Irony in Joseph Conrad's Victory.

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Date

Professor in Charge

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ABSTRACT

Conrad's talent in his later works (Chance and after) has been a subject of controversy among some of his contemporaries and, until the late fifties, among critics like Hewitt, Moser and Guerard. Among these works Victory has been taxed with being melodramatic, flat in its style, dull in its narrative technique. Recently the critic Gary Geddes has taken up the challenge of defending Conrad's later fiction, arguing that Conrad's use of irony alters the romance pattern of his late novels. For instance, Victory goes beyond its realistic, symbolic, and allegorical aspects. Irony—a literary device based on contrasts, showing the discrepancy between appearance and reality, between ideals and real achievements—characterizes Victory. It can be detected in the rhetoric of the novel—namely in the choice and use of words and in the descriptions of people and events. It can also be traced in the philosophy of the book—namely in its themes (the limits of detachment and isolationism) and in the motivations of the characters.

In Victory irony is conveyed through the narrative technique: the use of multiple point-of-views enhances
the ambiguities that characterize the tragic hero Axel Heyst and allows us to obtain a balanced view of him, and remain detached, but sympathetic, observers. Irony becomes a warning device that suggests not to take people and events at their face-value, but to consider also ambiguities and illusions. Heyst thinks that by remaining detached and elusive, he will be invulnerable and safe. But he fails because of his idealistic theories. Lena, the woman who loves him believes she has accomplished a victorious and rewarding self-sacrifice, but afterwards Heyst burns himself to death, because it is already too late for him to profit from her sacrifice and love.

By reading Victory with the same ironical and humorous mind as the author and the narrators offer, we discover the ambiguities of the novel, of the philosophy of detachment, and we are once again confronted with the talent of an accomplished writer, who makes us "feel," "see" and believe in the basic human values espoused by Conrad, such as solidarity and commitment.
INTRODUCTION

Conrad's literary career began when he was over forty, after twenty years at sea. The seagoing career provided the writer with a mine of material for his short stories and novels. His first novel, Almayer's Folly, was published in 1894. Encouraged by his friend Edward Garnett, Conrad went on writing. From a talented amateur, learning and experimenting his new trade, Conrad developed into a mature and prolific author, writing novels and short stories that took place at sea and on land, in the East and in the West. His literary fame grew slowly. It was not until the publication of Chance in 1913 that Conrad began to be widely noticed. Prior to that he had impressed only a small number of literary people. A year later Victory was a great success. The British acclaimed this new novel by a writer for whom English was a second language! Conrad himself took pride in Victory and even read some extracts in front of an audience, although he was usually reluctant to do this sort of thing. After the publication of The Shadow Line in 1916—perhaps his
last great work—Conrad wrote three more novels before his death in 1924.

Conrad's literary career has been and still is the subject of controversy, especially regarding his later years. A falling-off in Conrad's works was first suggested by Henry James, ironically on the publication of *Chance*, the novel that triggered his literary fame. Three years after Conrad's death, his friend John Galsworthy spoke of a "decline" in Conrad's career. In 1947 Albert J. Guerard started to raise serious doubts about the quality of Conrad's later works. In 1952 Douglas Hewitt in *Conrad: A Reassessment* criticizes Conrad's later fiction. In 1956 Thomas Moser published a book with a telling title: *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*. Two years later Guerard in *Conrad, The Novelist*, argued again that Conrad's later novels—with the exception of *The Shadow Line*—indeed lacked the qualities of the earlier works. In spite of a few concessions regarding its thematic interest, he attacked *Victory* at different levels, denouncing its sentimentality and concluding that: "The time has come
to drop Victory from the Conrad canon."^1 But more recently Gary Geddes in his book Conrad's Later Novels, has taken up the challenge of showing that these attacks were not really well founded, asserting that:

These novels of Conrad's last years can neither be dropped, as Guerard has recommended in the case of Victory, nor omitted from serious consideration as part of Conrad's contribution to the art of fiction, as so many critics have chosen to do.\footnote{Guerard, p. 275.}

Geddes refutes Guerard's arguments that Victory is melodramatic, that the "prose is often flat and unenergized rather than grotesquely bad."\footnote{Geddes, p. 47.} Geddes rescues Victory from such attacks by emphasizing the role of irony in the novel:

\begin{quote}
What distinguishes Victory from conventional allegory is the kind, and degree, of irony operative throughout the novel, though this is a feature that critics have continually ignored. \footnote{Guerard, p. 275.} I irony is, in fact, everywhere present in Victory. Structurally, as an ironic romance, Victory has a built-in antidote or counter-weight to its allegorizing tendencies.\footnote{Geddes, p. 47.}
\end{quote}

Irony is in fact a characteristic of many of

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\footnote{Guerard, p. 275.}

\footnote{Geddes, p. 47.}
Conrad's novels and short stories and critics have noted its presence in several of his works. For instance, in 1914, Richard Curle in *Joseph Conrad, A Study*, devoted a whole chapter to "Conrad's Irony and Sardonic Humour," starting in the following terms: "It requires no particular astuteness to discover that the irony of contrast is often present in the works of Conrad." He then analyzed irony in such works as *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. In *Victory* Conrad seems to go on with this ironic perspective. The title itself at the approach of World War I, sounded already ironical. The critics Ray B. West and Robert Wooster Stallman in *The Art of Modern Fiction* speak of "the subsurface meanings," of "Conrad's secret intentions" in *Victory* and note the irony of Heyst's rescue of Morrison. John A. Palmer in *Joseph Conrad's Fiction. A Study of Literary Growth* thinks that "Davidson's return restores the public

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level of mild irony and mere empirical understanding."\(^7\)
The irony of Lena's "victory" has been noted by several critics. Kingsley Widmer wrote an article called "Heyst's Pyrrhic Victory," concluding that:

The final Conradian irony is the victory of evil over evil, ending in the provocative but pyrrhic virtues of a homeopathic art in which the malady and the medicine are identical.

In the *Bucknell Review*, Maurice Beebe notes the ambiguity of the novel:

The novel seems to exist between poles of nothingness and victory, and is therefore more complex, ironic, and ambivalent than is generally recognized.

But Muriel Bradbrook, who praises *Victory* in her book *Joseph Conrad, Poland's English Genius*, has some reserve about the irony in the novel. She writes:

The tale is simply told; there is no narrator's perspective, there is neither irony, humour nor comment in the telling: the irony, the humour and the comments, such as they are, belong to Heyst.\(^6\)

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The controversy about the quality of Conrad's later works—which include *Victory*—incites us to reexamine this novel, and this in the light of irony, which many critics have noted. Such an approach could help us to reject the accusations of "sentimentality," of "melodrama," of flat prose and simplicity of narrative. In *Victory*, irony is a device, a method, a way of pointing out the ambiguities of the characters and themes, and of questioning their values.

We shall base our analysis of irony in *Victory* on several definitions and characterizations of the term as found in different studies and glossaries. From these definitions, the first feature that we shall use as one of our guidelines is "contrast." In *The Art of Modern Fiction*, Ray B. West and Robert Stallman define irony as "based on contrast--between what seems to be intended and what is actually meant, between the apparent situation and the real one."\(^\text{11}\) They also see it as "a method of suggesting the complexity of a thing or an idea by bringing into play the opposite or discordant side of it."\(^\text{12}\) Their definition of an ironic

\(^{11}\) Ray B. West, Jr., and Robert Stallman, p. 648.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 212.
style will help us to examine the verbal irony in 

**Victory:**

An ironic style is a manner of writing in which the expression is either subdued (understatement) or heightened (overstatement), beyond the expected emotional intensity.  

A second quality that seems pertinent to Victory is found in a definition by Haakon M. Chevalier, who speaks of detachment:

The great Ironists have in the main been spectators. To a certain extent they have all assumed the role of an Ironic will as well; but the Ironic spirit has always inclined toward detachment.  

The third feature of irony that we will emphasize has more to do with its function. It can be found in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, which stresses the goal of Irony:

Expression of one's meaning by language of opposite or different tendency, especially simulated adoption of another's point of view or laudatory tone for purpose of ridicule.

*Current Literary Terms* notes also this purpose of irony:

\[13\] Ibid., p. 648.

The use of words, with humorous or satirical intention, so that the meaning is the direct opposite of what is actually said.

With these definitions in mind, we shall examine the irony and its role in *Victory*, particularly as it applies to the narrative technique, the conflict between appearance and reality, and the protagonist's detachment.
Chapter I:  
Ironic in the Narrative Technique in *Victory*

One of the characteristics of several of Conrad's novels is his peculiar narrative technique, namely his story-telling approach, in which a group of people listen to a narrator, who reports events as he has witnessed them or heard about them. For instance, *Lord Jim*, "Heart of Darkness," "Youth" and *Chance* are told by such a narrator, called Marlow, who also serves as a character. Such a device allows for a livelier, more intimate, and more realistic story. Marlow is a mature man, a one-time sailor, with past experience, telling his stories retrospectively. In "Youth," for instance, Marlow views his younger days with maturity, distance, and nostalgia. In *Lord Jim* Marlow takes over after an introduction by an omniscient narrator and gives a more intimate and yet balanced and objective account of Jim's story. Such a point-of-view sounds more like a human voice than the omniscient narrative. And yet it does not lose its objectivity and reports the events with distance and retrospection. Marlow is an ironist in his way, because he tends to see both sides of events and characters, noticing their duality,
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contradictions, and ambiguities, trying to give a balanced view of them. In other words Marlow is both within and outside of the story. By using such a narrator, Conrad can establish a certain distance between himself and the story. But Marlow cannot be equated with Conrad, in spite of some affinities such as maturity and wisdom and sympathy for the hero in his predicament. Marlow remains an artist's creation, a device in a way and consequently he cannot reflect completely and faithfully Conrad's own ideas and philosophy.

In *Victory* the telling of the story becomes more complicated, through the use of several narrating voices. The story begins with a first-person narrator, who belongs to a group of white seamen: some are probably stationed in the Malaysian Archipelago, others like Captain Davidson and Captain Morrison are trading in the area. The "I" becomes a "we" at times, speaking for the group as a whole.

But in chapter 4 of part I, *Victory* becomes a story within a story. Davidson reports to the first person narrator and the other seamen what he knows and what he has heard about Heyst, the hero in *Victory*.
A few of us who were sufficiently interested went to Davidson for details. These were not many. He told us that he passed to the north of Samburan on purpose to see what was going on.¹

At times the first narrator intervenes, making ironical comments about Davidson and his telling of the story, showing his reactions. But Heyst's story is not entirely Captain Davidson's report either. Very soon, especially when Heyst settles on Samburan, the voice becomes that of an omniscient narrator, who reports Heyst's thoughts and actions on the island. (Indeed Davidson bypasses the island from time to time and stops only upon Heyst's request, and therefore has a limited knowledge of what is happening there. At the end of the novel he will resume his role of narrator, reporting the final holocaust.) The omniscient narrator reports also Schomberg's, Lena's and Ricardo's thoughts.

Because of these multi-focused perspectives in Victory, we readers, along with the author and the different narrators and listeners, can view Heyst's story from a greater perspective, from a godlike stance even. The different and sometimes opposed views we have

of him allow for more ambiguities and mystery regarding his personality and enhance the irony of the novel, which is based on the contradictory elements in events and people. To a certain extent the narrators in *Victory* and to a higher degree, Conrad, could illustrate Chevalier's definition of the Ironist:

> The Ironist is committed to the search of a more and more exterior point of view, so as to embrace all contradictions and behold the world from a point of vantage to which else is superior [...] The Ironic reaction is exterior to both elements of the contrast observed.

From the beginning of the novel, the first narrator sets up an ironical tone in his description of Heyst and the Tropical Belt Coal Company. His introduction is indeed based on contrasts, on paradoxes, on understatement—which are some of the ingredients of irony—and it juxtaposes the practical and the mystical: diamonds come from coal, evaporation precedes liquidation (but does every schoolboy really know these scientific facts, as the narrator pretends?) His description of Heyst on the island is also ironical:

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2 Chevalier, p. 47.
He was out of everybody's way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and in a sense as conspicuous An island is but the top of a mountain. (p. 1-2)

Already, from the start, the rhetorical style of the narrator, his doubts and restrictions, his use of dashes ("I believe," "I suppose," "At least so it was said," "--but it can't," "but not inimically," "--for himself at any rate!," "--for a time, at least.") reflect the ironical tone of the narration.

From the beginning also the first narrator sets Heyst apart: he identifies with "we ... out there" and later he repeats that Heyst was not "one of us." The distance set between Heyst and the narrator, between Heyst and the rest of the small community on the islands (the Archipelago is made of a multitude of separate small islands and therefore favors isolation), such a distance is also established between Heyst and the reader. We know that we are going to be confronted with a character out of the ordinary, a kind of outcast. And as we have stated in our introduction, detachment implies irony. The first narrator, through his irony, seems to view Heyst with a slight mockery and contempt and one reason for this is that Heyst stands apart and is different.
Such an ironical stance remains when the first narrator comments that Heyst's "most frequent visitors were shadows" and that "His nearest neighbour--I am speaking now of things showing some sort of animation--was an indolent volcano." (p. 2) We feel the narrator's irony, which is again based on contrasts, on paradoxes. In these comments, the narrator mixes two different categories of words: the narrator mentions first human being (visitors, neighbour), and then undercuts his statement by referring to mere inanimate shadows and a volcano! Ironically, animate visitors (the evil trio of Mr. Jones, Ricardo and their servant Pedro) will pay a visit,—and what a visit!--to Heyst! Describing Heyst's "neighbour"--the volcano--the narrator is again ironical, using understatement: the volcano can indeed show "some sort of animation" under its "indolent" aspect! By assimilating Heyst to the volcano, the narrator is still displaying his ironical humour:

Axel Heyst was also a smoker; and when he lounged out on his verandah with his cheroot, the last thing before going to bed, he made in the night the same sort of glow and of the same size as that other one so many miles away. (p. 2)
By being ironical toward Heyst, the first narrator emphasizes our protagonist's "queer" behavior, his contradictions, his mystery and his romantic sides. Like everyone else in the Archipelago he is intrigued, perhaps disturbed, by Heyst.

The first narrator's irony is mostly based on contrasts, on the discrepancy between what is and what has been, between what he sees and what he has seen. For instance the way he describes the landscape is pervaded with such an irony: the jungle regains its sovereignty and takes over now what used to be the coal mine settlement, a "once sanguine" enterprise. Ironically the progress of civilization, of Western culture, such as we can see it in "Heart of Darkness," has here also been vanquished by the jungle, by the Eastern native spirit. Ironically too the gigantic blackboard of the Tropical Belt Coal Company is still here, although the company went into liquidation.

Another aspect of the narrative technique that also reinforces the irony in Victory, is the gossipy tone that pervades the novel. The first narrator insists very often that he is not sure, that it is hearsay, that people did not know or understand everything about Heyst and his situation. It is
noticeable that he uses a lot of adverbs of doubts and verbs of modality in his rhetoric: "perhaps that was it," "may be," "he must have spoken," "may have consisted,—and probably did." The narrator is also reporting people's gossip: "Some said that he was a partner, others said he was a sort of paying guest." (p. 7) and this provides a means for more irony and distance on the narrator's part. The way he familiarly warns us about gossip ("you know") is full of gentle irony:

But you know how it is with all such mysteries. There is always a leak somewhere. Morrison himself, not a perfect vessel by any means, was bursting with gratitude, and under the stress he must have let out something vague—enough to give the island gossip a chance. And you know how kindly the world is in its comments on what he does not understand. (p. 15)

The first narrator's irony directed toward the island community can be harsher at times. He says about it:

Human nature being what it is, having a silly side to it as well as a mean side, there were not a few who pretended to be indignant on no better authority than a general propensity to believe every evil report; and a good many others who found it simply funny to call Heyst the Spider—behind his back, of course. (p. 17)

But if the first narrator uses mild irony and seems to excuse humanity in general, he is harder on Schomberg, the malignant hotel-keeper, who does not stop slandering Heyst. Schomberg's "Teutonic temperament" is
the target of the narrator's irony. The narrator sets the "Teutonic creature" off from the rest of the community:

You see we had on the whole liked him /Heyst/ well enough. And liking is not sufficient to keep going the interest one takes in a human being. With hatred, apparently, it is otherwise. Schomberg couldn't forget Heyst. The keen, manly Teutonic creature was a good hater. A fool often is. [...] The innkeeper was not mercenary. Teutonic temperament seldom is. [...] Observe the Teutonic sense of proportion and nice forgiving temper. [...] A bell started ringing and he led the way to the dining room as if into a temple, very grave, with the air of a benefactor of mankind. His ambition was to feed it at a profitable price, and his delight was to talk of it behind its back. (pp. 21-22)

When the narrative in Chapter 4, Part I, passes onto Captain Davidson, the first narrator (whose name we never learn—a fact that enhances his position as a distant, somewhat anonymous observer), is still intervening through ironic comments about Davidson and Heyst. He becomes a listener, who cannot help warning us to take Davidson's report with a pinch of humour. By intervening with ironical and humorous comments, he keeps up with the story-telling device and the somewhat gossipy tone of the beginning of the novel. For instance, such words as "confessions," "history," "memorable" used to comment on Heyst's and Davidson's relationship during the passage on the "Sissie" are
hyperbolic with regard to the situation and therefore ironical and humorous:

The confessions of Heyst. Not one of us—with the probable exception of Morrison, who was dead—had ever heard so much of his history. It looks as if the experience of hermit life had the power to loosen one's tongue, doesn't it?

During that memorable passage, in the "Sissie," which took about two days, he volunteered other hints—for you could not call it information—about his history. (p. 27)

The first narrator's comments on Captain Davidson and his descriptions of his reporting Heyst's story are full of irony, allowing us to view the events and the situation with humour, detachment and more objectivity than Davidson:

The loneliness, the ruins of the spot, had impressed Davidson's simple soul. /.../Ough! /.../ Thus the sensitive Davidson. /.../The capacity for sympathy in these stout, placid men! Davidson was stirred to the depths. /.../
He rejected the mere possibility of such an unwarrantable intrusion. Wonderfully delicate fellow, Davidson! /.../ "Why, she helped the girl to bolt," said Davidson turning at me his innocent eyes, rounded by the state of constant amazement in which this affair had left him, like those shocks of terror or sorrow which sometimes leave their victim afflicted by nervous trembling. It looked as though he would never get over it. (pp. 35-36)

But it is evident that the first narrator derives fun too easily at the expense of Davidson. Davidson is certainly emotional, but he can also remain detached.
This attitude of the first narrator—being amused and
taking pleasure and fun from a situation he has
observed or he is told about—characterizes his irony.

In fact very often the first narrator's irony
verges on humour and comedy. His description of Captain
Morrison—a small trader in the area—is one example:

He was tall and lantern-jawed, and clean-
shaven, and looked like a varrister who had
thrown his wig to the dogs. (p. 8)

Morrison's trade and attitude with the local people is
described with irony:

It was hinted also that Morrison had a wife
in each and every one of them the places he
traded with, but the majority of us repulsed
these innuendoes with indignation. He was a
ture humanitarian and rather ascetic than
otherwise. (p. 8)

When Morrison is "rescued" by Heyst out of the hands of
the Portuguese authorities, who want to confiscate the
Captain's brig, the first narrator views the scene with
irony:

Heyst crossed over, and said with a slight
bow, and in the manner of a prince addressing
another prince on a private occasion. (p. 9)

As we have pointed out, the first narrator's inflated
vocabulary very often characterizes his irony toward
Heyst, Davidson, and any event:
To Davidson as to any of us, the idea of Heyst, the wandering, drifting, unattached Heyst, having any belongings of the sort that can furnish a house was startlingly novel. It was grotesquely fantastic. It was like a bird owning real property. (p. 26)

And then came this elopement, this incongruous phenomenon of self-assertion, the greatest wonder of all, astonishing and amusing. (p. 50)

We could conclude that the first narrator represents a sort of intellectualized viewpoint sans feeling. He is trying to be dispassionate and objective, seeing both sides of people and events, with humour that is heavy-handed at times. As he states in one of his comments on Morrison's "rescue," Davidson and he are not romantic like Heyst:

Davidson shared my suspicion that this was in its essence the rescue of a distressed human being. Not that we were two romantics, tingeing the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was. (p. 42)

Therefore the first narrator tends to look disdainfully and humorously at the world of romance and chivalry as it is represented by Heyst. But although the first narrator tends to view people and events with irony, trying to remain detached and objective, he is aware that he himself gets involved in Heyst's story and predicament, that he is one of the curious onlookers
and he views Heyst as Don Quijote, comic on one level
and admirable on another.

When the story-telling passes onto Captain
Davidson--the second narrator--the point-of-view is
slightly different if we consider that Captain Davidson
is closer to Heyst. Davidson is not, contrary to the
critic Guerard's statement, a "dullard." Even the first
narrator's ironical remarks about him are mild and we
must not forget that he is "one of us." Davidson is
himself capable of ironical comments on Heyst Senior
and Junior:

Just the sort of father you would expect Heyst
to have. Isn't he a bit of a crank himself? He
told me that directly his father died he lit
out into the wide world on his own, and had
been on the move till he fetched up against
this famous coal business. Fits the son of
his father somehow, don't you think? (p. 27)

His comments on Heyst's rescuing the beautiful English
girl Lena from the hands of the despicable "conductor"
Zangiacomo and of the hotel-keeper Schomberg,
ironically foreshadow the final retribution: Lena's
death and the holocaust, when Heyst burns his house and
himself down:

You don't take a woman into a desert jungle
without being made sorry for it soon or later,
in one way or another; and Heyst being a
gentleman only makes it worse. (p. 42)
And his comments on this rescue are tinged with humour, when he says:

"Funny notion of defying the fates--to take a woman in tow!" (p. 47)

In a way Davidson is more than the first narrator, a representative of l'homme moyen sensuel, who feels sympathetic toward Heyst, whose predicament moves him. But his view and involvement remain also those of a curious onlooker, passing gentle judgments on Heyst's "queerness" and unusual behavior.

At the end of the novel, Davidson's sudden reappearance on Samburan, just after Lena has been shot by the villain Mr. Jones and just before she dies, has been criticized as an artificial device. But in fact it is a necessary and useful device that brings us back to reality and a more normative and standard point-of-view which does not always characterize the narrative that deals with the events taking place earlier on Samburan: these events are tinged and colored by Heyst's and Lena's views, the enchantment of the islands and the romance atmosphere. Davidson's sudden reappearance looks ironical because he arrives just a little too late and cannot prevent the shooting and because it contrasts with the "enchantment" and the tension Heyst
and Lena—along with the reader—were under. It thus cuts off the "melodramatic" side which could have gone too far if all the deaths and the holocaust had been directly described. With Davidson's reporting to an audience, the distance is kept. Davidson is a practical man, more down-to-earth, a representative of the outside world that breaks off the romance on Samburan.

Therefore both the first narrator and Davidson bring a useful point-of-view in Victory, inviting us to see things with detachment, humour and irony. Guerard's statement about the dullness of the narrators in Victory can be rejected. He writes:

And Victory, before dispensing with a narrator altogether, offers a dullard within a dullard, Davidson within the "I".3

On the contrary both of them give an extra dimension to Heyst's story. Of course they appear rather heavy and ordinary at times and Conrad wants us to take this into account and consider their reports with some distance, care and humour. Indeed their view of Heyst is also biased at times and Conrad the author is also directing his irony toward them.

3Guerard, p. 259.
In part II, an omniscient narrator takes over to relate the rest of Heyst's story. Again the first narrator appears from time to time, which allows us to differentiate between the two perspectives. Nonetheless it can be said that the omniscient narrator's ironical stance resembles at times very much that of the first narrator so that we do not always know who is commenting. The same devices, that is to say the use of contrasts, of understatements, of parenthetical comments, also characterize the omniscient narrator's irony. For example he makes ironical comments on the Tropical Belt Coal Company, on man's ambiguous curiosity:

Tropical nature had been kind to the failure of the commercial enterprise. The desolation of the headquarters of the Tropical Belt Coal Company had been screened from the side of the sea; from the side where prying eyes—if any were sufficiently interested, either in malice or in sorrow—could have noted the decaying bones of that once sanguine enterprise. (p. 141)

But we feel that the omniscient narrator's comments are sounder, wittier and more sarcastic than the first two narrators. He sounds more serious and less gossipy than they are. Moreover the omniscient narrator in spite of his ironical comments about Heyst, is also very close to him and more sympathetic toward him. Indeed the
former has access to Heyst's thoughts and life on Samburan, but he remains however a detached observer. We could say that the rhetorical and humorous irony of the first narrator switches to a more philosophical and tragic irony throughout the novel. This seems to be in tune with the remarks of Geddes, who sees *Victory*, a realistic novel at the beginning, becoming a more symbolic one later. He writes:

> In *Victory* Conrad does stoop to gossip; he uses gossip and hearsay to establish an illusion of reality in Part I, to give the novel a basis in actuality, in the quirks and habits of a narrator with an itchy ear. And this gossipy quality provides a balance for the symbolic dimension that predominates as the novel winds its way deeper into the forest of Heyst's psyche.  

There is indeed an evolution and a building up in Heyst's predicament. Conrad adds up elements and events that give us a rounder view of the protagonist, who becomes a tragic hero in conflict with the world and his own contradictions.

The omniscient narrator remains also an ironical commentator in the characters description for instance. Here is how he presents a scene with Heyst and his oriental servant Wang:

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4Geddes, p. 64.
Heyst said nothing. Wang said nothing. Perhaps he had always been a taciturn man; perhaps he was influenced by the genius of the locality, which was certainly that of silence. (p. 147)

And when he describes Schomberg, the malignant hotel-keeper, he uses elements already seen in the first narrator's comments—an echoing device that reinforces the irony:

"That man" was the florid Schomberg with the military bearing, benefactor of white men ("decent food to eat in decent company")—mature victim of belated passion. (p. 160)

Some descriptions of the scenes and the characters verge on comedy and caricature, still mixed with irony. The passage describing the transformation of Schomberg's hotel into an amateurish clandestine casino is an example:

In the middle, Mr. Jones, a starved spectre turned into a banker, faced Ricardo, a rather nasty, slow-moving cat turned into a croupier. By contrast, the other faces round that table, anything between twenty and thirty, must have looked like collected samples of intensely artless, helpless humanity—pathetic in their innocent watch for the small turns of luck which indeed might have been serious enough for them. They had no notice to spare for the hairy Pedro, carrying a tray with the clumsiness of a creature caught in the woods and taught to walk on its hind legs. (p. 98)

Ironically, Schomberg's ideals about his hotel—his "establishment," his "concert hall" as the narrator
names it—do not turn out as he wishes. The narrator depicts the scene to emphasize its ridiculousness, every member of the evil trio clumsily performing his task.

But the narrating voice here is also very often that of Heyst. Then it is Heyst who sees, thinks and comments. Heyst is himself an ironist—a bitter ironist—whose view of the world, of people and of himself is not always flattering. He is aware of his philosophical heritage, of his predicament and he comments bitterly and ironically on them. For instance, in one of his conversations with Lena, he says:

He /the elder Heyst/ was a great man in his way. I don't know much of his history. I suppose he began like other people. (p. 161)

A man drifts. The most successful men have drifted into their successes. I don't want to tell you that this is a success. (p. 162)

But it is by folly alone that the world moves, and so it is a respectable thing upon the whole. (p. 163)

But sometimes we feel that Heyst takes too much of the narrative on his shoulders, giving a slight twist in the point-of-view and altering the objectivity of the omniscient narrative. The detached and distant observer disappears at times and it is Heyst who is explaining and justifying his own actions and behavior. But this
allows us to go deeper into the hero's own contradictions and his inner struggle, thus enhancing the irony of his situation.

It must also be noted that in the narrative technique, irony is not only conveyed through the different voices, but also by the constant shifts in time and space. Not only does Conrad simply show the irony of fate and events by contrasting the present with the past, what Heyst was with what he is, what Schomberg and the trio wanted with what they get; he also enhances it by delaying some information about some past events or the past of a character. Victory is not told chronologically. We may have some hints about Heyst's youth and his father, but we discover about them little by little. Lena's elopement with Heyst is mentioned and talked about, but it is only later that we get more information, more details, that we relive the entire scene, with Heyst at the post of observation this time. These constant shifts in time, in point-of-views reinforce the irony in the novel and allow also for dramatic irony. For example when Heyst and Lena are enjoying their paradisal peace on Samburan, we know that the evil trio is on its way to disrupt it. These shifts in time and narrative stances
are paralleled with shifts in place. For instance we pass several times from Sourabaya to Samburan, from the "garish, unrestful hotel" and gossipy table-d'hôte to the "silence of his Heyst's surroundings," and vice versa, and this of course allows for contrasts and irony.

This examination of the irony in the narrative technique of Victory shows that from the beginning we are asked to read the novel with the same ironical and humorous distance as the Author and the narrators tell it. Although, like them, we get involved and we sympathize with some of the characters, we have also to keep a distance from the events and view them with detachment. This role is emphasized by Chevalier, when he writes:

The spectator has absolutely no influence upon the action. Though he knows beforehand the exact circumstances that will lead to calamity he can do nothing to prevent it. He is completely detached from the action of the play. He lives in a different world. He can merely watch. That is the role of the Ironist.\(^5\)

If we fail to read Victory from an ironical standpoint, we may misinterpret the novel and just read it as a mere sentimental romance, taking events and

\(^5\) Chevalier, p. 43.
people at their face-value, forgetting the warning detached and ironical voices in the background. Irony does not use straightforward talk. In the narrative technique irony is also conveyed through the multiple and contradictory approaches of events and characters. Conrad's art of fiction lies partly in these multiple and ironical stances, giving a balanced view of the hero, enhancing his dimension. And Conrad's dualistic rendering of his fiction--involvement and detachment--characterizes the art of writing. Gustave Flaubert said that the author's presence in a novel should be always there, but never felt.

Irony is certainly a subtle device that demands a careful participation of the reader and an intimate communication with the author, but the result and the pleasure drawn from it enhance our sense of being confronted with a better and greater work of art.
Chapter II: Appearance and Reality

One of the sources for irony in *Victory* comes from the conflict between appearance and reality. As Chevalier puts it: "The basic feature for every irony is a contrast between a reality and an appearance."\(^1\) West's and Stallman's definition of irony mentioned in the introduction also emphasizes this contrast.

As we have seen in our first part, the first narrator makes us aware from the beginning of the novel that what we see or hear can be deceptive or can hide something: "An island is but the top of a mountain." (p. 2) For instance, nature can play a deceptive role: the sea may look "tepid, shallow," but it is also "the great waters which embrace the continents of this globe." (p. 2) The sea, in spite of its tranquility, will also bring the trio that will spread evil on Samburan. Nature, like the volcano on the island, may look "indolent," but it can also become violent and destructive:

The bulk of the central ridge of the island cut off the bungalow from sunrises, whether glorious or cloudy, angry or serene. The

\(^1\)Chevalier, p. 42.
dwellers therein were debarred from reacting early the fortune of the new-born day. It sprang upon them in its fulness with a swift retreat of the great shadow when the sun, clearing the ridge, looked down, hot and dry, with a devouring glare like the eye of an enemy. (p. 152)

A great silence brooded over Samburan—the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought. (p. 180)

There was something cruel in the absolute dumbness of the night. (p. 308)

As in _Almayer's Folly_ and "Heart of Darkness," nature in _Victory_ has an exotic, fascinating appeal but it is also ominous. It seems to be indifferent to man's tragedy or predicament. It remains, patient, victorious after man and his "progress" and "civilization" have gone. "The Tropical Belt Coal Company" is now just a piece of board with white initials on it! Moreover the island at the end returns to the natives. As in _An Outcast of the Islands_ for instance, nature in _Victory_ can remain indifferent to man's voice and appeal, ironically emphasizing man's disillusionment and loneliness. The last lines of _An Outcast of the Island_ show this:

"Hope" repeated in a whispering echo the startled forests, the river and the hills; but Almayer, who stood waiting with his head
on one side and a smile of tipsy attention on his lips, heard no other answer.

Therefore nature in *Victory* and in other works by Conrad sets off man's illusions and failure. Galsworthy's remark that "In the novels of Conrad, nature is first, man is second" could be partly applied to the victory of nature over man.

Heyst seems certainly in communion with nature, but more precisely he is "enchanted" by the islands. However, as we know, enchantment is usually followed by disenchantment and a return to reality. The first narrator ironically comments: "He whom we used to refer to as the Enchanted Heyst was suffering from thorough disenchantment." (p. 53) Heyst, following his father's philosophy, is at times aware of the illusions, of the appearances on which the world is built. Ironically he himself has lost touch with reality. During one of his conversations with Lena he tells her:

I've said to the Earth that bore me: "I am I and you are a shadow." And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impurity. Here I am on a shadow inhabited by shades. How helpless a man is against the shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade,

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resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities...." (pp. 287-288)

The elder Heyst's view of the world reflects also the falsity and the illusions in which everybody is trapped, as Heyst explains it to Lena:

I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both, by the way. Later he discovered—how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well, he discovered that the wages were not good enough. That they were paid in counterfeit money. (p. 161)

But irony of irony, man, even when aware of his predicament, likes it. According to Heyst senior:

"Clairvoyance or no clairvoyance, men love their captivity." (p. 181) In his philosophical statements he also denounces the bait and the ties of action, of feelings, of illusions:

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love—the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams ... The so-called wickedness must be, like the so-called virtue, its own reward—to be anything at all. (pp. 180-181)

Illusion, disillusion, deceptiveness characterize Victory. Everybody in the novel is at one moment or another mistaken or cheated and disillusioned.

Schomberg, the self-conceited hotel-keeper believes that he is better than his wife, that he has control over
her, but in fact she is "a miracle of dissimulation," (p. 49) and acts behind his back. Heyst's remark about women, after he has observed Mrs. Schomberg, produces also an ironical echo, when we think of his discovering Lena, whom he trusted, and Ricardo, together:

   No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude. (p. 66)

There is irony also, when the evil trio is led on a wrong track believing there will be money at the end! Mr. Jones, who trusted his secretary, is betrayed by him and ironically by a woman, of whose presence he did not know! Ricardo is doubly deceived by Lena, who can physically and cunningly fight him back: We are told how he misjudges Lena's hidden strength and cunning:

   To Ricardo the girl had been so unforeseen that he was unable to bring upon her the light of his critical faculties. Her smile appeared to him full of promise. He had not expected her to be what she was. (p. 244)

Such remarks about Ricardo sound ironical: as we know the light of Ricardo's critical faculties is rather pale and hardly can we guess that the "smile" and the "promise" hide more than he thinks. Lena is playing a double-game with Heyst and Ricardo. But at the end she is herself ironically deceived: she believes she has saved Heyst, she has accomplished the "supreme
sacrifice," but she is self-deluded. Her "victory" is ambiguous and limited. Already with Lena's idea and dream of self-sacrifice, we are made to see by the omniscient narrator's ironical voice that she is wrong and self-deluded. She has illusions about the potentiality and the value of her intention; she overestimates her role:

A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty; altogether on herself, every bit of it, leaving him nothing, not even the knowledge of what she did, if that were possible. She would have liked to lock him up by some stratagem. (p. 259)

Lena's description on her death bed contains mawkish images and inflated elements that undercut the reality and the value of her death and sacrifice and show her naivete. For instance:

On her white neck her pale head dropped as in a cruel drought a whitered flower droops on its stalk. (p. 334)

The faint smile on her deep-cut lips waned, and her head sank deep into the pillow, taking on the majestic pallor and immobility of marble. (p. 335)

There seems to be something stiff, unreal and inhuman in Lena's death. This is enhanced by Captain Davidson's sudden reappearance, which throws a realistic and crude
light on this scene, unmasking its melodramatic and far fetched aspects.

In *Victory* the characterization bears ironical elements and tones. As we have just noted the characters can easily dissimulate. But at the same time they can be self-deluded. It is noticeable that in *Victory* the characters seem to be wearing a mask, playing a role, adopting stereotyped attitudes. For instance the narrator's use of "-ian" adjectives in "the Schombergian theory" (p. 217) and "Heystian tone" (p. 334) is meant to be ironical, because they are too grandiloquent for the real situation. The discrepancy between the mask and the real self allows for irony. Schomberg puts on an air of "lieutenant-of-the-reserve," but he is also a coward. Mr. Jones in his "ghostly" appearance is indeed a false gentleman, and by opposition Heyst is a real one. Conrad's irony in his characterization is also skillfully used in the pairing of Heyst and Jones, Jones and the elder Heyst, Ricardo and Lena, Pedro and Wang, Captains Davidson and Morrison. It is indeed ironical that virtuous people should have features in common with evil people. Mr. Jones' remark to Heyst about the similarity of their goal is disturbing:
"'We pursue the same ends,' he said, 'only perhaps I pursue them with more openness than you—with more simplicity.'" (p. 263)
"'Ah, Mr. Heyst, he said, you and I have much more in common than you think.'"

It is also ironical that during the last encounter between Heyst and Mr. Jones, the latter should be wearing a garment similar to one of the elder Heyst's:

Mr. Jones, tightly enfolded in an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing gown, kept his elbows close against his sides and his hands deeply plunged into the extraordinarily deep pockets of the garment. (p. 310)

The devices of echoing, paralleling and contrasting are very much used by Conrad, allowing for more irony. With Pedro "the ape" and the "vanishing" Wang such pairing and contrasting verge on comedy. When Pedro is forced into the role of a "waiter" or to replace Wang, or when he has to perform the ritual of tea making, the situation becomes ironically grotesque.

These devices are a means to set off reality from appearance, to show the fake sides of every character. In a pair each character serves as a foil to the other: Heyst can see his other self in Mr. Jones. By pairing good and evil, by using doubles, the author throws some doubts on his characters' behavior, he questions it.

In Victory there is also an impression of irreality that surrounds the characters. Like the hazy
and blurred landscape of the island or for the T.B.C.
Company, "the ghosts of things that have been" (p. 199)
some characters lack also substantiality: the elder
Heyst is now only an image, a portrait, Mr. Jones has a
"ghostly" air, Wang "vanishes." Very often too the
characters are described in the dusk or darkness, which
makes them look like silhouettes or shadows. Lena
appears very often still, "frozen" and lifeless. Conrad
describes her as a statue and thus makes her a little
irreal:

She stood poised firmly, halfway between the
table and the curtained doorway, the insteps
of her bare feet gleaming like marble on the
over-shadowed matting of the floor. The fall
of her lighted shoulders, the strong and fine
modelling of her arms hanging down her sides,
her immobility, too, had something statuesque,
the charm of art tense with life. (p. 208)

Words such as "stone," "white pallor," "cold,"
"marble," "immobility" are used in descriptions of her
and they echo of course her death. To Ricardo she also
appears shadowy:

Lighted dimly by the reflection of the outer
glare, she loomed up strangely big and shadowdy
at the other end of the long, narrow room.
(p. 235)

Caricature is another means by which Conrad conveys the
stiffness, the distortion and the poses of his
characters and thus show the ridiculousness and the
irony of their attitudes and situations. Here is how Mr. Jones is caricatured:

The costume accentuated his Mr. Jones' emaciation. He resembled a painted pole leaning against the edge of the desk, with a dried head of dubious distinction stuck on the top of it. (p. 310)

Morrison, Mrs. Schomberg ("she sat there like a joss," "and as she had a set of very good white teeth, the effect of the mechanical, ordered smile was joyous, radiant" (p. 66)), the Zangiacomos are targets for Conrad's humour and irony. Even Heyst with his "martial" and "great bronze" moustaches is also caricatured:

At that epoch in his life, in the fulness of his physical development, of a broad, martial presence, with his bold head and long moustaches, he resembled the portraits of Charles XII of adventurous memory. However, there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man. (p. 6)

Such a characterization tends to show that people in *Victory* are made up of masks, appearances and stereotypes and are consequently in conflict with reality.

Gossip and hearsay, which characterize the tone of the novel, are also based on appearances, lies, exaggeration, distortion and thus opposed to reality, truth and facts. As we have mentioned in chapter 1,
this allows for the author's and the narrators' irony and sarcasm, which are directed at the gossipers, who misapprehend reality and people. As Heyst mentions to Lena about his relationship with Morrison, people are blind and mistaken:

"...The people in this part of the world went by appearances, and called us friends, as far as I can remember. Appearances—what more, what better can you ask for? In fact you can't have better. You can't have anything else. (p. 167)"

In *Victory*, the characters, like everybody else in the world, are victims of appearances or ignorant of a deeper reality. As illustrated in "The Return," people pass by an inner reality but ironically miss it:

They /Alvan Hervey and his wife/skimmed over the surface of life hand in hand, in a pure and frosty atmosphere—like two skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen.

And more ironical is the fact that, according to Heyst, people might be aware of their predicament, but are impotent to fight it:

"There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don't say anything. They can't. They wouldn't know how,

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or perhaps, they wouldn't speak if they could. (p. 161)

And Heyst ends his statement with pessimism:

Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation. (p. 161)

Victims of appearances and illusions, of a dream or of gossip, the characters in *Victory* fail to see reality and to face it. And ironically it is when they expect it the least that harsh reality breaks in, bringing disillusion. It is when Heyst and Lena start to appreciate their paradisiacal life on Samburan, that Wang announces the arrival of a boat. Heyst ironically says to Lena:

[...]. And if we forget, there are no voices here to remind us. [...] Nothing can break in on us here. (p. 184)

By contrasts and discrepancy, Conrad reveals the hidden and deep layers of things, which the characters and man in general, tend to ignore or take for granted. For instance it is only when the silence of Samburan is invaded by the sounds of the orchestra or even by a mere splash of water that Heyst and the reader realize how deep and precious silence is: "Its loud, fitful, and persistent splashing revealed the depth of the world's silence." (p. 194) Or with the Zangiacomo orchestra:
When the piece of music came to an end, the relief was so great that he felt slightly dizzy, as if a chasm of silence had.yawned at his feet. (p. 56)

Because harsh reality, with its evil and cruel truth, keeps breaking in, upsetting Heyst's detachment and solitude, disturbing Schomberg's plans or those of Lena and the trio--because we are constantly reminded of the discrepancy between appearance and reality--we understand how ironic is Victory and life on the whole.

Conrad's irony in Victory denounces and shows how everybody feeds on illusions, but that nothing can be done about it. As the omniscient narrator puts it in the episode relating Schomberg's humiliation by Lena, it is inevitable and one of the ironies of life: "For every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and the human race come to an end." (p. 78)

And still in the same episode, the narrator comments--by using double irony--on Schomberg's "resentment" connecting it with "perenniality" of appearances: "But nothing lasts in this world, at least without changing its physiognomy." (p. 79) Conrad himself in one of his letters wrote that "All is illusion" and more ironically that "Life knows us not and we do not know life,--we don't even know our own thoughts." With such a statement, which looks like
those of the elder Heyst's, Conrad shows the supreme irony and absurdity of life and man. Even if it is overstated, this comment makes us aware of the deceptiveness of illusions and appearances, of their ironies, such as they are denounced throughout Victory. But Conrad implies also that illusions are inevitable and are part of human life. Without illusions, Heyst, Lena--and man in general--would not get any relief from harsh reality and hard facts. To allow oneself to be deluded can also be a means of discovering one's own truth, one's own identity and of testing one's potentiality and resources.
Chapter 3: The Ironies of Detachment

Although Axel Heyst is the protagonist and the "hero" of *Victory*, his name does not figure on the title page of the novel. Obviously a title like *Victory* is probably more appealing and more suited to the ironical tone of the novel. The name Heyst, which rhymes with "height," may sound ironical and contrary to what the protagonist wishes—to remain unnoticed. And, at the same time, such a name sounds ordinary and common, as if echoing the emptiness and illusions of his life.

Heyst is an object of fascination and a subject of a lot of talk and gossip in the Archipelago in the early pages, but ironically, he will appear in person only later in the novel. By delaying the protagonist's appearance on the scene and by describing him through hearsay and through different and contradictory opinions, the narrator conveys better the mystery and the ambiguities that surround our hero.

Little by little, episode after episode, the ironies and the contradictions of Heyst's life are revealed to us. With the different and paradoxical names he is given—"Enchanted Heyst," "Utopist Heyst,"
"Naive Heyst," "Hard Facts," "Heyst the Spider," "Heyst the Enemy"—we discover the opposite reactions he triggers in people and consequently his dual and ambiguous personality. It is only when we finally get details about Heyst's childhood and youth that we understand all the ironies and paradoxes that make up Heyst's behavior and way of living. Taught by his father to "Look on--make no sound," "to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity" (p. 142), Heyst has decided to "drift":

"I'll drift," Heyst had said deliberately.

/.../ "This shall be my defense against life," he had said to himself with a sort of inward consciousness that for the son of his father there was no other worthy alternative. (p. 76)

And the omniscient narrator--whose thoughts seem to be also those of Heyst in this scene--then comments ironically about the origins of the young man's drift, by paralleling them with less noble ones--namely drink, vice and weakness of character. Such an ironical parallel seems to deflate the seriousness of his conviction:

He became a waif and a stray, austerely, from conviction, as others do through drink, from vice, from some weakness of character--with deliberation, as others do in despair. (p. 76)

The bases of Heyst's "system" are detachment, non-involvement and passing by:

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It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. (p. 74)

But the ironies, the ambiguities, and the limits of such a system, of such a way of living, show up more evidently a few years later, when Heyst cannot remain indifferent to the distress of Captain Morrison, whose brig the Portuguese Authorities in Timor want to confiscate. Heyst pays the required fine for Morrison. This rescue by Heyst appears then ironical. The "unattached," "floating" Heyst, who has decided to "drift," to withdraw from life and action, is apparently moved by Morrison's predicament and cannot resist helping him out, thus forming a tie—which goes against his father's teaching. The irony goes even further. Indeed this rescue is followed by a businesslike association between Heyst and Morrison, who makes Heyst a local manager of the new Tropical Belt Coal Company, the offices of which are in Europe. After Morrison's death in England, Heyst is officially appointed from Europe a "manager in the Tropics"—in spite of himself. He becomes the "Number One" of the Company—a name by which his Chinese servant Wang will ironically keep calling him after the liquidation of
the Company.

This new appointment is followed by an invasion of new professionals and new technology:

The Tesmans appointed agents, a contract for government mail-boat secured, the era of steam beginning for the islands—a great stride forward—Heyst's stride! (p. 17)

Engineers came out, coolies were imported, bungalows were put up on Samburan, a gallery driven into the hillside, and actually some coal got out. These intentions shook the soberest minds. (p. 19)

As we can see, Heyst's original idealistic and innocent "stride forward" is ironically commented upon by the first narrator. Indeed the consequences run counter to the protagonist's good intentions: his "stride forward" brings the dissatisfaction of the seamen and the locals:

Oh, yes; it had come, and anybody could see what would be the consequences—the end of the individual trader, smothered under a great invasion of steamers. We could not afford to buy steamers. 'Not we. And Heyst was the manager. (p. 19)

And one of the seamen ironically comments: "That's what they call development—/.../" (p. 20)

This episode is also an opportunity for the first narrator to comment ironically upon company promoters and "civilization":

Company promoters have an imagination of their own. There is no more romantic temperament on
The "civilizing" step of such people is indeed to exploit the area, making profit, regardless of the environment and the differences of cultures.

Therefore Morrison's rescue by Heyst leads to unwanted "progress." The consequences for Heyst of his involvement with Morrison go even further: if the evil trio invades Heyst's peace on Samburan, it is because Jones and Ricardo want the money they believe he got from Morrison. And when Jones tells Heyst: "You mustn't be shocked if I tell you plainly that we are after your money--[[...]]" (p. 313), our protagonist is astonished and sees the irony of the situation, because for him this evil intrusion intends no more than a mere base robbery of money he even does not possess.

Heyst seems unable to keep up with his ideals of detachment and non-involvement. Fate and chance move counter to his plans. Unwillingly or unconsciously he ends up by acting contrary to his wishes. Even in his simple "aimless wanderings," Heyst the mystical, the indolent, the enchanted becomes practical and locates most of the outcrops of coal on the island!

Morrison's "rescue" acquires another ironical dimension when later it is paralleled with Lena's
rescue. Then we are shown a little more about the real nature of Heyst's "benevolent" action in rescuing Morrison. Heyst realizes that with the Captain he had not been moved by real pity or feeling. His gesture toward him looked like more gentlemanly politeness than real warmth. It lacked sincerity and was ambiguous. He says to Lena:

I have never been so amused as by that episode in which I was suddenly called to act such an incredible part. For a moment I enjoyed it greatly. I got him out of his corner. (p. 163)

Lena is shocked at that revelation that Heyst's gesture toward Morrison could have been tinged with fun. For her, distress and fun do not mix together. She is then ironically confronted with what she believes is the sham of her own rescue. Indeed she compares her own rescue by Heyst with that of Morrison and starts doubting about the sincerity and depth of Heyst's gesture and feelings toward her.

Heyst's attempts to act, to get involved, not only betray his resolutions and ideals of withdrawal, but more ironically they also lack sincerity and genuineness.

As we have shown in chapter 2 of our thesis, the characters in *Victory* are victims of appearances and illusions and Heyst probably more than anybody, in
spite of his detachment: he is indeed "enchanted," "naive" and "a pursuer of chimaeras." Moreover, his detachment and withdrawal from the world, from any action, have in fact turned into alienation—alienation not only from the world and society, but also from himself. He has completely cut himself off from the rest of the Archipelago and has forgotten that others exist and gossip about him. He has wrongly believed that people were not interested in him. We learn that:

The idea of being talked about was always novel to Heyst's simplified conception of himself. For a moment he was as much surprised as if he had believed himself to be a mere gliding shadow among men. Besides, he had in him a half-unconscious notion that he was above the level of island gossip. (p. 169)

Heyst has become a stranger to himself, unable to understand his own predicament:

The outer world had broken upon him; and he did not know what wrong he had done to bring this on himself, any more than he knew what he had done to provoke the horrible calumny about his treatment of poor Morrison. (p. 213)

Heyst gets caught in his own system of withdrawal. By the time that reality and evil break in, he has "managed to refine everything away" (p. 287) to the extent that he is unable to fight back on a realistic and practical level. He has become impotent, and thinks:
I have lived too long within myself, watching the mere shadows and shades of life. To deceive a man on some issue which could be decided quicker by his destruction while one is disarmed, helpless, without even the power to run away—no! That seems to me too degrading.

Any positive action, any diplomatic act seems beyond his capability. Heyst has reached an extreme in his detachment. He says:

I have never been diplomatic in my relation with mankind—not from regard for its feelings, but from a certain regard for my own. Diplomacy does not go well with consistent contempt. I cared little for life and still less for death. (p. 266)

Lena, by contrast, is more practical, more spontaneous in her behavior. Confronted with the evil Ricardo, for instance, she can act practically. She fights him when he attacks her. Cunningly she gains his confidence and eventually she disarms him. Heyst, on the contrary, reflects too much and intellectualizes situations. His behavior is condemned by Conrad, who writes in the Author Note of *Victory*:

Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man. (p. x)

Heyst appears to be a victim of illusions. As he believes he is geographically safe on his island, Heyst believes he is emotionally safe in his detachment. He
I don't care what people may say, and of course no one can hurt me. (p. 44)

In this scheme he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world—invulnerable because elusive. (p. 74)

Heyst's emotional life has become somewhat of a failure and an illusion, for, although he is very much attracted to and moved by Lena, he is incapable of real love for her. He is in fact unsure of his feelings, he confuses them, he does not know how to express them. Lena, on the contrary, sees clearly through Heyst. The following conversation illustrates this situation:

"You should try to love me!" she said. He made a movement of astonishment. "Try!" he muttered. "But it seems to me--" He broke off, saying to himself that if he loved her, he had never told her so in so many words. Simple words! They died on his lips. (p. 182)

This situation ironically foreshadows the end, when Lena is dying after she has been shot at by Mr. Jones and when Heyst is here again unable to utter a word of love:

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. (p. 336)

Throughout the novel, we see how to Heyst Lena remains a mystery. This kind of relationship betrays Heyst's
inability to relate emotionally to people, even to Lena. This is how he sees her at times:

That girl, seated in her chair in graceful quietude, was to him like a script in an unknown language, or even more simply mysterious: like any writing to the illiterate. (p. 183)

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words and even her embraces. (pp. 265-266)

Therefore some of the ironies of Heyst's detachment are that it leads indeed to alienation, restriction, illusion and lack of spontaneity. Conrad in his Author's Note of Victory sums up some of the counter-effects of Heyst's philosophy:

Besides, Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue and for the matter of that, even in love. (p. x)

Heyst's detachment has indeed led him to excess and confusion and also to pain and failure. It has run counter to its initial goal and its advocate has become its victim. Heyst admits his failure and his lack of commitment in real action, when he says:

To slay, to love--the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either. (p. 174)
Such a remark may sound ironical in itself: it parallels two extreme and opposite actions—killing and loving.

What Heyst finds painful to accept is that he has betrayed his original philosophy of perfect detachment. This is how he sees it at one time:

Action—the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth! The barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations!

"And I, the son of my father, have been caught too, like the silliest fish of them all," Heyst said to himself.

He suffered, he was hurt by the sight of his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness. (p. 142)

Heyst is unhappy, not only because he has failed in his adopted philosophy, but also because he has chosen a way of living that leaves him "alone on the bank of the stream." As already noted, Heyst does not adopt such a credo from mere conviction, but rather out of sheer pride: "And in his pride he determined not to enter it [the stream of life]." (p. 143)

Therefore the philosophy of detachment and withdrawal as followed by the elder Heyst and his son, is indeed full of paradoxes and its ironies accumulate. For instance, it has to be remembered that the elder Heyst's philosophy came from his own personal failure:
he was "dissatisfied with his country and angry with all the world, which had instinctively rejected his wisdom." (p. 75) The narrator's comments—close to those of Heyst—on the elder Heyst's last words show some of the ironies of the old man's death and his credo:

"Look on--make no sound--," were the last words of the man who had spent his life in blowing blasts upon a terrible trumpet which had filled heaven and earth with ruins, while mankind went on its way unheeding. (p. 143)

The elder Heyst's lesson, devoid of any positive action, any positive axioms, sounds paradoxical. It is a lesson of negation, which teaches not to hope, not to love, not to act. Consequently such a lesson breeds only indifference, impotence, Lena's and Heyst's deaths and unhappiness. For instance, even the small community on Samburan seems to have been upset and disturbed by such a tragedy. Moreover, at the end of his life, the elder Heyst adopted a somewhat paradoxical philosophy, since "he claimed for mankind that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy." (p. 75) The terms "claims" and "not worthy" seem to clash.

In spite of Heyst's awareness of the drawbacks, shortcomings, and inadequacy of the philosophy of
detachment, his father's impact is irreversible.

Heyst's moments of awareness reveal the ironies and the illusions of his father's credo and also of his own situation. For instance:

The young man learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost. It is not the clear-sighted who lead the world. (p. 76)

He turned the pages of the little volume, "Storm and Dust," glancing here and there at the broken text of reflections, maxims, short phrases, enigmatical sometimes and sometimes eloquent. /.../With what strange serenity, mingled with terrors, had that man considered the universal nothingness! He had plunged into it headlong, perhaps to render death, the answer that faced one at every inquiry, more supportable. (pp. 180-181)

The elder Heyst's nihilistic lesson cannot bear any fruit. More precisely his son cannot adapt such a philosophy to the living world around him. His detachment becomes indeed limited and inadequate. It falls short of its original precepts. Heyst misuses them, makes a mess of them. Instead of remaining absolutely indifferent and detached, Heyst goes astray and cannot fight against the attractions and the temptations of life. One critic, Ted E. Boyle, writes that "though Heyst believes life to be a bad dog he
cannot avoid stooping to pet it." And at times, Heyst's credo and faith fail. Even when confronted with horror and ugliness, he cannot remain indifferent and detached, as he has promised himself. The episode when he hears Zangiacomo's orchestra at Schomberg's hotel illustrates some of Heyst's contradictions:

But there is an unholy fascination in systematic noise. He did not flee from it incontinently, as one might have expected him to do. He remained, astonished at himself for remaining, since nothing could have been more repulsive to his senses, and, so to speak, more contrary to his genius, than this rude exhibition of vigour. (p. 56)

And throughout Victory, in event after event through which his precepts are tested, Heyst becomes aware of the transformations taking place in his detachment. For instance, at the idea of Lena's being in danger, he noticed that:

/.../; the sceptical carelessness which had accompanied every one of his attempts at action, like a secret reserve of his soul, fell away from him. (p. 202)

And now he views the evil trio with concern and fear, whereas before his detachment was his shield. He says to Lena:

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And only three months ago I would not have cared. I would have defied their scoundrelism as much as I have scorned all the other intrusions of life. (p. 265)

Ironically Heyst's life which "ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness" (p. 142), has become the assault and the prey of temptations, of harsh reality, of "the outer world," against which his inadequacies are unable to cope. Heyst's policy and philosophy of withdrawal and detachment are ironically defied by fate in the person of the ghastly Mr. Jones, who tells the cornered isolationist:

I, my dear sir? In one way I am--yes, I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast--almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate--the retribution that waits its time. (p. 312)

The final irony in Heyst's behavior is that in spite of his awareness, he cannot come to terms with his predicament and doubts. Even at the end he has doubts about Lena and, worse, he cannot utter "the true cry of love." Heyst's final awareness of his tragic failure, as stated in his last words to Davidson, does not even allow him to change:

Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life! (pp. 338-339)

It is ironically too late for Heyst to start anew and
for him there is no rebirth—except perhaps by the fire of his suicide.

Finally Heyst's detachment is also ironically revealed by that of his Chinese servant Wang. Like "Heart of Darkness" and Nostromo, Victory depicts at one level the irony of Western progress and civilization in undeveloped countries. In these novels, the Whites invade an area under the pretext of "progress" and civilizing mission, but this hides depredation. And ironically the agents of civilization, instead of improving the so-called undeveloped situation make it worse. In Victory Wang's suspicions and fears about the Whites' "step forward" and their philosophy are shown in his distance from them. The episode when Heyst and Lena—on their way to Wang's settlement—are suddenly confronted with a barricade is telling:

It [the path] ended in a barricade of felled trees, a primitively conceived obstacle which must have cost much labour to erect at just that spot.

"This," Heyst explains in his urbane tone, "is a barrier against the march of civilization. The poor folk over there did not like it, as it appeared to them in the shape of my company—a great step forward, as some people used to call it with mistaken confidence. The advanced foot has been drawn back, but the barricade remains." (p. 283)
Wang embodies Eastern detachment and wisdom, which is opposed to Western withdrawal and indolence, as they are embodied in Heyst. Wang has none of the romantic and intellectualizing spirit of Heyst. The Swede envies Wang's oriental "simplicity," because through it he can see the inadequacies and the passivity of his own rationalization and intellectualization. Although there is an ironical undertone in the comment on Wang as a gardener ("as if the growing of vegetables were a patented process, or an awful and holy mystery entrusted to the keeping of his race"), it remains that Heyst admires the Chinaman:

And, looking silently at the silent Wang going about his work in the bungalow in his unhasty, steady way, Heyst envied the Chinaman's obedience to his instincts, the powerful simplicity of purpose which made his existence appear almost automatic in the mysterious precision of its facts. (p. 148)

Such features as "obedience to his instincts," "steady way," "powerful simplicity of purpose"—which seem to characterize the Oriental contemplative life—cannot be applied to Heyst's ambiguous and imperfect Occidental philosophy of withdrawal. Wang, unlike Heyst, becomes immediately aware of the danger represented by the evil trio and reacts practically by stealing Heyst's revolver.
In *Victory*, Conrad shows us how the elder Heyst and his son misuse and misinterpret detachment and withdrawal. If one chooses to adopt detachment, one has to keep up constantly and perfectly with it. Such a policy does not allow for irregularities and whims. But in fact Conrad makes us see through the failures, the imperfections, and therefore the ironies of Heyst's detachment—that such a philosophy is utopian. As we have shown, Heyst's detachment lacks perfection, fails short of adaptability to circumstances and breeds unhappiness and death. Conrad's comment in his Author's Note about the acquaintance from which he drew the character of Heyst, can also be applied to our protagonist:

"...for he had charmed me by the mere amenity of his detachment which, in this case, I cannot help thinking he had carried to excess. (p. xi)

"Excess," but in spite of it "amenity," certainly characterize Heyst and man in general. Indeed man—because he is an ambiguous, imperfect and unpredictable creature, just like Heyst—triggers such a reaction. This is what makes him more likeable and admirable and enables him to adapt, to survive and endure. Heyst by his death breaks part of the rule, but he does not invalidate it; on the contrary, he enhances
it. Conrad states in his Author's Note that:

The unchanging Man of history is wonderfully adaptable cloth by his power of endurance and in his capacity for detachment. (p. x)

Although this statement is ironical, when we think of Heyst's failure in his detachment; it remains true for Conrad's philosophy about man's potentiality. Victory may resound with pessimism and despair, but Conrad has at the same time denounced the defects of Heyst's philosophy and we can feel the author's faith in man's resources. In this, undoubtely, lies an element of victory. Because "no man is an island," because man is a responsible social being, detachment, like anarchy or revolution as seen in Conrad's other works, cannot have but a negative and destructive effect. This goes against Conrad's philosophy of human solidarity and work, against man's progress and improvement.
Conclusion

The title of the novel and its last word "Nothing!" seem to contain all the irony of this controversial work of Conrad's. These contradictory words have invited us to read Victory as a story constantly pervaded with irony. Gerry Geddes writes that:

Conrad has loaded every rift with irony, making it impossible to slip away comfortable in the assurance that one has fully understood the novel, in whole or in part.

And indeed Conrad proves again to be a master of irony, using it in his words, rhetoric, narrative technique, characterization, and themes.

Contrary to the assumptions of a few critics, Conrad shows in Victory that he is still a skillful craftsman, who has mastered the art of fiction. The sentimentality and the melodrama which, according to the same critics, mar the novel, are in fact well integrated in the tone of Victory, An Island Tale, a story full of "enchantment" and feelings. But thanks to

\[\text{Geddes, p. 48.}\]
the ironical distance, we are guided by the Author and the narrators, who point out to the right reading and interpretation, give us clues and warn us. Consequently we are never completely caught in the romance and in the melodramatic aspects: more precisely we have a dual reading of *Victory*. Like the author and the narrators we are within and without the story. These narrative voices represent a standard and normative point-of-view.

Irony seems to be a perfect device to convey the ambiguities, the duality, and the illusions that characterize the novel. It is a device that reveals the contrasts, the discrepancies, and the limits of the characters' actions and theories. Through gentle irony—never really slashing as in Swift—through humour and comedy, but also through tragedy, Conrad in *Victory* questions action and detachment, progress and indolence. At one extreme progress and action bear their evils and ambiguities, but ironically too, at the other extreme, detachment and isolation leads to passivity, impotence and more evil.

*Victory* is indeed a challenging book, in which Conrad invites us to reflect about the meaning of our actions, of our achievements, even if according to
Conrad "Thinking is the great enemy of perfection." (p. x) Victory remains an open ended book, for we are not sure whose victory it is, or even if there is a real victory after all. Rather we are forced to ponder about the relative meaning of the word "Victory." It certainly depends on what side of the battlefield you stand. Conrad's statement that "a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion,"² applies to Victory. It is echoed in one of Heyst's conversations with Lena, when he tells her with some irony:

There is a quality in events which is apprehended differently by different minds or even by the same mind at different times. Any man living at all consciously knows that embarrassing truth. (p. 204)

And ironically, truth is thus never to be known. Or if some kind of truth exists, it is probably to be found in duality and ambiguity. Victory, in the puzzling and ironical nature of its characters and themes, could illustrate this paradoxical statement.

Nonetheless, in Victory, Conrad achieves perfectly

some of the purposes he sets for his task as an artist and a writer in the famous Preface of "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'":

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.  

Victory goes even further, for it makes us not only aware of our frailty in this world, but also of our responsibility and duty toward man's survival. Isolationism and withdrawal are incompatible with the human solidarity of which Conrad is an advocate. And by showing the irony of detachment, Victory, in spite of its ambiguities and its nihilistic overtones, reaffirms Conrad's belief and faith in man.

The use Conrad makes of irony therefore fits his style, his intentions and his message. In a letter to F. N. Doubleday dated June 2nd, 1924, he writes:

I think that an author who tries to "explain" is exposing himself to a very great risk—the risk of confessing himself a failure. For a work of art should speak for itself. Yet much

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could be said on the other side; for it is also clear that a work of art is not a logical demonstration carrying its intention on the face of it.

Irony, because it does not use a straight and one dimensional talk, was therefore the perfect tool for Conrad's art of writing. Besides, like any artist, Conrad was also a man. And if Conrad uses Marlow or a narrator in many of his works, it is because it allows him at times to differentiate between the artist and the man. Moreover, Conrad, because of his Polish background and bringing up, was probably more aware than any other artist of his different identities and masks.

It remains however that the mask of Marlow and the mask of irony--close to each other--characterize Conrad's fiction and give it its originality and extradimension. Irony is not an easy tool to handle, but it gives its user a greater and subtler means of transcribing and mastering the nuances and shades of his art. The result is an improved pleasure for both the writer and the reader. And Conrad, the thinker, Conrad, the artist, have achieved a non negligible victory in the everlasting battle of writing and creating.
Bibliography


VITA

Bernard Antonin Baudot was born in Cussey-les-Forges (Côte-d'Or), France, on February 7, 1947, to Albert André and Jeanne Baudot.

He attended the Collège d'Enseignement Général in Is-sur-Tille and the Lycée Carnot in Dijon, where he passed his baccalauréat in 1967. In 1969 he registered with the Faculté des Langues et Civilisations Étrangères in Dijon, where in 1976 he passed his Licence in English and in 1978 his Maîtrise.

Twice he went as a French Assistant to England: in 1972-73 at Chichester High School and in 1976-77 at Chester High School. He came to Lehigh University in the Fall of 1981. While a teaching assistant of French in the Modern Foreign Languages Department, he enrolled for a Master's degree program in the English Department. He was also a Resident Advisor for Lehigh University in the French/Spanish House in 1981-82 and in the International House in 1982-83. Thanks to a University Scholarship he was able to complete his graduate work.