Prospectus

Beyond the Pale: The “Other” Women of the Raj

For my English Honors Thesis I would like to explore the representation of native women in colonial fiction during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I have chosen to focus my research on South Asia primarily because of the preeminent power of the British Raj. India’s rich history of colonization produced many outstanding texts by some of the greatest authors of the Victorian and Edwardian ages. Because of this there is no dearth of literature that both glorifies and questions the colonial agenda. The novels I am most interested in studying are preoccupied with relationships between native people and European colonizers. I will be focusing on the specific role of women in these texts; however I do not intend to draw general conclusions on the role women played in colonial lands. There is far too much variety in language, class, customs, and cultures for me to do so. Rather, I would like to scrutinize such generalizations and stereotypes found between multiple texts in their portrayal of native women in order to analyze the colonial mindset during the height and decline of British imperialism.

One of the main questions I will be focusing on is the notion of savagery and “backwardness” that European colonizers deemed endemic to their colonized lands. I mean to discover whether women are utilized in perpetuating this belief or if they offer any means of countering this stereotype. Connected to this issue is the role of women in the family, both as daughters reared in a colonized land and mothers acting as caregivers. This difference is significant because it can indicate the effects of colonization in culture and modernization. This also brings up the role of marriage, which is a very important facet of the life of young native women, especially in cultures that practice arranged marriages. The treatment of women across multiple classes is also a rich issue, because class is what determines whether a woman is participating in prostitution or the purdah, and thus changes the role of sexuality, education, and many other aspects of life.
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The role of women in the lives of European men is also an issue I would like to explore. Women tend to play the part of secondary characters, rarely existing as protagonists. However, their significance to the European experience is paramount. Following this idea, I would like to study the role sexuality has in the portrayal of female native characters. The physical aspects given to women from youth to elderly age will be part of my analysis, including how the European man responds to the woman's appearance. Another side of understanding the role of women in regards to colonizers can be found by analyzing the existence of "Eurasian" characters. "Eurasians" are the offspring of European and native people. As they are almost always the offspring of native women and English men, their role and their treatment in the text can be studied in tandem with their mother's experience. Lastly, the relationship between European women and native women is an issue I would very much like to explore. I would like to study their encounters, and the way both respond to their foreign counterpart. Through this analysis I hope to discover whether these encounters only serve in sustaining the colonial agenda, or whether they can break down the wall between European and "other." I am interested in how multiple authors, male and female, treat colonial encounters, and whether there is a difference between the way European men and women feel and respond to the presence of a native woman.

As of now I plan to write multiple chapters, each focusing on different authors. One chapter in particular may focus specifically on the companion books Bengal Nights and It Does Not Die by Mircea Eliade and Maitreyi Devi respectively. Other authors I have been considering include Rudyard Kipling, Flora Annie Steel, E.M. Forster, and George Orwell. Important to my research will be texts written by Indian women at the time as well, for by reading the personal and diverse existences that they write about, I can better understand the scope of the stereotypes colonizing writers assigned to a native woman's life.
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In order to successfully explore my topic, my thesis would need both post-colonial and feminist theory to structure its argument. I have been exposed to post-colonial theory many times in my education, first through my Studies in Narratives class with Professor Heitzman, and then through Fictions of Empire with Professor Seshadri. In Professor Lydenberg’s Advanced Seminar: Topics in Theory, post-colonial theory was used in a unit concerning “The Other.” I plan on delving into more critical theory as my research continues. Background in feminist theory also began during my Studies in Narrative course, but continued through Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries.
Annotated Reading List
September 2013

Below is a list of the critical texts and novels I will be using to explore my topic. Texts that have already been read are marked with an asterisk. I fully expect to include more sources as I delve more thoroughly into my research.

Primary Texts

Conrad, Joseph. Aymayer’s Folly.*
This novel is set in Indonesia during the late 19th century, and explores the disintegration of a Dutch trader’s colonial dream. The Dutch trader’s daughter, Nina, a mixed-race woman, is unable to be identified as white, and her inevitable destiny to fully become native ensures the downfall of her father.

A semi-autobiographical account of Maitreyi Devi’s life, focusing around her brief love affair with Mircea Eliade in 1930. This book counters Eliade’s own novel concerning their relationship, unraveling many of the misconceptions and lies Devi found in his portrayal of her family and herself.

A semi-autobiographical account of the year Mircea Eliade spent in a secret love affair with Maitreyi Devi while living in her family’s home in Calcutta. Eliade includes many spurious scenes of sexual intimacy that rely on Maitreyi’s “otherness.”

Forster, Edward Morgan. A Passage to India.*
This novel focuses on the unsurpassable boundaries that block intimacy between people of India and England during the colonial era. Its plot turns around a perceived attempt of sexual assault by an Indian man to a young British woman. It explores two sides of representation: how the British perceive the Indians and how the Indians perceive the British.

This compilation of short stories is replete with tales such as “Lispeth,” “Beyond the Pale,” and “Without Benefit of the Clergy” that feature native women as prominent characters.

The three main characters of this text are Eurasian characters, one of which is a woman. It takes place after World War II and particularly focuses on the Eurasian population, and their unidentifiable identity in British India.

This novel is about an Englishman in Burma during the decline of the Raj. As he contemplates his profound loneliness in the savage, yet beautiful, land, his former prostitute is used by a seemingly innocuous enemy to ensure his downfall.

Steel, Flora Annie. On the Face of the Waters.
This novel written by a British Woman is a historical account of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. It offers a woman’s perspective of the violent revolution that eventually dissolved the British East India Company.

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This collection of works contains texts produced during the reign of Britain in India by native women such as Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji, Sarojini Naidu, and Toru Dutt. It will offer a foundation to use when contemplating the British writer’s portrayal of native women.

**Historical Texts**


This text follows the true account of James Kirkpatrick, a British soldier whose loyalties to the East India Company are reversed when he falls in love with Khair, a native woman in a purdah and engaged to a native man.

**Secondary Texts**

Ghosh, Durba. *Sex and the Family in Colonial India.*

This text explores the effects gender, sexuality, and race played in constructing the colonial government, culture, and societal standards in British India. It follows the stories of native and British relations, from concubines to Eurasians, across all social classes.

Roy, Shampa. *In Zenanas and Beyond.*

This text is a compilation of travel accounts, letters, essays, and more written solely by British women during the colonial era. It explores how British women participated in the politics of creating a colonial empire through their portrayal of native women.

Sen, Indrani. *Woman and Empire: Representations in the writings of British India, 1858-1900 (New perspectives in South Asian history).*

This text uses both literary sources and non-literary sources, such as periodicals, to explore the perception of British, native, and mixed-race women during the colonial era.
Writing Sample 1

Professor Wallace

Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries

4 December 2012

Knowing One’s Place: Social Mobility in Emma

In Jane Austen’s *Emma*, a strong argument can be made that the novel argues against social mobility and fights to maintain the status quo within a flourishing, though strongly stratified, society. The eponymous protagonist lives in luxury, marries Mr. Knightley and his prosperous estate, and realizes that her friendship to the lovely, yet poor and illegitimate Harriet must be dissolved because they come from two widely opposing social classes. The novel contains an egregiously stereotypical upstart by the name of Mrs. Elton who personifies the pretentious affectations of “new money.” Even the struggling Jane Fairfax, a lady by birth whom fortune treats ill by forcing her to become a governess, is rehabilitated into the higher rungs of the landed gentry class through marriage in the end. All the narratives of these plot-driving characters suggest that there is safety and comfort in such a definitively divided society, yet the stories of some of the minor characters seem to suggest that social elevation is actually a legitimate possibility that does not always threaten to dismantle society. Two sets of characters whose rises into high society are subtly woven into the text are Mr. Weston and the Cole family. Inserted early into the novel, Mr. Weston’s story seems to outline both the dangers of attempting and the correct way to execute a rise into society, while the gradual introduction of the Cole family encapsulates Austen’s ideal, if somewhat too obsequious, mode of entering high society without damaging the social order. Through her minor characters Austen suggests that minor social mobility is possible, provided one never disavows his modest origin, pursues reasonable ambitions that work beneath the highest rungs of society, and always defers to the rights of birth that apply to all members of the landed gentry, regardless of wealth.
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The history of Mr. Weston’s first marriage to Miss Churchill exposes the dangers of putting on airs and assuming a position in society on which one has yet to establish a claim. Austen first introduces Mr. Weston by explaining that he is “of a respectable family, which for the last two or three generations had been rising into gentility and property” (Austen 16). The tone of the narrator in this statement is perfectly neutral, allowing the reader to infer that the family’s gradual elevation towards “gentility and property” is wholly acceptable. Social mobility is thus far tolerable; however, Austen quickly reveals that Mr. Weston begins to veer off the safe course established by his family. She writes that “on succeeding early in life to a small independence” the young Mr. Weston “had become indisposed for any of the more homely pursuits in which his brothers were engaged” (Austen 16). In other words, the escalating successes of Mr. Weston’s family caused him to cultivate an egotistic self-image in which employment suitable to his position was viewed as “homely.” Instead of being satisfied as a tradesman like his family, Mr. Weston gratified his pretentions by “entering in the militia of his country” (Austen 16), a position deemed suitable for many second and third sons of the landed gentry class excluded from the rights of primogeniture. By enrolling in the militia as a young man, Mr. Weston worked to place himself above his actual rank in the novel, which, despite his good education and moderate wealth, is still not equal to the same privileges as those born into the landed gentry class.

Though able to flourish as a captain in the militia, Mr. Weston’s rising conceit becomes problematic when the “chances of his military life” introduce him to Miss Churchill (Austen 16). Austen defines Miss Churchill as “a woman of a great Yorkshire family” alone (Austen 16), emphasizing her social status as the only characteristic she contains that Mr. Weston covets. She comes from a very high family of the landed gentry class and is thus the exact bride Mr. Weston is looking for to cement his position as part of the landed gentry. However, despite his reasonable wealth and military status, “the connection would offend” the “pride and importance”
of Miss Churchill's family (Austen 16). Mr. Weston still has ambitions that are disproportionate to his actual status, and when the marriage occurs and Miss Churchill is "[thrown]...off with due decorum" (Austen 16), the consequences of his pretentions become manifest. The narrator goes on to describe the marriage as "an unsuitable connection [that does] not produce much happiness" (Austen 16). Miss Churchill "[does] not cease to love her husband, but...[wants] at once to be the wife of Captain Weston, and Miss Churchill of Enscome" (Austen 17). This statement, along with the choice of the word "unsuitable," inculcates the idea that the two character's attempt to unite two completely divided classes is what causes the downfall of their marriage. The crux of the problem is that Miss Churchill is unsuited to the lower status that Mr. Weston dragher to, and that Mr. Weston is too unsuitable to be accepted by her family. Ultimately the unhappy marriage results in the death of Miss Churchill, who is given no chance to recuperate her position in the novel. Even Mr. Weston, "who had been considered, especially by the Churchills, as making such an amazing match" is said to have "much of the worst of the bargain" for he is left bereft of his money, his child, and his wife (Austen 17). All the disastrous consequences of this marriage occur simply due to a corrupt attempt of social mobility, in which Mr. Weston tries to improve his position by breaking into a family much too elevated above his low social status. Furthermore, Austen creates a situation in which both sides, Mr. Weston and Miss Churchill, are punished, suggesting that maintaining the status quo over an ill-performed attempt to better oneself preserves the safety of the entire community, rather than promoting one side at the expense of the other.

Mr. Weston's response to the fallout of his marriage exposes an acceptable way to successfully better one's position in society without disturbing the stability of the established order. In the wake of his loss of wife and child, Austen writes that "A complete change of life [becomes] desirable" for him (Austen 17). He quits the militia and "[engages] in trade" (Austen 17), returning to the position he initially deemed a "homely pursuit" but now recognizes as
suitable to his status (Austen 16). Instead of trying to raise himself to the landed gentry class through marriage to a woman in its highest ranks, he chooses to work in his trade for "eighteen or twenty years" until he can "secure the purchase of a little estate adjoining Highbury, which he [has] always longed for" (Austen 17). Only after succeeding in his trade enough to purchase a modest estate through his own means does he decide to choose a wife again, one much more suitable to his station. Miss Taylor, the governess of Emma, is still technically a lady of the landed gentry though she is "portionless" and must work (Austen 17). By marrying the newly propertied Mr. Weston she is rehabilitated into the landed gentry class, as he simultaneously completes his social transformation. It is a doubly gratifying situation, for Mr. Weston finally succeeds in attaining social mobility while saving a member of the landed gentry class in the process. Austen succinctly summarizes Mr. Weston's journey as she outlines her idea of the perfect path towards social mobility when she writes, "He [has] made his fortune, bought his house and obtained his wife; and [is] beginning a new period of existence with every probability of greater happiness than in any yet passed through" (Austen 18). Social mobility is fruitfully achieved in this case, but only after Mr. Weston's pretentions have been dropped, and his impossible ambition to break into the highest level of society has been corrected to a more attainable goal.

To further emphasize the need for a gradual, unpretentious ascension into a higher level of society Austen introduces the Cole family late into the novel. The Coles' introduction is as understated as their rise into society and fortune, and it highlights the primarily low level status of the connections they make into the landed gentry class. The first allusion to them made is by Mr. Elton when he mentions in an offhanded comment that "his friend Cole had been saying so much about his dining with him" (Austen 79). They next appear much later when Miss Bates elaborates on how Mrs. Cole has just visited and "just called in for ten minutes, and had been so good as to sit an hour with them, she had taken a piece of cake and been so kind as to say she
liked it very much” (Austen 146). In both of these cases, the Coles display a fine amount of intimacy with members of the landed gentry class, for although the Bates are impoverished and Mr. Elton is only a clergyman they are all born into a high class. Mr. Knightley himself makes an offhand mention of Mr. Cole before the Coles are formally introduced as well, though his is of a different nature than that of Mr. Elton and Miss Bates. In a scene in which Miss Bates is battering Mr. Knightley about a letter of Mr. Cole’s, Mr. Knightley mentions that he “was with Mr. Cole on business an hour and a half ago” and has already seen the letter (Austen 163). Unlike the meetings between the Coles and Mr. Elton and the Bates, Mr. Knightley qualifies their meeting as due to “business,” as if making it a point to reiterate that their relationship is built on grounds of business first, and any intimacy is a byproduct of this. Indeed, when the history of the Coles is finally explained in the text, Emma’s impression of them is that because they are “of low origin, in trade” they are “only moderately genteel” and “they ought to be taught that it [is] not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them” (Austen 194). Intimacy between the Coles and the Bates is perfectly acceptable due to the lower level of the Bates in the spectrum of the landed gentry class. However, Mr. Knightley and Emma stand much higher in social class, making their commingling much less frequent and much less intimate.

Despite Emma’s disdain for the rise of the Coles, their history represents the quintessential example of successful social mobility. Austen writes that the Coles “[have] been settled some years ir. Highbury…. On their first coming into the country, they had lived in proportion to their income, quietly, keeping little company, and that little unexpensively” (Austen 193-4). Only after they accumulate wealth do “their views [increase]…they [add] to their house, to their number of servants, to their expenses of every sort; and [are], in fortune and style of living, second only to the family at Hartfield” (Austen 194). Although they experience such a sudden transformation from simple means to exorbitant wealth, they never lose sight of
their "low origin, in trade" (Austen 194). Austen herself characterizes the family as "unpretending" (Austen 194), a sentiment Mr. Knightley continues to impress when he mentions to Emma, "Cole does not want to be wiser or Wittier than his neighbours" (Austen 268). Emma herself is taught to treat the Coles with more civility once she experiences how they "[express] themselves so properly...[with] so much real attention...so much consideration for her father" (Austen 195). Through this statement, Austen is highlighting the fact that the Coles, despite their great triumph in social mobility, still retain an excess of humility and deference towards families such as the Woodhouses. According to Mr. Weston, the Coles "have been [the Woodhouse's] neighbors [for] ten years" (Austen 197), yet only now do they feel they can invite the Woodhouses to a party without being presumptuous. Even so, their manner of invitation is blatantly obsequious, for they write in their late invitation that they "would have solicited the honour earlier, but had been waiting the arrival of a folding-screen from London, which they hoped might keep Mr. Woodhouse from any draught of air, and therefore induce him the more readily to give them the honour of his company" (Austen 195). At the party itself Mrs. Cole displays her desire to flatter Emma and acknowledge her own lower status very openly by mentioning how she does "not know one note from another" on her new pianoforté, and that she has a "hope that some of [her] good neighbours might be so obliging occasionally to put it to a better use...and that really is the reason why the instrument was bought—or else [she is] sure [they] ought to be ashamed of it" (Austen 201). As the pianoforté in Austen's time is an instrument typically denoting high class, any shame Mrs. Cole would experience in owning one would be brought on by her fear of assuming airs and affectations. Instead, she averts this possibility by telling Emma the instrument was bought for Emma and all other more genteel neighbours that would "be so obliging" to play for the Coles. The fact that the Coles can even convince Emma to admit that "she [does] not repent her condescension in going to the Coles" and that they are "worthy people, who deserved to be made happy!" forces the reader to
acknowledge they have successfully infiltrated the higher classes of Highbury (Austen 215). This phenomenon is only so successful because of their unfailing modesty, and their refusal to assume pretentions about their societal gains.

As the novel develops, minor characters like Mr. Weston and the Coles tend to fall into the background as plots become thicker and more nuanced around the protagonists. Thus is the fate of all minor characters; however, in Emma these characters fall even more readily to the back of the readers’ mind precisely because they make it a point not to call attention to themselves. No one can forget the obnoxious affectations of Mrs. Elton, nor can they forget that she is what Emma refers to as “A little upstart, vulgar being” (Austen 259). Mrs. Elton can only be looked on with cisdain for her arrogance and pretentions as she fails to situate herself comfortably within the high society of Highbury. Meanwhile, the subdued Coles find themselves gracefully accepted by all into the society of the landed gentry class, once it becomes clear just how modest and unassuming they are in their wealth. Mr. Weston too is able to elevate himself into an accepting society, once he leaves behind his youthful ego and learns that social mobility is possible when restricted, and may not even be worth attempting if it threatens the stability of a society. The novel ends with Emma contemplating the dissolution of her dear friendship to Harriet into “a calmer sort of goodwill...that ought to be, and must be...in the most gradual, natural manner” (Austen 451). This line suggests the comfort in a natural separation of classes in which people find their place and survive within its constraints peacefully without changing the status quo. However, the minor stories of Mr. Weston and the Coles fight against such a standard division. Through their mutual discoveries of gradual, subdued, and moderate paths to increase their wealth and establish a more luxurious living situation, they show that social mobility is a real possibility, provided one does not let his fancies run too far.

Works Cited

Writing Sample 2

Professor Seshadri

Fictions of Empire

15 December 2012

Almayer’s Folly: The Imperialist Dream

In *Almayer’s Folly* by Joseph Conrad, the eponymous protagonist named Kaspar Almayer spends the last moments of his life inside a house of the same name. Within its walls he wallows in all of his failed dreams of living the traditional tales of colonial victory and a life of glory. The novel, in fact, is highly preoccupied with the deterioration of colonization, especially highlighting the psychological responses this phenomenon produced. Joseph Conrad’s novel is named *Almayer’s Folly* because it highlights the fact that Almayer’s tragedy is self-inflicted, caused by his own mistakes rather than brought upon him by the volition of other characters. Almayer’s folly that initiates every mistake he makes over the course of the novel is that he foolishly deceives himself into disavowing the decline of the power of colonialism, which he then exacerbates by imposing them upon his daughter. Already a problem, his ultimate folly is not only that he clings to this fantasy built on greed and glories long past attainable, but also that by blindly imposing this dream onto his daughter, he ruins the only redeeming relationship he ever has by attempting to realize his impossible goals around her body.

Almayer’s folly of pursuing foolish illusions of colonial triumph works as a vicious circle: he continuously becomes more entrenched in his folly every time he lets it guide his actions. The crux of his illusions is centered in the common imperialist dreams of striking into the East to make a fortune, in order to return to Europe as a wealthy adventurer. Already problematic because of the decline of colonialism, Almayer is even further removed from realizing this goal because, as he himself admits, he “[has] not been to Europe” (Conrad 15). Conrad strongly suggests that Almayer’s misapprehensions of the downward trajectory of
colonialism originate in his childhood, where his mother first inculcates fantasies of Europe by “[bewailing] the lost glories of Amsterdam” while his father “[grumbles] all day at the stupidity of the native gardeners” he is forced to work with (Conrad 5). With such an idealistic mirage of his motherland and pessimistic view of civilization in Java, Almayer’s colonial superiority complex is ingrained into his psyche before he even begins his quest for “a glorious life” (Conrad 15). This idea is upheld by the language Conrad employs as Almayer first ventures into Macassar when Conrad writes, “Almayer left his home with a light heart and a lighter pocket, speaking English well, and strong in arithmetic; ready to conquer the world, never doubting that he would” (Conrad 5). The lightness of his heart and the complete lack of doubt in his future expose just how foolishly unaware Almayer is of the realities of colonialism.

Almayer’s first tangible mistake that arises due to his folly of grandiose dreams is his marriage to “a Malay girl,” despite the fact that it leaves him with “a confused consciousness of shame that he is a white man” (Conrad 8-9). He goes so far as to disavow his own reluctance, making this mistake solely in pursuit of his ultimate fantasy that “[gleams] like a fairy palace,” “the big mansion in Amsterdam, that earthly paradise of his dreams, where [he would] be made king amongst men by old Lingard’s money” (Conrad 9). This choice is what deposits him amongst the “unscrupulous intrigues and...fierce trade competition” of the native Malays in Sambir, where he is first confronted with the reality of colonialism that labels him and other Europeans as “not wanted” (Conrad 20). Again, the repercussions of Almayer’s folly manifest when the natives are able to exploit him and spy on him, for he is completely unaware to the fact that his friendship as well is “not wanted.” Despite being the only white man in Sambir, experiencing “isolation and despair” from “the savage life to which he was condemned” (Conrad 23), and thus personally representing the decline of colonialism himself, Almayer still refuses to abandon his unrealistic dreams of wealth and glory. Instead he chooses to focus on a new, more concrete illusion for the future. This new impossible hope is introduced in the first chapter as a
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"dream of splendid future" in which Almayer, and now his daughter as well, "would live in Europe... rich and respected...[with] his immense wealth" (Conrad 3). This becomes his second, and most consequential illusion.

By superimposing his European ideals and dreams onto his half-caste daughter, Nina, Almayer contradicts the colonial nature of his folly, exacerbating his obsession by becoming even more unaware of his reality. Nina, a half-caste girl of Malay and European ancestry, is openly held separate from Europeans; a fact which Almayer, immersed in denial, cannot comprehend. Even if met with civility and not contempt, a minor character explains the simplicity of her inevitable ostracism from even the European society in Singapore with the statement, "What can you do? ...You can’t make her white" (Conrad 24-25). If Europeans in Asia cannot even accept Nina, it is clear that Nina’s introduction into society in Europe itself will be even less successful. Thus she can never assist Almayer in his quest to establish himself as a successful European. However, Almayer neither considers this nor the idea that being rejected by Europeans in Singapore would create within her a disinclination for white society. Foolish and blind, Almayer creates an intensely devoted relationship with his daughter that is almost entirely constructed around her role in solidifying his establishment in Amsterdam through marriage. Completely denying his own repugnance in a union with a woman with Malay blood, Almayer dreams that "Nobody [in Europe will] think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth" (Conrad 4). Almayer posits that through “witnessing her triumph he [will] grow young again...[and] forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle on this coast where he [feels] like a prisoner” (Conrad 4). Almayer masks his selfish motivations by yet another delusion that his quest for wealth is for Nina’s sake, rather than to fulfill his own dreams.

By imagining his goals to be Nina’s goals as well, though the reality proves her goals to be polar opposites of his own, Almayer’s relationship with his daughter becomes the crux of h
foolly where he nourishes every illusion of colonial triumph. His illusions go so far as to even
mask from him the woman she has become in order to sustain his fantasy of what he wants her to
be. He calls her “my little girl,” ignoring the fact that “she [is] nearly as tall as [him]” because
“he [likes] to recall the time when she was little and they were all in all to each other” (Conrad
14-15). There is one scene in which he truly appears to notice her when he says, “You do not
seem to be very happy to-night, but to-morrow you will show a brighter face. Eh?” (Conrad 15).
However, he completely misses her troubling “sigh” of an answer, for he is “already half asleep”
moments later (Conrad 15). When Almayer’s dreams seem on the verge of manifesting, he
spends a “fortnight... ...in a kind of walking trance, where practical details...[and] the present
misery of the burning sun...[disappear] in a gorgeous vision of a splendid future existence for
himself and Nina” (Conrad 30). However, “though Nina [is] ever present in his thoughts” he
“hardly [sees] her” (Conrad 30). This preoccupation with the Nina he believes shares his
grandiose goals rather than with Nina herself is the most egregious example of how his folly of
clinging to elusive, unattainable, and antiquated goals manifests. The way his folly dismantles
his relationship with Nina is encapsulated in her exclamations of “Why were you so blind? Did
you not see me struggling before your eyes?” (Conrad 151). Not only does his preoccupation
with colonial fantasies bring about his ruin, it causes him to neglect the only loving relationship
he ever has.

Just how seriously embedded in Almayer’s psyche his illusions have become is revealed
when Nina’s actions disassemble them, highlighting the true severity of his follies and causing
his inevitable downfall. When Almayer finally understands where Nina’s loyalty lies, with Dain
Maroola, and learns how strongly duped he is by Dain’s fake death, his physical response is
severe. Conrad writes that in the moment of revelation, the realities of his situation “run out in a
hot stream... rise in scalding waves about him...drowning his heart, touching his lips with a feel
of molten lead, blotting out his sight in scorching vapour, closing over his head, merciless and
deadly” (Conrad 127). Finally confronted with the truth, he again tries to disavow it by asking the informant, “Who sent you here to torment me?...I do not believe you. You lie”’’ (Conrad 128). However, his empty house proves that Nina is gone, and he cannot deceive himself any longer. Still, he holds on to some of his illusions when he finds Nina in her escape with Dain. Proving just how in denial he is of her half-caste status, he tells Nina that “Between [Dain] and [herself] there is a barrier that nothing can remove,” referring to a nonexistent separation between their races (Conrad 140). He attacks her with ideas that arise from European constructions of the East such as, “Do you know that you shall be at first his plaything and then a scorned slave?” and “What made you give yourself up to that savage?” (Conrad 140). When he asks Nina if she has “forgotten the teaching of so many years” in Singapore, reminding the reader of his denial of Nina’s expulsion from European society, she finally breaks through his psyche by saying, “I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove”’’ (Conrad 141). Almayer’s illusions about Nina and his dreams of introducing her into Europe for his triumphant entrance are irrevocably shattered, and he “[staggered] as if struck in the face” (Conrad 141). Almayer, finally forced to see how entrenched within his folly he has become, says to himself, “I am a white man” and from there “[broke] down completely...[going] on tearfully, “I am a white man, and of a good family...the only white man on the east coast. No, it cannot be...white men finding my daughter with this Malay!”’ (Conrad 145). He irreversibly breaks down because he finally is confronted with the fact that in the pursuit of his antiquated colonial dreams, he in fact has brought himself to the realization of their total opposite. However, instead of taking responsibility and thus escaping his folly of self-deception and grand illusions, he chooses to create for himself one more deception. He chooses to blame Nina, saying it is she who has “torn [his] heart from [him] while [he] dreamt of [he:] happiness” (Conrad 150). When he exculpates himself by saying that he “wanted to give [he:]
years of happiness” but “only knew of one way,” he acknowledges how stuck in his colonial imaginings he is but does not take responsibility for how he let them run his life (Conrad 150).

Almayer never fully lets go of the imaging aspect of his folly, though finally aware that his colonial dreams are useless. Within the house labeled “Almayer’s Folly,” he convinces himself that “his faith in [Nina] had been the foundation of his hopes, the motive of his courage, of his determination to live and struggle” rather than the outdated promises of colonial imperialism (Conrad 151). His last self-deception is that the reason “his faith [is] gone” is because it has been “destroyed by [Nina’s] own hands; destroyed cruelly, treacherously...in the very moment of success” (Conrad 151), when the reader knows he never even approaches success, and that reality is what finally brings him down. Almayer spends the last dregs of his life in a house that is aptly labeled Almayer’s Folly, for inside its walls he deteriorates in a hallucinogenic opium haze, drowning in the consequences of his follies.

Works Cited