

CONRAD AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF *RESCUE*

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To the memory of Prof. Zdzisław Najder who introduced me to Conrad

Abstract: The writer for Conrad, in a less familiar passage in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, is a “snatcher” who saves lost fragments from disappearing beneath the waves of time by “holding them up.” Dedicated to an involuntary salvation resembling other imaginable conversion experiences, Conrad’s redeemer “plucks” the fragmentary to a new life, revisualized in a new light. Response to the call to rescue can be self-serving or redemptive, but inevitably creates an irrevocable fictional bond that threatens the self-determination of rescuer and rescued. “I was lost, but now I am found” becomes an entrée to a reluctant *political life* rather than a life obedient to “looking on without making a sound,” advised by Heyst’s father in *Victory*. Who is saved and for what purpose? Saviour and rescued have a dialectical relationship, each on occasion becoming the other in an endless quest for mutual recognition. If colonialism purported to salvage the savage from primitivity, so de-colonialism held out the hope of rescuing the subaltern from the oppressive master. Rescuer and rescued are “bonded” as they re-write each other’s lives in a perpetually redefined *attachment*.

Carlos Gould’s reclaimed, previously abandoned San Tome silver concession of *Nostromo*, converts a sleepy colonial backwater in an only descriptively rich Golfo Placido to an object of speculative economic and ideological investment. The translation (conversion) of Razumov’s abandoned, diary/manuscript/manifesto-in-situ – a fragment translated/ “held up” to light by a “mere” expatriate English teacher – does the same in *Under Western Eyes*.

As with other conversion experiences, then, existence comes to have a “before” and an “after,” denoting change, rather than Lukacs’ frozen, artificial time of the bourgeois novel. All conversions arouse suspicion, as Marlow’s unreliable narratives suggest. Adoptions, adaptations and formal “conversions” of Conrad’s works by contemporary novelists (Anthony Burgess’ *The Malayan Trilogy* being an early example); filmmakers; manga artists; and post-colonial poets and performing artists are similarly unique “rescues” of Conrad. Like literary criticism, new “takes” illuminate (re-) *cognition* and renewal of a canon for a less literary age.

The need for periodic rescue, in reality or fantasy (*Lord Jim*), is an informing trope of Conrad’s achievement. The *rescue* of silver ingots (*Nostromo*); of a maiden and her mentally-challenged dependent by a *Secret Agent*; of a suicidal Flora de Barral by Captain Anthony in *Chance*; of an ivory merchant gone rogue in *Heart of Darkness*; of a Leggat rescued by a nameless *Secret Sharer*; or of a Lena rescued from the demi-monde of Schomberg’s bar in *Victory* – all testify to the demands of rescue as a perpetual “calling” for the drifting seafarer. Captain and crew were to be at-

tentively “on watch.” Critical and creative conversion is the change that assumes that it knows what it is doing, that always- already knows its own value and virtue, but really speculatively opens an extended life for character, canon, criticism.

Ironically, Conrad rescued *Rescue* in 1920 (late in his career), initially an earlier volume in the *Malay Trilogy*, but abandoned shortly after marriage. This author, only an incidental Conrad scholar, had an abandoned, because critically rejected, essay on Conrad (with the words “drop this one” affixed), plucked from the waste file by two members of the Polish Conrad Society who threw it an editorial life vest: a new life. Rescue is a trope of generic renewal for speculative investment by authors and readers during inclement literary weather.

Keywords: rescue, late colonialism, stranded asset, investment in another, redemption, Malay archipelago

To *snatch* in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached [...] is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the *rescued fragment* before the eyes in the light of a sincere mood.¹

In a less familiar passage from the “Preface” to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* Joseph Conrad compares the writer to a “snatcher” who rescues fragments from the waves, redeeming a potential loss to the possibility of a new, reimagined life in a different light. Vocationally, this secular savior redeems some derelict from the jointly threatening flow of temporal events. Eliding *tempests* (time and storms), the author can lose all beneath the waves.

Contemporaneous with this trope of the writer as rescuer, Conrad was jettisoning (old Fr. *getaison*, “to throw overboard so as to lighten a load”) a fragmentary manuscript, *The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows*, Newly-married, rapidly produced novellas and short stories were more remunerative than heavy Victorian novels. *The Rescue*, the *abandonné*, was salvaged from its long, unattended state in 1920, Conrad’s last novel, preceding his return to Poland from life- long exile, adrift.

Who among us has not been rescued from impending loss by parent, clergyman, physician, lover, thesis advisor or, in my case. two members of the Polish Conrad Society who saved an essay for publication after it had been submerged with the words “drop this one” affixed by a previous editor? Alternatively, which of us has not heeded an S.O.S. from the intellectually or politically “at sea,” especially in Central Europe, no more so than now? The late novelist, David Foster Wallace, once said that the “horrific struggle to establish a human self,” results in a self “whose humanity is inseparable from that struggle.”² The literature of psychoanalysis warns of *transfer-*

¹ Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’: A Tale of the Sea*, ed. Allan H. Simmons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 7, ital. added. I have uniquely used the Cambridge Edition for this citation rather than the J. M. Dent Edition (rpt. London, 1966) used elsewhere (with initials) because of a slight difference in punctuation. Rescue as a “plucked fragment” held up from some flow has a characteristic, often bracketed or syntactically “set-off” style in Conrad: ‘It was going to be a short episode – a sentence in brackets so to speak – in the flowing tide of his life: a thing of the moment, to be done unwittingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten. (OI 3)’

² David Foster Wallace, “Some Reflections on Kafka’s Funniness,” in David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 2005), p. 43.

ence, the shift of dependency onto the shoulders of the tentative rescuer.³ In *The Rescue* Conrad's last rescuer, Captain Lingard, equates the act with financial, emotional, even political in-vestment: "When you save people from death, you take a *share* in their life" (*R*⁴ 120, ital. added): the partnership of the *doppelganger*.

Holroyd's share in the abandoned silver mine of *Nostramo* disguises materialism with a salvational gesture. After cautioning Gould that he is "out" at the first sign of political trouble – as if it were poker – he compensates by building churches to replace the fake beliefs, "tinsel faiths" (*N* 71), of the natives. In his San Francisco office, a silent investor aligns two speculative transactions common to colonialism: extracting and charitable giving.

In *The Secret Sharer* a novice captain abandons two identities: his name, and symbolically, a captain's titular role, by volunteering for the mate's night watch. The abnegation of command by a gesture of misplaced communal solidarity with the crew, opens him to the rescue of a distressed swimmer: the enhanced sensitivity to the needs of an escaped fugitive. One ceases to be a master when he once becomes a mate, during which the hidden rescue of Leggatt and their mutually dangerous attachment occurs: an extension of (always-already) forgetting who he is. When is a rescue proof of my humanity, a way of touching another, and when is the Other, like the cockroach encountered at mess early in the tale, an historically ageless, parasitical stowaway? Leggatt is a fugitive from the vessel, *Sephora*, named for the biblical secret sharer of a tribal rescuer, Moses' wife, Zipporah.

In "L'Enracinement" ("The Need for Roots") Simone Weil argued that our sympathy with the politically or physically-stranded should be compassion-based rather than legally-determined, involving obligations discernible to a *moral attentiveness*. □For Weil this demands that we "open up" to what we do not expect to find – and hence, in some sense opposite considerations of justice. She rather urged a dangerous *recognition* of shared vulnerability to what is strange, difficult, even painful, without turning away, an attuned sensitivity to those in need ("écouter des toutes les oreilles"), as if by surplus receptors.⁵ This unconditional *attentiveness* is a duty of the mate on night watch, one of whom in the 1950's-60's was the musicologist-composer, Anthony Burgess. Before *A Clockwork Orange* he wrote a "sequel" (rescue?) to Conrad's *Malayan Trilogy* bearing the same collective title, thereby the "secret sharer" of a genre. Burgess affixed an English glossary of polyglot vernacular to sensitize the occidental reader's ears, just as did Conrad in *Nostramo*.

³ Adam Phillips, *On Wanting to Change* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2021), pp. 11-13, addresses the contradictory ways in which the converted or "saved" simultaneously think of themselves as fitting into a new "mold" (often collective) at the same time as they think of themselves as having been released, liberated, or, to borrow from Conrad's imagery, "enlightened," from some darkness or doubt.

⁴ *OI* = *An Outcast of the Islands*; *R* = *The Rescue*; *N* = *Nostramo*; *V* = *Victory*; *UWE* = *Under Western Eyes*; *HD* = *Heart of Darkness*; *SA* = *The Secret Agent*; *R* = *The Rescue* here and elsewhere.

⁵ Simone Weil, "L'Enracinement: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humain," in Albert Camus, *Espoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 256-282. Though I have not consulted a concordance, a number of Conrad's characters, most notably Axel Heyst, uses "deracinated" (*V* 136) to describe an ontic status synonymous with perpetual drift.

In his *Being Singular Plural*, Jean-Luc Nancy similarly called attention to a grammar of touching insofar as the French deploys the self-reflexive in a transitive way: *se toucher toi* is “to touch myself in touching you” but also “to touch you touching myself.” The “oneself” is just as indispensable as the “you,” in the act of a secret sharing.⁶ Touch *ex-poses* (in the sense of placing me outside myself), but also gives exposition to one not previously seen or heard. The same exposure can both awaken and threaten an aspect of the self, previously unacknowledged, creating an awareness of our singularity, but also of another, plural potential. Colonialism and de-colonization would participate in a dialectical relationship, alternately awakening and threatening to native and invasive colonizer.

Kojève’s lectures in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, seem especially relevant to this violation of a code in *The Secret Sharer*. Master and apprentice – and there are a lot of apprentices among Conrad’s seafarers – have a responsibility to each other, defined by rank. The coming to mastery (captain) by an apprentice is symbolically deferred so as to maintain difference in rank and order aboard the vessel. Though the newly-promoted, insecure captain has the pleasure and power of mastery, he never really has the satisfaction of *recognition*, mates being so far beneath him that recognition would not register as recognition or perhaps only as the insufficiency of misrecognition. Nor can the captain ever achieve recognition by his mates as an equal, for then he would cease to be a captain with its implied mastery. The armature that drives history in this radical re-reading of Hegel, is the struggle for an impossible mutual recognition as equals, displaced onto another relationship with Leggatt.⁷ Neither mates nor captain nor stowaway can be fully free, for freedom stems from being recognized as an equal by an equal. That kind of mutual recognition is impossible even if, to borrow from the nomenclature of psychoanalysis, there is a “transference” of clothing, like the quasi-parasitical relationships known as *mutualism* among parasitologists,⁸ Leggatt and the captain have a *mutual dependency* – a definition of both humanity and colonialism – but not necessarily, equality.

The Secret Sharer, if held up to a “new light” could easily become an illuminating conversion narrative, typically identifying a “before” and “after.” If the endangered or fallen person, enterprise, or manuscript is in need of redemption, as are the pilgrims aboard the endangered *Patna* in *Lord Jim*, how is the reader, a symbolic rescuer, to determine the sincerity of the presumptive plea? Particularly, if, like the Axel

⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 55-90.

⁷ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, compiled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1981). The elusive freedom of mutual recognition is re-imagined in Levinas’ early (1935) work, *De l’évasion (On Escape)*. For Levinas, since we can never possess the “Other,” even if filtered through some mutually-shared Categories of the Understanding, Kantian metaphysics is a hoax. We can “encounter” the Other as it unfolds at a pre-cognitive level thanks to an embodied sensibility. Thus, transcendence becomes not a question of humans passing beyond themselves to some hidden reality, but rather through our sensuous evasions.

⁸ Scott Gardner, Judy Diamond and Gabor Racz, *Parasites: The Inside Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), pp. 64-68.

Heyst of *Victory*, he has been warned by a father “to look on” but “make no sound,” as befits a supernumerary gentleman. Alternatively, one could, as did this writer of his “dropped” Conrad manuscript, passively regard it as a “stranded asset” (kept in the “waste” file on my computer) for later redemption. Having spent his childhood as the youngest of five sons in a dark parsonage on a hill, the future Lord Jim was a “stranded asset” in terms of inheriting a “living.” His “rescue fantasies” while an apprentice seaman are surely applications of his father’s commitment to the salvation of lost souls. He resembles the nameless captain of *The Secret Sharer* who, against nautical protocol, takes the night watch.

Late colonialism was endowing an assortment of potentially stranded assets in unfamiliar corners of Empire. Heyst corrects his initial self-description as “transplanted,” to an ontic status of “the uprooted, an unnatural state of existence” (*V* 217). As with free-trade and open markets, Great Britain was an early advocate of a harmonious “family” of nations with long-term shared interests and mutual benefits. In Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1885), Captain Lingard offers a partnership in a concession (including a rumored gold mine, which forms a pillar in the foundational “tale” of Costaguana), to the incompetent drifter, Almayer. It is a transactional exchange for marrying Captain Lingard’s adopted Malay daughter, as Britain had adopted portions of Southeast Asia, including the Malay States, as “children” of Empire. In what sense is this unhappy union to a native by an expatriate *like* the development of a legacy concession? In its dynamic, the trade resembles Raffles’ exchange of the port of Singapore (then a mudflat) for money paid to local rulers. Trade created *a-filiative* families with often, absentee fathers.

Trade being trade, love too is transactional, including an unhappy wife’s later acceptance of a dowry from Dain Maroola, a Balinese Prince with an interest in their beautiful mixed-race daughter, Nina, born of Almayer and his Lingard-gifted partner. “Bride money” being traditional in Javanese culture, payment for the value of the concession is logical. Nina, the exotic fruit of this joint concession, is sent away to a British boarding school in colonial Singapore, only to be ridiculed because of the dark skin inherited from her mother. Rebelling against Almayer’s wish that she become a high-toned WOG, *cheloped* (Peranakan: “curry-complexioned”) Nina *reverts* rather than converts, to her mother’s Malayan identity, an instance of anticipatory de-colonization.

Host of a luxurious resort for non-existent trader-guests as a substitute income source for the undiscovered gold seam, Almayer ends his days as an opium addict (one of the products traded) alone and unloved in empty real estate: a failed international resort, from which Conrad’s novel takes its title. Monetization of “concessions” is not invariably successful. Nina allegorically mirrors an environment contested between Dutch, British and Malay interests in Southeast Asia. Captain Lingard, the foundational investor, having disappeared somewhere in Europe, Almayer’s ghostly, “secret sharer” becomes an empty hotel in an unfinished resort, another of Conrad’s “hotels-of-the world” awaiting reclamation, like Borel Castle in *Under Western Eyes*. Rescue-as-investment embraces the possibility of human, institutional, and proprietary, stranded assets.

Almayer's Folly contains *in situ* a number of themes developed in more familiar later works. The displacement of affection by a commitment to the redemption of an abandoned silver mine that defines the marital distance of Don Carlos and Emilia Gould (*Nostramo*); the liquidation of a redundant Tropical Belt Coal Company now extant only on paper thanks to vessels of enhanced range (*Victory*); the stranded, beautifully loyal "Jewel" who even nominally reflects the materiality of an undefined love in a colonial outpost (*Lord Jim*); Kurtz' solitary "Intended," victim of false narratives and an obsession with ivory; Lena's metaphoric alignment with hidden gold in Schomberg's narrative that prompts the speculation of invasive brigands on Samburan – are all speculative *material ventures* in Conrad. If the exotic native female "Intended" is indeed an umbrella concept for the stranded (in the sense of unconsummated) asset in distant locales, wherever she dwells, then a critical accusation often levelled at Conrad – the inadequacy of his representations of women – should be interrogated. The value of any stranded human or material asset is very volatile.

In *Nostramo*, the plot of the last quarter of the novel is dedicated to the rescue of a potentially stranded asset, silver ingots, from a previously abandoned San Tomé mine threatened by a native insurgency. After Gould's redemption of the operations of the mine, the bold rescue of the ingots under the plans of Decoud and Nostromo would only represent a fraction of the assets. Both gold and copper now exist in abundance in Costaguana. The supposed salvation and burial of the "rescued" shipment by Nostromo and Decoud is really designed to promote the stability of a new nation, thereby maintaining foreign investment in a separatist Occidental Republic. The buried/stranded/rescued lighter load of silver on one of the Isabels will match the legend of the buried gringo gold with which *Nostramo* began.

Both romantic convention and colonial practice often disguise selfish possession with the veneer of mutual benefit (an international marriage, a new world order, an antique silk *serang kebaya*, which attracts Mrs. Travers in *The Rescue*). Salvaging the stranded asset, be it the beautiful native woman, part of a captain's fugitive "self" in *The Secret Sharer*, or the promise of exotic riches or novel ideas, generates a dialectic that informs the seafarer Conrad's work. "Redemption" of the alluring, inaccessible or distressed lode, simultaneously fuels the colonial quest and justifies rescues that detach nativity from its "life," in the interest of permanent affection or wider exposure (Fig. 1).

Similarly, creative fugues upon Conrad's canon, "plucked" from the waves of time by later creative artists and held up to the light of new genres, serve to rescue his achievement in an age less receptive to literature. Films, mangas, graphic novels, operettas, poetic interpretations of episodes, musical performances by post-colonial re-interpreters – successors to Anthony Burgess' pioneering *Malay Trilogy* – have rescued Conrad's work, for conversion to a new life in a new light, beyond "the commonplace *surface* of words."

The trope of the stranded asset of British imperialism may have had more historical domestic roots. Although the "transported" convict made a recognized contribution

to the history of Australia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, other corners of Empire often hosted British men accused of anti-social behavior or transgressions unbecoming of their social rank. As the government of the country came to be separated from its landowning families, they began to lose some of the protections enjoyed by the nobility. The passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 established wider categories with which to prosecute homosexuals, as Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas discovered. Lord Ronald Southern Gower, a sculptor thought to be the model for Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, fled to Venice, and a life known to the *carabinieri*. Earl Beauchamp, Mayor of Worcester and Governor of New South Wales in his youth and later Chancellor of the University of London and Lord Warden of the Cinq Ports, was accused by the Duke of Westminster of homosexual proclivities, and died a broken man in New York after resigning all positions.

Lord Lonsdale's famous voyage to the Arctic, though ostensibly sponsored by the Scottish Naturalist Society, was actually prompted by a love affair with the actress, Violet Cameron, whose husband had brought charges of adultery. Wilfrid Blunt, Sussex squire and Victorian poet, an infamous lecher, sympathized with the cause of Egyptian nationalism, and learned the Bedouin dialect, later establishing himself as an arbiter of nomadic disputes in Cairo, a forerunner, though less popular in the contemporary imagination than Lawrence of Arabia, of more ambivalent sexuality. Mark Sykes, heir to a vast Yorkshire estate, despised the advent of self-promoting tradesmen into British life, and in 1915, abandoned his patrimony in order to preserve and protect aristocratic sheiks whose independence was threatened by the Ottoman Empire. He is memorialized in the Sykes-Picot Treaty which divided the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence. Sykes was always pursued by rumors of an unfortunate sexual relationship which followed him to a new posting. To have a "washed up" career (stranded on foreign shores), is not always metaphorical, a sentiment reflected in the comment of a native Malay in *An Outcast of the Islands*: "Rajah Laut left another white man here in Sambir" (OI 48), following on the heels of Almayer. One could be the third son of an embarrassed estate or an heir otherwise gone to moral seed, and unwilling to become a tradesman in what Napoleon termed "a nation of shopkeepers" and eke out an adventurous existence as (doubly) *An Outcast of the Islands*. Rarely did the "stranded asset" morph into the "return of the repressed," though Winston Churchill, left an impecunious journalist by Lord Randolph, was an exception.

The underrated, *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Tale* (1901), co-authored with Ford Madox Ford, addresses this recurrent theme. Its anti-protagonist is the "washed up" member of a noble family, another King Arthur *manqué*, the unsuccessful writer, Arthur Etchingham. Discouraged by an unreceptive publisher, this Arthur finds himself introduced to a roundtable of would-be reformers, the so-called "Fourth Dimensionists,"⁹ by a vamp who pretends to be his maritally-available relative, Ms.

⁹ Conrad's interest in a fourth dimension in *The Inheritors* in combination with temporal coincidence in the *Malayan Trilogy* might suggest some unverified familiarity with the interests of his neighbor, H. G. Wells, as well as their shared fashionable interest in Charles Howard Hinton's 1885, "What is the Fourth

Etchingham. She communicates in a curious syntax of compound metaphors in which anything can be *like* anything else, a virtual linguistic kinship, as befits marital arrangements often practiced by the nobility. Accordingly, the novel is replete with some of the techniques used in science fiction: temporal coincidence, cosmic accidents, invisible agents of transmission. To the “Fourth Dimensionists” the country is run by a group of industrialists, press barons, and allied monopolizing politicians and includes as supposed members: Fox, the editor of a subversive journal; a well-respected writer, Callan; the Foreign Minister, Churchill; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gurnard.

The “secret sharer,” Ms. Etchingham (who pretends to be part of Arthur’s family, yet another of Conrad’s *doppelgangers*), spends money to improve a run-down estate on which Arthur’s aunt lives while urging her supposed ally, Fox, to give Arthur, her presumptive fiancée/relative – and hence an incest-skirting relationship – a position. The failed writer is to become a propagandist, engaged to write “atmospheric pieces” – a petty trader in words – for an ostensibly political journal, *The Hour*, a forerunner of Decoud’s *Porvenir*, of *Nostramo*. At the last minute, she betrays the plot to the Establishment (of which she has been a member all along) and abandons Arthur, to marry Gurnard and betray the “Fourth Dimensionists” to which Arthur had been recruited. Pretending to rescue a down-at-the-heels relative, she is the betrayer, revealing the partitions (and potential for civil war) within every supposed revolutionary movement. Read allegorically, Great Britain itself has become another “stranded asset,” along with all the betrayed idealists who had sought to give the country a future time, another Dimension. Vulnerability to betrayal in Conrad’s work is a risk factor for all presumptive, albeit highly speculative, assets, banking on future returns. This twentieth-century King Arthur, betrayed by another magician of “likenesses,” a fraudulent “secret sharer,” ends his days passed out, dead drunk, at a round table at his posh club.

In *The Secret Agent* Verloc, initially rescuer of Winnie and her mentally-challenged brother, Stevie, is informed by his control officer, Vladimir at the Russian Embassy, of a mission impossible. Because any terrorist attack in London against elite institutions, like museums, the Houses of Parliament, or churches, would be narrated as ideologically elitist, insofar as they host artistic, political, or faith-based interests. Vladimir urges an attack against the Greenwich Observatory, the world’s GMT-defined temporal benchmark. The collective understanding of time itself would, if destroyed, become a stranded asset, affecting all life, insofar as time was coming to be regarded as money in some nineteenth century economic analyses, accelerated by the advent of an “hourly-wage” scale. In *The Inheritors*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) – reprised in both French and Israeli film versions – time has become to be imagined as space.

The latter is largely set in Geneva, Switzerland and narrated by one of many political refugees and ideological and vocationally-stranded expatriate exiles in Zurich

Dimension?” In that pamphlet the tesseract as a fourth- dimension analogue of the cube, is analyzed along with eliminating directionality in the interest of severing body and soul as secret “sharers.” Hinton’s exotic work has several cameo appearances in the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges.

and Geneva, including Conrad's narrator, a "mere" English teacher and unreliable translator. Composed of an arbitrary amalgamation of cantons, Switzerland then was effectively a "virtual" country politically, and not coincidentally, an important producer of instruments measuring time. Narrative time in fact proves itself, a very fungible dimension indeed given all the temporally unmarked flashbacks in *Under Western Eyes*. As the European refugee capital of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, large parts of the novel are set in Chateau Borel, a large neglected house that Madame de S- rents from the widow of a wealthy Italian banker. This political salon, a stranded asset of capitalism, anticipates a future Switzerland, a country-as-bank for people and money in flight. The large dwelling is the de facto meeting place for a group of revolutionaries and anarchists including Peter Ivanovitch, a noted hypocritical feminist author, who abuses his own secretary, Tekla. Razumov believes himself to be an ideological "secret sharer" / co-conspirator of a university classmate sought by czarist authorities for a murderous anarchist attack. Like the nameless captain in "The Secret Sharer," Razumov has provided only a tentative sympathetic refuge in his university rooms to his friend, the fugitive anarchist, Haldin, confusing sympathy with an act.

Yet, he feels sufficient guilt to fear for his own political safety as a co-conspirator in a crime. Under the cautious urging of his wealthy university sponsor, Razumov presents himself to be interviewed by State Councillor Mikulin of the czarist police in the interests of preserving his future career as a potential public servant (another safe haven) under the czarist government. Although having no role in the subversive explosion, he *becomes* guilty by ideological proximity – "secret sharing" – even writing a radical "manifesto" comically miming Haldin's half-digested ideas, discovered by the authorities. Is guilt a consequence of a merely attentive, humane gesture in a post-Dostoevsky world absent the faith that formerly determined the parameters of guilt? If guilt is a universal condition *of* those sensitively *attentive* to the human condition, rather than *for* an act, then "to be fully human" is to be guilty. Rescue would always implicate the would-be savior, for the fugitive Leggatt's and Haldin's in need of rescue are everywhere among us. To sympathize with a political refugee is to identify with him, so that *Razumov* (Rus: Reason) becomes a refugee from reason, without a "cause," in Switzerland at the Chateau Borel, a precursor of Kafka's imprisoning castle-cum-penal colonies. These reclamations become anonymous hotels-of-the-world, banks for fugitive assets, speculative investment, or political refugees, for which Geneva was an appropriate metaphor.

In one of the novel's temporal flashbacks, the reader learns that Councillor Mikulin of the czarist police has been promoted. He must deduce after the fact that the promotion is partially the result of "running" Razumov as an informant on the activities of the refugee anarchists around Borel Castle in Geneva. Initially thinking of himself as a guilty co-conspirator in a plot against the Russian state, Razumov becomes an unwitting/witting informant. He is in effect a guilt-laden, stranded asset of both anarchists and a repressive government with no *reasoned* self-determination of his own. In a novel very dependent upon what is overheard in confidence, he suffers a severe beating by the descendants of the anarchists that renders him deaf, no

longer “*turning their ear to the murmur of abstract ideas*” (UWE 294) where, according to Councillor Mikulin, the Russian spirit lives. The loss of Weil’s *attentiveness* is represented in Conrad as a deafness to the cries of the Other from an excess of ideology. Stevie similarly heeds no shouted warnings from passers-by as he stumbles during his appointed, destructive mission. This deafness to a “call” is surely opposite Conrad’s incredibly sympathetic ear for foreign languages and local vernaculars. To have lost self-determination to some “double” is to become a “runner,” lacking directionality.

This dimension of Conrad’s canon enables its application by/in unforeseeable contemporary genres. The various “riffs” on Conrad’s work by contemporary producers and graphic artists, contrary to being distortions, erasures, or mis-applications of intention are not “covers.” They are rather *always-already* contained *within* how his work generates meaning as something “outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out, only as a glow brings out a haze” (HD 48) to borrow from “Heart of Darkness.” *Razumov* (Rus: reason) is ideologically de-constructed, rendered deaf. None of the subversives or “wannabe” anarchists, at the equally misnamed Castle Borel, has any consistent ideology. They literally dwell in a stranded asset of internationally- mobile capitalism, part of a *rentier* culture.

To be an unwitting or reluctant secret sharer is to be potentially a secret agent. We simultaneously need to be watchfully attentive, yet fully aware that this very attentiveness leaves us *open* to being used, mistaken or self-interested. The *Patna* does not sink, but is rescued. Yet its mate, educated to the continuing need for salvation in his father’s parsonage, inapplicably applies his apprenticeship, to be convicted of criminal abandonment of a ship.

The drawing rooms of the wealthy patroness of Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle of *The Secret Agent*, “was probably the only place in the world where an Assistant Commissioner of Police could meet a convict liberated [...] on other than professional and official grounds” (SA 106). In the same novel, his colleague, Inspector Heat, upon encountering the radical anarchist “Professor” with his hands on a pocket detonator, is warned to keep a distance: “you may be *exposed* to the unpleasantness of being buried together with me, though I suppose your friends would make an effort to sort us out” (SA 93, ital. added). This radical proxemics is applicable to other forms of sharing. Axel Heyst’s disinterested charity in *Victory*, his willingness to rescue Morrison and later, Lena from respectively, financial and moral distress, is scorned by Davidson as the “compassionate lie” by which he deceives himself, “for his compassion had been as genuine as his shrinking had been” (V, 85), perpetually compromised.

Let us imagine for a moment that literary criticism (excluding editing, genetic criticism, historical research into sources, as imaginative as they often are) is in reality

but another contemporary application/adaptation/adoption of Conrad's work. We critics are being simultaneously faithful and unfaithful to a hidden lode: a "compassionate lie," common to literary analysis. We add *meaning* and *value* beyond limits, by figuratively re-writing it in another speculative medium, thereby dwelling in it. Misidentification and misappropriation are hazards of our attempts to redeem an obscured lode by a salvational *elucidation*.

The last book of *Nostromo*, "The Lighthouse," is dedicated to the prolonged attempt to rescue a lighter load of silver ingots from the San Tomé concession, so as to preserve the viability of an independent Occidental Republic and its capital, Sulaco, from the threat of occupation by the Negro Liberal Monterists who control the hinterland of Costaguana. The expatriate boulevardier, Decoud, and the expatriate Nostromo, acting on rumors of imminent assault, dedicate their efforts to the rescue of the silver. Yet, considering that the mine is highly productive, the salvage of one lighter load seems, like the rescue of Leggatt in "The Secret Sharer," as a distraction, beneficial to attract further investment. Already puffed by the *Times* of London as "The Treasure House of the World" (*N* 450) and by Decoud, the self-styled "brilliant defender of the country's regeneration" (*N* 156) maintaining propaganda in his rag, *Porvenir*, is the object of the rescue: "Oh yes, we must comfort our friends, the speculators" (*N* 175). The speculative puffery seems to be effective, for the Occidental Republic gives every appearance of being, albeit part of a partitioned country, having been rescued. Yet, the rescue is surely provisional in Conrad's narrative.

The officious Captain Mitchell, formerly of O.S.N, Navigation, now a tour guide, informs his imaginary visitors that the company has laid on a new boat, the *Hermes*, to accommodate an influx of tourists. New "weed" (tobacco) and a domestically-produced coffee bean branded as "Tréy de Mayo" (*N* 479) – the "3rd of May," celebrating Spain's independence from Bourbon rule and incidentally the title of Goya's best-known painting – suggests enhanced domestic productivity. New social venues, the Amarillo Club and an Anglo-American Club with regulated gambling, are challenging the local *cargadores*' penchant for petty gaming at dock-side venues. The "rescued" concession has become transformed into a corporation, The Consolidated San Tomé Mines "with interests in copper, gold, and silver" (*N* 481) in which the retired Mitchell owns shares. The enclave would seem to have entered what developmental economists term the "take-off stage."

If so, then the energy dedicated to rescuing a relatively small amount of silver bullion given the massive output of the mine – especially with the historical collapse of the world silver market 1897-1899 – seems unnecessary. But less so if the rescue scheme was designed, as much of the claptrap written in the *Porvenir*, to reassure foreign investment. The maintenance of a continuous flow of capital by "fake news" is crucial to the flow of silver, even as Nostromo, who took his "cut" earlier in the form of silver buttons on the military uniform of an enforcer against labor unrest, is now burying more silver.

Hence, a "partition/theft" of the "rescued" silver will become another "stranded asset" – as was the mine when a youthful Don Carlos Gould, accompanied by Emilia, initially returned to Costaguana to redeem its supposed promise. In an alternative

circulation system, a “stranded asset” redeemed from a formerly “stranded asset,” is buried for later rescue on the *Isabels*, along with another of Conrad’s “Intendeds,” assisting her father in maintaining a lighthouse. No matter what the presumptive asset on which other assets are dependent, Nostromo’s later comment seems accurate: “There is something in a treasure that fastens upon a man’s mind” (N 460), even though the treasures are variously denominated as, often interchangeably, human and material. When the politically-compromised Dr. Moynigham, apprises Emilia Gould that refugees from Sta. Marta are conspiring with the last of the Corbellàns to foment a revolution to re-unify the partitioned Costaguana, she replies, “will there never be any peace?” (N 511). Rescues and refugees being “secret sharers,” by following the silver plot, the reader is implicated in the distraction that treasure or *meaning*, the critic’s supposed buried treasure in our professional quest to rescue or mine it, represents. The potentially redeemable stranded asset, be it Conrad’s “women left behind” (the curious “Intended” of “Heart of Darkness,” Jewel, Aissa, Antonia, or Lena), its buried material synecdoche, or some down-at-the-heels “representative” at an isolated trading post in the Malay Archipelago, are objects attracting both investment and divestment, depending upon timing. Development can be of mutual benefit or oppressive, often indistinguishable.

Rescue and salvage invariably involve careful re-assemblages and re-constructive displacements. *An Outcast of the Islands* deals with events in 1872 whereas *Almayer’s Folly* deals with events in 1857. *The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows* (set in the 1850’s) was *rescued* very late (1920), by an author who, employing metaphors common to seafaring, said that he had “lost sight” of the novel which “remained a dark speck in the misty distance” (R x) as the years and early pages “stretched wide” until it “loomed up [...] among the glittering shallows of the coast” (R x). There was, as Conrad took up the manuscript again, “nothing about it of a grim derelict,” but rather “an air of expectant life” (R x), hence synonymous with the revivable *stranded asset*. “Salvation,” “derelict,” “reclamation” collectively reflects a nomenclature of potential “claims” common to seafaring, the politics of colonialism, and the rehabilitation of outcasts, including the long genetic history of *The Rescue*, as narrated in Conrad’s prefatory “Author’s Note.”¹⁰ In that prefatory comment, Conrad confesses that he “dropped *The Rescue*” (R ix), not because of some “idleness,” but rather the demands of “The Nigger of the Narcissus,” and that the abandonment was “the first crisis of my writing life” (R, ix): a stranded asset.

Acquiring new assets, however, can interrupt or even violate other assets. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, the sea is made analogous to woman in temperament, a familiar pun aligning, *mer* and *mère*, Conrad’s omniscient narrator imagines its purity as having been violated by a large “ditch,” not unlike that metaphoric one from which Lingard “plucked” the stranded cabin boy, Willems. This occurred when “the French

¹⁰ Conrad’s dedication of *The Rescue* to the U.S. Ambassador to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914, Frederick Cortland Penfield, is significant, insofar as it recognized Penfield’s assistance in rescuing a number of citizens unexpectedly caught up in World War I. Politicians, rescuers, and colonists all share what Almayer terms, “a readiness to seize the unexpected opportunity” (OI 304). Conrad may have been familiar with Penfield’s *East of Suez: Ceylon, India, China, and Japan*.

mind set the Egyptian muscle in motion and produced a dismal but profitable *ditch*" (*OI* 12, ital. added) – the Suez Canal – reimagined as rapine of a previously mysterious, innocent, veiled (Muslim?) sea:

The hand of the engineer tore down the veil of the terrible beauty in order that greedy and *faithless* landlubbers might pocket *dividends*. The mystery was destroyed. Like all mysteries it lived only in the hearts of its *worshippers*. (*OI* 12, ital. added)

A unitary faith of the sea was displaced by a pluralistic "faith" in materialism, enhanced by a transactional *ditch*, attracting unstable western speculation. Compressing the distance to a largely monotheistic Muslim Bahasa already converted by earlier Arab traders, late colonizers confronted assets which incited colonial struggles for salvation among rival white contestants. In the words of the devout, well-travelled Babalachi to Lakamba, white colonizers are also slaves in disguise, and hence, unknowing "secret sharers" with their putative subjects:

In many lands I have seen them; always the slaves of their desires, always ready to give up their strength and reason into the hands of some woman. The fate of the Believers is written by the hand of the Mighty One, but they who worship many gods are thrown into the world with smooth foreheads, for any woman's hand to mark their destruction there. Let one white man destroy the other. (*OI* 60)

The successful, nearly monopolizing Southeast Asian trader, Captain Lingard (aka Rajah Laut) of the brig, *Flash*, having rescued Peter Willems as a seventeen-year-old emaciated fugitive cabin boy, "picked up from a ditch" (*OI* 18), places the rescued youth with the trading firm, Hudig & Company, in Macassar, thereby maintaining liaison with a rival colonial power. Later, Lingard learns from the same contacts that his former Dutch protégé has embezzled from the company to pay off gambling debts, while attempting to become a partner. For Willems, unknowingly, has married Hudig's half-breed daughter as part of his employment contract; hence, unwittingly a partner in the trading company that deals profitably in opium, cotton and rattan. Made outcast from both his family and the family company that engages him as an up-and-coming clerk, the doubly-disgraced Willems is next "placed/rescued" by Lingard under the custodial eye of, whom else, but Almayer, in a trading post in fictional Sambir: "It is the second time, Willems, that I take you in hand. Mind it is the last" (*OI* 41). In Conrad, however, there is never a "last rescue," only obscured claims, as even the oft-inebriated Almayer wonders why Willems "seems to have a *claim* of some sort upon Lingard" (*OI* 64, ital. added). Even in the act of betrayal of his saviour, Lingard, Willems utters a wish to engage a not-so-secret sharer, "He wanted to call back, his very life was going away from him" (*OI* 281), equally appropriate to *The Secret Sharer*.

Given the context, the whole question of the nature of "claims" and how they arise poses itself, as the Patai River in Sambir comes to be referred to as "Lingard's own river" (*OI* 49). Because the life and work of the expatriate colonist involve *speculation* in volatile commodities, one rescue necessitates a life of subsequent rescues, as the gambler "doubles down" on his "stakes" in a geopolitical poker game. Conrad's

outcasts spend a lot of leisure time at small stakes billiard and card games; there is no escape from the ups and downs of the speculative life, dimly recalling the typhoons and becalmed moments of the seafaring life. Their distracting addiction to native women, imagined as stranded assets in need of rescue from an oppressive faith or father, is similarly provisional and short-term.

“Deracinated” from his own wife and child as a solitary expatriate, Willems has already been smitten there by the exotic, native Aissa who lives with a blind father, Omar, a Muslim pirate, who formerly controlled access to trade with Sambir, now contested by Abdulla, of Arab descent, and Lingard’s appointed representatives, Almayer and Willems. As inevitably in Conrad, the exotic Aissa is a fickle living commodity whose loyalties to father, faith, lover, and political strategy are both fungible and highly leveraged. Successful investment ventures in the tropics require affectionate or financial tribute, with attendant risks to full recovery.

In the belatedly salvaged *The Rescue* the “Malayan Trilogy’s” omnipresent Lingard, now a trader in arms and protection “contracts” for commercial concessions during a Malay civil war, discovers that his ally-client, water chandler, Hassim of the Wajo Tribe, has lost his share of a “partitioned sovereignty” in a civil war.¹¹ Hassim’s rescue, negotiated by Lingard in an exchange of men for arms, bonds the two as inseparable, but unlikely allies. Coincidentally, as narrated in a “back story,” this politically-risky partnership foregrounds Lingard’s awareness of a foreign-owned yacht aground in the shallows. The lavish yacht’s owner, Travers, once “rescued,” accuses his fellow occidental of being a mere brigand adventurer hoping to salvage his stranded luxury vessel, *Hermit*. Hence, Captain Lingard, like colonizing Britain itself, is simultaneously needed as a rescuer by the *stranded asset* and accused by the potentially rescued asset of self-interest. In the words of Carter, Travers’ plaintiff, “that strange rescuer himself was bringing the news of danger” (*R* 50): a local Malay civil war is also being fought in the area.

Hence, there are mutually-disguising and hence conflictual “stranded assets”: material (Travers’ grounded yacht); a political ally (a royal Wajo family on the losing side, of a civil war, Hassim and his sister, Immada); Lingard’s love interest (the maritally-distressed Mrs. Travers); Mr. Travers, her wealthy husband, later taken hostage by one of the parties to the civil war in Malaya while on a stroll ashore. Finally, he fails to rescue his *seorong* (Mal. “most dedicated servant”), Jaffir. The answered “call” can kill other stranded assets, in this case Lingard’s “man Friday.”

The Malay Archipelago is populated by stranded, adrift, homeless adventurers, affluent and less so. Like the British Empire, Lingard’s superior power on water, “the floating wisdom of the South Seas” (*OI* 131) – to borrow the appraisal of the native Babalatchi – is in contrast with an interior “heart of darkness,” into which occidentals disappear. The native Malay warring tribes can threaten and tempt intruders by land

¹¹ The Wajo Tribe, a subdivision of the Orang Asli, an indigenous people of Malaya, combined sea trading with hunter-gatherer proclivities. In Conrad’s *Rescue* Lingard’s alliance with Hassim is explained as a shared respect for the British aristocratic colonial practice requiring that one be “diplomatic and courageous,” so as to secure the favour of the existentially-threatened, which comes to include, ironically, Lingard.

or sea, as can their women, as befits the amphibious native inhabitants of flexible loyalties and partitioned domains.

When Willems' masculine ambition to recover his lost honor by redeeming his past indiscretions is sapped by the deceptively beautiful Aissa on Sambir in *An Outcast of the Islands*, it is narrated as a devouring emotional jungle, "being lost among shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly" (OI 80). Before his death, he dreams of a white man's world where materialities and loyalties are clearly marked rather than diffused and undetermined:

Men like himself. Good men who would *rescue* him, [...] take him far away where there was trade, and houses, and other men that could understand him exactly, appreciate his capabilities. (OI 329, ital. added)

His "rescue fantasy" is indistinguishable from homesickness: a rescue from Lingard's rescue.

Mrs. Travers of *The Rescue*, in imitation of Hassim's sister, Immada, and Nina of *Almayer's Folly*, begins to dress as a Malay, assuming a "local" appearance which draws Lingard's interest as another potential stranded asset to be salvaged. Stranded and becalmed in a boring marriage to an affluent British toff, Mrs. Travers *converts* to the local by donning her *sarong kebaya* and tight-fitting *baju*. Is she identifying with local culture, affecting a nativity to lure Lingard, as Aissa did Willems, or merely duplicating their joint alienation from western culture? Conrad obscures the difference between assimilation, alienation, and affected style – as does much modern fashion. Like Jewel in *Lord Jim*, or Kurtz's Intended, she fades into the unconsummated distance, as does Lingard, another of Conrad's rescuers, confronted with increasingly partitioned assets in need of rescue.¹² Read allegorically as a perversion of a salvational mission, all aboard Travers grounded *Hermit* would have been possible guests of the empty hotel known as "Almayer's Folly" in the novel bearing the same name. Did British colonialism in Southeast Asia ultimately result in a Raffles Hotel rather than justice or knowledge, an altogether different mission?

Emmanuel Levinas, especially in *Totality and Infinity*, like Conrad, reminds us that we can never possess the Other. Hence traditional metaphysics which installs categories of the understanding after Kant, would be a hoax. An entreating "face" is a trace of itself given over to my inadequate responsibility. It is *as if* I am responsible for its mortality, with survivor's guilt. My responsibility for the Other would be rooted in my subjectivity, which is not derivative, but constitutes it: hence, *ethical*, not theoretical.¹³ My Being-ness is not a derivative feature of my subjectivity, but rather founds a subjective being in the world by giving it a responsive *direction*, away from

¹² See my forthcoming essay, "The Trope of 'partitioned sovereign(ties)': Shadows of Poland in Conrad," in *Spectral Conrad*, ed. Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech (New York, Lublin: Columbia University Press, Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2025).

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay in Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 152-174; 194-211. In Levinas' early *De l'évasion (On Escape)* he actually compares the Being – the *il y a* – to something adrift, afflicted with nausea (seasickness?) until it is re-constituted as an illeity.

the drifting “uprootedness” felt by the Decoud’s, Lingard’s, and Heyst’s of Conrad’s fiction. In explaining his exaggerated *attentativeness* (my portmanteau qualifier of Weil’s “attentiveness”) to Mrs. Travers’ curious situation as something heretofore alien to him, Lingard confesses to a secret sharing:

It is *your face* that I brought back with me aboard the brig. I don’t know why. I didn’t look at you more than anyone else. (R 323, ital. added)

In Levinas’ work, the face losing face while pleading for help (not coincidentally, perhaps a definition of love) engages us ethically, giving my being a moral directionality as a potential secret sharer. The task is not “to love how to know” (metaphysics) but “to come to know how to love” (sentient/affective) intersubjectively.

A rhetorical question almost asks itself, to wit., can we ever live our own lives without encountering a distressed asset? The *stranded* is often in conflict with competing appeals, demanding that we distinguish between a self-interested rescue (affection for the unhappily-married Mrs. Travers); the combination of political and commercial obligation to the oppressed to whom we have become allied (Hassim); and the urgent need to rescue a potential rival, her husband, Mr. Travers, from certain death. Everything becomes a potential redemptive *cause*, including Conrad’s rescue of *The Rescue*, all open to failure.

Lingard’s redemption of a yacht stranded in the shallows has in *The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows*, had its genetic duplicate in the “call” of a long-abandoned manuscript:

[...] every stroke of the pen was taking me away from the abandoned “Rescue,” not without some compunction on my part, but with a gradually diminishing resistance; till at last, *I let myself go*, as if recognizing a superior influence against which it was useless to contend. (R x, ital. added)

How do we discern “an air of expectant life” (R x) from an abandoned manuscript previously regarded as a “grim derelict” (R x)? Does an open-ness to the redemption of some stranded asset – be it manuscript, real or imaginary lost treasure mine, lover – lend a spiritual dimension to the self-serving interest that was colonialism? Is Mrs. Travers a Lady Chatterley (in waiting for awakening) by a seafaring gypsy rather than a gamekeeper?



FIG. 1. Fertility carving “rescued” from a UNICEF benefit exhibition in Irian Jay Indonesia by the author and photographed by Hiromi Gordon.

As *The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows* opens, the brig, *Lightning*, is immovably becalmed in shallows until one of the Bugis deck hands thinks has heard something in the darkness. The alerted, overly “attentive” (R 27) Captain Lingard always “seemed to listen yet” (R 25, ital. added), as if a continuous watchfulness (for commercial opportunity or self- defense) defines him. The characteristically “invisible” (R 8) Lingard, addressed as a symbolic “father” (OI 361) by Almayer, Willems, and even so appointed by Hassim with the words, “you shall be the father who advises for good [...]” (R 93), is reduced to the status of a “shuttle diplomat” to dependencies who will both represent and betray him. Like the British colonial presence, he fades in and out of all three volumes of Conrad’s *Malay Trilogy*.¹⁴ Though ultimately losing the speedy vessels, *Flash* and *Lightning*, trading income, and political control of his entrepot concessions to the rival, Abdulla, in Sambir, Lingard is a figure of survival.

Captain Lingard is “a man of high mind and of pure heart,” one of those who “lay the foundation of a flourishing state on the idea of pity and justice” (R 4). Unfortunately, it is the Devonshire native’s idea of pity and justice – easily morphed into a contempt of the natives – that brings him repeatedly a cropper. In the words of Mrs. Travers to

¹⁴ An admittedly radical interpretation might imagine Captain Lingard as the intermittently absentee father of Empire and his succession of adopted “sons,” Almayer, Willems, and Hassim, as the last orphan-figures of the Victorian novel, historically discontinuous, estranged apprentices, serving time.

her estranged husband, in purgatory between rescue and death aboard Jorgenson's rusting hulk of a political half-way house, the salvaged *Emma*: "the first thing was not to liberate you, but to get you into his keeping" (R 273), as a negotiating chip. But that strategy often comes close to *brigandage*. The target of the rescue always challenges one's moral conscience in Conrad.

Like the British colonizers of Southeast Asia, Captain Lingard selectively uses both hard and soft power.¹⁵ In *The Rescue* he outfits the abandoned hulk *Emma* with another expatriate "rescued fragment" from dereliction, the financially washed-up Jorgenson. The beached human and marine vessels stand guard over ammunition and materials to bribe or pacify a flickering insurgency that has ousted Lingard's royal allies, Hassim and Immada:

[...] she was stocked with muskets and gunpowder, with bales of longcloth, with bags of rice and [...] brass guns. She contained everything necessary for dealing death and distributing bribes to act on the cupidity and upon the fears of men. (R 278)

As the proverbial turtles of expanding size who hold up the flat earth in the Hindu aphorism of infinite regress, so in Conrad's novels it is always "rescue all the way down." In an attempt to save the Willems smitten by an increasingly estranged Aissa with whom he had "gone native" in *An Outcast of the Islands*, Tom Lingard, restless British adventurer, unhappy in his native land, had responsibly brought Willems' Sirani wife and child to rescue his protégé, "deracinated" from sponsor, family, law and the Malay culture, in none of which he is at home. When his jealous Sambir exotic companion, Aissa, kills Willems, she does Captain Lingard's work for him, dispensing with the compromised grifter/betrayer.

A serial presence in *The Malay Trilogy* concludes with a now "listless" Tuan Tom realizing that his "indomitable strength is robbed of its fire" (R 424), a master reduced to negotiating a prisoner exchange by offering himself as ransom for an ineffective promise and empty honor. Like the twilight recession of the British Empire, reduced to restoring loyal, but politically irrelevant royalty to historical thrones, Lingard's slow retreat from politics and the personal romance with Mrs. Travers resists resolution. Their relationship is imaginatively *partitioned* like Costaguana politically in *Nostramo* or the concluding separation of Aziz and Fielding in *A Passage to India*. Even to those colonized by his presence, like Mrs. Travers, Lingard seems inexplicably, *foundationally absent* and narratively resistant to representation:

But you know, I can not – what shall I say? – imagine him at all. He has nothing in common with the mankind I know. There is nothing to begin upon. (R 149)

Yet, paradoxically she "found herself slowly *invaded* by the masterful figure" (R 215, ital. added), as if spiritually colonized, by a totalization of one she calls, not

¹⁵ Sir Gerald Templer, who as High Commissioner, initiated the so-called "hearts and minds" policy in Malaya during *Dzururat* (Ar: "Emergency") post-independence (1958-1968), cleared secluded plantations and effectively urbanized remote areas with "new towns" that denied the MNLAs refuge in jungles. Intriguingly, Lingard uses strategies from a similar tool kit in his trade "settlements" in the Malayan Archipelago in Conrad's *Malayan Trilogy* to limit dark jungle hideouts.

by his name, but rather as a quasi-abstraction, the Man of Fate. Like the British Empire, “in him crime, sacrifice, tenderness, devotion and the madness of a fixed idea” (R 215) co-exist, yet “apart from social organization,” for he “had no place in it” (R 167). He is the Ur-misfit, existing as Pure Idea.

If Hegel be correct in his belief that Minerva (the owl of wisdom) takes flight at the sunset of an Idea, then the setting sun of Empire at the conclusion of *The Rescue* that accompanies the separation of Tuan Tom and Mrs. Travers, and the sunset of Conrad’s authorial career in 1920 is a hunting ground. The Man of Fate with a fixed idea has had his final, less-than-successful rescue, existing only as an archaic guardian of a line (Lingard). He has been (narratively) rescued from the status of an historically-stranded asset: a literary legend, imagined by us readers, even if escaping Mrs. Travers’ imagination as a lover.

Poly-lingual Tuan Tom with his powerful brigs, “placements” of Rajah’s in profitable concessions, and neutralizing adversaries is now a diminished figure, accompanying post-colonial sunsets: Ian Fleming’s Man of Fate, James Bond. The comparison may not be exaggerated. After the 1956 failure of the Anglo-French-Israeli attempt to rescue the Suez Canal (Conrad’s “vile ditch”) from Egyptian nationalization, Prime Minister Anthony Eden, a member of Churchill’s famous war cabinet, went on a Jamaican holiday. Contemplating the end of the British presence east of Suez, heart-broken, tipsy and on tranquillizers, Eden was greeted by consoling hosts: Ian Fleming and his darkly-complexioned native companion.¹⁶

Like the tale of the disappeared gringos prospecting for gold, never to be heard of again which informs a foundational legend in *Nostromo*, Lingard becomes one of those ghosts “lost” to the shallows of history. He shares an existence in a narrative purgatory, as if awaiting, like the manuscript of *The Rescue* and the Empire, some narrative salvage vessel whose presence Conrad addresses. Not a casualty of memory, these men became an anonymous collective:

They cannot be said to have been forgotten, since they have not been known at all. They were lost in the common crowd of seamen – traders of the Archipelago. (R 4)

As if on cue, in December 2018 an imaginative Singapore artist, Teng Kai Wei, used intersecting light beams and a special paint to “de-monumentalize” a familiar landmark at crowded Empress Place. The statue was that of the country’s 19th century founder, Sir Stamford Raffles, memorialized in a luxury hotel there, who had traded portions of Java to the Dutch colonial rivals for Singapore and other Straits Settlements. Teng’s achievement was surely a parody of modern Singapore’s arbitrary “cancel culture” of censorship of films, novels, and performances that “offend local sensitivities.” A Singapore government official embraced the logic of the erasure of a foundational presence and author of books on the flora and fauna of Malaya to justify the absence of prosecution for the defacement of a national monument: “Singaporeans built this country, not British traders.” Erasure in some double sense becomes part of the legend, as Conrad anticipated in his “Introduction” to *The Rescue*.

¹⁶ Nicholas Shakespeare, *Ian Fleming: The Complete Man* (New York: Harper, 2023), pp. 440-452.

The novels of Patrick Modiano, Nobel Prize Emeritus, rescue a French cohort, similarly “lost” to historical, social, or political erasure – petty criminals, prostitutes, the disappeared of Nazi occupation, bankrupts, Vichy collaborators, or faded memory. Theirs is nothing less than “une longue période d’hibernation,”¹⁷ from which Modiano awakens them by loaning his own projected voice to “re-monumentalize” their dreams: an untrustworthy “chanteur.” Marlow, “everyman” on Conrad’s narrative night watch, is a purveyor of “snatched” narratives, thereby similarly combining the roles of rescuer/inhabitant/secret sharer and invariably untrustworthy claimant for your *attentative* (provisional listening) presence.

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¹⁷ Patrick Modiano, *Chevreuse* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 15.