CHAPTER - V

VICTORY OR THE ISOLATION OF DETACHMENT

In Under Western Eyes, the heroic force in Haldin confronts the bourgeois caution in Razumov and loses. From Chance and Victory the heroic force has disappeared, to be replaced by something else, an asceticism or self-abnegation combined with sexual inhibitions in both Roderick Anthony and Axel Heyst. While Roderick Anthony is colourless, Heyst's self-abnegation in Victory is drawn so vividly and graphically as to make him one of Conrad's most vivid characterizations. The full portrait stands at the centre of the novel, the rest of which is rather flat and melodramatic. Conrad presents Heyst as the self-conscious individual living out his life in physical, moral, social and intellectual isolation. This isolation stems from a sort of scepticism inherited from his father whose concept of life was that human existence is essentially evil, and that participation in it can only increase the evil and involve a man in trouble. The elder Heyst had taught his son that one's only concession to life should be to watch it from a detached distance, never to partake in its action. Such a philosophy, ingrained in Heyst during his impressionable youth, leads him to withdraw from life.
In fact, Conrad explores in *Victory* the far-reaching repercussions and devastating consequences of a deliberate and conscious choice of an individual who cuts himself aloof from the larger community of man. Axel Heyst chooses to live in the island of Sambir as a natural consequence of his complete self-styled ex-communication with the others. Here the geographical setting forms a fitting background for his philosophical bias on life. He spends his days on the small island of Samburan, surrounded by a shallow, passionless sea. Once the site of a thriving coal mine, the island is now deserted, its settlements abandoned, its boom days surviving only in a gigantic blackboard containing the initials of the mining company. Night after night, Heyst, the manager of the mine, sits on his verandah smoking his cheroot, against the near background of an indolent volcano still smoking faintly 'like the end of gigantic cigar'. "The man and the volcano merge in one of Conrad's most brilliant ecological fusions. Like a male Brunnhilde, Heyst has withdrawn to the inner centre of his magic circle away from the world that his father, a belligerently misanthropic philosopher, has taught him, is meaningless and corrupting. There he sits, not waiting to be rescued by life, but to be kept safe from it".¹ His secluded life, fittingly externalized in setting and the environment exemplifies his isolation from the world.
The natural inclination in Heyst's personality fortified by the teachings of his father has made him a detached observer of life rather than an active participant in it. "He was out of everybody's way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of Himalayas,... Everyone in that part of the world knew of him, dwelling on his little island... Axel Heyst, perched on it immovably was surrounded ... by a tepid, shallow sea.... His most frequent visitors were shadows, the shadow of the clouds relieving the monotony of the inanimate, brooding sunshine of the tropics". 2 He thus lives a shadow-life of unreality in the make-belief that he is safe. He justifies his life of isolation from mankind and affairs of the world, believing that action and involvement would disturb the peaceful and serene life available to him on the island. His intellectualized indifference to life and community make him lose "The habit of asserting himself", 3 which does not 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". 4 He withdraws from the hullabaloo of life and settles in the island like a hermit. To keep his life undisturbed on the island, he drifts gradually but surely away from Others. The hazards of life seem to him to be
"too great for his fears and too mysterious for his understanding". As such, he sees the power of "blind destiny" behind them. Thus, he remains wrapped up in his isolation because of his illusory concept of life. To make it worse, he forsakes "the habit of profound reflection" because it is "the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man". This view of life takes deep roots in him as a conviction and works as a defence against any interference from the outside world.

Conrad had, at first, thought of calling his hero Augustus Berg, which suggested nothing in particular. He then changed to Axel Heyst, thereby opening up lines of agreeably indirect inquiry. Critically analyzed, the first name points straight to Prince Axel, the Aristocratic hero of Villiers, de l'Isle Adam's novel who looks upon life with contemptuous disdain and whose famous remark, "live? our servants will do that for us", served as an epigraph for the literature of decadence. The last name, rhyming with Christ, is too full of obvious interpretative possibilities to need elaboration, though Conrad elaborates further by specific reference to Lena as Magdalen: "Heyst had shut the door. On his way back to the table, he crossed the path of the girl they had called Alma - she did not know why - also magdalen...". As John Batchlor puts it, "Heyst is Christ-like, of course, and he is a
flesh-and-blood Christ in a morality in which the other actors are puppets". In fact, Heyst's secluded life under the illusion of playing safe is a denial of vital force: "I have never killed a man or loved a woman - not even in my thoughts, not even in my dreams.... To slay, to love - the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either".

Heyst's attitude to life was out of keeping with that of any white man in the East, so that he received such names as "Enchanted Heyst", and "Utopist" Heyst and so on, indicating that his attitude towards life had made him an inexplicable odd man. "For fifteen years", it is narrated, "Heyst had wandered, invariably courteous and unapproachable, and in return was generally considered a 'queer chap'. He had started off on these travels of his after the death of his father, an expatriated Swede...." His idea was that life should be 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. 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. "I'll drift", Heyst had said to himself deliberately. "He did not mean intellectually or sentimentally or morally. He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soil, like a detached leaf drifting in the windcurrents under
the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything". Conrad's narrator observes that Heyst "had been wondering before he came under our observation. In what region? At what early age? Mystery. Perhaps he was a bird that had never had a nest". Perhaps the end of withdrawal should be return, but where is Heyst, the displaced wanderer, to return to? He remembers "objects familiar to his childhood and his youth" and thinks of them as the only realities remaining. "In his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp". But he never returns to London and to the reality embodied in those objects. Out of his solitude and detachment, out of practicalities of living, and out of the course of events and circumstances, Heyst has built his own reality by virtue of which he believes he has revoked illusion; as he tells Lena "I've said to the Earth that bore me". I am I and you are a shadow. And, by Jove, it is not". When Lena enters into Heyst's physical, emotional and intellectual world, he thinks of her presence and even her touch has "the insubstantial sensations of a dream invading the reality of waking life; a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts". That is, he views her intrusion as that of a dream into the real world. Perhaps it is Conrad's way of suggesting that "The state of blindness and confused perception in Victory
is no temporary enchantment: it is, rather the habitual illusion that is the inescapable condition of all human relations".\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, he is neither, as Laskowsky observes, "the important hollow man"\textsuperscript{21} nor the 'Heysts' that each who comes across him on the island nicknames him to be, but he is an independent man existing in his own right with a definite view of life. So, all that he has inherited, imbibed, and learnt from his father and his own backward-moving tendency is not to get involved in the world and its affairs, though in the fictional world of Conrad it has to face the challenge and undergo the test. However, "seldom in Conrad is the reader made so aware of the importance of chance in the affairs of an individual. In the case of Heyst he is whirled away, despite himself, into a series of events and situations in which he finds passivity impossible".\textsuperscript{22} This structural flaw in \textit{Victory} provokes some of the critics to suggest that both in \textit{Chance} and \textit{Victory} "Conrad renounced a vision of personal autonomy in its positive sense".\textsuperscript{23} Man comes to be less and less responsible for his destiny. As in Hardy, the universe takes over: "it is a turbulent and capricious universe, but its workings are not so interesting as those of the human beings of Conrad's earlier novels, who had taken the responsibility (insofar as they knew what it was) for their own actions".\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Victory} and \textit{Chance} are thus based on the opposition between what a man rightly
wants and what the universe is prepared to allow him. Insofar as the catastrophe with which Victory ends does not appear to be the logical outcome either of Heyst's actions or of his beliefs, it might be maintained that "this is a novel without those underlying moral tensions that characterize Conrad's earlier work".25

In short, all his life Heyst has made a project out of his own detachment, it is the essence of his life. He has not withdrawn, like a hermit, but he wanders from one place to another, rootless and free of all ordinary entanglements; Conrad makes Heyst into a larger than life figure, a loner withdrawn from commerce with others separated by his habit of solitude and detachment; yet, somehow, noble and sympathetic. In this he recalls Jim. He comes out of his isolation when moved by pity to perform a kind act for a fellow human being.

Conrad's irony exposes the absurdities and perils of a theory of detachment with reference to special situations and unusual characters. Whereas, the interest in Chance is largely psychological, that in Victory, is as near the philosophical as Conrad ever comes; and his familiar theme of detachment and action takes greater prominence in the later than in the earlier book. "The allegory in Victory has wider universal significance than the single conflict of good and evil in the individual.... The story has, more-
over stronger undertones of warning and premonition than chance; and since it was finished in May, 1914, it is perhaps not accidental that the thunder over the closing scene has the sound of a naval action on the horizon." The malady of Heyst is a modern low fever of ingrained scepticism. Although, moved by pity, Heyst does act to rescue a fellow human being in distress. He is addicted (under the early influence of his father's belief) to a spectatorial attitude to life and to a persistent habit of thought. He cannot act without feeling self-contempt. "This melancholy distrust of existence makes him ineffectual and pathetic, even a little boyish as Anthony never is; but his more delicate egotism absorbs him and fosters a condition of spiritual pride which defies fate more arrogantly than Anthony's masculine vanity."27

As in other novels, Conrad faces Heyst with a peculiar situation, wherein his (illusory) ideal of absolute detachment from others is tried and tested. His (Conrad's) ironic vision exposes man's failure to come to grips with reality (which for Conrad is social) and rips apart the illusions in which Heyst is enmeshed. In Conradian credo, the sense of solidarity with the community is paramount; man cannot shut out the world. Despite self-imposed seclusion and isolation it pounces on one, as Haldin does on Razamov's bastion of solitary confinement to his
scholarly studies. In *Victory*, as in *Chance*, the fundamental point of recognizing the need of one for the Other is worked out in a dramatic manner. The story designed for the purpose of wringing out the insuppressible need to let the self journey into the ineffectiveness and hollowness of sceptic, isolated and indifferent existence of Heyst. The pilgrimage is artistically devised to operate both at spiritual and day to day human relationship levels. While the first test sparks off the voyage, the second and most powerful test of his chivalrous rescue of Lena proves decisively the illusory nature of his long-cherished ideal of detachment from life. Both these tests are humanity-oriented, owing to his basically anti-life and anti-mankind attitude. The basic issues which the novel raises and which open a new way of looking at and knowing life are: What is going to happen to the detached self, if circumstances force it to abandon its aloofness? How stable and viable is Heyst's philosophy of scepticism? The supreme question that arises is: How will a self so unequipped to act upon that instinct behave? Will it go into action? If it does, what on earth will be the consequences?

Determined to pursue the detached life of a spectator, Heyst (after his father's death) assumes the role of a wandering loner and goes to the Malayan Archipelago. Fifteen years pass and nothing occurs to change Heyst's
philosophy. He is now in middle thirties and confirmed in his pattern of life. Then an unexpected happening throws latent forces in his character into conflict. He finds a man, Captain Morrison, in trouble with Portuguese authorities, in Timor over a small fine for a trifling sum of money; Morrison might lose his ship. Compassion for a fellow white man in distress inspires Heyst to offer help. With the emergence of long suppressed humanitarian feeling Heyst says (definitely): "I can lend you the amount". And Morrison accepts and thinks it to be a miracle which he believes is the end-result of his prayers. He is awestruck at this act of grace. Morrison is so deeply grateful that he insists on Heyst joining his now ransomed vessel. Heyst, embarrassed and ashamed of his involvement, goes along with Morrison. When Morrison decides to organize the Tropical Belt company, he makes Heyst his manager for the Tropics, with headquarters on the island of Samburan about three hundred miles from Sourabaya. Conrad has skilfully dramatized the emergence of the basic instinct in Heyst in order to provide a test for a much vaunted philosophy of detachment. It makes him (Heyst) forsake all his past convictions of remaining secluded, indicating his pretence of detachment as impracticable, untenable and hollow. Furthermore, it suggests that eventually everyone must be involved in the affairs of life and human community, and that the herd instinct is
as inescapable as the urge to live on this world.

On a fund-raising mission to England, Morrison catches chill and dies. The Tropical Belt Coal company folds and Heyst after dismissing company employees, continues to live on Samburan, with no companion but a Chinese servant, Wang. After Morrison's death, Heyst withdraws from the world and chooses to live like a hermit. He does not resume even his wanderings lest he should fall a victim to another compassionate impulsion. He wants to avoid the indignities, follies and illusions of involvement in life, and prescribes for himself a solitary and self sufficient code of living. Very adroitly does Conrad suggest through the use of Morrison episode that Heyst is lacking in self-knowledge, which he could progressively gain only through further relations with Others. Conrad enacts it through a second test followed by a chain of relations and incidents that complete the onward pilgrimage.

In spite of all his intellectual armour justifying his secluded life, he surprisingly discovers that he is alone. He is troubled with a hurt feeling of having betrayed his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness. "In fact, his long-established equilibrium has been permanently upset; his uneasiness is an obscure recognition of radical discrepancies, between his 'scheme' and necessities of his own nature".29
He feels absolutely lonely:

Where could he have gone to, after all these years? Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth. Of this fact - not such a remote one, after all - he had only lately become aware; for it is failure that makes a man enter into himself and reckon up his resources. And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings. 30

That is how the narrator perceives Heyst's state of mind for a year and a half on the island. After dismissing employees of the company, he chooses the lonely life of a man stranded in a desert; he tries hard to suppress all human feelings and avoid any human contact as that of Davidson trying to break his silence and taking him elsewhere to be in the midst of Europeans. There grows, beyond his knowledge, a suffering from thorough disenchantment:

Heyst was disenchanted with life as a whole. His scornful temperament, beguiled into action, suffered from failure in a subtle way unknown to men accustomed to grapple with the realities of common human enterprise. It was like the gnawing pain of useless apostasy, a sort of shame before his own betrayed nature; and, in addition, he also suffered from plain, downright remorse. 31

The narrator observes that living for a long time in the general desolation which is enough to frighten any
new comer, has broken the spell of his "taste for silence" and reduced him to "a captive of the island". It is in this state that Heyst, making a winding-up call at Sourabaya finds himself exposed once more to acclaim on his humanity. This exposure, impelled by "a natural sweetness of temper, a vein of gallantry, a streak of Lingardism" shakes his claim of aloofness so laboriously and consciously built. The inevitability of the plunge that he once more takes, this time before our eyes, is brought poignantly home to us. The whole episode, with its circumstances and setting is rendered with dramatic immediacy - "the torrid desolation of the hotel, the malicious asinity of the manly bearded Schomberg, hotel-keeper and Officer of the Reserve, the limp subjection of his poor charmless rag of a wife, the squalidly sinister Zangiacomos, with their travelling concept-party, and the hopeless isolation of the girl-member who has the ill-luck to touch off Schomberg's inflamed importunities". Conrad, the consummate craftsman makes us realize, at the same time, the contained sensitiveness and aloof distinction of Heyst who registers all the details, and his action comes as the one possible issue of the pressures evoked.

Heyst's barricades break apart and humanity within him surges up when he, waiting in the Schomberg's hotel for the steamer to pick him up on his return trip, feel "a sudden pity for these beings (of the music band), exploited,
hopeless, devoid of charm and grace..." Thereafter, he goes to the concert hall, an act which signifies the virtual denial of his cherished philosophy of uninvolvement of life and in its affairs. Though he sits alone at the table and listens to the music and finds something like 'an unholy fascination in systematic noise', there grows gradually an interest in the first sympathetic sight of a girl being abused by the wife of the orchestra leader, the effect on Heyst is communicated by the narrator in a most touching manner:

She had captured Heyst's awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings.

Heyst's temperament pull towards life proves more powerful than the rational conviction that it is not worth bothering with. Just in the case of Morrison (in whom he finds his own alter ego), sentiment stills into him and undermines his rational judgement. In case of Lena, sexual attraction appearing in the irresistible guise of sympathetic pity and chivalry causes him to renounce, for the second time, his vow never to form any ties.
Instead of throwing light on the subconscious process actuating affinity with the girl, Conrad has developed it in a rather conventional way. The psychologist in him disappears in the artist. Instead of delving deep down into the unconscious layers of his psyche, Conrad makes it abundantly clear that a sort of mystic communication was established between Heyst and the helpless but charming girl. Through the use of language and symbol, Conrad underlines the primacy of the irrational element in man's nature, for the lonely and abused girl feels equally taken up with the man sitting alone in the corner.

At the first encounter, the communication works as the narrator perceives, at three levels - the one of impulsive response, that of the eyes acting as a means of knowing the other and that of conversation affecting their thinking process. "It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him... accost Morrison", now it is extended to one "in trouble expressively harassed, dejected, lonely". Their nocturnal encounter introduces her as a supplicating, wraith-like figure precipitating suddenly into his arms. He sympathizes with her, a girl in distress, and assures her of help. At the level of eyes, each approaches the other with irresistible might: "the greatest astonishment became visible in her face; for she now perceived now different he was from the other men in the room. He was
as different from them as she was different from the other members of the Ladies' Orchestra. Therefore, "she obeyed his inviting gesture" and sat down side by side. As to conversation, "they had nothing to say to each other", except few sentences, because their communication worked at a level different from that of reasoning. From the little conversation that they had, her voice indexing her acute innermost suffering "seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talks fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune."

On another occasion of interval, sitting side by side, he listens to the moving tale of the poor and innocent girl, imagines what may have come to her and finds his heart once more filled with compassion. Her imploring plea to rescue her takes on the quality of a moral and spiritual "command" for it was he who had instinctively drawn her to him and aroused delight and admiration for him, "a very novel experience, not very intelligible, but distinctly pleasurable". Heyst, likewise, is equally affected. The charm of her voice did not fail her even in whispering so that "Heyst seemed to see the illusion of human fellowship on earth vanish before the naked truth of her
existence..." Moreover, her joyous radiant smile astonished him: "Here was a smile the origin of which was well known to him, and yet it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience". Thereafter, retiring from the 'uproar' of the Concert, he could not sleep. The narrator presents in a subtle, suggestive manner, the psychology of the situation which is in sharp contrast with that of isolation:

Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes even profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness. But now he was troubled, a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman.

So the sleepless Heyst, to quieten his restlessness walks into the garden behind the hotel - like "a calm, meditative ghost in his white drill suit, revolving in his head thoughts absolutely novel, disquieting and seductive". He was trying to reason out his sudden and spontaneous decision to rescue the girl because he thought that his purpose by being faced steadily would appear praiseworthy and wise. For, "the use of reason (as Conrad puts it), is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices and follies, and also our fears". There he is met by Lena who is equally
restless over the prospect of escaping from Schomberg's hell of a hotel. Impelled by the imperative need for man-woman communion, they whisper to each other, converse, and gradually clasp each other passionately as a sign of their mutual need. In spite of all his sceptical convictions, the human instinct of love prevails. Although he had no illusion about her, his sceptical mind is "dominated by the fullness of his heart". He assures her that he would liberate her from the clutches of the troupe and, later on, he tactfully elopes with her to the island of Samburan.

This crucial step on the part of Heyst gives a new direction to the plot of the novel. We have to remember that Heyst is a titled nobleman, well-educated, refined, accustomed to a detached style of living, and fastidious. Lena, on the other hand, is almost a child of streets, a waif with nothing to command her but her physical charm, a lovely voice and her deplorable helplessness. The plot of this story is often referred to as the Pygmalion and Galatea plot. Kipling used it in *The Light That Failed* and W. Somerset Maugham used it in *Of Human Bondage*. Many other writers have used the same plot since Conrad wrote *Victory*.

The girl's 'names' are significant. When Heyst finally chooses a name for her, he adopts Magdalen to Lena; thus
following a common practice of the Indonesian people, who often use the last syllable of one's name as a nickname. But critically considered, it implies that Heyst considers her to be Magdalen and not Alma; suggesting that Heyst accepts her not so much out of a feeling of deep emotional attachment but more out of compassionate desire to rescue the lady in distress. This suggestion has a very important bearing on the course of events that follow as well as the behavioural pattern of Heyst towards the close of the novel.

Heyst's detachment proves ineffective when put to the test. He realizes that he is, after all, a human being and has to come to terms with the Other. When he gets time on the island for a 'meditation' which "is always in a white man, at least - more or less an interrogative exercise", he meditates "on the mystery of his actions", and finds that "there must be a lot of the original Adam" in him, that there is "the primeval ancestor", "the oldest voice" now raising "its imperative echoes". But he cannot behave accordingly. The inexperience of either killing a man or loving a woman either in thoughts or in his dreams, leads him to beg pardon of Lena: "You must forgive me anything that may have appeared to you awkward in my behaviour, inexpressive in my speeches, untimely in my silences". As far as women went, he was altogether uninstructed and he had not the gift of intuition which is
fostered in the days of youth by dreams and visions, exercises of the heart fitting it for the encounters of a world in which love itself rests as much as antagonism as an attraction. He is struck by "the physical and moral sense of the imperfections of their relations - a sense which made him desire her constant nearness, before his eyes, under his hand, and which, when she was out of his sight made her so vague, so elusive and illusory, a promise that could not be embraced and held".51

From the outset, the relationship between Lena and Heyst has been uneasy, almost unnatural. It remains so until towards the close of the book, "Lena, woman-like, probes into the facts of Heyst's past relationship with Morrison, and it dawns upon her that her own situation is beginning to offer a parallel".52 It becomes clear that Heyst wishes to save her, rather than to possess her. With her woman's logic, she also perceives that it was not, in the first place, affection for Morrison which led Heyst to help him. It was something else. This becomes evidently clear in the dialogue between Lena and Heyst on the subject. To Lena's question, "you saved a man for fun - is that what you mean? Just for fun?" Heyst makes an answer which throws a flood of light on the basic trait of his character.

"Why this tone of suspicion"? remonstrated Heyst. "I suppose the sight of this particular distress was disagreeable to me. What you call
fun came afterwards, when it dawned on me that I was for him a walking, breathing, incarnate proof of the efficacy of prayer. I was a little fascinated by it - and then, could I have argued with him? You do not argue against such evidence, and besides it would have looked as if I wanted to claim the merit. Already his gratitude was simply frightful. Funny position, was not it? The boredom came later, when we had lived together on board his ship. I had, in a moment of inadvertance, created for myself a tie. How to define it precisely I do not know. One gets attached in a way to people one has done something for. But is that friendship? I am not sure what I was. I only, know that he who forms a tie is lost...."

To Lena Heyst refers to himself as the "most detached creatures in this earthly captivity, the veriest tramp on this earth, an indifferent stroller going through the world's bustle", but his unruffled behaviour which, without being stiff, kept people at arm's length hid a side of his nature which hitherto his distrust of life and his command of himself had screened. But now that this side has emerged, he finds that he cannot rid himself of his ingrained mental equipment. In his remarks and observations to Lena, he gives himself away, which arouses doubts and fears in the mind of Lena who wants him absolutely for her and wishes to give herself totally to him. When Heyst reads *Storm and Dust*, one of the books authored by his father, she interrupts and exclaims:

"You should try to love me!" she said .... "I have done nothing", she said in a low voice. "It's you who have been good, helpful and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that - just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because - well! But sometimes
it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever.55

Such words pierce his heart straight - the sound of them more than the sense, and as a result "all his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat".56 He assures her that "nothing can break in on (them) here".57 However, her doubts linger. Although she understood him in a sense, even to his very aloofness she did not know where she stood with him, or how to pierce beyond his kind and withdrawn serenity.

In spite of the "instinctive bond which was, almost outside their own volition, bringing them closer together",58 Heyst maintains his habitual silence and remains aloof; he remains what the existentialists call a 'stranger'. Although he has been uprooted emotionally, nothing as yet has altered the fixed habit of his mind and the experience of a lifetime. There seems to be no overt shadow between them but there is a sort of charged silence. Enduring love, on the contrary, means complete harmony where mannerism matters no longer. His detached aloofness hinders his total surrender to the master-passion of love even when the whole adventure of elopement has "an air almost of inevitability",59 about it. He remains till the last, the victim of his temperament, of his upbringing, of the twisted wisdom that had been instilled into him. Even as Lena lies dying, she whisper-
ingly asks, "why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?" All that he does in response is to bend "low over her, cursing his festidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life".  

In sharp contrast to Heyst, Anthony in Chance forges an intimate, enduring love relationship with Flora. Marlow's comment adequately illuminates Conrad's view of the triumphant life:

Of all the forms offered to us by life it is the one demanding a couple to realize it fully, which is the most imperative. Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the - the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple.  

Anthony and Flora do not commit such a sin against life; on the contrary, they respond to the call and consummate their love life and thus emerge triumphant. In Victory there is a suggestion at the end of the novel, about the triumph of life, but it is worked out through the use of melodrama, as many critics complain. Conrad works out the theme of the novel through the multi-angular human relationship, the interaction of the conflicting attitudes of each character and an elaborate design of plotting, intriguing, and counterbalancing forces. Conrad's
doubt about the propriety of the word 'Victory', the shining and tragic goal of noble effort, appeared too great, too august, to stand at the head of a mere novel", is resolved at the end of the novel, by his schematically manipulating a tragic catastrophe. The tragic death of Lena does signify the 'Victory'. But Heyst - the - loner's self-sacrifice by immolation seems too melodramatic and sentimental. It is certainly a forced ending which does not accord with a peculiarly ironic credo of Conrad.

At the crucial stage, when Lena and Heyst are engaged in cementing their love relationship, the bandit-trio of Ricardo, Jones and Pedro, instigated by Schomberg, arrives on the island in search of Heyst's supposed treasure. Even Heyst realizes that they are the agents of evil, he (Heyst) remains as inactive as before: "Here they are, the envoys of the other world. Here they are before you - evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back".

Mr. Jones, in reply to the demand that he 'define' himself, responds:

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.
What we are to witness is the opposition "of two radically different versions of human autonomy: Heyst's isolated scepticism against the psychopathic amorality of Mr. Jones and his peripatetic entourage". Therefore, we have in Victory the same tensions that underline Chance. On the one hand, there is the apparently irresistibel need for a man to overcome isolation through love; on the other, the terrible fact that the universe is not only indifferent, but hostile to the affairs of mankind. Neither the union of Anthony and Flora nor that of Heyst and Lena can abide, the one destroyed by 'Chance', the other by 'fate' both of which are metaphysical principles not of neutrality but of malignancy.

But neither of the poles of this new tension is very adequately realized in the novel. Conrad had never written convincingly of romantic love, and his new belief in its importance is not accompanied by an adequate capacity to portray it. For example, we have a description of Lena's emotions as she is confronted by the lustful hotel-keeper, Schomberg:

She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her - the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path.
The affirmation is nothing more than a string of romantic cliches. The sentimental ethic of Chance and Victory is balanced by an emerging fatalism. Standing against the movement of a man towards a woman is the very nature of life itself, cruelly represented in Victory by Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro. Anthony's death is gratuitous; Heyst's is caused by the fact that Schomberg does not like him; thus the subtle ambiguities of Conrad's earlier works begin in these novels, "to be transformed into a relatively crude opposition between the sentiment of love and the kinds of bad luck that oppose it".  

His life-long attitude of detachment and aloofness from the world and its affairs precludes Heyst's immediate response to the sinister invasion - the visit of the world. On the contrary, Lena is on the look out to do something; to convince Heyst of her deep, sincere and abiding love for him. Ironically, the chance comes her way with the arrival of the bandit-trio; it came strangely and darkly, but to her feminine reason which, for all its subtle shades, seized direct upon the truth, as she saw it, came pointed as an arrow. She seethes with courage to benefit from this opportunity, "to give herself up to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice". She feels it a compulsion because she thinks she exists as far as and as long as Heyst imagines her to exist. As she succeeded earlier to exert some effect on his nonchalance leading to
his discovery that "all his cherished negations were falling off him one by one",70 she now hopes to arouse his genuine love for her. Her weapons to save Heyst from the bandit's malevolent attack are her feminine charm, courage, and devotion to him. She maintains her balance even when she is confronted with the devilish designs of Ricardo; the devotion for Heyst proves stronger in her than fear.

Woman-like, she grasps the implicit rift between Ricardo, a violent heterosexual dacoit, presently taking more interest in her physical charm and feminine daring, and Jones who has imbibed a pathological loathing towards woman. She hides from Heyst the unexpected assault of Ricardo on her and determines to snatch by a trick of her charms the knife from Ricardo who had designs to kill Heyst. She feels thrilled at the prospect of defending the man she loves so dearly: "It was she who would have to protect him, to be the defender of a man who was strong enough to lift her bodily".71 Actuated by every instinct of a loving woman, her weakness changes to strength, her dependence to protective competence, she meets Ricardo's 'feral spring' with a courage that matches his own and wins admiration. Perhaps this is Conrad's way of suggesting that love can transform the lover and bring about a qualitative change. It is a double blessing; it produces not only an alchemic effect upon the person who loves, but it also proves
redemptive for the person who is loved. We have seen how Natalia's pure passion for Razumov arouses in the latter the consciousness of his own guilt at betraying her brother Haldin, which leads him to make a confession and thereby redeem himself. In Victory as well, Conrad attempts a variation on the theme. Here, for Conrad love is the one sure way to step out of one's isolation from the Other and the community of man.

While Lena wishes to take the whole struggle on herself showing a "woman's sublime faculty" of self-sacrifice, Heyst, to her indignation, tries to send her away into the forest to hide so that she is safe. It is a subtle suggestion indicating that instead of remaining indifferent and aloof, Heyst is concerned about her. Parting from Heyst at this critical situation is unthinkable for her. She knew that Ricardo carries a dagger strapped to his leg and that he intends to murder both Heyst and Mr. Jones this very night. She decides to remain in the house, sure of winning an unconditional and unequivocal feminine victory over Heyst's heart:

Such as she was, a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy, she would try to rise above herself, triumphant and humble; and then happiness would burst on her like a torrent, flinging at her feet the man whom she loved.
Lena presses on toward Victory. Secure in her purpose, activated by a great love, she is invincible. In contrast, Heyst who, because he cannot love, is incapable of aggressive action. When alone, she is visited by Ricardo whom she overpowers with her beguiling charm and thereby succeeds in getting the dagger from him. She conquers Ricardo who, in a fit of delirious passion, bends low to kiss her feet. Conrad represents him as a devenomed viper prone at her feet. While Ricardo is in the act of kissing her white ankle, Heyst and Jones appear in the door. Jones is furious at Ricardo for concealing from him the information about the girl. In a murderous rage, Jones snaps a shot, the bullet glances off Ricardo's head and pierces Lena's breast. Heyst is taken aback by what he thinks — is Lena's betrayal of love that he is so confused, and does not realize what has happened.

Lena, though mortally wounded, remains unaware of the deadly wound because she is concerned more about Heyst's well being than about herself, and mentally and spiritually concerned more to show that she has finally been able to do something tremendously significant for saving his life: "You are safe now, I have done it... oh, my beloved!" Her voice fades, but her eyes still shine like the sun breaking through mist. Conrad has drawn the likeness between Lena and Christ, who loved so much that He gave His life. Conrad speaks of her breast as being of a "Sacred
whiteness", 75 her "transfigured beauty", 76 and the "divine radiance" 77 on her lips as she expires. Lena has now become the symbol of perfect love: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". 78 Her final words uphold her in the ecstasy of her self-sacrifice for the man she so truly loved: "who else could have done this for you?" She said, "No one in the world". 79 He answered her in a murmur of unconcealed despair. And thus, "with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last, triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death". 80

Since we are dealing with the theme of isolation in Conrad, we have to remember that until Lena met Heyst at Schomberg's hotel, she had led an unhappy and harried existence of a lonesome girl. Her mother had deserted her father, a musician playing in a small theatre, when she was a little girl, and the "landladies of various poor lodging-houses had attended casually to her abandoned childhood". 81 Later, after her father who had taught her the violin, died of a paralytic stroke, she had drifted into Zangiacomo's Ladies' orchestra, going with it on its tour throughout the East. Her background could not have been more unpropitious and her new wandering life only added to her forlornness. She was subjected to this kind of lonely life under stress of circumstance. Conrad shows us how the awakening of love in her for Heyst drove away her
feeling of having been left, metaphorically speaking, an orphan. In fact, it is Conrad's way of suggesting that love is a remedy against lonesomeness. It is her deep and abiding love which helps her achieve spiritual victory over death; and more important, it is her love which transforms in the end the otherwise incurable sceptic isolationist Heyst who has nourished for too long a time, his distrust of life and torn himself apart from rest of mankind.

However, so constrictive is the grip of isolationist philosophy on his mind that even in the moment of crisis, Heyst fails to realize Lena's supreme effort to save him even at the cost of her life. As he enters the living room of his house along with Jones, all the objects including Lena seem to him "shadowy, unsubstantial, the dumb accomp-lices of an amazing dream plot". He seems crazed with jealousy at finding Ricardo at Lena's feet, and suspects an act of infidelity on her part. Even after the shot is fired, he does not awaken enough to realize what has happened. And when she whisperingly implores him to take her into his arms, all he does is to bend "low over her" cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. His habit of isolation and detachment has not yet loosened its grip on him. He lifts her only to remove her to the bedroom. It is only later when he reads the signs of death on her face that he is shaken to the shock of his
life. At the very next moment, he slips his arms under her neck, "ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart for ever!" All at once the demon of isolation is exercised and realization dawns on him that Lena had made the supreme sacrifice of her life out of her deep love for him. As F.R. Leavis puts it, Heyst gets "from his relations with (that) new sense of reality, and now, after death, makes to Davidson his tragic pronouncement in favour of trust in life, before setting fire to the bunagalow and himself dying in the flames. It is an ironical victory for the life, but unequivocally a victory". Before he acts out his self immolation, he makes his sad pronouncement - a sequel to his self-realization: "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life".

As Conrad suggests, Lena's victory implies a condemnation of the isolationist policy, a verdict on life, a judgement that, as Karl observed, "no man is an island unto himself, and that human solidarity must often take precedence over the individual will". Viewed in this light, the opinion of Kaehele and German that the "admirable individuals like Heyst and Lena achieve very tenuous victories", does not take into account the fact that Lena's death forces Heyst inexorably to recognize the inadequacy
of his long-cherished creed of detachment. Therefore, Leavis's claim that "the victory is a victory over scepticism, a victory of life" and that "the tragic irony that makes it come too late and identifies it with death does not make it less a victory, it is unequivocal", is in keeping with Conrad's attempt to convey through the sacrifice of Lena and Heyst, the efficacy of love as a transforming agent. However, in the most successful of his novels, such as, _Lord Jim, Nostromo_ and _Under Western Eyes_ Conrad's attitude to life has been one of sceptical irony which is basic to his artistic canon. The tragic ending which seems forced and melodramatic to some of Conrad's critics, indicates, in fact, a distinct change in his general attitude to life. Here, he affirms the importance of love as a galvanizing agency of transfiguration: "The transformation in Heyst from the withdrawn man to the involved, from a sleeping volcano to an active one (the funeral pyre in which he immolates Lena and himself symbolizes his final blazing-up), from coal to diamond, is the same process through which Captain Anthony moves and, in a more formidable way, Razumov and Decoud". 

There are quite a few critics who disagree with this assessment. John Batchlor, for example, believes that Heyst never learns to love. "Fire purifies every thing", including despair, and it may be that Heyst burns himself to death less out of remorse than out of a final recognition
of his own incompleteness. "What he feels for Lena is not love but, in his father's phrase, 'that form of contempt which is called pity'".\textsuperscript{92} Rather, Heyst is a sceptic like Decoud, a passive figure driven by events until it takes a climactic 'plunge' like Lord Jim, and a man caught up in the toils of his father's destiny like Charles Gould.

"While Decoud, Jim, Gould and Anthony are engaged in inner struggles with aspects of themselves, Heyst fights on the side of good against conspicuously obvious evil".\textsuperscript{93} Similarly, Guerard argues that a fatal flaw in Victory is to be found in the fact that Heyst undergoes an inexplicable change of character.\textsuperscript{94} Heyst utterly lacks the traditional attributes of a hero: purposefulness, self-assertion and sexual enterprise. Morrison and Lena die from a chain of events which begins with his intervention; Heyst's own death is a victory for his father: He was wrong to be hooked like a 'silly fish' into the world of 'action'. 'Victory' 'is perhaps best seen as a theoretical exercise demonstrating the difficulties of building a dramatic structure round a protagonist who is devoid of will'.\textsuperscript{95} Donald Dike calls him "a Prospero without power to sustain his illusion",\textsuperscript{96} because unlike Prospero, who has the proven ability to manipulate events, conspiring around him on the island, Heyst is completely overpowered by events he cannot control. "Heyst cannot sustain even the illusion of his own detachment".\textsuperscript{97}
Anyone seeking to understand Axel Heyst will profit by Hume's personal confession (The Treatise of Human Nature):

I am first affrighted with that forlorn solitude, in which I am placed in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expelled all human commerce, and left utterly abandoned and disconsolate... where am I or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence or who have any influence on me? 98

Viewed in this light, the claim that Conrad looks on love as a transforming agent capable of transforming Heyst-the-Coal into Heyst-the-diamond cannot be sustained. Conrad thus suggests in the opening paragraph of the novel that Carbon is the common element in both coal and diamond: "there is, as every school boy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamond. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as 'black diamonds'." 99 According to those critics who believe that Conrad offers love as a solvent of Heyst's solitude and solitariness, this suggestion in the opening paragraph of the novel, symbolizes and predicts the sea-change that Lena's deep love for him brings about. No doubt, the realization comes too late and that is what leads to his tragic end. But what is important to note is that Heyst is able to realize before he dies that it was through
the denial of love that he had turned his life into an
arid wasteland.

As a marginalia, we might observe that in *Victory*,
most of the characters are in a sense displaced "outcasts
both by immediate circumstance and by the unhappy and
inescapable accident of who and where they are". Lena
who is apparently rescued from exile is forced to lead the
life of a stranger on the island of Sambruan by the obstinate
attitude of the condescending pity of Axel Heyst. Earlier,
she has been a victim of Schomberg's villainous advances
and now she suffers the cold indifference of detachment
from Heyst. Schomberg is himself an outcast; in part,
because his extraordinary malice causes people to shun him,
and in part, because he considers himself superior to others.
Similarly Mrs. Schomberg is isolated and pitifully misunder­
stood. Pedro and Ricardo are outcasts in a different way.
Both of them are alien to normal human intercourse: Pedro is
unsuitable for any civilized society and Ricardo because of
his violent nature and instinctual savagery. Jone's displace­
ment is self-generated. He acknowledges that he is now a
rebel, "coming and going up and down the earth".
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