

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

IJELLH

Crossref
INDEX  COPERNICUS
INTERNATIONAL

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

UGC Approved Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



**Volume 6, Issue 7
July 2018**

www.ijellh.com

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Vindication of the “Fallen Woman” in Conrad’s *Victory*

Abstract

Victory is one of the later novels of Joseph Conrad written during the First World War. A critically acclaimed work, it has given rise to extensive metaphysical debates among scholars regarding the value system represented by the protagonist Axel Heyst. But the positioning of the central female character, Lena, is an equally fascinating one. A “fallen woman” according to Victorian terminology, Lena emerges triumphant at the end of the novel as the only character that fulfills her avowed intention. While others remain marred by indecisions and doubts, she alone has the courage of conviction to carry through her plan till the end, even if it means her own destruction. Her supreme love for her beloved which leads to her willing self-sacrifice signals the victory of life and love in the age of moral crisis when the novel was written. Hence I argue that the titular “victory” of the novel belongs to her alone, as she is finally able to convert Heyst’s sceptical mindset to commit to her vision of life.

Keywords: Biblical Myth, Delayed Decoding, Joseph Conrad, Lena, Myth, *Victory*.

Victory is one of the most critically as well as commercially successful of Joseph Conrad’s novels. This period of his writing, which saw the publication of *Victory*, has been characterized by his greater engagement with women characters as also found in *Chance*. One of the most fascinating features of the novel is his treatment of the central woman character Lena, who has at once been idealized and mythified in contrast to the author’s much more measured treatment of the male protagonist Heyst. Conrad began writing *Victory* in April 1912, describing it to his agent Pinker as a short story called ‘Dollars’, consisting of approximately 15,000 words, that is about forty to fifty pages. However, as elsewhere in Conrad, the novel continued to gain in volume until its final publication in 1915, the dust-jacket describing it as a novel of “love and jealousy” (Simmons 182). Conrad’s first reference

to the novel's title occurs in a letter to Pinker dated July 1, 1914, written three days after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, hastening the outbreak of the First World War. In his "Note to the First Edition" of *Victory*, Conrad wrote that he had planned that the title of the novel would be its "last word": "Nothing!" Conrad voiced his unease about the altered title of the novel in this "Note": "There was also the possibility of falling under the suspicion of commercial astuteness deceiving the public into the belief that the book had something to do with war." In a letter to Iris Wedgwood dated January 28, 1915, he further wrote, "It seems almost criminal levity to talk at this time of books, stories, publication" (Simmons 183). Nevertheless it is possible that its apparently uplifting title helped the sale of the book during the bleakness of the War. Appropriately the opening paragraph of *Victory* builds up an image of the instability of the period and of the crisis of values facing the Western civilization by speaking of "the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel" (Conrad 1). *Victory* is a novel about faith in human relationships; it asks if it is possible for this faith to achieve victory over faithlessness and ennui in an age of moral crisis.

Victory is the last of Conrad's novels dealing with contemporary Europe. His subsequent novels stopped dealing with the crisis of values that Conrad believed was troubling Europe. A major modernist preoccupation typical of the period found in *Victory* is the disappearance of the stable social order to be replaced by chaos and uncertainty as a consequence of the War. Commercialisation of society is a major feature of the times. This contemporary world is symbolized in the novel in Zangiacomo's travelling band and Schomberg's hotel which combine to provide an extreme example of sordid capitalist venture of the times involving prostitution rackets. Zangiacomo's orchestra band is just a screen—it consists solely of women who are not trained musicians and who are forced to "circulate" among the audience during their performances at the hotel, and for their presence Schomberg can charge extra from his willing customers. Lena is an unwilling participant of the racket as is evident from Mrs. Zangiacomo's venomous pinching when she refuses to "circulate". As Jeremy Hawthorn says: "Conrad's presentation of the Ladies Orchestra makes it clear that there is a sort of sexual commerce involved in the performance that situates prostitution at the centre of the cultural exchange depicted in the novel, not on its margins" (Hawthorn 126). Axel Heyst is a representative of an older world order with his courtesy and delicacy. Faced with the economic competition of modern life, he has taken refuge in the island of Samburan, remote from human society. As the novel begins, we are introduced to this English-educated Swede, who has spent fifteen years moving around the islands of the Malayan Archipelago.

Due to his inherently sympathetic nature, he rescues the debt-ridden Captain Morrison and his ship from the Portuguese port-authorities in Delli, and as a consequence becomes the grateful Morrison's partner in the Tropical Belt Coal Company with its headquarters in Samburan in the Java Sea just because he is too kind-hearted to deny Morrison. The venture is short-lived, and after Morrison's death in England and the liquidation of the company, Heyst continues to live at Samburan, accompanied only by Wang, his Chinese servant, and with the "indolent volcano" as his "nearest neighbour" (Conrad 1). After a year and a half at Samburan, Heyst suddenly returns to society, travelling to Sourabaya in Captain Davidson's steamship the *Sissie*. He is still blaming himself for Morrison's death, and feeling utterly alone in the world, for he had unconsciously become dependent on Morrison's companionship. But when Davidson returns three weeks later to collect Heyst, he learns that Heyst has run away with Lena, the young violinist of the Zangiacomo travelling orchestra, whom Schomberg the hotel-owner was trying to seduce.

Part II of the novel tells us more of the events during Heyst's stay at Schomberg's hotel, where he "could not defend himself from compassion" and instinctively responded to the mistreatment of Lena by Mrs. Zangiacomo (Conrad 54). Following Heyst's elopement with Lena, and while Schomberg is still suffering from "the pangs of wounded vanity and of thwarted passion", three strange people arrive at his hotel led by "plain Mr. Jones . . . a gentleman at large", and accompanied by Martin Ricardo, his knife-carrying "secretary" and their servant Pedro, "a nondescript, hairy creature" (Conrad 66, 70, 68). To get rid of them, Schomberg invents a story of Heyst's fabulous wealth which the latter had accumulated by robbing Morrison. After Heyst had run away with Lena frustrating Schomberg in his attempt to seduce her, his hatred of Heyst had increased to such an extent that it became a "recognised entertainment" in his hotel to hear him curse Heyst (Conrad 65). Schomberg becomes almost hysterical in his pronouncements about Heyst, pretending to represent the moral standpoint of society: "The cheek, the indecency, the impudence, the atrocity! Vagabond, imposter, swindler, ruffian, *schwein-bund!*" (Conrad 32) He feels that he "would have kicked everything to pieces about me for her. . . . I am in the prime of life. . . . Then a fellow bewitches her—a vagabond, a false, lying, swindling, underhand, stick-at-nothing brute" (Conrad 80). He had become obsessed by his desire for Lena. He is so full of "shocked fury" at Heyst's elopement with Lena and his hatred now is so intense that it "seemed to him that he could never be himself again till he had got even with that artful

Swede” (Conrad 64, 65). He is finally able to get his revenge on his rival by killing off Heyst along with Lena, the object of his desire.

Part III of *Victory* tells us briefly of Heyst’s life prior to his meeting Lena and then the focus shifts to Samburan where Heyst and Lena have been living for the past three months. Heyst’s literal and emotional isolation with which he has lived his entire adult life is being threatened by his growing involvement with Lena. Ironically, just as he assures Lena that “[n]othing can break in on us here”, the three outsiders (Jones, Ricardo and Pedro) arrive, exhausted and thirsty, “guests whom the renounced world had sent him thus at the end of the day” (Conrad 153, 164). As Gentleman Brown had arrived at Patusan to shatter Lord Jim’s cocooned world, so does the arrival of Jones and his companions threaten the newly-formed sense of companionship and intimacy between Heyst and Lena. Heyst settles the men at the disused counting house of the Tropical Belt Coal Company. He fears for Lena, and thinks that these people’s visit “could bode nothing pleasant” (Conrad 170). This makes him realise that “[h]e no longer belonged to himself” (Conrad 168). Adding to his sense of defencelessness, he discovers that his revolver is missing, which we had seen earlier being stolen by Wang.

The last part of the novel dramatises the final eventful day two days after the arrival of Jones and his companions at Samburan. Ricardo, who was spying on Heyst, enters his bungalow in his absence and tries to sexually assault Lena. However, Lena is strong enough to defend herself. She almost strangulates Ricardo, and later uses her knees and feet to disarm him. Ricardo appreciates this strength of Lena, attributing it to her common, lower-class background where she had to follow the rule of the jungles to survive, a background he shares. This, he thinks, links the two of them together, and he thinks that henceforth Lena’s loyalty would lie with him because of this. When Heyst visits Jones that evening, against the “ill-omened chaos of the sky”, Ricardo returns to the bungalow and prostrates himself before Lena, who takes this opportunity to secure Ricardo’s knife (Conrad 243), seeking to enact Christ’s triumph over a stinging, serpentine death by depriving Ricardo of his weapon. Ricardo takes this opportunity to lie supine at Lena’s feet and indulge in his foot fetish. Jones, along with Heyst, enters now. Looking at Ricardo caressing Lena’s feet in an attitude of erotic devotion, Heyst at once assumes the worst of Lena, thinking that she has been unfaithful to him. However in actuality Lena has been trying to secure Ricardo’s knife for Heyst—an attempt the narrator thinks is akin to “disarm murder itself” by taking away Ricardo’s murder weapon meant for Heyst (Conrad 272). Like Lord Jim, Heyst lacks faith in

himself, hence his failure to trust Lena's love for him. He becomes doubtful of Lena's fidelity to him and at the same time is acutely jealous of his supposed rival Ricardo: "Doubt entered into him—a doubt of a new kind, formless, hideous. It seemed to spread itself all over him, enter his limbs, and lodge in his entrails. He stopped suddenly with a thought that he who experienced such a feeling had no business to live—or perhaps was no longer living" (Conrad 268). To Jones whose homosexuality has made him a misogynist, Lena is a character analogous to all the fatal women of myth and literature such as Lamia who disarm their men by offering illusions of erotic escape. Enraged at what he sees is an attempt by Lena to seduce Ricardo, Jones shoots at Ricardo, merely wounding him, but fatally injuring Lena. Rapidly and in quick succession, Davidson arrives, Lena dies, Wang kills Pedro, and Jones kills Ricardo before drowning. Finally in Davidson's flashback in the novel's final chapter, we get an account of how Heyst puts fire to the bungalow and dies in the same fire that consumes Lena's dead body. In his last words, Heyst exposes the failings of his father's philosophy which was inculcated in him when he was young and impressionable: "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!" (Conrad 281) The ending of the novel, thus, remains ambiguous. Lena dies sure of "her triumph convinced of the reality of her victory over death" and believing that Heyst "was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart—for ever!" She has a romantic faith in the power of love. But Heyst remains unconvinced of his ability to be as unselfish in love as Lena. "Heyst is paralyzed because action requires commitment, hope, and belief, and he is too knowledgeable to succumb to such illusions", as Gordon W. Thompson says (Thompson 445). Not having had any previous experience of genuine attachment for another person, he cannot trust the novelty of his feelings for her. This cynicism and scepticism that have been implanted in him by his father paralyse him. He recognises the extent of Lena's sacrifice: that she died trying to protect him. But his awareness of the kind of extreme unselfishness of love comes too late to him, at the cost of her death, and he remains inarticulate, "cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life" (Conrad 278). But Lena's belief is never shaken by Heyst's lack of faith and, as she is dying, she believes that her self-sacrifice has made her love eternal:

Exulting, she saw herself extended on the bed, in a black dress, and profoundly at peace; while, stooping over her with a kindly, playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his

innermost heart-for ever! The flush of rapture flooding her whole being broke out in a smile of innocent, girlish happiness; and with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last, triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death.

The obstacles generated by Heyst's scepticism in a way compel Lena to devise a sentimental and finally self-destructive mode of action to "prove" her love for Heyst. In spite of her repeated questionings and imploring, Heyst had never verbally voiced his love for her, taking shelter in ironies and indirect answers. This had made Lena unsure whether Heyst loved her at all, and she undertook this self-annihilating path to secure his love for her by showing him her devotion. But from another perspective, Lena's higher vision seems a fatal delusion, and her "victory" is ironic; she has not defeated the forces of evil as they self-destruct themselves, and her self-sacrifice is rendered meaningless for the man she means to save soon destroys himself in despair. Thus many critics feel that nobody ends victorious; everyone undergoes the same nihilistic fate in an indifferent universe. Like Heyst's scepticism, Lena's self-consuming love is seen by them rendered redundant in the grand scheme of things which no longer has the space for such grand gestures.

If, on the other hand, Lena is indeed victorious, this victory is bestowed on her at the very end of the novel. The ending of *Victory* which witnesses her death has been called an excellent example of "delayed decoding" by critics like Tim Middleton and Allan H. Simmons echoing the phrase coined by Ian Watt. Ian Watt says that through this technique of delayed decoding "Conrad presented the protagonist's immediate sensations, and thus made the reader aware of the gap between impression and understanding; the delay in bridging the gap enacts the disjunction between the event and the observer's trailing understanding of it" (Watt 176-77). Through the process of delayed decoding, the Impressionist writer first presents a confusing sense impression, before allowing the protagonist and the reader to understand the significance of the incident in course of time. Towards the end of *Victory* Heyst witnesses the shooting of Lena by Jones but he is initially unaware of her fatal wound—he does not realise the full significance of the incident. He is still troubled by what he thinks is a liaison between Ricardo and Lena. He becomes fully aware of the significance of the incident a few moments later:

He turned his back on her; but a sudden drop, an extraordinary faltering of her tone, made him spin round. On her white neck her pale head dropped as in a

cruel drought a withered flower droops on its stalk. He caught his breath, looked at her closely, and seemed to read some awful intelligence in her eyes. At the moment when her eyelids fell as if smitten from above by an invisible power, he snatched her up bodily out of the chair, and disregarding an unexpected metallic clatter on the floor, carried her off into the other room.

As Davidson arrives, Heyst and he both realise the cause of Lena's injury: "the little black hole made by Mr. Jones's bullet under the swelling breast" (Conrad 277). The readers' attention is drawn to the whiteness of her breast which point to the physicality as well as spirituality of her persona. There is a convergence of knowledge between Heyst and the readers at the end so that the readers share in Heyst's realisation: the physical revelation of Lena's death due to the bullet wound coincides with the moral revelation to Heyst about the extent of Lena's sacrifice. He realises that Lena, whom he was suspecting of betraying him, had actually sacrificed her life to save him from Jones and Ricardo. The emotional climax is reached when Lena asks for and receives the token of her victory, the knife, and then presents it to Heyst, gasping out her wish that he take it as a trophy of her love. She thinks that she has protected him from the need to act violently by disarming his enemies. Apparently realizing that she has won a victory he himself could not win because of his hesitations, Heyst sadly returns the dagger, laying it on her breast.

Victory reflects one of Conrad's major preoccupations—that "the thoughtful intellectual man would prove inadequate to the demands of action", as Daniel Schwarz says (Schwarz 61). Heyst's father had impressed upon him the virtue of detachment when he was young and impressionable. But this makes him being unable to respond, both physically and emotionally, to what life demands of him. He had thought of his spirit sustained "proudly on its own contempt of the usual coarse ailments which life offers to the common appetites of men" (Conrad 120). But he is unable to live by his self-imposed aloofness when he helps Morrison and then rescues Lena, cutting himself off from his father's scepticism and negativism. Heyst's father had advised him: "Look on—make no sound" (Conrad 118). But first Morrison and then Lena break down this barrier, especially Lena, as he feels an increasing need to be constantly near her at Samburan. A life-long bachelor, Heyst succumbs to Lena's sexual allure almost at first sight. Heyst's initial awareness of Lena's physical attraction at Schomberg's hotel is clearly brought out:

It was evident that she was a girl. . . . 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. (Conrad 48)

In this scene as raw sexually-tainted over-loud cacophonous noise is made by Zangiacomo's band of eighteen piece ladies' orchestra, Heyst is shown getting hopelessly attracted to this girl whom he does not know. Her soft voice beguiles Heyst into undertaking the most momentous action of his entire life. Lena's habitual quietness adds to her enigmatic charm for Heyst. Mrs. Zangiacomo's pinching of Lena further prods Heyst into action. Lena's passionate intensity which makes her cheerfully embrace death to save Heyst is reflected in Heyst's own instinctive nature in this case that makes him elope with a virtual stranger. After arriving with Lena at Samburan, Heyst reflects on his action of running away with Lena and concludes, "There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all." He has brought his Eve to his Paradise. Heyst is indeed jeopardizing his security by rescuing Lena, for it is Lena, indirectly, who brings destruction to his island. He had been advised by his father to shun romantic attachments, yet he has just eloped with a girl he barely knows. He continues to reflect on his action, realising that there is a bit of Adam in all of us: "He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed. . . . 'And I, the son of my father, have been caught too, like the silliest fish of them all,' Heyst said to himself" (Conrad 117). Lena makes him feel "enveloped in the atmosphere of femininity as in a cloud, suspecting pitfalls, and as if afraid to move" (Conrad 152). The near presence of Lena gives a "greater sense of his own reality" to Heyst, thus complicating his sense of selfhood constructed since his youth: "The girl he had come across, of whom he had possessed himself, to whose presence he was not yet 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" (Conrad 136). But when Lena confesses that she has heard Schomberg's tale that Heyst had murdered Morrison and wants to know the truth behind the allegations, he feels as if his father's injunction to remain aloof from human society has been vindicated, for even his unconditional support to Morrison has been subject to vicious rumour-mongering. Her questioning of his relationship with Morrison based on hearsay almost brings about a mental collapse in Heyst.

Unlike Heyst, Lena is much more insistent in her to attempt to control her fate through action. Her experiences on the streets as a poverty-stricken woman forced to earn her livelihood by any means had made her better prepared to face physical dangers than Heyst who has had a more sheltered life. In Italian, “Lena” means a woman of vigour and energy who perseveres through trials. This is an apt description of Lena. However, as she herself confessed to Heyst, she is not a conventional “good girl”; hence she thinks herself unworthy of Heyst’s love. She also feels his love cannot last for long:

She had admired him [Heyst] from the first; she had been attracted by his warm voice, his gentle eye, but she had felt him too wonderfully difficult to know. He had given to life a savour, a movement . . . She said to herself that she must not be irritated because he seemed too self-contained, and as if shut up in a world of his own. When he took her in his arms, she felt that his embrace had a great and compelling force, that he was moved deeply, and that perhaps he would not get tired of her so very soon. She thought that he had opened to her the feelings of delicate joy, that the very uneasiness he caused her was delicious in its sadness, and that she would try to hold him as long as she could—till her fainting arms, her sinking soul, could cling to him no more. (Conrad 169)

Lena’s feeling for Heyst verges on adoration as he seems almost god-like to her; she is aware “in her consciousness of her love for this man [Heyst], of that something rapturous and profound going beyond the mere embrace” (Conrad 210). She thinks that even her feeling of selfhood is dependent on what seems to be Heyst’s impression of her: “Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn’t be in the world at all! . . . I can only be what you think I am” (Conrad 127-28). Lena’s romantic conception of her own identity and selfhood are clearly brought out in these lines. She has an almost Platonic concept of her selfhood and this leads her to think that she would cease to exist if Heyst stopped thinking of her. But in Lena’s mind, her true “double” is Ricardo, who also recognises the similarity between them: “You and I are made to understand each other”, he says as Lena vigorously defends herself against his attempts to molest her. “Born alike, bred alike, I guess. You are not tame. Same here! You have been chucked out into this rotten world of ’yporcrits. Same here!” (Conrad 201). Because of their common, seamy background and a similar physical toughness, Ricardo assumes that they are exactly alike, and that she is “one of his own sort”, an “ally of his own kind” (Conrad 230, 233). So he trusts her more

implicitly than Heyst does, and his death is caused by this misplaced trust. Yet, within certain limits, Ricardo is right, as Lena herself realises: “Perhaps because of the similarity of their miserable origin in the dregs of mankind, she had understood Ricardo perfectly” (Conrad 210). She, like Ricardo, is a fluent liar and is a complete contrast to Heyst who has an almost sacred regard for truth. But there is a fundamental difference between them. She lies to Heyst in order to save him from Ricardo and his friends; so “[s]he was not ashamed of her duplicity. . . . She was appalled by the situation, but already all her aroused femininity, understanding that whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him, and . . . faced the danger with a passionate desire to defend her own” (Conrad 202-3). Her physical strength when she repels Ricardo’s attack arouses his admiration: “You have fingers like steel. Jimminy! You have muscles like a giant!” (Conrad 198) Lena’s strength—physical, moral, and psychological—proves superior to Ricardo’s brute power. This is hardly the same helpless girl of Heyst’s imagination who passively endured the venomous pinching of Mrs. Zangiacomo. Lena’s latent strength is brought to the fore due to her deep devotion to Heyst as her ferocious struggle against Ricardo proves, for Heyst’s regard for her has given her a sense of self-respect. She feels she is now fighting for both herself and for Heyst:

She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted [Ricardo] 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. (Conrad 198-99)

Ricardo urges her: “Give the chuck to all this blamed ’yporcrisy”, Heyst being the hypocrite here according to Ricardo. Apparently Lena agrees, and embarks upon a plot to deceive Heyst, her “gentleman” as Ricardo calls him (Conrad 202), which parallels Ricardo’s systematic deception of his gentleman, Mr. Jones (Conrad 200). Lena is “not ashamed of her duplicity” because “[n]othing stood between the enchanted dream of her existence and a cruel catastrophe but her duplicity” (Conrad 103, 202), that is her life with Heyst on the island and the death of Heyst in the hands of these criminals. So she deceives everybody including Heyst and pretends to be in love with Ricardo in order to secure Ricardo’s weapon. In the process she uses her weapon of sexuality, which had so long been a bane to her, to lure Ricardo. In her joyful acceptance of death in order to protect her beloved, she offers an

extreme contrast to Ricardo's avarice, thus upholding the values of love and life over treachery and death. Almost like a Christ-figure, she sacrifices her all to protect another.

Lena's death in a way is a result of the lack of communication between her and Heyst. From their very first encounter there is a gap of communication between Lena and Heyst. Each remains incomprehensible to the other. Lena is bewildered by Heyst, and cannot trust his love for her. To secure his love, she feels that she must use secrecy and deception in her very final act. Heyst too finds Lena inscrutable as he never had a romantic relationship before, and is not able to decipher her. Sometimes they even think each other unreal, a product of his/her imagination. "This experience of the ephemerality of the other is portrayed in such a psychologically compelling manner that their earlier experiences are not falsified but rather given a strange power, with paradoxical resonances for both of them," as Suresh Raval says (Raval 426). For example, Lena's early experience of poverty and exploitation makes her extra sensitive to Heyst's inability to verbally communicate his love for her. Lena seems to recognize not merely that Heyst does not really love her but that, given his rejection of the world as evil and friendship as facade, he cannot possibly feel or experience love. This recognition compounds her sense that she has been liberated from her past only in a superficial sense, that she has not been really rescued from the destitution and abuse that made up her life in the past, and so she cannot feel the security of the self derived from the knowledge of genuine human reciprocity. Hence her desperate attempt to prove her love to Heyst.

Lena in many ways is reminiscent of Dickensian characters or of Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and has the same sentimentality and over-romanticizing in her portrayal. She is also the embodiment of Richardson's "Virtue Rewarded" in an exalted moral sense. But Conrad has also imbued Lena with deeply symbolic overtones. *Victory* can be read as a fable where an uncorrupted man, Heyst, takes shelter in an island, builds an earthly paradise with his Eve, only to be threatened with inexplicable malignant forces. Lena's attitude towards Heyst and her self-sacrifice for him suggest a kind of divine love. Heyst mocks her simple conception of faith when Lena thinks some kind of divine interception sent Heyst to her rescue. But it is this simplicity of faith that enables her to act so selflessly and heroically at the end. She is a "fallen woman", being associated with prostitution, and has been twice called Magdalen, thus strengthening her Biblical association and reminding us of the prostitute Mary Magdalene whom Jesus rescued. Critics have often discussed a Conradian reworking of the Eden myth and emphasized the recurrence of Adam's

naming of things in Heyst's christening of the nameless girl as "Lena". He simply invents, "after several experimental essays in combining detached letters and loose syllables". The name Lena is a shortened form of "Helen", perhaps ironically hinting at the story of abduction of Helen by Paris followed by disastrous consequences. Another name that has been used for her is Alma (or "soul"). The transcendent and the mundane, innocence and experience, are combined in the names Alma and Magdalen. This to-and-fro movement regarding her name points to a deeper inability on her part to create a coherent sense of her true self for herself. According to Dwight H. Purdy, Conrad spent a lot of time before finalizing Lena's name, thus proving the importance of the symbolic significance of the name. He writes:

The changes from manuscript to novel show Conrad muting her saintliness, and finally finding the ambiguity he wants in an allusion rather than a dramatic rendering. The business of Lena's triple naming is heavy in the manuscript, and Conrad experiments, apparently listening for the right symbolic note to sound. The first effort at a name occurs when it does in the novel. Heist has known her for several days when it occurs to him that he does not know her name. She replies, "They have named me Alma. I don't know why. Silly name. Margaret too" (MS, 223). . . . Conrad next attempts "Madelaine," and now he has Heyst's name for her: "The girl they called Alma (she did not know why) Madelaine too—and whom he called Lena . . . (MS, 606). Finally, in another passage excised from the novel, Conrad finds the name he wants . . . Lena. . . . The first of Conrad's tries, Margaret, suggests that he may indeed have had in mind Goethe's *Faust* as an analogue for the plot of *Victory* . . . Faust's Margaret is all saint. "Madelaine", on the other hand, is too Proustian. "Magdalene" gets the ambiguity—by tradition, though without scriptural warrant, the prostitute Jesus saves from stoning. (Purdy 96-97)

In the manuscript, Lena is a more spiritual presence than in the novel. Her "victory" there is a spiritual and metaphysical one over evil forces. There is an echo of this throughout the novel as we see her dressed in white and often described as a phantom-like apparition. But she dresses in black in the culminating scene where she is fighting evil with evil. In the novel, Conrad is ambivalent regarding the spirituality of Lena. He sometimes suggests that her spirituality is a delusion of Heyst's mind; at other times, it seems of Lena's own construction

arising from her Sunday-school education; but at other times, there are hints that Lena's spiritual nature exists outside the mind of both of them.

In the final analysis, the titular victory of the novel is indeed Lena's. Her ultimate victory is a victory against both the central male protagonists of the novel, positive and negative; against Jones who is a symbol of death she claims a victory of life, and against Heyst who is a symbol of cynicism and scepticism she claims a victory of love and faith. "She is a representative of life whose passion and intuitive wisdom achieve a victory—perhaps an illusory victory—over Heyst's detachment" (Thompson 446). It can be said that the novel concludes as a moral discourse which condemns detachment and recommends a redemptive involvement with life as exemplified by Lena's "victory" of causing Heyst to commit himself to her at the end. However, to critics like William W. Bonney, "Lena's deluded obsession, which leads to the ugly deaths of five people, including herself, cannot be regarded as a triumph" (Bonney 25). Nevertheless, she feels triumphant in her belief that she had saved Heyst and that this will ensure his eternal love for her, and Heyst in his final confession to Davidson acknowledges the claims of life and love that Lena represents over his long-held belief of detachment. Lena dies subjectively victorious, while Heyst plunges into despair at his own failure. His suicide next to Lena's dead body in the burning cottage illustrates his defeat. This by contrast makes the final vindication of Lena and of her triumph at the end of *Victory* all the more glaringly perceptible to the readers.

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