his newly emerging selves seem locked in a conflict, while a generally optimistic Alma seems anxious to turn over a new leaf, as it were), this phase not only proves a watershed in their lives but also prepares us for the second phase of their common life at Samburan in the course of which the patterns of their behaviour remain more or less unchanged. For example, whenever Heyst is alone, he ponders over the nature and consequences of his rash act of elopement and feels grimly doubtful. But, as the
author tells us, 'There were not many such moments in his days now and he did not like them when they came' (Underlining mine, p159). In conformity with his new pattern of behaviour Heyst continues to forget himself in the contemplation of Alma's body, achieves a close communion with her through physical contact and acknowledges that she has '... given him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life' (p170). Of course, the old contemplative self in him, the loyal intellectual disciple of his father in him, offers a resistance before yielding to the enemy. He feels a surge of impotent anger at life '... the commonest of snare in which he feels himself caught' (p181), at the gradual dissolution of his 'cherished negations' (p187), at the weakness of his own heart which has fallen a prey to all sorts of common human feelings and failings. The doubting Thomas in him still feels the '... fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life which makes of them a delusion and a snare' (p179). On Lena's part, as her acquaintance with Heyst ripens into intimacy, as her faith in and love for him grow and her expressions of her inmost feeling become open and whole-hearted, she affirms that her nature is determined by and her existence is dependent on his thought. She says: "... if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all" (p159) and again, "I can only be what you think I am" (p160). Apart from expressing faith in him, she thinks over ways and means to surrender herself totally to this
strangely self-sufficient, mysterious, fastidious, superior, unique soul by some act of 'absolute sacrifice' (p170).

The third and the final phase of their life which begins with the appearance of Mr. Jones and his associates, (a pack of desperadoes misled by Schomberg, Heyst's sworn enemy), brings about positive changes in Heyst. Having tasted the deliciousness of female company once, he is apprehensive of his possible separation from Alma. Besides, '... the sceptical awareness which had accompanied everyone of his attempts at action ... fell away from him '(p203)In a marked departure from his habitual indifference to the pressing realities, he looks for his long-unused revolver and though not a diplomatic type, he disassembles his passionate desire to take scoundrels like Mr. Jones, Ricardo and Pedro by their throats for the sake of ensuring the safety of Alma's life. Moreover, he begins to set great store on her opinion of his conduct in the Morrison affair and on her love and loyalty. However, in keeping with his settled mental habits he still feels contemptuously irritated whenever the outer world breaks in upon his privacy and compels him to act.

Conversely, Lena's preoccupation with her lover at the waking and sleeping hours of her life, her concealment of the fact of her scuffle with Ricardo from Heyst to spare him anxiety, her perception that she alone is
responsible for the grave menace to his life, her guilty feeling that she has beguiled him into a sinful life, her decision to sacrifice her life to save Heyst’s life, to win his love and to transcend her ordinariness and her subsequent act of snatching a deadly knife away from Ricardo (an operation wherein she employs all her histrionic skill, courage, self-possession and sense of timing) --- all argue a heart full of Heyst. And although she accidentally sustains a fatal bullet injury from a shot fired by Mr. Jones, she feels wildly joyous, nay, triumphant because of her conviction that she has succeeded in eliminating a very serious threat to her lover’s life.

But even on the eve of her death, his deep-rooted mistrust of life does not allow him to express his love. His ‘fastidious’ (p324) soul keeps the true cry of love from his lips in ‘the infernal mistrust of life’ (Ibid.). Following her death, of course, he feels grief-stricken and the sight of her dead body wrings an anguished confession from his lips. To Davidson he says: “Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love --- and to put its trust in life” (p326). Heyst’s self-immolation by fire, the last act of self-assertion in his life that follows his realization of the impossibility of a life without Alma amounts to his abandonment of his father’s nihilistic teachings, acceptance of Lena’s simple, positive and life-enhancing principles and his ultimate tribute to an ordinary, ill-educated, miserable English girl whose love,
loyalty and sacrifice melt his hardened heart, dissolve his petrified feelings, move him to action and transform his outlook on life irreversibly.

This is a remarkable victory by all standards. As Leo Gurko puts it: “It is a victory of character over social station, of action over inertia, of will over misanthropy. She shakes Hyst out of his accustomed mould and almost reconciles to the world—a feat beside which her triumphs in the two grotesque encounters with Ricardo (she almost chokes him to death in the first, and in the second casts a mesmeric spell over him by a simple exudation of sexual magnetism) seem trivial.”

Then let us consider the relationship between Mrs. Gould and Dr. Monygham in Nostromo which is an eloquent commentary on the far-reaching changes that love and trust can bring about in a misunderstood and maltreated individual. Imprisoned on a false charge of conspiring against a tyrant named Guzman Bento and released by Bento’s henchman Father Beron, Dr. Manygham, a medical practitioner of unquestionable capacity, is picked up, sheltered, trusted and cared for by the Gould couple at a point of time when everyone gives this cripple, destitute, misanthrope and social outcast (Dr. Monygham has been reduced to all these by the long, systematic and complicated course of torture inflicted upon him by Father Beron) a wide berth.
‘A penniless outcast, slinking about the streets of Sulaco without a single friend or acquaintance’ (p361), ‘a beachcomber of superior intelligence’ (p288), he is reinstated professionally and financially by Mr. Gould who appoints him the medical office of the San Tome silver mine, while the tasks of humanizing him, transforming him morally are taken up by his wife Mrs. Emilia Gould. With her intuitive understanding of and insight into human nature, Emilia discovers his true nature consisting in ‘his capacity for passion and in the sensitiveness of his temperament’ (p426), reposes her implicit faith in his goodness buried under his unprepossessing appearance, gait and manner, pampers his peculiarities, tames him by her kindness, reclaims him from his ‘abased state’ (p288) to a great extent, refreshes his ‘withered soul after many arid years’ (p303) and exercises a salutary restraint on his cynicism and misanthropy. She alone is capable of curbing (if not eliminating) his ‘...immense mistrust of mankind’ (p49) engendered mainly by the realization of his own moral baseness, smallness and vulnerability to pressures. Conrad tells us: “Only Mrs. Gould could keep his unbelief in men’s motives within due bounds” (p49). And it bears no repetition that the doctor repays her friendliness, kindness and trust by settling all his devotion and love on her, by expressing his sincere gratitude and respect to her and by performing such acts as are clearly inspired by his positive feelings for this unique woman the delicate preciousness of whose inner worth ‘partakes of a gem and a flower’ (p365). Widely noticed and criticized for wearing dresses
that defy the ‘established conventionalities’ (p49) of Sulaco, he pays his tribute to Emilia by wearing a white jacket. ‘The white jacket was in reality a concession to Mrs. Gould’s humanizing influence (p50),’ the author tells us. Besides, any development or any individual action that robs Emilia of her mental peace exasperates him greatly. Thus the steady prosperity of the silver mine and the indifference of Charles Gould to her happiness and peace infuriate him as they have an unsettling effect on her mind. In his obsession to save her life during a military revolution, a pretty common event in a country plagued by chronic political turmoil, he spares no pains. He makes Nostromo carry a crucial message to Cayta, commits an outrage on his own nature, indulges in lie, deceit and circumvention and performs a nearly Herculean labour of love and devotion by playing ‘a game of betrayal’ (p339) with a rapacious villain named Sotillo at the risk of his own life. (The greatness of his sacrifice is gratefully recalled and acknowledged by Emilia) And after the military revolution he lives by drawing on the secret store of his immense devotion to Emilia. He strongly dislikes anybody who approaches her with a semblance of intimacy; he tries hard to monopolize all her attention, speech and time; in her absence he enjoys the company of such people as admire her generously; and a solitary, sad, tired, self-doubting Emilia deprived of her husband’s company because of his absorption in material pursuit, values his
company, consideration, service and sacrifice. Thus theirs is an ideal symbiotic relationship in all conscience.

In the selfsame novel, Antonia inspires ‘...a sincere passion in the heart of a trifler’ which her lover Martin Decoud is, at least initially. A thirty-year-old Parisian, a student of law, a dabbler in literature, a frequent visitor to some newspaper offices in Paris and an occasional contributor of articles on European affairs to a Sta Marta-based newspaper, he is essentially a trifler, a sceptic, ‘an idle boulevardier’(p135), ‘an exotic dandy’(p195), ‘a sort of non-descript dilettante’(p135) who has ‘... pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature’(Ibid.). But this gilded youth the dreary superficiality of whose life is covered by the glitter of universal blague ‘...like the stupid clowning of a harlequin by the spangles of a motley costume’(Ibid.) is changed by his ardent love for a serious, patriotic, accomplished and beautiful Antonia who is the fountainhead of his actions as is amply demonstrated by his open admissions and passionate declarations. Thus he unreservedly says: “There is nothing I would not do for the sake of Antonia. There is nothing I am not prepared to undertake. There is no risk I am not ready to run”(p185) since “She is more to me than his church to Father Corbelan. She is more to me than his precious mine to that sentimental Englishman” (Charles Gould that is,p202). No wonder then that he cancels his tours to Europe and
America, stays on in a God-forsaken hellhole called Sulaco, and, to his utter surprise, finds himself playing a vital role in the local revolution and the consequent emergence of Sulaco as a separate nation! Out of love for Antonia (who reciprocates his gesture mostly with moderate zeal and prudent economy of expressions and gestures) he discharges his duties as an executive member of the patriotic small-arms committee of Sulaco and carries out his mission of procuring improved rifles for the nation’s defence with a rare degree of earnestness and ability that surprise his beloved and trusted sister. Again, he accepts the responsibility of editing a local newspaper entitled Porvenir and zealously expounds the political faith of the Blanco party before the world, voices the aspirations of the people and counteracts the effects of lies disseminated by the Monterist press. A stranger to his own nature so far, he now perceives a gradual change in his feeling and outlook. He confesses to Mrs. Gould that he does not feel like ‘an idle cumberer of the earth’(p139) any longer. A man who previously contemplated revolutions in his native land from the Parisian boulevards and dismissed their tragic comedy with the expression, ‘Quelle farce!’(p153) now realizes surprisingly that he is more of a Costaguenera than he would have believed possible and needless to say, he owes this startling self-knowledge to his passion wherefrom he draws ‘his strength and his inspiration’(p223). Finally, his first-hand involvement in a riot triggered off by the Democrats’ attack, his fervent advocacy of Sulaco’s
separation from a chronically unquiet Costaguana, his composition of a draft constitution of a new country, his participation in the act of removing six months’ yield of the San Tome silver mine (along with the unique Nostromo) beyond the reach of the marauding Democrats attest to the degree of change wrought in this man by his passionate devotion to Antonia. Thus in their meeting we see the meeting of opposites, namely, the temperamentally serious and the habitually frivolous. Needless to say, Antonia being nobler and more powerful, brings out the best in Decoud, acquaints him with the hidden reserves, the unknown depths in his character and helps him to discover, know and understand himself.

(It is a different matter altogether, of course, that the solitude, silence, sense of unreality and disillusioned weariness that he experiences during his ten-day-long stay on the beach of great Isabel where the silver is concealed drive him to commit suicide thereby preventing the fulfilment of his desire, namely, his union with his beloved.)

We meet almost a similar situation in The Arrow of Gold where Rita transforms Mr. George’s nature, in fact, his life significantly for a considerably long period of time (if not for ever) and where the process of change follows their very first meeting. The first “four hours” (p87) that George spends in Rita’s
company constitute a ‘decisive moment’ (p13), a watershed in his life. A ‘complete change’ (p87) comes over him and he feels that he is reborn. Like Heyst who becomes aware of his own personality in Alma’s presence in Victory, George becomes aware of his own self after his meeting with Rita. In his own words, he experiences ‘...a warm, steady, eager sensation’ (p70) of his individual life after his maiden encounter with her. Her bewitching beauty, her ‘poignant, heart-gripping presence’ (p107), her enthralling ‘outbreaks of temper and gesture’ (Ibid.) and her magical voice affect him profoundly. From this point onward, he cuts himself off from his usual haunts, shuns the society of his light-hearted, young, reckless friends, his ‘harum-scarum kind’ (p87), foregoes the careless freedom of his old lifestyle and seeks the company of a person named Mr. Mills simply because he is interesting, mature and most important of all, close to Rita. Everyone and everything connected with her directly or indirectly becomes a source of ‘peculiar fascination’ (p119), a matter of tremendous significance for him. The change in him is so conspicuous that even a casual observer like Madame Leonore (the sweetheart of Dominic, the sailor who helps him in all his risky ventures) notices it. By degrees, he finds nothing more lovable, more life-giving, more inspiring and more illuminating than the emanation of her charm. “This charm, warming like a flame, was also all-revealing like a great light; giving new depth to shades, new brilliance to colours, an amazing vividness to all sensation and vitality to all thoughts: so
that all that has been lived before seemed to have been lived in a drab world and with a languid pulse” (p124). Small wonder then that for Rita’s sake he commits himself to a senseless, ridiculous and risky venture like gun running for the Carlists and becomes the chief of the arms smuggling organization eventually in a manner which recalls Decoud’s participation in revolutionary activities in *Nostromo*. (He makes no bones about the fact that he is not interested in the Legitimist Principle at all. His diary entry informs us: “All the others might have been merged into the idea, but I, the latest recruit, I would not be merged in the Legitimist Principle” p89). Later on, the revolutionary venture goes up in a smoke for a variety of reasons and George ceases to have anything to do with it. Of course, his romantic interest in Rita remains as undimmed as ever. But we must not suppose that the change is one-sided since Rita too is changed by George in whose company she tastes true love for the first time in her life. Quoting Rita Mr. Mills says to George: “She told me amongst other things ... that till she met you she knew nothing of love. That you were to her in more senses than one a complete revelation” (p349). That apart, George’s candour, simplicity, informality and friendliness are a permanent source of relief to a lady like Rita who is eternally besieged by an endless stream of toadies, hangers-on, favour-seekers and interested admirers.
(Unfortunately the union between these two "venturesome children" (p150) turns out to be short-lived. Like a child, George, "the pig-headed enthusiast of the sea" (p351) for whom the sea and woman are "two mistresses of life's values" (p88) once declares his love for the sea in Rita's presence which the sensitive Rita cannot bring herself to forget. And when an opportunity presents itself, the generous lady sacrifices her love and frees George from the responsibilities and restraints of a regular relationship so that he may freely live a sailor's life, a life of his own conscious choice.)

In Razumov, the leading male character in Conrad's Under Western Eyes and a third-year-student studying philosophy at St. Petersburg University we come across another example of a flawed human being cured, once again, by the sovereign power of love and trust. A natural child of an aristocrat named Prince K. and a lonely young man with none to call his own in the world and no domestic influence to shape his feelings and opinions, he is a promising student of "conspicuous abilities" (p42) who exerts himself to succeed in life, to achieve recognition in society. Hence, he shuts the national political turmoil out of his circumscribed world and aims at winning the much-coveted silver medal (awarded to the winner of an essay competition organized by the Russian Ministry of Education) since he knows that the winner of the prize will have a greater claim to an administrative appointment of the better sort. Thus his is the
uncomplicated life of a solitary and diligent student pursuing his own ambition in a systematic manner. But the even tenor of his routine-bound life receives a rude jolt when Victor Haldin, a fellow university student who knows Razumov slightly but trusts him greatly, enters his room, voluntarily informs him about his role in killing the universally hated Mr. de P, the Minister of State and the ex-President of the notorious Repressive Commission and seeks his co-operation in running away from the country so that he may continue his revolutionary works. An angry, nay, indignant Razumov feels the safety of his lonely and industrious existence permanently endangered and sees, in his mind's eyes, his life broken and robbed permanently of all hopes and dreams. Naturally, instead of co-operating with this man to escape, he makes up his mind to give him up to the police since in his eyes Haldin is nothing if not a criminal, a fanatic, a disruptive element, 'a subtle pest' (p30), a foolish, 'headlong utopist' (p44), a menace to individuals like himself and to the entire nation. But immediately after resolving to hand him over to the police, his mind undergoes an intense conflict, his conscience confronts the question of betraying a fellow human being. Of course, he manages to silence the voice of his conscience by arguing himself into believing that there is no moral bond between the two, that his own conscience is not engaged here because he knows Haldin but slightly, because he has not sought any information from him and he proceeds to translate his resolution into action. However, after the commission
of the deed, he once again finds himself haunted by Haldin’s spectre and feels himself closely involved in the moral consequences of his act. The flimsy garment of equanimity falls off him the moment Haldin’s name is mentioned even casually by anybody. But again, the strong instinct of self-preservation of an essentially ambitious man gets the better of the scruples of his conscience and his spares no efforts to ensure survival in a world fraught with veiled menaces, covert suspicions and hidden dangers. And on account of a combination of factors which include Razumov’s capacity to inspire confidence among the people, a series of mistaken judgements on the part of those he comes into contact with and the occurrence of several fortuitous incidents, he succeeds in enjoying the trust of both the police and the revolutionaries. He even plays the game of running with the hare and hunting with the hound with an unmistakable zeal for quite some time. He indulges in a calculated outburst of passion before a seasoned bureaucrat like Mikulin and manages not only to convince him of his innocence but also to win his confidence; he plays with the inflated greatness of a self-styled messiah like Peter Ivanovitch; he embarks on a plain struggle for self-preservation against a dangerous adversary named Sophia Antonovna and invents a circumstantial and specious story to befool her and he makes Kostia, a flighty, sensual yet revolution-infected student steal his father’s money.
But his meeting with Haldin’s beautiful and truthful sister which fascinates and frightens him simultaneously and which ushers in a phase of ‘terrible beauty’ (to borrow the immortal words of Yeats) results in his transformation and redemption. Needless to say, the process of Razumov’s transformation is appropriately long, tortuous and painful. In fact, their first encounter reveals the sharply antithetical nature of their responses to the situation at hand. Nathalie, who takes Razumov at her brother’s valuation, looks upon him as an unstained, lofty, solitary soul and feels overwhelmed at facing a vital part of her dead brother, as it were. Her characteristic self-control fails her and she behaves, on her own confession, like a weak, foolish, ‘emotional French girl’ (p146). On the other hand, Razumov is bewitched into immobility by Nathalie’s beauty. The harmonious charm of her physique, its strength, grace and tranquil frankness leave an indelible imprint on his mind. But the moment he shakes her hand, realization dawns upon him and he feels mortally scared. Conrad delineates his reaction to the fateful event in the following manner: “It (the handshake) nearly suffocated him physically with an emotional reaction of hate and dismay as though her appearance had been a piece of accomplished treachery” (p143). Hence he shuns her like poison and refrains from meeting her for one full week at a point of time when Nathalie longs to meet and hold conversations with him every day. Besides, he scrupulously avoids ‘any mental reference to this young girl’ (p169). Unaware of Razumov’s hideous role in her brother’s betrayal and
apparently blissful in her ignorance, Nathalie, like the other characters in the novel, mistakes him for what he is not, namely, a contemplative man who suffers more ‘...from his thoughts than from his evil fortune’(p144), an exceptional individual who is planning to undertake some vast plan for which he requires the assistance of a faithful, worthy person and Nathalie who gradually develops a romantic interest in the man expresses her fervent desire to offer him her help. On the contrary, Razumov’s indignation against the irresponsible and crazy brother who ruined his life surges back with an overpowering force and strengthens his resolve to visit the brother’s sin upon the sister. In the innermost recesses of his heart, he harbours the infamous, wicked intention of stealing her soul by marrying her. But Razumov proposes, Nathalie disposes. Like a divinity, she shapes his end, as it were. Her innate goodness, near-total innocence, unshaken faith in and touching love for Razumov and above all, her stunning beauty take their inevitable toll. The solitary young man whose heart is a stranger to warm feelings of any kind so far, comes under the magic influence of love and undergoes a metamorphosis. He is wrenched out of his solipsistic universe and is made to realize that by betraying Haldin he has betrayed himself, that there is a moral bond between the betrayer and the betrayed. Razumov not only acknowledges his deep debt of gratitude to Nathalie but also explains her role as the agent of his transformation when he writes in his diary: “You were appointed to undo the
evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace” (p301). He further adds: “You have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate, the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me (p303)”. Out of this realization of his accountability, a deep, sincere feeling of remorse grows and from this sense of contrition, an overpowering impulse to confess is born.

His voluntary confessions (both private and public) cost him enormous losses since he loses his ladylove and the soundness of his limbs. But simultaneously these losses pave the way for his moral redemption. Anyway, after his confessions, he is cleansed from sins, freed from ‘the prison of lies’ (p304) which his life degenerated into and calm of mind all passions spent, he starts his life de novo.

Our last two examples from The Rover will reinforce the claim we made in the opening paragraph of this chapter about the important role played by women in the principal works of Conrad. Peyrol, the rover in Conrad’s eponymous novel, is a fifty-eight-year-old former pirate-turned-master-gunner in the French Republican Navy when we first meet him. An absolute loner, an apparently ‘undemonstrative (p1) and unsentimental man (‘Sentiment in itself was an artificiality of which he had never heard’ p34): and above all, a rover ‘tired of rolling about the seas (p3) for almost fifty years, he comes over to and
puts up at the Escampobar farm to seek ‘...a quiet nook, an obscure corner, out of men’s sight where he could dig a hole unobserved’ (p12). In other words, an exhausted sailor looks for a quiet retreat where he can lead a bother-free, safe and reposeful life, from where he can venture out into the sea at times. Always carrying his windfall of a property comprising ‘gold mohurs, Dutch ducats, Spanish pieces, English guineas’ (p13) inside a waistcoat, he reminds himself that ‘... he must not get into trouble of any sort, keep clear of rows, of intimacies, of promiscuous jollities’ (p14). A self-made, self-taught, widely-travelled, experienced and prosperous man, he feels like ‘...an utter stranger in his native country’ (p13), considers the local people as savage and treats them in an openly condescending manner. He wants to stay on the shore and enjoy ‘the great sense of peace and security’ (p35) that it generates. But simultaneously he wants to steer clear of the shore breed who ‘... with their houses, animals and activities did not count’ (p30). In other words, he wants to have the best of both the worlds, to eat and have the cake, as it were. To all appearances, therefore, Peyrol’s is a self-centred existence devoted to a selfish search for rest, pursuit of personal affairs and conscious avoidance of intimate personal relations.

But in Conrad appearances are deceptive and people are not what they appear to be at first glance. A close look at the very first meeting between Peyrol and Arlette brings out not only the impact of Peyrol’s arrival on Arlette’s
life but also the susceptibility of a seemingly unemotional, undemonstrative man to the influence of tender human feelings aroused by a childlike girl. Thus while Peyrol’s unusual aspect startles Arlette, Arlette’s breath-taking beauty takes Peyrol’s unawares. Of course, she overcomes her incipient feeling of surprise almost in no time, smiles at and comes up to him boldly, questions him searchingly to ascertain the fact of his involvement in the French Revolution, fingers the lapel of his coat ‘like a child’(p23), professes her friendship for the stranger and expresses her intention to share her own nightmarish experiences of the French Revolution with an unwilling listener thereby making him her confidant. Actually Peyrol’s arrival at the farm coincides with an extremely critical and empty phase in Arlette’s life. Orphaned, driven half-mad and turned into a sufferer from occasional hallucinations by the Toulon massacre, she was more dead than alive before Peyrol’s entry into her life. Now Peyrol turns up like an angel and performs a miracle, as it were. As Catherine tells us Peyrol opens her mind, unlooses her tongue and arouses some sentiment in her. Arlette herself acknowledges the enormous impact of Peyrol’s advent on her life when she says that he gives ‘...a moral and physical jolt’(p219) to all her being. He is the first human being she takes note of and talks to of her own accord after a considerably long period of time. On Peyrol’s part, he too is touched by a soft, indefinite emotion. Arlette arouses in him an ill-defined, a vague emotion ‘...which he had not known before to exist by itself in a man’(p88). In other
words, Peyrol’s latent, hitherto-untried paternal feelings are stirred up from the depths of his being by a child named Arlette.

Thus the possibilities of the development of a positive daughter-father relationship (surrogate though) and of future changes in Peyrol are indicated. Needless to repeat, after staying on the farm for some years, his attitude does undergo a sea-change gradually. Coming out of the cocoon of his puny self, he starts taking a fairly active interest in the lives and occupations of the farm’s inmates, discovers ‘a strain of manliness in a miserable cripple’(p143) like Michel, slowly sheds his original feeling of superiority over the savage locals, ceases to feel like a rank outsider, like an utter stranger in his native land and feels not only related to but also responsible for the people surrounding him. No wonder then that the man who kept himself aloof from the people initially, swings to the other extreme and says: “... this place (meaning the Escampobar farm) ... is like a ship to me and all in it are like shipmates”(p44). This irreversible change in the outlook of an ex-pirate to his microcosm can be attributed primarily to his love for Arlette which acts as the mainspring of the majority of his actions (other factors governing his conduct and influencing his action include his magnanimous nature, his dormant patriotic instincts to which Captain Real appeals successfully). Arlette’s attitude to Peyrol swings between implicit faith in his ability and nagging doubt about his motives. She believes
that being a larger-than-life figure he can help her out of many crises, can
'soothe her aimless unrest'(p146), can perform all conceivable exploits. But
later on, she misreads his motives, mistakes him for an enemy and openly
accuses him of plotting against Real and herself! On the other hand, Peyrol’s
loving concern for this ‘problematic human being’(p88) who is ‘a lovable
creature’ (Ibid.) at the same time never flags. Her nocturnal adventures in
search of her unenthusiastic lover, her gnawing anxiety about Real’s safety
resulting in her sleeplessness worry him greatly. Moreover, Real’s frigid and
inconsistent responses to her passionate protestations of love arouse in Peyrol’s
breast anger and a fleeting impulse to kill him. Of course, the ultimate
expression of ‘Papa Peyrol’s’(p175) selfless love for Arlette, the most eloquent
testimony to his complete self-identification with Arlette’s interests are
illustrated in his conscious decision and subsequent action to participate in an
especially risky and odious naval operation (like the odious game of betrayal
that Dr. Monygham plays in Nostrromo) the purpose of which is to deceive the
English admiral by luring him into chasing a tartane containing counterfeit
dispatches and letters. (Though Peyrol himself resolves to go on the naval
mission, Arlette’s desperate leap off a boulder to stop Real from performing the
perilous naval operation, her soul-stirring appeals to Peyrol to spare her lover’s
life, her loss of consciousness immediately after her frantic appeals strengthen
Peyrol’s resolution and hasten his departure for the mission.) Anyway, a series
of acts performed by Peyrol like saving Arlette jumping off a detached boulder, imprinting his last kiss on her forehead before launching his premeditated naval exercise, sending Real away apparently to carry an unconscious Arlette back to the Escampobar farm, removing Scevola, the blood-drinker-cum-tormentor of Arlette (who comes to kill Real and finds himself trapped in the tartane) and sacrificing his own life serve several purposes like expressing his love for Arlette, saving Real’s life, removing an obstacle from Arlette’s life and facilitating Arlette’s union with Real respectively. Thus a parentless child like Arlette arouses the father in Peyrol, an inexpressive, unemotional, middle-aged, lonely bachelor who is a stranger to paternal emotions, draws him out of the shell of his petty self though he originally resolved to seek pleasure in pursuing personal interests, induces him to form close ties almost against his nature, brings out the generous, the large-hearted man in him, makes him realize the supreme necessity of responsibility, commitment and action thereby transforming him spiritually to such an extent that a former pirate, ‘a man of dark deeds’ (p286) sacrifices his own life for fellow human beings.

Lastly, we intend to look closely at Real-Arlette relationship which incontrovertibly proves something that has already been proved repeatedly in the course of our discussion, namely, the alchemy of whole-hearted love, the transmuting power of absolute trust. The apparently interminable orgy of
massacres that followed the French Revolution robbed Arlette of her parents, killed her normal, healthy feelings and destroyed the peace and balance of her mind. A victim of fear psychosis and hallucinations, she becomes a diseased, Wastelandish creature dragging a dreary, desiccated, deathlike existence. At such a critical juncture Captain Real turns up like a saviour, like a radiant messenger of life and the dying girl clutches at him the way Winnie clutches at Ossipon in _The Secret Agent_. Real’s very presence restores her mental sanity, revives her normal feelings, re-orients her directionless life and most important of all, generates a novel and elevating feeling of love which she gives vent to in an extremely passionate and candid manner. On the contrary, the response of Real to Arlette’s clarion call of love is inconsistent, conflict-ridden, confusing and the hold of love on the mind of such ‘a slippery customer’ (p104) is precarious till the moment of his irreversible conversion. The reason thereof can be traced back to the circumstances and influences which mould his attitude to the world, his values, his nature as a whole.

A child of ‘a ci-devant couple’, (p78) a victim of the Toulon massacre which claims his parents’ lives and subsequently, a responsible and meritorious naval officer, he has nobody to call his own and no place to go to in the world. A loner, his feelings are ‘purely professional’ (p70), his behaviour is guarded and his moral conduct is straightforward and honest though rigid and
pedantically conscientious. He avoids close relationships and emotional interactions. In fact, ever since his boyhood he tries to suppress, even destroy, ‘...all the softer feelings within himself’(p117). Thus an apparently self-contained, strong-minded, unemotional person arrives at the Escampobar farm to relieve his oppressive sense of boredom. On his own admissions, he enjoys ‘the sense of remoteness from common mankind’(p209) which the sequestered farm produces and the talks that he has with Peyrol (who is ignorant of the French Revolution, which, in the captain’s opinion, is the fountain-head of unbridled passions and clamouring falsehood.) But as far as his interactions with Arlette at this stage are concerned, they are limited, nay, negligible. Real takes note of her ubiquitous presence and even feels temporarily drawn towards her thanks to her ‘unapproachable aspect’(p210). But he never heeds her obvious interest in him although she hangs around him, casts lingering and longing glances at him and tries unsuccessfully to engage him in conversations. In fact, the story of her sufferings related by Peyrol awakens ‘...more bitter indignation than pity’(p209) in his mind. But evidently Real’s consistent endeavour to eradicate all soft feelings from his system thereby rendering it totally immune from the influence of all conceivable emotional invasions does not succeed. One day at a café in Toulon he realizes, to his horror, shame and sorrow, that he has developed a romantic attachment to Arlette, ‘a witless and unhappy creature’(214), ‘a body without a mind’(Ibid), a mere mortal envelope
whose mind is darkened by a terrifying, atrocious and guilty experience. The moment of this shattering realization is immediately followed by a momentary impulse to commit suicide. Of course, Real refrains from translating his desire into action on the ground that in war-time his life belongs to the nation. However, he resolves to avoid the fatal farmhouse with its femme fatale, the inspirer of his base passion, the cause of his fall. But his unbearable loneliness haunted by the forbidden vision of Arlette tells upon his abilities to think systematically and talk sensibly. To overcome this pitiable mental state, he pays several visits to the farm and regains his mental balance to a great extent.

In the course of these visits he ‘...assumes austerity like an armour’ (p212) and behaves formally, even icily, with Arlette. But the harder he seeks to evade an emotional attachment to Arlette, the deeper he gets involved. And on one particular occasion when they are thrown together by circumstances, the captain yields to a strong impulse and implants passionate kisses on Arlette’s hand. For a scrupulous, rational and serious person like Real, this is ‘an absolute moral disaster’ (p213) the consciousness of which makes him rush to Toulon where he takes upon himself the responsibility of playing the part of a despatch-bearer in a particularly risky naval exercise the aim of which is to deceive the English navy. But as the luck would have it, he returns to the farmhouse to take his personal belongings, chances upon Arlette, comes under the irresistible spell of love, experiences moments of delicious oblivion and
becomes a convert to the cause of love for the first time in his life. Of course, old habits die hard and his old, embittered and conflict-torn soul peeps out once again just before the commencement of the naval operation already referred to. Pulled by contradictory impulses in sharply opposite directions first he broods over Arlette’s despair at his departure, then he imagines Arlette as a fickle-minded girl who is likely to forget him in a month’s time and the very next moment his realization of ‘this sacrilegious cynicism of thought’(p240) saddens him deeply.

Be that as it may, he fails to participate in the planned naval exercise because of the rapid occurrence of a chain of events in which he finds himself playing a decisive role. As Peyrol is about to start the pre-arranged exercise, Arlette, who is disturbed by a nightmare in her sleep, wakes up and comes out searching frantically for him. Seeing him in the tartane, she jumps off a boulder into Pryrol’s lap, appeals earnestly to Peyrol to spare Real’s life and faints away. Real carries her back to the farm, commits her to her aunt’s care, returns to rejoin Peyrol but finds the tartane gone. On regaining consciousness Arlette comes out once again in search of her “heart”, meets and grasps him firmly and passionately. Her passionate embrace, her firm grasp dispel Real’s nagging doubt about Arlette’s sincerity, resolve his perennial conflict, tear ‘...all his scruples out of his breast’(p258) and turn him into a votary of love for good.
Thus Arlette’s complete absorption in and single-minded pursuit of love, her total self-surrender to Real, her loyalty which remains unshaken through all thick and thin, her willingness to lay down her life in the event of her failure to win Real transform an eccentric, a misanthrope, revolutionize and sanitize his defective, unhealthy attitude to life, regenerate his long-buried emotions, humanize him in short. Before the unquestionable fact of her love, faith and devotion, his scruples, his pedantic conscience melt into thin air; his rigid principles of conduct fall apart; his warped notions of love and kindred emotions are reversed and finally, his opinions of Arlette are thoroughly revised. So, far from being an insane woman, a fatal creature to be avoided like plague, a stumbling block for his conscience and a body without mind, she now appears to be a messenger of ‘triumphant life’ (p260), a sane, exquisite woman, ‘a miracle’ (p216), a boon, a god’s gift in his eyes. In other words, Arlette is an agent of Real’s radical moral transformation and a rectifier of his emotional deficiencies.
Notes and references

1. In the following lines occurring in **Heart of Darkness** Conrad openly expresses his doubt, through Kurtz and Marlow, about women’s ability to face the ugly and horrible truths of life since they are the denizens of a beautiful, though false, world. Thus Kurtz says, “They—the women I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse” (p71). The contents and tone of Marlow’s observation are no different. He says, “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. It is too beautiful altogether” (p15). But interestingly and significantly, the attitude of the self-same Marlow undergoes a sea-change (indicative of the enormous change in the author’s own stance effected probably by his marriage and by the suffragette movement) who lets us know in **Chance**, “The women’s rougher, simpler, more upright judgement, embraces the whole truth, which their tact, their mistrust of masculine idealism, ever prevents from speaking in its entirety. And their tact is unerring. We could not stand women speaking the truth. We could not bear it. It would cause infinite misery and bring about most awful disturbances in this rather mediocre but still idealistic fool’s paradise in which each of us lives his own little life—the
unit in the great sum of existence. And they know it. They are merciful" (p131).


3. Marlow echoes an identical sentiment in *Chance* when he says, “I suppose affections are, in a sense, to be learned. If there exists a native spark of love in all of us, it must be fanned while we are young” (p222).


5. Author’s Note to *Nostromo*, p13.

6. It requires no special imaginative or intellectual effort on the part of even an average reader to understand that Conrad disapproves of debased and distorted form of love when it makes men forget themselves. In other words, when active, responsible and strong men neglect their duties, forget their responsibilities and act in a manner uncharacteristic, unexpected and unbecoming of them under the debilitating influence of love, Conrad disparages the negative emotion, the agent awakening that emotion consciously or unconsciously and the victim thereof. In *The Rescue* Lingard, who prides himself on and contents himself with his steadfast attachment to his brig, responds to the innumerable calls of the sea, discharges his routine duties and tries his utmost to help Hassim and Immada in their struggle for the restoration
of their lost Wajo kingdom. But this state of affairs goes on till his chance meeting with Edith Traverse which spells doom to his dependants and himself. The simple and generous man proud of his immunity from the contagion of feminine love, falls in love with Edith, drinks her beauty, her physical presence and her conversations to the lees and tastes the life-enhancing (though momentary) glimpse of paradise, as it were. But in the process his will to exert himself atrophies and he fails to redeem his promise to provide Hassim and Immada with necessary assistance. Consequently, a major disaster follows which results in the loss of many lives (including those of Hassim and Immada) and in Lingard’s despairing realization of the true extent of his fall caused by his vulnerability to female charms. In The Planter of Malata Renouard, the ambitious, enterprising, honest and unemotional planter loses his integrity, initiative, seriousness and the goal of his life after he comes in contact with a stunningly beautiful though heartless Felicia whose supercilious rejection of his love breaks his heart and drives him to suicide. (Already discussed in some detail in the fourth chapter.) In A Smile of Fortune and in The Return men find women brazen, disloyal, unfeeling, unintelligent and unresponsive, discover the vanity of their own desire for female body and love, loses their will to exert themselves, feel disillusioned with life to such an extent that they quit home and profession for ever. Thus Conrad is not unaware of the mutually
exclusive roles, the totally opposite parts that women are capable of playing in men’s lives.