

REPRESENTATIONS OF ASIAN WOMEN IN KIPLING AND CONRAD: IMPERIAL "BOUNDARIES" AND THE ASIAN WOMAN AS OTHER

Wong Soak Koon

The Asian woman, differentiated both by gender and race, is the primary mark of the "other" in the epistemology of the imperialist. Her alienness incites fear even while it arouses curiosity; she is thus the site of both repulsion and attraction. This essay compares and contrasts the ways in which Kipling and Conrad employ narrative strategies to deal with the challenge that the Asian woman presents to the "boundaries" of the imperialist's epistemology.

Wanita Asia, yang berbeza dari segi gender dan bangsa adalah petanda asas kepada yang lain ("other") di dalam epistemologi para imperialis. Kelainannya, di samping menimbulkan ketakutan juga mencetuskan perasaan ingin tahu. Esei ini membanding dan membezakan cara-cara Kipling dan Conrad menggunakan strategi-strategi naratif untuk menghadapi cabaran wanita Asia kepada "garis-garis sempadan" di dalam epistemologi para imperialis.

Both Kipling and Conrad began their writing careers in an age when the rhetorical aspect of "New Imperialism" played a vital role in a linguistic re-appropriation of the world. Besides the visible alteration of the world by conquests and annexations, imperialists were busy fictionalizing the environment and creating psychological power structures that would reinforce the control of vast geographical areas and subject peoples. The Asian woman, as alien Other, differentiated both racially and by gender, challenges this hegemonic imperial rhetoric and the narrative strategies of both Kipling and Conrad as they explore the encounter between Europeans and Asiatics.

Kipling's early stories reveal his ambivalence with regard to the figure of the Indian woman who is the site of both attraction and repulsion. A select few of these women characters will be analysed before I deal with *Kim*, Kipling's "fable" of imperial harmony. In the case of Conrad, I focus on his early novels. These are all too often simply dismissed as embryonic works of little importance in an evaluation of Conrad's oeuvre. On the contrary, there is a need for a revisionist examination of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* as much more than romances of Empire. It seems to me that Conrad was looking for a narrative form that could embody the disturbing fragmentation of epistemological certainties occasioned by cross-cultural encounters. A case can be argued that the use of Marlow and the sophisticated narrative framing in later works such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord*

Jim grew out of the early exploration of shifting perspectives. An examination of the major novels must be left to another occasion. In this essay, I foreground Conrad's early Asian women characters who play an important role in challenging the interpretative structures of his European protagonists.

I

In one of his many speeches on the relationship between the Englishman and the far-flung British Empire, Lord Milner confidently paints a picture of painless transplantation. The Englishman, he affirms "can be at *home* (my emphasis) in every state in the Empire from the moment he sets foot in it, though his whole previous life may have been passed at the other end of the earth because "he hears men speaking his own language, he breathes a social and moral atmosphere which is familiar to him."¹ The use of the word "home" demonstrates Lord Milner's concern with the issue of alienation and the powerlessness that it brings. The Englishman as imperial functionary, must be provided with a refuge from the existential terror of being thrown into unrecognisable places. Imperial rhetoric, of which Milner's is an example, consistently mobilises its tropes and metaphors to domesticate the unfamiliar spaces of a far-flung Empire so that every foreign hearth is like that of home.

The frequency of the mother-child metaphor used in imperial discourse to describe the relationship between England and the rest of the Empire, ostensibly a description of affectional bonds between England and the colonised, more effectively serves to connect the Englishman with home. Thus the imperial functionary seems always connected with the nurturing and sustaining home civilization imaged in the trope of maternity. It is also not surprising to find that European women who marry imperial functionaries are exhorted to remember the virtues of the angel-in-the-house. Home, writes Ruskin, in *Sesame and Lilies*, should be a "place of Peace, the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division."² European women in the colonial outposts of Empire are asked to heed Ruskin's advice. In fact instead of recognising the disjunction caused by overseas colonial service, the imperial rhetoric of Victorian England often imaged such service as a process of maturation and growth for young men. Joseph Chamberlain for example, speaks of sending "troops of stalwart sons to people and occupy the waste spaces of the earth."³

These "sons" are not only nurtured in the maternal imperial bond, they are often placed under the paternal guidance of the many authority figures who act as surrogate fathers to young white men out East. Kipling's novices in the imperial service, for example, are often licked into shape by veterans whether in the army, the civil service or in schools. Kim is one of the most vivid

examples of such a process. It is common in imperial rhetoric to find references to vast, empty spaces colonized and made safe by authority figures for their heirs. There is a sense in which, Prospero-like, these "fathers" have magical control over the lives of the other men whose very existence depends on the structures (political, social, cultural) which they "conjure" up within the safe spaces of colonial enclaves whose perimeters are also epistemological limits.

Boundaries in the colonial world thus define more than political units. They are part of the geography of the mind. In **Orientalism**, Said draws our attention to the universal practice groups have of designating mentally "a space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space which is 'theirs'".⁴ "The colonial world," observes one of its most perceptive critics, "is a world divided into compartments...native quarters and European quarters."⁵ There is a resolute effort to shut out contamination and infiltration by the alien Other. In Conrad's first novels, **Almayer's Folly** and **An Outcast of the Islands** there are recurrent representations of the Europeans "fenced in" spaces (**An Outcast of the Islands**).⁶ One notes as examples, firstly, Hudig's warehouse, a microcosm of the colonial bureaucracy in its commercial aspect. Here Conrad's protagonists, Almayer and Willems begin their careers as clerks under the patronage of Hudig. There is the Buitenberg Botanical Gardens in which tropical flora and fauna are catalogued. In Kipling, the most striking example of such spaces is the club which Orwell in **Burmese Days** termed "the spiritual citadel" of British power in any town as well as a reminder of the social norms of home. In appropriating to itself the metaphors of hearth and home and empowering this sense of the familiar by lending to Empire the resonances of maternal protection as well as paternal guidance, imperial rhetoric therefore consistently insulates the colonialist against a loss of self. It creates the enabling mythology of a stable racial and cultural identity.

The Asian woman poses a challenge to the epistemological schema of the imperial imagination. As John McBratney has perceptively noted, Kipling's Indian women are often "seen as the primary mark of the 'other'," because of "their condition of being both Indian and female, of being doubly 'other'".⁷ And yet, even while the native woman's alienness incites fear, she also arouses curiosity. She is thus the site of both repulsion and attraction and one is therefore not surprised to find her mythologised in travellers' tales, official reports, private journals and other examples of colonial discourse. To Isabella Bird, (a traveller in Asia in the 1870's) Chinese women project a passive, less-than-human presence with their "apathy and calm," their tiny bound feet seeming "hoofs rather than feet."⁸ And yet in her energetic aspect, the Asian woman is linked to the awesome generative energies of the Orient, with what Edward Said terms its "untiring sensuality" and "unlimited desire." In this aspect the Asian woman is often seen against a tropical landscape which overpowers the mind's capacity to categorise. Nature's

luxuriance in tropical lands simply overflows definitions. In Isabella Bird's prose, one senses her unease with this abundance which threatens to become an unmanageable riot (a far cry from Nature tamed in the Buitensorg Botanical Garden now termed "Kebun Raya Bogor"). The tropical landscape is conveyed thus by Isabella Bird:

The white, unwinking sun looked down upon...mangrove swamps and nipah palms dense along the river side, on the blue gleam of countless kingfishers, on slimy creeks arched over to within a few feet of their surface by grand trees with festoons of lianas, on an infinite variety of foliage, on an abundance of slender shafted palms...and other waxen-leaved trailers matting the forest together and hanging down in great festoons, the fiery tropic sunblaze stimulating all this over production into perennial activity, and vivifying the very mud itself.⁹

Resonant of the fecundity and sensuality of tropical forests, the Asian woman is therefore seen as a threatening siren figure to be avoided if one is not to succumb. In the hortatory messages of imperial discourse imperial functionaries are warned against allowing these temptresses to jeopardise the work of the Empire. She threatens the metaphoric grasp of Empire as family like the whore in metropolitan London threatens Victorian familial bliss. In her case, racial difference compounds her destructive "powers." But even as she repels, the Asian woman, whether she is literally in purdah or otherwise secluded by indigenous mores, is the metonymy of the unknown Other, an affront to imperialism's claim to a knowledge of the colonial world. Imperialism cannot tolerate enigmatic elements in its universe because what defeats explanation will resist penetration and can neither be manipulated nor controlled and the Asian woman, seemingly constricted behind the "purdah" may well possess certain powers. Emily Innes, the wife of a colonial functionary posted to British Malaya, paints an image of the Malay woman as possibly subversive in those hidden negotiations and manipulations carried on behind the walls of the female chambers. "The Malay woman," writes Innes, "like the white ant or the Jesuit, works in secret, and obtains by listening behind curtains and other underhand practices the information which she is denied openly."¹⁰ Almayer's Sulu wife in Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* seems to fit this image, but as my subsequent analysis of this novel will attempt to show, Conrad's native women resists easy formulations because of the complex resonances of the Conradian narrative.

Since the native woman threatens to be a multifaceted and Proteus-like creature, many European writers try to contain her multifariousness by a re-invention which divides her into benevolent and malevolent categories. Kipling, for example, through the mouth of the Sahiba (*Kim*) says, "I have

seen something of this world and there are but two sorts of women in it - those who take the strength out of a man and those who put it back."¹¹ Yet it seems to me that a re-reading of Kipling will reveal images of Indian women who challenge the bounds imposed by his narrative strategies. In a perceptive essay on the mesmeric effect of figures like Svengali, Dracula and Freud over seemingly powerless women, Nina Auerbach convinces us that "the apparent female victims" in fact grew in regenerative powers and stature while seemingly under the sway of those powerful male figures. Thus if Victorian patriarchy thought it could contain its women "by making myths of them", it had not reckoned with the fact that "social mythology had an unpredictable life of its own, slyly empowering the subjects it seemed to reduce."¹²

In both Conrad and Kipling, it seems to me, the figure of the Asian woman is a site of centrifugal forces which destabilise imperialist epistemology and in Kipling's case, Raj imperatives. There is every likelihood that a re-examination of the images of Asian women in both writers will uncover "subtexts." Contradictory meanings and ambivalence are generated -- in Conrad's case because his struggle to escape imperialist ways of seeing is continually menaced by "pressures drawing [him] back into the orbit of the imperialist world-view."¹³ And Kipling's works may offer readings where his Raj imperatives and hortatory imperial parables (in which the Indian woman is often reduced by crippling, age or death) cannot contain the vitality of the Indian woman.

II

John McClure has rightly observed that Kipling's predominant thematic concern was with the maturation process of young white men towards a perfection of the imperial mould.¹⁴ Even while as unofficial post laureate of British imperialism he supported its claims, as an Englishman born in India (his autobiography *Something of Myself* reveals his attachment to the fascinating kaleidoscope of Indian life), he was critical of the timidity of those who sought refuge in the Club. Power, Kipling often reveals, can only be effective if it is based on a knowledge, not an evasion of Indian life. The ubiquitous policeman Strickland, wins Kipling's approval because he moves in and out of native enclosures as he dons and takes off native garb. As Strickland's aim remains infiltration and control, this traversing of racial boundaries never contaminates or undermines racial identity. Imray, by contrast, pays the price of ignorance and Trejago in "Beyond the Pale", the price of complete abandonment to the siren - call of Indian spaces. Thus, in exploring the educational process of his white heroes as they learn the ropes of the Empire's work, Kipling is also impelled to deal with the presence of the Indian woman. She is like an unknown text that must be deciphered and where possible re-appropriated and transformed into a fount of benevolent

maternalism. Although the Indian woman remains the primary mark of the Other, Kipling understands that some Indian women, like the Sahiba in *Kim* can be nurturers "for through the Indian 'mother' the protagonist imbibes a native milk that grounds him instinctively in an Indian world"¹⁵ thus making him more knowledgeable and more powerful as a covert agent of imperialism. In the early stories of 1880's therefore Kipling explores a variety of relationships between European men and Indian women in order to define how in the process of his maturation in imperial work, "the young Englishman should conduct himself when confronted by the Indian woman.

In "Beyond the Pale" Kipling warns of the heavy price exacted when a European man enters unguardedly into native spaces. Trejago is the failed "ethnographer" whose ability to break Bisesa's object-letter only leads to his descent into a hellish world. We are told that to meet his Indian lover, he puts on a *boorka*, a native garment "which cloaks a man as well as a woman."¹⁶ Thus, in this non-gender-specific garment, Trejago already loses his male identity, a presaging of his final wounding. Kipling implies that no imperial functionary should ever lose his manly awareness of his sexual and racial identity. Trejago opens himself to the malevolent influences of Amir Nath's gully, a space without sunlight with walls rising on either side behind which live women like Bisesa. The nightmarish quality of this locale is reinforced by the fact that Trejago never succeeds in identifying the front portion of Bisesa's house. Such a space cannot be mapped.

Unlike Strickland whose forays into native quarters yield the fruits of useful information for the government, Trejago has no mastery of that world for he has only penetrated into Bisesa's tiny room. Of the male antagonist in that house, Durga Charan, who finally wounds him in the groin, we are told, "who or what Durga Charan was Trejago never enquired" (p. 175).

One must never allow passion to detract from self-possession, Kipling suggests, because the burden of Empire is carried on the shoulders of men whose integral selves are never violated or penetrated. Trejago's passion for Bisesa emasculates him even before he is finally wounded in the groin. Kipling also reduces Bisesa to a cripple (both her hands are cut off at the wrists by Durga Charan).

The tender love story in "Without Benefit of Clergy" seems at first glance to illustrate a happy coming together of white and brown. The obverse of Trejago's illicit affair with Bisesa, Holden's attachment to Ameera affords him the domestic nurture of a "marriage". However unsanctioned by Anglo-India it is still a hearth to replace that left behind in England. Kipling in fact labours to evoke numerous scenes of tender affection as if he himself is seduced by a "happiness withdrawn from the world" found within the gates of that "little house overlooking the great red-walled city."¹⁷ In this early story Kipling's

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ambiguous attitude toward a beneficial relationship between the European man and the Indian woman is evident. On the one hand, he values the nurture that Ameera offers Holden - a respite from the burden and loneliness of the daily routine of Raj service. On the other hand, Kipling also fears the consequences of a liason that results in the birth of a Eurasian child. We are told that as Holden looks affectionately at his son he is assailed by doubts, and promises to "devote himself very seriously to a consideration of Tota's future". But precisely at this point when Kipling's narrative also promises to develop possibilities, we read: "He need hardly have taken the trouble," (p. 79). The child is struck down by cholera. There is no future in Kipling's Raj vision for a child who threatens to muddy the European racial strain.

In few of Kipling's stories dealing with the love of white and brown is there such a total annihilation of the brown characters. Tota dies from cholera and Ameera succumbs shortly. The building where they lived is destroyed by the municipality who ploughs over it to build a road "so that no man may say where this house stood" (p. 93). In this context Ameera's piteous final plea for primacy for herself and her son in Holden's memory acquires added poignancy: "Remember only that I was thine and bore thee a son. Though thou wed a white woman to-morrow, the pleasure of taking in thy arms thy first son is taken from thee forever" (p. 89).

The young Indian woman who would forge a bond with the European in Kipling's Raj narratives is inevitably reduced - maimed or struck down by death. Her sensuality and generative power are thus countered. And yet, in his search for the best maturation process for his young imperial agents, Kipling needs to invent positive images of Indian women, usually old and therefore non-threatening sexually, who nurture his young white men and who, together with various surrogate fathers (white as well as brown), teach him to be a more effective spy for the Raj government. In *Kim*, Kipling's celebration of a commitment to the programme of the imperial educational authorities, such Indian mothers play vital roles and it is to this novel that we now turn.

After establishing clearly early in the novel that "Kim's mother had been Irish"¹⁸ (his father is an Irishman in the Raj army) so that his race is clear, Kipling allows his young orphan to be adopted into the care of various Indian women. Although the roles of the surrogate fathers - Mahbub Ali, Lurgan, Colonel Creighton, for example - are foregrounded, at crucial moments in Kim's career, it is the aged courtesan, Haneefa and the matriarchal Sahiba who save him. Haneefa works her "jadoo" (magic) to protect Kim before he enters the Great Game of espionage and after the disastrous encounter with the Russian agents on the Afghan border, it is the Sahiba whose medicinal skills return Kim to health.

In the figure of Haneefa, Kipling attempts to exorcise the power of the sensual Indian woman. Although a courtesan, she is old and blind. We first encounter her as "a huge and shapeless woman clad in greenish gauzes," (p. 253) a figure devoid of erotic appeal. And yet she is not unambiguously safe. She has the power to create a "new" Kim not only by dying his skin but by conferring on him the magical protection of her amulet. In fact, in this "birthing" as her soft fingers massage the dye into the boy's skin and she speaks in tongues, Kim's customary alertness is menaced as he drifts into a semi-consciousness. The sense of unease is increased when he is told that he has to divest himself of his compass, survey paint-box and medicine-case (those "amulets" of Raj espionage work) before the ritual can begin. Kipling's own unwillingness to give full scope to a representation of Haneefa's possible powers is seen in the fact that Mahbub Ali's presence throughout the ritual ensures that there is a male counterpoint to Haneefa. If it is her power which "transforms" Kim, it is, after all, the strength of Mahbub Ali, the faithful servant of the Raj, which "bowed [Kim] to the floor." His reassuring grip "never shifted from [Kim's] neck" (p. 255).

To be effective protectors of his young hero, both the Sahiba and Haneefa are allowed to be empowered in a way that younger women like Bisesa and Ameera cannot be. And yet, they must not usurp the powers of the "fathers" nor threaten the perimeters of Kipling's Raj imperatives. Kipling's representation of the Sahiba can be read anew within this ambiguity - an ambiguity which threatens to generate an instability in Kipling's narrative.

With her largesse and hospitality, the Sahiba offers a constantly reliable refuge for both Kim and the Lama who return to enjoy the bounties of her hearth in Saharunpore after each cycle of travel, (p. 389). Her authority as matriarch of her household is seen in the way she commands the fear of relatives and retainers alike. Nonetheless, Kipling anatomises and reduces her into "a cackle" or "a voice" from behind the curtains of her palanquin, with "one skinny brown finger heavy with rings" exposed (p. 95). And yet in the sick room where she tends Kim, she is a figure of knowledge and power. Her brews of mysterious Asiatic origins induce in Kim a "blankness that half-menaced and half-soothed him" (p. 392). Together with "a cousin's widow", another old woman, she massages Kim: "took him to pieces all one long afternoon -- bone by bone, muscle by muscle, ligament by ligament, and lastly, nerve by nerve". (p. 393). In this description, the Sahiba's benign aspect is blurred by the suggestion of her ability to destroy. Is such a woman, aged but still powerful -- perhaps even empowered by her years -- capable of taking to pieces not only Kim, but the secret plans of the agents of the Great Game if she so chooses? From the first instance of her appearance we learn of her frequent travels in her palanquin on various mysterious "missions." Her purdah in no way prevents her gathering of information about and involvement in the outside world. In an early dialogue with Kim when

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the subject of slave-traffic is brought up by the young boy, the Sahiba's reactions even suggest her involvement in a contravening of the laws of the Raj. Yet, in the final analysis, it is just this kind of potentially subversive Other that Kipling re-converts into and re-presents as Raj supporters in his fable of imperial harmony.

In *Kim*, he thus evades historical realities; Indian agitation for independence from the colonial yoke is resolutely excluded. If Kipling's ultimate purpose was to seek a narrative form that would best embody his celebration of Empire's charmed circle of agents and supporters, Conrad is generally said to question critically Empire's epistemological perimeters. Are his Asian women, therefore, quite simply, vehicles for voicing a critique of Empire? The matter, we discover, is not quite so unambiguous when we examine how Conrad's representations of Asian women both question imperial stereotypes and are drawn back into their perimeters.

III

Asian women in Conrad's Eastern tales are often unquestioningly associated by critics with dangerous sensuality. His heroes are seen as the victims of "dangerously exotic half-caste women."¹⁹ There is, in fact, a kind of *stasis* in critical perceptions of Conrad's Orient. One encounters, time and again, racist assumptions about the careers of his white heroes in the East. Writing in the 60's, Leo Gurko states that for Conrad, "The East is filled with white men who lost their spirit, grew soft, and declined into vague misfits."²⁰ Two decades later, Daniel Schwarz continues in a similar vein. It is the East, often metonymised in Asian women, that is responsible for an atavistic influence "cast upon white men, drawing out long repressed and atrophied libidinous energies."²¹ A cursory reading of Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* seems to justify these critical perceptions. Almayer dies amidst the ruins of the godown of Lingard and Co. after his Sulu wife and half-caste daughter, Nina, working in concert with the Bugis Dain Maroola and piratical Babalatchi shatter his dream of riches. Willems, Lingard's other protege, dies at the hands of Aissa, the Malay woman for whose love he had traversed racial and cultural boundaries. Thus Conrad's Asian women like Aissa, are seemingly linked with the destructive generative energies of tropical Nature. And as in Kipling, they can be reduced to witch-like hags (Almayer's Sulu wife is one example). Nonetheless they exceed in significance the exotic stereotypes of the popular romances of Empire because Conrad's early Eastern novels are more than simple tales of colonial adventures. It seems to me that in the depiction of these encounters between white and brown Conrad is testing the interpretative structures of the white man. The psychological drama of Conrad's Western exiles is one where their once firm belief in the strength of inherited ethnic and cultural values is threatened when they come to "the boundaries of those provinces of discourse

in which their inward and outward experience made sense and which defined for them not provinces, but reality itself."²² While Kipling's imperial narratives re-enact "ritual cycles of boundaries being violated and then redrawn",²³ Conrad's tales can record horrifying instances of final estrangement not only from one's racial space but from one's essential humanity (Kurtz's career culminating in that cry of quintessential alienation "the horror, the horror" comes to mind).

The relationship between surrogate-fathers and young European men is as important in Conrad's Eastern novels as in Kipling's imperial narratives. The wealthy merchant Hudig and the redoubtable "Rajah Laut", Tom Lingard assume patriarchal roles in the lives of Almayer and Willems. But while Kipling's "fathers" succeed in forming the personality of their young charges into a perfection of the imperial mould Conrad's mentor figures fail. The Southeast Asian locale of Conrad's travels, then experiencing the brutalizing circumstances of creeping colonialism: a region of shifting political boundaries and a commingling of numerous cultures severely challenges the shaping efforts of the authority figures. In fact, his Eastern travels confirmed Conrad's suspicion that "personality is only a ridiculous masquerade of something hopelessly unknown."²⁴ Thus Conrad perceives an enigmatic element in the white man's own personality; the father-figures who would shape others have not even explored the *terra incognita* of their own being. Through the career of Tom Lingard, Conrad subjects the power of the "fathers" to ironic and critical scrutiny. In this process, his Asian women who challenge Lingard's plans are heard as strong voices of protest against the domination of Conrad's "benevolent" patriarchs.

Lingard, we are told went about the Eastern seas "shaping stray lives he found here and there under his busy hand."²⁵ His confidence in his ability to construct linear tales of happiness for his brown and white wards is seen in his yoking together two such different specimens as Almayer and a Sulu girl. He also attempts to rescue the young Willems who had been expelled from Hudig's patronage by transferring him to Sambir, a native settlement near a Bornean river. Lingard's proprietary claim to native space is revealed by the narrator who tells us that he regards Sambir as that "little corner of the world which he loved to think all his own" (p. 200). In addition, when describing Sambir to Willems, Lingard constructs a history of that settlement which is completely Western-centric using language clearly reminiscent of imperial rhetoric: "You see, Willems. I brought prosperity to that place. I composed their quarrels, and saw them grow under my eyes. There's peace and happiness there" (p. 45). Unlike the obtuse, authoritarian Lingard, Conrad shows that the dynamics of self-orientation for the white man in the Empire's outposts are far more complex given the existence of an autonomous native life. "In the historical background of Conrad's novels,"

writes Andrzej Braŭn, "there are references to the local autonomous past, that was told at night around the fire rather than the history that appears in books."²⁶

Conrad's Asian women interject their oral histories into Lingard's history of Sambir - his linear narrative of founding a settlement and bringing progress and prosperity to the natives. They break into Lingard's narcissistic monologue. Mrs. Almayer, the scion of Sulu pirates whom Lingard had defeated in a sea-battle, challenges his benevolent paternalism and his claim to a knowledge of what is best for others. His dream of happiness for his Sulu ward and for Almayer (whom he had persuaded to marry the Sulu girl by a promise of wealth) remains unfulfilled. Completely contemptuous of her white husband, she lives alone and separate in a hut away from the main household where, chewing on betel nuts, her mind drifts to the memories of her Sulu past. Unlike Kipling's surrogate Indian mothers who nurture young white men, Conrad's Sulu woman denies Almayer the comforts of a home. Instead, she subtly works to empower herself in an alignment with other natives like Babalatchi and Dain Maroola. Significantly, she interjects an oral narrative of her Sulu past into Lingard's Western-centric history. Mrs. Almayer would relate to the fascinated Nina, her half-caste daughter "the glories of the Sultan of Sulu" (p. 41). In *An Outcast of the Islands*, the events of flight and exile from native strongholds which were destroyed by white men, such as Aissa's escape with her father, Omar-el-Badavi (a Brunei pirate) live on in native oral tales. Conrad notes that "the story of that escape lives in the heart of brave men even to this day" (p. 54).

In the climactic final scene of *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad locks the redoubtable Tom Lingard and Aissa in a contest of wills. Lingard, who among white men and within the familiar spaces of hotels and godowns had been accustomed to being the speaker, to having his identity reinforced by Europeans, is now forced to listen to native voices. Lingard's ruthless summation of his involvement in the events of colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: "We fight, we vanquish, and we forget" is juxtaposed to Aissa's recitation of the effects of creeping colonialism on traditional societies: "I also have heard the voice of firearms...I have watched the sleep of weary fugitives, and looked at night shadows full of menace and death with eyes that know nothing but watchfulness...what more have you done? That was my life. What has been yours?" Aissa's narrative (a tale of disjunction and flight) forces Lingard to rethink and refeel his past; she asserts her humanity, even her superiority before Lingard who is compelled to see the brutal consequences of colonialism as well as the disastrous results of his benevolent paternalism. The Asian woman here breaks out of the passive categorisation (whether benign or malevolent) which imperial rhetoric confers on her. In asserting a native perspective on the history of advancing colonialism in the Archipelago she jolts the hitherto confident Lingard into acknowledging, however unwillingly, the presence of other interpretative structures. Such a

moment is a terrifying one for the white man for it threatens a loss of the perimeters of personality. Lingard's recoil from Aissa's revelations is the kind of retreat later evoked in **Lord Jim** when the French Lieutenant to whom Marlow addresses the question of Jim's "crime" refuses to contemplate a darkness which may threaten his idea of the "fitness of things."

Unknown spaces had once been appropriated by Lingard through his tales to European audiences in which a native settlement like Sambir appears like a familiar space "colonized" by his words; now "a new universe was being evolved out of sombre chaos" (p. 236). In these last scenes, the landscape itself appears to Lingard with all the strangeness of an unexplored space analogous to the glimpse of a *terra incognita* in his own personality. It is not the alien Other, but he who is revealed as a stranger to himself. Conrad's ambivalence toward the Asian woman is revealed precisely at this point when her presence threatens a dissolution of self for the white protagonist. Conrad quickly allows his narrator to close ranks with Lingard. The narrative voice proceeds to speak of Aissa as symbolic of some aspect of darkness in the human psyche. We are told that she had "the wild and stealthy aspect of a lunatic longing to whisper out an insane secret" (p. 253). We therefore find Capt. Lingard making a resolute effort to reassert his identity. Stepping away some distance from Aissa, "he pulled himself together. The strong consciousness of his own personality came back to him" (p. 272). Thus while Conrad's early Eastern novels far exceed the form of the popular romance of imperial adventure and his Asian women strain at the mould of the stereotypes, Conrad is not uninfected by imperial rhetoric in his depiction of these white-brown encounters. He even found it necessary, after having written his early Eastern novels, to create the figure of Marlow, a masculine centre of consciousness who, seated in the familiar space of a yacht anchored on the Thames, ensures Conrad the anchor of a stable point of reference as Conrad continues to explore journeys of the mind such as we find in **Heart of Darkness**.

The Asian woman challenges both Kipling and Conrad as a generator of centrifugal forces which threaten to destroy the epistemological boundaries of the white hero, propelling him from the comforts of the hearth to the existential terror of unknown spaces. The final ambivalence of both writers toward their female Asian protagonists, illustrated in narrative strategies to prevent the possibilities of a dissolution of the male figures' perimeters of identity, only reinforces our sense of the vitality of these Asian women.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Milner, Alfred Lord, *The Nation and the Empire: A Collection of Speeches and Addresses*. London: Constable & Co., p. 141.
- 2 *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered at Manchester in 1864*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973, p. 147.
- 3 Speech at the Royal Colonial Institute, 31 March 1897. See *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, Vol. 2, ed. Charles W. Boyd. London: Constable & Co., 1914, p. 5.
- 4 *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1979, p. 55.
- 5 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, p. 29.
- 6 *An Outcast of the Islands*. London: J.M. Dent, 1967. All subsequent references are to this edition. Page references are in parenthesis in the text.
- 7 See "Images of Indian Women in Kipling: A Case for Doubling Discourse," *Inscriptions*, 3(4): 53, 1988.
- 8 *The Golden Chersonese: Travels in Malaya in 1879*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford Univ. Press, reprinted 1980, p. 31.
- 9 *The Golden Chersonese*, p. 166.
- 10 *The Chersonese With the Guilding Off*. Vols. 1 & 2 Kuala Lumpur: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974 - first published 1885, p. 87.
- 11 *Kim*. London: Macmillan, 1966. Subsequent references are to this edition. Page references are given in parenthesis in the text.
- 12 "Magic and Maidens: The Romance of the Victorian Freud," in Elisabeth Abel, (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 111.
- 13 Benita Parry. *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers*. London: Macmillan, 1983, p. 7.
- 14 *Kipling and Conrad*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981, p. 33, 39.

- 15 "Images of Indian Women in Kipling: A Case for Doubling Discourse," *Inscriptions*, 3(4): 51, 1988.
- 16 *Plain Tales From the Hills*. London: Macmillan, 1982 - first edit. 1888, p. 174.
- 17 *Two Tales*. Boston: Internat. Pocket Library, 1919, p. 64. Subsequent page references, in parenthesis, are to this edition.
- 18 *Kim*. London: Macmillan, 1966, p. 17.
- 19 Sansford Pinsker, "Conrad and the Language of the Sea," *Conradiana*, 3(3): 13, 1972.
- 20 *Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile*. New York: Macmillan, 1962, p. 97.
- 21 Daniel Schwarz. *Conrad: Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980, p. 4.
- 22 Thomas Herbert. *The Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980, p. 235.
- 23 John McBratney, p. 51.
- 24 Letter to Edward Garnett, 23 March, 1896. G. Jean Aubry (ed.), *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*. New York: Doublday, 1927, I, p. 185.
- 25 *An Outcast of the Islands*. London: J.M. Dent, 1967, p. 198. All references are to this edition. References to *Almayer's Folly* are to the Dent Edition, 1968.
- 26 "The Myth-like Kingdom of Conrad," *Conradiana*, 10(1): 7, 1978.