The Beginnings

The inter-relationship of certain motifs, character-types or particular characters and situations constitutes the Conradian universe. A developing and changing pattern of characters and their concepts about the world around them has been followed through Conrad's novels, from first work Almayer's Folly to the last completed one The Rover. This pattern consists in considering the novels chronologically in order of their publication. Its aim is to present a view of Conrad's development in terms of the progression his art shows in handling of human relationships. The recurring motifs and patterns can be traced from the first novel gradually mellowing and maturing through the last. It is a process of action, consequences and realization through which the individual's life phases out. The commonest pattern which manifests itself in Conrad, from the beginning, is an individual's facination for material glory which becomes a major factor controlling his thoughts and actions and inter-relationships. The curse of materialism, that causes the collapse of all values sustaining human relationships, haunted Conrad throughout his life and formed the nexus of his works. Stanislaw Baranczak attributes Conrad's concern and preoccupation with the problem of human relationships, mainly to his Polish mind and background. He says:

It is a fact, though, that sense of a special obligation to society, which being particularly intense in a typical emigre
intellectual, remains also characteristic feature of the Polish intellectual in a general sense.¹

To begin with, let us take his first novel, *Almayer’s Folly*, (1895) *. Almayer’s dreams of wealth and power are the germs of all evil and pervert his concept of relationships with people and places. For Conrad the most important factor in human relationship is the "... bond between us and ... humanity ... of men and women..." (p.viii). The very first note of Almayer’s life and career is struck on a wrong chord. Almayer marries Lingard’s half-caste “daughter” enticed by “the great piles of shining guilders and ... all the possibilities of opulent existence” (p. 10). It is an affront to the oldest social institution – marriage – which instead of bringing to his young mind, as it normally ought to have, the ideas of love and companionship with his bride, bring, instead, the perverse and unchristian consolation that she would "mericfully die" and even "old Lingard would not live for ever" (p. 10).

Almayer’s ideas of relationship with his benefactor and guardian, whom he calls father, are regulated by his material ambitions. The guardian-ward relationship, central to Conrad’s early novels, fits in perfectly with his own experiences. Conrad was ward of quite a few people before his uncle Tadeuz Bobrowski became his guardian. Almayer’s relations with his wife, on the

other hand, are controlled by his racial complexes. His colour consciousness and perhaps his colonial distortions of superiority prevent him from entering into a compatible relationship with his wife and her community. He felt ashamed of "the companionship for life of a Malay girl, that legacy of a boatful of pirates - there was only within him a confused consciousness that he - (was) a white man..." (p. 10). Not that he is really rich, but the very possibility of riches makes him so intolerant of others that he detests the Malay natives on considerations that are racial and economic rather than human. Yet he is fundamentally and proudly possessive about his domestic slaves whom he calls "my own people" (p. 13).

It is important to know that Borneo was a region which suffered a great deal because of constant strife between Dutch and English imperialists; the natives had to survive by fighting against Arabs, Malays and pirates. In this context Frederick Karl notes that in *Almayer's Folly* Conrad captures "the disrupted plans of the individuals caught in a country which is a play thing of colonial and imperial powers." This appears to be too sympathetic a view of Almayer's character and a sort of justification of his behaviour. Almayer is so acutely conscious of himself that living, as it were, in a shell he loses all sense of perspective beyond himself. He becomes the victim, as Leo Gurko rightly puts it, of "self love." The traits that Almayer suffers from are hereditary in his disposition. Conrad is fond
of developing characters in terms of genetic analysis as he himself could never free himself from the fetters of family genes, a curious admixture of Korzeniowski and Bobrowski blood. The letters of Tadeuz stand a faithful testimony to this. Almayer's father, in the ancestral house, "grumbled all day at stupidity of native gardeners, and the mother from the depths of her long easy chair, bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam" (p.5).

The greatest paradox of Almayer's situation is that he gets more deeply involved in the very situation that he wishes to escape. His position is just like going to war to acquire peace. His aim is to achieve a life of material grandeur, but to achieve it he must associate himself with Borneo, he must suffer obscurity for the sake of fame. Almayer's conflicting position is a result of the "antithesis and confrontation between European and Malayan cultures" as Land puts it. Dr. Raval attributes the same cause to Almayer's failure. He says:

Almayer's colonial upbringing is at the root also of his gross confusion of dream and reality, power and authority, and at the root also of his failure to grasp the cultural and historical displacement that so distorts his aspirations.\(^3\)

Nina, his daughter, with whom Almayer associates all his prospects of opulence and wealth, comes back to Sambir in search of her identity amongst the natives. She had already had the
taste of white living with Vincs’ family at Singapore. A basic
disagreement between the quests of the father and the daughter
causes tension in their relationship and finally results in a
confrontation. The main thrust of the novel lies in the
different ways in which two dreams of father and daughter
develop. Conrad here resorts to his own life. The father-son
relationship of Appolo and Conrad becomes the basis for the
father-daughter relationship of Almayer-Nina.

Nina’s mixed inheritance becomes the source of her sorrow.
The domestic situations in Conrad, where parent-child relations
are concerned, inevitably leads to confrontation. For the father
is always a source of anxiety, as Karl sees it:

... father (and not mother) is a figure of
death, decay, dying. He must be honoured
perhaps but opposed. His advice, even his way
of life, is anathema. To survive, one must
resolve to be different and ultimately to defy
him”.

It is a very typical relationship where the hero and the heroine
are not lovers but father and daughter to which the mother stands
in direct opposition. Nina responds to her father’s love in a
mixed way. She sees the wretched, semi-savage, slave-like and
miserable existence of her mother and in her sub-conscious holds
her father responsible for it. Nina is sensitive enough to
comprehend her parents’ relationship and also the cause of such
estrangement; she has not forgotten the bitter taste of the

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treatment meted out to her by Mrs. Vinc at Singapore. She senses the same racial block and tells her father, "I am not of your race. Between you and me there is a barrier that nothing can remove" (p. 179).

Inspite of all the love and care that Almayer showers upon Nina she turns Malay and demonstrates her preference for her mother’s blood by going away with Dain, the Malay trader. While Almayer’s dream gets blurred with Lingard’s disappearance, Nina’s dream becomes reality as she meets Dain. The daughter slaps the truth into the face of the father – the truth about his notions of racial superiority, the truth about his relationships with his wife, the truth about his dreams of gold, and the greatest truth of all – that pervades all others – that of her love for Dain, in the face of which every ambition and every aspiration of Almayer seems to be petty and ignominous. Juliet McLauchlan maintains that, "to both men Nina is essential to life, but only Dain can offer life in return."\(^7\) Nina cries to her father: "could you give me happiness without life!... life that means power and love" (p. 190). To her life and Dain are synonymous. She explodes Almayer’s self-created myth about himself when she tells him:

You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions – the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my ownself; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love.
You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife? (p. 179).

Almayer has to learn from Nina that no relationship can be based on ideas of possessiveness, ego-centricity and racial high headedness. It is fidelity to certain principles that endures. Almayer's is the principle of fidelity to his own self. Edward Said quotes from Conrad's letter of March 24, 1824, to Marguerite Foradowska. It was when Conrad struggled with Chapter XI of the novel. Conrad wrote to her, "I must go out some times." The words are highly revealing and remind one of "what Shelly had called 'a going out' of the self towards others", adds Said.

The irony about father-daughter relationship in Almayer's Folly is that Almayer's ambition about the treasure is prompted by his vision of golden future for Nina. But all his attempts to locate it push... Nina farther apart from him and deeper into the native world from which Almayer wants her to escape with him to Europe. In fact, Almayer is so lost in his schemes and strategies to reach the treasure that he loses all communication with Nina resulting in her falling for Dain. In this sense Dain is a rival-figure but there are no sexual undertones in Almayer - Nina relationships as suggested by Moser and Meyer who interpret these relations in terms of incest. Such analysis appears to be short-sighted and a rather misappropriation of modern theories of sex.

No doubt Almayer is possessive about Nina and begins to dislike Dain when he comes to know of Nina's leanings but this
does not suggest Almayer’s incestuous bent. Adam Gillon presents a more natural and justifiable analysis of these relations when he observes that:

In the Poland of Conrad’s youth parents tended to be rather autocratic and the relationship of father to daughter was usually patriarchal. Almayer’s love for Nina is great and therefore it must be possessive....

The inadvertent or deliberate consequence of this parental possessiveness is that the father tends to block his child’s desires and her feelings concerning her freedom and happiness. Conrad himself could never come to terms with the idea of his son Borys’ marriage since Borys showed his independence by marrying a girl of his choice without considering it necessary to consult his father.

Jocelyn Baines has noticed an ambiguous absence of father-son relationship in Conrad’s works, though it was precisely this relationship that formed the core of his youth. Baines explains that:

this situation was doubtless far too charged emotionally for Conrad to be able to represent it directly whereas his deepest impulses could find disguised expression through a portrayal of the father-daughter relationship.

Baines has related the conflict between demands of Nina’s father and the glamour of Dain to the conflict in Conrad’s mind between his father’s memory and the desire to create his own life.
Apart from the father-daughter relationships, the husband-wife relationships in Conrad's novels, too, are seldom compatible; for the father and the daughter are always more intimate. Many a time it appears to be a triangle. Infact, physical and mental relationships never go together in Conrad's characters. They can not have any physical contact with the woman who is either an equal, intellectually, or revered. Mrs. Almayer belongs to a much lower strata of society as compared to Almayer; their relationship, therefore, is simply physical and they never rise to the level of intellectual companionship and togetherness as George and Rita or even Razumov and Nathalie, in The Arrow of Gold and Under Western Eyes, do.

Meyer observes this trait and attempts to explain why Conrad married an unknown, obscure English girl, Jessie George, while practically worshipping Marguerite Poradowska as an idol. "Do not come down from the pedestal where I have set you", he wrote "even though that would mean to come nearer to me". Having quoted from Conrad's letter Meyer comments:

Conrad could have attained physical relationship with a woman who failed to inspire such worshipful sentiments. For the sensuous women in Conrad's fiction are not the monolithic Rita and her like, but those creatures who spring from a much lower station in the hierarchy of social organization, women like Aissa, Winnie Vgrolc and simple hired girl like Amy Foster.
In the absence of intellectual parity, therefore, mere physicality in relationships degenerates into an ignominous burden. It is an insult to the society when an individual begins to treat its institutions as instruments for lower personal gratification. Almayer, "concocting plans for getting rid of pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future", (p.23) is guilty of denouncing the English men's law according to which a wife is to be his "companion and not his slave" (p.23).

The atomosphere of mutual distrust, hate and fear pervades Almayer's domestic life so deeply that when Nina is taken to Singapore for a better upbringing at Vincs', Almayer had a dread of living alone with his wife - "the savage tigress deprived of her young" (p.25). She may poison him, he thought, "well aware of that easy and final manner of solving the social, political or family problems in Malay life" (p.27). Mrs. Almayer, on her part, responds to every appeasing overture of her husband with silence - silence which is the highest form of contempt. One reason of her contempt is "the little girl's preference for her father" (p.26). So, later on, she becomes actively instrumental in Nina's escape with Dain. As Almayer had isolated Mrs. Almayer in preference for Nina, so Mrs. Almayer separates Nina from him and has had her revenge. The mother's influence, that has long been strong over Nina, has ultimately proved itself.

Conrad has been charged with failure at handling of women,
love, sex and marriage. Several critics have tried to trace the source of this failure in his own unresolved sexual conflicts. Moser, for one, is the major exponent of this view. Only Ian Watt exonerates Conrad by providing justification from biographical sources. He maintains that:

Conrad's sea-going years perhaps influenced his sexual attitudes in two ways. First his works tend to reflect the nautical mythology which divides women into two wholly separate categories - the idealized asexual mother figures and the venal sexual aggressors. Second Conrad's life as a seaman must have deepened his earlier deprivations, and intensified his yearnings for a wife, a home and a rooted existence.¹³

One clear reason for incompatibility in marriage appears to be the exogamous marriage which is a reiterative pattern in Conrad's novels. Almayer, Willems, Kurtz, Jim, all marry outside their own social groups. This results in the individual's isolation; inspite of the union, the husband and the wife remain separate. Frederick Karl adds language to the list of reasons for the husband-wife incompatibility. Both speak a different language, sometimes even literally. Their alienation is due to their different worlds representing different values and desires. Karl appears to be sympathetic to women, as against men, when he says, "if women 'devour' or 'burn up' their men, it is defensive gesture on the women's part against men who 'use' them."¹⁴

Neither for the sake of nor through his daughter or wife Almayer is able to cultivate any community relationships. The
reasons are not far to find. The first reason is his obsessive racial consciousness and the second his extremely individualistic attitudes to relationships. Moser speaks about the "tremendous selfishness of (Conrad's) characters" and goes on to observe that, "whether simple or complex, his vulnerable heroes are all egoists.... They are alone chiefly because they have thoughts for no one but themselves." In his early novels both Almayer and Willems fail to support the human community.

Conrad understood the need of belonging to a group later in his life. His uncle, Tadeuz, was a firm believer in such community group and that is why he repeatedly advised Conrad to take English nationality. That way the whole race is a group too but in terms of the individuals' relationships with it, it hardly has any meaning. Almayer does not and can not create any social ties in Borneo because of his egocentric nature. He develops the ties of friendship with Dain because Dain would help him find out old Lingard's treasure. Almayer and Dain are "connected by a community of interests" (p.63). Almayer reconciles with Lakamba, (whom he actually despised in the heart of his hearts) for the sake of the treasure, sacrificing "his pride, his honour and his loyalty" (p.62). Later on, he plans to give Dain, his friend, up to the Dutch, the same Dutch for whose destruction he had been selling the gun powder.

For Almayer, every relationship, right from marriage to
friendship, including the filial one of Lingard's, seems to be a matter of sheer convenience. Almayer's prejudice not only prevents him from merging with the native groups but it also prevents him from trusting the good individuals like Dain. He is paid back with the same distrust by Rajah Lakamba who plans to kill Almayer for the fear that if caught by Dutch, he may reveal the secret of the treasure to them. It is because Almayer has failed to develop a relationship of trust and understanding with the local Rajah that their "partnership" has no element of comraderie in it. Almayer is totally cut off from everyone around him due to his personal greed and suspicion. Even in loving Nina he loves his own Narcissistic image, otherwise he should have sacrificed his desires for her happiness.

In rejecting his wife, Dain and the Malay society Almayer has condemned himself to the horror of loneliness. He is unable to grasp the simple truth about personal and social relationships. Life, says Conrad, is a simple equation of "scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate" (p.179). Therefore, the bliss of "that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers of this earth" is never Almayer's. The only redeeming aspect of the whole story is reflected in the Dain-Nina relationship. Love, we must remember, in Conrad, is not just a physical infatuation. Critics who charge Conrad with failure in the treatment of love tend to mix up feeling with sexual passion. Conrad considers love as an
emotional need, the fulfilment of which brings a definite meaning and a sense of completeness to human life; the absence of it resulting in gloom and decay. This theme is better elaborated in the future novels. Love is the central symbol for peace and fulfilment in this strife-torn world. Glassman has done some serious thinking on this aspect in Conrad's works. With particular reference to Almayer's Folly Glassman notices the absence of such emotional ties. He says that, "no one in Almayer's Folly experiences an emotion of fellowship or even of the moral continuity with the physical setting in which his life is lived." 17

John Hicks attempts to bring this home in his analysis of Dain-Nina relationship. He says, "Nina seems to achieve a kind of victory by choosing fulfilment in Dain's native society rather than remaining in a corrupt white one." 18 Nina has succeeded in sailing the rough course of life smoothly on reliable waves of love. In Dain's love she has found a justification for her otherwise captive-like existence on Settlement. When Dain comes, all uncertainties and doubts about her own identity vanish and she sees "only the light of the blue and the cloudless heaven" (p.29). Later on, we learn that Nina-Dain are blessed with a child - not that a child essentially represents joys of life, since Nina herself as a child hardly had any memories to cherish and had seen nothing but disharmony in parents' life. Nonetheless, Nina's child is born of love, understanding and
harmony, a symbol of joy for the family and that of hope for a better society.

Only a child born of love and happiness, Conrad seems to suggest, can bring about harmony and stability in society. It is a kind of "affirmation" as Juliet McLauchlan puts it. She says that, "Nina appears to have chosen life, life's very essence being its continuation from one generation to the next." Love as an essential element in human relationship is developed more completely in the later novels of Conrad. Of course, marriage, too, as a social institution, representing home, is based on love and understanding where one can enjoy a sense of togetherness. Almayer's marriage is on the rocks because such feelings are absent in his marital relationship.

Indeed, Almayer is incapable of rising above himself and recognize the identity of his wife as an individual with a thinking mind and a feeling heart. Distrust and selfishness, ultimately, lead to the disintegration of the family, affecting in turn the life of children. Nina is very important because she shows a sense of conviction in breaking loose from this trap. With this note Conrad seems to move, though very slowly, in the proper direction of the development of human relationships. The daughter, at the end of the novel, is shown succeeding at what the father failed - right understanding and cultivation of human ties.
In terms of progression, the human relationships in *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896)* hardly show any remarkable growth over *Almayer's Folly*. The theme is virtually the repetition of the first novel—the betrayal, the dreams of prosperity, conflict of two cultures, decay and death in isolation. Here, too, Conrad presents a picture of the colossal waste of human life. Practically every character, at one time or the other, suffers from a sense of futility arising mainly out of individualistic and self-centered tendencies common to human temperament in a materialistic society. The hero—Willems—who is Conrad's center of interest in *An Outcast of the Islands*, is, as Warner puts it, "a shabby villian."20 Conrad in two of his letters to Edward Gornett dated March 8, 1895 and June 7, 1895 refers to Willems as "stuffed full of emotions—without any moral—" and "as faithless."21

For Willems honesty is a convenient guise and that dishonesty brings better dividends. Of course Conrad could not have stooped to choose such a "villian" as a main character of his story. A man capable of passionate love can not be a thorough-bred villian. He needs posses some sensitivity, some refinement, some human impulse to invite Conrad's perceptions, or at least some human weakness to induce Conrad's compassion.

Willems is certainly sensitive to his material and emotional needs, he also has refinement of the European culture and an essential impulse to 'fall' in love. But Willems' common human failings (Conrad is ever eager to sympathize with any human failing) are of using honesty as the best policy. Both Almayer and Willems are weak men who disown responsibility for their own actions and are prepared to attribute their misfortune to everything except the paralysis of their own will. Willems, too, like Almayer, thinks that his white qualities deserve success because of their moral superiority to native culture. This is what Bruce Johnson calls, an aspect of the "conventional complacent notions of economic bourgeois self." The novel's beginning indicates Willems' rather too practical ideas of honesty. The novel claims that:

> When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but the safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect (p.3).

Ironically, the "desired effect" is not essentially a desirable effect and is suggestive of Willems' actions, the consequences of which are bound to be beyond his governance. Like Almayer, he too is obsessed with thoughts of prosperity and power with little thought for anyone else. No relationship that blocks his progress or that does not enhance his prospects, is
sacred to him. His idea of material success has a natural corollary suffixed to it—the thought of power. Gloating over his position he tyrannizes his half-caste wife, glances over his sickly child with contempt and patronizes his brother-in-law who felt an awe at Willems and considered his sister fortunate in having him as a husband. Glassman puts it aptly. He says that:

Willems enjoys such an ecstatic pleasure with himself that in a final access of mindless vainglory he treats his evening snookers as a metaphor for existence itself.23

He is definitely a victim of self-love; like Narcissus he would look at his shadow "gliding obsequiously before him.... With the intoxication of his own glory... he had won the game of life; also the game of billiards" (p. 7).

Almayer, in this respect had been presented in a better light, that inspire of what he is, he is intensely attached to his daughter and all his dreams of happy life are associated with her. Whereas, Willems has nothing but contempt for his own offspring and his ideas of a happy life are confined to his personal glory through power and money. He enjoys "the great great luxury of his life" in the sunshine of Da Souza family's admiration:

It is a fine thing to be providence.... It gives one a feeling of enormously remote superiority, and Willems revelled in it.... They lived now by the grace of his will. This was power. Willems loved it (p. 4).
He is proud of his knowledge of the world. Never does he realize, for a moment, that the world too has the knowledge of him and his sham can not be an eternal disguise. The greatest joy of his life arises out of, what he thinks, good opinion of others — "submission of his wife, smile of his child, the awestruck respect" (p.3) of his in-laws and colleagues. He falls from his exalted position when exposed, and becomes an outcast being scorned by his wife, relatives and co-workers. Martin Bock has an indepth analysis to offer to understand the likes of Willems. He says:

The social outcast, in exile from his civilization, undergoes a troubling of the soul as he confronts the unfamiliar sensations of the wilderness or an alien culture.... The outcasts like Decoud and Willems, who are banished unwillingly from their civilization and confront inevitably unfamiliar sensations, also decline quickly.

Conrad is not out to glorify such a character. He just sympathizes with Willems, the sinner and the sufferer, and goes on to analyse the causes of his suffering. Unlike in Almayer's case Conrad tries to trace the sources of his character to Willems' childhood. As a boy Willems showed tendencies of contempt for secure and settled domestic life because there was no money there. He was "quick in learning but idle in school" (p.16). School necessitates discipline and discipline is a prerequisite for every human relationship and thing Willems is totally devoid of it. Conrad wants to suggest that it is the
presence of such people with no fidelity to any principle and with no sense of human solidarity that disrupts the societies and causes heart-burns to many a good people.

Willems considers family ties as 'encumbrances' of his life. Drunk with material glory he has "no time for love" (p.35). His marital life is no better than Almayer’s except that Willems does not really hate his wife but silently detests her. Everything he does is a "necessity" for him and, ironically, "deplorable". His disgust at the thought of his wife, he thinks, is justified because she is half-caste and he is a white. Bruce Johnson perceives in his character, "the familiar late nineteenth century pattern of the disintegrating colonial."25

The colonists found it convenient to consider other races as of inferior status. Hudig encouraged Willems’ visits to Da Souza family because it was the most convenient way to get rid of his socially embarrassing half-caste daughter. Lingard had married off his "daughter" to Almayer, in the same situations. Willems cheats Hudig to establish his financial position as, later on, he cheats Lingard to gain Aissa. He is ignorant of the political manoeuvrings that have been going on in the background. Allan Hunter perceives the situation better when he says:

In a very real sense Willems is the last victim of a chain that represents the same attitude to Malay women in a whole colony, and the same mistakes duplicated in each instance.26

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Willems' widow and her child, later on, are kept by Lingard at Macassar and Almayer, reluctantly allows Aissa to remain in his house. This is how the white men behave in their relationship to coloured women. Willems is not one of those people who feel gratitude and humility amidst security and congenial atmosphere. Security makes a man arrogant, reckless and selfish. Congeniality, as the whites believe, creates an atmosphere of material growth but what they don't understand is that it also causes the corruption of spirit. Like all proteges in Conrad, Willems fails and deceives both his benefactors — Hudig and Lingard. The guardian/father figure of Lingard had given him a position which was not only colonial to some extent but also familial. The re-play of guardian-ward relationship results in ingratitude on the part of the later and punishment by the former. Neither Hudig and Lingard's favours nor the warmth of home can keep Willems stable. He does not think twice before breaking away from all family ties, for a better future.

Like all condemned characters of Conrad Willems is bored and restless even at the Settlement. He can not stand monotony and passivity of Bornean life away from his own civilized society. In this bored state of mind he falls in love with Aissa since he has nothing better to do and love presents to him the best alternative in the given situation. Naturally, it is infatuation and not love. He had been rejected, sexually, by his wife Joanna after the exposure of his embezzlement at Hudig's. He is taken
unawares to see Joanna’s abrupt expression of independence and hatred for him. He goes to Sambir and tries to win Aissa as if in compensation of the loss of his male self-respect. Though ambitious for wealth, his passion seems to be controlled by a desire to prove his male superiority by taking Aissa to avenge Joanna’s defiance. Peter Glassman observes:

Willems does manage to evolve for himself a source of temporary energy and hope. Deprived of every rational stratagem of existence, he commits, himself at last, to a mad sort of communion with the terrain which simultaneously has stirred and repelled him... he makes a fervent acceptance of the poisonous Pantai, joins himself in passion and trust with the "tall and graceful" witch woman — Aissa — who seems to him to incarnate the jungle's mysterious "blooming of the dead".27

Joanna and Aissa deserve more admiration on this account. They are at least loyal to him; the same can not be said of Willems. One may take Joanna’s loyalty and forbearance for granted since she is the legitimate wife and her devotion to her husband is an expected social habit. But the devotion of the primitive woman, Aissa, is a sentiment to be admired. The renewal of love-making induces ecstatic feelings in Aissa as opposed to the repulsion and horror that Willems feels. Aissa even begins to have hopes of having a child to constitute "a bond which nothing on earth could break" (p.352). Joanna’s patience and Aissa’s devotion are set against Willems’ baseness in order to emphasize the basic depravity of his character.
The germ of failure lies deep within himself. He can not look beyond himself. His individualism is an aggravated form of the trait that was characteristic of Almayer. But Almayer is a weak person, whereas Willems is not really so and is consciously what he is. His is a double sin, he deceives both his benefactors - Hudig and Lingard and fails to develop and maintain proper relationships with either of his women. He respects neither the reality of social life in the form of marriage nor the beauty of personal life in the form of love. He hates both of them at different stages and whatever love he shows for Aissa is momentary and in the heat of passion. His overtures to Aissa remind one of Satan tempting Eve, by flattering her feminine ego. with almost a sadistic pleasure he insists that she was "a complete savage" and he was "a civilized man" (p.80). Palmer perceives this relationship in terms of "light and darkness" and says that, "Aissa is likened to 'tropical life which wants the sunshine but works in gloom' (p. 70); and in his final submission Willems falls 'back into darkness' (p.80)."28 For Willems the black world is a mere negation of everything that he wished to achieve - fame and affluence. He has the conviction that happiness is attainable only through wealth. Almayer's idea of happiness through wealth is centered upon the future of his child whereas Willems' centers solely on self.

It is also interesting to note that his ideas of husband - wife relationship are peculiarly patriarchal. He had expected a
slavish obeisance from his wife, Joanna, and later on he expects the same from Aissa who is not even socially accepted as his wife. He is so furious, in his possessiveness, that he shouts at Aissa when she puts on a veil against his wishes. He is so possessive that this simple act of Aissa seems to him an act of disobedience and induces in him the feeling that, "they had nothing in common—not a thought, not a feeling" (p. 128). He shows a total lack of tolerance, be it in marriage, in love or in other relationships. Bock attributes these qualities to Willems' "social and psychic state of exile." 29

More than his psychic state of exile, as Bock calls it, his materialistic instinct needs to be carefully analysed. Lying in the arms of Aissa, for instance, "gave him a clear perception of secure ownership, strengthened his belief in the possession of that human being..." (p.146). He perceives love in purely material terms of "ownership" and "possession". His distrust of all women is so complete ["you can not believe any woman" (p.268)] that he holds Aissa responsible for his fall. She is a sort of Eve, the temptress. He tells Lingard:

She took me as if I did not belong to myself. She did... she is a savage. I, a civilized European, and clever! She that knew more than a wild animal! Well she found out some thing in me. She found it out and I was lost. (p.269).

His obsession with his racial superiority creates in him a
kind of mental block, which he is not able to break from even in the most intimate physical moments with Aissa. He feels guilty of "surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization" (p.80). It is a relationship based on racial mistrust of each other. Aissa thinks of Europe as "a land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us - who are not white" (p.144). Adam Gillon observes that, "immobile and tense, this passionate savage woman is a constant reminder of his failure." 30 She can not visualize her life among his people in Europe and he can not stand the decaying corpse of his existence amidst the people of her race. Conrad, wrote in his letter of September 24, 1895, to Edward Garnett:

They both long to have a significance in the order of nature or society. To me they are typical of mankind where every individual wishes to assert his power, women by sentiment and men by achievement of some sort - mostly base. 31

In the same letter Conrad observes that both Aissa and Willems fail in their respective desires. Aissa fails in her desire to be "something" for him:

- to be in his mind, in his heart - to shelter him in his affection which is simply the ambition to be an important factor in another's life. 32

And Willems fails "in his effort to throw off the trammels of
earth and of heaven." With no power to wield, Willems
collapses completely. The ideas on which he had formed his
individuality seem to have been completely shattered.

Like most self-centered protagonists of Conrad, Willems too
is a victim of his racial vanity. He can not forget that after
all he is a white. This is the reason he fails to accept the way
of life and love to which Aissa has escorted him. Lingard's
verdict of condemning Willems to live with Aissa and die in
Sambir is a retribution well meted out to such men because
Willems' way of life deserves no other end. Juliet McLauchlan,
speaking about Willems' 'aberrational' way of life, observes:

He does not realize that, as a life long
worshipper in the "temple of self" he is
living a form of imprisonment. Nor he can
realize that there is nothing of value to lose
in this self-imprisoned personality.

Stephen Land notices the paradoxical features of cleverness and
weakness in his character which make him a typical Conradian
hero. Land maintains that:

... he is caught in a paradoxical situation
between two worlds. Whatever he does proves
unsatisfactory, and whichever world he choses
for his efforts, finally throws him back to
the other. Willems' relationship with Aissa
has, for him, the character of demonic
possession.

The paradox is quite apparent in his attraction for Aissa.
He sometimes feels drawn towards her and sometimes feels
repelled. Conrad comments that, "he was horrified and grateful; drawn irresistibly to her—and ready to run away" (p.150). Suzane Nalbantian sees it as "conscious and vindictive yielding of 'civilization' to 'savagery'."36 Palmer locates a similarity between Kurtz's two "Intendeds" and Willems' two women though the later's feeling for them is of a baser kind. Palmer's analysis of Willems-Aissa relationship is highly revealing. He says:

It is important to see here that Aissa must not be taken as representative of sexual feeling or 'love' per se but rather of destructive and regressive passion. After he has yielded to Aissa, Willems sits up suddenly "with a movement and look of a man awakened suddenly by the crash of his own falling house" (p.77) and when late in the novel she clasps Willems passionately, he recoils "in horror" just as Kurtz does late in *Heart of Darkness*.37

Willems' hate for Aissa is more intense than love and that hate later on is shifted to Aissa's people and the place on the whole. But this is ironically reciprocal. Aissa hates and suspects all whites. She would neither let him go back to civilization, alone, nor would accompany him there. Aissa's people reject him, having got what they wanted—the secret of Lingard's river. The situation can not be resolved. Willems has lived, all through, within himself as if there is nothing without, as if the world outside him did not exist. Lingard tells him that he has been "possessed of a devil" (p.273). His corruption lies in his act of betrayal and this means nothing to
him. He can never see that his most devastating deviation has been from the path of honour and loyalty.

Juliet McLauchlan speaks of the 'escape' motif as pervading the novel. She says, "Willems escapes from his own attempted tight control, to be enslaved by his desires. When satisfied he escapes from Aissa's spell only to return to temple of self." His desire for escape does not embody his desire for freedom. Ironically, he longs for the comfort and security, for a kind of life that is purely merchantile and hence materialistic. He desires a world where

there were ships there—ships, help, white men. Men like himself. Good men who would rescue him, take him away, take him far away where there was trade, and houses, and other men that could understand him exactly, appreciate his capabilities; where there was proper food, and money; where there were beds, knives forks, carriages, brass bands, cool drinks, churches with well-dressed people praying in them. He would pray also. The superior land of refined delights where he could sit on chair, eat his tiffin off a white tablecloth, nod to his fellows—good fellows he would be popular; always was—where he could be virtuous, correct, do business, draw a salary, smoke cigars, buy things in ships—have boots... be happy, free, become rich. (pp.329-30 )

The ideas, one can easily notice in the passage quoted above, of happiness and freedom, in Willems' case, are associated with the comforts and luxuries that wealth alone can bring. This, we must understand, is a very painful travesty of the
romantic dreams of escape.

A word about the Willems - Almayer relationship is important here. There are no grounds to explain Willems' failure to develop a correct, if not close, relationship with Almayer. For Almayer belongs to his race and culture. Willems is "accustomed to think of himself as indispensable to others" (p.65) but Almayer's presence induces in him a feeling of futility. Almayer appears to him cold and hostile and the place as barbarous. Stephen Land considers Willems' behaviour as anticipatory of Lord Jim. He says:

Willems'... begins by rejecting the white world, turning his back on Almayer in Sambir and on Lingard's promise of re-instatement in Macassar, and making himself an outcast rather than face humiliation among his people.39

One can not overlook the contrast in their intentions. Jim's desire for re-instatement is for the cause of his lost honour, in his own eyes. It becomes a moral force for him. Whereas re-instatement for Willems is a material necessity. He is obliged to leave for Macassar not because he is morally sensitive, like Jim, but because his moral integrity itself in doubt. He is already at the receiving end, he must accept whatever is offered to him. Gurko Leo holds Lingard responsible for the sad lot of Almayer and Willems. Not that Lingard has a pre-meditated plan to destroy them but he is, says Leo:

"a sentimental egoist who derives a self-
sustaining gratification from "arranging" and "improving" the life of others. Both marry native women from greed rather than love. Both stifle in the fecund jungle of Borneo, whose tropicality and profusion sap their vitality and leave them gasping in vain for spiritual air.  

The cause of the failure of relationships in Conrad has often been attributed to his pessimism and nihilism. It is true that he perceived the universe as an indifferent mechanism consisting mainly of destructive forces beyond man's control. But he also perceived how family relationships and passionate love sustain human beings and enable them, as Schwarz finds it, "to escape the psychological imprisonment of fears, doubt, obsessions, compulsions and fixations." 41 Schwarz feels that Conrad's gloomy perceptions of his early life as an orphan and an emigree later on induced in him a need to restore personal and family ties. These form the main crux of his later works. Without parents, without a wife, Conrad lived in England a life without any family ties. In presenting a picture of Sambir as dominated by greed and manipulations he wishes to present an alternative in the form of family and personal bonds. Peter Glassman is of the opinion that "the novel insists that its characters are incapable of social interaction." 42

Infact, by presenting a scene of disintegrated relationships, Conrad wants to emphasize the need for proper human relations. Every character in the first two novels seems to need someone to share his sorrows with, as Conrad wrote to
Edward Garnett in his letter of June 7, 1895, "... one must have some object to hang his affection upon ..." One can not forget little Taminah, in Almayer’s Folly, longing in vain, for Dain’s love and suffering in silence. She, too, has been viewed by Conrad as an outcast. The desire for some object to "hang" one’s "affections" upon is viewed strongly in the minor characters of An Outcast of the Islands. For the subtle statesman like Babalatchi, Omar is a father-figure whose death brings a sense of isolation generally unknown to him. Conrad comments:

The mind of the savage statesman, chastened by bereavement, felt for a moment the weight of his loneliness, with keen perception worthy even of a sensibility exasperated by all the refinements of tender sentiment that a glorious civilization brings in its train, among other blessing and virtues, into this excellent world. (pp.114-15).

Babalatchi, the great "puller of wires", is himself transformed, later on, into a father-figure for Lakamba. Lakamba’s life among his many wives and parasites is a picture of ennui and despair on the level of personal relationships. Cut off from human ties, Conrad’s individual feels completely lost. Lingard, for instance, feels "a great emptiness in his heart" (p.272) when he realizes the failure of ties with Willems who had betrayed his secret. Lingard has to review, from the beginning, the relevance of all relationships and as to where did he go wrong. All his generous actions, so far, appeared to have a
taint of futility:

Speech, action, anger, forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain, that was needed to give them effect. (p. 272)

These thoughts of Lingard are consequential upon the absence of fidelity in the character of Willems. Same is the case of Omar.

Omar, the criminal and ex-pirate, the terror of the seas, too, feels need for companionship at some stage. He measures his last days, blind and desolate, and dies with no one to share his lonely days. The only companion of his old age, his daughter Aissa, is lost to him because he failed to recognize her as a separate entity, a thinking and feeling individual with an independent world of her own. Arnold Weinstein attributes this tendency to the fact that for a parent the child is "an extension of the self." It is a repetition of the same old motif in Conrad – the father exerting a pull on the love-life of his child causing separation or at least tension as was caused between Conrad himself and his son Borys.

Both Almayer and Willems have no father and try to compensate through someone, with whom they can identify themselves. Whether white or Malays, life for both seems to be an eternal search for identity through personal and family communion. Schwarz finds a biblical analogy in their
relationship with Lingard. It is close to a "biblical concept of symbolic paternity in which God the Father or the patriarch confers his blessings as if by magic." Lingard requests Almayer to call him father as Mrs. Almayer is Lingard's "daughter". Lingard dotes upon little Nina as an indulgent grandpa. Conrad makes it very clear that despite the urgency and intensity of the urge for human ties no relationship can survive unless it is unconditional; it can not go a long way if it is based on personal greed, ambition and hypocrisy since they are an affront to the human values. The very act, as it is, of Almayer and Willems, of taking women of a different race is a confrontation, in itself, against the established code of conduct and when prompted by no genuine impulse, it becomes immoral too.

Arnold Weinstein seems to speak for Conrad when he analyses the element of mutuality in human relations and calls it "a spectrum" of interactions. He says, "relationship is not exactly a passion, but rather a mutual enterprise," and that the individual "seeks completion as well as gratification...." Both Almayer and Willems tend to ignore the relevance of this aspect of relationship until the end. Almost like obstinate and inexperienced youth, they blame life and society for their failures which are actually consequential upon their own refusal to cultivate proper relationships. They attribute their sorrow to personal and social injustice.

The awareness of a need for a disciplined community life,
where an individual has to curb his personal freedom, his own whims, caprices and animal instincts to accommodate other members of the group, begins to appear from the third novel of Conrad, *The Nigger of the *Narcissus*. With this novel begins the mature phase of Conrad’s career as a novelist and as a great exponent of human relationships. This we will take up in the next chapter.
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Chapter II


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