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CONRAD'S EROTIC WOMEN

JOYCE WEXLER

It is time to correct Joseph Conrad's reputation as a writer who falls short when the subject is women or sex. Praised for his ethical, political, and psychological insight, he is pitied for his love scenes. Writing about *The Rescue* in 1945, Walter F. Wright generalized, "Conrad usually had trouble with his women characters when they came into the foreground of a story. The themes which he best understood could be illustrated very well through the lives of men" (1945, 216). In 1956 Thomas Moser reinforced Wright's judgment, arguing that the quality of Conrad's later work declined *because* he tried to write about women and sex (1956, 345). Discussing *The Rescue*, he claimed that the dialogue "between the lovers is wooden, and there is the same insistence upon emotions that Conrad seems unable to dramatize" (344).¹ Thirty years later, Lloyd Fernando observed that "no major novel of his has received in recent years more adverse criticism than this one. Conrad has been accused of treating immaturely the portrayal of Lingard and Mrs. Travers, the two principal characters in the novel, and of evading the sexual consequences of their encounter" (1976, 86); Fernando agreed that "such strictures may be warranted" (86).² In addition to disparaging *The Rescue*, this consensus diminishes Conrad's oeuvre because his stories about political intrigues and ethical dilemmas often hinge on erotic desire. In *The Rescue*, the political implications of Lingard's decisions depend on

Conrad's ability to make the erotic attraction between Lingard and Edith Travers convincing. Looking for descriptions of sexual *acts*, critics have ignored Conrad's representation of erotic *feelings*.

Despite contemporary limits on what could be said explicitly, Conrad wrote about erotic feelings throughout his career. Although he usually focused on the dire consequences of passion, he also probed the sources of desire and found ways to represent the experience itself. In "Conrad and the Erotic" Jeremy Hawthorn argues that this dimension of Conrad's work has not been recognized because the common critical view is that "moments of passion or sexual excitement are rare, and often presented in such a way as to minimize or remove any evocation of the erotic in the reader" (2003, 112). In contrast, Hawthorn calls attention to the "flashes of erotic excitement [that] are depicted and enacted in several works" (112). If we pay attention to these flashes, we can see how Conrad portrays the sources and sensations of desire. As my examples demonstrate, he regards imagination and individual agency as essential components of passion, and he creates female characters who possess both qualities.³

Since *The Rescue* is the standard example of Conrad's ineptitude, it must be the starting point for any critical reassessment. When he finished the novel in 1920, Conrad was at the height of his career.⁴ Nevertheless, *The Rescue* is so widely dismissed and so rarely read that a plot summary is in order. Captain Tom Lingard is a self-made man who takes risks more respectable men avoid. He has made his fortune in the Malay Archipelago selling arms to warring villages. After Hassim, one of the local princes, saves his life, Lingard puts aside his commercial interest in supplying all factions and pledges to protect Hassim and his sister, the princess Immada. This alliance is tested when a yacht runs aground in the vicinity of battle. The yacht carries three wealthy European tourists, Edith and Martin Travers and a Spanish acquaintance named d'Alcacer. They need Lingard's help to tow the yacht to safety, but Travers refuses to be obligated to an "adventurer." Lingard parries this insult defiantly: "I *am* an adventurer,' he burst out, 'and if I hadn't been an adventurer, I would have had to starve or work at home for such people as you'" (Conrad 1925, 134). Mrs. Travers intercedes, and Lingard is smitten by her beauty and elegance. He agrees to aid the Europeans, but when Travers and d'Alcacer are captured by Hassim's enemy, Lingard is torn between his duty to rescue his fellow Europeans and his loyalty to his Malay friends. The personal dimension of this political conflict

is expressed as a choice between Lingard's paternal love for Immada and his erotic attraction to Edith Travers.⁵ Lingard has fought his way to wealth and power, and Edith's reciprocal passion for him is a tribute to his new status in the East. He chooses her because his erotic desire and social ambition are stronger than his loyalty to Hassim and Immada.⁶ But the novel does not have a happy ending. Hassim and Immada are killed, and Edith and Lingard realize they must part.

Although critics have begun to reassess *The Rescue*, they continue to ignore its erotic content. For example, in *Conrad and Women* Susan Jones describes Conrad's friendships with women, his familiarity with literary forms popular with women readers and women writers, and his "confessed identification with the female sex" (1999, 37). She points out that although *The Rescue* was planned as a "boy's own" adventure," ultimately it became a romance suitable for serialization in the "popular fiction section of *Land and Water*" (187). Although Jones demonstrates the influence of women in Conrad's life and work, she values the novel primarily as an example of "the continuity and the development of [Conrad's] concern with the physiological manifestations of vision" (187). She focuses on the "vast network of looks and glances, of observations and spectacularly theatrical scenes in which Conrad specifically investigates traditional visual structures and Western notions of representation" (188). She claims that the lovers' "most intimate discussions focus on the subject of illusion, spectacle and drama" (190), ignoring the erotic feelings that underlie these discussions.

Despite her emphasis on vision, Jones says nothing about the heroine's beauty, a conventional feature of romance. Conrad describes Edith's appearance through d'Alcacer's admiring eyes:

Her complexion was so dazzling in the shade that it seemed to throw out a halo round her head. Upon a smooth and wide brow an abundance of pale fair hair, fine as silk, undulating like the sea, heavy like a helmet, descended low without a trace of gloss, without a gleam in its coils, as though it had never been touched by a ray of light; and a throat white, smooth, palpitating with life, a round neck modelled with strength and delicacy, supported gloriously that radiant face and that pale mass of hair un-kissed by sunshine. (Conrad 1925, 139)

Unlike objects that merely reflect light, Edith herself radiates brightness. The erotic implications of "undulating" and "palpitating" are brought out in "un-kissed." D'Alcacer is mesmerized, and Lingard

is so dazzled that he can hardly speak: “I had forgotten you—and now—what? One must—it is hard—hard—’ went on Lingard, disconnectedly, while he looked into Mrs. Travers’ violet eyes, and felt his mind overpowered and troubled as if by the contemplation of vast distances” (144). He is unsettled by new feelings as his inner world expands.

Ruth Nadelhaft’s feminist readings in *Joseph Conrad* also refute earlier critics’ denigration of Conrad’s female characters while ignoring erotic excitement. She agrees with Daniel Schwarz’s opinion that *The Rescue* is a major work, but she rejects his interpretation of Edith as a spokesperson for “Conrad’s own pessimistic assessment of the moral world” (Nadelhaft 1991, 130). Nadelhaft locates the continuity of Conrad’s oeuvre in his critique of imperialism rather than in his moral judgments. She fits Conrad into current critical paradigms, arguing that in addition to opposing imperialism, he disapproves of patriarchy and primitivism (9–10). For example, in her discussion of *The Rescue* Nadelhaft describes the relationship between Edith and Immada as sisterly solidarity: “Between Immada and Edith Travers there is a strong current of interest and curiosity, a sense of mutual admiration and longing for connection” (131). Yet the text emphasizes their competition rather than their compatibility. Seeing Lingard’s expression as he looks at Edith, Immada perceives that he is “tasting the delight of some profound and amazing sensation.” She exclaims, “Do not! Do not look at that woman! . . . O! Master—look away . . .” (Conrad 1925, 218). While Immada fears losing Lingard, Edith regards Immada as a rival: “Immada’s dark and sorrowful eyes rested on the face of the white woman. Mrs. Travers felt as though she were engaged in a contest with them; in a struggle for the possession of that man’s strength and of that man’s devotion” (217). Edith and Immada are presented as adversaries, not as allies.

Nadelhaft’s feminist interpretation of Edith’s decision to wear native clothing is another example of critics’ tendency to overlook sexual motives. Nadelhaft claims that Edith sheds her European dress to enjoy the “freedom conferred by clothing appropriate to the climate” (1991, 130). Travers, however, understands that his wife’s new clothes symbolize far more than warm weather. When he sees her in the gold-embroidered sarong that Lingard has given her, he says, “And you look simply heathenish in this costume,’ Mr. Travers went on as though he had not been interrupted, and with an accent of deliberate disgust” (Conrad 1925, 275). He implies that she

has gone native, a phrase usually applied to European men living with native women. He correctly sees that Edith's delight in wearing native clothing expresses her sexuality, her marital discontent, and her feelings for Lingard. Although Jones and Nadelhaft recognize the importance of Conrad's female characters, neither critic notices Edith's sexuality.

If we set aside Moser's influential judgment that Conrad's artistic ability declined, especially when writing about women and sex, we can begin to appreciate *The Rescue* on its own terms as a romance. Romance is a wish-fulfilling genre in which individual desire prevails against external obstacles.⁷ Since desire is conditioned by social realities, the genre also provides for a critique of specific cultural constraints. Romance acknowledges that our personal and social desires are real, even if they are unrealistic. While *The Rescue* combines romance and realism, critics usually depreciate the former in favor of the latter.⁸ In contrast, Katherine Isobel Baxter values the subversive social effect of romance. In *Joseph Conrad and the Swansong of Romance*, she cites Gillian Beer's claims that the genre provides a liberating alternative to familiar life because it "is not bound to realism," it offers "experience that is otherwise unattainable," and it "oversteps the limits by which life is normally bounded" (Baxter 2010, 3). These characteristics, Baxter argues, allow romance to open possibilities for social change: "through reference to romance's potential for destabilizing the status quo, we begin to see how Conrad uses romance radically throughout his writing career to question the values of his historical milieu and the power of narrative itself" (14). Connecting the romantic and realistic aspects of the novel, Baxter interprets *The Rescue* as "a traditional romance of the Far East, which embroils one man in a conflict of loyalties between West and East. Yet implicit in this conflict are larger issues of narration, nostalgia, and their relationship to fiction and reality" (120). While romance glorifies private passion, personal transgression has public consequences. Conrad has to convey the force of erotic desire to account for its consequences.

Announcing its genre in the subtitle, *The Rescue* presents romance's characteristic blend of adventure and love, danger and passion. The hero is handsome and brave, and the heroine is rich and beautiful. He is an outlaw, and she is married, but they feel an immediate erotic attraction. Their desire is so strong that it overcomes social obstacles. These romantic conventions allow Conrad to challenge European assumptions about imperialism, class, and women's roles.⁹

In the idealized society of the novel, a colonial profiteer puts native interests above his own, a gun-runner wins the love of a diplomat's wife, and an upper-class woman risks her life for erotic pleasure. However unlikely these events may be, they fulfill personal and social desires.

Attraction across class boundaries is common in romance, as it pits individual desire against social reality. Class differences function both as a stimulant to desire and as an obstacle that tests the lovers' passion. In *Sexuality and the Erotic in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*, Hawthorn notes how many of Conrad's plots turn on erotic desire and how often this feeling is based on the power differential inherent in class differences. Hawthorn argues that "we can see early evidence of Conrad's fascinated interest in the association of unequal power relationships between a man and a woman with sexual excitement" (2007, 61). And since power varies with social class, Hawthorn considers class an inescapable component of attraction: "sexual desire is thoroughly saturated with images of class. A culture's stereotypical images of sexual desirability are never class-neutral. . . . You can no more remove class from sex than you can remove corporeality from it" (107).¹⁰ In addition, he claims that the power differential in cross-class desire is inherently sadistic and masochistic: "there is a disparity in the class position of hero and heroine that introduces the axis of power, and opens for feelings of sadism and/or masochism on the part of the hero" (99).¹¹ Hawthorn shows that having power over another person is erotic, but Conrad also shows that passion requires having power over one's own life. Both his male and female characters need imagination and a degree of agency to feel desire. I agree with Hawthorn that the power differential in class differences stimulates erotic desire, but in *The Rescue* this disparity does not lead to sadism or masochism because the lovers are equally powerful. Edith and Lingard both possess the imagination and agency that desire requires, and their mutual delight transcends the differences that ignite their passion.

Although Hawthorn recognizes the importance of erotic desire in Conrad's fiction, he agrees with earlier critics' judgment that Conrad was unable to convey it well:

Conrad's sense of the erotic does not seem capable of depicting the attraction that active men feel for upper-class, "society" women without lurching into the melodramatic. (Lingard's romantic involvement with Mrs. Travers in *The Rescue* offers another example of such an unconvincing depiction.) (Hawthorn 2007, 105-6)

While *The Rescue* may be melodramatic, to call it unconvincing is to disregard romance's ability to dramatize wishes, personal and political, sexual and social. Lingard wins the love of an upper-class woman who would never have spoken to him in England, and Edith wins the love of a heroic man who appreciates her sexuality and her courage. Both seek adventure, and both believe in their luck. Each fulfills the other's desire.

Although it departs from realism, romance conveys the intense sensations and emotions of desire. In movies the visual allure of the actors dispels the audience's incredulity, and in 1929 the novel was in fact made into a silent film starring Ronald Colman and Lily Damita. Unable to rely on screen chemistry, however, Conrad expresses passion in language. He does this structurally by contrasting the lovers' sexuality with the frigidity of the Travers's marriage; figuratively by creating metaphors for lovemaking; and dramatically by modeling the lovers' dialogue on the outpouring of passion in opera. The lovers speak to each other as they speak to no one else. The difference between their ordinary speech and their intimate conversations registers their erotic feelings.

The structure of the plot emphasizes the contrast between the absence of passion in the Travers's marriage and the sexual attraction between the lovers. D'Alcacer speculates that Edith married Travers for social position, though now she scorns the "shallowness of events and the monotony of a worldly existence" (Conrad 1925, 122). D'Alcacer confirms Edith's view that Travers is a poor specimen of manhood:

Certainly the prospect of listening to long monologues on commerce, administration, and politics did not promise much alleviation to his sorrow; and he could not expect much else from Mr. Travers, whose life and thought, ignorant of human passion, were devoted to extracting the greatest possible amount of personal advantage from human institutions. (Conrad 1925, 123)

D'Alcacer finds Edith much more "interesting" (122). Travers, however, is incapable of appreciating his wife. He considers her eagerness for new experiences and her sexuality vulgar: "I can't credit you with the possession of feelings appropriate to your origin, social position, and the ideas of the class to which you belong. It was the heaviest disappointment of my life. I had made up my mind not to mention it as long as I lived" (267). Aware of his wife's attraction to Lingard, he reacts not with jealousy but hauteur: "And why you should be carried

away suddenly by a feeling toward the mere man I don't understand" (268). He compares her to Lingard, intending to insult her: "It's my belief, Edith, that if you had been a man you would have led a most irregular life. You would have been a frank adventurer. I mean morally" (268).¹² But this is exactly what she would like to be, an adventurer like Lingard.¹³

Edith replies to her husband's insult with a very sophisticated justification: "'I was bored,' murmured Mrs. Travers in a reminiscent tone and with her chin resting in the hollow of her hand" (Conrad 1925, 269). He replies, "'I am never bored'" (270). Perhaps he is never bored because he does whatever he pleases. Edith cures her boredom by doing the same thing. Lingard stirs her imagination, and she has the courage to follow her desire. In response to her husband's tone of disgust when he sees her in native clothing, she uses sarcasm to humiliate him sexually and socially:

"As long as I don't look like a guy," she remarked, negligently, and then caught the direction of his lurid stare which as a matter of fact was fastened on her bare feet. She checked herself, "Oh, yes, if you prefer it I will put on my stockings. But you know I must be very careful of them. It's the only pair I have here. I have washed them this morning in that bathroom which is built over the stern. They are now drying over the rail just outside. Perhaps you will be good enough to pass them to me when you go on deck." (Conrad 1925, 275)

This speech might be cited to illustrate Conrad's awkwardness when writing about women, but Edith's circumlocution persuasively expresses her contempt. Suggesting that her husband would prefer her to "look like a guy," Edith targets his sexual indifference. Since the native sandals are a sign of her sexuality, her offer to put on her stockings mocks his disgust. Her unnecessary report on her supply of stockings and the otherwise pointless detail that the bathroom is built over the stern lead to a condescending request to get her laundry. She speaks to her husband as if he were a servant, and he is enraged: "Mr. Travers spun round and went on deck without a word" (275). The contrast between this exchange and Edith's conversations with Lingard dramatizes the depth of her passion.

Unlike her husband, Lingard is physically and emotionally attracted to Edith, as she is to him. Lingard embodies everything Travers lacks and Edith wants:

He had a large simplicity that filled one's vision. She found herself slowly invaded by this masterful figure. He was not mediocre.

Whatever he might have been he was not mediocre. The glamour of a lawless life stretched over him like the sky over the sea down on all sides to an unbroken horizon. Within, he moved very lonely, dangerous and romantic. There was in him crime, sacrifice, tenderness, devotion, and the madness of a fixed idea. (Conrad 1925, 215)

Lingard is not only captain of his ship and master of his fate; but he is also a hero who is attractive to men and women alike. Even the reserved d'Alcacer reaches for superlatives: "Lingard sat down heavily on the other end of the bench, and d'Alcacer, looking at his profile, confessed to himself that this was the most masculinely good-looking face he had ever seen in his life" (409). An older sailor voices a similar feeling: "Nobody can resist that man,' Jörgenson muttered to himself with increasing moroseness. 'I couldn't'" (387). Nor can Edith resist Lingard. She asks him, "Do you want me to tell you that you were irresistible? How could I have sent you away?" (322). He is the complete romantic hero.

The erotic scenes in the novel are neither explicit nor chaste. The sensations of passion are conveyed through figurative language. When Edith and Lingard are alone in a small boat, the narrative displaces their erotic feelings onto the setting: "The darkness enfolded her like the enervating caress of a sombre universe. It was gentle and destructive. Its languor seduced her soul into surrender. Nothing existed and even all her memories vanished into space. She was content that nothing should exist" (Conrad 1925, 245). The erotic meaning of "enfolded," "languor," and "seduced" flows from the darkness to Edith's "surrender." Similarly, the motion of the boat is a metaphor for the movement of their bodies:

Lingard, aware all the time of their contact in the narrow stern sheets of the boat, was startled by the pressure of the woman's head drooping on his shoulder. He stiffened himself still more as though he had tried on the approach of a danger to conceal his life in the breathless rigidity of his body. The boat soared and descended slowly; a region of foam and reefs stretched across her course hissing like a gigantic cauldron; a strong gust of wind drove her straight at it for a moment then passed on and abandoned her to the regular balancing of the swell. . . . He watched it as he would have watched something going on within himself while Mrs. Travers slept sustained by his arm, pressed to his side, abandoned to his support. (Conrad 1925, 245)

The last sentence emphasizes the erotic significance of the scene by drawing attention to the lovers' feelings: Lingard watches the

soaring and descending of the boat and the hissing cauldron of the sea as “he would have watched something going on within himself,” while Edith is “abandoned to his support.”

Extreme and contradictory metaphors represent the consummation of the lovers’ passion. Conrad’s language exploits the similarity between the physical sensations of danger and erotic excitement. When Edith brings Hassim’s ring to him in the enemy’s stockade, for example, Lingard is overwhelmed by her willingness to perform this dangerous service. She feels “irresistible terror” (393), and he is “deliriously” inarticulate: “She became aware that Lingard was trying to say something, but she heard only a confused stammering expressive of wonder and delight in which she caught the words ‘You . . . you . . .’” (Conrad 1925, 394). To Edith, being held by Lingard feels like being captured: “He didn’t release his hold of her; his helpful and irresistible grip had changed into a close clasp, a crushing embrace, the violent taking possession by an embodied force that had broken loose and was not to be controlled any longer” (394). This feeling is not unwelcome; it allows her to break loose too:

his great strength, too, seemed able to fill all space in its enveloping and undeniable authority. Every time she tried instinctively to stiffen herself against its might, it reacted, affirming its fierce will, its uplifting power. Several times she lost the feeling of the ground and had a sensation of helplessness without fear, of triumph without exultation. The inevitable had come to pass. (Conrad 1925, 395)

Lingard’s strength and will feel erotic to Edith: “He was like a blind force. She closed her eyes altogether. Her head fell back a little. Not instinctively but with wilful resignation and as it were from a sense of justice she abandoned herself to his arms” (395). The sexual union is confirmed by the rower’s comment: “A voice said suddenly ‘It’s done’ with such emphasis that though, of course, she didn’t understand the words it helped her to regain possession of herself” (395).¹⁴ A post-coital awkwardness follows as the lovers tentatively negotiate their relationship: “when Lingard asked her very little above a whisper: ‘Why don’t you say something?’ she answered, readily, ‘Let me get my breath first’” (395). She recovers her normal demeanor more quickly than he does:

When she stood up, still holding his arm, they confronted each other, he rigid in an effort of self-command but feeling as if the surges of the heaviest sea that he could remember in his life were running through his heart; and the woman as if emptied of all feeling by her

experience, without thought yet, but beginning to regain her sense of the situation and the memory of the immediate past. (Conrad 1925, 396)

Edith realizes she has lost one of her sandals, which she regards as a symbol of her sexual surrender:

Oh, yes, there was no doubt of it, she had been carried off the earth, without shame, without regret. But she would not have let him know of that dropped sandal for anything in the world. That lost sandal was as symbolic as a dropped veil. But he did not know of it. He must never know. Where was that thing? (Conrad 1925, 396)

The sandals that her husband considers “heathenish” are again a sexual symbol, this time signifying consummation, though her sexual surrender does not yet involve a full emotional commitment. Edith’s emotional surrender occurs after Hassim and Immada are killed.

To portray extravagant emotion, Conrad alludes to narratives that exude the grandeur and intensity of erotic love. Together with references to myth and tragedy, opera provides analogues for the “croce e delizia” of passion. At times, these references are ironic, serving as realistic markers of the class disparity between Edith and Lingard. In “Conrad in the Operatic Mode” Laurence Davies demonstrates that Conrad refers to opera frequently in his work, using it for various purposes. Discussing *The Rescue*, Davies points out the multiple functions of Edith and Lingard’s discussion of opera. Davies perceives that this “is an erotically-charged scene, tense with inarticulate desire,” and it “also inverts the associations of culture and social standing” (2009, 138). Edith assumes that Lingard is too unsophisticated to appreciate opera. Speaking ironically, she tells him that she feels like a diva: “It seemed to me that I was walking on a splendid stage in a scene from an opera, in a gorgeous show fit to make an audience hold its breath. You can’t possibly guess how unreal all this seemed, and how artificial I felt myself. An opera you know . . .” (Conrad 1925, 300). Lingard disarms Edith’s irony with a frank acknowledgment of his lower-class background. Describing an opera he saw in Melbourne, he says, “I daresay it was poor enough to what you must have seen, but once I went to a show like that. It was a story acted to music. All the people went singing through it right to the very end” (301). She expects someone of his class to think operas are silly, but his response to the form is deeper than hers. He says: “I assure you that of the few shows I have seen that one was the most real to me. More real than anything in life” (301). The extreme

emotions of opera seem unreal to Edith, but to Lingard opera is the passionate essence of reality: “Yes, it carried me away. But I suppose you know the feeling” (301). Until now, however, she has not known it: “No. I never knew anything of the kind, not even when I was a chit of a girl” (302).¹⁵ His imaginative capacity for emotion releases reciprocal feeling in her. She is unwilling to let anyone else know how she feels, so she tells d’Alcacer that her conversation with Lingard was merely small talk: “You want to know what we were talking about,” said Mrs. Travers. . . . ‘Oh, well, then, we talked about opera, the realities and illusions of the stage, of dresses, of people’s names, and things of that sort’” (308). This tone disappears when the lovers are alone together.

As the lovers’ erotic attraction deepens into an emotional bond, their dialogue becomes more artificial. Their avowals of love are as passionate as arias. Taking responsibility for the Malays’ deaths, Edith confesses that she decided not to send Lingard Hassim’s ring, the signal that he needed help. But Lingard assures her: “Haven’t you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?” (Conrad 1925, 465). She replies with rapturous hyperbole: “You are the most magnanimous of men but you are throwing it away on me. Do you think it is remorse that I feel? No. If it is anything it is despair. But you must have known that—and yet you wanted to look at me again” (465). Thinking everyone can see how different she is, she says: “A million stars were looking on, too, and what did it matter? They were not of the world I know. And it’s just the same with the eyes. They are not of the world I live in” (400). Lingard tells her:

It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself: for I see now that as long as I live you will never die. (Conrad 1925, 465)

The unrealistic dialogue registers the intensity of their feelings. In contrast, when Edith returns to her husband, she tells d’Alcacer, “‘You were right. I have come back.’ Then with a little laugh which impressed d’Alcacer painfully she added with a nod downward, ‘and Martin, too, was perfectly right. It was absolutely unimportant’” (467). Using ordinary expressions, she resumes her pose of sophisticated indifference, but not before Conrad allows erotic love its triumph. Conrad combines the adventure and passion of romance with

the irony and verisimilitude of realism. The lovers eventually succumb to the external impediments they defied. Warring factions, class differences, and marital obligations prove insurmountable.

Although critics have made *The Rescue* the definitive example of Conrad's inability to portray women or sex, the novel is the culmination of years of thinking and writing about erotic desire. While *The Rescue* portrays the mutual attraction of lovers who are both "adventurers," eager and able to fulfill their desire, Conrad more often examines the fluctuation of desire as power waxes and wanes. Hawthorn discerns this pattern as early as *An Outcast of the Islands* and traces it through later novels and stories (2007, 61). Almost all of Conrad's supposedly masculine narratives include female characters, though the balance of power rarely favors them. In "Amy Foster" (1903) and "Freya of the Seven Isles" (1912), however, the narrators call attention to each heroine's erotic feelings. Amy and Freya have the imagination and agency that passion requires, but their passion fades when events diminish their power.

"Amy Foster" is about a young woman who seems incapable of desire. In service since she was fifteen, she is "content to look day after day at the same fields": "She never seemed to wish for anything more" (Conrad 1958, 332). The frame narrator hears her story from a country doctor named Kennedy. The narrator describes Kennedy as a man of "scientific" intelligence, "investigating habit," and "unappeasable curiosity" (330). These qualities give the doctor's account the authority of a case history as he explains the etiology of erotic attraction.¹⁶ Amy interests him because she is an unlikely romantic heroine. She is plain, "passive," and "dull," but the doctor remarks, "At any rate, such as you see her, she had enough imagination to fall in love" (330). He connects Amy's passion to her capacity for empathy, because both depend on imagination: "there is no kindness of heart without a certain amount of imagination. She had some. She had even more than is necessary to understand suffering and to be moved by pity" (331-32). However dull Amy may be, she has keen feelings of love and pity.

Amy's lover is an uneducated emigrant named Yanko who has left his village in Central Europe to seek his fortune in America. His ship is wrecked in a storm, and he is washed ashore, confused and unable to make himself understood. Wandering like a "madman" (Conrad 1958, 341), he frightens the small community (348). Amy, however, pities him, and he kisses her hand in gratitude. She is not used to such an honor, and she falls in love with the handsome

foreigner. Amy's feeling for Yanko soon becomes erotic: "He was very good-looking, and most graceful in his bearing, with that something wild as of a woodland creature in his aspect" (347-48). She is so eager to be with him that her employer calls her a "shameless hussy" (347). The doctor proposes cultural analogues for the elemental force of Amy's desire. Her "aptitude" for passion is an "inscrutable mystery" that suggests mythic forces: "it was love as the Ancients understood it: an irresistible and fateful impulse—a possession! Yes, it was in her to become haunted and possessed by a face, by a presence, fatally" (332). As in *The Rescue*, allusions to cultural examples of grand passion magnify the characters' emotions. Despite "the inertness of her mind" (330), Amy's passion is so strong that she ignores the xenophobic fears of family and friends and marries the castaway.

As a penniless foreigner, Yanko is Amy's social inferior. His subordinate position gives Amy the opportunity to offer pity and love, but the balance of power shifts after their child is born. Fatherhood allows Yanko to assert his identity. He teaches their son his native language, his songs, and his prayers. As he becomes stronger, Amy becomes weaker. Her desire and her pity fade, and she lapses into the community's beliefs. She begins to fear Yanko: she "snatched the child out of his arms one day as he sat on the doorstep crooning to it a song such as the mothers sing to babies in his mountains. She seemed to think he was doing it some harm" (Conrad 1958, 349). She now regards her foreign husband as the threat the community feared: "People were saying that Amy Foster was beginning to find out what sort of man she had married" (349). Yanko's "difference, his strangeness," initially so alluring, now seems threatening (349).

Neither Yanko nor the doctor understands why Amy changes. Yanko simply says, "Women are funny" (Conrad 1958, 349). The doctor is also puzzled, because he thinks that Amy should be grateful to have such a handsome husband. In the doctor's judgment, the power differential favors Yanko from the start. The doctor cynically notes the disparity in their natural gifts: "I wonder whether he saw how plain she was. Perhaps among types so different from what he had ever seen, he had not the power to judge; or perhaps he was seduced by the divine quality of her pity" (348). She abandons Yanko, taking their child to her father's house. The doctor is appalled to find Yanko ill and suffering alone, now marked by the look of "a wild creature under the net, of a bird caught in a snare. She had left him. She had left him—sick—helpless—thirsty" (352). The doctor blames Amy for "failing to sustain her desire for the man she loved": Is his image as

utterly gone from her mind as his lithe and striding figure, his carolling voice are gone from our fields? He is no longer before her eyes to excite her imagination into a passion of love or fear; and his memory seems to have vanished from her dull brain as a shadow passes away upon a white screen (352). Amy has enough imagination and agency to conceive a strong passion but not enough to maintain it.

Like “Amy Foster,” “Freya of the Seven Isles” (1912) dramatizes a woman’s erotic desire as a function of her power and imagination.¹⁷ As in *The Rescue*, the plot involves a ship run aground—it is the starting point of *The Rescue* and the turning point of “Freya.”¹⁸ In both narratives, a handsome and ambitious captain wins the love of a beautiful woman. Each captain is contrasted with a repugnant foil. In “Freya,” Jasper Allen is the attractive adventurer, and Heemskirk is the unappealing rival. Again, metaphors convey erotic feeling—images of the sea in *The Rescue* and of music in “Freya.” Power, as Hawthorn argues, is a critical factor in both narratives, though it plays out differently. Edith Travers is a bored wife who exercises the power of her social status to fulfill her desire. Freya is an unmarried woman who exercises the power of her beauty to withhold herself from the men who desire her. Whereas Edith consummates and then renounces her desire, Freya realizes too late that she lacked the courage to fulfill hers. The similar subtitles of these narratives comment on each woman’s limits: *The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows* and “Freya of the Seven Isles: A Story of Shallow Waters.”

The narrator of “Freya” characterizes himself as a friend of the family, but he too is attracted to Freya. His desire permeates his description of Freya’s charms.¹⁹ She is, of course, beautiful, but she is also assertive: “The oval of her face was perfect; and within that fascinating frame the most happy disposition of line and feature, with an admirable complexion, gave an impression of health, strength, and what I might call unconscious self-confidence—a most pleasant and, as it were, whimsical determination” (Conrad 1928, 149). The narrator progresses from an idealization of Freya’s pure girlhood—“She dressed generally in a white frock, with a skirt of walking length, showing her neat, laced, brown boots” (150)—to a full appreciation of her mature physical presence: “she seemed as fresh and sparkling as a dewdrop. But a dewdrop is evanescent, and there was nothing evanescent about Freya. I remember her round, solid arms with the fine wrists, and her broad, capable hands with tapering fingers” (150). He observes how Freya uses these qualities to inflame and cool Jasper’s passion:

Her cool, resolute, capable, good-humoured self-possession seemed to steady his heart. Was it the magic of her face, of her voice, of her glances which calmed him so? Yet these were the very things one must believe which had set his imagination ablaze—if love begins in imagination. (Conrad 1928, 158)

Like Jasper, Freya possesses the imagination and agency that erotic feeling requires. As in “Amy Foster” and *The Rescue*, the heroine has strong erotic feelings. Unlike Amy and Edith, however, Freya does not fulfill them. In her father’s words, which seem mistaken at first but turn out to be true, she is a “sensible girl” (156). She finds pleasure in arousing passion. She uses her power as the object of both suitors’ desire to control them. She forces Jasper to restrain his passion by refusing to elope with him until her twenty-first birthday, and she forces Heemskirk to restrain his by striking him when he kisses her. Jasper’s compliance is a sign of his love for Freya, while Heemskirk’s persistence proves his unworthiness.²⁰

The narrator notices that Freya’s desire increases with her power. She is torn between fulfilling her desire and controlling it: “She closed her eyes and smiled in the dark, abandoning herself in a delightful giddiness, for an instant, to his encircling arm. But before he could be tempted to tighten his grasp she was out of it, a foot away from him and in full possession of herself” (Conrad 1928, 189). She relishes the power of controlling her desire—and his. As she tells Jasper, “No one could carry me off. Not even you. I am not the sort of girl that gets carried off” (189). Then she flatters him: “Isn’t it enough for you to know that you have—that you have carried me away?” she added in a tender tone” (189–90). She professes her passion but decides not to act on it. She believes that delaying fulfillment is a sign of her “own free will” (190). As the narrator comments, “That was the steady Freya” (189), a woman exercising agency.

Freya’s father refuses to acknowledge his daughter’s sexual allure. The narrator rebukes him for failing to see the rivalry between Jasper and Heemskirk. Mockingly referred to as “Nelson (or Nielson)” throughout the story, he is “a comedy father” (Conrad 1928, 173). The double name suggests his lack of self-knowledge. Although he claims to act in his daughter’s interest, as a foreign national Nelson is more concerned with the security of his mercantile interests in the Dutch port than with her welfare: “All I want is to live in peace and quietness with the Dutch authorities,” he mumbled shamefacedly” (161). The narrator comments, “He was incurable” (161). When Heemskirk tells him to curb Jasper’s visits, Nelson replies

that “his girl didn’t care for the fellow, and was too sensible to fall in love with any one” (181). Like the narrator, Heemskirk is disgusted with Nelson’s self-deception: “‘Much you know about it,’ he grunted nevertheless” (181).

In contrast to Nelson’s blithe unwillingness to acknowledge the erotic triangle in his household, the narrator and Freya joke about her suitors. Enjoying another kind of intimacy, they mock Jasper’s devotion and collude to keep him “quiet.” As the narrator says, “He’s such a lunatic, too, when he’s roused” (Conrad 1928, 162). The narrator compliments Freya on her influence over Jasper, reflecting, “For it could not be unpleasant to her to be told of her power, and she had some sense of her responsibility” (163). She has the power to satisfy or deny her passion and Jasper’s. The narrator’s solution to the rivalry between Jasper and Heemskirk is to urge Freya to elope soon. He tells her, “‘The sooner you are on board to look after the man and the brig the better,’ I said seriously. ‘They need you to steady them both a bit. I don’t think Jasper will ever get sobered down till he has carried you off from this island’” (162). Being “sobered down” implies a post-coital calm, a satisfaction that Freya denies him.

Although Freya claims that she wants to delay the elopement to circumvent her father’s opposition, the narrator detects another motive: “But there was a peculiar vein of obstinacy in Miss Freya, and her reason for delay was characteristic” (Conrad 1928, 167). At the same time, he notices that Freya’s resolve weakens as her desire increases:

Overwrought! Overwrought by the approach of the decisive moment. After all, sincere, courageous, and self-reliant as she was, she must have felt both the passion and the compunction of her resolve. The very strength of love which had carried her up to that point must have put her under a great moral strain, in which there might have been a little simple remorse, too. (Conrad 1928, 176–77)

Conrad situates Freya’s desire in a matrix of feelings. Torn between gratifying her passion and restraining it, she manages the demands of three men: “The absurdities of three men were forcing this anxiety upon her: Jasper’s impetuosity, her father’s fears, Heemskirk’s infatuation” (187).

As in *The Rescue*, metaphors convey the characters’ erotic feelings. Music is established as a vehicle of passion early in “Freya.”²¹ Nelson’s “first and most important preparation” for his daughter’s arrival is to have a piano shipped to the island at great expense (150). This

instrument becomes her means of communicating positive and negative erotic feelings. When Jasper visits, she “would sit down to the piano and play fierce Wagner music in the flicker of blinding flashes, with thunderbolts falling all round, enough to make your hair stand on end; and Jasper would remain stock still on the verandah, adoring the back view of her supple, swaying figure, the miraculous sheen of her fair head, the rapid hands on the keys, the white nape of her neck” (Conrad 1928, 152). Freya plays the same music for Heemskirk, even though her feelings are hostile.²² She is keenly aware of Heemskirk’s desire: “He was not exactly drunk, but he was sufficiently primed to make the suggestions of his excited imagination seem perfectly feasible and even clever” (194). Power and imagination stoke his desire, as they feed hers.

Freya tries to forestall Heemskirk’s advances by opening the piano and playing “a fierce piece of music” (Conrad 1928, 194), but her performance has the opposite effect:

Standing behind her, he devoured her with his eyes, from the golden crown of her rigidly motionless head to the heels of her shoes, the line of her shapely shoulders, the curves of her fine figure swaying a little before the keyboard. She had on a light dress; the sleeves stopped short at the elbows in an edging of lace. A satin ribbon encircled her waist. In an access of irresistible, reckless hopefulness he clapped both his hands on that waist—and then the irritating music stopped at last. (Conrad 1928, 195)

The erotic implications of his gaze passing over her body culminate in action. He embraces her and then kisses her: “Heemskirk’s lips, aiming at her neck, landed a hungry, smacking kiss just under her ear. A deep silence reigned for a time. And then he laughed rather feebly” (196). The balance of power shifts, and she retaliates: “Freya had swung her round, strong arm with such force that the impact of her open palm on his flat cheek turned him half round,” while on her face is “a sort of restrained determined smile showing a tiny gleam of her white teeth” (196). She slaps him to defend herself, but the smile indicates an undercurrent of pleasure.²³ The parallel scenes emphasize that Freya takes erotic pleasure in both love and hostility.

Freya stages a virtual seduction of Jasper to torment Heemskirk. She rises early to watch Jasper’s brig set sail and is not properly dressed. Aware that Heemskirk is observing her, she displays her body to Jasper, who is far away, to taunt Heemskirk, who is in her house: “Heemskirk had never seen her looking like this, with her hair

drawn back smoothly to the shape of her head, and hanging in one heavy, fair tress down her back, and with that air of extreme youth, intensity, and eagerness” (Conrad 1928, 203). The narrator emphasizes the erotic feeling in Freya’s hostility to Heemskirk: “And Freya knew that he was watching her. She knew. . . . She was aware of his eyes being on her, with scornful bitterness, with triumphant contempt” (204). Her display of passion for Jasper expresses her loathing for Heemskirk:

She brought both her hands to her lips, then flung them out, sending a kiss over the sea, as if she wanted to throw her heart along with it on the deck of the brig. Her face was rosy, her eyes shone. Her repeated, passionate gesture seemed to fling kisses by the hundred again and again and again. . . . (Conrad 1928, 204)

To make sure Heemskirk knows that she is aware of his gaze, she returns to the piano and again plays the “modern, fierce piece of love music which had been tried more than once against the thunderstorms of the group. She accentuated its rhythm with triumphant malice” (206). Her sexual gestures are directed to Jasper but aimed at Heemskirk. Fierce music expresses the intensity of Freya’s erotic desire to both men.

Freya’s aggressive display of erotic feeling for Jasper humiliates Heemskirk. Seeking revenge, he captures and wrecks Jasper’s brig, destroying the lovers’ hopes for a life together. The loss of his brig puts an end to Jasper’s agency as well as his desire for Freya. Taking responsibility for this outcome, Freya blames herself for refusing to elope with Jasper. Knowing her love for Jasper is doomed, she tells her father, “I’ve been really a coward. . . . I’ve been conceited, headstrong, capricious. I sought my own gratification. I was selfish or afraid” (Conrad 1928, 238). Nelson, however, persists in believing that his daughter is too “sensible” to have loved Jasper, attributing her confession to illness. The narrator erupts: “Man! I cried, rising upon him wrathfully, ‘don’t you see that she died of it?’” (238). His anger at her father’s unwillingness to recognize the erotic drama in his house indicates the strength of the narrator’s feelings for Freya.

Power and passion are inseparable in Freya. When she is seen as a powerless victim, her passion is invisible. For example, Heliéna M. Krenn wants to reverse critics’ “traditional tendency” to see Conrad’s “female characters as ‘goads and threats’ to men,” but to do this she casts Freya as “the pathetic victim of three men’s egoism” (2000b, 16). In her view, Freya is torn apart by the “conflicting loves

for her father and lover” (25). For Krenn, the story is a critique of the “reality of women’s life in the author’s time” (25). She affirms her “esteem for Freya’s capacity to feel deeply and to be truly human by allowing herself to be vulnerable” (19). Recognizing that the narrator portrays Freya as an empowered woman with strong erotic feelings, Krenn simply nullifies his judgment: “The facts . . . contradict the narrator’s statements about the girl and prove his limited understanding of her” (24). She interprets Freya as a woman “caught in life’s complexities to a degree that she is destroyed physically by anaemia and morally by doubts about the choices she has made” (19). She regards Freya’s music as a sign of “weakness” and “basic insecurity that prompts her to seek self-assurance by counteracting the threats of the elements and of a despicable person with thunderous music” (24). Krenn hears the thunder but not the passion behind it. To defend Conrad’s treatment of women, she denies them the agency necessary to feel or fulfill erotic desire. The pathetic victim Krenn describes may not be a goad or a threat to men, but she is incapable of feeling passion.

As Krenn points out, Conrad knew that passion is hard to describe (2000b, 16). Responding to criticism of “The Planter of Malata” in his “Author’s Note” to *Within the Tides*, he admitted: “Indeed the task of the translator of passions into speech may be pronounced ‘too difficult’” (Conrad 1925, xi). Nevertheless, he did not shrink from the task. He defended the story as “an essay in description and narrative around a given psychological situation” (ix). Conrad wrote about such psychological situations throughout his career. My examples not only illustrate his use of plot, imagery, and dialogue to express erotic feelings, but they also suggest that Conrad believed passion requires imagination and agency. Looking for these qualities in male and female characters in Conrad’s other works, we may find evidence for a reassessment of his ability to write about women and sex.

NOTES

¹ Daniel Schwarz disputes “Moser’s contention . . . that Conrad falters when he deals with the uncongenial subject of heterosexual love,” but instead of showing how Conrad deals with this subject successfully, Schwarz defends *The Rescue* as a continuation of Conrad’s view of “man’s moral behavior as resulting from psychological needs that are often dimly understood or barely acknowledged” (1982, xi). Schwarz claims that Lingard is “the morally responsible man of action who lives in a romance world of his own creation” (110).

- ² Citing Conrad's statement in 1897 that he wanted to convey "the stress and exaltation of the man under the influence of a sentiment which he hardly understands and yet which is real enough to make him as he goes on reckless of the consequences," Fernando nevertheless comments, "This is not the phraseology of an author who wishes to deal with a passionate love affair" (1976, 86). Fernando takes Conrad's comment that "Lingard—not the woman—is the principal personage" as support for his reading (86). Heliéna M. Krenn reaffirms the view that after *Under Western Eyes* Conrad's narratives "gradually manifest a more direct treatment of female characters" (2000a, 1), causing the work of this period to be inferior: "But by doing away with ambivalence, one of the important elements that contribute to the complexity and tragic tensions of Conrad's greatest works, the value of these novels . . . is diminished" (10).
- ³ William Freedman illustrates critics' tendency to treat Conrad's women as "woman," that is symbolically. For example, Freedman claims: "The ambivalent attitude toward hidden truth in Conrad's fiction typically derives from its association with woman as both carnal reality and the symbolic incarnation of forbidden knowledge" (2010, 67). It is Conrad's ability to represent the "carnal reality" that has been underestimated.
- ⁴ A portrait of Joseph Conrad was the cover image on the April 7, 1923, issue of *Time*. See also Mary Morzinski's defense of Conrad's late style against critics who cite *The Rescue* as evidence of his decline (2005). In an essay on "The Late Novels" for the *Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, Robert Hampson notes that critics are reevaluating this period of Conrad's work: "Indeed, Conrad's particular interest in women and sexuality in his late fiction has proved remarkably congenial for recent critical interest in the issue of gender" (1996, 140).
- ⁵ See also Heliéna M. Krenn's "The 'Beautiful World of Women'" on the significance of this rivalry for Conrad's critique of colonialism (1993, 116).
- ⁶ In contrast, Schwarz claims that Lingard's attraction to Edith represents a loss of status: "Lingard ceases to be King Tom when his passions respond to Edith Travers" (1982, 114–15).
- ⁷ Despite the ambiguity of "realism" and "romance," George Levine argues: "It is no accident, therefore, that conventionally we speak of 'romance' as the most obvious alternative to realism," and "much nineteenth-century realism defined itself against romance because that form implied wish fulfillment rather than reality" (1981, 9).
- ⁸ An exception is William Freedman, who reads the novel as an example of Freud's rescue fantasy. He interprets the novel's two rescues in relation to Conrad's childhood. Having lost his mother at an early age and his father some years later, he wishes to "restore a youthful royal pair to their rightful place" and to possess "the idealized mother to the exclusion of the rejecting and detested father" (2014, 19). Freedman also points out,

however, that Conrad calls attention to the cultural currency of these themes by quoting Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* in the epigraph (11).

- ⁹ For example, Hampson argues: "The failure of Lingard's project registers, among other things, the success of the Dutch colonial interference in Wajo (and elsewhere) and the decline of the Illanum after a successful Spanish campaign. What seems like a very personal drama of Lingard's conflicted loyalties also marks a particular moment of colonial triumph in the region" (2009, 51).
- ¹⁰ Hawthorn argues that "because Conrad typically perceives sexual relationships as, among other things, power relationships, the varied roles played by sexual desire and erotic experience in his fictions cannot be isolated from other uses of power: political, economic, and emotional. To ignore the sexual and the erotic in his fiction is not just to pass over an isolated, 'private', and self-contained component in his novels and short stories, but to disregard elements in them that are often organically linked to those elements that have, for many years, been deemed worthy of serious study" (2007, 15).
- ¹¹ Hawthorn cites Bernard C. Meyer's negative judgment of Conrad's ability to represent passion: "But in those stories like . . . *Chance*, *Victory*, *The Arrow of Gold*, and *The Rescue*, in which the protagonists are both white and of comparatively similar backgrounds, the lovers appear to expend most of their sexual energies by backing and filling in a morass of inhibition, all the while engaging in a ruminative chatter that at times approaches sheer double talk" (2007, 98). Hawthorn credits Carola M. Kaplan's 2005 essay "Beyond Gender: Deconstructions of Masculinity and Femininity from 'Karain' to *Under Western Eyes*" for calling attention to Conrad's interest in gender and sexuality (10).
- ¹² See also Yannick Le Boulicaut's reading of this scene as a "violent argument" that exposes Travers as "a snobbish middle-aged man and an incompetent diplomat" and Edith as "an exemplar of shallowness and vulgarity" (2012, 167).
- ¹³ In "Women Travellers in the Malay Archipelago and the Malay Fiction of Joseph Conrad," Robert Hampson notes that Conrad recognized the presence of "European women adventurers in the archipelago" (2009, 51), citing Doris Yedamski's 1995 *Images, Self-Images, and the Perception of the Other: Women Travellers in the Malay Archipelago* about "travel as offering women the opportunity to escape from the restrictive conventions of European society and the chance to reconstruct their identity" (48).
- ¹⁴ Andrew Francis also argues that the encounter between the lovers in the Malaysians' camp is a scene in which Lingard and Edith "perform a virtual sexual union" (2015, 75).
- ¹⁵ Christopher GoGwilt notes Lingard's unexpected "passion for opera" as an instance of Conrad's "operatic aesthetic" (2005, 110, 101).

- ¹⁶ Jürgen Kramer argues that the story is primarily about the doctor rather than Amy or Yanko (2004).
- ¹⁷ See also Sylvère Monod: “It seems to me that ‘Freya’ is one of the very few Conrad stories in which desirability in women and desire in men are depicted convincingly” (2006, 89). Yet his praise excludes the possibility that Conrad represents Freya’s desire as well as her desirability. Defending Heemskirk, Monod joins the chorus of contempt for *The Rescue*: “Tom Lingard . . . succumbs, mysteriously to me, to the seduction of Edith Travers; he is in love with her; yet on the only occasion when he holds her in his arms . . . he becomes rigid—I mean, his whole body becomes rigid, he is paralyzed and nearly drops her to the ground” (89).
- ¹⁸ Both narratives have been criticized for similar faults. Mark Larabee summarizes the usual objections to “Freya”: “Critics have found fault in, among other things, its uneven style, sentimentality, and moral simplicity. Baines, for example, cites ‘occasional lapses into facetiousness or heartiness,’ its ‘extreme romanticism,’ and ‘operatic form’ . . . Graver emphasizes the tale’s ‘stylistic imprecision and structural mismanagement’ and the difficult-to-believe changes its characters undergo” (2004, 108).
- ¹⁹ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan argues that the narrator “not only tells the story, but actually tries to become one of its characters as well” (1991, 25).
- ²⁰ Monod comments, “Had Heemskirk taken Freya in his arms, he would have known what to do; he knew what he wanted, with overpowering, irresistible ardour. But that, of course, is hardly imaginable” (2006, 89).
- ²¹ Hawthorn notes that “the use of music to mimic and accompany sexual desire and frustration is a technique that we have also seen Conrad make use of in ‘Il Conde’” (2007, 130).
- ²² As Erdinast-Vulcan observes, Freya’s use of the piano, “as an instrument of sexual communication, is curiously indiscriminating” (1991, 27). She also notes that the piano was “freighted to the island by the narrator” (27 n. 11).
- ²³ Hawthorn comments, “That little smile speaks volumes. From this point on the relationship between Freya and Heemskirk—one that involves her taking pleasure from his sexual frustration and humiliation—becomes more erotically charged than that between her and Jasper” (2007, 128). I argue that she takes pleasure from Jasper’s sexual frustration as well.

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