Autobiographical Elements in *Victory*

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［要旨］　『勝利』においてコンラッドは、アクセル・ヘイストが父から受け継いだ傍観的哲学を標榜しながらも様々な事件に巻き込まれ、破滅する姿を描いているが、ヘイストの中には作者自身の影を強く感じさせる要素が多く見られる。ヘイストがコンラッドその人を彷彿させるのは、人物像においてだけではなく、父との関係においてもコンラッドの実人生を思わせるものがある。また、リーナの人物像には妻ジェシーを思い起こさせる点が多くあり、彼女との関係においても自伝的要素が見られる。作品の場面や主題においても、ヘイストがリーナとの生活で辿った心理的プロセスは、コンラッドがジェシーとの交際・結婚生活で辿ったプロセスと類似している。ヘイストとリーナの関係には、出会いの場面から結婚当初のコンラッドのぎこちなさを経て、信頼関係を築いていくまでのプロセス、ジェシーの献身愛にいたるまで、コンラッド自身の妻との関わりが投影されている。

All novels may be considered autobiographical to a certain extent, if writing fiction is viewed as an unconscious attempt to search for the author's identity. Conrad, amongst others, is a novelist whose reflection can be strongly felt in his work. Many readers easily recognize his past in his novels' fictional settings or characters, although he constantly attempts to conceal it through skilful narrative strategies. *Victory* is one such fictional work and especially important regarding the issue of Conrad and women. In this essay, autobiographical elements in *Victory* will be traced by comparing a portrait of Heyst with the author's biographical sources. By examining autobiographical elements and considering the subject of the novel, its hidden meaning will be investigated.

I

In his correspondence with Macdonald Hastings, who was adapting *Victory* for the stage, Conrad remarks: “For Victory, don’t forget, has come out of my innermost self” (*CL*5 655). Four years after this letter was written, Conrad confides in his Author’s Note that “on approaching the task of writing this Note for “Victory” the first thing I am conscious of is the actual nearness of the book, its nearness to me personally” (ix). According to *Joseph Conrad’s Letters to His Wife*, Conrad read Lena’s death scene aloud for his audience during his American tour in 1923 (92). This was presumably the only occasion on which he read his fiction in public. Although it received mixed critical reception, *Victory* may have been Conrad’s most intimate and cherished novel.

As Conrad’s comments suggest, *Victory* is a novel fraught with autobiographical aspects, even though it is set on the tropical islands of the East. Similar to how he delineates the destiny of white men in the East in his earlier fiction, Conrad dramatises the destiny of Axel Heyst. Heyst is endowed with many characteristics reminiscent of the author. And the most striking point in the characterisation of Heyst is his *modus vivendi*. He has drifted across the Malay Archipelago for 15 years, maintaining his principle of living as an observer of life, as was recommended by his late father. Heyst’s father considered “the universal nothingness” (219) and conceived life “not worth touching and, perhaps not substantial enough to grasp” (176). Impressed by his father’s philosophy, Heyst determines not to enter the stream of life, defining himself as “the most detached of creatures in this earthly captivity, the veriest tramp on this earth, an indifferent stroller going through the world’s bustle” (199). Heyst conceives this world as not worth living in and refuses to be involved in the flow of life’s stream. On one occasion Heyst says to Davidson: “I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm,

since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole" (54). As Kalnins has seen Schopenhauer's belief in this statement (321), epistemological scepticism is central to Heyst's life philosophy.

Heyst's sceptical view of life reflects Conrad's view of the universe. As he repeats his failures, Heyst fluctuates between his intended life philosophy and his impulse. *Victory* has an indeterminate narrative ending, as found in most of his fictional works. It ends with Davidson's expression of "Nothing!" which symbolizes Heyst's philosophy of negation. As Davidson's last word reverberates throughout the novel, Conrad's own profound scepticism can be felt in it. Scepticism was, to Conrad as a novelist, a necessary medium, as he writes in a letter to Galsworthy in November 1901: "The fact is you want more scepticism at the very foundation of your work. Scepticism the tonic of mind, the tonic of life, the agent of truth—the way of art and salvation" (*CL*2 359). Conrad's conflicting attitude towards the problem of skepticism is indicated in the novel.

Said, who has explored autobiographical aspects in Conrad's fiction in *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, has maintained that his letters are rich testimonials to the intensity of his intellectual life. A letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham in December 1897, for instance, accords with Heyst's philosophy:

> There is a—let us say—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold!—it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled.… And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident—and it has happened. You can't interfere with it.… It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions—and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the

remorseless process is sometimes amusing. (*CL*1 425)

The metaphor of the knitting machine reveals Conrad's vision of the absurd universe. This often-quoted passage expresses his deterministic and pessimistic view of the universe. Although the letter was written 18 years before the publication of the novel, the last sentence in the quotation suggests Conrad's stance as an observer of life as a novelist and echoes Heyst's doctrine of life, namely that this world is nothing but "an amusing spectacle" (178). Critics have maintained that contemporary writers influenced Conrad's scepticism.[1] Several influences can indeed be assumed to have shaped his scepticism. Kalnins, for example, has pointed out at an echo of Schopenhauer's belief in Heyst's words: this world is nothing but "an amusing spectacle" (325). Heyst, who observes only facts while retreating from life itself, may be a persona of the author. Conrad's scepticism can be regarded as condensed into the life philosophy of *Victory*'s protagonist.

Other letters also indicate Conrad's sceptical view on life and the universe. In a letter to Graham from January 1898, Conrad writes: "Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow" (*CL*2 17). In another letter to Graham from January 1898, he writes: "There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and floating appearance" (*CL*2 30). In *Victory*, Heyst says to Lena: "Truth, work, ambition, love itself, may be only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life" (203). A similar expression can be found in Conrad's letter to Ford Madox Ford in March 1911, wherein he writes: "Life is an awful grind. The feeling that the game is no longer worth the candle" (*CL*4 434).

Conrad's fiction is, indeed, full of sceptical views on the absurdity of

the world. To name only a few, in *Lord Jim*, Jim repeats his failures despite his ambition, and his heroic dream is achieved only temporarily in Patusan. In *Under Western Eyes*, Razumov is accidentally involved in the Russian autocracy through the Haldin affair, and is unable to escape it. Conrad's sceptical vision is not only evident in the characters' fates, but also permeates the various narrators' views expressed in his fiction. Tempered scepticism can be felt in Marlow's meditations in *Lord Jim*, as well as in "Heart of Darkness." Marlow expresses his mixed feelings towards Jim and muses on his death: "But we can see him, an obscure conqueror of his fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of *his exalted egoism*. He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a *shadowy ideal* of conduct" (351, italics mine). Marlow tries to be loyal to Kurtz because he identifies with him. But on one occasion Marlow says of Kurtz: "I remember his abject pleading, his abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul (118). Marlow's divided views of Jim and Kurtz articulate authorial scepticism.

Heyst and Conrad also show a significant resemblance in terms of their personalities. On the street of Delli, Heyst comes upon Captain Morrison and hails him in his usual courtly tone, sympathetically listening to his story of how a fine was inflicted upon him by the Portuguese authorities. Heyst, who shows a polite interest in Morrison's narrative, offers to pay the fine and later accepts his proposal to help his trade by becoming a partner for the purpose of his repayment. Retrospectively, Morrison's rescue seems to him to be an "apostasy" (65), but Heyst also comes to Lena's aid after his abortive involvement with him. During an interval at a performance in Schomberg's concert-hall, Heyst addresses Lena, imagining that she was pinched on the arm by Mrs Zangiacomo. In this scene, Heyst feels a sudden "pity" (70) for Lena's plight. As the scenes of the encounter with Morrison and Lena show, Heyst easily sympathises when he finds people in trouble. Because of this,

he is stirred into action and inadvertently forms a “tie.” He becomes involved in the reality he chose to refuse in spite of his intended philosophy. Significantly, this capacity for sympathy was shared by Conrad himself. In *Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered*, his second son John recollects: “JC was a sympathetic listener and looking back I have a strong impression that some of his acquaintances abused that friendliness and sympathy and in one or two instances definitely took advantage of his generosity” (68).

Heyst’s peculiar manner is also reminiscent of Conrad’s own. During their first encounter, Heyst asks Lena: “What would you wish me to do? Pray command me” (73). The anonymous narrator stresses Heyst’s polite attitude by repeating words such as “polite” (14, 31, 33), “politeness” (17, 18), “graciously” (17), “courtesy” (18), “courteous” (72, 91) and “courtly” (33). Because the narrator expresses it as “playfully courteous talk” (6), Heyst’s polite attitude indicates his detachment from the world and serves to mask his thoughts. At the same time, this attitude suggests his origin. The narrator refers to the courtesy of his manner as “consummate good-society manner” (13), which refers to Heyst’s origin as a Swedish baron, indicating that he belongs to the aristocracy. Interestingly, Conrad’s manner was observed as similar by his family. In *My Father: Joseph Conrad*, Conrad’s first son Borys mentions his father’s “usual elaborate courtesy” (158). In *Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered*, John elaborates that his father was courteous and that this was remarked upon, especially by the wives of friends and neighbours (185-86). Conrad’s politesse probably stemmed from his aristocratic origin, as he was of the *szlachta*, a Polish noble class.[2]

In terms of their relationship with women, there is a profound similarity between Heyst and Conrad. Before carrying Lena off from Zangiacomo’s Ladies’ Orchestra to his secluded island, Heyst was thought to be a man unfamiliar with women, since he was wandering alone and nobody had heard him talk of women (42). Therefore, Captain

Davison was astonished to hear that Heyst had run off with an orchestra girl (41). Heyst's escapade was the general topic of conversation among people on the islands and became the source of gossip (50). On the other hand, Conrad has been regarded as a novelist who exclusively wrote about the male world and was not interested in women. As he lived as a seaman in a predominantly male world for nearly twenty years, it is easily surmised that Conrad did not have many chances to be in contact with women. His experiences with women would have been comparatively scarce until he married, even though, in fact, he had some relationships with women when he was younger.[3]

Furthermore, the figure of Heyst's father displays similarities with Conrad's father. The elder Heyst was an expatriate who had quarrelled with his fellow countrymen in Sweden (33). He was "dissatisfied with his country and angry with all the world, which had instinctively rejected his wisdom" (91). Heyst lived with him for three years after leaving school at the age of eighteen, and this companionship had left an impression upon his young thoughts. After his father's death, Heyst subsequently started out on his travels, making his last words "Look on—make no sound" (175) his guiding principle. As his fate shows, the elder Heyst's philosophy exerted a destructive influence upon his son. By comparison, Conrad's father Apollo Korzeniowski was a literary man who wrote poetry and translated Shakespeare and Hugo (Meyers 1991: 7-8). Apollo was arrested for his political activities as a patriotic revolutionary by the Russian authorities and was exiled to Vologda (Meyers 1991: 13). During the exile, his wife Ewelina died as a result of the harsh conditions, and after her death Apollo became hopeless and despaired of life, considering himself to be a failure in life (Meyers 1991: 22-25). Apollo's portrait after his wife's death is reminiscent of Heyst's late father, who advocated a life-denying philosophy that regarded life as not worth living. In his youth, Conrad lived alone with Apollo for a while after Ewelina's death (Meyers 1991: 25). The forced isolated companionship of Heyst and his

father is reminiscent of that of Conrad and Apollo. Therefore, it is highly probable that Apollo's strong personality shaped Conrad's life and writings, as critics have noted.[4] Although Apollo's messianic Polonism should not be equated to Heyst's father's Schopenhauerian scepticism, in terms of the paternal figure that influenced his son, Heyst's father is a reflection of Conrad's father.

Heyst and his creator also show similarities in other, minor respects. Heyst had been wandering across the Archipelago for many years, while after his father's death Conrad left Poland at the age of sixteen and had been travelling around the world as a sailor until he became a novelist. Heyst was over thirty-five years of age in his encounter with Lena (90), and Conrad was in his late thirties when he met Jessie through a mutual friend.[5] Heyst, who resembles the author in many respects, can therefore to a great extent be considered as Conrad's self-portrait.

II

A further point concerning autobiographical elements in *Victory* is the way Jessie Conrad's reflection can be felt in the portrayal of the heroine. *Victory* has commonly been regarded as a novel that engages women, and this has been critically commented upon. Critics have had the tendency to ignore female influence on Conrad's fiction, emphasising only male influence.[6] In particular, Jessie's influence on Conrad has received scant attention in Conrad studies. But when viewing *Victory* from the perspective of an autobiographical novel, the figure of Lena is important and worthy of more consideration than she generally receives.

In the Author's Note to *Victory* in 1920, Conrad confesses that Lena is based on a girl he met in a café in France (xv). But Lena's portrait indicates that she is modelled after Jessie in several points. First of all, Lena is depicted as a young, lower-class English woman. She does not receive formal education as she is a performer in the ambulant Ladies'

Orchestra.[7] She had to work for the Orchestra for a living, since her father, a musician in the orchestras of small theatres, was struck by a paralytic stroke (78). She was not yet twenty when she first met Heyst (84). Due to their differences, Lena sometimes does not understand Heyst (254, 325, 326, 353). And Heyst does not always understand her either, as the descriptions of her eyes "the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes" (324) and "the grey veil of her eyes" (330) show. The differences in class background as well as Heyst's philosophy make it difficult for them to fully understand each other. In comparison, Jessie was an English woman of twenty-one when Conrad first met her. As her father was a bookseller's assistant,[8] Jessie belonged to the lower-middle class. Biographers have remarked that she had little formal education and apparently grew up in privation (Karl 369). As a lower-middle class woman of a large, typically Victorian family, whose father had died before her marriage, Jessie was assisting her mother when she became acquainted with Conrad (Stape 2007: 79). Furthermore, in *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*, Jessie mentions Conrad's peculiarity and their differences (2, 24). In *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*, Jessie repeatedly mentions her surprise caused by Conrad's foreignness and their differences (10, 12, 167).

Moreover, there is a significant resemblance between Lena and Jessie in terms of their personalities. Before meeting Heyst, Lena was helpless, unable to repel Schomberg's cunning advances that took advantage of her situation. But after escaping to Samburan with Heyst, Lena undergoes a metamorphosis into a determined woman. Lena repulses Ricardo when he suddenly leaps upon her from behind, and she fights him off. Later, she fearlessly deals with Ricardo to obtain his dagger in order to defend Heyst from villains. This is because in the course of living with Heyst, Lena comes to feel "an irresistible desire to give herself to him more completely, by some act of absolute sacrifice" (201). United by love, Lena attempts to show her loyalty to Heyst through the act of protecting him. Thus, she is described as a courageous, heroic woman, who devotes

herself to him. Similar aspects can be recognised in Jessie, who supported her family as a wife and mother. In a letter from 1898 to Cora Crane, Conrad writes that Jessie is doing all the housework cheerfully (*CL*2 73). Likewise, John's reminiscences convey her devotion, as he writes that Jessie cooked, sewed and typed Conrad's manuscripts without rest (*JCTR* 16, 101). These observations made by Conrad's family indicate that Jessie was a devoted wife and mother. During the family trip to Montpellier in 1907, Conrad suffered gout, while Borys caught measles. In a letter to William Rosenstein, Conrad states that Jessie coped well with these troubles despite pain in her own knees (*CL*3 444). Recollecting this trip, Conrad reports that Jessie had been "calm" and "heroic" in their troubles. In a letter from 1918 to Jessie, Conrad describes her as a "plucky" girl (*JCLW* 37). Heyst uses the same word in reference to Lena, by saying: "I believe you are very plucky" (316). Supported by her affection and devotion, Conrad might have been able to concentrate more on his work.[9] Although Lena's active heroism and the domestic, maternal heroic qualities of Jessie are not the same, Conrad may have been inspired by his wife's figure in his daily life that he spent with her.

A minor similarity can also be found between Lena and Jessie in terms of their appearance. Although *Victory*'s narrator mentions that Lena's physiognomy is not "distinguished" (74), Heyst says that she is "pretty" (188) in a conversation with her. On the whole, Lena is portrayed as a young, pretty girl, though not markedly beautiful. This appearance corresponds with Jessie's. In a letter to Carol Zagórski before his marriage, Conrad introduces Jessie with similar vocabulary: "She is a small, not at all striking-looking person (to tell the truth—rather plain!) who nevertheless is very dear to me" (*CL*1 265). In a letter to Jessie a later year, Conrad uses the word "pretty" to describe her (*JCLW* 37). Similarly, Heyst calls Lena "My dear girl" (198, 211), as she is much younger than he is, and in his letters to Jessie, Conrad often calls her "girl" (*JCLW* 5, 33, 37, 47, 49, 131).

Conrad's portrayals of female characters have been criticised, and *Victory* is no exception. But Lena is not represented negatively on the whole. In the final scene of the novel, Lena dies from a bullet fired by Jones, who attempts to kill Ricardo for revenge. Lena's sacrificial death has caused critics to see the author's treatment of women in a negative light.[10] Lena seems to act according to the female virtue of her age, as she regularly attended Sunday school when she lodged in the north of London (191). Lena remembers well what she learned there (359). The narrator mentions that self-sacrifice is woman's sublime faculty (317), as it was considered to be a female virtue in Victorian culture.[11] Self-sacrifice, which was a virtue that Victorian women strived for, may be seen as a negative attribute by modern standards. But to Conrad it may not have been so, because in *A Personal Record* he affectionately recalls his mother, who devoted herself to Poland and her husband (28-29). Furthermore, even though she is uneducated, Lena is described as perceptive, as Baldwin has remarked (2015: 143). Lena acts on her intuition to save Heyst, disobeying his instructions. When Heyst expresses himself as "a man of universal scorn and unbelief" Lena responds, saying "you are putting it on" (199). She intuits that his scepticism is not his own nature. Lena's intuitive perceptiveness is described as cutting to the heart of the matter more than Heyst's intellectual detachment.

Moreover, Conrad describes Heyst's positive response to his encounter with Lena. In Schomberg's concert-room, Heyst looks at Lena's smile and feels that "it had conveyed a sensation of warmth, had given him a sort of ardour to live which was very new to his experience" (81). After parting with her, Heyst feels restless and roams around the grounds of the hotel. The narrator observes that, as Heyst feels Lena clinging to him, "Heyst's sceptical mind is dominated by the fullness of his heart" (83). In this scene, Heyst finds Lena's hands "so warm, so real, so living in his grasp" (86). In a later scene, Heyst detects "the veiled

glow of intelligence" (191) in her face and feels there are "depths of wisdom" (209) in her charming voice. The narrator mentions "the characteristic harmoniousness" (194) of Lena's face and observes that "the unfailing grace of attitude" is one of her natural attributes (246). Thus, Conrad presents Lena as a woman who leads Heyst towards a transformation.

III

As we have seen, the reflection of Jessie in the portrait of Lena is indicated in the novel through their similarities. But these similarities are not limited to the level of the heroine's characterisation. Conrad's memories of Jessie are embedded within the novel, and his experiences with her are woven not only into some scenes, but also into the thematic core.

First of all, the scene of the initial encounter between Heyst and Lena is reminiscent of that of the Conrads'. During the interval of the Orchestra performance in Schomberg's concert-hall, Heyst is indignant to see Lena mistreated by Mrs Zangiacomo, and speaks to her. The narrator describes their exchanges as follows:

> It was a great comfort to hear her say:
>
> "It wouldn't have been the first time. And suppose she did—what are you going to do about it?"
>
> "I don't know," he said with a faint, remote playfulness in his tone which had not been heard in it lately, and which seemed to catch her ear pleasantly. "I am grieved to say that I don't know. But can I do anything? What would you wish me to do? Pray command me"
>
> Again the greatest astonishment became visible in her face; for she now perceived how different he was from the other men in the room. (73)

In this scene Lena is amazed at his overture, because Heyst is a complete

stranger who suddenly speaks to her in a courteous tone, which is new to her. On a later occasion, we are told, Heyst's polished manner gives Lena special delight and is distinctly pleasurable to her (79). The description of Heyst's attitude and Lena's response to it is reminiscent of Jessie's impression of Conrad from their first meeting. Looking back on the encounter in *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*, Jessie writes: "The ceremonious courtesy and exaggerated politeness, so characteristic of Joseph Conrad, was entirely new to me and rather took my breath away. In later years I have seen the same effect produced, over and over again, but in the beginning I was completely out of my breath" (9). Similar to how Lena is astonished by Heyst's polite attitude, which is unknown to her, Jessie is impressed with Conrad's attitude. In both cases, the women are favourably impressed by the politesse of the men they encounter.

Secondly, the circumstances of Heyst's rescue of Lena recalls Conrad's marriage in its speediness and unexpectedness. Feeling pity for her, Heyst carries Lena off from the Ladies' Orchestra after meeting her a few times. It takes only several days for him to do this bold act. His neighbours regard this affair as an elopement and the people on the islands are shocked to hear of it. Especially Schomberg, who is jealous of Heyst, uses the word "honeymoon" (159) to describe their flight. Hearing this from Mrs Zangiacomo, Davidson thinks that "this startling fact did not tally somehow with the idea Davidson had of Heyst. He never talked of women, he never seemed to think of them, or to remember that they existed; and then all at once—like this! Running off with a casual orchestra girl!" (42). Schomberg tries to prevent the elopement by sending villains to the island.[12] By comparison, Conrad's marriage was also speedy and probably unexpected. According to Jessie, Conrad met her only several times before their marriage, though one year and some months had passed since their first encounter (*JCC* 10). It was nearly one year later when he met her again, and the odd marriage proposal came several months later. In her reminiscences, Jessie confides that Conrad

insisted that they should marry quickly, within one or two weeks because he would be dead soon, and that she felt his proposal was abrupt (*JCC* 12). After the proposal, they married after a two-week engagement period (*JCC* 15).

Moreover, there are scenes in *Victory* that seem to reflect Conrad's feelings for Jessie from the early period of their married life. The narrator describes Heyst's internal experience after living with Lena for more than three months: "The girl he had come across, of whom he had possessed himself, to whose practice he was not accustomed, with whom he did not yet know how to live; that human being so near and still so strange, gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life" (200). On Samburan, formerly a fort of his solitude where he lived alone avoiding human relationships, Heyst is puzzled about living with a young woman, a situation to which he is unaccustomed. Explaining the Morrison affair, Heyst confesses to Lena: "To slay, to love—the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either. You must forgive me anything that may have appeared to you awkward in my behaviour, inexpressive in my speeches, untimely in my silences" (212). Though he impulsively saved Lena from distress, Heyst does not understand the meaning of living with a woman. But the latter part of the quotation shows that Heyst comes to feel a sense of his own reality in the course of living with Lena. Conrad foregrounds the relationship between Heyst and Lena on Samburan, and the first half of Part III is devoted to the process of how they come to terms with each other, despite misunderstandings caused by their differences.

The process Heyst experiences in his life with Lena on the island is similar to what Conrad experienced in his married life. (Conrad and Jessie also spent their honeymoon on a small island in northern Brittany.) In *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*, Jessie looks back on Conrad after their marriage:

> He hadn't the slightest notion how to take care of a young girl—a wife not even from observation. What chance had he had of learning about married life? Not at school and still less on the high seas, while his days ashore were intervals of utter loneliness. It was only natural, he said, that he should have been frightened. But he perceived very soon that the young girl, now his wife, could not only take care of herself but also knew how to take care of him; and then he understood the blessedness of the married states. (45)

Jessie's memoirs have often been regarded as unreliable, as exaggerated or contradictory.[13] However, Jessie may have felt some awkwardness about Conrad's attitude towards her in the early stage of their life. In the latter part of this passage, Jessie remarks that Conrad comes to feel relief in their new life. In *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*, she also confesses that their honeymoon brought them closer to each other (36). Jessie's affectionate reminiscences convey that Conrad's uneasiness was probably transformed into happiness through their shared life.

Conrad's marriage to Jessie has been referred to as a "strange marriage" by biographical critics (Najder 1984: 192). His marital relationship with Jessie has been negatively commented upon so far. The main reason for this is the radical differences in class, background, education and age between Conrad and Jessie (Baines 1975: 170; Karl 1979: 340). According to Najder, Conrad was a sensitive and cultured Pole with aristocratic manners, whereas Jessie was a typist of humble origin (1984: 192). Edward Garnett even tried to dissuade Conrad from the marriage after he had only just met Jessie, because he thought that she was intellectually beneath him (Karl 1979: 346). Critics have adversely commented on Jessie's origin and upbringing, regarding her as a woman unworthy to be Conrad's wife. They assumed that she was incapable of understanding an aristocratic, hypersensitive artist.[14]

Conrad's correspondence with Jessie, however, shows that their marriage was a happy one.[15] It indicates that they deepened their bond throughout their married life. In his letters written during his journey to

America, Conrad writes: “I miss you more and more. As a matter of fact I am on the edge of worrying tho’ I suppose there is no reason for it. It seems ages since I left you in that bedroom in the hotel. When I think of it I have a funny sensation under the breastbone” (*JCLW* 63). In another letter, he confesses: “There is not a moment when you are not in my thoughts. I long to be back. I have heard nothing from B. Oh my dearest I do miss you” (*JCLW* 80). Conrad’s affectionate letters indicate that Jessie became a precious woman to him.[16] Furthermore, Richard Curle’s remarks in his introduction to *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* show their relationship: “Between them there was a deep bond of affection, and Conrad’s anxiety as to his wife’s health and as to her future when he should be gone was touching to witness…. But if both of them worried over one another in secret, when they were together they would often talk in a vein of humorous and tender chaff, which was, in its own way, as sure a sign of their mutual devotion” (vii).

We cannot know how Conrad truly felt about his long-term married life. Mentioning the possible causes of Conrad’s breakdown in 1910, Stape puts forth: “And there are areas of Conrad’s carefully guarded emotional life that remain too dark to allow for easy gauging of how rewarding in mid-life he was finding marriage and fatherhood” (2007: 173). It is highly possible that Conrad’s various experiences from his married life provided him a pregnant imagination and material for *Victory*, as well as stress and worries. His life-experiences as a husband may have enriched his fiction.

IV

Conrad has for a long time been regarded as a “misogynistic” writer, incapable of representing love and sex.[17] Although he has been regarded as a male-oriented writer who wrote about the masculine preserves of the sea and politics, Conrad’s fiction engages with the sexual and the erotic

as Hawthorn has convincingly argued (2007). After he takes up a heterosexual relationship in *Chance* between Anthony and Flora, Conrad continues to explore the theme in more depth when he delineates the relationship between Heyst and Lena in *Victory*.

Conrad presents the mature love of an inexperienced lover who lacks self-knowledge, deliberately tracing Heyst's response to his encounter with Lena. During his stay in Schomberg's hotel, Heyst unwittingly enters the concert-hall, while desperately driven towards it by the snatches of tunes. It was simply "uproar" (68) for Heyst, who loved solitude and silence. Considering the noise to be repulsive, Heyst remains and speaks to Lena. We are told that it was the same impulse in the case of Morrison, when he walked up to her in the concert-hall (72). However, there is a difference between the two rescues. It was not merely sympathy that Heyst felt for Lena. In this scene, he stares at her and forgets himself as his eyes move from her shoulder to her slender white bust, her skirt and her feet (70). The shift of his gaze reveals that sexual desire arises within him and that the rescue of Lena is motivated by it. The eruption of the neighbouring indolent volcano suggests his repressed desire. After he parted from Lena, Heyst is described: "he paced there to and fro for a long time, a calm, meditative ghost in his white drill suit, revolving in his head thoughts absolutely novel, disquieting, and seductive" (83). Chapters 1 and 2 of Part II are devoted to the progress from their encounter to their elopement, and the inner states of Heyst and Lena are vividly described, as if Conrad wrote these scenes remembering the progress that led to his own marriage.

In representing the intimate relationship between Heyst and Lena, Conrad presents love as the central theme of *Victory*. The extended conversations between Heyst and Lena on Samburan in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of Part III show this, namely, the scenes in the forest and after their return to the bungalow in which Heyst tells about his father, his inherited philosophy and the Morrison affair. Such scenes are not found in his

previous fictional works, except *Chance*. Heyst later has a sexual relationship with Lena on his island, as the white space between Chapters 4 and 5 of Part III suggests. Although what happens during that space is left undescribed, at the beginning of Chapter 5 Lena opens her eyes and does up her hair, which had come loose.[18] Also, the narrator describes: "But in the intimacy of their life her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force—or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender" (192). The detailed descriptions of the conversation between Heyst and Lena in the forest after the negotiation with Wang in Chapter 8 of Part IV show Conrad's development in representing a heterosexual relationship. Although portrayal of sexuality and the erotic in his fiction remains suggestive, Conrad delineates the locus of Heyst's transformation through his intimate relationship with Lena. In Part II, Heyst's inner conflict between his self-conception and his actions are foregrounded. In his dialogue with Lena in the forest, Heyst remarks: "I've never killed a man or loved a woman—not even my thoughts, not even my dreams" (212). But as Lena becomes a precious woman to him in the course of living with her, Heyst attempts to protect Lena.

Heyst's awakening comes too late and involves the death of the woman he loves. But Heyst changes because of his experiences with Lena. He lets out a "groan" (405) when he finds Lena's wound caused by Mr Jones's bullet, which makes Davidson shudder inwardly. At the climax of the novel, Heyst commits suicide, leaving the words: "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love — and to put its trust in life!!" (410). Although he is unable to protect Lena, Heyst's cry definitely expresses his change. Conrad has Heyst utter words of self-awakening, which Jim in *Lord Jim* is unable to utter. Even though he is unable to fully express his love for her, Heyst's last words indicate that Lena had finally become a precious woman to him. Her self-sacrifice

gives him an opportunity to emerge from his philosophy of negation, which had possessed him. As he is seduced by her "enchanting voice" (74), his inner voice, which had been repressed within him, starts to live as part of a human relationship. As she confesses, Lena is referred to as "Alma" (88), which means "nourishing" in Latin. Heyst's involvement with Lena establishes his subconscious urge for a human bond. Heyst finally recognises the importance of human relationship, which he had unwittingly been searching for. He finds his true self through his deep contact with her. In his earlier novel *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad presents Willems's passion for Aïssa as an erotic impulse that drives him to moral corruption and subsequent destruction. But in his late novel *Victory*, Conrad explores the theme of heterosexual love by tracing Heyst's inner conflict and process of awakening to the importance of human bonding.

Victory is a novel in which fiction and autobiography are strangely intertwined. It seems to register the process that the author experienced in his relationship with the woman who became his wife. The figure of the Swedish baron who comes to know the importance of human bonding through his contact with a British girl on a fictional island in the East may provide a metaphorical analogy to Conrad's origin as part of the Polish *szlachta*, after he migrated to Britain and found love for his wife during their long-term married life. Jessie exerted an influence upon the creation of her husband's last major novel. In this respect, *Victory* can be seen as Conrad's autobiographical novel, for which he drew inspiration and obtained the power of observation from his experiences with the woman he loved.

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Notes

[1.] For a discussion of affinities between Schopenhauer's thought and Conrad's, see Wollaeger (1990). Wollaeger has remarked that Schopenhauer's presence in Conrad's writing is evident not only in the early novels but also in *Victory* (206). See also Bonney (1980: 3-30); Panagopoulos (1998). Panagopoulos has argued that Conrad was grappling with the same problems as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

[2.] Najder (1984: 3). Politesse towards women was the characteristic of Polish *szlachta*. For a discussion of this topic, see Iwashimizu (2013).

[3.] For a detailed account of Conrad's relationship with two French women, see Meyer (1967).

[4.] See, for instance, Najder (1964: 19); Hodges (1967); Schwarz (1983: 61-62).

[5.] In *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*, Jessie recalls that she met Conrad at the end of 1893, introduced by his friend Fountaine Hope (9).

[6.] See, for instance, Hodges (1967). Contrary to this tradition, Jones has demonstrated Marguerite Poradowska's influence upon Conrad's fiction (1999).

[7.] Conrad makes a significant change in Lena's social class. According to Meyers, Zangiacomo's Ladies' Orchestra is based on the Ranee's orchestra, but the Ranee's girls were upper-crust Grey Friars and virgins (1986: 43).

[8.] Stape corrects Najder's designation "shopkeeper" (1984: 192). According to Stape, Jessie's father was a publisher's warehouseman (2009: 86).

[9.] Sawamura (1934) may be the first critic who has commented positively on Jessie's personality and Conrad's relationship with her.

[10.] See Gurko (1979: 214-15); Bonney (1980: 177); and Roberts (2000: 186-87, 196).

[11.] The action of the novel is probably set in the 1890s, since the narrator mentions that after the Franco-Prussian War Schomberg came out East (96). The narrator also mentions the Achin war in the last scene.

[12.] The similar rushing process is also enacted in the marriage of Anthony and Flora in *Chance*. The sudden elopement of Anthony and Flora astonishes the Fynes, and Mrs Fyne tries to interfere in it by sending her husband to London.

[13.] See, for instance, Karl (1979: 369); Najder (1984: 196, 206).

[14.] See Baines (1975: 171); Karl (1979: 341); and Meyers (1991: 135). Adverse comments on Jessie cannot be found in Stape's biography. He assumes that Jessie's motherliness was probably attractive to Conrad (2007: 89).

[15.] Baldwin is one of critics who have regarded Conrad's marriage as a happy one

(2015: 141).

16. I have discussed Conrad's relationship with Jessie elsewhere. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Iwashimizu (2001).

17. Moser has claimed that love is not congenial to Conrad's creativity (1966: 65) and that Conrad's creativity suffers "the near paralysis when dealing with a sexual subject" (1966: 77).

18. For an interpretation of the gap, see Hampson (2012: 129).

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