The Woman Question in *The Secret Agent*: Conrad's Humanism

Mahmoud K. Kharbutli*

ABSTRACT

This essay deals with Conrad's treatment of the woman question, one of the most controversial topics of the Victorian Age. As opposed to the two extremes of the question, Conrad adopts a position that makes him more or less as accidentalist, rather than an essentialist, believing that women, like men, are governed as much by nature as by nurture. To illustrate this view, he places Winnie, the protagonist, of his novel, under very difficult conditions that lead her to murder her husband, a form of madness that can be explained, at least partly, in terms of her circumstances. He also uses foil as a narrative technique to show that different women respond differently to conditions which are almost the same as hers. Thus, he frees women from natural determinism and from preconceived categorizations and generalizations. This is the form of his humanism.

Keywords: The Woman Question, Essentialist, Nature, Humanism.

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Age is known for its parliamentary reform, and the woman question was perhaps equally important as shown by the huge amount of writings on it. Obviously, the two issues are connected. Justin MCarthy wrote in *Westminster Review* (July 1864), "The greatest social difficulty in England today is the relationship between man and woman" (Qtd. in *Norton Anthology 2*: l650). The crux of the question was the female character. Is it determined by nature or nurture? Another question followed: What is the woman's zone of action? Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, felt obligated to define the frontier in *The Princess*: man for the field and woman for the house, though he had to resort to some kind of propitiation, "Not like to like, but like in difference." Strangely enough, some women, like Sarah Stickney Ellis in her book *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, insisted on women's role as domestic guardians, angels, and mentors. On the other extreme, others, like Dinah Maria Mullock in her book *A woman's Thoughts About Women* and Florence Nightingale in her book *Cassandra*, rejected this characterization, considering it repressive and humiliating. They complained of the restraints imposed by a patriarchal society upon women's sphere of action, with the house becoming like some sort of a golden cage, with the spoon and knife taking the place of the pen and the brush (See *Norton* l650-l670). Florence Nightingale took her convictions to the war zone, opting to be a field nurse, notwithstanding the opposition of her well-to-do parents. In fiction Charlotte Bronte's novel *Shirley* addresses the question by showing the boredom women are subjected to, so much so that Caroline longs for death. Even at the end of the century, after some changes had been introduced and the restrictions somewhat loosened, the "Oriental prejudice" against women, as Walter Besant terms it (Qtd. in *Norton 2*: l668), still persisted. So, at least during the Victorian Age the war was neither won nor lost.

Conrad found himself amidst this controversy when he settled in Britain, and the woman question is fictionalized in many of his works. Most importantly, it is highlighted in *Heart of Darkness*. Kharbutli dealt with the issue in his article "The Treatment of Women in *Heart of Darkness,*" where the Intended and the Savage Woman stand as a case of binary oppositions. The Intended, raised in the city, has all the characteristics of the Victorian womanly woman, an angel in the house, naïve, idealistic, and gullible. The other, raised in the jungles of Africa, is a leader of men. The message is clear: the character of a woman is not genetic but social.

The case is more complex and less obvious in

* Department of English, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan
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Conrad's other novel, *The Secret Agent*, which, as most critics agree, is a dark and pessimistic novel employing irony very aptly as a structuring paradigm. Claire Rosenfield calls the novel's special type of irony "gallows humor" (121). We all remember the last paragraph of the novel describing the Professor ( *Secret Agent* 252), that satanic symbol of ruin and destruction, strolling the streets of London and calling "madness and despair," in a magnificent stroke of savage irony, "to the regeneration of the world" (253).

However, when it comes to Winnie, there is a marked disagreement among critics. Some sympathize with her. John Palmer considers her along with Stevie "the norms of masculine and female innocence, and Verloc's essential victims" (118). Eustace Tillyard even considers her "noble" (104). On the other hand, Eileen Sypher sees her as a "Medusa" (42), and, as many critics have observed, the Biblical references in the novel imply that she is the Devil.

Such disagreements regarding Winnie's character are more than justifiable. She is both good and bad, an angel in the house and a murderess of her husband, a sacrificial priestess and a devil. In portraying Winnie there is a degree of indeterminacy, ideological and political, and this is the focus of this essay. Conrad is not equivocating as he seems to swing between the two diametrically opposed views of the Victorian Age concerning the female character. Actually, he is embracing a neither/nor stance, which indicates the complexity of the question and consequently a rejection of any oversimplification in matters related to human nature as opposed to dead matter and a refusal to pre-judge people according to gender. This is Conrad's basis of humanism as he carves his own way into the thorny issue. Against essentialism, which maintains that women are genetically endowed with certain characteristics which make them inferior to men, he shows in this essay, is "Don't generalize."

Conrad walks into the war zone by choosing, for the first time in his literary career, a woman as his protagonist.1 Winnie's horrendous circumstances, frustrations, madness, confusions, and fumbling attempts to cope with her problems all support the claim that she is the protagonist of the novel. Conrad himself speaks of the tale as "Mrs Verloc's story" (Author's Note II), and many critics concur, such as L. Hillis Miller and M.C. Knoepflmacher. Actually, the title of the novel applies as well to her as to her husband, for she is the secret double agent *par excellence*, as we shall see.

With Winnie as a protagonist pushed to the precipice, Conrad manages to weave out of marriage, love, family, sexuality, maternity, patriarchal society, politics, morality, revolution, and economy a tale of maddening anarchism and absurdity into which Winnie is tossed and against which she is to be defined as she struggles for some meaningful survival. Obviously, Conrad moves on bumpy roads while trying to outline, perhaps for the first time in his fiction, his position with respect to the woman question, a complex, chicken-or-egg issue in analytic psychology and *a fortiori* much more so in fiction, as he traces Winnie's development from early girlhood to the moment when she finds herself at the precipice, at which point she commits suicide in utter despair. He shows the complexity of the question and the difficulty to come up with simplistic either/or answers by an act of self-deconstruction.

The pivotal motif in this regard is madness, Winnie's as well as that of others. The theme is an eminent part of Conrad's artistic and ideological vision, particularly in conjunction with society and civilization. My emphasis here lies on Winnie's madness, the madness of a woman, a wife, and a sister/mother. What are the causes behind it? Is it rooted in biology or society? Is it an exception or a rule in women? All these were pertinently hot questions at the time, but Conrad would not subscribe to any side. His ideological views can be sensed throughout the novel.

The topic with the questions and ramifications emanating from it is featured in the novel with at least two references to Lombroso, the Italian criminologist who formulated a somewhat biologically deterministic theory on crime along gender lines. At the end of the novel, Comrade Ossipon gazes at Winnie, whose face still betrays the effects of the crime she has just committed, and invokes Lombroso "as an Italian recommends himself to his favorite saint" (*Secret* 242). For Lombroso, anatomy "really becomes destiny," as Miriam Hirsch believes (140), and as Ossipon seems to believe at the moment. Although women were "less criminally oriented than men" (Hirsch 140), they were capable of excessively cruel murders. Lombroso says:

The woman, as distinguished from the man... stands at one or other extremity of the pole, being either perfectly normal or excessively
anomalous. And when the anomaly is excessive, suicide and madness are one. Consequently, women are very rarely criminal when compared with men, but when criminal they are infinitely worse. (Qtd. in Hirsch 140)

Lombroso is inclined toward classification, genetic -- man, woman -- and intra-genetic -- some women and other women -- although he is not clearly and flagrantly misogynistic. Not all women are genetically criminal-minded but some are and these latter ones are worse than men. Lombroso's analysis stops here. He definitely represents one side of the controversy on the subject. It is believed that women are more likely to suffer from mental and psychological disorders than men due to such biological facts as menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, all of which contribute to their "vulnerability to mental and behavioral aberrations (Martin 28).3 The other side is social not biological, and this is where Conrad stands.

Now, with Lombroso invoked in the novel itself and with some thinkers of the Victorian Age attributing the female character to nature and few, including John Stuart Mill, to society, Winnie seems to be a classic example of the Italian criminologist's views, a woman gone mad for natural, genetic reasons. Now it is necessary to gauge Conrad's position. Where does he stand? What does he mean by making Ossipon refer to the Italian criminologist? If he stopped here, he would be conniving with the anarchist and would be labeled as a conservative, anti-feminist thinker of the times.

But he does not. He uses irony as a means of contesting Ossipon's views, showing the contradiction between his words (sentiments) and actions, appearance and reality. The Secret Agent, in more ways than one, is a merciless debunking of anarchists, including Comrade Ossipon. Conrad wrote to Cunninghame Graham, "I don't think I've been satirizing the revolutionary world. All these people are not revolutionists -- they are mere shams" (Qtd. in Stine 126). Actually, the debunking of anarchists is one way of undermining the Victorian gender categorization. Michaelis, "the ticket-of leave apostle," (46) looks like a "tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semi-transparent complexion" (46). Yundt's portrait is equally grotesque and repulsive:

The terrorist, as he called himself, was old and bald, with a narrow, snow-white wisp of a goatee hanging limply from his chin. An extraordinary expression of under-handed malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes. When he rose painfully the thrusting forward of a skinny groping hand deformed by gouty swelling suggested the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab. (47)

Comrade Ossipon's appearance is also repulsive with his "robust legs... a bush of crinkly yellow hair... flattened nose and prominent mouth cast in the rough mould of the negro type" (48). He is "in fact nothing more than a complacent sensualist living off the dole of desperate women" (Stine 126) of a bourgeois society. There might be in all this a trace of old-fashioned psychology, where physical appearance reflected inner character, but Conrad bolsters all this with equally repulsive mental and psychological traits. Moreover, while these anarchists call for a change by revolution, Ossipon subscribes to a biologically deterministic view of female character, a view which defeats the anarchists' purposes beforehand and belies their assumptions.

Thus, Conrad, having exposed the anarchists, casts doubts on Ossipon's biological determinism, or at least he undermines any serious consideration of the anarchist's opinion, by highlighting the social determinants of Winnie's behavior. This is his second strategy. Like a trained psychologist, he traces character back to the roots, to childhood and adolescence with all the surrounding environment in order to rebut Ossipon's sentiments and opinion; he seems to suggest that, while biology may be a potential factor, society triggers the response, while genetics may offer a latent cause, society sparks the explosion. This is what we see in his dramatization of Winnie as he disparages idealism, hypocrisy, and all kinds of false consciousness.

In other words, in modern terminology on the subject, Conrad endorses an accidentalist's position rather than an essentialist's. In other words, he believes that character is determined or, at least, influenced by social circumstances and not by genetic factors. He does this by offering evidence which might suggest the biological crises listed by the advocates of the latter, while at the same time he underscores the social factors in a move which might suggest shades of the theories of Durkheim, his famous contemporary, who, opposing both individualism and biologism (Cockerham 104-105),
believed that "individual behavior was largely determined by the social order, in that society existed as a distinct entity outside of and above the individual and so shaped the manner of individual responses" (Cockerham 105), largely not wholly.

The social determinants of Winnie's character are clearly inscribed and even foregrounded, which clearly indicates a purposeful move by the author to bolster his case. That Winnie's girlhood, due to factors beyond her control, was a plaything of social and economic circumstances cannot be denied. Significantly, it is not a father/son but a mother/daughter relation: she grew up with her mother, who ran the "business house" (200) in a world of men not "exactly of the fashionable kind" (19). Her womanly charms "of the French descent" (19) naturally attracted the customers. She did not try to hide them, nor did she object to a friendly conversation with them from time to time, obeying the call of duty in spite of the unbearable conditions at work, "It was a crushing memory, an exhausting vision of countless breakfast trays carried up and down innumerable stairs, of endless haggling over pence, of the endless drudgery of sweeping, dusting, cleaning, from basement to attics" (200). In view of the swollen legs and heavy movement of her stout mother, we have to believe Winnie's account of her work at the business house. In retrospect, she complains to Ossipon, "What is a girl to do? Could I have of her work at the business house. In retrospect, she says to Ossipon, "What is a girl to do? Could I have trouble telling people how to do their work?" (255), which could be her way to solicit his pity and support, but the facts are all too real.

The marriage deal, which she accepted as part of her duty, determined Winnie's life and character. It was a blessing to the mother since for her it came as "a complete relief from material cares" (21), and she had a sense of "absolute safety" (21) in her son-in-law's heavy nature. It also meant, as she believed, that her daughter's future was secure and her imbecile son, Stevie, was to be taken care of. Such an evaluation of the marriage coming from the practical-minded mother in a materialistic society was not unreasonable in light of the family's dire circumstances. She was so practical that she was blind to her daughter's instinctual needs, and Conrad's irony is apt to strike though not quickly enough. As for Winnie, having absorbed the spirit of her heroic mother and having been brought up as a surrogate mother for Stevie, this being a biological impulse, she accepted the deal for the economic and psychological stability of her family, thus obeying a Victorian call of duty, but only after sacrificing her real lover, the butcher's son, who, with a boat too small to accommodate passengers, could not provide for the family. Verloc, on the contrary, owned a "roomy craft" (201) and had a much-needed "taciturn magnanimity" (201). Thus, in order to serve at her new "post of duty" (177), Winnie had to sacrifice her romantic sexuality, which constituted a traumatic experience for her that was to leave an indelible scar on her mind. In the mainstream spirit of the age, as Houghton says, "... love could be blatantly thrust aside if it interfered with more important values" (381) such as duty and responsibility. In Freudian terms, the latter is a sublimation of the former.

Moreover, Winnie's self-renunciation, repression, and frustrations, evolving out of the marriage/deal, are aggravated by a childless, sexless married life, though in the same spirit of Victorian respectability the problem is covered up completely. The two sides stand face to face, biological, female instincts and socially-imposed duty, nature and society. Here, it seems that Conrad is swinging towards biology. It is true that she is warm on some occasions, but only as a mother for both her brother and husband. It is also true that Verloc loves her, but his love is desexualized. He loves her in a truly Victorian manner, "as a wife should be loved--that is maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief possession. This head arranged for the night, those ample shoulders had an aspect of familiar sacredness--the sacredness of domestic peace" (152).

This frigid, sexless relation is borne out by two bed scenes. In the first one the husband and wife talk about business, Stevie, and the anarchists. The second one of Chapter VIII is also sexless. Verloc, extremely worried and agitated over the explosion, tries to open a conversation with his wife, but, on being rebuffed, he falls asleep. She then suggests that she put out the light, but, oddly enough, he fears the "darkness and silence that would follow" (59). The Gulf between them may have led to the childless marriage. However, she cannot do anything about the situation, being hampered by Victorian respectability. Her resignation and self-renunciation as regards her natural sexuality are indubitable, as repression would have it in a truly Victorian manner. In short, she accepts her fate as a victim, demonstrating at this stage the first part of Nina Auerbach's opinion, "Victorian womanhood is most delectable as a victim ..." (35). The second part, metamorphosis, will soon follow.

So, it is repression that best defines her way of coping
with her problems although the narrator declares that she is "not a submissive creature" (203). All this seems to underline the tenacious repression which she has to exercise and which becomes for her a way of life. Her passiveness is the other side of the coin. However, the volatile combination is never reassuring. It seethes until it explodes. As she has to live by the standards of her patriarchal society, she has to conceal her true feelings, thus becoming a hypocrite, a double agent. She explains to Ossipon that as a respectable woman she has had to suppress her real self. Conrad finds here his chance to lash at Victorian respectability, which proves to be nothing but "prudent reserve without superfluous words, and sparing of signs" (217), a form of consensus conspiracy "covering by a decent reticence the problems that may arise in the practice of a secret profession and the commerce of shady wares" (217). Speaking of this form of repression as an "ideological instrument" (3), Kucich describes it as the "cultural decision to value silenced or negated feeling over affirmed feeling, and the corresponding cultural prohibitions placed on display, disclosure, confession, assertion..." (3). With a life of repression, the most Winnie can hope for is to live with her husband "without distaste" (205), but also without sexuality. As for maternity, Stevie can provide some satisfaction. He is the safety valve for the time being. Thus, romance, sexuality, and genuine maternity are sacrificed for the marriage/deal. The narrator outlines the situation with a simile.

Mrs Verloc pursued the visions of seven years' security for Stevie loyally paid for on her part; of security growing into confidence, into a domestic feeling, stagnant and deep like a placid pool, whose guarded surface hardly shuddered on the occasional passage of Comrade Ossipon, the robust anarchist with shamelessly inviting eyes, whose glance had a corrupt clearness sufficient to enlighten any woman not absolutely imbecile. (201; my emphasis)

It is not so much imbecility as repression or rather imbecility resulting from excessive repression as she resists the devilish temptations of the devilish Ossipon, as we shall see.

However, with Stevie's bloody death, the safety valve securing Winnie's silence and passivity snaps loose. Her fantasy cocoon is shattered. The guarded surface of the marriage not only cracks but is broken open. Now, faced with brute reality, she has no use for any saving illusion which Marlow in Heart of Darkness strives to keep in place to save the Victorian lady in the sepulcher-like city. Winnie's character, heretofore forged by social circumstances, is fragmented, pending re-formation and reshuffling, a process that is apt to take time. At the moment she is possessed by a fit of insanity, reflecting the other explosive insanities of the novel. She stabs her husband, leaves him dying and runs away, overwhelmed by a confusing flux of emotions and sentiments, as if a dam were blown open. She goes "raving mad--murdering mad" (216). This is her metamorphosis in Auerbach's opinion. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see it almost in the same way, "At times … in the severity of her selflessness, as well as in the extremity of her alienation from ordinary fleshly life, this nineteenth-century angel-woman becomes not just a memento of otherness but actually a memento mori …" (24).

Her insanity is both individual and collective, within a wider social perspective. Verloc has caused Stevie's death, though inadvertently, but this is not the only cause. It pushes the crisis to the breaking point, betraying a deeper wound that seven years of marriage, of repression and self-alienation, have failed to heal. On the collective Jungian level, Verloc becomes the Male Antagonist who has persecuted women from Medea to Tess in a long historical war, "Into the plunging blow, delivered over the side of the couch, Mrs Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns and the unbalanced nervous fury of the age of bar-rooms" (216).

This is an instance where sociology blends with psychology, where a social factor turns into a psychological trait. The age of caverns and the age of bar-rooms are uttered in one breath; the past and present are fused together in her mind. Time is condensed into few seconds, a thought, and a blow. With the blood drops trickling like the ticking of the appropriate transferred epithet "insane clock" (217) and with the ticking changing "into a continuous sound of trickling" (217), the blowing of the Greenwich Observatory and the stabbing of Verloc become interwoven in one of Conrad's artistic moves toward thematic unity, a technique which Dolan calls "analogy" (228). Time is abolished in both cases. The crimes of ancient times are still committed at present, and the revenge which should have been taken ages ago is
now being executed justly and memorably, the statute of
limitations notwithstanding.

The full implications of the foregoing analysis are
materialized in the murder scene. Verloc comes home
with practical plans for the family, expecting, as
Victorian men normally did, understanding cooperation
and even compliance from his wife. However, things do
not go the way he wants, owing to Winnie's accumulated
frustrations and fixations. Here, she goes out of her place
in the Victorian society. They talk, but they, as always in
the novel and as many critics have observed (See
Rosenfield, for example), do not communicate. Each is
captured in a private, closed world. His is one of
practical exigencies and brutalities, perhaps a man's
world, though he is not unkind nor unsympathetic. Hers
is one of unfulfilled hopes, pent-up emotions, and loss. At
the end it becomes difficult to tell whether one "is talking
to a dummy or a live woman" (203), though actually she
is drumming up her courage and mustering her energies
for the climactic act, "This man took the boy away to
murder him. He took the boy away to murder him" (203).

We know that this is not exactly the case, but
impelled by her unconscious frustrations she is not after
the truth but after revenge, personal and collective as we
have seen. He has deprived her of her sexuality and now
of her surrogate maternity. With this "inconclusive and
maddening thought" (203), she bends all her faculties for
the final act, for the long-repressed revenge. She becomes
a woman possessed, "released from all earthly ties. She
had her complete freedom. Her contract with existence,
as represented by that man standing there, was at an end"
(207). This is the freedom of madness, which she does
not exactly know "what use to make of" (209) and which
merges with the other forms of anarchy in the novel. In
my opinion, she suffers from what Durkheim sees, in
Cockerham's words, as "a sudden dislocation of the
normative system" (105). On the other hand, her reference
to 'contract' to describe her relation to Verloc is of utmost
importance because it specifies the way she regards her
marriage and underscores her repression, frustration, and
obsession.

The diagnosis of Winnie's madness falls in line with
Philip Martin's sexist analysis. In his introduction to his
book Mad Women in Romantic Writing, he summarizes
his thesis on the myth of female madness:

The myth tells a simple tale: the woman left or
found alone, a widow, a bereaved mother, a
deserted wife, or a jilted lover. Her mind is
vulnerable to the disturbances caused by an
obsession with past happiness or promises,
perhaps an excessive desire for the lost object
of love. (1)

This outline perfectly fits Winnie's case, particularly
with the memory of her lost romance, her fixations, and
obsessions. The myth, going deep in Western culture,
develops out of a sense of a lost Eden. Female madness
boils down to a fall from love and desire:

It recognizes the lost life of the past together
with its promises and hopes for the future into
the present obsessed with both, and unable in
its suffering to distinguish between them. It
articulates this suffering through the vocabulary
of despair and loss, and it speaks therefore of
disappointment and unfulfilled desire. (Martin
22)

It is noteworthy in Martin's diagnosis that he speaks
of the collapse of time, an observation already made in
connection with Winnie's sense of ancient abuses. With
this in mind, the blowing of Greenwich Observatory turns
out to be a symbolic symptom of her state of mind at the
time of the murder. She lives in the past as she suffers the
frustrations of the present intensified by the thought of
betrayed future promises, all at the same time. It is also
noteworthy that, although Martin's analysis verges on
gender differentiation, it does not overrule the role played
by society in sparking the explosion, a position which
Conrad seems to embrace.

Conrad could have ended the novel with such a
bloody scene, which nothing could have produced better
than Winnie's murder of her husband, but for him the
case is not yet closed. He has not yet delivered his
concluding statement about Winnie from the perspective
of the woman question as he sees it in terms of a number
of social determinants; however, he underscores the
complexity of the question by leaving a margin wide
enough for individual development and self-realization
on the basis of a mature, enlightened freedom and
responsibility.

While it is evident that Winnie has been a victim of
circumstances in a patriarchal society, Conrad does not
seem to acquit her of all responsibility. As Laing points
out above, it is a question of response to a destructive
society. Conrad's technique of doing this is contrast, the presentation of foils, although circumstances can never be the same. He presents her not so much as a type representing the Woman but as an individual set apart from the other women in the novel. However difficult it is to gauge his exact position with respect to a very delicate issue, he seems to delineate a propensity for positive, committed, well-guided, and even assertive action. In doing so, he drives his point even further. Women cannot be lumped together in one category. This is his third strategy.

One of these women is her mother, who, despite her physical infirmities, remains a woman of the world, a practical business woman of sorts, who in order to survive in it provides "for the years of widowhood by letting furnished apartments" (19). Her judgment of Verloc as a gentleman who has the right character to serve her personal needs as well as those of her imbecile son, Stevie, proves right to a very great extent, the bloody incident being an instance of cosmic not human irony. At the end, when she observes "displeasure" (131) in her daughter, she manages independently to secure an admission into a poor house, behaving heroically and honorably. In brief, this woman has been able to get things done for her and for the people around her in spite of her uneasy conditions. To a great extent, she has proved the fallacy of division of labor along gender lines.

Another woman who likewise serves as a foil for Winnie is Michaelis' patroness. Like Winnie, she is a surrogate mother, but, unlike her, she remains a woman of the world, with "that sort of exceptional temperament which defies time with scornful disregard as if it were a rather vulgar convention submitted to by the mass of inferior mankind" (94). She also defies other conventions because they stand in her way toward self-realization, however unheroic this might be. Antithetically, Winnie, as we recall, is a plaything of conventions. Another contrasting element pertains to mental ability. While Winnie is incurious, the patroness is "intelligent" and "curious at heart, but not like many women of social gossip" (95), as people of all sorts come freely to the "temple of the old woman's not ignoble curiosity" (95). She likes to watch what the world is "coming to" (95). With her practical mind she is a good judge of "men and things" (95).

Although there are bound to be some unexplored significant differences involved in the comparison, in Conrad's ideology as well as in any humanist's no two human beings are identical. Winnie is somehow the antithesis of these two women, and they are somehow antithetical to each other. The three women respond differently to the same destructive society. So, it is the individual human being and not the type nor the gender that matters. Winnie's passivity, negativity, withdrawal, indifference, and mental lethargy are clearly stated, overly demonstrated, and repeatedly dramatized. They seem to draw attention to themselves, especially with the foils put into place. This is Conrad's way of imputing to her a degree of responsibility for her plight, and that is why he makes her pay for it. Even before the marriage/deal, when she is enjoying her romance, these traits are manifest. She acquiesces without argument, let alone any form of dissent or questioning. She stands out in the novel by her willful and obstinate refusal to look into the world, to examine its facts, and understand its logic, allowing herself to be written on and acted upon. Conrad forthrightly calls her "incurious woman" (198) and refers to her "detachment" (171), "unfathomable indifference" (18), and "unfathomable reserve" (19). Unlike the Victorian womanly woman of the sepulcher-like city of Heart of Darkness with her saving illusion, Winnie has grown up in the world, whether at the business house or the shop/home, but only physically not mentally, thus failing to become the New Woman of the age. Although she overhears fragments of the anarchists' conversations, she shows no interest in learning, willfully preferring sleep to what might prove to be a healing dose of the real facts of the world, rationalizing her attitude with the conviction, "a tragic suspicion" (Author's Note II), that things "did not stand being looked into" (152) and "don't bear looking into very much" (153). Her philosophy consists "in not taking notice of the inside of facts" (133). The narrator refers ironically to her "supreme illusion" (201) that Verloc and Stevie "might have been father and son" (201). To me there is a faint sense of fatalism in her "philosophy."

These traits, heavily corroborated by direct and indirect bulk of evidence and outlined as personal rather than gender-bound, give rise to mental incoherence and impulsive acts in Winnie. Mentally, she easily swings between realism and idealism. On being asked about the work of the police, she responds sarcastically with a bit of political realism, "They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them that have" (147). This is an advanced, anarchist view not an imbecile's. However, on hearing her husband's suggestion
that emigration might be a practical solution, she explodes with a bit of political idealism, "I should like to know who's to make you. You ain't a slave. No one need be a slave in this country" (l63). By the same token, her psychological problems --repressions, fixations, obsessions, and frustrations-- blind her to the real facts of life as we have witnessed in the murder scene. She is a mere child when it comes to the real world, to which she responds impulsively, emotionally, and even "libidinally" (Kucich 3) rather than rationally. Her betrayal by Ossipon and her suicide are her punishment.

All this is underscored in the final scene when she escapes with the money. Having just committed a crime, she is understandably overwhelmed by a multitude of passions, sentiments, and visions, which she fails to prioritize or even control. Actually, they control her. Consequently, she fumbles at every move and stumbles at every step, failing to assess her position realistically and reasonably. Her first impulse is to drown herself in the river. The world outside accosts her as a mysterious enemy. Lonely, afraid, and confused, she meets Comrade Ossipon, the parasitic and robust anarchist whom she, in a culmination of her tragic ignorance and naivete, regards as the very "messenger of life" (224). As he looks at her and invokes Lombrosso, he himself is mystified and terrified. If it were not for his love of money, he would have nothing to do with her. So, he persists in his attempt to rob her of her money and finally wins. Now she is made to look into things, but only when it is too late. Looking down the precipice into "the very bottom" (219) of things, she totters, falters, and falls. Unable to sustain any existence in this world, in which she is an utter stranger, she commits suicide in what appears to be a combination of two of Durkheim's three types of suicide, the egoistic and the anomic (Cockerham l05).

Winnie is betrayed and defeated in the final encounter with Ossipon. However, what kills her is character, which has manifested itself in such psychological traits as indifference, negativity, incuriousness, and passivity. She has failed to live up to any sort of enlightened goodness or, in Blake's thought, organized innocence. Another way to see her failure is provided by Rigney in her study of some fictional female characters who in her opinion achieve "a relative liberty in the assertion of the self" (7), along with "a superior sanity" (7), a concept which she borrows from Laing and which consists in "the experience of recognizing the general illness of society" (Rigney 8). Winnie fails this test, too. At the point when she seems to stand at the brink of real freedom, personal enlightenment, and self realization, even with a crime hanging around her neck, she gives up the struggle. In the final analysis, she betrays herself.

Thus, Conrad, refuses to align himself exclusively with either accidentalism or essentialism as regards the woman question. The complexities of the novel, including those of Winnie's character as evidenced by the above discussion and represented in the critics' opinions of her, adumbrate a position barring both exclusivity and naïve compromise and resting on a belief in the possibility of single-minded, individual adaptation to excruciating circumstances. Such a possibility aims to achieve a certain measure of sanity and safety in a mad world. This is what man can hope for in such a world as the police try to make sense out of nonsense. As for Conrad, his neither/or position might reflect an age described by Arnold as "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born" (Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse), but it is an expression of his enlightened humanism: "Don't generalize! Don't categorize!"

NOTES


3. As for modern theories on this topic, they are, on the whole, largely partisan. For some, anatomy is still considered a significant factor leading to women's mental and psychological crises, "The concept of premenstrual and menstrual tensions and irritability has been associated with crime in recent studies" (Hirsch 143). Other factors include puberty, pregnancy, and menopause. Freud, of course, is most forthright in the field, speaking of woman's "castration complex" (Three Essays 92) and "envy for the penis" (Three Essays 93) as dominant factors in their mental and psychological constitution. Not only does he take the male child as the norm and the standard, but he categorically writes up his
deterministic views by underscoring "the greater proneness of women to neurosis and especially to hysteria (Three Essays 124), due to certain complications in their sexual development. He considers these "determinants" (Three Essays 124) as contributing factors to the "essence of femininity" (Three Essays 124).

Not surprisingly, it is feminists from Victorians to Modernists who unflinchingly see women's madness as a totally social issue, "Most feminists see madness, first, as a political event. Female insanity, they argue, can in a majority of cases be explained by the oppression of women in a power-structured, male-supremacist society" (Rigney 6). Virginia Woolf's opinions on this topic as expatiated in her book A Room of her Own are common knowledge among academics. R. D. Laing treats psychosis across sexes in terms of a person's "response to life in a destructive society" (Rigney 8). So, it is not a question of anatomy or biology, but society.

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رواية في المرأة

* "السري العميل"

كونراد إنسانية المحبي

المرأة؛ شخصية حول الآراء انقسامت حيضاً.

أهي الآن الموقف هذا، كيف يتبعد بإلى الأماكن المحيطة الأحوال الطبيعية الناتجة مناكد؟ كونراد.

أمثل رجلي، أياً وأنا، كونراد، بكونه طبيعة الناتجة تكون ذلك للفتوى هذه في تدعهما المحيطة الأحوال.

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