Fourth Chapter

The two previous chapters study such characters as are loving and lovable. But this should not make us lose sight of the sizeable number of negatively-drawn characters in Conrad who serve as contrasts to their positively-drawn counterparts, bring out the writer’s natural flair for satire, reveal his negative attitude to some masculine, confused, flawed, inhuman women and enable him to plumb the depth of human hypocrisy, misery and turpitude.¹

First of all, the character of Eliza, Flora’s governess in Chance which is obviously a product of Conrad’s overtly negative attitude to women.² With her never-failing correctness of speech, glance, movement, smile, gesture and with her ‘cold, distinguished exclusiveness’ (p88), this nearly forty-year-old woman has the manner of a ‘perfect lady’ (p85) and ‘the soul of a remorseless brigand’ (Ibid.)-Besides, this scheming governess is exceedingly fond not only of young men of a certain sort but also of busy, bustling urban life. To gratify her ‘taste for urban landscape’ (p66), her employer de Barral rents a splendidly furnished house in Brighton and lavishes sweets and money on her. A middle-aged, pessimistic, disillusioned woman, she loves young men like (Therese in The Arrow of Gold) and to retain her precarious hold on one such scamp of a
twenty-three-year old young man, she bribes him with Flora’s money. ‘Severely practical’ (p92), opportunistic and unscrupulous, she resolves to abandon de Barral’s household the moment she gets wind of his fall as a financier. But before her departure she takes away a jewelled penholder, an ivory and gold penknife and steals money from his (de Barral’s) bank account. With her supercilious manners, she blackmails and bullies de Barral in an outrageously lofty manner, flaunts her connection with a ducal family, grossly neglects her duties towards Flora, the hapless daughter of the unsuccessful financier and pours her unstinted scorn on the teenager.

The second character in this chapter Eleanor Maximovna alias Madame de S-- is the sole Russian female character in Under Western Eyes to be satirized by the author. ‘Once upon a time the intriguing wife of a now dead, forgotten diplomat’ (p109), she has been introduced initially as the owner of ‘a mystic revolutionary salon’ (p114), as ‘a lady of advanced views’ (p109), as ‘a perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit’ (p112), and as a spell-binding personality before whom ‘contradictions vanish, trouble falls from one’ (Ibid.). But immediately after presenting such a highly flattering picture of the lady in question, Conrad, by introducing the contrary viewpoints of other characters, unmarks her and she stands exposed as an ugly, lifeless, greedy
woman whose morals, intellectual capacity and antecedents are highly questionable.

As a matter of fact, she is an ugly, heavily made-up, over-dressed woman past her prime. With her repulsive, 'wooden' (p191), 'plaster figure' (Ibid.), big, unfathomable, gleaming eyes rolling endlessly behind a short veil of black lace, rasping voice, huge, false teeth, clawlike 'bony, skeleton hand' (p192), 'glittering with costly rings' (p185), vividly red lips, 'rouged cheekbones' (p183), she is, as Razumov fancies, 'a galvanized corpse out of Hoffman's (sic.) Tale' (p183).

Posing as a spiritualist, she is 'avaricious, greedy and unscrupulous' (p138) in earthly affairs and has a shady past. Nathalia's English teacher insinuates that she flies from Russia when she becomes a suspect in the eyes of the police following her alleged involvement in the assassination of Emperor Alexander. Conrad looks askance at her morals and intellectual ability when he points out that though a mystic, she is not always in a mystical state of mind and is fond of talking to young men of 'notably good appearance' (p186) like Razumov at times and that though she has been compared with Madame de Staël (a leader of fashionable thought of Napoleonic era), she is '... very far from resembling the gifted author of Corinne' (p123). In fact, her book is a
'mystically bad-tempered, declamatory and frightfully disconnected piece of writing' (p139).

Though enormously rich, she is, as Tekla says, a heartless miser. She spends no money to clothe and comfort Tekla, her own companion and attendant, who shivers in biting cold in a thin-walled French villa and performs the literally back-breaking job of taking dictation from an unusually exacting man like Peter Ivanovitch. She is flattered by the revolutionaries in general and Peter Ivanovitch in particular for her money. But she lets all of them down, dies intestate and her relatives come down from St. Petersburg, '...like a flock of vultures' (p320) to grab her money. These acts of hers are of a piece with her deceitful and parsimonious nature.

A dominating type, she, like Peter Ivanovitch, loves to influence, indoctrinate (especially young) people. And anyone seeking to ignore and cold-shoulder her or Peter not only incurs her wrath but also arouses a strong revengeful desire in her breast. The patently cold reception of Peter Ivanovitch by Victor Haldin’s sister and mother infuriates her to such a degree that in Razumov’s presence she flies into a passion, calls Natalia a 'wild young thing' (p190), a 'conceited democrat' (Ibid.) and expresses her sinister intention of extirpating the family.
To conclude, Eleanor and Peter are "extravagant parodies" of Voltaire and Madame de Staël with whom they have been deliberately compared and contrasted.

Mrs. Lucy MacWhirr, wife of Captain MacWhirr in Typhoon belongs to the category of satirically etched bad wives (like Mrs. Davidson in Because of the Dollars and Mrs. Hervey in The Return discussed, for the sake of convenience, in the following chapter) in Conrad. A superior and ladylike daughter of superior parents, she is a pretentious person with a scraggy neck and a disdainful manner. Apart from employing straightforward descriptions, Conrad contrasts her with Mrs. Raut and with Captain MacWhirr to bring out the full extent of her vanity, superciliousness, hypocrisy and heartlessness. The character of Mrs. Raut, wife of Mr. Solomon Raut (chief engineer of Captain MacWhirr's steamer) who is extremely fond of her husband, of his letters, of their style and who revels in reading out large chunks of passages therefrom to Mr. Raut's old mother and to complete strangers, presents a sharp contrast to Mrs. MacWhirr who reads her husband's painstakingly-written letters perfunctorily and finds them quite prosy and uninteresting.
Furthermore, Conrad lets us know that she feels decidedly uneasy in her husband's presence at home and that her mind is set at rest when his letters contain no allusion to his homecoming. The thought of her husband's retirement strikes terror into her heart since for her it means his permanent stay at home and a certain decrease in the flow of money which will force Lucy to alter her life-style, the two chief preoccupations of which include shopping and reclining in a plush-bottomed and gilt hammock chair near a tiled fireplace with Japanese fans on the mantel and a glow of coals in the grate.

Of course, being a hypocrite to the core, she conceals her real attitude to her husband from the world as is evident from her equivocal conversation with an unnamed lady in the course of which she says that though she misses him very much, she is glad to know that he is keeping fine and doing well aboard his ship. Thus her public posture is at the furthest remove from her inward feeling.

In short, her hypocrisy, her life of ease, her fear of husband's company and presence are in total contrast with the sincerity, simplicity, hard life and loving care of an undemonstrative man who earns money by the sweat of his brow to keep his family happy.
Conrad's hatred of and indignation against shallow, irresponsible, stupid, smug, manipulative and heartless people belonging to the high and privileged strata of society come to the fore in his thumbnail sketches of a number of characters including Felicia Moorsom in The Planter of Malata, Mrs. Blunt in The Arrow of Gold, Doña Erminia in Gaspar Ruiz, Mrs. Fyne in Chance and so on.

The daughter of the famous and fashionable physicist-cum-philosopher Professor Moorsom and the sweetheart of a man named Arthur, Felicia is a la belle dame sans merci of sorts while Renouard, an explorer, a planter of silk plants and an apparently steady, unemotional man is like a knight-at-arms who succumbs to the fatal spell of her hypnotic beauty.

Felicia's distinctive presence, her spell-binding personality can be attributed primarily to her stunning physical beauty (an aggregate of her tall, straight, flexible body, pagan head covered with a wealth of incandescent hair, straight, fine nose, white throat, black eyes, splendidly gleaming shoulders and arms and low, distinct, charming voice) and secondarily to her open, sound and clever mind, tranquil bearing, dignified manners and self-confident, free gestures.
But behind this attractive façade lies an ugly interior made up of vanity, superciliousness, superficiality, emotional instability, obstinacy, insincerity and above all, heartlessness. Her shallow mind fails to read the character of her lover Arthur (to whom she remains engaged for one year) and, therefore, when he gets mixed up in a financial scandal for no fault of his own, she doubts his honesty. But the moment his innocence is proved and his reputation restored, she rushes to atone for her misdeeds. Being a pampered child of a widower and a superficially romantic type, she defies the wishes of her practical father and aunt, undertakes a search (‘a sentimental pilgrimage’ she calls it) for her lost lover to perform the duty of paying her ‘sacred debt’ (p76) to a misunderstood and wronged man. Of course, her lofty and laudable assertions should not be taken at their face value since she belongs to the aristocratic circle of society, to the topmost layer of society where ‘... thoughts, sentiments, opinions, feelings, actions too, are nothing but agitation in empty space — to amuse life’ (p41). And that her ambition is to satisfy her boundless vanity (her ‘calm, conscious pride’ (p47) always envelops her like a mantle), by playing the Fate, by moulding the very destiny of an individual becomes evident when she, at an unguarded moment, lets Renouard into her heart. She says to him: “As to giving myself up to anything less than the shaping of a man’s destiny — if I thought I could do it I would abhor myself” (p76). In other words, her desire to
rehabilitate Arthur socially and financially by using her position, prestige and wealth can be traced back to her lust for gratifying her ego.

Besides being a vain woman, she suffers from an attenuated form of emotional necrophilia in a manner vaguely reminiscent of Emily in Faulkner’s short story A Rose for Emily. She seems to love the absent lover, while paying no heed to the passionate and unabashed protestations of love of a man who dangles after her, casts lingering and longing glances at her and seems to eat out of her hand. And when Renouard, in a fit of maddening passion, embraces her, Felicia, long used to emotional and physical repressions, feels indignant and describes his act as an example of his ‘absolute turpitude’(p79). Her bewitching beauty casts its evil spell on a steady, unemotional man like Renouard who ‘... gives the last shred of his rectitude to secure a day more of her company’(p56). To enjoy her company thereby prolonging his moments of heavenly bliss, he lies to her that her lover is alive. That apart, in spite of being a habitually enterprising and ambitious man, Renouard neglects his work, develops insomnia, loses mental peace and pursues the mirage of love. Of course, true to her nature, the disdainful and superior creature, the ‘condescending and strong-headed goddess’(p34) Felicia remains consistently and inhumanly heartless and her heartlessness breaks Renouard’s heart who in desperation commits suicide at the end of the story.
Another former aristocrat ruthlessly exposed by Conrad is Mrs. Blunt in The Arrow of Gold. Originally a South Carolina-based aristocrat, she had ‘... a position in the days of the Second Empire’ (p30), had owned slaves and had never worked for her bread. But shorn of her position, privilege, prestige and power in her advanced age, she is constrained by poverty and nature ‘to live by her wits’ (p182) and to scrape together some money in various ways without working and without breaking laws. She preserves her queenlike airs (accentuated by her silver hair, white, soft hands, serene, starlike, brilliant eyes, ‘well-bred ease’ (p184), ‘aristocratic repose’ (Ibid), proud bearing), retains her artistic, literary pretensions and maintains her distinguished connections mainly to impress, deceive, exploit and terrorize people. Whenever she has a goal to achieve, she dolls herself up like a teenager, uses people without any compunction and cloaks her real motives from the public under the fig-leaf of innocent and plausible causes. For instance, though the ostensible reason of her visit to Henry Allbgre’s gallery is to appreciate his rich collection, her real motive is to procure a picture by selling which she hopes to earn a decent sum of money. Again, though she is interested in Rita’s money and property, she leaves no stone unturned to feign indifference to these two things. She is, therefore, an overtly hypocritical and manipulative woman exploiting and hoodwinking people to further her own interests. 6
Like Mrs. Blunt, Emma Moorsom too (Felicia Moorsom’s aunt and Professor Moorsom’s unmarried sister in *The Planter of Malata*) is a member of the upper echelon of society. But unlike the former whose life strikes a bad financial patch, the latter’s life has been uniformly smooth from the financial point of view. Hence, as Renouard, the planter in the story, wryly observes, ‘There were no traces of the dust of life’s battles on her anywhere’ (p44), hence the well-preserved appearance of this middle-aged spinster. Besides being a stranger to the very notion of life’s struggles, she cannot stand ill-treatment from men. Even harsh, impolite words from men (who are supposed to be invariably chivalrous in their conduct with women) jar on her ears. A hollow woman, she attaches an excessive importance to the smart clothes, to the attractive façade of men. In fact, she believes that dresses can make or mar men. No wonder then that her attitude to men is shaped by their sartorial elegance or inelegance. Therefore, when Renouard appears in (what she considers to be) an ‘unduly Bohemian costume’ (p44) in the afternoon, she shrinks from him instinctively. But when the same man decks himself out in fine clothes in the evening, she succumbs to his charm. A thorough snob, she is fond of such people as have money, property, social position and prospects. She pours out her heart to Renouard since she has been given the impression that he is ‘the son of a duke’ (p44). She is extremely disappointed at Felicia’s unwise selection of a worthless fellow like Arthur as her lover and future husband.
because he is without money, without prospects. For the same reason she is not very delighted at the news that the missing lover of her favourite Felicia (Arthur that is) has been found. Of course, being shallow, artificial and unstable in her feelings, ‘...she felt moved by the sentiment and romance of the situation’ (p58), the narrator sardonically remarks.

She indulges in egregiously double standard. (too stupid and narcissistic to be aware of her folly though) and applies two different yardsticks to two groups of people performing the same act. Thus when her London-based social equals claim that they see ghosts, she takes their claim seriously. But when Renouard informs her that workers on his silk plantation see ghosts, she feels shocked at this odious comparison and disdainfully dismisses the ‘superstitious fancies’ (p67) of these ‘horrible savages’ (Ibid.).

Another woman in this category, namely, the patroness of Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle of humanitarian hopes, in *The Secret Agent*, is an influential and distinguished lady. Though advanced in years, she defies time ‘... with a scornful disregard, with a serene superiority as if it were a rather vulgar convention submitted to by the mass of inferior mankind’ (p98). She is a stranger to the sentiment of admiration because she thinks that only mediocre and inferior admire and she is fully aware of her superiority. Fearlessly
outspoken in her opinions and equally untrammelled in her actions, she is interested in watching ‘... what the world is coming to’ (p99). Hence she welcomes, listens to, penetrates, understands and appraises for her own edification, people of all descriptions including kings, artists, men of science, young statesmen, charlatans of all ages and conditions. Of course, despite her attempts at sizing up people, she is stupid and her penetration of human psyche is very superficial as is clearly demonstrated by her act of mistaking Michaelis for a harmless revolutionary expressing mild humanitarian hopes. Her appraisal of his character: “He is a mere believer with the temperament of a saint” (p103), is a stupendous stupidity, a monumental error in judgement.

Lady Amateur of anarchism, the nameless dilettante revolutionary in The Informer and the daughter of a distinguished government official, belongs to the aristocracy, an idle, selfish, fun-loving class which affects hollow poses, superficial gestures and short-lived impulses to kill time and to feed the silly vanity ‘... of being abreast with the ideas of the day after tomorrow’. Thus, in keeping with the fashionable gesture of charity and personal service that enjoys a brief vogue amongst the people of her class, she explores the poor quarters of the town to serve the socially down-trodden. But when she comes in contact with the revolutionaries, she shifts her attention and energy to revolution-related activities. She lets the anarchists use her own house for propaganda and
underground activities. Then, to prove her revolutionary credentials and to assert her individuality, she puts on slightly original, picturesque dresses (‘just enough to mark a protest against the philistinism of the overfed taskmasters of the poor’ (p81), the cynical narrator adds) feigns enthusiasm, independence of mind, courageous thought, assumes advanced ideas and revolutionary lawlessness and acquires ‘...all the appropriate gestures of pity, of anger, of indignation against the anti-humanitarian vices of the social class to which she belonged herself’ (Ibid.). Besides, conscientiously and gladly she corrects proofs of the Italian and French editions of party papers entitled Alarm Bell and Firebrand and writes ‘sentimental articles with ferocious conclusions’ (p84). The narrator comments: “I could see she was enjoying herself hugely, with all the gestures and grimaces of deadly earnestness’ (Ibid.). Even her make-believe affair with Sevrin, carried on by her with a great deal of ‘...dignity, sweetness, condescension, fascination, surrender and reserve’ (p85) is a perfect pose, a hollow gesture aimed at satisfying her vanity. Once again, the sarcastic narrator affords us an intimate glimpse into the heart of this lady by saying: “She came mostly to exercise her fascination upon Sevrin and to receive her homage in her queenly and condescending way. She was aware of both --- her power and his homage and enjoyed them with complete innocence” (p90). But all said and done, she is nothing if not a wordsmith ignorant of the world around her and a poor judge of human character to boot. ‘After all, she knew little of anything...
except of words' (p86). Except her knowledge of the publication of anarchist literature, she is innocent of the world around her. (For instance, she is in the dark about the chemical and other operations going on at the top floor of her house on Hermione Street!) A silly woman, she reposes her complete faith in Sevrin’s high-minded motives, mistakes him for an anarchist, for her protector and feels foolishly secure. After Sevrin’s suicide she gets hold of and goes through his diary and feels cheated after reading the accounts of his casual and simultaneous indulgence in amatory and revolutionary activities. Greatly scandalized, she cuts herself off from society at large, leaves for Florence and finally becomes a nun—all hollow gestures in perfect conformity with her class, all ‘...consummate and hereditary grimaces that in a certain sphere of life take the place of feelings with an excellent effect’ (p99), according to the narrator of the story.

Doña Erminia in Gaspar Ruiz is a chip off the old block in the sense that she is a Royalist daughter of a Royalist father dispossessed, harassed and ruined by the revolutionary army. But unlike her embittered, nay, maddened father who raves and rants, she nurses her vindictive desires against the revolutionaries in a grave, silent, calculated and resolute manner. And fortune too smiles on her when she (fortune) sends Gaspar Ruiz, apparently a deserter from the Royalist army, to seek shelter at Erminia’s dilapidated place. This
simple, mild-mannered, loyal, docile and unusually strong man (who has no understanding of heroism and like a Shavian soldier no inclination to fight) is appropriated and manipulated by this beautiful, haughty, cold-hearted, vindictive, masculine and uncompromising royalist in the way a puppet is handled by an expert puppeteer. By using her subtle way ‘...of awakening and keeping alive in his simple mind a burning sense of an irreparable wrong’, she instigates him to wage a relentless war on the revolutionaries till they are exterminated. And obeying her hallowed words, he inflicts death and devastation on two flourishing provinces and causes serious anxiety to the leaders of the revolution till his death (brought about by his unsuccessful attempt at freeing his wife imprisoned by the enemies). Immediately before his death, a dry-eyed, an impassive-faced Erminia meets him and expresses her feeling in a steady, unemotional voice. Her hallowed words “On all the earth I have loved nothing but you, Gaspar” (p66), delivered in a serene voice eloquently sum up her own nature which reduces human beings to lifeless things and her cold, formal attitude to her devoted husband.

The next sketch, a caricature of a grave civil servant’s imperturbable wife named Mrs. Fyne in Chance, shows Conrad’s great debt to Dickens and Thackeray. Her mature, smooth-cheeked face of masculine shape, her ‘blouses with a starched front like a man’s shirt’ (p35), her self-possession (which she
retains '... even in the very hour of her elopement with Mr Fyne' (p45), as Marlow, the narrator caustically remarks), her inability to live without 'admiring deference' (p37) from young girls who sit at her feet like disciples, her preposterous feminist theory which advocates that '... no consideration, no delicacy, no tenderness, no scruple should stand in the way of a woman ... from taking the shortest cut towards securing for herself the easiest possible existence' (p53), her stupid manual for women with grievances wherein her '... complete ignorance of the world, of her own sex and of the other kind of sinners' (p59) as well as her lack of '... ordinary power of observation' (Ibid.) are reflected, her unconscious indulgence in double standard which makes her consider her own elopement and Flora's elopement as two different issues, her '... lack of imaginative sympathy' (p130), her mean generosity, cruel kindness and evasive assurances evident in her treatment of Flora, make Mrs Fyne another creation of Conrad's satirical vision which his readers will not consign to wilful oblivion.  

Conrad's negative treatment of the majority of non-European women (for which he has been sharply and justifiably criticized by critics of the new generation like P. Mongia, R. Stott, H. Krenn and the like) is in evidence in his presentation of Mrs. Almayer, Alice, Joanna and Mrs. Schomberg...
‘Witchlike in appearance’ (p33), shrill-voiced and sharp-tongued (her husband is the standing target of her volcanic tongue though on rare occasions she does not spare even her dear daughter whom she calls a ‘shameless woman’ (p53), ‘a white snake’ (Ibid.) when she tries to catch a glimpse of Dain in violation of social norms), Mrs. Almayer in Almayer’s Folly is embittered by the experiences and struggles of her life to such an extent that she never laughs. (Laughter and Mrs. Almayer are not ‘close neighbours’ (p51), we are told by Conrad.) A savage woman, she loves murder and mischief and deplores her marriage to a timid, violence-shy, weak soul like Almayer. Once again the author lets us know that she laments the lost possibilities of murder and mischief that could have fallen to her lot had she been mated with ‘a congenial spirit’ (p148). Because of her narrow, ignorant and xenophobic mind, she fears the unknown morbidly. She wrongly presumes that she will be taken to a remote country where she will be treated like a slave and married by Lingard, considers the whites capable of committing all monstrosities and regards her own people as unquestionably superior to the whites. Her great love for the Sulu people prompts her not only to extol their bravery, glory, power and prowess to the skies but also to disparage their white enemies. Her hatred of European persons and objects is overt and unqualified. She detests her Dutch husband, European finery, western education, religion and way of life. A savage, primitive woman, she has no use for the commonplace decencies of
civilization and, therefore, she contemptuously burns European furniture to cook family rice and tears down pretty curtains to make sarongs for her slave girls! In her jaundiced eyes, the white people are invariably hypocritical (‘...with prayers on their lips and loaded guns in their hands’ p153), mendacious, polytheistic and more numerous and ubiquitous than her own people. Not religious but superstitious, she places her implicit faith in the ‘vague talismanic properties’(p41) of a small brass cross that hangs from her neck. A carryover from her short convent life in Samarang, this is her sole theological prop that presumably facilitates the journey of her life. The author comments in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, “This is ... the only theological outfit for the stony road of her life”(Ibid). Besides, she is a greedy woman with great ‘appetite for shining dollars’(p67) which her would- be son-in-law Dain satiates to a considerable extent. A product of a primitive society (where women are bought and sold like commodities), this worldlywise mother puts a high price on her beautiful and much-sought-after daughter. Her aptitude for intrigues, her high histrionic skill, her great capacity for using and organizing people and managing events are brought out in the elaborate and multipurpose plan of deception that she conceives of and carries out to ensure Nina’s happiness. Shaking her dishevelled hair frantically, setting up loud wails occasionally in her shrill voice, wearing a sad face, and buying the onlookers’ silence, she
manages to outwit her husband and the white officials and saves Dain's life for her dear daughter's sake.

Last but not least, she is an enthusiastic lover and liver of life like many female characters in Conrad and her love of life makes her cunning, diplomatic, manipulative and unscrupulous. She threatens to disclose the compromising past of a local potentate named Lakamba in case he refrains from offering her protection from the anger of a desperate and betrayed Almayer. Thus Conrad presents a negative portrait of a typical Malay woman the only redeeming feature of whose character is her boundless love for daughter (as will be discussed in the next chapter).

Alice, originally a child of a circus-rider (for whom her putative father Alfred Jacobus once developed a strong passion) and a girl of over eighteen years of age when introduced first in Conrad's longish short story *A Smile of Fortune*, is 'an unfortunate creature'. In fact, it would be more appropriate if we describe her as a victim of social ostracism, of defective upbringing, and of her father's moral bankruptcy.

Socially excommunicated (because of her father's scandalous indulgence in shameless passion for her mother), she is forced to lead a sedentary, solitary
and static life, a life absolutely devoid of healthy human contacts and normal human concerns. Never stepping out of the confines of home, everlastingly sitting like a statue or like 'a figure in a tapestry' (p43), she is a social outcast in the real sense of the term. Deprived of the advantages of education and general human interactions, she has learnt nothing worthwhile and humanizing. The author points out: “The girl has learned nothing, she has never listened to any general conversation, she knew nothing, she has heard of nothing.” (p60). And her silly, ignorant governess, whose company and guidance she falls back upon willy nilly, fills her head with all sorts of imaginary ideas, wild thoughts, wrong information. Naturally, she thinks that Paris and London are ‘sinks of abomination’ (p60), while her little island is an ideal abode of peace, that Europeans are, without any exception, murderers and abductors, that her father is an extremely wicked man 'capable of anything' (p66). And unfortunately it so happens that her tranquil-looking, avaricious father, a ship-chandler by profession, confirms her negative opinion by making use of her seductive physique to force a commercial deal on a reluctant captain. He exploits the compromising circumstances he finds the captain in (the captain is caught in the act of planting kisses on his daughter) and compels him to buy a huge quantity of potatoes which he does not require.
In a nutshell, under the combined and massive impact of her cloistered life, rotten education, harmful training and negative parental influence she degenerates into a creature indifferent to everyone and everything, slovenly in attire and appearance, ill-mannered, vile-tempered expressing herself in rude, laconic expressions like 'Don’t care' (p49), 'Shan’t' (Ibid), 'Won’t' (Ibid), etc. and radically loveless, cynical, pessimistic in her general outlook on life. On her own admission “I love nothing” (p78). Since her tender, positive feelings and normal physical desires remain undeveloped, this frigid teenager does not react to the Captain’s passionate kisses. For her life holds no prospects, no prizes and hence her deeply pessimistic utterance: “Nothing is any good” (p63).

Schomberg’s nameless wife in **Victory** is an ugly Australian woman who has failed to adjust herself to the eastern climate and whose very presence is ignored by almost everybody. With her ‘flattened nose’ (p46), ‘hollow cheeks’ (Ibid.), staring goggle eyes, ‘scraggy neck’ (p107), sallow head, long ringlets and a single blue tooth she is ugliness incarnate and is passionately hated by her middle-aged husband who has a very high opinion of his appearance and qualities. An extremely unfortunate female, she clings on to her husband because he happens to be the only man ‘... to hold on to in the world’ (p97), though this man tyrannizes over her for years, forces her to do risky and dirty jobs at times (she is compelled to frisk the luggage of Mr. Jones
and his associates though she is mortally afraid of firearms.), muzzles her freedom of expression and openly expresses his aversion to her and his love for Alma. Be that as it may, she takes upon herself the thankless task of defending her own position of Schomberg’s wife by utilizing her cleverness and great capacity for dissimulation. Her silence, naïve look, set grin and acquired habit of immobility recalling ‘a plain dummy’(p46), ‘a painted image’(p50), ‘a waxwork figure’(p49) are masks behind which she hides her resourcefulness, ponders her plans and executes them prudently. Hence her generous co-operation to Heyst and Alma in their act of elopement.

Joanna in An Outcast of the Islands is another pitiable and weak character in Conrad’s fictional oeuvre. Besides being ugly, untidy and submissive, she is emotionally unstable. The author draws our attention to her supreme indifference to sartorial cleanliness and personal appearance in the following lines : “She trailed through life in that red dressing gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back” (p25). Anyway, because of her unprepossessing appearance, slovenly attire and seemingly spineless nature, initially she is treated very rudely by her condescending husband Willems. At this stage her only job is to listen to her
great husband's 'night-discourses' (p9) and feel proud of his glorious achievements detailed therein. But when his involvement in a case of embezzlement is detected, misfortunes assail him not in singles but in battalions. He is thrown out of his job by his employer Hudig (who happens to be Joanna's father too), and driven away from home by his subservient wife! After this rare act of self-assertion, she takes possession of dust, dirt and squalor where she appears at home and drags a melancholy and dull existence '...made up of sad remorse and frightened hope' (p301) and yearns for a re-union with her husband, who recoils from and looks down on this 'dummy' (p9) of a woman and attaches himself to an attractive Aissa.

Finally, Lucilla and Erminia, the old Spanish innkeepers in The Inn of the Two Witches, who with 'Their toothless mouths, their hooked noses, the meagreness of the active one and the hanging yellow cheeks of the other' and with their pitiless 'passion for gold' (p164) prompting them to dispatch a number of their customers, are witchlike creatures, while their worthy hench-cum-hatchet woman, a destitute gipsy girl having the ferocious and ravenous expression of 'a baffled cat' (p153) and killing people to rob them of their coat-buttons is 'a child of Satan kept there by these two weird harridans for the love of the Devil' (pp149-150).
Notes and references

1. Though the overwhelming majority of the minor characters in Conrad are drawn in an obviously negative and satirical manner, there are following notable exceptions:

Sophia Antonovna, with her indifference to dress and appearance, suppression of personal feelings, intent facial expression, serious nature deprecating frivolous and ironical talks, businesslike and capable manner, anti-clerical and atheistic attitudes, typifies a dedicated revolutionary. Turned into a rebel by the iniquity-ridden Russian social system at the early age of sixteen, she is, as Conrad tells us, “a true spirit of destructive revolution” (p222), an embodiment of “ruthless revolution” (Ibid.). Sophia herself asserts that ‘... life, not to be vile, is a revolt, a pitiless protest all the time” (p221).

A strong-willed, generally self-possessed, dominating personality, she regards men (with certain honourable exceptions, of course, like Peter Ivanovitch) as children who cherish ‘childish notions down to their very grave’ (p209) and who, therefore, require constant female supervision and guidance. But for her busy schedule, she says she would have loved to take charge of Razumov and train him up properly.

The right hand of the great feminist-cum-revolutionary Peter Ivanovitch, she is trusted and respected by her colleagues for her devotion to the
revolutionary cause, for her ‘...great store of secret knowledge’ (p215) and for
her tremendous influence. Thanks to Razumov’s association with Sophia, he
enjoys a long period of immunity from the suspicion and attack of fellow
revolutionists.

Generally considered as a woman with great penetration of human
psyche, she turns out to be a bungler, like her fellow revolutionists in the novel,
as is clearly seen from her wrong appraisals of Razumov and Nikita (a police
informer masquerading as a revolutionary) and her unquestioning faith in Peter
Ivanovitch. She mistakes Razumov for a man of exceptional fortitude, for a
man of uncommon strength of character, and she wrongly assumes that Nikita is
without malice. Besides, in her blind faith in Peter, she stubbornly refuses to
judge him and continues to describe him as an “inspired man” till the end of the
book. (p320). Thus Conrad, whose opinions of the revolutionaries were never
very high, exposes some shortcomings of hers. But simultaneously the author
draws our attention to her humanity, her capacity for appreciating a transformed
Razumov’s moral courage which enables him to confess his guilt, sacrifice his
own good and suffer the consequences of his confession at a point of time when
he is totally safe from public suspicion. No wonder then that critics
unanimously agree that Conrad’s portrayal of Sophia is a fairly balanced one.
For instance, David Daiches notices the author’s “reluctant admiration” for
Sophia’s dedicated commitment to revolutionary action. (See D. Daiches. The

Exceedingly ugly and shabby (Conrad tells us that she is “… as devoid of all comeliness of feature and complexion as the most miserable beggar is of money”. p198) Tekla, another minor character in Under Western Eyes, is a self-sacrificing, golden-hearted, principled woman.

A self-negating type, she passionately believes that life, to have any meaning at all, must be sacrificed for a noble cause and that by performing a task (related to revolutions, of course, such as Haldin's assassination of the hated minister who decimated the Russian youth) one can acquire immortality. Naturally she says that she is ‘… quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends” (p128). An ardent hater of ministers (especially finance ministers), bureaucrats and upper-class Russians and a voluntary servant of the proletariat, she leaves her parents (Her father is attached to the abominable finance ministry) since she cannot tolerate their endless talks about vile office intrigues, promotions, salaries, etc. and willingly chooses a life of poverty, deprivation and hardship to serve the oppressed, poor humanity, to make herself useful to the utterly hopeless. Her rhetorical question to Miss Haldin “But was it not sin
enough to live on a government salary while half Russia was dying of
hunger?" (p129) reveals the highly principled stand of a conscience-stricken
woman who renounces creature comforts of her own accord.

She is a courageous, loyal, responsible, untired and misutilized grassroots-
level worker either actually performing or capable of performing, as she herself
claims, a variety of risky or tiresome jobs like bearing secret messages,
carrying important objects on her person, keeping a close watch on the
movements of anti-revolutionary elements, writing compromising documents,
suffering silently when arrested and tortured, acting as secretary to the great
feminist Peter Ivanovitch and as lady companion to Eleanor Maximovna, etc.
But the job which she is extremely fond of is that of a nurse, of an attendant.
Since she is, as Miss Haldin tells us, is a "...good Samaritan by an irresistible
vocation" (p313) she tries her utmost to nurse sickly, hopeless outcasts back to
health. Thus she attends first a journeyman lithographer named Andrei and then
Razumov (both mercilessly beaten by the police and the revolutionaries
respectively and both needing urgent and sustained attention). Particularly she
tends Razumov (whose marked civility touches her deeply) with the "...pure joy
of unselfish devotion" (p318).

Miss Antonia Avellanos, the beautiful daughter of Don Jose Avellanos
( the brilliant orator-cum-diplomat in Nostromo, who besides being an inspirer
of the Blanco party is a prime force behind attempts at regenerating
Costaguana) is a woman of serious nature, strong political convictions and powerful character. Serious by disposition from a very early age, she lashes out at Decoud whose aimless life and frivolous opinions nettle her greatly. An accomplished and a ‘...terribly learned woman’(p125), she often writes State papers from her father’s dictation. The eight-page-letter which informs Decoud of his selection as a member of a rifle- procuring committee is penned by her. Besides, she is allowed to read all the letters addressed to and all the books owned by her father. At the receptions ‘...she could hold her own in a discussion with two or three men at a time’ (p133). With her foreign upbringing and foreign ideas(She was, we are told, ‘...born in Europe and educated partly in England’p125), she is contemptuous of certain inflexible and meaningless local customs. Hence she scornfully defies the social conventions of Sulaco and refrains from making the ‘...usual greeting gesture of a fluttered hand’(p155) to an influential person like Don Juste Lopez, hence she extends her hand toward Charles Gould à la the English, hence she defies the correct form of Costaguana courtship and neither appears at a ground-floor window to chat with mounted Spanish gentlemen nor peeps through a barred window at a cloaked figure of a lover ensconced in a doorway opposite. Instead, she holds an intimate conversation of extreme impropriety in public with her lover Martin Decoud, another Costeguenero with European manners.
But though she detests the inhibiting social codes of conduct, she loves her benighted motherland groaning under chronic tyranny, injustice and political instability. Her large-hearted patriotism which opposes Decoud’s pragmatic brand of patriotism is founded on humane considerations shaped by her father’s liberal philosophy enunciated in his book Fifty Years of Misrule.

Her strong mind, powerful character and serious patriotism do not prevent her from becoming a devoted daughter and a loyal ladylove. Following her mother’s death she takes care of her old father, (a victim of Guzman Bento’s tyranny) and nurses him back to health. The author tells us: “Whenever possible, Antonio attended her father; her recognized devotion weakened the shocking effect of her scorn for the rigid conventions regulating the life of Spanish-American girlhood” (p133)-And despite differences between Decoud’s and her own political opinions, her faith in her dead lover remains unshaken.

2. Conrad’s thorough dislike of governesses is evident in his negative presentation of the chaperon-cum-governess of Alice in A Smile of Fortune. Besides being an atrocious teacher she is, like Madame de S—in Under Western Eyes, a creature associated with death. Again, Conrad certainly has a dig at Mrs Fyne, who with her efficient but unemotional management of her family, is nothing if not a governess as he points out on more than one occasion.
3. Conrad's spelling is incorrect. The correct spelling is E. T. A. Hoffmann, a German writer, musician and composer best known for stories with a supernatural or uncanny content, especially those portraying doubles.


6. For other instances of her systematic manipulation of people see the next chapter.


8. *Gaspar Ruiz* in *A Set of Six* (London, J. M. Dent, 1946-54) p52. All further references are to this edition.

9. Interestingly, one feels tempted to point out her resemblance to Mr. Traverse in *The Rescue*. In fact, she appears to be a female version of that man since both of them are shut up in their own private world, both of them write books in spite of their intellectual and mental purblindness and both of them insist on being treated deferentially.

11. The Inn of the Two Witches in Within the Tides (London, J. M. Dent, 1946-54) p148. All further references are to this edition.