

# MAPPING AXEL HEYST'S ISLAND: THE LIMITS OF ALLEGORY IN CONRAD'S VICTORY

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*"It is not down in any map, true places never are."  
Melville, Moby Dick*

*"Minute discrimination is Not Accidental. All sublimity is  
founded on Minute Discrimination."  
Blake's annotation to Reynolds' Discourses*

## I

Readers of *Treasure Island* may remember Stevenson's observation that his novel grew up around the treasure map he had one day draw in a mood of daydream. The map preceeded and incited his prose, providing not only atmosphere, but stimulus for plot. Thus Jim Hawkins discovers Stevenson's map (attributed to Captain Flint) in Billy Bones' tarry trunk, and the game is afoot. Having invented such places as the anchorage, the stockade, Spyglass Hill and the like, the author was at pains to connect them in a story that converges in time as well as space at the X that marks the spot of Flint's silver.

One might question whether the inventors of fictional islands are not more than usually apt to think of their settings in cartographic terms. Though their geography may not be as explicit as Stevenson's, such works as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Typee*, or *Lord of the Flies* imply background maps that are detailed and highly consistent. The closed world of the island setting seems to call for a gestalt in the mind of writer and reader, a greater graphic and geographic coherence than the vaster spaces one customarily finds in the realistic novel, where the roads lead in every direction outward, into the chaos of actual history. The imagined island is freer to flow into ink-blot shapes both vaguer and more definite than the Wessex of Hardy on the Middbands of *Middlemarch*. If it calls for greater exactitude, it is also more amenable to direct translation into metaphor.

It is tempting to suggest that there is a kind of subgenre of island adventure novels in the language, books which regularly share common traits. In addition to their amenability to mapping, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island* and *Lord of the Flies* have the appearance of adolescent literature for boys. Like the American frontier of Leslie Fiedler, or Delos, the island sacred to Apollo, their settings exclude women. They suggest Romance where romance is absent: the Romance of polymorphous metaphor where a boy-hero escapes to a green world, journeys to encounter the Other. But in their initiation theme, they also lay their claim to adult seriousness. They tease us out of the great world, but then their microcosms point us back to it via themes of blind innocence, Fall and trial. The islands of *Typee* and Conrad's *Victory* are places of test that might seem to violate the pattern by their inclusion of a love-plot. But one could also argue that though Melville and Conrad allow women on the premises, they do not allow them to join the club. The narrator's dalliance with Fayaway seems like free love, but broken taboo leads to the threat of cannibalism. In *Victory*, Davidson regards it as pure hubris to take a woman to such a place as Samburan, and suggests that Heyst, Lena's rescuer, "may end yet by eating her."

How "real" a place is the world of *Victory*? Can it be mapped? The two questions are not quite the same. In a persuasive essay,<sup>1</sup> Donald Dike has argued that the island of the novel is best seen not as an actual place, but as an ahistorical nowhere, an inner space, a stage for romance and allegory like the island of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Yet the abstraction he detects in Samburan is not synonymous with vagueness: Tolkien is evidence enough that elaborate maps can be made of imaginary places.

Stevenson, for example, never loses sight of the twistings and turnings of his characters amid the points and inlets, swamps and streams that form a total gestalt "like a fat dragon standing up."<sup>2</sup> Having landed Jim in the sinister southern bay opposite "skeleton island" (held as it were between the legs of the dragon), Stevenson moves him (and through his eyes, the reader) to the stockade. This lies in a miasmatic delta, or what a Freudian might see as the dragon's crotch. Subsequent events involve Jim's clockwise circumnavigation of the setting in the coracle and "hispaniola": What begins as Jim's rebellious skylark, an act parallel to the mutiny of his sometime idol, John Silver

ends in his heroic recapture of the ship. Even the stuffy Squire can no longer complain that Jim has deserted his duty. Like the young captain of Conrad's "Secret Sharer", Jim has both indulged and purged his alter-ego. The final events of the book describe smaller circles through the setting: the treasure hunt towards Spyglass Hill ("like a pedestal cut off to put a status on"<sup>3</sup>), and the removal of the Squire's party from the stockade to Ben Gunn's cave near the north inlet.

In *Lord of the Flies* too we find the novelist intimately immersed in a setting that is like a comprehensive, embracing metaphor. Golding's island is said to be shaped like a northpointing ship<sup>4</sup> that tapers from its stern (where rises the mountain on which the boys kindle their beacon fire) to a bow (where we find the forecastle of Jack's rocky fortress). If the mountain (quarterdeck?) is the place where civilized values of ego and super-ego hold out, the opposing prow is the locus of a rebellious id. By seeking security there from Beast which, he superstitiously believes, haunts the mountain, Jack has fallen into a primitive identification with the Beast, a "magical" denial of Ralph's rational psychology. The explorations of the hunters take them from the relatively tame, reefsheltered eastern shore where they landed, to the wild, piginfested cliffs of the exposed western shore. One is tempted to find in the generally counterlockwise movement of plot some analogue to Golding's more pessimistic map of human nature.

Both novels, in any case, exhibit highly consistent references to setting that are also in harmony with a level of emergent allegory. If a character facing north turns left, and then turns left again, we will find him, sure enough, facing south; and this will have a meaning. Though the characters may be confused on their island, the author knows his way around. A beach that received the sunrise in chapter one will face it again in chapter twelve. And if the reader takes a pencil in hand and tries to sketch these authors' accumulating references to geography, he too can orient himself. A detailed map will seem to grow from a center in the writer's coherent imagination of space. Whatever of the allegorical "sublime" (to borrow Blake's terms) the author achieves is founded on a "Minute Discrimination" in the particulars of setting.

What of Conrad's *Samburan*? Does it yearn to be similarly mapped, or is the attempt merely a pedantic, adolescent game whose misguided literalism can tell us nothing about Conrad's art? Like

Stevenson (a seaman in fancy<sup>5</sup>) and Golding (a ship's officer in fact) Conrad often weaves travel knowledge and navigational skill into his fiction. Critics have already said much about his simultaneously biographical and fictive "eastern" and "western" worlds.<sup>6</sup> In his preface to *Heart of Darkness* the author tells us that his tale grew out of a boyish fascination with the map of Africa, whose heart was then *carte blanche* and whose central river seemed to uncoil like an enormous snake. A plainer realism is discernible in the landscape of *Nostramo's* Costaguana, which critics have attempted to trace to real prototypes in Colombia or Panama which the author has imaginatively rearranged.<sup>7</sup> The critical controversy over the place of *Victory* in the Conrad canon has mainly revolved around the question of what proportions of realism or allegory define this late Conrad setting, or the further question of what one sees as an acceptable generic mixture of these elements in the novel.<sup>8</sup> Though not a "real" place, is Samburan at least consistent with itself and with multiple levels of meaning implied by the text? The mapping of Samburan can, I think, cast light on the way Conrad imagined *Victory* as a whole.

## II

Conrad's descriptions of the island are cumulative<sup>9</sup> and the reader will find that his naive efforts in cartography pass through at least four stages of amplification and revision. Our picture of the place begins to form in part one, chapter one, even though the action of the first two parts is set in Surabaya. The narrator opens the novel with a retrospective, yet prescient flash of Heyst musing on Samburan. The place openly serves here as a way to define the person. Conrad playfully presses on the reader a conceit which is to become more tragically ironic in the course of the narrative: *Heyst is an island*. Islands are also mountains that rise from the sea bottom and in volcanic form "smoke" in imitation of the cigar-wielding Heyst. Ascetic nobleman that he is, Heyst is existentially perched high and alone, as if "on the highest peaks of the himalayas." The thoughts of this Hamlet of the South Seas are as shadowy as the clouds which pass over Samburan.

Heyst's subsequent abduction of Lena from the girl's orchestra is going to prove, however, that this island-that-is-Heyst is something of

an imposture. The philosophy of detachment which he has inherited from his father is inadequate to suppress in him a restiveness both sexual and social. The "old Adam" is not quite dead in him, Heyst must conclude: while the volcano that returns his gaze never erupts, Heyst himself will go up in self-consuming flames at the book's finale. At the outset Heyst seems as martial as the portrait of Charles XII, "of adventurous memory." Yet it is only a portrayal, a simulation: Heyst is gentle, a gentleman. At a third level, he is even more volcanic than the volcano: his violence turns inward. Conrad's metaphor thus multiplies irony from the outset: Heyst is and is not, is more and less than an island. No man is an island. Conrad will imply that the attempt to set himself radically apart from history is hubris on Heyst's part, as it was for Lord Jim. His reticence is really arrogance. Heyst would make himself whole, like an island, by being cut off from the whole. Irony derives from the fact that metaphor is half-truth that alternately applies, does not apply, or applies in a new sense that destroys the metaphor.

The prime physical fact that we learn initially about Samburan is that it is round, and this is also an ironic moral truth about the protagonist. Like Euclid (similarly intruded upon) Heyst is absorbed in circles that surround him. The full moon above Samburan (p.5) links "enchanted" Heyst with romantic fancy and imagination. Like an enchanter (or an introverted Cartesian spider) he sits inside a concentric nest of protective circles: the island; the horizon beyond; and beyond that, the "magic circle" whose 800 mile radius marks the limit of his wanderings from Manilla to Java, from Saigon to New Guinea. The circle is ideal, platonic: Heyst prefers the virginal music of the spheres (p.66) to the sensual cacophony of the female orchestra. On the charts of the failed coal company Samburan is represented as the central navel of the eastern hemisphere, from which lines of trade and influence radiate in all directions. Even the "objective" truth of maps, Conrad implies, is all a matter of point of view.

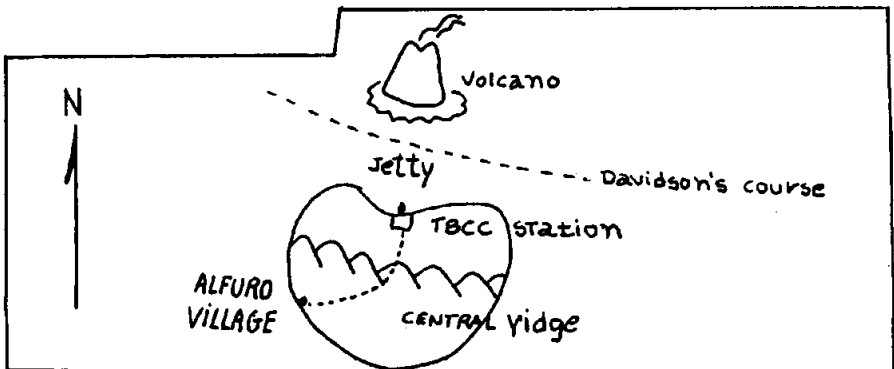
Thus the metaphor that lies at the base of our map is both sympathetic and critical, descriptive and ironically in error. Located like some Buddha in the middle of a mandala, Heyst is possibly a sage, a man who has achieved individuation, integrity. But he is also possibly a solipsist crippled by his inability to see things in themselves, im-

prisoned by thought and incapable of action.<sup>10</sup> On the physical level again we learn the round island is not geometrically perfect: it has a "shallow indentation" (Black Diamond Bay) on its north shore, facing the volcano. Through this flaw will push all the darkness Heyst has tried to exclude. Later (p.179) we learn that the island is divided into two parts by a "central" ridge. The trail connecting the once-colonized northern portion with the primitive half has been barricaded by Alfuro natives who are as wary of "hard facts" Heyst as "utopist" Heyst is himself wary of "the world". The difference lies in the fact that the Alfuro's armed barrier is successful whereas Heyst's circles and civilized reticence are powerless as a means of defense.<sup>11</sup> Something in Heyst (inherited from his father) would agree with Marvell:

Such was that happy Garden-state  
While Man there walked without a Mate  
Two Paradises twere in one  
To live in paradise alone.

Yet Heyst's Eden is not simple or perfect, but divided from the outset by the fact of his own intrusion there.

When we assimilate Conrad's further information that the native village is on the west coast of the island, we can draw our first tentative map, thus.



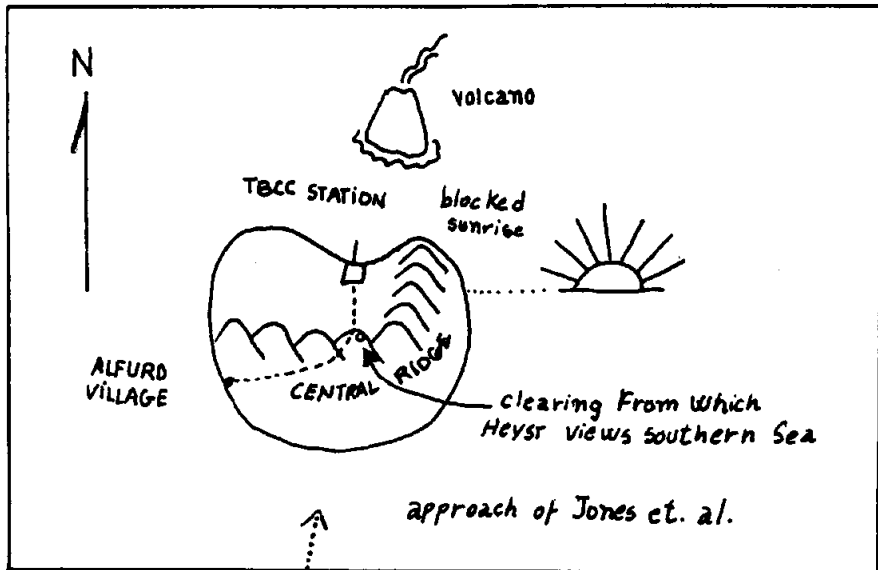
Presumably the central ridge is not quite central, but bends to the north on the western coast.

In part III, chapter 3, however, we learn new things about Samburan which force us to revise our map so as to accommodate the sun and shadow images that dominate this section. Most of the action of part III takes place within a single day. We follow the hero from his rising to his ascent with Lena of the ridge. Midday witnesses their lovemaking, and afternoon their postcoital descent into the ascetic gloom of the study dominated by the elder Heyst's portrait.<sup>12</sup> At sunset, Jones, Ricardo and Pedro stand revealed in the last horizontal light and darken into insomniac shades.

Sunrise is both visual and allegorical, temporal and spatial:

The bulk of the central ridge cut off the bungalow from sunrises, whether glorious or cloudy, angry or serene. The dwellers therein were debarred from reading early the fortune of the new-born day. It sprang upon them in its fullness, with a swift retreat of the great shadow when the sun, clearing the ridge, looked down, hot and dry, with a devouring glare like the eye of an enemy. (p.185)

This Yeatsian sun is a talisman for "objective consciousness" that threatens the moist, subjective world of the shade-loving lovers and menaces the self-assumed innocence of our middle-aged Romeo.<sup>13</sup> Rather self-consciously, the sun is Nemesis, the punishment that will come. The ridge is like Heyst's prolonged adolescence, the blindness to fate that inhabits his pose of fatalism. The allegory is perhaps a little too clear. On the level of geography, we wonder what the central ridge is suddenly doing to the *east* of the clearing on the bay. Consistent allegory seems to have led Conrad into other inconsistencies: we had supposed the ridge lay south, which is the direction in which Heyst and Lena (from the ridge) soon see Jones' boat, approaching from Surabaya.<sup>14</sup> Either we abandon our project at this point as a hobgoblin of small minds, or we redraw our map again in a way that is beginning to strain credibility. Evidently the central ridge curves, not only to the north of west, but even more radically to the north of east:



Following the sun to its setting later the same day, we must redraft our map a second time. On pp.224-25 Heyst learns from Wang that a boat has come around "the point"<sup>15</sup> and goes down to the pier to investigate. While the villains, ghost-like, are hidden under the boards, Heyst again surveys the prospect described at the novel's outset. The volcano lies across the water (still to the north, we would say), but other details in his view again jar the reader's sense of orientation. Not only does the late sunlight redden the jetty, but Conrad tells us that Heyst can see the sun itself touching the water,

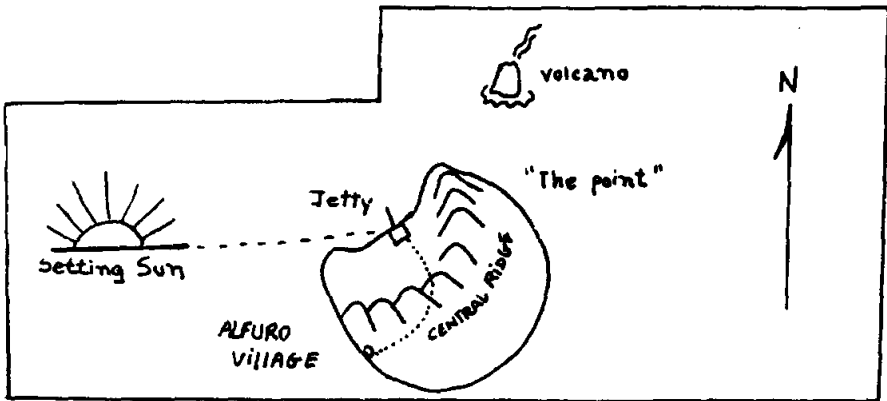
like a disk of iron cooled to a dull red glow, ready to start rolling around the circular plate of the sea. (p.235)

The image of the circle which connoted abstraction into platonic isolation has here reversed valence ironically. We might have noted this before in the ridge scene, where Lena was blinded by the noon horizon that surrounded Samburan without sheltering it. The magic circle has come to stand for the very world it should exclude: a repressed truth returns. In the sunset scene, diamonds have, so to speak, reverted to coal. The iron disk that rolls around the circular plate of the sea is a mechanical part in a Hardyesque engine, a deterministic world where dead atoms collide, but do not mingle. The sky and sea of Heyst's soul



— his ideals and instincts — seem to generate similar friction<sup>16</sup> The fracas over who shall be first to drink the rusty water Heyst has freed from an old pipe reveals the absurd disjunction between gentlemanly pretension (Ricardo's language to his rescuer) and the deeds of the natural man (Ricardo's clouting of Pedro). Jones appropriately comments, "I am afraid we aren't presenting ourselves in a very favorable light."

What makes sense in allegorical, philosophical, or even psychological terms is again however difficult to square with the geographic sense. How can the setting sun be seen touching the water from the indentation (shallow though it may be, of the bay? Either there is no point west of the jetty; or the jetty does not face north, as before implied; or the sun is setting north of west, which would be inconsistent with the equatorial latitude and season.<sup>17</sup> The dogged map maker must try to get around these contradictions by drawing a third map that incorporates some combination of possible alternatives:



A third and final revision in the chart of Samburan is provoked by Conrad's second (and last) round of sun and shade images in part IV.<sup>18</sup> Again the action of a single day (Heyst's last) fills several chapters: again sunrise and sunset invite allegorical reading. But this time, the inconsistencies posed by Conrad's protean geography seem so serious that we must abandon our faltering map.

About thirty-six hours have passed since sunset on the dock. Ricardo is on the prowl, determined to spy out the woman he knows is

hidden in Heyst's bungalow. Just as the sun bursts full-blown over the ridge, he makes his charge at Lena. From now on, she will be too much in the sun, and conceals her knowledge from Heyst as Ricardo conceals her existence from Jones. Heyst's ineffectual attempts to protect and conceal Lena within his magic circles have failed. Alma-Magualen's veil of innocence, never very secure, is torn as easily as the curtain redundantly hung inside her bedroom door, and she enters the ambiguous liason with Ricardo, the "mudsoul" who often seems more truly her double than does the knightly Heyst. Like Ricardo, Lena instinctively recognizes the connection between eros and aggression, a connection gentlemen prefer to deny. Unlike either of the men, she can translate her natural capacity for deception, eros and self-assertion into a higher, active purpose: her aim to rescue Heyst, her rescuer.

Afternoon sees the couple's second ascent of the ridge to regain possession of the stolen revolver. But rebuffed by Wang at the barricade, they descend into the gathering shadows and the atmospheric mutterings of a storm which will culminate in the climactic shooting of Ricardo and Lena. From the "southern" edge of the clearing behind the three bungalows, they see this scene:

... before she had advanced more than three yards [Lena] stood still and pointed to the west.

'Oh, look there,' she exclaimed.

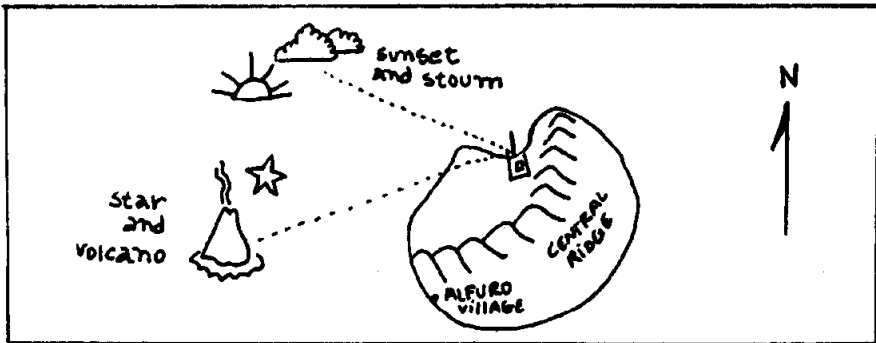
Beyond the headland of Black Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark red sun showing at the bottom. Heyst cast an indifferent glance at the ill-omened chaos of the sky. (p.355)

A few minutes and a page later, Heyst again takes "a survey of the surroundings from the veranda":

The thunder-charged mass hung unbroken beyond the low, ink-black headland, darkening the twilight. By contrast, the sky at the zenith displayed pellucid clearness, the sheen of a delicate glass bubble which the merest movement of air might shatter. A little to the left, beyond the black masses of the headland and of the forest, the volcano, a feather of smoke by day and a cigar-glow at night, took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening. Above it a reddish star came out like an expelled spark from the fiery bosom of the earth, enchanted into permanency by the mysterious spell of frozen spaces. (p.356)

In this final landscape, Conrad has returned to the scene that opened the novel. Heyst is still smoking and musing, but there are changes of mood and detail. The allegory is now luridly clear, and Heyst is a Moses blind to its signs. The association of black headland, storm, volcano and reddish star imply the approaching catastrophe and the hero's destruction by fire. The "glass bubble of the zenith" reiterates the image of Heyst surrounded by platonic spheres which may yet be penetrated despite his conviction that "nothing can break in on us here" (p.223). Possibly the dying sun is Heyst? Possibly the reddish star, elsewhere identified explicitly with Venus,<sup>19</sup> is Lena, the victorious Anima of the novel's last pages? What is chiefly stressed in this and in the preceding passage is Heyst's ignorance of his fate, his persisting pride and self-absorption. Despite middle age, he seems as blind as young Jim in his parallel encounter with a gentleman intruder's claim to familiarity. The quality of Conrad's irony here seems however different — more generic, formal and external — than the irony of previous bipolar symbols which pointed us deeper into Heyst's peculiar and unclassical psyche.

At the level of geography: it would seem strictly speaking impossible for Lena to see the "headland of Diamond Bay lying black on a purple sea" from a point behind the bungalow. The clearing opens only to the north, the direction in which the bay has always lain. Moreover, what is the "headland" of this passage? Is it the same as the "point" seen in the previous sunset? We inferred that the latter lay east of the bay, while the headland is towards the sunset. The sun shows "beyond" this headland — presumably not in the sense of *over* it (which would be inconsistent with the previous map), but *north* of it, where the final rays might pass over the water to the jetty. Still more difficult to fit into our previous ideas, however, is the volcano. Now visible over land rather than water, it has been shifted from north to west, "a little to the left, between the black masses of the headland and of the forest." Above it twinkles the red star that signifies both love and bloodshed. The geographic problems have finally become insuperable: there is no way we can redraft or rotate the island to fit this new picture with those previously accumulated.



Rereading the last two passages, it becomes evident what has happened. Conrad's eagerness to convey meaning — the allegory of approaching doom — has led him to clump together images of dark headland, storm, dying sun, volcano and star. Heyst must be "indifferent" indeed not to notice the author's determined — overdetermined — rearrangement of his world. All the symbols point to the same fate, but only a couple of them would have been adequate to prove to the reader that he knows more than Heyst. One feels Conrad has indulged in a kind of allegorical overkill.<sup>20</sup>

The map of Samburan grows, falters, reforms — and finally fails. What of it? One would hardly care to claim that *Treasure Island* is a better novel than *Victory* because its geography is exact. It would be tempting to find in the mutations of our map some sweeping analogy to the elusive, indefinable, doomed Heyst. The argument might run: just as you have shifting views of the protagonist as "spider", "angel", "utopist" or man of "hard facts", but no view of Heyst-in-himself<sup>21</sup> — so you have tentative maps, but no Map of his island. But this is overingenious: Conrad does not deliberately sew contradictions into his geography to deceive us. Ironies that apply to various metaphorical parts of his island may not apply to the whole. Rather he is careless about geography in at least two ways, one of which is less acceptable than the other. He is properly careless about the necessity of proving that Samburan is a real place since his artist's concern is with inner states; but he is also careless about making his island consistent with itself. Our map failed not because *Victory's* stage is a setting for fantasy, but because it is a sometimes disorderly stage where allegory works at

cross-purposes with a way of imagining landscape more in harmony with what one must vaguely call “psychological realism”.

### III

For more than twenty years, critical dispute has bubbled around *Victory* – Conrad’s “most controversial novel”<sup>22</sup> – and its place in the Conrad “canon”. The arguments offered on either side, however, often tend to use this novel as a pawn in the larger game of evaluating the author’s entire later production. The schools involved are basically two: those who, with Hewitt, Guerard, Moser and Meyer, argue Conrad’s decline after about 1910, and those who in contrast affirm the aging artist’s continuing growth. Paul Wiley and John Palmer are the most persuasive of this second group.

Palmer argues that we should be wrong to see serious contradictions between the “realistic” level of *Victory* (rooted in the setting of urban Surabaya) and the more fantastic level represented by the island setting since this novel moves irresistably from the former to the latter. Because Conrad’s “deepest” intentions lie toward allegory, he feels we can temporarily suspend disbelief when allegory conflicts with realistic detail<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Guerard, who finds the artistic truth of *Heart of Darkness* lies in the balanced tensions the story maintains between differing levels, the allegorical critics have given up the organic middle ground and shifted the balance of judgement offcenter, toward a reading that seems Manichean and not a little Heystian. Since it was Guerard who first championed the symbolic reading of *Heart of Darkness*, it seems unfair for Palmer to brand him as too inflexibly realistic in his demands on the novel as a *genre*. Yet Palmer is right, I think, to dissent with Guerard’s narrow judgement of *Victory* as “one of the worst novels for which high claims have been made by critics of standing.”<sup>24</sup>

Each position struggles with contradictions inherent in its argument: “decline” critics praise the modernist virtue of connotative symbolism in Conrad’s earlier work, but deny similar psychological elements in the later production. Thus Guerard makes much of Marlow’s initiatory journey to the interior in *Heart of Darkness*, but is silent about the shift towards fantasy setting in *Victory*. Thus too those who

praise the doubling of Jim and Gentleman Brown find no parallel virtue in the association of Heyst and Jones. "Growth" critics, on the other hand, affirm the moral or philosophical center of *Victory* and discount the "realistic" criteria which they claim are overstressed by the decline people. They argue that the novel is as a genre flexible enough to embrace techniques of allegory which illuminate its central moral concern. But in neglecting to define three crucial terms, these critics practice a kind of literary gerrymandering: they redistrict that part of *symbolism* which they do not value, and call it *realism*. Then they reattribute the remaining virtues of symbolism to *allegory*. In his attempt to revive and modernize that neglected mode, Palmer is led to chimerically characterize *Victory* as an "existential allegory". But I doubt that allegory can be made congruent with Conrad's pessimistic irony and still remain allegory. Allegory is surely a denotative mode, where essence precedes existence. Despite its epigraph from *Comus*, *Victory* inhabits a world radically different from that of Milton. On Heyst's solipsistic island one may mourn the lost connection with a believing community, but like Heyst, the reader cannot experience that connection. It is a long way between the Mount of Vision and the central ridge.

The controversy over allegory in *Victory* goes back, I think, to the fundamental ambiguity in Conrad's view of his own art: is it meant (as Palmer believes) to convey a few "simple notions" (mainly Fidelity) — meanings which it encloses like the didactic kernel of the simple seaman's tale? Or does the meaning of that art lie in the symbolist haze of allusions which surround it?<sup>25</sup> Which is most important — the goal of the journey, seen straight ahead, or the journey itself, seen to the side, with peripheral vision? What the devil did Conrad mean by "seeing"?

All argument which approaches *Victory* as a point of evidence for Conrad's hypothetical decline or growth, or descends from generic presuppositions about the proper constitution of the Novel has, I think, failed to lay the ghost of this old problem. Palmer is right in wanting to restore *Victory* to the place of eminence the author himself gave it, but wrong, I feel, about some of the reasons for that restoration. The schools of decline and growth have both neglected a dimension in the novel where we may find stronger grounds than those of "realism" or "allegory" for its defense. I mean the domain of "psychological

realism" selectively praised by Guerard in other contexts. Contrary to allegorical critics who see this novel as a reflection on the bases of morality and not a "love story", I would suggest that the Heyst-Lena tale is a successful love story after all: providing the critic grants Conrad some ironic distance in his treatment of a neurotic and self-baffling love. Contrary also to those decline critics who acknowledge the love story, but deplore its lack of psychological relevance and seem (how odd for Freudians!) embarrassed by Conrad's whole belated exploration of eros, I would submit that Conrad succeeds better than they dream — and on their own terms. Better late than never. Despite its reticences, *Victory* is a breakthrough in its ability to confront sexual themes which have long simmered beneath the surface of those austere fictions about initiation into a masculine code,<sup>26</sup> *Victory* is a novel about psychic impotence rather than a sign of it.

We are accustomed to hear that D. H. Lawrence's claim to modernism lies not so much in his use of experimental technique as in his complex and kinky vision of modern love. It lies in the insight (parallel to that of depth psychology) that the self is a "polarized flux" and not a fixed ego, or even a psychomachia fought out between good and evil elements in a "certain moral scheme". When we follow the ironic doublings and inversions, the symbolic flux and repolarization of the Lena-Heyst affair, I think we can credit the more fastidious Conrad with some of the same insight into the "life stuff."<sup>27</sup> *Victory* has its stiff moments — like the solar allegory we examined, where irony grew formal and divorced from character — but on the whole it is far more than the naive romance of rescuer and maiden-in-distress which some have supposed.

To expand this point about psychological realism, one must finally go beyond the dead-ending trail of maps with which I began this essay. That device was only a means to affirm in *Victory* a modernism beyond the limits of allegory. The extended metaphors that grow from Heyst's relation to place "swell" towards allegory<sup>28</sup> but we have seen them turn and deflate and return to the ground. Heyst is Hamlet and Prospero both, but neither philosophy nor magic empower him to act: we are left with the sense that neither allegory nor romance can express him. A mode of ironic pseudo-allegory best defines his modernism, which lies not so much in his disordered beliefs as in his divided

being. The peculiar realism of *Victory* invites further exploration by psychological critics less eager to demonstrate that their discernment is superior to that of a fading and naively Victorian author.

## NOTES

1. Donald Dike, "The Tempest of Axel Heyst," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, vol.17, n: 2 (Sept. 1962), 95-114.

2. *Treasure Island* (New York: Signet, 1981), p.46.

3. *Ibid.*, p.82.

4. *Lord of the Flies* (New York: Putnams, 1954), p.27.

5. See, e.g., Stevenson's epitaph: "Home is the sailor..."

6. Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Eastern World* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1966) and *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1971).

7. Greiff, Louis K. and Shirley A., "Sulaco and Panama: a Geographical Source in Conrad's *Nostromo*," *JML*, 3 (1973), 102-04. Also see.

8. John Palmer, *Joseph Conrad's Fiction: a Study in Literary Growth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968). See especially pp.171-73 and 179-82.

9. I use the 1923 Doubleday edition of *Victory* throughout. Pertinent references to Samburan's geography occur on the following pages: 3-5, 23-24, 27-28, 179-82, 185, 189-90, 216-17, 224-26, 235-36, 248, 241-42, 256-58, 281-85, 343-44, 355-57. In addition references to the islands location appear on pp.167-68, and allusions to the season on 165, 192 and 255.

10. Lena assures herself (p.246) that she must not be irritated if Heyst seems "too self-contained, as if shut up in a world of his own." Later she fears she will disappear if he stops thinking of her. I take this to mean not that she has become a Berkeleyan idealist, but that she sees the abstract quality of Heyst's feelings. His love is watered to a compassion that separates into pity and contempt. While Ricardo is potent to kill or love, Heyst's solipsism leaves him with "neither force nor conviction" (350).

11. In 1893 Conrad wrote to Mme. Poradowska rather piously anticipating the darker images of *Victory*:

"... my vision is circumscribed by the somber circle where the blue of the sea and the blue of heaven touch without merging. Moving in that perfect Circle inscribed by the Creators hand, and of which I am always the center, I follow the undulant line of the swell..."

Sceptical relativism that borders on solipsism is only one of the traits that link Conrad to Heyst, a character who (the preface to *Victory* confesses) lay particularly close to the author's heart. Like Heyst, Conrad lived under the shadow of a melancholy and disappointed father. Like Heyst, Conrad used fastidious politeness as a defense against the world's squalor. Like Heyst, Conrad vacillated between periods of Faustian activity and passive withdrawal.

12. To go further in this line: the "tragic brutality of sea and sky" seen from the summit clearing near which Heyst and Lena make love induces the latter to "put her hand to her eyes": later in the bungalow she lies down with a headache. Heyst has chivalrously led her into the shade to spare her, but knocks off her "helmet" in his sudden haste to make love. Overtones of



blinding and castration by a punitive truth that is like the sun appear again in the "black stumps, charred, without shadows" which oppress Heyst in the company clearing after his single (evidently first and last) experience of physical love. Later it will be Heyst who is "blinded" by the candles Lena has lit in her disobedient attempt to unman Ricardo.

13. Jones (Heyst's anti-self) ridicules the Swede as a "woman-ridden hermit... (a) man in the moon" (p.387). Thus both sun and moon provide analogues to Heyst, depending on Conrad's purpose.

14. Schomberg tells Jones that Samburan lies 50 hours sailing northeast of Madura (near Surabaya, Java). This would put it somewhere in the equatorial sea near the east coast of Borneo which Conrad had already used as a setting in *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Lord Jim*, etc.

15. Which point — eastern or western? Presumably the first, since an easterly ridge cuts off the sunrise from Heyst's bungalow.

16. In the scene on the ridge for example (p.214-15), we see a disturbing disjunction between Heyst's tender and erotic impulses toward Lena. He first philosophizes to her, then ignores her, and abruptly detests her. Finally her tears evoke his lust and he possesses her against her will. We can appreciate Lena's fear that he does not love her "for herself." Heyst is not so unlike Ricardo as he imagines.

17. It is the dry season on Samburan, which in Indonesia would occur in the winter months when the sun is furthest south in the sky.

18. From pp.256-287 several details of setting expand our picture of the bungalow area but have no special symbolic overtones. They would allow us to sketch an "inset" of the compound, but tell us nothing more about the island as a whole.

19. Venus explicitly appeared previously, on the evening of Jones' arrival: "a bright lamp... above the grave of the sun" (p.241). A cold breath from the (feminine) star makes Jones' teeth chatter.

20. More evidence of over-allegorization can be found in the machinery of lit and unlit candles which Heyst concocts as a code means for Lena to signal him (372).

"I fear for you, but in this black dress with most of your face muffled up in that dark veil, I defy anybody to find you there before daylight. Wait in the forest till the table is pushed in full view of the doorway, and you see three candles out of four blow out and one relighted — or should the lights be put out here while you watch them, wait till three candles are lighted and then two put out. At either of these signals, run back as hard as you can. For it will of these signals, run back as hard as you can. For it will mean that I am waiting for you here."

In Conrad's defense, we can try to see analogies here between the numbers of candles and shifting combinations of characters. Palmer claims that each candle represents a life: "if Lena sees three candles lit and blown out and one relighted, that is Heyst's signal that he has destroyed the three villains and that Lena is to reemerge from the darkness to join him" (Palmer, p.190). To me the passage remains pedantic and the allegory obscure: Heyst's ingenuity is out of harmony with the emotional context and the dramatic moment. Poor Lena is being brow-beaten as if by a senior scout. It does not seem any more convincing to alternatively explain this odd passage as authorial irony directed against Heyst's pedantry and patriarchal desire to keep Lena in the dark.

- 21 See Robert Secor, "The Rhetoric of Shifting Perspectives in Conrad's *Victory*," *Penn State University Studies*, 32 (Penn State University Press, 1971):40-47.
22. The phrase is from Geddes, p.44. For resumis of the decline controversy, see Gary Geddes' introduction to his *Conrad's Later Novels* (McGill-Queens University Press, 1980), or Palmer's bibliographical end-note in *Joseph Conrad's Fiction*. The main prodecline texts are Douglas Hewitt's *Conrad: a Reassessment* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952), Thomas Moser's *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), Albert Guerard's *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), and Bernard Meyer's *Joseph Conrad: a Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967). In addition to the books by Geddes and Palmer, see Paul Wiley's *Conrad's Measure of Man* (New York: Gordian Press, 1954) for statements of the "growth" thesis.
23. See Palmer, p.182: "Victory cannot sustain its opening level of psychological realism without interfering seriously with the development of its symbolic motifs. Whichever level of a work dominates and limits the others may properly be called its thematic level: and in *Victory*, this is the allegorical level which culminates in Samburan."
24. See Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist*, p.255.
25. The metaphors are Marlowe's, in *Heart of Darkness*.
26. See Terry Whalen's discussion of Conrad's mixed self-revelation and inhibition in the former's "Hecyst's Moral Oddity: a Reading of *Victory*," *Conradiana* 3:1 (1970-71):39-48.
27. In a letter to H.S. Cranby (April 7, 1924) Conrad wrote, "Victory... is a book in which I have tried to grasp at more life stuff than perhaps in any other of my works..."
28. According to R.W.B. Lewis, *Victory* shows a "swelling towards allegory." See his "The Current of Conrad's *Victory*" in Chas. Shapiro, ed. *Twelve Original Essays on the Great English Novels* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1970), pp.103-31.