

**JOSEPH CONRAD'S *VICTORY*: A CASE STUDY OF THE
PRIMARY TEXT, SELECTED CRITICAL COMMENTARY, NATAL
SENIOR CERTIFICATE ENGLISH FIRST LANGUAGE
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS AND A SELECTION OF
CANDIDATES' EXAMINATION RESPONSES IN 1990, WITH
SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENTS IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE**

By RAYMOND DOUBELL

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
in the Department of English, University of Natal.**

Durban 1995

CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER ONE:</u> CONSIDERATION OF A SAMPLE OF ANSWERS TO QUESTION 5 (<i>VICTORY</i> ESSAY) IN THE 1990 NATAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE ENGLISH FIRST LANGUAGE HIGHER GRADE THIRD PAPER (LITERATURE)	25
<u>CHAPTER TWO:</u> NATAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE ENGLISH FIRST LANGUAGE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS ON <i>VICTORY</i> : DECEMBER 1977 TO DECEMBER 1990	77
<u>CHAPTER THREE:</u> COMMENTARY ON <i>VICTORY</i> GENERALLY MOST AVAILABLE IN NED SCHOOLS IN 1990	101
• Centring Heyst and Leavis's Conception of 'Life'	104
• Social and Political Implications, including the Policy of Detachment, but excluding Sexual Politics	107
• Lena and Sexual Politics	129
• Whose 'Victory'?	146
• Allegory and Caricature	157
<u>CHAPTER FOUR:</u> CONCLUSION: SOME SUGGESTED PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, USING <i>VICTORY</i> AS EXAMPLE	169
• Overtly 'Political' Criticism: Collits as Example	169
• Prescription of Secondary Sources	178
• Suggested Senior Certificate Examination Questions	181
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY:</u>	187

INTRODUCTION

In the sub-culture of secondary education within predominantly white, English-speaking South African society (a sub-culture to which I belong and with which I am directly familiar), teachers, pupils¹ and most other readers of the literary text² have tended, conventionally, to see its 'meaning' as belonging to a supra-temporal Platonic realm and capable of adumbration or even exhaustive explication by critical commentators who write learned studies, address in-service courses or otherwise 'teach' it. (This is so even when 'the meaning' is accepted as ambiguous or if ambiguity itself is seen as the meaning or an aspect of it.) Teachers and pupils are influenced by the indices of institutional authority and by their own immediate need to function and survive in the institutions on which their futures depend. My own consistent experience of in-service courses is that most secondary-school teachers explicitly want to be *told* (as opposed to discuss) what to tell their pupils about prescribed texts and other aspects of syllabus. The institution of a democratic and non-racist form of government in recent times has caused the apartheid barriers between teachers to start to break down, and this year (1995) has been the first in which I have attended in-service courses which were not either completely or predominantly 'white'. So far, my impression is that teachers who are not white are not distinguishable from their white colleagues in this regard.

That interpretations can differ is acknowledged, but there tends to be the assumption that some hermeneutic and critical perceptions are 'better' (in an abstract, ideal and inadequately philosophically grounded sense) than others. As one approaches *the* meaning of the text, increasing benefit is expected. It is empirically evident and common cause in the secondary-education sub-culture that a high proportion of both teachers and pupils are predominantly or exclusively concerned with how well an interpretation will fare when marked. Otherwise, teachers tend to understand this benefit as the assisting of their pupils to become more 'humanized', 'civilized', 'moral' or aware of 'life'.

This understanding is problematic. It is at least not convincingly demonstrable to those who do not accept the validity of the relevant philosophical paradigms. What

¹ The term, 'pupils' will be used to designate those still studying at school level, as a convenient means of distinguishing them from tertiary-level students.

² 'Text' is taken to mean the raw material, prior to decoding, of writing or any other signifying structure. In the case of writing, it applies to lexical and grammatical terms and features as well as to anything else, such as, for instance, typographical qualities, which can be variously processed during decoding. Textual features can function and be considered separately as local effects, but their force tends overwhelmingly to be contextual and dependent on what is taken by a given reader-decoder to be their inter-relationships and interactivity. Meanings of textual features and ensembles of textual features are not stable and fixed but contingent and variable. MH Abrams writes of 'poststructural accounts of signifying practices' that 'a "text"' is treated by poststructuralists as 'a structure of signifiers regarded merely as a given for the reading process' (1993: 260). This definition is applicable to the use of the term 'text' in this thesis, with the qualification that the extreme structuralist and poststructuralist position described by Abrams as imputing to the literary work a possible 'illusion of reality, but ... no truth-value, nor even any reference to a reality existing outside the literary system itself' (281; my ellipsis) is eschewed. This thesis is concerned with problems inhering in the text-reader-reader's 'world' relationship, and it would be self-contradictory to deny the reality of relationship between text and 'reality' (author's and/or reader's), however uncertain and speculative one's sense of such relationship might be.

constitutes the 'humane', 'civilized' and 'moral' depends on point of view, on ideology not derivable from absolutes or universals but socio-historically relative. What constitutes an important feature of 'life' is similarly problematic. For much of the third quarter of this century, FR Leavis's *Great Tradition* significantly influenced the thinking of large numbers of University of Natal graduates in English and therefore secondary-school teaching in Natal. Essentially Leavisian thinking is still normal among KwaZulu-Natal teachers and, indeed, throughout the country, even though explicit reference to *The Great Tradition* is not as apparent as it used to be. What 'life', as used by FR Leavis, *means* tends to be vague; under analysis, however, it emerges as a liberal humanist, ideologically uninnocent construct purportedly self-explanatory, transparent and commonsensical, but in effect geared to the propagation of a particular *Weltanschauung* and, therefore, a particular set of power-relations. It is a politically charged term and concept.¹ But one need not abandon the term 'life'. Specifically defined conceptions of aspects of 'life' are offered below in this Introduction and further discussed in later chapters and it is suggested that the teaching of literature can help to inculcate an awareness of them.

Critics, teachers, public examiners and those whom they influence are not necessarily clearly aware that their thinking is ideologically directed. It is typical of dominant ideologies that they are naturalized within the psyches of ideologues who do not recognize themselves *as* ideologues. The phenomenon is analogous to that in which only possessors of other accents are recognized as 'having an accent' while the subject does not readily think of herself as having one. There are supporters of dominant ideologies who are conscious of themselves as such, and who deliberately seek to condition others so that those others become adherents of the ideology concerned; this is true even of some proponents of a liberal humanist and expressive realist poetics. This poetics, however consciously or unconsciously adhered to and propagated, is still prevalent among teachers of English in predominantly 'white' South African secondary schools. The anecdotal evidence available to me is that the same can be claimed of other South African teachers. For instance, Basil Snayer is Acting Chairperson of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) in the Western Cape province, and a senior English teacher who was classified 'Coloured' during the apartheid era. By virtue of his work for SADTU, he has extensive experience of what happens in our schools, particularly those which serve the historically disadvantaged ethnic groups. He has told me that it is his opinion that what my experience over more than a quarter-century tells me about white teachers is applicable to most teachers in this country, irrespective of ethnicity. Kevin McAnda, also a 'Coloured', formerly Subject Adviser (English) in the Education and Culture Service of the apartheid-era House of Representatives and now Principal Subject Adviser in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), confirms this impression and offers the view that, regardless of ethnicity, South African teachers were and generally still are conditioned by 'the system'. Phumla Satyo was a Subject Adviser (English) in the apartheid-era Department of Education and Training, the national ministry which controlled the schooling of black (African) pupils. She is

¹ Leavis's concept of 'life' will be further discussed in the course of consideration of his analysis of *Victory* (see below: 104-107).

emphatic that it was and still is the case throughout the country that African teachers are in the main unaware of the contestable ideological nature of the positions they adopt. Her opinion is that most 'confuse ideology with reality'. It would be valid to gloss her word, 'reality' as meaning 'objectively verifiable and non-relative knowledge'.

Most South African teachers, irrespective of ethnicity, are largely or completely unaware that they are propagators of either a specific poetics or an ideology. The range of theoretical positions with concomitant theoretical debate which has manifested itself within our university English departments has not for the most part percolated through to secondary-school departments. Many teachers, especially those old enough to be in positions of authority, graduated before the debate became strongly evident in our universities. Their younger colleagues seldom know any better. Even where a substantial amount of theory has been included in undergraduate syllabuses, as has occurred at the University of Natal (Durban), only a small proportion of students seem to have benefited. Apparently, many undergraduates find such study cripplingly difficult; besides, there is much primary material to get through. (I have been given anecdotal evidence that developments in course-design have had some success at some centres, and it might well be that our future secondary-school teaching will be more informed by knowledge of the debate than has been the case to date.)

A point which emerges here is that a poetics has socio-political implications. A theory of literature, however explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, adhered to is in its implications and potential effects more than a way of reading and interpreting printed or otherwise propagated texts. It tends to influence the ways in which one perceives and conceives of extra-literary reality, by which is meant the psychological, social, economic and political conditions of flesh and blood existence (as opposed to printed, filmed, taped or electronically stored and propagated simulacrum of that existence). A poetics cannot be ideologically neutral.

By the same token, this thesis is not ideologically neutral. It is materialist and rooted in a radical liberal attitude which is distinguishable from Marxism only inasmuch as it does not subscribe to *specifically* Marxist programmes for the restructuring of education or any other social practice. It assumes and asserts that pupils should be invited to consider the modes of power-relationship - especially those which are covert - which inform discourse and value-systems. It takes cognizance of what has in recent decades become a commonplace concept in our universities but not in their secondary-level 'feeders'. As Philip Goldstein writes (1990: 2), various Marxist theorists and commentators have pointed to 'a "microphysics" of power embedded within traditional criticism and certifying its "disinterested" results.' Goldstein notes that 'What Marx discovered was a theory of ideology according to which philosophy, theology, art, and other cultural discourses do not have a history apart from that of their socioeconomic systems' (6). As Goldstein puts it simply, but not simplistically, 'In a particular society certain ideas prevail because they and not other ideas best defend the interests of the ruling class' (7). Goldstein claims that 'Classical Marxism [and] the historical and speculative schools [of Marxism] emphasize the illusory independence of the "objective" theorist and minimize the determining influence of authoritative institutional discourse' (11). This thesis aligns itself with the attitude Goldstein attributes to what he calls '(post)structuralist Marxism' and 'disavows that autonomy and objectivity and

acknowledges the determining force exerted by twentieth-century institutional discourse' (*ibid*).

Inescapably, any adverse or partly adverse criticism of a particular 'institutional discourse' implies that it ought to be replaced by an alternative form of 'institutional discourse'. Also inescapably, the proposed alternative will not be free of ideological content.

Before any such proposal is outlined, the term 'ideology' requires glossing. Terry Eagleton notes at the beginning of his *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991): 'Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology, and this book will be no exception' (1). Eagleton quotes Martin Seliger as

defining ideology as 'sets of ideas by which men [*sic*] posit, explain and justify ends and means of organised social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order' (1991: 6-7; quotation from Seliger's *Ideology and Politics*, 1976: 11; Eagleton's interpolation).

Eagleton asserts that this definition

has the advantage of staying faithful to much common usage

[but]

carries the disadvantage of appearing to jettison from the concept of ideology a number of elements which many radical theorists have assumed to be central to it: the obscuring and 'naturalizing' of social reality, the specious resolutions of real contradictions, and so on (1991: 7).

This thesis accepts Seliger's definition as qualified by the *caveat* Eagleton presents. To clarify further. One of the 'radical theorists' to whom Eagleton refers is Pierre Macherey. In his discussion of Lenin's critique of Tolstoy, Macherey writes:

If we consider the nature of ideology in general ... it is soon obvious that there can be no ideological contradiction, except if we put ideology in contradiction with itself, if we induce contradiction within the framework of a dialogue (which is also ideological). By definition, an ideology can sustain a contradictory debate, for ideology exists precisely in order to efface all trace of contradiction. Thus, an ideology, as such, breaks down only in the face of real questions: but for that to come about, ideology must not be able to hear these questions; that is to say, ideology must not be able to translate them into its own language. In so far as ideology is a false resolution of a real debate, it is always adequate to itself *as a reply*. Obviously, the great thing is that it can never answer the question. In that it succeeds in endlessly prolonging its imperfection, it is complete; thus it is always equally in error, pursued by the risk that it cannot envisage - *the loss of reality*. An ideology is real to itself only in so far as it remains inadequate to the question which is both its foundation and its pretext. Ideology's essential weakness is that it can never recognise for itself its own

real limits: at best it can learn of these limits from elsewhere, in the action of a radical criticism, not by a superficial denunciation of its content; the criticism of ideology is then replaced by a *critique of the ideological*.

... Ideology is enclosed, finite, but it mistakenly proclaims itself to be unlimited (having an answer for everything) within its limits. ... Ideology is a false totality because it has not appointed its own limits, because it is unable to reflect the limitation of its limits. Ideology has received these limits, but it exists solely in order to forget that moment of origin. These abiding limits, which are both permanent and permanently latent, are the source of that dissonance which structures all ideology: the dissonance between its explicit openness and its implicit closure.

... Like a planet revolving about an absent sun, an ideology is made of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of. ...

... the symptomatic weaknesses ... are to be located in the questions which are left unanswered (1978: 130-132; italics in the original; my ellipses).

So it is in the nature of a given ideology to define and determine the topography of playing-fields and position goal-posts so as to maximize its chances of establishing and preserving a position more powerful than alternative and competing ideologies. Where necessary to the promotion of its own interpretation of phenomena, ideology is selective in what it stresses, what it marginalizes and what it ignores or suppresses so as to make experience coherent, to legitimize criticism of the theory and practice of other ideologies and to justify the activity of its adherents, all in terms of its own assumptions. Left here, ideology would be intrinsically guilty of bad faith. The football metaphor would have to be extended to include the notion of inevitable cheating, and cheating is bad faith and automatically carries the stigma of being morally 'wrong'. If, therefore, this thesis calls itself 'ideological', it accuses itself of bad faith and moral 'wrongness'. But the metaphor is imperfect, and useful only preliminarily. If one accepts the premise that there is no indisputably objective basis for the determination of the validity of value in social and political relationships, there can be no immutable 'laws of the game'. There can, however, be conviction as to the need to 'win the game' in order to achieve 'good'; 'good' can be only what is assumed in good faith to be of value in the light of what experience seems currently to suggest. This circularity of argument is inescapable in the absence of a 'hard' science of social value (see below: 13-14). The social values espoused in this thesis (see below: 14 ff) seem to me to be fundamental and obviously in accordance with reason and natural justice, but they are the products of my historical moment and social conditioning, and therefore provisional, contingent and relative in essence. However, Frank Lentricchia presents a *caveat* (1983: 145) concerning such acknowledgement:

Recent theory is very quick to acknowledge openly its commitments, its historicity, the fact that it is not innocent or "value-neutral"; the capital sin of this sort of honesty and

self-consciousness is the belief, always unstated, that the mere acknowledgement of the interested quality of the act of reading somehow protects the reader from all other sins.

Lentricchia's observation must be heeded. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that respectful recording of this observation and its concomitant *caveat* does not of necessity provide more effective protection against 'all other sins'. What it can do is provide a reminder that trying to be transparent and to write in good faith does not prevent one from lapsing into incoherence. One is simply brought back to the obvious but taxing need to try to avoid incoherence by attempting to anticipate and answer questions which test coherence. Meanwhile, acknowledgement of 'historicity, the fact that it is not innocent or "value-neutral"' must remain a requirement of any discourse which cannot objectively establish any eternal and universal basis for itself.

It seems to me to be self-evident that ideological distortion can be conscious. Macherey's personification of ideology as an entity that 'is pursued by the risk it cannot envisage - the loss of reality' and 'can never recognise for itself its own real limits' is no denial that it is *people* who generate and are directed by ideology and who for reasons probably of self-interest can function in terms of that ideology even when aware of its limits. Still, the totalizing power of an ideology is in general dependent on its being regarded as objectively (universally, consistently and non-relatively) valid. Questions of which it seems to be unaware, or which it ignores, finesses or responds to dishonestly must be insisted on if its incompleteness and inadequacy are to be revealed in the attempt to build more complete and more adequate knowledge.

As indicated above, a proposition's being ideologically rooted does not mean that it is necessarily consciously programmatic. Neither does identification of it as ideological have any *a priori* implication as to its truth-content. Eagleton's valid point is that

The rationalist view of ideologies as conscious, well-articulated systems of belief is clearly inadequate: it misses the affective, unconscious mythical or symbolic dimensions of ideology; the way in which it constitutes the subject's lived, apparently spontaneous relations to a power-structure and comes to provide the invisible colour of daily life itself. But if ideology is in this sense primarily performative, rhetorical, pseudo-propositional discourse, this is not to say that it lacks an important propositional content - or that such propositions as it advances, including moral and normative ones, cannot be assessed for their truth or falsehood (1991: 221-222).

Ideology is disseminated in as many ways as there are means of communication and structures of relationship among individuals and groups. Schools are by definition institutions for the dissemination of data, ideas and skills. Louis Althusser coins the term, 'ideological State apparatuses (ISAs)'. He asserts that 'an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material' (Rice & Waugh 1992: 58). (He distinguishes the 'material' from the 'ideal [*idéale* and *idéelle*] or spiritual existence' [57; interpolation in the original]). Althusser explicitly cites 'some schools' (55) as being among the apparatuses which transmit and impose the dominant (in the sense of most coercively powerful) ideology of the society. In the South African

educational system under both white minority governments and the current democratically elected Government of National Unity, provincial and national education departments have had such power, and syllabuses, public examination practices, textbooks and commentary carrying the stamp of institutional approval have been the most important means of exerting it. Those in control of 'English' in the various 'white' provincial education departments have tended not to be proponents of the principles of Christian National Education (CNE), which formed the theoretical basis for apartheid schooling; however, the liberalism which has informed their practice has tended to be of a kind which gently promotes tolerance and sympathy for other individuals and groups rather than interrogation of the material bases of the politics of race, social class and gender. The syllabus for ENGM (English as Main - or First - Language) of the Natal Education Department (NED) and the ENGM Core Syllabus for all South African secondary school educational authorities contains 'Goals' and 'Commentary' on each of these goals. It is Goal 4.2.4 (1986a: 11; 1986b: 12):

That pupils:

- expand their experience of life, gain empathetic understanding of other people and develop moral awareness.

The Commentary on Goal 4.2.4 reads:

Literature can arouse pupils to question and to re-define for themselves their assumptions, attitudes and values, open their minds and hearts to new ideas and sensations. They may, therefore, have opportunities to feel more profoundly and to perceive more fully the implications and possibilities of experience than the **constricted and fragmented** conditions of life permit.

Because literature explores people's lives and gives insight into their motives, values and feelings - insight not easily obtained from everyday encounters with other people - it can increase the pupils' awareness of their fellowmen. Cultures differ in values, customs and world view and acquaintance with the writings of members of other cultures around them can facilitate understanding of such differences.

These ideas are worthy in that they are socially responsible and well removed from formalism such as turns the artefact into an autonomous object of merely aesthetic contemplation. But they can be read as implying that the literary text is a 'given' which is capable of clear and fundamental heuristic and hermeneutic determination, and they do not indicate that there needs to be concern with the ways in which literature can be both reflective and productive of ideology. Terms such as 'awareness of their fellowmen', 'motives', 'values', 'feelings', 'customs', and especially the all-encompassing 'world view', ought to be explicitly related to consideration of their historical rootedness. This means, from the viewpoint of this thesis, their origins in and effects on social structures (however large or small, formal or informal) and the power-relations which such structures serve, with varying degrees of efficacy, to establish, maintain, obscure, ameliorate, subvert, reveal or in any other way affect.

It is now (the second half of 1995) over a year since the ending of white minority government, but changes in secondary-school English syllabuses and examination practices are scant. For instance, a circular memorandum dated 26 January 1995 was addressed to Subject Heads of English in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and signed by the members of the Western Cape CCC (Curriculum Coordinating Committee) English Working Committee, the members of which represent the spectrum of teacher organizations and former (*ie*, apartheid-era) government education departments in the province. Paragraph two reads: 'The English First Language syllabuses are unchanged as they have been found acceptable, for the interim, by all those involved in the review.' In a telephone call on 3 July 1995, Anne Schlebusch, a member of the Western Cape CCC and chairperson of the sub-committee dealing with evaluations (testing and examining), informed me that throughout the country the basic or core syllabus will for the foreseeable future remain the same as it has been, with trivial modifications, for decades. Subsequent to this conversation, I was co-opted to both Schlebusch's sub-committee and the WCED Interim Prescribed [Books] Committee and can testify that curriculums and syllabuses are not due for significant change. Methods of evaluation (both internal to schools and in public examinations) have recently been modified, but the changes have to do with matters such as the distribution of marks among the aspects of the syllabus and what should be examined in which paper. There has been a degree of change of attitude toward what *kind* of questions should be asked, as reflected with particular explicitness in the Examiners' Report on the 1994 Cape Senior Certificate (CSC) Networks (*ie*, Literature) Examination:

This paper has been the boldest step towards incorporating open-endedness and pupils' personal response. Whilst this style of questioning is unquestionably less threatening, more inviting, more likely to encourage genuine engagement with the text, as opposed to study guides and teachers' notes, it brings with it fresh challenges.

The philosophy underpinning this approach is one in which the reader is acknowledged as one who brings something of his/her own to the work; one in which the notion of 'meaning' being fixed and universal is questioned; one in which the teacher is no longer to be regarded as the privileged possessor of all knowledge, but rather acknowledged as the facilitator making it possible for the learner to 'make' meaning. Naturally, this approach makes examining all the more challenging: an 'open-ended' paper presupposes an 'open-ended' memorandum, and marking which is sensitive to a wider range of possible answers (underlining in the original).

This is the policy of the current panel of examiners in one of the education departments. It is also very recent policy. It is capable of being influential, but is not binding on examiners in other departments or on the successors of those currently holding office. It is not altogether new: various NED Literature examiners, for instance, have over the years and with varying degrees of consistency adopted an attitude related to that of the

current Western Cape examiners (who were the Cape Education Department examiners in 1994). The latter have, however, presented the policy with an unusual degree of formal theoretical explicitness (however briefly) and in a document which is particularly likely to influence teaching and internal examining practice at least in the next few years in the three provinces which are the heirs of the former Cape Province. Examining practice in the successor to the NED is not incompatible with this policy, but the questions (see below: 93-94) strike me as less 'open-ended' than seems to be the WCED ideal.

From the perspective of this thesis, the cited development in the Cape is welcome, but a significant amount of further development is required. It is suggested that pupils need to explore *how and why* meaning is made. They should be guided toward an understanding of themselves and others not as scholars seeking to discover the immanent meaning or meanings of texts, nor merely as individuals who confer meanings, but as individuals whose autonomy of meaning-making is limited and governed by their social and political circumstances: it is important for pupils to grasp that interpreting texts and interpreting the 'text' of extra-literary reality are ideologically influenced. It is also important for them to see that both primary and secondary texts are produced within ideology.

As far as I am aware, the closest approximation thus far to institutionalizing such an aim in South African secondary-school education has occurred in the Western Cape Education Department, and it has manifested as a criterion for the selection of prescribed literature and not in any document to do with examinations. The final draft of the 'Criteria by which literary works are judged for study in primary and secondary/high school' was drawn up by a three-person sub-committee on which I sat and accepted by the WCED Interim Prescribed Committee in November 1995. One of its clauses reads:

In **Senior Secondary Schools**, it is desirable that the prescribed text conduce to teaching which reveals ways in which feelings, attitudes and ideologies are subject to influence and manipulation (by author and/or teacher and/or critical commentators and/or characters). That is, considerations which are paramount in the teaching of advertising, propaganda and other forms of persuasive material should also be prominent in the teaching and therefore prescription of literature: pupils should learn not to accept anything naively (bold print in the original).

It can be argued that any text can be used in this way, but in accepting this clause, the committee opined that some texts are more readily useful than others. My motive for writing it and bringing about its inclusion was that it could be the thin edge of the wedge and that the principle might become more powerfully institutionalized in the future, specifically in public examination practice.

* * *

Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey consider 'the way that literature functions in the reproduction of ideology within the ISAs of the French educational system' (Rice & Waugh 1992: 53). They assert that

literature is historically constituted *in the bourgeois epoch* as an ensemble of language - or rather of specific linguistic practices - inserted in a general schooling process so as to provide appropriate fictional effects, thereby reproducing bourgeois ideology as the dominant ideology (63; italics in the original).

One does not need to accept the Marxist ideological tendentiousness of the limiting of the characterization to 'the bourgeois epoch' to see the applicability of the point to standard South African English teaching.

If an aim is to make pupils aware of the role of ideology in both the production and the consumption of texts, the teacher ought to understand, and ought to assist her pupils to understand, what Balibar and Macherey call 'The first principle of a materialist analysis':

literary productions must not be studied from the standpoint of their *unity* which is illusory and false, but from their material *disparity*. One must not look for unifying effects but for the signs of the contradictions (historically determined) which produced them and which appear as unevenly resolved conflicts in the text (64; italics in the original).

Balibar and Macherey warn against the possibility of their being misinterpreted:

Rejecting the mythical unity and completeness of a work of art does not mean adopting a reverse position, i.e. the work of art as anti-nature, a violation of order (cf. *Tel Quel*). Such reversals are characteristic of conservative ideology: 'For oft a fine disorder stems from art' (Boileau)! (*ibid* fn)

To assert that the refraction of reality found in works of art contains 'ideological contradictions' (*ibid*) and anomalies is not to espouse an extreme post-structuralist (*Tel Quel*) notion of the disappearance of determinate meaning into epistemological chaos or infinite regress. Goldstein distinguishes the 'poststructuralist Marxism' of which Althusser is the initiator and of which Balibar and Macherey are practitioners from 'Derridean Marxists' by pointing out, *inter alia*, that the deconstructionism of the latter 'subverts all authoritative discourses, dismissing them as metaphysical quests for absolute meaning' while the 'institutional Marxism' of the former 'reveals [the] political import' of such discourses 'and still acknowledges their interpretive power' (26-27).

Moreover,

Both this Marxism and deconstruction expect the indeterminate figuration of language to govern reading; however, while deconstruction assumes that this figuration dissolves the constraints of established practices, this Marxism argues that reading reveals the discursive formations or interpretive communities whose conventions and practices constitute the reader as a political subject (27).

Balibar and Macherey see texts as presenting determinate meanings which are flawed by their (the texts') failure to reconcile the irreconcilable:

literature is produced finally through the effect of one or more ideological contradictions precisely because these contradictions

cannot be solved within the ideology, i.e. in the last analysis through the effect of contradictory class positions within the ideology, as such irreconcilable. Obviously these contradictory ideological positions are not in themselves 'literary' - that would lead us back into the closed circle of 'literature'. They are ideological positions within theory and practice, covering the whole field of the ideological class struggle, i.e. religious, judicial and political, and they correspond to the conjunctures of the class struggle itself (64).

Crucially,

these ideological positions ... can only appear in a form which provides their *imaginary solution*, or, better still, which displaces them by substituting imaginary contradictions soluble within the ideological practice of religion, politics, morality, aesthetics and psychology (64-65).

Balibar and Macherey are thinking of the study of primary texts. In teaching secondary-school pupils - the principle applies equally validly to the teaching of tertiary-level students - it is important to extend their (Balibar and Macherey's) ideas to the consideration of published commentary and also to the discourses of teachers and the pupils' own responses to texts. Teachers need to consider what questions are begged by texts and by interpretations of texts. They need to consider what ideological interests are served by both accounts and occlusions of the origins, processes and effects of power-relations such as can be discerned in literature and discourse about literature. They then need to assist their pupils to consider these issues. (Such considerations are not necessarily or demonstrably more difficult than 'doing English' as currently practised in the last couple of years of secondary schooling.)

Here is an example of such a consideration accessible to secondary-school pupils. In Conrad's *Victory*, Jones, Ricardo and Pedro are described by Heyst as manifestations, respectively, of 'evil' in the three forms, 'evil intelligence, instinctive savagery ... [and] brute force' (*Victory*: Dent 329). Teachers and pupils ought to consider the extent to which the novel presents these qualities as merely randomly inherent traits, the results of socio-economic determination, or deriving from any other cause. They should also examine how published commentaries interpret these qualities and ascribe origins to them. They should consider what they themselves would assume to be the origins of the qualities described. Ultimately, they should ask themselves how these various responses relate to wider systems of belief and assumption. More complex practice would be inappropriately difficult at secondary level. Meanwhile, the kind of interrogation outlined here would constitute a radical departure from or development on established practice.

* * *

Texts which are prescribed for secondary-school study have been suggested and approved by committees of institutionally authoritative educators who are familiar with

them and regard them as suitable. A prescribed text is almost certainly already in a canon regarded as respectable by those in authority. I cannot recall a prescribed novel, novella or play on which there has not been some published critical and hermeneutic commentary available, and such commentary is a sign of some form of canonization; only the occasional prescribed poem or short story is unsupported by secondary sources. The great majority of texts set at Senior Certificate level are by authors on whose writings much critical commentary has been produced. Tony Bennett quotes Frederic Jameson as referring to

texts [that] come before us as 'the always-already-read',
apprehended through the sedimented reading habits and
categories developed within inherited interpretive traditions.

Bennett continues:

That is true insofar as one is concerned with the canonized tradition, for which the most consequential activations of the relations between texts and readers consist of precisely those forms of critical commentary that circulate within cultural apparatuses (critical journals, educational institutions, publishing houses) that have a primary investment in the institution of Literature (Rice & Waugh 1992: 219-220; Bennett quotes from Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [1981]: 9).

Bennett coins the term, 'reading formation' and defines it as 'a set of intersecting discourses that productively activate a given body of texts and the relations between them in a specific way' (208). He denies that 'texts [have] "essences"' (210) and asserts that

Meaning is a transitive phenomenon. It is not a *thing* that texts can *have*, but is something that can only be produced, and always differently, within the reading formations that regulate the encounters between texts and readers (211).

Concerning 'canonized texts', Bennett writes:

there is a considerable degree of coincidence between the discourses of academic criticism and the reading formations that productively activate¹ such texts. Inasmuch as, for most readers, some form of acquaintance with those discourses constitutes a necessary apprenticeship for reading, this coincidence constitutes the means by which readers are socialized into the literary community (211).

Bennett's intention is to overcome the difficulties inherent in setting up either the text or the individual reader as source and guarantor of meaning. He writes that

the relations between the semiotics of texts and the semiotics of reading have been developed along the path of a mutually numbing symbiosis. Within this construction,

¹ Bennett explains: 'I venture the concept of the "productive activation" of texts as a means of displacing, rather than of substituting for, the concept of interpretation and the particular construction of relations between readers and texts that it implies' (206). This is an aspect of Bennett's denial that 'texts [have] fixed properties that may, *of course*, be variously "interpreted"' (220: italics in the original).

readers require the 'text itself' as that against which their readings can be registered as a creative departure: a use or interpretation that is in no way preordained. The subject triumphs: contingency overrules necessity; the subject conquers the object; Man has his day. On the other side of this exchange, the 'text itself' requires such a reader as the means of affirming its own objectivity and necessity - misunderstood, maybe, but still intact and indissoluble into the acts of reading which, in Robert Escarpit's terms, it is 'creatively betrayed' (215; quotation from Escarpit's 'Creative Treason as a Key in Literature' [1961]; syntax of last clause as in the original).

Bennett recommends the 'dissolution' into each other of what he calls 'the "fixed code" and its various "decodings"' (*ibid*) and specifies that it is

not the dissolution of the 'text itself' into the million and one readings of individual subjects, however, but rather its dissolution into reading relations and, within those, reading formations that concretely and historically structure the interaction between texts and readers. As a result of such dissolution, the interaction between text and reader no longer would be conceived of as an interaction between, on the one hand, the 'text itself', as a pure entity uncontaminated by any exterior determinations and, on the other, the 'subject', whether conceived of as 'raw' and unacculturated, or as situationally formed. Rather, such interaction would be conceived of as occurring between the *culturally activated* text and the *culturally activated* reader, and interaction structured by the material, social, ideological, and institutional relationships in which *both* text and readers are inescapably inscribed (215-216; italics in the original).

This is not unproblematic. It is not obvious how one might precisely determine the ways in which a text and its reader are 'culturally activated' and of the way in which the cluster of 'relationships' structures the 'interaction' between them. The spectre of a 'million and one' possibilities looms here too. But careful speculation on the basis of whatever evidence is available is possible. Scientific accuracy such as that to which the physical and life sciences can reasonably aspire is too much to hope for, at least at this stage in the development of social science. Karl Popper's criteria of testability and falsifiability of theory (see, for instance, Magee 1973, ch 3 *passim*) are in practice less applicable to an activity such as an investigation of the cultural activation of text and reader and the structuring of their interaction than to, say, the development and testing of an experimental vaccine or the famous case of the testing, potential falsification and ultimate highly probable verification of a keystone of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity by astronomical observation during the the solar eclipse of 29 May 1919. Einstein's theory predicted a certain effect. No such effect would have meant that the

theory was false. The effect was recorded, so the theory was verified as far as current understanding permitted, since no coherent explanation of greater explanatory power was available. The indeterminably vast number of variables (possible causes of given effects) involved in social processes such as that under discussion do not admit of this kind of precision. But a manageable number of patterns might be discerned. Bennett refers to MM Bakhtin's '[listening] for the echoes of carnival in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*' (210); similarly, one might 'listen for the echoes of' various discourses in a text or in a response to that text and reasonably speculate as to the nature of cultural activation and text-reader interaction.

It is proposed that such speculation be constituted as an important part of 'English' in secondary education.

It is further proposed that an analysis of Senior Certificate examination questions and of pupils' written responses to those questions would yield some useful information about how institutions of secondary education affect text-reader interaction and, hypothetically, potentially and less certainly, the attitudes of the pupil-reader to extra-literary reality.

* * *

But why should pupils be guided to engage in speculation about the cultural influences on writing and interpreting? Why should pupils be aware of the role of social forces and the ideologies they produce and which in a kind of feed-back system contribute to producing them?

It is standard procedure for teachers to discuss commercial advertisements, political propaganda and other persuasive material in order to assist pupils to be as un-naïve as possible when confronted with these ubiquitous means of manipulating consumers to do certain things such as spend money and vote for political parties. Questions on 'Techniques of Persuasion' are virtually certain to appear in any given 'Language' paper. The capacity to make informed choices is validly regarded as being a necessary attribute of citizens of a free society. The ability to resist manipulation is a necessary condition of such an ability. A defining social goal of the study of literature should be to make emerging citizens as epistemologically sophisticated as possible. The assumption is that such sophistication would tend to limit the capacity of power-wielding individuals or groups (whether commercial, party-political, religious or otherwise constituted and motivated) to subvert the autonomy of the individual citizen and/or groups of citizens. Insight into how and why meanings are made can contribute to resistance to exploitation and incursions on freedom. Inasmuch as this pattern of assumption and goal is geared to a way of thinking inimical to authoritarianism of any kind, it is political and ideological in the sense defined above. It is 'liberal' in the broad sense and pro-democratic; it is not incompatible with Marxism or socialism as such, or with right-of-centre ideology such as modern Toryism or capitalism as such. It is incompatible with any form of racism, self-perpetuating oligarchy, fascism, Stalinism, caesarism, McCarthyism or theocracy, as well as with the practice of any capitalist or socialist formation which seeks to circumscribe critical investigation of and intervention in its processes. No ideology or institution should be regarded as immune to distortion into anti-democratic and exploitative

manifestations or practices. All of the general political ideological positions listed above as compatible with the proposed social goal of the study of literature, and not excepting self-defining liberalism itself, are open to perversion into forms of authoritarianism or, at least, class hegemony. There are numerous historical instances, including the deforming of Marxism into Stalinism and the well-documented collusion of office-bearers in the American liberal democratic system with multi-national capitalist interests in the bloody overthrow by the military of a democratically elected Marxist government in Chile. In South Africa, to cite but one of a number of cases, the liberal Progressive Party tried for years to finesse the contradiction between its commitment to a non-racial democracy and the perceived class-interests of both its actual and its hoped-for white constituency by offering a qualified franchise policy which would limit the capacity of the 'non-white' masses to intervene in government.

A concomitant of its anti-authoritarian potential which involves greater specificity of its particular content is that the study of literature ought to assist in equipping pupils with knowledge of those social issues which are currently of particular importance, whether or not it can successfully be argued that such issues are manifestations of 'timeless' or 'universal' concerns. The liberal theorist, like the religious thinker, tends to see human nature as invariant at least in essentials and also, very often, in specific higher order categories. By contrast, the hard-core Marxist determinist, especially, tends to see human nature as being a product of socio-historical forces and to view universalist perceptions as obscurantist. The idea, particularly associated with but not exclusive to Marxism and, in the field of psychology, behaviourism, that human nature is circumstantially determined, should be heeded; yet it is rationally incontrovertible that

human animals (as Sebastian Timpanaro has reminded us) share a biological structure even when they do not share a direct cultural heritage. Birth, nourishment, labour, kinship, sexuality, death are common to all social formations and to all literature; and it is no rebuttal of this to insert the correct but commonplace caveat that this biological 'infrastructure' is always historically mediated. So indeed it is; one merely repeats that what is variably mediated is a common biological structure (Eagleton 1978: 178-179; Eagleton cites Timpanaro's 'Considerations on Materialism', *New Left Review* 85; May/June 1974).

So if one is studying *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or *Macbeth*, one might deal with, *inter alia*, the Divine Right of Kings, the moral responsibilities of those who rule and the condition of those who are ruled. The Jacobean form of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings does not impinge directly on our lives, but, *mutatis mutandis*, the related issues do, and Divine Right is open to examination as a species of social control the consideration of which can be relevant to the pupils' lives. If, in *Victory*, Heyst and Lena are like each other and like those in the classroom in that they are sexual beings, but experience and manifest their sexuality differently from each other or from anyone in the classroom, it is apparent that sexuality is the 'universal' but that socio-historical mediation is important in determining the crucial differences. The nature of the mediation and the nature of the

differences deserve interrogation, especially as they relate to sexual politics and the subordination of women.

Power-relations are always fundamental. Race, gender, social class, economic power and sheer brute strength such as is provided by larger numbers of people and/or more effective military forces and supportive technology are obvious issues involved here. Pupils need to think seriously about them. The study of literature ought to energize such thinking. Any extreme formalist or aestheticist tendency to view the literary artefact as fully or largely autonomous would contribute to quietism *vis-à-vis* issues of crucial importance to emergent citizens and would be socially dysfunctional, especially in a period of sometimes wrenching socio-political change such as South Africans, irrespective of ethnicity or socio-economic class, are currently experiencing and will continue to experience into the foreseeable future. Although such study cannot guarantee that pupils become more 'humanized', 'civilized' or 'moral', their becoming more aware of the aspects of 'life' described here is likely to be facilitated. (This does not mean the abandoning of standard classroom discourse about and examination on literary technique, characterization, the morality of inter-personal relations and the degree of sympathy pupils experience for specific characters. Broadening of awareness and not the doctrinaire replacement of one set of concerns by another is advocated.)

In this specifically South African context, principles enunciated in institutionally authoritative documents are apposite.

A project of the National Education Co-ordinating Committee has been the establishment of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) Curriculum Research Group. The NEPI Report on *Curriculum* includes commentary on the 1991 Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa (CMSA) published by the apartheid-era Department of National Education in the course of its last-gasp efforts to come to terms with the democratization process. In the CMSA,

Languages feature prominently 'because of their value as bearers of culture and the contribution which they can make to conceptualization in all fields of knowledge' (*Curriculum*: 40; quotation from CMSA: 27; italics in the original).

The NEPI document's general criticism of the CMSA is that it is an attempt to evolve curriculum changes on the basis of the present [*ie*, pre-democratic] system, rather than to break new ground. Even in these terms, it offers no suggestions for the implementation of curriculum change or support for teachers (46; my interpolation).

This thesis offers some specification of how language-teaching can 'break new ground' and make a 'contribution ... to conceptualization'.

Curriculum also identifies (89) as aims of a restructured education system: teaching the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the majority of students with a quality of educational experience which will enable them to participate as citizens in the key institutions of a democratic society ...

[the] need to build a citizenship of common rights and entitle-

ments, and at the same time to deal with rights to difference.
Here, principles of **non-racism, non-sexism and equality**
may guide curriculum policy (bold print in the original).

These principles are echoed in the policies of the Government of National Unity. The 15 March 1995 Department of Education White Paper on Education and Training notes that 'developing the human resources of the country' is a goal of the Reconstruction and Development Policy (RDP); with a view to this goal, the role of 'Appropriate education and training' is to

empower people to participate effectively in all the processes of democratic society, economic activity, cultural expression, and community life, and can help citizens to build a nation free of race, gender, and every other form of discrimination (17).

Moreover,

The realisation of *democracy, liberty, equality, justice and peace* are necessary conditions for the full pursuit and enjoyment of lifelong learning. It should be a goal of education and training policy to enable a democratic, free, equal, just and peaceful society to take root and prosper in our land on the basis that all South Africans without exception share the same inalienable rights, equal citizenship, and common national destiny, and that all forms of bias (especially racial, ethnic and gender) are dehumanising (22; italics in the original).

The WCED document establishing 'Criteria by which literary works are judged for study in primary and secondary/high school' (see above: 9) contains the clause: 'The values promoted in and by the prescribed material should be compatible with the promotion of a human rights culture.'

There is a danger here. I, for one, accept these principles. So do multitudes of others. It can however be argued that inculcation of the specific politico-moral principles which form current government policy has a potential to collide with that epistemological independence which can be asserted to be a *sine qua non* of the ideal citizen of a genuinely democratic society and which our current rulers accept as such.

The African National Congress (ANC) is the majority political party in South Africa and it is common cause that, in the foreseeable future, it is highly unlikely to lose its position as the dominant force in government and, therefore, the framing of, *inter alia*, education policy. In the January 1994 draft of the ANC's *Policy Framework for Education and Training*, it is proposed (69) that one of the principles of 'the national core curriculum' should be to 'Problematise knowledge as provisional and contested'. The 23 September 1994 Draft White Paper on Education and Training asserts:

The curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training should encourage independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgments, achieve understanding, recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge ... (12; underlining in the original; my ellipsis).

These principles have been briefly adumbrated in national legislation: the National Education Policy Act of 1995 includes among 'Directive Principles of national education

policy', 'the advancement of democracy' and 'encouraging independent and critical thought' (6).

On the one hand, teachers will be institutionally encouraged to promote an ideology; moreover, the teacher herself is an ideological being, whether she considers herself one or not. On the other hand, teachers will be institutionally encouraged to present knowledge as 'provisional and incomplete' so that 'independent and critical thought' may be fostered.

The question arises as to how to reconcile ideology with the inculcation of the sense that knowledge is incomplete, contestable, provisional, contingent and relative. The only answer of which I can conceive is that the teacher must not keep quiet about the ideological content of the mediation of prescribed texts. It is the unacknowledged ideological bias which is particularly likely to masquerade as absolute or fundamentally valid. Roland Barthes's idea that 'the major sin of criticism is not to have an ideology but to keep quiet about it' (Lodge 1972: 649) is apposite. The teacher's opinions and the doctrines informing directives from higher authority ought not to be covertly any more than overtly forced on her pupils. The teacher should act in good faith and declare her positions, ideological stances and intentions in teaching, so that the pupils are aware of her discourse *as* ideologically and teleologically governed. This doctrine runs counter to a common liberal educational theory, as articulated by, especially, Lawrence Stenhouse, that a teacher ought to assume a 'neutral' stance (1983: 123), keeping her own biases out of her discourse¹ and enabling her pupils to be aware of as wide a range of possible approaches to the text as possible. However, inherent in this approach is the danger of covert, even if unintentional, specific ideological conditioning and inhibition of the pupil's heuristic and epistemological emancipation. The teacher's declaration of her positions does not eliminate this danger, but it mitigates it to a greater extent than the 'neutral' kind of approach would if such situation of herself as a specific 'co-writer' of the text is related to the status of all text-reader relationships as variously productive of meanings. Concomitantly, it is incumbent on the teacher to assist her pupils to become aware of ideological positions other than her and their own. Inescapably, moreover, the classroom must be a non-authoritarian arena of discourse. The desirable result would be a dialogic interplay among teacher, pupils, text and the world outside the classroom more productive of serious and (relatively) independent thinking about literature and society than is all-too-often the case. In using the term, 'dialogic' here and below, I echo MM Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). Interpretative adaptation of Bakhtin produces the understanding that the text is the locus of a complex yet coherent dialogic interplay of ideologically grounded points of view which inhere in both the individual text and in any combination of texts and which are, whatever the time and place of origin of the text, potentially current and important, and capable of bringing about a refreshing dialogic relationship between itself and the reader.

¹ Stenhouse acknowledges that 'there is nothing logically problematic about teachers giving their views on a controversial issue on the understanding that they are open to criticism on the same basis as any others'; his claim, however, is that 'it does not seem possible to make good that understanding in practice' (1975: 118). In the books which I have read, Stenhouse does not offer research data in support of his claim. My experience would seem to contradict Stenhouse's, but that experience would, if reported, be both an unwarranted digression and no more than anecdotal.

Since the reader we are considering is a pupil, the dialogic relationship has more than two poles (reader and text). Manfred Schroenn (1982: 105) argues:

Through the dynamic interactions between educand, literary work, and educator a tripartite relationship comes into being.

Schroenn then approvingly quotes the Bullock Report (1975 UK):

“Some of the best and most lasting effects of English teaching have come from the simultaneous encounter of teacher, pupil and text ... this experience can be more universally enjoyed when it takes the form of a shared exploration. This is clearly not easy. The teacher has a deeper knowledge of literature in general and that work in particular than his pupils can possess. He brings to the situation a wider experience of life and a mature view of it. To contain these in the process of sharing is a measure of his skill at the highest level. A child derives value from a work of literature in direct proportion to the genuineness of the response he is able to make to it. The teacher’s skill lies in developing the subtlety and complexity of this response without catechism or a one-way traffic in apodictic judgements” (*ibid*; ellipsis in the original).

Schroenn then comments:

The educator must allow his pupils to encounter each character in the freedom of making his existential choices. He can assist his pupils, if necessary, in identifying, evaluating and interpreting the existential choices made by characters in a literary work, but must let the work provide the evidence and speak for itself (*ibid*).

It can be doubted whether ‘the work’ really can ‘speak for itself’, given the inescapability of a dialogic process which prevents the text-reader dyad from being independent of a constantly shifting complex of influences on the process of interpretation. It is also not necessarily true that ‘the educator’ is more ‘mature’ or possessed of ‘a wider experience of life’ than all those whom she teaches. However, Schroenn’s basic position is well-founded: the teacher ought not to be an inculcator of attitudes toward and interpretations of texts; instead, she should see herself as a facilitator of the processes involved in reading, interpreting and evaluating. And there is stress here on ‘a facilitator’: one among others. It would be valid to develop Schroenn’s idea by noting that the relationship under discussion is more complex than the term ‘tripartite’ would suggest. Other voices, such as those of other pupils as well as those of published commentators, can be heard in the classroom.

Catherine Belsey’s ‘concept of knowledge as *discursively produced*’ is useful in this regard. She asserts that knowledge is

the product of the recognition and resolution of contradictions within and between the existing discourses of ideology. If what is ‘obvious’ is also incoherent, non-explanatory or even self-contradictory, it is possible to *produce* a recognition of the ideological status of what is ‘obvious’. By bringing together

existing discourses which claim to be scientific, and foregrounding the incompatibilities and collisions between them, we can produce new, more coherent discourses which, until their own contradictions are exposed, can lay claim to the status of knowledge. Such a knowledge, though it is tested in practice, does not seek a guarantee in an extra-discursive order of reality. At the same time, it is never final, always hypothetical, always ready to recognize the possibility of its own incoherence. To this extent, it is never fixed but always in process. Its only certainty is the inadequacy of the discourses of ideology (1980: 63-64; Belsey's italics).

Christopher Butler's essentially similar point is that
Workable norms are discarded when they are felt to contain anomalies

[so that]

the theory of interpretation, along with its methods and justifications, is itself part of an historical process, as each interpreter (like the writer of this argument) sees himself as an institutionally backed contributor to an historical process of understanding in the evolution of which conceptual frameworks for interpretation have changed, and will continue to do so (1984: 90; Butler's bracketed parenthesis).

A function of this thesis is to query the extent to which the principles here outlined have been manifested in a specific exemplificatory case of NED practice and to suggest the form that change should take. General policy must eventually come to grips with specific practice.

* * *

Which texts are chosen for prescription is clearly important. It has become a commonplace of discussion in this regard that the study of South African literature is a vital ingredient in the promotion of pupils' understanding of the historical provenance of their current social and political reality and of the experiences and attitudes of members of ethnic groups and social classes other than their own. This is valid. However, any kind of text, including the merely 'culinary'¹, can be productively used in terms of the principles outlined above, although it can be argued that some are more readily useful than others (see above: 9).

A justification unrooted in ideology or individual taste for prescribing a text which belongs to a well-established canon such as, among others, FR Leavis's 'Great Tradition', is that it is heuristically and hermeneutically relatively accessible because of the substantial body of work done on it.

¹ HR Jauss's adjective for 'light reading' (1974: 15) or 'entertainment art' (1982: 25) as translated by both Elizabeth Benzinger and Timothy Bahti.

Conrad's *Victory* is such a text. Moreover, it is to a marked extent a 'writerly' text. Roland Barthes distinguishes (in *S Z*) between the 'readerly' ('*lisible*') and the 'writerly' ('*scriptible*'). Terence Hawkes's interpretation (1977: 114-115) of these terms is useful:

Where *readerly* texts (usually classics) are static, virtually 'read themselves' and thus perpetuate an 'established' view of reality and an 'establishment' scheme of values, frozen in time, yet still serving as an out-of-date model for our world, *writerly* texts require us to look at the nature of language itself, not *through* it at a preordained 'real world'. They thus involve us in the dangerous, exhilarating activity of creating our world *now*, together with the author, as we go along. Where *readerly* texts presuppose and depend upon the presumptions of innocence outlined above, and with them the unquestioned relationship between signifier and signified that those presumptions reinforce, saying 'this is what the world is like and always will be like', *writerly* texts presume nothing, admit no easy passage from signifier to signified, are open to the 'play' of the codes that we use to determine them. In readerly texts the signifiers march: in writerly texts they dance. And paradoxically, where readerly texts (which require no *real* reading) are often what we call 'readable', writerly texts (which demand strenuous reading) are often called 'unreadable' (Hawkes's italics).

Victory is to too great an extent expressive realist to stand accused of being 'unreadable' in the sense in which, for instance, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* and William Burroughs's *Nova Express* are. This is crucial to its viability as a text prescribed for secondary-school study. However, pupils can be guided to see the problems involved in interpreting it and how open its various aspects are to a range of readings: they can be guided to view it as an 'incomplete' construct in the completion of which they themselves can participate as 'co-writers', with the understanding that different 'co-writers' produce different versions of *Victory*. The ideological nature of the differences should be interrogated.

Further, discussion of *Victory* conduces to consideration of the politics of social class, economic interests, colonialism, criminality, ethnicity and gender. It also problematizes attitudes of non-involvement in one's social context.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out:

During the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial centre is inevitably, of course, produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power (1989: 5).

Ashcroft *et al* are dealing with texts produced in the colonies, a category into which *Victory* does not fall. However, it is set in the colonial world, its characters are members of dominant and subordinate groups and its author, a former senior merchant seaman, has a history as an agent of colonial and imperial interests. Conrad's works are characterized by an interestingly ambivalent attitude to the colonial enterprise. In 'Heart of Darkness',

published thirteen years before *Victory*, he makes Marlow, his most ubiquitous character, say of the ancient Roman conquerors of Britain:

“... They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force - nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind - as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. ...” (‘*Youth*’, ‘*Heart of Darkness*’, ‘*The End of the Tether*’: 50-51).

Evident here is tension between, on the one hand, an awareness of the criminality of conquest, colonialism and imperialism, and, on the other, a need to distinguish between mere institutionalized rapine (such as that of Romans and the unidentified colonial power - based on Belgium - which employs Kurtz and Marlow) and the motivation which presumably drives Marlow himself. It is not a distinction which holds much water. Some conquerors and exploiters are more idealistic and decent than others. There is scant comfort here for the victims. How far Marlow is being ironic, precisely what ‘intention’ might be imputed to Conrad and the extent to which he and his work are racist (as Chinua Achebe has claimed) and imperialist are endlessly problematic. ‘*Heart of Darkness*’ is a deep well of material useful in the educational terms discussed above. But it has never been set for Senior Certificate study in this country, while *Victory* has been, and *Victory* is also set in a colonial context. It would be useful to pupils to discuss the extent to which *Victory* manifests a ‘primary identification’ with the colonial perspective and the extent to which it explicitly and/or ‘unconsciously’ enables criticism of that perspective by inviting what Macherey calls ‘the questions which are left unanswered’ (see above: 5). The standard classroom concerns with Heyst’s detachment and the nature of the ‘*Victory*’ are of value, but it is all-too-easy for a teacher to avoid, or even fail to notice, that *Victory* might stand accused of that of which Patrick McGee accuses (1992: 119) Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* when he claims that there is in the ‘discourses’ of the characters in that text ‘a system of unquestioned truths and values, a form of cultural hegemony, that we can identify with imperialist ideology’. It is of value to query whether the relationships between the European characters and members of the subordinated groups (principally Pedro, Wang and the Alfuros), as well as the *kinds* of attention the novel pays to the various members of these groups, support the same or any other kind of ‘cultural hegemony’, whether or not such a term is itself used in a given classroom and granting the constraints imposed by discussion within secondary-school groups which

rarely contain anybody who could as yet substantially comprehend books such as McGee's. In a recent article on the nature of Namibian literature, Michael Chapman writes (1995:21):

As in *Heart of Darkness* or, more recently, numerous films about the Vietnam war, the perspective in grensliteratuur is either imperial or counter-imperial; rarely do the indigenous people appear as anything more than the chimeras of the metropole's psyche.

It is not clearly germane to the concerns of this thesis to consider whether or not *Victory* qualifies as *grensliteratuur*. But the novel's colonial setting is an exotic stage for a drama in which the major characters are European, although Wang and, arguably, Pedro, can be seen as significant secondary figures. However, Wang, Pedro, the Alfuros and the tribespeople who live in 'God-forsaken villages up dark creeks and obscure bays' (10) and to whom Morrison gives food ('an advance') to his own financial detriment are 'decentred and 'chimeras of the metropole's psyche'. A potentially fruitful subject of discussion is the extent to which *Victory*'s 'perspective is imperial or counter-imperial', colonial or counter-colonial, or oblivious of colonial-imperial issues.

* * *

So *Victory* is worth prescribing. Moreover, because it frequently has been prescribed for NED Senior Certificate study, its past use can to an extent be investigated. Such investigation can serve as a case study to exemplify what this thesis suggests would be desirable modification of current practice.

A caveat against the prescription of *Victory* for study in the multi-cultural classrooms which are increasingly the South African norm is that it is unsuitable on stylistic and linguistic grounds: children from, especially, proletarian African backgrounds would tend to find the language more alien and opaque than their white counterparts do. The best-known manifestation of this issue is the argument over whether the study of Shakespeare should be compulsory in our schools. Certainly, if Conrad were to be deemed unsuitable for prescription on stylistic and linguistic grounds, it would not be consistent to allow work by Shakespeare and the majority of 'classic' writers to remain on lists of prescribed books. It could even be argued that, although Marguerite Poland's *Shades* (1993), the most recently published novel to be canonized in such a way (in, at least, the Western Cape), is written in an idiom which is 'late-twentieth-century' rather than 'early-twentieth-century', and although it is a South African novel with some African characters, it is linguistically not much less alien to pupils from non-Anglophone proletarian backgrounds than *Victory* is. According to Kevin McAnda (see above: 2), the problem is that a high proportion of pupils from a variety of ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds lack 'basic reading skills'. McAnda thinks that the advantage of a novel such as *Shades* over one such as *Victory* is that most of them would 'be able to identify' more easily with the former; however, he does not think that they would tend to find Poland's work easier for linguistic reasons.

How to assist in the development of the requisite 'reading skills' is a problem being intensely considered by those who study especially primary-school methodology, and is

not a concern of this thesis. Moreover, the great majority of those whose home language is not English study it at Second Language level. Certainly, the selection of texts suitable for Second Language study should take into account relative accessibility. On the other hand, my own experience as a Western Cape Education Department examiner of English Second Language, Second Paper (Literature) is that candidates who fare well in answering questions on one kind of prescribed text tend to succeed in answering questions on other kinds; those who cannot cope with, say, *Macbeth* or *Great Expectations* tend to be similarly unable to cope with the modern 'third-world' short stories collected by Brenda Cooper in *Nations* (1995).

At First Language level, at least, and arguably at Second Language level, it would be hard to make a convincing case that *Victory* is unsuitable on stylistic and linguistic grounds.

* * *

In this thesis, a selection of candidates' answers to the 1990 Natal Senior Certificate (NSC) Higher Grade essay question on *Victory* will be examined. There will follow consideration of NSC examination questions which have over the years been set on this novel. Next will come discussion of those secondary sources which had the best chance of influencing teachers who taught toward and pupils who wrote the 1990 paper. Finally, and in the light of the foregoing, suggestions as to pedagogical practices will be offered. These suggestions will be governed by the concerns of this thesis as outlined in this Introduction.

In summary, this thesis is about literature as a socially operative combination of artefacts in a given institutional context, and involves examination of and speculation about the effects on, especially, nascent adult members of the historically privileged ethnic oligarchy of a combination of primary text, secondary sources and institutional mediation by teachers and public examiners.

* * *

Pagination of the Dent's Collected and Everyman's Library editions is the same and will be that used.

The use of '*sic*' and other, more detailed means of indicating error or peculiarity of language will be kept to a minimum. Some commentators use American spelling and quotation will reproduce it. In Chapter One, details from Senior Certificate examination essays will be quoted without correction of errors of spelling, punctuation, syntax or diction.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSIDERATION OF A SAMPLE OF ANSWERS TO QUESTION 5 (*VICTORY* ESSAY) IN THE 1990 NATAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE ENGLISH FIRST LANGUAGE HIGHER GRADE THIRD PAPER (LITERATURE)

In 1991, with the permission of the NED, I examined the essays on *Victory* written in response to question 5 of the Natal Senior Certificate Higher Grade Literature paper by candidates from a selection of schools.

It is proposed that analysis of these essays yields knowledge of the dominant patterns of response and therefore of teaching in NED schools.

Answers from ten schools were looked at. They are called Schools A to J, as Dr Manfred Schroenn of the NED has asked that the names of schools not be used. (Dr Schroenn also assisted with both the selection of the schools and the characterizations of them which follow.)

The schools were chosen to represent a range of types of school whose pupils wrote the Natal Senior Certificate examinations in 1990, the year of the cited examination, and descriptions of them are valid as of that year.

School A is an old and famous single-sex boys' private 'church' school. Its pupils are predominantly from highly privileged families, but there are some less financially advantaged pupils attending on scholarships and judged to be academically able.

School B is an old and well-known single-sex boys' government school. Its pupils represent a wide spectrum of English-speaking white society, from orphanage children to those from highly privileged backgrounds.

School C is a single-sex girls' government school, consistently among the most successful schools in the country if Senior Certificate results are an indication. It is zoned to take in pupils from an area predominantly inhabited by members of the white business and professional elite.

School D is a single-sex boys' government school. It is the 'brother-school' of School C and generally shares its characteristics.

School E is a single-sex girls' government school, with pupils from a fairly wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, but predominantly from the middle to lower-middle class.

School F is a single-sex boys' government school. It is the 'brother-school' of School E and generally shares its characteristics.

School G is a co-educational government school in Northern Natal. A wide socio-economic range is represented among its pupils. It is a parallel-medium institution (*ie*, Afrikaans is the medium of instruction in some classes and English in others). It has a solid academic reputation.

School H is a single-sex boys' government school, zoned for an area which is in the main inhabited by members of the white lower-middle class and working-class (insofar as there is such a thing as a 'white working-class' distinguishable from the lower-middle class in the Durban area).

School I is a small co-educational private parochial school. Most of its pupils are white and from privileged homes. It has a very good academic reputation.

School J is a co-educational government school. It serves a small-town/semi-rural area and has pupils from a fairly wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, including children of the local farming gentry as well as boarders from other parts of Natal, among whom are a number of 'problem-children' as well as children from single-parent families.

The schools are characterized here in order to demonstrate their representativeness of institutions submitting candidates for the examination under discussion. The characterizations do not appear with discussions of scripts as there appear to be no determinable differences attributable to these characteristics other than, perhaps, the average marks for the question. Pupils from schools serving more socio-economically and educationally privileged communities tended to score higher average marks, although only Schools G and J failed to produce any As for the Conrad essay. Even this last datum is not necessarily significant as the pupils most successful in English Literature might have opted for the contextual question set as an option to the essay.

Very few of those who wrote these examinations in 1990 were not white. At the time, pupils who were not classified as white in terms of the Population Registration Act (Act 30 of 1950) were not admitted to NED schools, although 'white' private schools did admit pupils from all population groups while remaining predominantly white.

The following is a guide to markers issued to NED Literature sub-examiners (markers). The total number of marks allocated to an essay-question is 30.

SYMBOL	MARKS	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
A	24 - 30	Excellent 27 - 30	Only for the truly outstanding. Essays should be clearly marked by unusual maturity of thought, cogency of argument and command of language. Ability to marshal information, to be perceptive in insight, to be confident in judgement, and to reveal real originality of mind, will be apparent in the work of only the very best candidates.
		24 - 26 Very good	An exceptionally pleasing, interesting essay; sensitive; showing sound judgement of important issues; logical development of argument.
B	21 - 23	Good	A fluent, interesting essay with a well-presented, reasoned argument; careful selection of material. Highly commendable without being brilliant. Shows insight into the text.
C	18 - 20	Above average	A sound, reasonably correct essay. Relevant information selected and used to give a direct answer to the question. Perceptive, but without the depth that would merit a B. Solid worth.

D	15 - 17	Average	The pupil does not show any particular flair for the literary. The text has been read and understood and the pupil makes an honest attempt to answer parts of the question. Some faults in expression.
E	12 - 14	Below average	A passable essay only. The text has been read, but there is not much success in giving a clear or well-argued or direct answer to the question. Such an essay will often be padded with narrative. Views often not sustained. Language: fair to muddled.
F FF	9 - 11	Weak	Poor command of language. Little or no attempt to answer the question. Very poor structuring. Perhaps utterly narrative.
G	6 - 8	Very weak	Completely incompetent. Muddled and inarticulate. Personal spelling. Very short essay.
H	0 - 5	Hopeless	Unworthy of serious consideration. Atrocious expression.

The process of marking and moderation applicable to the NED in 1990 is typical of such processes in South Africa. My understanding is that practices have not differed greatly from time to time and among education departments. In some marking committees, sub-examiners have marked whole scripts as opposed to sections only. It is regarded as desirable for more than one sub-examiner to evaluate a question, but this would mean a substantial increase in personnel and therefore costs, and enough money has not been made available. Allowing extra time for marking has not been regarded as a viable option as there is pressure to issue Senior Certificate results as soon as possible: access to bursaries and scholarships is affected in many cases by how early one joins the queue, and, understandably, education departments do not want 'their' matriculants to be at a disadvantage relative to those from other departments. (If all goes according to plan, 1996 will be the first year in which all nine provincial departments publish their results on the same day.)

A team of sub-examiners marks a given section (the sections are Poetry, Shakespeare, Major Novel and Fourth Genre, which might be a shorter novel, a novella, a collection of short stories or a non-Shakespearean play). Senior sub-examiners and the examiner herself moderate about a tenth of scripts marked by each sub-examiner on a random and continual basis so as to ensure that standardization is maintained. From time to time, a sub-examiner might request moderation of a 'problem' essay. If mark and comments are in the sub-examiner's handwriting only, it is safe to assume that an essay has not been moderated. Moreover, the examiner's intervention is usually apparent in her use of green ink. Finally, even if the examiner or other moderator (such as a senior sub-examiner) fully agrees with the mark and feels no need to add to the sub-examiner's comments, the ticking and/or initialling of that mark and/or of the front cover of the answer-book indicates that the answer has been moderated.

The ten schools produced 226 essays on *Victory*. Discussion of all of them would occupy a prohibitively large amount of space and be unnecessary for the purposes of this thesis. The essays selected will be, in the main, those most highly rated by the markers. Consideration of relative fluency and coherence aside, the high marks awarded these essays indicate the opinion of the examining body as to what constitutes successful reading. Moreover, it can reasonably be assumed that the candidates who produce such essays are those who have the most coherently absorbed the influence of teachers, printed secondary sources (whether directly, or indirectly *via* teachers), and the axiological determinants generally current in their social ethos. There will be discussion of some essays which have not received a top mark but which are particularly interesting because of what the marking reveals about the attitude of the examiner and/or sub-examiners. The mark awarded will be specified in each case.

Discussion of individual essays will include such general comments about the batch as seem to be valid. In this regard, it ought to be borne in mind that, in all but the smallest schools, Conrad would have been taught by more than one teacher and that schools vary in the extent to which a common approach is enforced by the head of subject. Given the circumstances, any evaluation based on statistics would be of suspect validity. Even so, there will be occasional comment involving a broadly statistical datum. In general, any such comment is incidental to my approach to the essays and to the marker's responses to them. Impression and speculation in the context of the concerns of this thesis are the basis of comments made in this chapter. If, in the case of School D, a comment based on the standard Z-test is offered, it is because it seems to be reasonably valid and germane to speculation.

In each school-batch, essays will be discussed in descending order of mark awarded, except where there is a specific reason to juxtapose essays for the purposes of comparison, as in the cases of the answers labelled D 2 and D 3 (see below: 46-49).

Quotations from essays and of the question will be uncorrected: as indicated above (24), errors of language are as in the original scripts.

None of the essays on *Victory* from the ten selected schools was awarded more than 26. It is accepted that a mark of 30 out of 30 for a Literature essay is possible, and on rare occasions such a mark is awarded to work which is regarded as being as good as can reasonably be expected from a Senior Certificate candidate. In 1990, no essay on *Victory* was rated at this level. Essays A 1 and D 1 received 26, Essay A 2 received 24, then 18 and then 26, and the mark for H 1 was moderated up from 25 to 26: these four essays were therefore graded as the pick of the bunch, as it were. (I 1 was moderated down from 26 to 25.)

The question is:

'Conrad's contrasting treatment of the evil characters - Schomberg, Mr Jones, Ricardo and Pedro, and the good - Lena and Heyst, shapes the central arguments of the novel.'

To what extent do you agree with this view?
(Italics as in the question.)

School A

Essay A 1 : Mark awarded: 26 out of 30; not moderated.

The essay starts:

The main themes and arguments that we come into contact with in Victory are the conflict between the forces of love and those of evil.

The candidate considers that what Heyst lacks before he meets Lena is 'love'. He emphasizes Heyst's 'profound mistrust of life' and asserts that Heyst's 'true nature ... was only revealed on certain occasions' (my ellipsis); these occasions are his involvements with Morrison and Lena.

This general approach is maintained throughout the essay. For instance, a comment on Schomberg is:

Schomberg has almost lost all his human characteristics, compassion, loyalty, trust, this is the reason why is so often given animal characteristics.

Throughout this exceptionally long essay (6½ pages), a traditionally moralistic approach is adopted. The title of the novel is interpreted in what might be characterized as straightforward Leavisian terms: Leavis sees the 'victory' as being 'over scepticism, a victory of life' which is 'unequivocal' (1962: 223) and A 1 adopts the same approach, although there is no explicit use of Leavis's phrasing or that of any other critic I have read.

There is no problematizing of any issue. The meaning of the novel is treated as transparent. In awarding a very high mark, the sub-examiner has greatly rewarded a thorough knowledge of 'content' and a consistent and coherent essentially 'Leavisian' response to *Victory*. The sub-examiner has not considered it significant that the essay reveals an apparent lack of awareness of problems and possible variability of interpretation. Neither has it been deemed important that there is no suggestion that 'the central arguments of the novel' might have any social implications beyond those which might vaguely be inferred from mention of 'love', 'evil' and 'life'.

A feature of the essay is the implicit equation of 'love', 'good' and the 'human'. There is textual justification for this. It is an indisputable commonplace of commentary on *Victory* that the narrator characterizes Schomberg, as well as Ricardo and Pedro, in terms of animal imagery. Schomberg, for instance, has a 'thick paw' (25), while references to the feline qualities of Ricardo and the simian aspect of Pedro are ubiquitous. The animal imagery does suggest the sub-human or the distortedly human. Jones is constantly compared to the demonic, the spectral and the skeletal, and this is further justification for reading the novel as equating the fully 'human' with the 'good'. It is less indisputable but nonetheless reasonable to understand Lena's capacity for love as intrinsic to the novel's presentation of the supremely heroic and therefore supremely 'good', especially given the most famous and often-quoted detail of the novel, Heyst's final comment on his own life and, indeed, human life in general:

"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)

The candidate creatively replaces the word 'good' as found in the question with 'love' and identifies 'compassion, loyalty, trust' - qualities conventionally regarded as 'good' - with the 'human'. The coherence and rootedness in the text of this aspect of the interpretation given in A 1 cannot be faulted. But there is no problematization of the notions of the 'good' and the 'human'. To accept any suggestion that 'evil' is *not* 'human' is to distance oneself from what one considers to be dangerously undesirable behaviour in such a way as to deny significant similarity between it and one's own actual or potential behaviour. A possible effect is the avoidance of discomforting self-interrogation. Another and related possible effect is the assumption that the sole or predominant cause of the behaviour is inherent proclivity: the concomitant would be avoidance of close consideration of the real social causes of the behaviour. It would be ludicrous to suggest that the candidate has any such intentions. However, given that consciousness itself is at least in part a verbal construct, teachers ought to make pupils aware of the possible influences on their attitudes of certain common tricks or habits of expression.

Essay A 2 : Mark awarded: 24 out of 30, moderated to 18 (probably by a senior sub-examiner), and finally moderated to 26 by the examiner.

The central thrust of this candidate's response is apparent in details such as:

With the use of the evil characters in the novel, Conrad is able to shape his argument that life holds more than is reflected in the cadaverous Mr. Jones and the savage Ricardo.

Heyst's 'Schopenhauer'-like philosophy makes him essentially a wanderer in the world.

Lena is able to make Heyst come to grips with life - and shows him through her Pyrrhic Victory that a life without love is purposeless.

It is people like Schomberg that causes Heyst to isolate himself from the world.

Samburan is linked to the harmonious Eden, which is untouched by the evils of mankind.

She feels that she has made Heyst able to reciprocate her love by her self-immolation. When she asks Heyst: "Who would have done this for you?",¹ he can only answer no-one.

He throws away his nihilistic views and stoical doctrines when he

¹ This is a misquotation of "'Who else could have done this for you?'" (406). The error, under examination conditions, is inconsiderable. The mangling of part of the 'Ah, Davidson' speech in the next extract is more striking, but has not been regarded as substantial by the markers.

tells Davidson that damned be the man who is unable to love and have faith in life.

After again alluding to the 'Ah, Davidson' speech, the candidate closes his essay with:
 He brings himself to realise that there is some good in the world.
 Lena showed him that love at the expense of her Pyrrhic victory -
 but, yet, it is a lesson for us all.

The original marker comments: 'A very genuine response. Tight argument, flowing style.' The second marker responds: 'Yes but largely narrative. Doesn't confront central argument.' The third and final marker, the examiner herself, indicates agreement with the opinion, 'Tight argument, flowing style.'

My sense is that the 'central argument' is 'confronted', and coherently, and that the essay deserves a high mark in terms of the established criteria, which do not include the need to display awareness of problems of interpretation or of concrete socio-political issues. There is nothing in any guidelines for examiners which would preclude specifically questioning candidates about such issues; my position is that there ought to be such questioning and that teachers ought to be institutionally and explicitly guided to include these issues in their teaching. Given the nature of the question and the norms governing teaching and examining, the candidate cannot be faulted for never presenting 'the evils of mankind' as other than general essences unrelated to social causes and for unproblematically presenting the 'lesson to us all' - the answer to Heyst's 'nihilistic views' - as 'love' at the immediate inter-personal level.

Essay A 3 : Mark awarded: 21 out of 30, moderated to 25 by the examiner.

Victory presents the major influence on the philosophy of Axel Heyst as being his father, whose doctrine of disillusionment and detachment is summed up in his advice, given a brief while before his death, that his son should "'cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity'" (174) and "'Look on - make no sound'" (175).

Essay A 3 presents the view that Heyst's father's philosophy of non-involvement in the affairs of an unworthy world is not entirely invalidated by the novel. The candidate therefore has some understanding of the complexity of *Victory*, although his expression of this sense is inconsistently clear.

The essay starts:

The final victory that is won is the love that is bred between Axel Heyst and Lena. This is a definite sign that good overcomes evil and in contrasting the good and evil characters in Victory, the power of love is greatly emphasised.

This basic approach is the same as that expressed in all of the essays from this school. However, the candidate comments on Heyst's father's 'nihilistic view':

Axel Heyst, being a good man, partially proves and partially disproves the theory by his involvement with evil people.
 These theories are the central issues of the novel.

There is here a sign of understanding that the novel can be read as a consideration of contrasting social philosophies, as opposed to a mere depiction of a collision of 'good' and 'evil' and/or a simple demonstration that it is wrong to be detached from 'life'.

The candidate does not mention Leavis or any other commentator, but his orientation is essentially that most commonly associated with Leavis, as is clearly indicated in his closing remark that 'good and love itself are victorious over bad and that, despite confrontations in life, it is worth living.' He coherently reconciles this view with his sense that the philosophy of detachment is not to be simplistically dismissed:

Wang is the only one who manages to remain well detached and he is the only survivor. This most definitely proves the theory that all action leads to evil, but the victory overshadows the losses.

Two intensely good people, surrounded by bad influences grow to love one another and this shatters the theory that life is meaningless. Heyst becomes more of a man and more human.

This comment is marred by a naive notion of what a novel can 'prove', what *Victory* suggests about 'all action' and a simplistic traditional assumption about what it is to be 'a man' and 'human'.

The literary text cannot 'prove' anything about flesh-and-blood experience: it can dramatize possibilities and within the limitations of its delineations of character and circumstance present certain ways of feeling, thinking and acting as more or less likely to have certain results; such presentation is, moreover, open to critical interrogation by a reader who can choose to set against it alternative conceptions, however derived, of cause and effect. My own practice is to tell my pupils this in so many words. Not all of them absorb the point (Candidate A 3's teacher might indeed have made it), but more understand it than would be the case were I not to make it. Pupils should be made aware that a literary text does deal with problems related to those in extra-literary reality, but that any solution it explicitly offers or which the reader can reasonably infer on the basis of its 'content' is what Balibar and Macherey call 'imaginary' (see above: 11) and is ideological and therefore provisional and contestable in essence.

There are various textually rooted objections to the idea that, in *Victory*, 'all action leads to evil'. One is that Wang, validly identified as 'the only survivor' of the events on Samburan, does take action and is not at all 'detached': he steals Heyst's revolver and retreats to the Alfuro village in order to avoid, in Heyst's words, the 'risk' of 'a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians' (347). He takes measures to defend himself, his wife and his adoptive tribe from harm. These measures might contribute to the 'evil' which happens to Heyst and Lena - Heyst is left without a weapon - but not for Wang and those he sees as his primary responsibility. Moreover, in making his choice of action in a threatening situation, as well as in the very act of taking a wife and adopting a community, Wang shows himself to be other than 'detached'. He does not merely 'look on'.

What is regarded as constituting 'a man' and being 'human' is one of the most simply and clearly ideological of issues. Behaviour of which the candidate approves, or, perhaps, of which he considers the novel to approve, is the criterion.

These objections to points made in Essay A 3 illustrate epistemological and axiological problems. Taken together with the positions adopted in the essay, they suggest forms which problematization of reading can take in the classroom. They do not militate against the identification of the essay as so far superior to the norm in terms of the official criteria that it deserves a high mark, particularly, in my view, and despite its incoherencies, as it is marked by some sense that the novel can be read as presenting philosophical problems.

Essay A 4 : Mark awarded: 24 out of 30; not moderated.

Eighty percent is a bare distinction, but a distinction nonetheless. An interpretation which can be described as straightforwardly Leavisian is highly credited.

The first paragraph reads:

Evil intelligence, instinctive savagery and brute force are the 'world itself come to pay Heyst a visit', sent through the malicious meddlings of the Iago-like Schomberg. The evil characters act as a catalyst towards Heyst's awakening doubt in his father's philosophy. As they inspire the Femme Fatale, Lena to 'capture the sting of death in the service of love' and ultimately by her sacrifice prove the inadequacies of Heyst's stance in life.

The candidate also asserts that the elder Heyst's 'Schopenhauer-like philosophy' is 'a suicidal stance which can only lead to catastrophe.' Interestingly, if not altogether coherently, the idea is developed with regard to Jones:

Jones's philosophy is seen as an extremist extension and possible result of a Heyst-like policy of 'look on and make no sound'.

There is a definite echo of Leavis in his application of the 'volcano' imagery of Part 1, Chapter 1 to the scenes of final confrontation: 'the explosion is catastrophic and yet unequivocally a victory for life.' Leavis's words are: 'It is an ironical victory for life, but unequivocally a victory' (1962: 230).

At one point the candidate makes a mistake which the sub-examiner does not notice. Instead, her approval of what she regards as a good point is indicated by a large red tick. The sub-examiner, like the candidate, has forgotten a detail of the text. Although such an error on a sub-examiner's part 'shouldn't happen', it would be a rare teacher who never made a comparable error, especially under pressure such as that to which a Senior Certificate marker is subjected. The more important thing about the error is that it can generate speculation about the way in which the candidate - and perhaps the sub-examiner - reads the novel in general. The comment is on Heyst's death by fire:

Heyst has come full circle when his policies are revealed as suicidal and his life becomes meaningless. The barb of action has caught Heyst proving his inadequacy and subtly showing the difference between the natural and the mystical, black gold and diamonds.

The reference to ‘the natural and the mystical, black gold and diamonds’ is an obvious allusion to the opening paragraph of the novel:

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as “black diamonds.” Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one’s waistcoat pocket - but it can’t! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose these two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst - Axel Heyst - from going away (3).

The candidate has substituted ‘black gold’, an idiom which usually refers to oil, for ‘black diamonds’. In Conrad’s text, the opposition is between ‘the practical and the mystical’; that is, between ‘wealth’ in straightforward financial terms and the ‘fascination’ which attends the role of coal as ‘the supreme commodity of the age’. The candidate has replaced this opposition with one between ‘the natural and the mystical’, the meaning of which is not altogether clear to me, although in the context of the essay as a whole it would be reasonable to speculate that he means that love and ‘life’ are to be preferred to an abstract and wrong-headed philosophy of detachment.

The candidate seems to have focused on the opening paragraph of *Victory* - and opening paragraphs are usually thoroughly dealt with in class - without registering, and almost certainly without being guided by his teacher to register, an implication of the reference to coal as ‘the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel’: that at the very beginning of *Victory* there is an indication that it is to be read as being at least in part a critique of the values characteristic of a money-oriented culture. The candidate shows no awareness that ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and ‘the central arguments of the novel’ might be wholly or in part related to economic issues and the struggle for success in a culture manifestly dominated by the desire for wealth (the Dutch and Portuguese colonialists, the Tropical Belt Coal Company, Schomberg, the Zangiacomoes and the three desperadoes are all clear manifestations of the destructiveness the novel presents as associated with this desire).

Essay A 5 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

The four essays on *Victory* discussed above were the only ones from School A to be awarded distinctions. One more essay from this school deserves specific mention. Its mark places it in the ‘middle-B’¹ category. The sub-examiner therefore considered it to be of distinctly superior, if not distinction-level, quality.

This extract is typical of the style and approach:

¹ Here and elsewhere in this chapter, expressions which are commonly used among teachers to characterize essays and the marks awarded them is placed between quotation marks.

With Heyst and Lena we see goodness and love prevail, we see Heyst move from "isolation" to having an incredible profound love and faithful relationship with Lena. Thus, I believe Conrad is arguing that evil and deception breeds disorder and hate, hence, the evil characters of the book die terrible, painful deaths, depicting unworthy lives. On the other hand the main characters of the novel, the 'victorious' characters die; understanding one another and die, taking love away with them.

Later, the candidate asserts that Heyst's 'victory' is his 'realising' Lena's 'incredible love for him'. Moreover, 'Heyst victory is that he overcomes scepticism and a lack of faith in life.' The essay concludes with a characterization of Heyst's death as

a Heroes death, understanding his flaw in life and repairing it
by being totally committed and creating immortal love;
hopefully going somewhere special with Lena.

Then the final flourish:

[LOVE IS IMMORTAL]
THEIR VICTORY

(square brackets and capitals in the original).

It is traditional practice in South African schools (not only 'white' schools) to emphasize the centrality of private relationships, love in particular. This hermeneutic and axiological paradigm is ubiquitous and much emphasized in, although not the sole concern of, traditional Anglo-American criticism such as that of the Cambridge School. In the form it takes in Essay A 5, it is divorced from wider social issues such as sexual and social-class politics. The candidate regards the issue of 'love' as central to *Victory*, but other than the vague and non-comparative reference to Heyst's 'isolation' and 'flaw in life', there is no interrogation of the difference between Heyst's and Lena's experiences of and attitudes toward love, and of the contributions toward that difference made by their contrasting social identities. Perhaps such an approach is symptomatic of a significant degree of obliviousness of social determinants of feeling, thinking and behaving; alternatively, there might be an assumption on the candidate's part that discussion of 'political' issues is 'unsafe' in public examinations, despite the examiner's reassuring injunction on the first page of the question-paper: 'Do not hesitate to give your personal opinions frankly'. Over the years, my own pupils have very frequently expressed the fear that one might be penalized for 'bringing politics into it'. Both the obliviousness and the fear are indicative of the climate of repression prevalent in pre-democratic South Africa and in late 1990 this climate had not significantly dissipated in certain sub-cultures: in the South African education system, the movement toward democracy was still in its infancy, the structures of the old order remained in place and 'white' schools had as yet felt no winds of institutional change. Obliviousness would also be characteristic of many comfortable members of the dominant group simply because they have not as yet been challenged by circumstances to consider the relationship between political forces and prescribed novels or other elements of their 'everyday' lives. The contents of an individual candidate's essay indicate nothing about anyone other than himself; however, none of the essays from School A demonstrates any

consciousness of socio-political issues beyond the vague and traditional liberal and Christian idea that (as one pupil puts it) 'no man is an island'.

Candidate A 5 is romantically and hyperbolically enthusiastic about the centrality of private relationships. This enthusiasm is casual about the specifics of content. There is nothing outstandingly 'painful' about the deaths of the desperadoes; indeed, Heyst's death is the physically agonizing one unless, after, setting the fire, he kills himself cleanly with Ricardo's dagger or the penknife mentioned on p 350 (to imagine which would be fanciful on the reader's part). Moreover, the textual indication (406) is that the dying Lena does *not* understand Heyst's sensibility: her rapturous words, 'Oh, my beloved ... I've saved you! Why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?' (my ellipses) and 'Who else could have done this for you?' which is 'whispered gloriously', do not display understanding of a man who cannot utter 'the true cry of love' because of his 'infernal mistrust of all life'. The assertion that Heyst and Lena die 'understanding one another' ought not to be regarded as acceptable by anyone other than a proponent of extreme textual indeterminability and variability of interpretation. Further, the idea that the novel can validly be read as suggesting that Heyst and Lena might depart for some kind of heaven for good people and/or lovers is starry-eyed and a particularly invalid conferring of meaning. In its juvenile melodramatic quality, the final capitalized flourish is the appropriate capstone for the essay as a whole.

It is valid to reward the candidate for what can be accepted as a sincere and energetic personal response. But a B is supposed to be given where there is 'reasoned argument', 'careful selection of material' and 'insight into the text'. I would have thought that the degree of invalid reading displayed by the candidate would disqualify him in terms of the formal criteria. However, the essay is unmoderated and the most rigorous sub-examiner can be expected to lose focus from time to time. Meanwhile, the essay is interesting in the context of the batch as a whole because of what it suggests about how the pupils of School A read and have been guided to read, or at least answer questions about, *Victory*.

School B

Only two essays on *Victory* from this school achieved As.

Essay B 1 : Mark awarded: 23 out of 30; moderated to 25.

This essay starts:

By contrasting the evil characters of Schomberg and the trio of virtually dehumanised caricatures (Jones, Ricardo and Pedro) with the good characters of Lena and Heyst, Conrad did "shape the central arguments of the novel" (especially that of the 'Victory'). However, Conrad also showed the subtle similarities of these characters to further "shape the central arguments of the novel."

In the examiner's green ink, 'Nice!' appears next to the point about subtle similarities. The pupil is validly rewarded for absorbing a significant aspect of structure.

The influence of Bev Moolman's institutionally authoritative commentary (see below: Chapter Three: *passim*) is clearly evident in a number of essays from this school, which is not one where she has taught, so her talk and/or her published article have been influential).¹ For example, this candidate notes that 'as mans intellect increases, so does his capacity for evil', which suggests that he is acquainted with Moolman's point (1990: 47) that:

as the apparent 'intelligence' of the three allegorical characters diminishes, so too does the 'evil' in their natures.

That Moolman influences this pupil either directly or through an influence on his teacher is apparent in 'It has often been said that the 'Evil Trio' are too contrived. But one must remember that their role is to parody and not to embody.' Moolman's words are: 'Caricatured figures are comical because they are in a sense dehumanised, their function being to parody, not to embody' (1990: 46). The sub-examiner's red tick and the examiner's green tick indicate the favourable impression made with this point. It would have contributed significantly to the achievement of the distinction. That my own preferred response to the presentation of the desperadoes is different from Moolman's and from the candidate's (see below: 160-162) is irrelevant to an evaluation of it as a viable reading. It is worth noting the elementary empirical evidence of what experienced teachers and examiners assume to be inevitable: the memorizing and reproducing as if one's own (*ie*, without acknowledgement) of striking points made in dictated or (even more influential) 'handed-out' notes earns marks if relevant in context and provided that the adult writer of the notes is not unusually muddled as a commentator. An obvious source of such notes is published commentary, especially if it is perceived to have institutional authority such as Moolman's enjoys.

In Essay B 1, there is a sense that *Victory* might have something to say about larger societal issues:

Jones' sickness of mind complements Heyst's undeveloped social sense. Both, when combined, represents the illnesses and weaknesses of late nineteenth, early twentieth century Europe. Thus, by contrasting and comparing Heyst and Jones, we see how Conrad shows society's ills.

However, there is no clear indication that these 'ills' have to do with anything other than the inherent badness of some people and the 'undeveloped social sense' of others, even if it is promising that the pupil uses phrasing such as 'undeveloped social sense'. Only one pupil from this school displays a clearer sense of the possible socio-political implications of *Victory* (see the discussion below of Essay B 3).

Essav B 2 : Mark awarded: 24 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner's comment on this answer is:

¹ Up to and including 1990, Moolman had taught in only one of the ten selected schools. She worked as a *locum tenens* teacher at School I for two terms in 1986. For explanation of the characterization of her work as institutionally authoritative, see below: 102.

Fails to contrast good and evil to any degree. Expression is sometimes clumsy and the argument disjointed in parts. For all that many astute observations and a commendable effort.

The essay starts:

Certainly the contrasting of characters has shaped some arguments in the novel, yet the number of arguments embarked upon in *Victory* are infinite.

This candidate has a mind of his own and is not coerced into simple agreement with the 'quotation' in the question, which is commendable even if one sees his use of 'infinite' as either wildly extreme (a kind of homespun ultra-Derrideanism) or simply slapdash expression.

There are various points which, while frequently poorly expressed, indicate that this candidate responds intelligently and authentically to *Victory*. He non-judgementally asserts that Conrad's exploration of 'the nature of evil' is 'non-Christian'. He discusses Heyst's inability to avoid involvement in a way which does not suggest the assembly-line approach evident in most scripts; for instance, he notes that when Heyst kisses Lena, he 'did not "look on - and make no sound"'. In asserting that 'Conrad believed in a universal evil - a fate', he quotes Heyst as saying: 'we are slaves caught in a trap by, shall I say - your fate or mine, Lena?' This is a misquotation of Heyst's 'We are the slaves of this infernal surprise which has been sprung on us by - shall I say fate - your fate, or mine' (353), but the error is of a kind forgivable under examination conditions and not the run-of-the-mill way of making the point about 'universal evil' or 'fate' in *Victory*. It is a debatable point, in that author and character are confused; this confusion is apparent elsewhere, as when the candidate claims that 'Conrad' regards love as one of the 'cruel stratagems of the Great Joke', which is probably derived in the main from the elder Heyst's 'Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love' (219). However, the attribution of these notions to the historical Conrad or to an implied author called 'Conrad' is unsound only from a doctrinaire anti-intentionalist perspective. Even though I am sympathetic to such a perspective, it is not one which is standard in this country or elsewhere among teachers or in published commentary.

The writer of Essay B 2 does indeed make some 'astute observations' and the 'effort' is 'commendable', as the sub-examiner remarks. If one were to categorize the essay in terms of models of reception, one might say that it is characterized by some intelligent 'close reading' and is a promising analysis generally in the New Critical tradition, with a refreshing if undeveloped sign that the candidate understands that texts are hermeneutically plural. There is, however, no attention to 'central arguments' which have to do with any larger socio-political perspective.

Essay B 3 : Mark awarded: 19 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner's general comment is 'Promising start but becomes waffly.' This comment is valid. It is a pity that the essay 'becomes waffly', since it is unique among the Conrad essays from School B, and rare among white high-school Literature examination essays in general, in its explicit mention of political issues.

The essay begins:

Conrad wrote *Victory* at a time when the values of civilized men were being questioned. Capitalism and imperialism were rife and Conrad was showing a disgust for peoples alienation in a faceless society. A society in which people wore masks to hide their true feelings and opinions. The title is indeed ironic.

Later, a comment on Jones is that he 'has the sole interest of gaining money and perhaps even power'. In contrasting Heyst and Jones, the point is made that the former has 'little interest in material possessions'.

The sub-examiner's comment ('Promising start') indicates approval of this approach. The simple inference one may draw is that reading cognizant of the larger socio-political implications of *Victory* is fully acceptable but, given the high marks awarded essays which are oblivious of such implications, not regarded as necessary.

This thesis does not suggest that Senior Certificate candidates be penalized for not mentioning such implications in answer to a question which does not specify them: doctrinaire leftist academic authoritarianism is not a value or a policy espoused by it. However, it is asserted that teachers, examiners and other educational authorities ought to give prominence to them. In general, this has not been done within the NED, although there have been exceptions. The circulation of Daniel R Schwarz's 1982 commentary on *Victory* (see below: Chapter Three: *passim*) is one. More strikingly, Mary Johnstone, at the time an NED Superintendent, sent photocopies of extracts from Martin Orkin's *Shakespeare Against Apartheid* (1987) to NED schools in 1989, 1990 and 1991. (For further discussion in this regard, see below: Chapter Four: *passim*.)

There are no other essays from School B which deal with socio-political issues in ways which resemble B 3's. One can only speculate about whether he had a politically aware teacher, and/or read a commentary (such as Schwarz 1982) which paid attention to the politico-historical context of the novel and/or simply thought for himself.

In two other essays in this batch, there are, however, details which touch on such considerations.

Essay B 4 : Mark awarded: 19 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner's comment is 'Very good at times, but slightly undeveloped.'

Even though it be true that the ideas are, in the main, 'undeveloped', this candidate makes the significant observations that Lena is 'the prisoner of circumstances, the victim of her upbringing' and that the Zangiacomos 'represent the prostitution of morals as well as woman, signifying the corruption of society'. This is not necessarily evidence of a well-developed consciousness of sexual politics. It cannot even be taken as indicating that the candidate (a male in a single-sex school) has a non-patriarchal attitude toward women. But it does show that the novel has been at least to some extent understood as dealing with, among other things, the influence of social factors and exploitation.

Essay B 5 : Mark awarded: 18 out of 30; not moderated.

On the one hand, this candidate writes of 'Schomberg who is corrupt and Jones and Richardo who are evil because they want to be'. There is no mention of Schomberg's being influenced by a coarse concern with profit (it is explicit that he loathes Heyst initially because the latter does not patronize his 'establishment' [26-27 *et passim*]). Neither is there reference to the possibility of Jones's being seen as representative of aristocratic decadence, of Ricardo's being warped because he is a proletarian victim of a society which would turn him into 'a wage-slave' (296), or of the criminal acquisitiveness of the desperadoes. Yet the candidate does write that

it is Heyst who is shunned by society because Heyst wants to get away from the world and live in his own socialistic ideas. Therefore it is Schomberg, Mr Jones and Richardo not forgetting Pedro who make up society.

The sub-examiner puts an approving tick after 'socialistic ideas'. The notion that there is something 'socialistic' about Heyst's 'ideas' is interesting but vague and unsubstantiated. As far as I can see, there is nothing in the novel which justifies it. Generosity, a lack of interest in money-making and a mistrust of turn-of-the-century European society do not qualify as socialism. There is perhaps implicit approval of 'socialistic ideas' in the presentation of destructive characters as representative of a society which is inimical to such ideas, but the thinking is woolly. Precisely why the sub-examiner ticks where she does is unclear. Perhaps she is simply impressed by a notion which is different from the run-of-the-mill; perhaps she approves of the introduction of something which has a socio-political flavour. I can sympathize with both of these possible motives.

What is clear is that pupils would be well served by clear explication of competing ideologies pertinent to the period in which the text is written as well as those which are important in our own time. While it cannot be confidently argued that such explication was absent from classrooms in School B in 1990, it can be asserted that it does not manifest in the essays on *Victory*, that it is not to the fore in the consciousnesses of the pupils and that it is unlikely that any classroom treatment of larger social issues was more than perfunctory.

Finally, there is some obvious evidence of the influence of the popular bluffer's guide, *Guidelines*, in essays from School B. For instance, one candidate who receives an 'average or just below' mark of 16 writes that 'Conrad displays that love and the good conquer all', and refers to 'the themes of lust; hate; fear', which details clearly echo points made in *Guidelines* (1990: 33 and see below: 156).

In general, however, Moolman is the commentator whose influence is most obviously evident in the essays from School B. There is the clear echo in Essay B 1 discussed above. One candidate refers to Ricardo's knife as 'a phallic symbol'; Moolman calls it (1990: 47) 'a decidedly phallic symbol in the context of the moment'. Another relates 'the evil trio' to 'a Darwanian progression', which is reminiscent of Moolman's 'Pedro, Ricardo and Jones can be seen to represent a Darwinian progression up the evolutionary continuum' (*ibid*). A few candidates repeat a typing error in Moolman's article and use 'mad dog' instead of 'bad dog' (Moolman 1990: 45, and see below: 154 fn). There is

some mention of the comedy in the presentation of the villains,¹ an idea not exclusive to Moolman but, given the other echoes of her work, likely to have been culled from it. Ready availability and apparent institutional authority are significant.

School C

Candidates from this school who wrote the essay on *Victory* achieved an average mark of 20 out of 30. Of the ten schools selected for the purposes of this chapter, only School I produced an equally high average mark for the question.² A score of 20 out of 30 is a full symbol above the mark accepted as 'average' for Higher Grade Literature in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal). Therefore the markers had a high opinion of this batch of essays considered as a whole.

Essay C 1 : Mark Awarded: 25 out of 30; not moderated.

The essay starts: 'This view is one that can be agreed with.' Characteristic passages are:

On this island they attempted to 'defy the fates' and live lives completely detached from the world and its evils. This however is not possible as 'no man is an island'. An island is 'merely the top of a mountain' and soon it will become a place where evil will 'visit'.

The values of Heyst and Lena will be undermined by the evil intentions of the three men. This is the central theme of the novel.

[The island] is like the garden of Eden. A 'utopia' as it were and Axel Heyst as Adam.

[The villains are] a sceptre, a cat, an ape.

Heyst realises that 'he who deliberates is lost' and that he must act soon in order to save his and, more importantly, Lena's life.

The fact that he cannot protect Lena is a significant theme in

¹ Conrad has made use of elements of comedy in a number of his novels, and in this novel comedy and allegory are combined, creating a macabre presence of evil mockery. ... In *Victory*, the implicit malice of the powers of darkness is given concrete form in the grotesquely comical figures of Jones, Ricardo and Pedro (Moolman 1990: 46; my ellipsis).

² Essays from School A averaged 19. Averages for the other seven schools were all below 60% and in the D category, although School G averaged 18 if the mark is taken to the nearest integer.

the novel. At the end, Heyst realises that if he had 'put his trust in life' he could have saved Lena from evil.

The essay closes with reference to the 'Ah, Davidson' speech and describes it as what 'Heyst is left to say'.

A mark of 25 is not a 'top A', but it is a 'clear distinction'. The sub-examiner's comment is 'Very logically argued - fluently follows a line of reasoning.'

The 'line of reasoning' followed is generally coherent, and, minor errors such as 'sceptre' aside, this candidate demonstrates that she has assiduously studied the text and committed a number of details to memory. However, the essay is straightforwardly, even naively, in the Leavisian tradition. There is no indication that *Victory* poses any problems of interpretation or that the values presented in it might be other than both transparent and right. Consideration of larger socio-political issues is wholly absent.

Essay C 2 : Mark awarded: 25 out of 30; not moderated.

The first paragraph reads:

One of the main themes in the novel is the conflict between good and evil forces. These forces are clearly portrayed by the characters in the novel and thus we can clearly identify with the statements that Conrad makes.

Later, reference is made to 'Jones, who states that they are simply another "world", implying hell, "come to pay" them "a visit".' Jones is seen as:

how a person would end up if he followed Heyst's father's view. They would be lifeless like Jones who is often referred to as resembling a "corpse".

Lena's 'victory' is that 'she dies for her beloved and in so doing expressing her deep emotions towards him.' Finally, the last paragraph reads:

One would therefore tend to assume that good prevailed over evil. There is, however, evidence that there will always be evil in the world. Firstly because Heyst realises too late that he was wrong when he states "woe to the man who's heart has not learnt while young to love, hope and put his trust in life." And secondly when our last image of Jones is him in a fetal position which implies the possible rebirth of evil.

The sub-examiner's general comment is 'good - interesting response'. She does not seem to be bothered by significant flaws such as the confused reading of Jones's "'I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit'" (379) as implying that 'they are simply another "world", implying hell', and the invalidly imaginative conferring of the notion of 'a fetal position which implies the possible rebirth of evil' on Davidson's description of Jones as "'huddled up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out'" (411). Such misreading ought to be enough to keep the essay out of the 'distinction' category. Moreover, the idea that Jones is an example of 'how a person would end up if he followed Heyst's father's view' is highly problematic. It appears in a few of the essays from School C and is therefore probably the result of at least one teacher's reading. In his 'last book', Heyst's father 'claimed for

mankind that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy (91). Shortly before he dies, he advises his son to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity - always remembering that you, too, ... are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself (174; my ellipsis).

Jones is an extreme example of the moral inadequacy which causes the elder Heyst to become disillusioned with humanity and impress on his son a philosophy of detachment. It is a philosophy which can be viewed as wrong-headed, but it has its origin in a form of moral idealism. It ought not to be confused with the pathological egocentricity of the criminal, Jones, who, far from being detached from the world, seeks out prey within it, and is far from his country and class of origin not because he has rejected them, but because he has been rejected:

Having been ejected ... from his proper social sphere because he had refused to conform to certain usual conventions, he was a rebel now, and was coming and going up and down the earth (317-318; my ellipsis).

It is possible that an eagerness to make the novel fit a fairly simple model of moral values has caused teacher/s and pupils alike to misread and offer interpretation which falls foul of Umberto Eco's precept (see below: 70). One takes, perhaps, the 'Ah, Davidson' speech as one's axiom, and proceeds from there. The 'author's message' is that detachment is unequivocally bad; Jones is detached inasmuch as he is a wanderer, incapable of 'love' and does not 'put [his] trust in life' (410); Jones is therefore an example of the end-product of the Heystian philosophy. Such a formulation can make study of *Victory* easier, but weakens the novel's capacity to generate thought about the complexities of our lives. This is educationally undesirable. While it is often necessary to steer pupils clear of complexities which would unnecessarily confuse them, a class or 'set' which has able learners such as the writer of C 2 in it ought not to be guided toward misreading of the kind under discussion. Moreover, the avoidance of certain complexities is not the same as misreading which deforms a crucial aspect of the text. A final observation in this connection is that sub-examiners are sometimes not as familiar with the prescribed text as they ought to be: the marker's comment suggests unawareness that there is anything wrong with the claimed relationship between Heyst's father's philosophy and Jones's mentality.

The notion that 'there will always be evil in the world' is unrelated to causes beyond a general sense that failing to follow the principles which can be derived from the 'Ah, Davidson' speech leads to evil. Neither in this essay nor in any others from School C is there any registration of the specific social, political and economic causes suggested in the course of the novel. It can be inferred that teaching simply did not include such registration. It would seem that the potential of the novel to assist consciousness of such issues was not activated. It is central to this thesis that this kind of omission is most undesirable.

Essay C 3: Mark awarded: 24 out of 30; not moderated.

The essay starts:

Conrad's Victory involves a complex intertwining of characters and ideas. The characters are his instruments he uses to put his message across and it is in the contrasting treatment of the evil and good characters which Heyst¹ uses as a building block for his central argument.

There is a noting of 'how the evil characters are all compared to wild animals', followed by itemizing of the comparisons of Schomberg with 'a bear', Ricardo with 'a cat', Pedro with 'an ape' and Jones with 'a spectre'.

In a discussion of Jones, the point is made that 'Jones is a common name and so we see how Conrad feels that evil things are common in the world today'. As for Lena: 'One of her names is Alma which means - life giving. Jones hates women because he sees them having this life-giving force which poses as threat to him.' Moreover, Lena is compared to Christ 'because of the passion she feels and her willingness to sacrifice herself for Heyst'. The 'volcano' image of Part I, Chapter I is associated with Heyst to indicate 'his potential for passion and showing emotion'. Concerning another significant image, the candidate points out that 'Coal and diamonds are basically the same substance', and this imagery is seen as suggesting that 'people have the potential to be either and circumstances effect the outcome of the final product'.

Essay C 3 also makes a point essentially the same as one made in Essay C 2, ubiquitous in the batch and discussed above: 'Heyst could have become a hard, cold, unfeeling, spiritually dead man like Jones if he had followed his father's philosophy.'

The sub-examiner's general comment is: 'Somewhat forced and confusing but some very good moments.' I think the essay has been given too high a mark, and the sub-examiner's own comment does not seem to accord with the awarding of an A. That aside, it would seem that the ability to marshal a variety of points and, in particular, to show an understanding of how imagery works to generate meaning has been well rewarded. An important aspect of 'close reading' is justifiably credited, whatever debate might be possible about the extent of the crediting, given the apparent absence of awareness of problems of interpretation and of the social causes and implications of behaviour.

Essay C 4: Mark awarded: 20 out of 30; the sub-examiner appends a note asking for moderation and the examiner indicates agreement with the mark.

The examiner's comment is 'Repetitive but holds an argument together.'

The general trend of this essay is typical of those in the batch. A point worth singling out, however, is that Lena's

desire to give to the man who saved her has now been satisfied.
She dies at peace with herself, and feels she has Victored over the

¹ Careless errors made under examination conditions - such as using 'Heyst' instead of 'Conrad' in the opening paragraph and the later inclusion of 'spectre' in a list of 'animals' - can justifiably be overlooked.

villians by saving Heyst. However, Jones and Ricardo die with no sense of achievement or joy, they have gained nothing.

Here there is a sub-examiner's red tick.

There is straightforward acceptance of the common idea that Lena has achieved a 'victory' by dying for love and at peace with herself. That there is an element of the illusory in her reason for contentment is not registered. The powerfully insistent description of her sense of 'tremendous achievement', her 'exulting', 'rapture' and 'innocent, girlish happiness' (407) seems to have negated the problem posed by the account of Heyst's inability to utter 'the true cry of love' because of his 'infernal mistrust of all life' (406) and by Heyst's suicide, which, it can easily be argued, renders Lena's sacrifice futile. The candidate, like her fellows in School C, interprets the novel, or has been taught to interpret the novel, in as optimistic a way as possible. Villains die unhappily, while moral heroines die happily, and, so that the formula can be seen as applying in an unqualified way, the suicide of the despairing hero is glossed over with the comment that 'Heyst has come to know himself and accept reality due to his relationship with Lena. This can surely be seen as a victory over his need for seclusion.' The understanding is therefore in the Leavisian tradition of seeing the 'victory' as being 'over scepticism, a victory of life' which is 'unequivocal' (1962: 223). It is thus approvingly implied that the novel presents a traditional notion of the correspondence of interpersonal love and self-sacrifice with successful living. There is no apparent sense of possible irony in the concept of 'victory' (whether or not intended by Conrad).

The essays from School C vary in their coherence and fluency, as well as in the amount of detail of both argument and reference to the text, but there is little variation - and no substantial variation - in their conceptions of what *Victory* is about. The essays give an impression of being the result of efficient drill in an approach which is conventional in its moral assumptions, hermeneutically traditional, and, as a consequence, 'safe'. This approach obfuscates understanding that the 'writerly' text poses problems of interpretation and can productively be read as problematizing the relationship between the individual and his/her circumstances.

However, evaluation criteria do not highlight such considerations and NED essay questions do not tend to focus on them explicitly; thus the approach adopted at School C must be seen as successful in bringing about a good set of marks, even if the socio-economic advantages of the girls from this school are taken into account.

School D

Only twelve boys from a total of 174 chose to write the essay on *Victory*. Such a discrepancy is often the result of advice given as English Department policy in a school. It is likely that the year-group was told to avoid the Conrad essay because the teachers considered that it would be likely to contain too many pitfalls. Of the twelve essays, two received distinctions.

Essay D 1 : Mark awarded: 26 out of 30; moderated by the examiner and the mark confirmed.

In this essay, Conrad is seen as using Morrison and Davidson to complement and explain Heyst and Lena and to form the early contrast between the good Davidson and the evil Schomberg. But neither does Conrad restrict himself from just contrasting good and evil but uses a technique of doubling between good and evil showing similarities and identifying for example Heyst with Lena and Lena with Ricardo.

Especially given the use of the word, 'doubling', it is distinctly possible that this candidate has read Chapter 5 of Schwarz 1982 - which was distributed to NED schools - or that his teacher has used material from it, since Schwarz enunciates a theory of 'character-doubling' (70) in *Victory*.

Later, he schematizes major characters. Heyst is seen as 'good passive', Jones as 'evil passive', Lena as 'good active' and Ricardo as 'evil active'. The pattern over-simplifies the characters, their similarities and their differences, but it has merit, especially in the work of a secondary-school pupil. Both Heyst and Jones are in their contrasting yet related ways 'detached' (even though this similarity needs to be treated with caution [see above: 42-43]); both Lena and Ricardo manifest (at least superficially) more nervous energy than their respective 'gentlemen'. Although opinions differ about how much 'evil' (if any) ought to be attributed to Heyst and Lena, it is rationally undeniable that they are representatives of what can generally be called the 'good' and that Jones and Ricardo are criminal. It is a commonplace of discourse about *Victory* that patterning is thus apparent.

Exposure to such discourse aside, a careful reader might readily discern the pattern in or confer it on the novel, especially once he has detected or read or been told about the idea of 'character-doubling', even in general terms.

The impressive aspect of Essay D 1 is its attention to formal structural elements of *Victory* as meaning-generating devices, even if its treatment of them is simplistic and begs questions.

Absent from it are attention to socio-political issues and to problems of interpretation. In its contrasting of characters, for instance, it does not focus on the class-origins of the characters but merely on their relative moral conditions and positions on the 'active-passive' axis. There is no suggestion that both 'gentlemen' can be conceived of as embodying the decadence of the privileged classes in contrasting ways, and that Ricardo and Lena are contrasting manifestations of the more vigorous subjugated classes. Neither does the essay suggest that the meaning of *Victory* is other than fixed and transparent.

Essay D 2 : Mark awarded: 24 out of 30; moderated by the examiner and the mark confirmed.

This candidate asserts that

in the end it is the force of good that overpowers the evil.
Conflicts arise between Lena and Heyst, Ricardo and Lena,
Schomberg and Mrs Schomberg. These conflicts are regarded
as the central theme of the novel.

This is not coherent. An implication of the phrasing is that Lena 'overpowers the evil' in or of Heyst, a meaning which might make sense if Heyst's detachment is conceived of as 'evil', which would be simplistic and otherwise problematic, but defensible (Douglas Hewitt makes a point along these lines: see below: 108-109). The idea that Lena ('good') overpowers Ricardo ('evil') makes sense, and any incoherence here can be understood as simply an error of syntax, a breach of parallel structure. But, a further breach of parallel structure aside, to see Mrs Schomberg as 'overpowering' her husband is loose, although one might 'see what he means' when one considers the assistance she gives Heyst. Perhaps the candidate does not mean precisely what I have interpreted his words to mean, and has merged disparate ideas unintentionally. Certainly, his essay as a whole is marked by muddled language and thinking. My impression is that he has a set of ideas which he is trying to arrange coherently but cannot.

With regard to 'evil characters such as Schomberg, Jones and Ricardo', he claims that Conrad 'does not study their feelings and beliefs'. This idea - which is central to the essay - might be the result of exposure to the common notion that the three cited characters are caricatures. Even if one were to accept that caricature is evident in their presentation, the claim that there is no 'study' of 'their feelings and attitudes' is untenable. The narrator examines Schomberg's consciousness at length and both Jones and Ricardo discourse substantially about themselves. There is room for disagreement about how such discourse might be interpreted, but this is another matter.

The immediately following point is that 'On the other hand he constantly dwells us into the minds of the good characters and lets us know what he thinks of them.' This detail tends to support the suspicion that the candidate has been influenced by a common view of the characterization in *Victory*: the villains are caricatures and the 'good' characters are presented with psychological verisimilitude. Confused thinking is evident in the claim that Conrad 'lets us know what he thinks of' the 'good' characters more than he does of the 'evil' ones.' It seems to be a blundering extension of the 'caricature'-non-caricature' way of contrasting characterizations.

The essay proceeds:

This treatment allows the reader to favour the good side as this is the side he, Conrad, takes. We are given situations of conflict through the good character's eyes and so tend to favour the good.

This detail compounds the invalid assertion that 'we' are not allowed to see matters from the viewpoint of the villains. It would seem that the candidate has learnt at some stage that a reader is more likely to be in sympathy with a character whose point of view he is allowed to know than one whose perspective is opaque to him; this is a common idea with considerable validity; however, it is irrelevant in the case of *Victory*.

There is mention of the naming of Lena: 'He refers to Lena as Mary Magdalen or Mother Mary with which their can only be strong, positive connotations.' Again, one 'knows what he means', and some credit is deserved for the degree of understanding of the allusions mentioned, but the clarity of language and depth of understanding are not what ought to be regarded as characteristic of a 'distinction-level' essay.

The essay ends with the limp and naive 'From this we learn that good will always rule over evil.'

The selected details are typical of the essay. There is no marker's general comment. The reason for the awarding of a distinction - even a bare one - by both sub-examiner and examiner is obscure. One might surmise that they approved of the awareness of the part played by 'conflicts' and of the standard more-or-less Leavisian interpretation, and either did not register or failed to regard as important not only the consistently mediocre control of language but the seriously flawed substance of the essay. If it is argued that my notion of what ought to characterize a distinction is arbitrary, one response must be that the mark is invalid in relative terms. A comparison with the marking of Essay D 3 follows below. Another response is that it is accepted doctrine that the A be awarded only to an essay which displays 'sound judgement of important issues' (see above: 26); the soundness of judgement displayed in D 2 is demonstrably uneven.

The point is germane to the concerns of this thesis inasmuch as there are grounds for speculation that substantial credit will tend to be given to answers which reproduce orthodox liberal pieties (apparently) supported by even astigmatic 'close reading' and which demonstrate a willingness to deal, however dubiously, with aspects of structure. At this point, it is as well to move on to discussion of Essay D 3 so that comparison can be made.

Essay D 3 : Mark awarded: 15 out of 30; not moderated.

The essay starts: 'The main theme of the book Victory is one of love versus evil.' This idea is apparent in a number of essays from various schools. It seems to be based on the opening words of the 'Themes' section of the *Guidelines* on *Victory*.

There are two major themes:

1. Evil
2. Love (1990: 32).

The impression that *Guidelines* has been this candidate's main source is confirmed by various details. One is "'Love conquers all'", which echoes the 'LOVE conquers all' (33) with which the 'Themes' section closes. Later in the essay, there is elaboration on this point:

No matter how hard man tries to destroy his fellow men that he never will because as I said love does conquer all and it certainly did in Victory!

This is clearly based on:

The Victory is the triumph of Good over Evil. It is the proving that no matter how man may try to destroy his fellow men he will never succeed, for LOVE conquers all (*ibid*).

Another detail echoing *Guidelines* is:

The victory of good over evil is seen when Lena is dying. "The spirit of the girl which passed away from under them (thunder clouds fading away which represent evil) clung to her triumph convinced of her victory over death.

In *Guidelines*, the relevant detail from p 406 of *Victory* is quoted with a parenthesized clarification of 'them':

At the end of the novel we read 'The spirit of the girl which was passing away from under them (the thunder clouds) clung to her triumph convinced of the reality of her victory over death' (33).

The parenthesis suggests the influence of *Guidelines* with the addition of the simplistic but not necessarily invalid idea that the thunder clouds 'represent evil'.

The sub-examiner's general comment is 'Shallow response'. This is valid, but it is significant that Essay D 3 is regarded as inferior to D 2 to the extent indicated by the awarding of 50% to the former and 80% to the latter, especially as D 2 and D 3 have been marked by the same sub-examiner. D 3 includes points such as the noting of Heyst's 'strange philosophy of life, one in which he uses to protect himself against hurt and sorrow', followed by this observation: 'At the end of the book he realizes that his philosophy had a lack of one element and that was "love".' The idea is developed: 'Although he had committed no evil he had also experienced no love.' Heyst's helping Morrison and Lena is seen as 'no sign of pity but a sign of love even though it was covered up by this excuse.' This might be 'shallow', as the sub-examiner claims, and poorly expressed, but it is coherent. D 2 is characterized by expression which is not much superior to D 3's, and important aspects of its content are untenable and therefore worse than shallow (since shallowness is not invalidity as such), even if, unlike D 3 it is not tainted with echoes of *Guidelines*.¹ It would seem that D 2 is greatly rewarded for manifesting what strikes both the sub-examiner and the examiner as relative sophistication in tackling aspects of *Victory* such as 'conflicts', whose 'eyes' are seen through and the naming of Lena. Perhaps the markers did not regard the flaws in the treatment of these aspects as being as serious as I do; perhaps they did not notice them. It is valid to speculate that the mere registration of codical indices² established within Anglo-American heuristic and hermeneutic practice has a good chance of impressing examiners.

Essay D 4 : Mark awarded: 20 out of 30; not moderated.

The writer of Essay D 4 is not a 'top' candidate with a well-developed ability to marshal a substantial body of material in support of his positions, but he demonstrates an ability to think for himself and to respond authentically. His essay is 'sound', his answer is 'direct' and he is 'perceptive'; the lack of well-developed substantiating references to content and a good deal of mediocre and even near-incoherent expression probably causes the sub-examiner to feel that the essay falls short of warranting a B. The mark

¹ There is no way of knowing whether the sub-examiner recognized the echoes of *Guidelines*. No annotation gives a clue. I can report that NED Literature examiners have traditionally had a hostile attitude to *Guidelines*. They have said as much when I have been present.

² Namely, in this case, conflict, point of view and the use of metonymical naming (or 'characteronyms' or 'tag names', to give terms sometimes used).

seems fair. What I like about Candidate D 4's work is his ability to think his way through to his own position, even though he does not always express himself coherently.

The essay starts:

I don't totally agree with the statement. I believe that Conrad's treatment of the evil and good characters does shape the central argument of the novel but I don't believe that it was a contrasting treatment.

I believe that the treatment of the characters was equal. There was no prejudice against either set of characters and they were both subjected to good times and bad times.

Later: 'the struggle is a very close one, that good doesn't have a great advantage.' The idea is developed with reference to the title of the novel:

... the triumph of good over evil from which the 'Victory' is received. Conrad shows that through the characters of Lena and Heyst, good defeats evil with the death of Jones, Ricardo and Pedro. There is still the idea that the victory is not a great one as we also see the death of Heyst and Lena.

A difference between this essay and one which would deserve a really high mark is that there is no development of the insight shown. D 4 does not extend or expand his thinking into an explicit consideration that the 'central arguments of the novel' are not as optimistic about the power of 'good' as many readers (such as Candidate A 2) consider. His argument does imply this position and it is to his credit that he is free of what can be termed the 'Leavisian' tendency to play down the hard reality of the tragic fates of the two principal 'good' characters.

Essay D 5 : Mark awarded: 14 out of 30; moderated by the examiner, who confirms the mark.

While it is true that this essay is characterized by 'not much success in giving a clear or well-argued ... answer to the question', it has moments which make me feel that placing it in the lowest category of pass is harsh.

The essay starts: 'It must firstly be established, that as the author of the book, Conrad has invented these characters and predetermined their role in the novel.' Although such a comment shows unawareness that novels do not necessarily develop according to an author's rigorously applied master-plan, it is refreshing to note that Candidate D 5 understands that a novel is an artefact. The question itself suggests this, with its reference to the author's 'contrasting treatment' of characters and to 'the central arguments of the novel'. The point is worth making because teachers often fail to emphasize this point and pupils often fail to grasp it. The ontological nature of the literary text thus becomes blurred: it is related to and discussed as if it were some kind of report of actual historical events. It can safely be assumed that only rarely is a pupil so confused that she thinks of fictional characters as having had flesh-and-blood existence. However, Candidate D 3, for example, is not unusual in not demarcating within his own mind (or at least in his writing) the difference between what he takes to be the nature of

what Leavis would call 'life' and the material in the text being analysed. D 3 feels that 'No matter how hard man tries to destroy his fellow man that he never will because ... love does conquer all'. This optimistic philosophy is separated from what is presented in *Victory*, inasmuch as D 3 immediately adds 'and it certainly did in *Victory*!' Yet the form of the separation suggests that *Victory* is validated as a representation of reality because of its adherence to a certain model of how things are. It cannot be determined whether D 3 is so influenced by the novel that he adopts a sense of reality like that he, prompted by *Guidelines* (see above: 48), takes it (the novel) to present, or whether he, again prompted by *Guidelines*, interprets *Victory* as agreeing with an attitude he holds prior to reading it. What is clearer is that he is not as aware as Candidate D 5 that *Victory* is an artefact with a relationship to extra-literary reality dependent on an artist's proclivities. (Neither candidate explicitly exhibits a sense that the reader's proclivities co-determine what the meaning of the novel might be.)

The examiner's response, identifiable by the use of green ink, to one further detail of Essay D 5 warrants specific mention. The detail is: 'Ricardo is portraid as a man who sees his manhood as being a knife'. A green rectangle is drawn around this sentence and 'WHAT!' is appended in the margin. The next sentence is: 'Conrad clearly shows how Lena takes Ricardo's manhood away from him by disarming him.' The expression is unclear and the idea is not coherently related to the question. However, the examiner seems not to understand that the point is essentially that which Moolman makes about Ricardo's knife's being a phallic symbol. Moolman's commentary has probably had an influence on the teaching of *Victory* in School D; if anything, Candidate D 5 deserves some credit for casting the idea in his own words and not slavishly repeating Moolman's. Because of simple human error on her part, the examiner does not understand the candidate's point, and, given the degree of attention she pays the detail, her impression of the whole essay is quite likely influenced. This is a pity, as the candidate demonstrates a valid if imperfect grasp of both an aspect of the psychology of Ricardo and how to interpret at the symbolic, or at least general figurative, level.

None of the essays from School D displays any sense of larger socio-political implications of *Victory*. Only Candidate D 5 suggests a qualification of the idea that good triumphs over evil, and he does so in a less-than-substantial way. If one were to apply the standard statistical Z-test to the datum that 11 out of 12 members of a sample in a 'population' of 174 have a given characteristic, one could say that, at the standard 95% level of confidence, between 76% and 100% of the entire year-group would have this characteristic.¹ From these data, two inferences can be drawn about the teaching of *Victory* at School D: firstly, a specific interpretation, which can be described in general terms as Leavisian, has been inculcated; secondly, problematization of interpretation has not been stressed.

¹ Calculation done by Mr Jeff Cohen of the Mathematics Department of Herzlia Senior High School, sometime external examiner in Mathematics Method. University of Cape Town.

School E

Essay E 1 : Mark awarded: 25 out of 30; not moderated.

The first paragraph reads:

I do not believe that the contrasting treatment of the good and evil characters shapes the central arguments of the novel. Rather that Schomberg, Mr. Jones, Ricardo and Pedro represent reality - the real world - as does Lena and Morrison; and that Heyst's world represents illusion. The characters which may be perceived of as evil, are such that they will shock Heyst out of his private, secluded world and make him realise that his existence is meaningless, fruitless.

This is a relatively sophisticated way of saying that Heyst's policy of detachment is dysfunctional. The sub-examiner's marginal comment is 'Contradiction, surely?' The sub-examiner's meaning is probably that the concomitant of Heyst's realizing the invalidity of his policy is his grasping that life *has* (or ought to have) meaning: this is a reasonable attitude. However, the candidate probably means that Heyst's life has been 'meaningless, fruitless' as a *result* of his policy, whereas it ought not to have been. The sub-examiner seems to have given the candidate the benefit of the doubt, which is just.

The approach signalled in the introductory paragraph is coherently and in the main fluently developed. In concluding, the candidate uses the 'No man is an island' formula which predictably occurs in a number of essays from various schools, and avers that Heyst must be shown 'that every human being needs to be committed to and responsible for someone to survive.'

To their credit, the markers show no tendency to disapprove of the use of 'No man is an island'. The image is effective - as its popularity indicates - and embodies a socially important idea. Unfortunately, it has come to be regarded by some educated adults as so staled by use as to have become a cliché. Whatever the degree of validity of such a view, the quotation would be of recent acquisition and quite likely strikingly revelatory for a secondary-school pupil, and therefore its use in these essays deserves to be treated with respect. Moreover, given the setting of *Victory*, it is particularly appropriate in context and is used by at least one institutionally authoritative commentator on the novel (see Karl 1960: 265 & below: 114).

A *caveat* is in order here. The educational value of a slogan-like quotation such as 'No man is an island' is subject to (possibly rapid) vitiation if automatized as a mere oft-repeated device to impress markers. The verbal formula achieves a pat familiarity and the concept is consequently encased apart from those aspects of the subject's sensibility engaged with extra-literary reality. Donne's dictum can be a 'vague and traditional liberal and Christian idea' (see above: 36) which is a pious bromide rather than an indication of activated social consciousness. But, for the reason adduced above, the public-examination marker cannot justly assume that a formula such as 'No man is an island' ought on principle to be treated with such scepticism, even if the teacher ought to inform her pupils of the potential adverse effect on their own thinking as well as on reception of their writing of such formulas.

E 1 is a superior Senior-Certificate-level response. That aside, it can be noted that the essay can be placed strictly in the tradition of which FR Leavis is the best-known representative. The closing words - 'committed to and responsible for *someone* to survive' - are particularly clearly indicative of a reflexive focus on private as opposed to larger social relationships. It would be absurd to suggest that Leavis and other commentators generally classifiable as liberal humanist focus on individual and private relationships to the exclusion of larger social and political concerns. However, the dominant tendency among them is to centre the individual life; attention to socio-political shaping forces, when it is present, tends all too often to revert to consideration of individual morality and immorality of essentially obscure and limitedly psychological or crypto-theological provenance.

Essay E 2 : Mark awarded: 23 out of 30, confirmed by the examiner.

The opening paragraph reads:

For Lena to gain her victory at the end of the novel Joseph Conrad had to create a strong contrast between the good and evil characters. Lena's victory was in gaining Heyst's love and in saving him from the evil desperadoes. The victory was also in the defeat of the evil characters against the good. Heyst's detachment policy is also broken by the intrusion of evil onto his good life on the island and this leads to his final realisation that his policy was inadequate for life. By contrasting the characters it is revealed that man is either good or evil and he can never be an 'onlooker'.

The sub-examiner's comment is 'Pleasant, sincere approach. Fluent, logical development.' The mark is a 'top B' and the essay is therefore regarded as most successful by both sub-examiner and examiner. Once again, full acceptance of a traditional liberal approach is indicated. The approach is broadly Leavisian, although FR Leavis is not as oblivious of socio-political considerations as the writer of essay E 2 and many others taught in the Cambridge School tradition. The apodictic quality of 'it is revealed that man is either good or evil' is a manifestation of naive moral essentialism divorced from consideration of socio-political shaping forces.

Later, the candidate points out that Jones is 'clean-shaven', Ricardo 'has a moustache', Schomberg 'has a beard' and Pedro 'is hairy all over'. The details are accurate: Jones has a 'clean-shaven, extremely thin face' (98), Ricardo has 'a thin, dishevelled moustache' (100), Schomberg is 'a big manly, bearded creature' (20), and Pedro is 'a nondescript, hairy creature' (99). The candidate sees these characteristics as significant of the different levels occupied by the four men. Moolman does not focus on the relative hairiness of the villains, and the essay contains no explicit reference to Darwinism or evolution, but there is a good chance that the candidate has been influenced by her idea that 'Pedro, Ricardo and Jones can be seen to represent a Darwinian progression up the evolutionary continuum' (47). Whether or not Moolman has influenced the candidate, the positioning of Schomberg within the pattern, and, for that matter, the interpretation of the relative hairiness of the characters, is impressive as 'close reading' on the part of the

candidate or her teacher or some other source. (One might quibble that Heyst has a moustache and that the pattern therefore does not hold; however, it can be counter-argued that Heyst is set apart from the cluster of destructive characters and that 'his red-gold pair of horizontal moustaches' which 'had grown to truly noble proportions' [8] is presented favourably whereas the corresponding aspects of appearance of the four disreputable characters are presented unfavourably.)

The essay is as traditional and over-simplifying in its perspectives as most of the others, not only in this batch but in all ten of those selected. A typical passage is:

The central argument of the novel is a universal theme of good triumphing over evil. The island of Samburan is at first a paradise where Lena and Heyst represent good. The materialistic, evil world intrudes into this paradise turning it into an evil place.

The materialism of the 'evil world' is not attributed to any social, political or economic cause. Vehicle and tenor are in effect indistinguishable: manifest evil is essential evil of crypto-theological or at least vaguely metaphysical origin. Later, the point is made that the 'Ah, Davidson' speech 'could apply to the realisation of the failure of his detachment policy or to the universal theme that good will conquer evil.' The point about a 'universal theme' of the triumph of good over evil is thus repeated and insisted upon. In this essay there is particularly explicit reproduction of the Christian doctrine which can be discerned as having been absorbed as a key assumption in much traditional liberal humanist thought: that basic truth about morality is accessible and that 'good' must emerge triumphant over 'evil'.

Essay E 3 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

This essay is more sophisticated than E 2 in the degree of independence of approach displayed in it. The reason for the sub-examiner's not rating it above the 'middle-B' level is apparent in her comment: 'Well-written, fluent, vibrant writing but tenuous link to the topic.'¹ Giving a 'middle-B' to an essay despite considering it to have only a 'tenuous link to the topic' is unusual. An implication is that, approval of style aside, the sub-examiner thinks that the ideas are impressive.

The essay starts:

It would be incorrect to interpret the novel as a battle between good and evil characters. If this had been the case, there would surely have been a victory for Lena and Heyst as a combined strength over the more malevolent characters in the novel. But, at the end of the novel we are faced with a handfull of dead characters who have been destroyed by what must be another force.

¹ Discussion of whether the sub-examiner is right in feeling that the essay is significantly 'off the topic' would be insufficiently germane to the concerns of this thesis to be warranted.

What this 'force' might be is explained: 'the inner-conflict of Axel Heyst is what shapes the novel' and leads to all of the deaths: Heyst's, Lena's and the three desperadoes'. At the end of the essay, the candidate avers that

Heyst dies a defeated man. This is not due to his conflict with other characters but conflict with himself. His suicide is a result of his realization that his principles are irrelevant in the real world. This force is far more powerful than the evil embodied in his enemies.

It is a defensible standard position that Heyst kills himself because he realizes that he has been disastrously misguided in basing his life on an illusion of detachment. As the candidate puts it, 'Conrad's main argument is that no man can exclude himself from the rest of the world in an attempt to spare himself the grief of loss.' The related conflict within Heyst is indisputably a key aspect of the novel.

But the implication in the first paragraph that this 'force' - Heyst's 'inner-conflict' - kills Jones, Ricardo and Pedro is incoherent. It may be suspected that the appeal of the apparently neatly packaging reductionism of the notion that 'the inner-conflict of Axel Heyst' is the key to everything significant in the novel has led to a vague, effectively metaphysical account of the psychological and moral condition of Heyst, one result of which is absurd.

The candidate has to an extreme extent reduced the novel to an investigation of an individual's psyche and its effects. 'The rest of the world' is not at all considered in terms of pressures which shape it independently of Heyst's 'inner-conflict'. Schomberg is seen as essentially a device 'to show how Heyst's inability to deal with life, leads to his attracting unsavoury characters and ultimately, his downfall.' There is no consideration of the desperadoes other than that they are 'unsavoury'. What might contribute to such unsavouriness other than (implicitly) essential nature is never mentioned.

Although the writer of E 3 has a mind of her own in that her approach is relatively independent, her ideas are, finally, ideologically typical of the essays from School E and, indeed, the overwhelming majority of the essays from all of the ten selected schools and of most critical discourse about *Victory*.

School F

Essay F 1 : Mark awarded: 25 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner's general comment is 'Exceptional, perceptive, logical.' This harmonizes precisely with the principle that essays scoring between 80 and 90 percent be 'exceptionally pleasing, interesting ... sensitive; showing sound judgement of important issues; logical development of argument.'

The writer of this essay shows a sense that *Victory* can be read as discoursing in a more subtle and complex way about 'good' and 'evil' than many candidates seem to grasp: 'The good (Heyst and Lena) and the evil (Jones, Ricardo etc) are contrasted but there is no absolute good and evil.' Using appropriate allusions to the plot in substantiation, this candidate makes the valid point that Heyst is worthy of being 'classed as good because of his concern for others.' The point might seem elementary, but it is

refreshing because it is plain, direct and as close to indisputable as I can imagine. It is also not really elementary, especially as it comes from a high-school pupil: the use of 'classed as' suggests an understanding that 'good' and 'evil' are categories which are determined by normative assumptions.

The essay continues:

But he is saved from the almost Christ-like figure that could evolve. This is shown by his withdrawal from Lena when she tells him she is not a good sort of girl. Also his struggle to give and express love, a major quality in Christ-like figures, is quite evident, and he does not have an easy time of it.

This is an aspect of the argument that 'absolute good and evil' are not presented in the novel: Heyst falls short of being truly 'Christ-like'. This demonstration that Heyst is not absolutely 'good' in Christological or otherwise mythical terms is perceptive, but would be more useful in materialistic terms were due attention paid to concrete social implications. Such attention is not forthcoming. Moreover, the assertion about Heyst's 'withdrawal from Lena when she tells him she is not a good sort of girl' is not defensible. On p 198, Lena tells Heyst: "I am not what they call a good girl." Heyst resumes speaking 'after a short silence'; he says "That sounds evasive" before continuing with his tale of his relationship with Morrison. Reflection, cogitation and even a trace of traditional gentlemanly embarrassment can be attributed to Heyst at this juncture, but there is no explicit or implicit mention of any kind of 'withdrawal' on his part. What seems to be happening is that the candidate has a case to make and interprets detail in a way which suits that case. There is no reason to assume bad faith. What is illustrated is a tendency to which even eminent published commentators are not immune: hermeneutic order and consistency are sought, and reading of aspects of a text can be distorted to fit a pattern legitimately derived from reading other aspects of that text.

Later, the candidate writes that

Plain Mr Jones may be the closest to a case of total evil or good. He is likened to Lucifer (although I take this with the proverbial pinch of salt! The phrase 'I am he who is', is too good to be true.)¹ rather got this conclusion from his removal from society ie Lucifer removed from Heaven. His 'wandering to and fro across the earth' is also reflected in the Bible where there is a text referring to Lucifer being made to 'wander the earth from end to end'.

The candidate goes on to view the contrast of Heyst and Jones in terms of 'moral vs amoral, semi-good versus very bad.'

If the premise is accepted that Heyst's 'struggle to give and express love' can be classed as a moral flaw, this diagram makes some sense; it is the premise which is problematic in its basing of a moral judgement on a psychological trait and its ignoring of the implications of details such as 'No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst (18).

Given that the essay has been written under examination conditions, the candidate can be forgiven the misquotation of Heyst's reporting of Jones's telling of his 'coming and

¹ Words missing before 'rather got' as in the original.

going up and down the earth' (317-318) and the confused reference to *Job*: Satan merely answers God's question about where he comes from with: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it' (*Job* 1:7); there is no mention of Satan's being 'made' to do anything.

The adversely critical attitude toward Conrad's means of associating Jones and Satan/Lucifer¹ is indicative of a liveliness of personal response and creditable even if one disagrees with it on the grounds that Jones's words are not 'too good to be true', or strained stylization on Conrad's part, but typical of the character's tendency toward self-dramatization. Such disagreement is not a sound basis for dismissiveness, and it is refreshing to come across a pupil who does not feel compelled to treat a 'classic' writer or text as a sacred cow in the course of an examination answer.

This essay demonstrates a coherent sense of the part played by myth in the presentation of Jones's 'evil'. However, it is a pity that it does not include discussion of Jones's non-mythical criminal behaviour. Focus on figurative devices is valid, but, given the assumptions of this thesis, should be accompanied by the citing of patterns of behaviour which make such figures concretely meaningful in real social terms. Teachers and examiners ought explicitly to challenge pupils to consider texts in such terms.

The sub-examiner seems to have been impressed by the discussion of both possible and clear biblical references and by the evidence of lively intelligence and authenticity of personal response. Given the general quality of answers to this question, 'exceptional' is a valid characterization. Given the phrasing of the question, I cannot adversely criticize the candidate for not including material which satisfies my ideologically determined sense of the value of the novel. I can only suggest again that it would be socially productive were examining to draw attention to clearly defined social issues.

F 1 was the only essay from this school awarded an A. There were three Bs, two of which will be discussed.

Essay F 2 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

In School F, teachers seem to have indicated that there is no absolutely neat division between 'good' and 'evil' characters. In this essay, an approach similar to that of F 1 is apparent: 'evil' is seen to be more unambiguously represented than 'good'; F 2 adds an undeveloped and therefore vague embellishment to do with Schomberg and Pedro:

The novel can be seen, in a sense, as a novel of good versus evil with Mister Jones and Ricardo representing evil and to a more limited extent Heyst and Lena representing some of the goodness prevalent in the novel. I would classify Schomberg and Pedro as neither good nor bad but rather as people stuck in between two opposites.

¹ The candidate's use of 'Lucifer' derives - as 'Lucifer removed from Heaven' indicates - from a knowledge of the myth originating in *Isaiah* 14:12: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!' (Authorised King James Version). The Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the most famous avatar of the Lucifer of the Latin Vulgate and King James Versions of *Isaiah*. In *Job*, the name is also Satan.

Later, this approach is reinforced with the standard assertion that Jones is 'stereotyped', while Heyst and Lena are 'essentially good people' who 'are by no means angelic and do have flaws but in contrast to Mr Jones and Pedro¹ they do symbolise good in the novel.' There follows clarification of what Heyst's 'flaw' is, but there is none of what Lena's might be:

His one great flaw is his removal from life that causes him to be unable to act in anger against these men. He refused to jump into the stream of life: "In his pride he determined not to enter it." Pride is a sin and as such we can see that he is by no means an angel or a Christ-like representation of goodness on earth.

The suggestion that Heyst's powerlessness results from his inability 'to act in anger' is valid.² The notion that Heyst is guilty of a 'sin' is problematic. The quotation (from p 176) is accurate, but the idea that Heyst's pride is sinful is not to be found in the novel: it is a judgement based on Christian dogma. Focus on the biblical aspects of the novel and a tendency to interpret *Victory* in Christian terms or strongly Christian-influenced terms are ubiquitous in the essays from School F; however, there is often confusion in the details of this approach. In essay F 2, for instance, a biblical origin is attributed to Jones's 'I am he who is' (317), but the comment is: 'This is a clear indication to the bible where Satan says very much the same thing to Eve in the Garden of Eden.' There is no such detail in *Genesis*. The closest approximation to a biblical antecedent is in *Exodus* 3:14, which reads: 'And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you' (Authorised King James Version). Moreover, "Jehovah" ... means "He is" or "He will be" (footnote to *Exodus* 3:15 in the New International Version; my ellipsis). The sub-examiner does not give any indication of awareness that the allusion is muddled.

The essay closes with a conventional attribution of the 'victory' to Lena 'and to a lesser extent Heyst'.

The sub-examiner's general comment is 'Sound - some insight - not very exciting' (the sub-examiner's emphasis). A 'middle-B' is awarded. The general understanding is that an essay in this category might not be brilliant, but must be characterized by 'reasoned argument' with 'careful selection of material'. The mark is two symbols superior to the average (as determined in terms of both statistical norms and non-statistical evaluative criteria) and, while emphatically indicating that the essay is not of distinction quality, also signals that it is not far short of this level.

Even if the typical absence from this essay of any mention of concrete socio-political issues be ignored, and even if I take into account my ideological and reflexive scepticism of Christian assumptions, the narrowness of focus on and the inadequacies in the adumbrating of biblical allusions are significant flaws. Inadequately justified and naively Christian impositions on *Victory* of dogma such as 'Pride is a sin' also mar this essay: the implicit tendency to view *Victory* as endorsing Christian assumptions is poorly founded.

¹ The sub-examiner seems not to have registered, or (justifiably) to have forgiven as an unimportant slip, the use of 'Pedro' instead of 'Ricardo'.

² See below (60) in the discussion of Essay F 3: textual justification is offered for the assertion that Heyst 'lacks the requisite ruthlessness or toughness to act on his understanding'.

On the other hand, it can be argued that, even if the relevant biblical details are muddled in the candidate's (or his teacher's) memory, the essay demonstrates a consistent attempt to interpret the novel and answer the questions in terms of a significant structuring and meaning-generating device (biblical allusion). This might be a narrow approach, but the candidate has approximately forty-five minutes in which to write an essay of about five hundred words, and it could validly be asserted that there is nothing amiss in choosing a specific important structuring device as a peg on which to hang one's response under the limiting circumstances prevailing.

It is interesting that this candidate 'would classify Schomberg and Pedro as neither good nor bad but rather as people stuck in between two opposites', but I would like to know why he feels this way. If I were to teach this novel today, I would suggest that Schomberg can be viewed as a distasteful product of the exploitative capitalist and colonialist enterprise. He is not a straightforward criminal like Jones and Ricardo, but his attitudes are the epitome of crass capitalism which values people strictly in terms of their material benefit to him. Lena is a subordinate female who is to be used; anyone not white is a natural inferior and servant; Heyst's not patronizing his table-d'hôte is an unforgivable sin. In Part 2, Chapter 6, he is presented as pathetic in the contemptible sense. His 'Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve bearing' is a device 'by which he tried to keep up his self-respect before the world' and he suffers from 'A great loneliness' (119). Yet any touch of compassion on the narrator's part is qualified by details such as his mentioning Schomberg's fantasizing about screwing his wife's head off, a deed for which he knows he is 'too tame' (120): he is a coward as well as a bully. Schomberg is not directly physically deadly like the desperadoes, but he hardly has anything 'good' about him. It can be surmised that candidate F 2 identifies a person as fully 'evil' only if that person is explicitly a homicidal criminal in conventional legal terms. This strikes me as betraying a significant degree of entrapment in a narrowly conventional moral framework which is inimical to thinking about social morality in really constructive terms. Teaching should subvert such narrowly conventional frameworks.

As for the vague sense that Pedro is 'neither good nor bad', it is a pity that the candidate has not developed a sense of Pedro as representative warped victim of colonialism. It verges on certainty that no-one has put the possibility to him.

Essay F 3 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

Concerning the assertion in the question, the candidate comments: 'This statement is true to a certain extent, but there is another factor which influences these arguments.' Elaboration follows: the 'contrast of Schomberg, Jones, Ricardo and Pedro with Lena and Heyst

show the conflict of good versus evil and bring forward the morality and immorality of mankind. Yet all that this contrast does is support the true central argument of the novel: can a man truly ever escape from the world? What this novel does is prove that a man cannot do this. Heyst "sat on the banks

of the river of life and determined not to enter.”¹ This decision proved to be fatal to Heyst, because if Heyst was more involved in the ways of the world, he would have had a better understanding of the conflict between good and evil.

The valid ideas that *Victory* examines relative morality, that one cannot ‘escape from the world’ and that attempts to do so are dysfunctional are quite clearly presented. It could be objected that the notion that Heyst lacks ‘understanding of the conflict between good and evil’ is problematic because it would be more textually grounded to argue that he lacks the requisite ruthlessness or toughness to act on his understanding: in his own words, he has ‘no experience’ of ‘the greatest enterprises of life’, namely ‘To slay, to love’ (212); he confesses that his detachment has caused it to be ‘against the grain’ for him to use deceit’ (318); he is uncertain that he could bring himself to ‘cut [the desperadoes’] throats one after another, as they slept’ even if he were armed with ‘anything bigger than a penknife’ (350). So the ‘decision’ to be detached ought not simply to be presented as ‘fatal to Heyst’ on the grounds that it adversely affects his ‘understanding’ of anything.

The candidate later writes:

Good overcomes evil. This is all that is achieved in this novel.
No-one wins. Lena, in a sense has victory, but she dies and never knows Heyst’s true feelings for her. All the main characters eventually die, and thus no-one has a personal victory. They are all pawns in the game of good versus evil.

The essay concludes: ‘Therefor: “no man is an island” and no man can escape the world.’ Relatively sophisticated thinking is interwoven with some muddle and woolliness. Scepticism about the achievement of ‘personal victory’ by any character is sound. Heyst, Lena and the desperadoes do die, and only Lena can be said to die happily; even the ‘triumphant’ quality of her death (407) is arguably the result of illusion, since her sense of Heyst’s ‘stooping over her with a kindly, playful smile, ... ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart - for ever!’ (*ibid*; my ellipsis) is a fantasy as it does not correspond to the reality of the inability of ‘his fastidious soul’ to utter ‘the true cry of love’ and of the ‘unconcealed despair’ (408) which is soon to drive him to suicide. In this regard, the candidate’s idea that Lena’s ‘victory’ is significantly qualified because she ‘never knows Heyst’s true feelings for her’ is misdirected.

To assert that ‘Good overcomes evil’ and that ‘No-one wins’ seems contradictory at first glance, but makes some sense in context, in that the candidate distinguishes between ‘personal victory’ and the notion that impersonal² ‘good’ defeats impersonal ‘evil’, the characters being merely ‘pawns in the game’ of this struggle. This is a simple metaphysic likely to be descended from Christian optimism. It should be standard classroom procedure supported by examination practice to challenge pupils to

¹ The quotation marks are misplaced. The detail in *Victory* on which this ‘quotation’ seems to be based is: ‘And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it’ (175-176). The idea is accurate, however.

² Not the candidate’s word.

problematize the ideological content of any and all discourse, including their own. Moreover, pupils ought to have impressed on them the need to distinguish between their own opinions and beliefs and those they attribute to the text. It is not clear whether the writer of F 3, for instance, believes in the cited metaphysic, attributes it to *Victory* or both. If a pupil accepts as meaningful in real terms a notion such as 'the game of good versus evil', he ought to know - he ought to have been taught - that clarity and precision would require his explicitly signalling his ideological standpoint with, for instance, words such as 'From a Christian (or Judaic, Islamic, *etc*) point of view' or 'From a viewpoint influenced by Christianity (or Judaism, Islam, *etc*)'. If the candidate sees the metaphysic as promoted by the text, he ought to evaluate it in terms of its applicability to extra-literary reality (commonly called 'real life' by pupils): a pupil with my kind of attitude would perhaps describe it as 'airy-fairy', 'irrelevant to real life' or even 'useless'; another might see it as 'a worthwhile idea because we need to believe in the power of good if we are to be positive about life'. The crucial point is that pupils should be taught not to take for granted - in effect, they should be taught to problematize - and to judge such notions as that under discussion. Such problematization and evaluation would not require unusual intellectual ability on a pupil's part and would conduce not only to greater rigour and clarity of communication but to his understanding that interpretations and values depend on assumptions which are not universally accepted or capable of incontrovertible proof. This elementary understanding is one of the most important - arguably the most important - which a pupil ought to absorb when 'doing English'.

Essay F 4 : Mark awarded: 23 out of 30; moderated to 22.

In general, the major trends in the answers from School F have been typified in the discussions of Essays F 1, F 2 and F 3. However, there is an aspect of another essay which deserves mention, as it gives rise to a consideration of social importance.

The writer of F 4 feels that the 'evil trio contains an element opposed to woman and an element not opposed to woman.' Certainly, Jones is a pathological misogynist and Ricardo is a passionate pursuer of Lena. But it seems to me that pupils, particularly males (and School F is a single-sex institution for boys), ought to be conscientized about sexual politics. Ricardo is 'not opposed to woman' in the way Jones is, but he can be seen as having attitudes which are in effect hostile to women. To read Ricardo in this way is to display an approach influenced by feminist discourse most (if not all) of which has been produced well after Conrad's lifetime, but, although the discursive formation in which the novel is originally written is significant, in the 1990s it verges on being tritely obvious that the 're-writing' of the text in terms current now is both inevitable and valid for readers living now.

Ricardo attempts to rape Lena: 'Ravish or kill - it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long' (288). He fails because Lena defends herself violently, repels him and earns his respect. Aside from his sense of class solidarity with her and his respect for the strength of character manifest in her self-defence, he considers that 'A woman that does not make a noise after an attempt of that kind has tacitly condoned the offence', so 'He felt flattered' (294). It is unfortunate that a pupil can sum up Ricardo's attitude to Lena with the notion that,

contrary to Jones, he is 'not opposed to woman'. Ricardo's male vanity, his sense that any woman can be conceived of as a fair target for a rape attack, his almost laughably stereotyped view of a woman's attitudes and the nexus of sexual lust and repressed savagery which motivate the attack are all symptomatic of an extreme (if not rare) form of typical male sexism. The form taken by his sexual fetishism is of a piece with this: "Give your foot," he begged in a timid murmur, and in the full consciousness of his power" (400). Here we have a species of the domination-subservience syndrome which DH Lawrence explores in depth in, especially, *Women in Love*. The infantile eroticism of Ricardo's pseudo-self-subordination has as its obverse a destructive enjoyment of potentially violent power over the female. The rapist fully co-exists with the false slave. For all his pathetically self-deluding talk of wanting Lena to be his 'chum' (*ibid*), Ricardo is incapable of recognizing the co-equal humanity of a woman. He is as much an enemy of womankind as is Jones. He is also far more typical than Jones, and discussion of his response to women should prove more useful than discussion of Jones's pathology in this regard.

Moreover, the novel contains a number of details which suggest that it itself has the potential to propagate sexist stereotyping. To give one instance, the narrator writes of Lena:

Mistress of herself from pride, from love, from necessity,
and also because of a woman's vanity in self-sacrifice,
she met Heyst, returning from the strangers' bungalow,
with a clear glance and a smile (314; italics added).

Victory is readily understood as in some of its aspects exposing the absurdities and destructiveness of male sexism and in others of itself adopting a sexist attitude, unless it be argued that the narrator does not necessarily reflect the attitude of the novel or of the implied or historically real author, 'Conrad'. Such a defence of *Victory* against the charge of sexism would be strongly tendentious: it is a commonplace of commentary on *Victory* that the narrator has by late in the novel lost whatever definition as a mere 'character' - a member of the white colonial sub-culture - he might have earlier, and he is not comfortably distinguishable from the traditional omniscient third-person narrator by this stage. The most viable distinction between the forms of sexism of Jones and Ricardo and that of the narrator and, almost irresistibly, the novel itself, is that the latter is paternalistic as opposed to blatantly destructive. Classroom discussion of this cluster of issues would clearly be of social value.

School G

No As were awarded to essays from this school. There were five Bs: one essay received 22 and four received 21. The single 'middle-B' and one of the 'bottom-Bs' will be discussed as representative.

Essay G 1 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

The basis of the essay is disagreement with the assertion in the question that it is 'Conrad's contrasting treatment of the evil characters ... and the good' which 'shapes the central argument of the novel':

I am not sure that his contrasting treatment of these characters shapes the central arguments of the novel. I do not think that this was his sole purpose in writing the novel.

The candidate's thinking is flawed in that a 'treatment' which 'shapes the central arguments of the novel' does not have to be an author's 'sole purpose in writing' it. But this is of slight significance, given that this is a standard ten essay written under examination conditions. I see it as a virtue that the candidate explicitly and honestly indicates that she is 'not sure' about a central issue: authenticity of response as well as an understanding that reading does not require arrival at cut-and-dried solutions is evident. Moreover, the essay is in the main coherently constructed and its thesis competently supported by reference to content. This thesis is summed up in the closing words:

The need to become involved, to commune with others is central argument of Joseph Conrad's novel, *Victory*. This, and not the contrast of characters, is why he wrote the book.

The virtue of this approach is that it focuses on the dysfunctional nature of social detachment and eschews loose discussion about the metaphysics of 'good' and 'evil'. However, its assumptions and orientation show the influence of traditional liberal humanism of the kind which deals with the individual condition largely or completely in isolation from social context:

Heyst's character seems misformed. He lacked maternal love and was very skeptical of other's motives. He lived by his father's philosophy, because he never knew any other way of behaving. So, Heyst was alone and no one could understand him. I believe that it was for this reason that Heyst became a drifter, a hermit. Yet his whole character and personality called out for something different.

Heyst was afraid to become involved, but he needed to become involved.

In effect, the burden of this candidate's case is that Heyst is the victim of dysfunctional conditioning which clashes with his essential nature - implicitly 'good' or 'normal' human nature - and causes him unease. The novel is therefore seen as principally about the individual's 'need to become involved' and 'to commune with others' if he is to be fulfilled. The emphasis is consistently on the psychology of Heyst as an individual, and concomitantly on the undesirable effect *on Heyst* of his father's policy. There is no consideration of the socio-political causes, effects and general implications of the social alienation of Heyst or of Lena, Jones or any other character.

Relatedly, it is worth mentioning that a few of the essays from School G briefly discuss Pedro. In Essay G 1, it is pointed out that he 'is used by Mr Jones and Ricardo.' In another essay from this school, it is remarked that:

Pedro can't actually be described as evil because he was forced to go with the two villains after they had killed his brother, he had nowhere else to go, so he followed them.

This interpretation of Pedro's motives for following Jones does not accord with Ricardo's explanation to Schomberg that Pedro is grateful for being allowed to live and that "A dog knows a gentleman" (145). The reader has only Ricardo's account to go on, although she (the reader) might register what Ricardo does not, namely the political implications of the subjugated sensibility. What is not apparent in this essay, in G 1 or in other essays which distinguish Pedro as less blameworthy than Jones and Ricardo is any idea that the South American peasant can be viewed as a representative victim of European exploitation.¹

Essay G 2 : Mark awarded: 21 out of 30; not moderated.

A number of essays from School G adopt the approach that the assertion in the question is (in this candidate's words) 'not entirely true or false'. Also typical of the batch is the opinion that 'Lena was a symbol of true love and good in the novel and gave Heyst no real reason to be isolated and detached.' The sub-examiner's comment on this point is 'Good'.

The essay continues: 'She loved him truly but because of his cynical detachment he could never return her love.' And later:

Lena thus shows us in the novel that the world is not entirely evil and bad and through this Conrad is trying to show us that Heyst's philosophy actually has no real foundation.

The candidate lists the forms of harm which result from Heyst's relationship with Morrison and Lena and comments: 'Heyst may thus have had reason to be detached and isolated.' It can be argued that there is a degree of self-contradiction here, in that it seems as if G 2 argues both that the philosophy of detachment 'has no real foundation' and that it does have such a basis. However, a 'real foundation' and a 'reason' for 'Heyst's philosophy' might not be precisely the same thing: a 'reason' can be wrong-headed. How far the candidate is conscious of this distinction is not indisputably clear, although she deserves the benefit of the doubt, not only on principle but because the last paragraph of the essay indicates that she has a sense that the novel can be read as equivocal about the reasonableness of the policy of detachment:

The world is thus not a 'bad dog' as Heyst put, because there are good and evil characters in the novel and Heyst thus had no reason, or perhaps he did, to become isolated.

Perhaps inadequate fluency has prevented the candidate from clearly expressing a sense either of the openness of the text to varying interpretation or of equivocation's being the essence of its presentation of detachment. Perhaps there has not been crystallization of either of these notions in her mind, even though some notion of one or both of them is present. (In this regard it should be noted that availability of words and capacity to

¹ The idea that Pedro is a relative innocent crops up in a number of essays from some other schools. None of them notes any possible political implication of the idea.

conceptualize cannot be neatly distinguished. It is empirically apparent that they are inter-related while being linguistically and conceptually distinguishable.)

Whatever the case, this candidate, together with others from School G, seems to have received credit for having some grasp of the idea that *Victory* ought not to be interpreted in cut-and-dried terms and that the examination question does not need to be simply agreed or disagreed with: this would indicate a sound approach on the part of the sub-examiner and, by implication, sound policy on the part of the examiner. There is, however, no indication of substantial understanding of possible larger socio-political implications of the novel. 'Good' is simply identified with love and charitable attitudes at the inter-personal level. The idea of 'evil' is taken for granted and not investigated. The relationship between criminality and concrete social causes and effects is not considered.

School H

Essay H 1 : Mark awarded: 25 out of 30; moderated to 26.

This was the only A awarded to an essay on *Victory* from this school. It is a lively, idiosyncratic and authentically 'personal' response to the question. The first marker's comment is 'Lovely'; the examiner clearly agrees. However, the ability of the essay to charm, entertain and suggest the relative sophistication of response of the writer ought not to blind one to its occasional descent into slickness and glibness.

An early point is:

It is obvious that Conrad is a man with obvious biases and preconceptions about the world (his sheltered lifestyle as a sailor the obvious reason) and his portrayal of the characters of good and evil are obvious.

The idea that a sailor's 'lifestyle' promotes 'biases and preconceptions' is loose and jejune pseudo-psychology. It is invalid as a basis for either interpretation of a text or explanation of its provenance. Moreover, the characterization of such a 'lifestyle' as 'sheltered' is an eccentric and wild assumption. The use of 'obvious' three times in quick succession not only begs questions but suggests a glossing-over (whether intentional or not) of problematic issues, with the qualification that, as regards the implicitly alleged stylization of 'good and evil', there is substantiating argument in later paragraphs.

The discussion of Schomberg is more valid:

Considering Conrad's portrayal of Schomberg, he is not to be taken seriously: He is a German (at the time of WW I) with thick bushy features, a large fat body with a rude manner and an insatiable gossiping strain which he uses to the full effect in his hotel.

On the one hand, the noting of the Germanophobia in the presentation of Schomberg is valid. The initial narrator's description of Schomberg as 'a big, manly, bearded creature of the Teutonic persuasion' (20) is one striking illustration of the novel's bias in this regard, especially as the derogation of the 'Teutonic' is never offset by an alternative

perspective. On the other hand, the treatment of Schomberg is more complex than Essay H 1 allows. It is true that it would take so much charitable feeling to sympathize with Schomberg that it is safe to describe him as a thoroughly despicable character. His watching the initial conversations between Heyst and Lena 'with a malicious enjoyment of the situation - a sort of Satanic glee' (93) is typical of how he is presented. Yet the narrator does take us into Schomberg's mind, and the yearnings, fears and confusions are not those of a straightforward caricature: he is more than a Great War-epoch cartoon Hun. For instance:

Forty-five is the age of recklessness for many men, as if in defiance of the decay and death waiting with open arms in the sinister valley at the bottom of the inevitable hill. Her shrinking form, her downcast eyes, when she had to listen to him, cornered at the end of an empty corridor, he regarded as signs of submission to the overpowering force of his will, the recognition of his personal fascinations. For every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and the human race come to an end (94).

In passages such as this, there is no redeeming revelation about Schomberg, yet his vulnerability and common humanity are stressed. It is too glib to dismiss him as a character 'not to be taken seriously'.

The argument that over-stylization¹ is a feature of, at least, the presentation of the villains is continued:

Bringing in the Big Guns of Badness are our three desperadoes - the Ghoulish Mr Jones, the feline Ricardo and the grovelling beast Peter/Pedro who is so disgustingly portrayed it is hard to imagine him as anything more than a gorilla with a white skin, a small brain and a bad temper.

The breezily cheeky response is attractive, especially coming as it does in the middle of scores of essays which are ploddingly solemn and all-too-often open to suspicion of inauthenticity of response. It must however be noted that the effect of this candidate's description of the villains relies not only on the extent to which Conrad's text does indeed belabour the 'ghoulish' quality of Jones, the 'feline' attributes of Ricardo and the ape-like appearance and manner of Pedro, but also on a stylization of stylizations and a caricaturing of caricatures: the elements of caricature are selected and rhetorically highlighted, while the complexities of presentation of Jones and Ricardo (see below: 160-161) and the possible status of Pedro as representative victim of exploitation (see above: 59, 63-64) are either ignored or not registered at all. In terms of a major concern of this thesis, the facile implied dismissal of 'the Big Guns of Badness' on the grounds of what is taken to be their lack of verisimilitude has the undesirable effect of nullifying or preventing cognition of their potential to generate consideration of the socio-political contributions to and effects of their 'Badness'.

The candidate later deals with various deaths. He validly links Pedro and Wang within

¹ Not the candidate's term.

the symmetrical structure of the presentation of the six non-native¹ characters on the island and calls Wang's killing of Pedro 'an obvious symbol² of good and light triumphant', which is a valid reading. However, he then goes on:

The other deaths are all obscure - Ricardo by Jones, Jones by accident/sickness,³ Lena by Jones and Heyst by suicide - which all seem ambiguous in the amount of good surpassing evil.

The use of 'obscure' is incoherent. The last clause of this extract is garbled, but the meaning emerges in the closing paragraph of the essay:

Of course, all the primary participants, the antagonist and the protagonist all die, so where is the Victory, where has all this characterisation and contrasting treatment of the central characters led to - immolation, crypts - graves? It has led to a shaping of the novel, the moulding of a damn fine story, but it also leads us to the victory of both parties - the Victory of death over evil, and good over death, Heyst and Lena will live together - forever immortal - when as a man Heyst could not even live with himself (or his father-inspired concepts of humanity). (Underlining in the original.)

The idea that 'Heyst and Lena will live together - forever immortal - has no textual basis. *Victory* does not suggest any tritely romantic pseudo-eschatology. The offered basis for the claim that 'good' enjoys a 'victory' over 'death' is therefore illegitimate. The idea that 'death' is victorious over 'evil' is more textually grounded, if flimsily conceived here. That 'all the primary participants ... die' is a point which has the potential to generate substantial interpretation, but such interpretation is not forthcoming. On the other hand, one has to take account of the difficulty Senior Certificate candidates face in producing detailed argument in the roughly forty-five minutes and two or three A 4 pages available per section of a Literature paper.

The emphasis on the deaths is placed with a rhetorical flourish which is pleasing because, typical of this essay, it suggests an energetic engagement with the text not often found in Senior Certificate examination answers. In context, however, it partakes of the lack of clarity of the point of which it is part, 'the Victory of death over evil, and good over death'.

Essay H 1 is not easy to evaluate. It is entertaining, sprightly and intelligent, but for me it does not convincingly demonstrate the 'sound judgement of important issues'

¹ Not the candidate's distinction.

² This use of 'symbol' could be viewed as loose. 'Allegorical representation' might be more accurate. However, the distinction is in context not important to the evaluation of the candidate's point.

³ Davidson tells the Excellency (411):

"... I suppose he tumbled into the water by accident - or perhaps not by accident. The boat and the man were gone, and the scoundrel saw himself all alone, his game clearly up, and fairly trapped. Who knows?"

The possibility that Jones commits suicide is worth some discussion - its implications have some substance - but it is not very important that the candidate has not noted it.

which is supposed to be a feature of a 'distinction-level' essay, particularly one which is only one mark short of the 27 out of 30 reserved for the 'truly outstanding'. However, the essay has a quality which deserves particular respect: it demonstrates a refreshingly iconoclastic attitude such as suggests a degree of immunity to the imposition of institutionally authoritative attitudes. It is probable that the markers have consciously rewarded this trait, in which case they have themselves manifested an attitude which is, in terms of an assumption of this thesis, commendable in teachers and educational institutions. Moreover, most explicitly in his discussion of the presentation of Schomberg, the candidate has shown that he has some sense of the way in which a text, even an institutionally venerated 'classic', can be marked by bias.

Given another basic assumption of this thesis, it is a pity that socio-political issues, if they have been mentioned at all in class in School H, have probably been scantily dealt with, since H 1 does not mention them, and of his schoolmates only H 2 touches on them at all, and then very slightly (see below: 69). I imagine that H 1 would have dealt with them in a lively way; even were an independent thinker such as he to assault my own icons and dismiss *Victory* as having little of value to suggest in this regard, he would have shown that he has been caused to think about them. Exposure to these issues is important, even though, as stressed above (18), 'specific ideological conditioning and inhibition of the pupil's heuristic and epistemological emancipation' is bad.

Essay H 2 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

This is a conventional essay in which there are a couple of points worth close consideration. The opening sentence is: 'The central arguments are whose victory is it ultimately, is it the victory of good or the victory of evil.' Toward the end of the essay, the answer is given that 'good' triumphs over 'evil', 'because Lena recieved recognition of Heyst's love which he could not express before and Heyst finally feels at peace with himself.' That the title, *Victory* might be ironic is not considered. The notions of 'good' and 'evil' and that one of them has to triumph are accepted uncritically. That Lena 'recieved recognition of Heyst's love' seems to mean acceptance of accuracy of perception in Lena's rhapsodical sense that Heyst 'was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart - for ever!' (407). There is no sense that Lena's belief is problematized by Heyst's 'infernal mistrust of all life' which 'even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips' (406). However, the candidate's point cannot be dismissed as invalid *per se*, since Heyst's inability to express love does not have to mean that he does not experience it. But there is no justification for the idea that 'Heyst finally feels at peace with himself'. *Lena* is 'profoundly at peace' (407), but the 'Ah, Davidson' speech is not that of a man 'at peace with himself'. There is a species of sentimentalizing in the candidate's reasons for thinking that 'good' triumphs over 'evil'. Perhaps straightforward misreading, possibly brought about or aggravated by classroom teaching or the reading of inferior commentary, is the cause. Alternatively, or in addition, the sentimentalizing might be a function of a desire, however conscious or unconscious, to believe in some form of benign universal order and to believe that institutionally significant texts support the existence of such an order.

Regarding the latter possibility, while general pessimism might be corrosive and both personally and socially dysfunctional, obliviousness of real social bases for both fulfilment and failure is promoted by acceptance of the notion that 'good' tends to defeat 'evil'. This notion is a piety which is basic (although not peculiar) to Christianity and other major theologies and my experience indicates that it is a standard assumption most teachers and pupils bring to bear on interpretation in our classrooms. Precisely because it is one of those ideas which tend to be taken for granted by pupils, it ought to be explicitly interrogated in class whenever the occasion presents itself.

There is in Essay H 2 some straightforward understanding of the nature of Jones's 'evil' in concrete social terms:

His evil arises from a hatred of society and the aristocracy and also his hatred of woman. He does not hesitate to kill and would do anything money and a profit.

What is lacking is any indication, however brief, that Jones's attitudes can be understood as symptomatic of a society distorted by a ruthless profit-ethic and conducive to alienation, or that he might, ironically enough, typify in extreme and overtly criminal form the decadence and exploitativeness of the privileged stratum from which he has been cast out because of his failure to adhere to the social ethics of members of his class. It would be absurdly ideological to suggest that these ethics are purely cosmetic, but, from a socially radical viewpoint, they do mask the parasitism of the class; a corollary is that one ought to consider the possible distinctions and contradictions between the norms of decency of any institutionally privileged group - not only the British hereditary upper crust - and the immorality of the practices by which they strive to maintain and strengthen their hegemony. The desire that pupils be aware of such a reading - such a co-writing of the 'writerly' text - is undeniably ideological. A proposition of this thesis is that such awareness is of real social value. What prevents the proposition from being authoritarian is that guiding pupils to be aware of a reading is not the same as imposing it as *the* reading.

Discussion of other essays from School H would not contribute anything not already discussed in the survey of H1, H 2 and the answers from other schools.

School I

School I is small: only forty-five candidates were registered to write the 1990 NSC examinations. Five candidates chose to write the essay on *Victory*. The small proportion of essays might be the result of English Department policy (see above:45).

Essay I 1 : Mark awarded: 26 out of 30, moderated to 25.

This is the only essay of the five to receive an A. It is for the most part (if not altogether) fluently written. Its interpretation of the novel is conventional.

A straightforward display of the 'the contrasting treatment of the evil characters ... and the good' is offered, with attention to the way in which Lena stands in contrast to Ricardo and Wang to Pedro.

The central structural feature of the essay is a contrasting of the 'Ah, Davidson' speech and the 'last words of the elder Heyst: "'Look on - make no sound'.'" ¹ The issue of the validity of the policy of detachment is thus stressed. The policy is seen as invalid: Heyst 'lives within an illusory world.' The 'victory' is thus of the attitude displayed in the 'Ah, Davidson' speech over that of the elder Heyst. The standard more-or-less Leavisian interpretation is enthusiastically affirmed in the last paragraph: 'Heyst and Lena achieve magnificent victories over tremendous odds and do not symbolise "Nothing" as it may seem at first.' This enthusiasm is related to some flawed reading: Lena, it is claimed, proves that love conquers all - evident in her ability to subdue and civilise the vicious Ricardo and, most important of all, teaches Heyst to express his emotions through love.

To claim that Lena 'proves love conquers all' is naively formulaic in the *Guidelines* mould (see above: 48 & below: 156). To claim that the proof is in Lena's 'ability to subdue and civilise Ricardo' is not viable. Ricardo is driven to turn against Jones by his sexual lust for and imaginative fixation on a physically attractive woman whom he considers to be like him in both class origin (as she is) and attitude (which she is not). He has been subdued only in the sense that Lena's cunning allows him to nurture his fantasy. He has not been 'civilised': he determines to kill both Jones and Heyst (398) in order to free Lena and himself from their respective 'gentlemen'. The claim about what Lena 'teaches Heyst' is less misdirected, but it is significantly problematic. However deep Heyst's feeling for Lena might be, his 'fastidious soul ... kept the true cry of love from his lips' (406; my ellipsis) even as she lies dying: this is the last of a number of explicit textual indications of Heyst's inability to learn to 'express his emotions through love'.

In rating this essay as 'distinction-level', the sub-examiner and the examiner demonstrate a willingness greatly to reward work which for the most part coherently reproduces the standard liberal pieties. They either do not notice or choose to ignore as insignificant the indicated failures of reading. I do not adversely criticize the cited details on ideological grounds, but because they are essentially untenable. There is a limit to how much variation of interpretation is rationally acceptable. Umberto Eco provides a simple yet useful way of reconciling acceptance that there is a limit to how much variation of interpretation is reasonable with acceptance of plurality, relativity, contingency and provisionality of interpretation:

I think that ... we can accept a sort of Popperian principle according to which if there are no rules that help to ascertain which interpretations are the 'best' ones, there is at least a rule for ascertaining which ones are 'bad' (my ellipsis).

One characteristic of an explanation worthy of dismissal is that it could not coexist with other hypotheses that proved to be reliable in order to explain phenomena that [the explanation being criticized] did not explain (1992: 52; my interpolation).

Eco illustrates his point with a discussion of why Ptolemaic cosmology fails in the light of the Keplerian hypothesis, but the simple yet valid logic he offers can be applied to any

¹ This is an accurate quotation from *Victory*: 175.

interpretative activities, including those expressed in details of a Senior Certificate examination essay. Essay I 1 offers comments on Lena's effects on Ricardo which 'could not coexist with other hypotheses that [are] reliable in order to explain' other ways in which Ricardo behaves, and which I 1 'did not explain' (*ibid*). Evaluation of a Senior Certificate essay needs to take into account that one is marking secondary-school work written under taxing examination conditions, but this does not mean that untenable (as opposed to merely unusual or idiosyncratic) interpretation of significant aspects of text should be accepted to the point of awarding an A. In my view, the writer of I 1 has fallen short of displaying 'sound judgement of important issues' to an extent sufficient to keep her essay out of the 'distinction-level' category.

Essay I 2 : Mark awarded: 22 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner's comment is 'Excellent - but very little dealing with the topic.' Since the mark awarded is less than a symbol below 'distinction-level', this remark suggests that the sub-examiner regards the understanding of *Victory* displayed in the essay to be worthy of an A, failure to deal with the topic aside. (Whether or not this essay fails as claimed is debatable; the issue is not, however, germane to the concerns of this thesis.)

While not unblemished, I 2 is unusually fluent and sophisticated relative to the bulk of essays from the selected schools. It starts:

The central argument of *Victory*, I feel, is an exploration of Heyst's 'defence against life': his negation of action, withdrawal from human involvement and refusal to commit himself.

Elaboration follows:

No man is an island, and commitment to humanity must surely take precedence over the individual human will. On a superficial level, *Victory* can be viewed as a "struggle between good and evil", a sort of island fairy-tale, however, the "unholy trio" serve a deeper purpose. They are not merely manifestations of evil, but representatives of humanity, of society itself ... "I am the world itself come to pay a visit." says Jones¹ (my ellipsis).

Heyst's involvement with Lena 'provides him with spiritual illumination about the shortcomings of his father's philosophy in the face of everyday exigencies.' At the end of the essay, the candidate states that she supposes that she agrees that the struggle between Lena and Ricardo is 'the epitome of the "good versus evil" struggle' but adds that it is 'not the central conflict of the novel.' She stresses 'action versus withdrawal' and concludes that 'in a sense, good does triumph over evil, but more importantly, Lena's philosophy of existence triumphs over Heyst's father's.'

The idea that the novel emphasizes the importance of 'commitment to humanity' as opposed to 'the individual human will' is textually justified. Presenting it uncritically

¹ There is here a slight misquotation, forgivable under examination conditions, of "... I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit ..." (379).

might simply mean a concentration on interpretation rather than evaluation of ideas. Alternatively, it might mean acceptance of a philosophy congruous with, *inter alia*, Christianity, Marxism and the more left-wing varieties of liberal humanism, as opposed to manifestations of liberalism, nowadays generally labelled 'conservative' or 'right-wing', which insist on the primacy of the individual and tend toward hostile suspicion of notions of unearned or *a priori* duty to the group, society or humanity as being subversive of individual self-determination. Whatever the candidate's own attitude might be, her point about what the involvement with Lena teaches Heyst about 'the shortcomings of his father's philosophy' suggests that the novel proposes that individual inter-personal relationships constitute a, and probably the, major space in which one's 'commitment to humanity' is or ought to be manifested. Moreover, the idea that the novel presents 'the "unholy trio"' as 'representatives of humanity, of society itself' implies that it (the novel) suggests that human society is *necessarily* 'evil' or 'fallen', a notion congruous with, if not peculiar to, (especially fundamentalist) Christian belief. Essay I 2 does not include consideration that the attitudes and behaviour of Jones and his followers are or can be related to the condition of the *specific* society in which they are formed, whatever their inherent propensities to destructive behaviour might be.¹

It is possible that Moolman's work has played a part in the stress placed on the victory of 'Lena's philosophy of existence ... over Heyst's father's'. The approach is essentially the same as that of Essay I 1, in which the 'victory' is seen as that of the attitude displayed in the 'Ah, Davidson' speech over that of the elder Heyst. In her penultimate paragraph, Moolman emphasizes (51) 'the victory of one idea over another ... the idea of social and emotional commitment to others ... over the idea of isolation and detachment' (underlining in the original; my ellipses; see below: 155). This approach is manifest in all five of the essays from School I, and specific discussion of any of the other three would be redundant. Other aspects of Moolman's approach are not clearly apparent in them: perhaps the teacher selected this point as the basis of her interpretation of *Victory*.

Perhaps, however, it is her own idea, or derived from a source other than Moolman. Whatever the case, the influence of the teacher² is simply and starkly illustrated in the way in which the essays from School I present the same opinion of what constitutes, in the words of the writer of I 2, 'the central conflict of the novel'. Alternatively, if the common thread is ascribable to a common source other than the teacher - informal discussion outside the classroom, for instance - the influence of common membership of

¹ In this regard, it is germane to discussion of secondary-school teaching to note that one ought to be sceptical about inherent propensities. One would not have to embrace hard-core Marxism in order to see that the validity of such propensities in an individual is questionable, the empirically indisputable biological basics excepted (see Eagleton's adumbration of Timpanaro: 15 above). At the very least, the determination of such propensities is questionable on the ground that the social environment is so pervasively determinant that the positing of characteristics anterior to social influence is hypothetical to the point of being potentially obfuscatory of socio-political issues. Especially in a country where ethnic and gender prejudice are as rife as they are in South Africa, teachers ought to make their pupils aware of the basis of such scepticism of inherent qualities.

² There is only one Senior Certificate Higher Grade English teacher in School I.

an institution is illustrated. That is, we have here a simple and clear example of the way in which interpretation is to a major extent socially determined.

Although the essays from School I display scant, if any, consciousness of the relationship to concrete social issues of their interpretation of what *Victory* is centrally about, the centring of a conflict between philosophies is of sounder social value than mere emphasis on the victory of 'life' or 'love'.

School J

School J is another institution with a small enrolment. Of the thirty-three candidates registered to write the 1990 NSC examinations, only four chose to do the essay on *Victory*. Two essays scored in the 'C' or 'Above average' and two in the 'D' or 'Average' category. Perhaps, once again, the policy of the English Department was to steer candidates away from the presumed pitfalls of the 'Conrad essay'.

Essay J 1 : Mark awarded: 18 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner comments: 'Pg 2 & 3 starts getting teeth into topic - isn't sustained, however.' The implication is that the essay is not 'on the topic' for much of its length. This is a finding which would cause the essay to be significantly penalized. (One cannot be more precise about the extent of the penalty, as there is no hard-and-fast rule obtaining over the years; neither is there any explicit indication by the sub-examiner in this case.) The awarding, despite the penalty, of a mark of sixty percent suggests that the sub-examiner finds distinct merit in the material.

In J 1, Heyst is seen as a 'nihilist. not believing in God and having no beliefs', while Lena is used by Conrad 'to make Heyst realise life and to accept certain things.' Surprisingly, the sub-examiner indicates approval, by means of a tick alongside the last line of the following detail, of the assertion that Heyst and Jones are similar inasmuch as 'They both tend to isolate themselves from people. Heyst does it because of his father. Jones does it because he hates woman.' That Heyst and Jones both isolate themselves is undeniable, as is the registration that this common characteristic can validly be seen as significant. But while it would make sense to speculate about the relationship between Jones's anti-social attitude and his misogyny, the idea that he isolates himself *because* he hates women has no reasonable foundation in the text. Perhaps the tick simply indicates approval of the general relating of the isolationism of the two characters, but there is no sign that the last sentence of this extract strikes the sub-examiner as odd.

The candidate considers that 'The central arguments are appearance-reality and Conrad interlinks his evil characters with his bad characters.' I assume that the candidate means 'evil characters with his *good* characters'; the sub-examiner either fails to register the error or does not bother to note it, perhaps adopting the reasonable attitude that it is merely a slip and forgivable under examination conditions. The 'appearance-reality' idea is developed as follows:

Evil and good are one of the common things in everyday life, we are so used to it that evil doings aren't so bad and good things are not commonly found. So when reading *Victory*

the goodness of Heyst and Lena stands out amongst the evil of the foursome.

(It is clear in context that the three desperadoes and Schomberg constitute 'the foursome'.)

The concluding paragraph reads:

Heyst is a "shadow in the shade" he is incapable of judging evil and therefore accepts Jones, Recardo and Pedro onto the island. Lena has the experience to tell and feel insecure, she knows Heyst is not capable of protecting himself let alone her, so she prepares to give up her self in order to save Heyst. The victory of the entire novel is not one of experience but one of good conquering evil and that evil doesn't prosper.¹ Evil is a short lived thing and even if it is in the majority good still comes through.

The 'appearance-reality' opposition is a favourite standby of teachers of secondary-school English. The 1990 *Guidelines on Victory* stresses its applicability, *inter alia* in the section devoted to Part 4, Chapter 5, in which appears the detail on which J 1's "shadow in the shade" is apparently based. In this chapter, Heyst says to Lena: "... I have lived too long within myself, watching the mere shadows and shades of life ..." (318). The context is accurate. In the cited speech, Heyst speaks of his difficulty in coping effectively enough with Jones. The compiler of *Guidelines* comments (126) on Heyst's words, "I am so rebellious to outward impressions ...": 'We have seen that the discrepancy between appearance and reality is one of the major themes of the novel (quotation from *Victory*: 316 [229 in the Pan Classics edition used by *Guidelines*]; ellipsis and failure to indicate ellipsis of 'continued Heyst' after "I" as in *Guidelines*). It is quite likely, if not certain, that *Guidelines* is the or a source for the focus on 'appearance-reality'. The popularity of this 'theme' among teachers is valid, as it is empirically clear that it can be discerned in or reasonably conferred on a substantial proportion of literary works. It is, moreover, educationally sound to impress upon pupils an idea which, applied to extra-literary reality, can militate against naivety and gullibility on both the immediate inter-personal and the larger social levels. A possible adverse consequence of the currency of the idea - of any popular formula - is that it is open to familiarization and automatization: formulaic concepts can readily be ossified as mere devices in the game of gaining marks, and their relation to extra-literary reality attenuated, broken or not internalized at all. A concept is particularly likely to be vitiated if it is rendered repetitively in the same words. The verbal formula achieves a pat familiarity and the concept is consequently encased apart from those aspects of the subject's sensibility engaged with extra-literary reality. My observation is that the terms 'appearance-reality' and 'appearance versus reality' are ubiquitous in classroom discourse in NED schools.

In J 1, the relationship between 'appearance-reality' and the opposing types of characters is initially vaguely expressed, but 'we are so used to it that evil doings aren't so bad' in effect links 'appearance-reality' to over-familiarization and concomitant

¹ Clearly, the intended word is 'prosper'.

failure of moral judgement in homespun terms which lack fluency but suggest internalization. In the context of 'we are so used to it', the most likely meaning of 'good things are not commonly found' is 'good is not recognized for what it is and/or is taken for granted', which would relate coherently to 'so when reading *Victory* the goodness of Heyst and Lena stands out amongst the evil of the foursome.' This would sustain the idea that 'we' tend not to make adequate moral distinctions and would offer as a value of *Victory* that it highlights such distinctions with the use of striking contrasts. It is fairly likely that the writer of J 1 has not - or at least not altogether - fallen prey to the cited form of automatization of response.

The candidate's concluding idea that 'The victory of the entire novel is ... one of good conquering evil and that evil doesn't prosper' is like that found in Essay H 2 and the *caveat* offered in this regard (68-69 above) applies, with the following further comment.

Certainly, the fates of Jones and his men can be read as to an extent justifying the idea that *Victory* proposes that 'Evil is a short lived thing', although it ought to be registered that Lena is killed, Heyst despairingly commits suicide, Davidson's "Nothing!" is the last word of the novel, and (therefore) the effects of evil are presented as powerful and not as dismissible as 'short lived' suggests. The idea that 'good still comes through' would, presumably, be based not only on the deaths of the villains but on a reading of the 'Ah, Davidson' speech such as Leavis, among others, offers (see below: 104 ff). Essay J 1 suggests, in effect, the metaphysical inevitability of the victory of 'good'. A possible implication of such thinking is that 'evil' tends to fail whether or not there is concrete social action directed toward its defeat. This is an undesirable idea, even if it is only vaguely present in the consciousness of the writer. Classroom discussion ought to include critical interrogation of such an idea, and it is my experience that it generally does. It is sound standard practice among secondary-school teachers of literature to highlight the idea, readily suggested in numerous prescribed texts, including *Victory* and the Shakespearian tragedies continually prescribed for study, that villainy might bring about the destruction of the villains, but first wreaks havoc among the innocent, and thus requires active opposition.

Essay J 2 : Mark awarded: 18 out of 30; not moderated.

The sub-examiner's comment is 'Not on the topic. Good language.' In general, therefore, the observations about the sub-examiner's approach to essay J 1 apply *mutatis mutandis* to this essay: comparison of the comments suggests that J 2 was regarded as being further 'off the topic' than J 1, but that the relatively superior fluency of J 2 would, in the sub-examiner's estimation, counter-balance this relative weakness.

The essay starts:

The novel, *Victory*, is about good versus evil ... However, that is not the central theme. The central theme is this: that to isolate oneself and merely be the observer is not worth it. It is worth getting involved in human relationships (my ellipsis).

So J 2, like J 1, stresses the counter-productivity of detachment. There is no evident sense that 'getting involved' can apply to anything other than immediate inter-personal relationships:

In the end, Heyst does come to love Lena and care for her. He experiences the joy of relationship, although the critics say that he is not more capable of having one at the end, than he is in the beginning of the novel.

'The critics' probably means Moolman. The next sentence after the detail from Moolman: 51 quoted above (72) is 'Heyst, after realising this, is no more capable of commitment to the human world than before and dies in the fire that he creates.'

Moolman's failure to analyse *Victory* in useful social and political terms is typical of much traditional Anglo-American commentary. This failure - whether attributable to her influence or to that of any other commentator, or to the general attitudinal ethos prevalent in white South Africa - is echoed in the essays from School J and is a dominant characteristic of the essays from all ten of the selected schools.

By 'useful' is meant that which conduces to constructive engagement with and adaptation to the necessary restructuring of South African society along democratic lines inimical to the maintenance or establishment of racial or other class-based hegemonies as well as sexist thinking. The immediately inter-personal aspects of social relationships are of major importance and deserve extensive classroom discussion, but they seem to be stressed to the extent of excluding or at least marginalizing the larger picture. Moreover, where there is some sense of a larger picture, it tends to be empty metaphysical.

This thesis is explicitly opposed to authoritarian inculcation of any ideology or 'world view' in pupils. However, syllabuses, syllabus-guidelines and examination-papers must and do establish a common basis for teaching, and inclusion in the relevant documents of the suggestions outlined in the Introduction to this thesis would, I hope, promote a coming to grips with issues I take, for the reasons adduced, to be of major importance. Candidate A 2, for instance, would be entitled to maintain his position - that inter-personal 'love' is the 'lesson to us all' - but would have to articulate it in the context of an explicit awareness that other 'lessons', complementary to and/or contradictory of his own preference, can be derived from the novel.

CHAPTER TWO

NATAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE ENGLISH FIRST LANGUAGE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS ON *VICTORY*: DECEMBER 1977 TO DECEMBER 1990

Because public examination question papers are the documents which most influence teaching, analysis of the Natal Senior Certificate English First Language examination questions on *Victory* is a *sine qua non* of a consideration of the use of this novel in NED schools.

Victory was first prescribed for the NSC English First Language Third Paper (Literature) examination in 1977.

There are four sections: poetry, Shakespeare, major novel - the category into which *Victory* falls - and a fourth section which can be a non-Shakespearean play, a shorter or canonically 'less major' novel or a selection of short stories.

NED Standard Grade¹ candidates are given, in each of the four sections, five or six 5-mark contextual questions from which they must choose four; in 1990, a short essay of '1½ - 2 pages (approximately 40 lines)' was also set, as an alternative to the contextual questions on a given prescribed work (poetry excluded). The *Victory* section therefore carries 20 marks out of the 80 allotted to the Third Paper and the total of 300 for the English First Language Standard Grade examination.

Higher Grade candidates must choose between an essay question and a set of contextual² questions. The paper as a whole is worth 120 of the 400 marks allocated to English First Language Higher Grade and the four sections carry 30 marks each. The instruction is that a literature essay should be approximately 500 words long.

It is a truism among all but the most inexperienced and unguided teachers that the documents with the greatest influence on senior high school teaching are not syllabuses, but past Senior Certificate examination question papers. The October 1993 draft of the *English Guideline Document for Curriculum Development*, drawn up by the national Core Syllabus Committee for English, notes that 'The Senior Certificate Examination has a powerful impact on teaching and learning that even permeates down to the junior secondary classes' (36). Teachers analyse past papers, note where examiners place emphases, and place their own emphases accordingly. Success in the Senior Certificate examinations is the dominant consideration, both because teachers fully justifiably want their pupils to have the best possible chance in the competition for places in tertiary educational institutions and for jobs, and - also justifiably if not laudable as altruistic - because their own professional positions are judged in large measure on how well their charges do in the public examinations.

¹ Taking English First Language at the Standard Grade precludes one's gaining a university entrance pass. Teachers and pupils are aware that 'Standard' is a euphemism for 'academically weak'.

² In the 1977 and 1980 Higher Grade question papers, the term used is 'textual'; in the later papers it is 'contextual'. The variation results from the difference between the preferences of people in authority in different periods.

In the following pages, the questions on *Victory* are reproduced and discussed. In addition, the marking Memorandum applicable to the 1990 Higher Grade questions on *Victory* is discussed.

In order to avoid unnecessary extra bulk to this thesis, the passages accompanying the contextual questions are not reproduced. Instead, the opening and closing words of the passages are quoted, followed by citation of the applicable page references in the standard Dent edition.

1977: STANDARD GRADE

2 (A) From

He was a noxious ass,

To

Don't you ever get caught in his web.'

(20)

Schomberg dislikes Heyst intensely and refers to him as "the spider". Is there any justification at all, at this point of the novel, for Schomberg's assessment of Heyst? Discuss.

(5)

2 (B) From

A mist seemed to roll away from before Davidson's eyes,

To

Davidson told us some time afterward.

(41-42)

Davidson has just heard the news from Mrs Schomberg that Heyst and the Girl (Lena) had run away together.

"He's not the man for it."

"Heyst! Such a perfect gentleman."

This is Davidson's reaction.

Explain carefully why you think Heyst could run away with the girl and still remain "a perfect gentleman."

(5)

2 (C) From

'I'll drift,' Heyst had said to himself deliberately.

To

This, stripped of its facts, had been Heyst's life up to that disturbing night.

(92)

This passage gives the reader a deep insight into Heyst's character. Say what kind of person Heyst is. Illustrate your answer with pertinent quotations from

the extract. (5)

2 (D) From

He reflected.

To

his manliness set off by the military bearing.
(155-156)

Schomberg feels that he has to get rid of Mr Jones and his party. He feels that he would “relieve himself of these men’s oppression” as well as getting a chance of “paying Heyst out.”

Explain in your own words how he sets about this and why he wants to get even with Heyst. (5)

2 (E) From

Over Samburan the thunder had ceased to growl at last,

To

and she no longer had the strength to throw her arms about
his neck.
(406)

“Oh my beloved,” she cried weakly, “I’ve saved you.”

Lena is dying when she says these words. What had she done to save Heyst? Say also what you feel about her sacrifice. (5)

* * *

None of the questions invites any consideration of substantial social issues, even in a relatively uncomplicated way such as would tend to be seen as appropriate in a Standard Grade paper. Questions 2 (A), (B) and (C) all have to do with Heyst’s character. 2 (D) is a mechanical ‘content’ question; even the question about Schomberg’s motives is unlikely to generate thought about anything other than his resentment at the disappearance of Lena, and, perhaps, his resentment of Heyst’s not patronizing his establishment as he would like him to do. 2 (E) has the virtue, however, of inviting the candidates’ personal assessments of Lena’s beliefs and behaviour. In this regard, it bears a resemblance to the questions recently emerging and increasingly prominent in the 1994 Cape and 1995 Western Cape Higher Grade question papers (see above: 8 & below: 93).

In general, the questions treat Standard Grade pupils as limited readers, which most of them probably are. What is not valid, and whether or not it is the examiner’s conscious intention, is that the questions treat these pupils as being effectively incapable of consideration of socially substantial issues.

1977: HIGHER GRADE

5. Essay question

Lena can be seen either as the instrument of Heyst's undoing or of his final victory.

Discuss, with reference to the novel.

* * *

This essay question deflects attention from issues of socio-political substance. Its most overt virtue is that it draws attention to variability of interpretation and implicitly problematizes the title of *Victory*.

It might also elicit from some candidates a consideration of how gender-roles are conceived. For instance, it would be productive to discuss in the context of this essay whether or not the presentation of Lena covertly suggests that the more-or-less stereotypic female is the destabilizing and indirectly destructive influence in the male's life or whether or not she can be seen as functioning as a necessary complementary adjunct that enables *him* to achieve a kind of emotional completeness. Such discussion is unlikely unless an individual teacher or English department stresses such aspects of the text, as pupils are unlikely to think of them. And unless public examination questions, preferably assisted by institutionally authoritative commentary, clearly stress them, very few, if any, teachers are likely to invite their pupils to discuss them.

6. Textual question

From

‘My dear girl, I am not a ruffian,’ he said.

To

than he had ever known in all his life.
(198-200)

- (a) Describe briefly the episode which Heyst is talking about here. (4)
- (b) From what Heyst says in lines 4 - 12 and lines 16 - 27,¹ explain what you think he means by ‘the Great Joke’. (4)
- (c) How does Heyst describe his chosen attitude to life in this passage? (4)

¹ ‘Lines 4 - 12’ run from ‘was so representative’ to ‘offering a prayer’ (198). ‘Lines 16 - 27’ run from ‘“That sounds evasive”’ to ‘universal scorn and unbelief. ...’ (198-199).

- (d) How does his reference to his father (lines 30 & 31)¹ help us to understand this attitude? (Do not repeat material used in (c).) (4)
- (e) Explain lines 49 & 50 (I only know ... soul). Why do you think he uses such extreme terms as "lost" and "corruption"? (4)
- (f) To what extent is Lena aware of the ironies in Heyst's story? (5)
- (g) How does this passage help us to appreciate the positive effect that Lena is having, and will have, on Heyst? (5)

* * *

The textual questions start with a straightforward 'content' question, probably to 'ease in' the candidates and to give a chance to score some marks to those candidates who have attentively read the novel (or a study-aid) but have limited conceptual ability. The rest of the questions, except, perhaps, for 6 (b), are elementary tests of 'close reading' and investigate the Heystian philosophy of detachment and the Heyst-Lena relationship in effectively socially detached terms.

Question 6 (b) is a useful mini-case study. The question asks for a kind of definition from Heyst's perspective of 'the Great Joke'. My own view is that 'the Great Joke' can refer in context to futile belief in an imaginary Divine Providence and/or to the related but not identical concept of the lack of any valid (metaphysical or otherwise) ground or significance of existence. I think it would have been of greater value to challenge the candidates to evaluate - to give their opinions of - Heyst's notion. It has been my consistent experience that even pupils who do not shine academically have or can develop reasonably coherent views on such issues. They should be encouraged to do so, and teachers are more likely to provide such encouragement if prompted by public examinations.

Question 6 (g) implicitly invites problematization of Heyst's philosophy, but suggests that the sole or at least predominantly wrong thing about it is its inhibition of private relationships. I have an ideological objection to such a suggestion, but that is not important here. What is important is the absence of a question which can at least generate consideration of implications of more general disengagement from society, even if a given candidate decides that private relationships are of paramount significance.

1984: STANDARD GRADE

3 (A) From
 They were not looking at each other.
 To

¹ 'Lines 30 & 31' run from "'No. I am not like that' to 'I am he, all' (199).

‘Funny notion of defying the fates - to take a woman in tow!’
(57)

“The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance”

Heyst is speaking to Davidson after he had fled to Samburan with Lena.

Explain why you think that at this stage of the novel, Heyst should feel that the world was against him. Say also what is ironical about the fact that he and Lena would be safe on the island. (5)

3 (B) From

Meantime Schomberg watched Heyst out of the corner of his eye.

To

planning some new swindle, no doubt.
(67)

Account for Schomberg’s dislike of Heyst. Does he in fact have any real reason to hate Heyst? Say what aspect of human behaviour Conrad is illustrating in his description of Schomberg’s feelings for Heyst. (5)

3 (C) From

Mr Jones closed his eyes wearily,

To

after which his moustaches stirred by themselves in an odd, feline manner.
(112)

Look carefully at this passage, and then, using pertinent quotations to illustrate your answer, say how Conrad manages to convey the feeling that Mr Jones is the essence of evil. (5)

3 (D) From

The crudeness of your ferocity is positively gross, Martin,’

To

I shan’t spoil it.’
(336-337; ‘sha’n’t’ and not ‘shan’t’ in both the Dent and the Penguin editions)

Comment on the different approaches of Jones and Ricardo. Say also what you learn of these two men from the above passage. (5)

- 3 (E) From
 ‘You have heard a lot of ugly lies,’
 To
 Heyst said, as if speaking to himself.
 (381)

Heyst and Jones are talking when Heyst remarks:

“The stupidity of that creature is so great that it becomes formidable.”¹

Using your knowledge of the novel, discuss the part played by Schomberg as the catalyst that led to the fatal meeting between Jones and his gang and Heyst and Lena. (5)

- 3 (F) From
 She sat up a little,
 To
 all my own at last!’
 (403-404)

Why has Heyst misunderstood Lena’s sacrifice? Say what you learn of Lena from the passage, and also why Ricardo’s dagger was her symbol of victory. (5)

* * *

3 (E) is purely a ‘content’ question. 3 (A) is in essence also one, although it is more difficult. ‘Explain why you think’ suggests a significant degree of open-endedness. The question is to an extent open-ended, in that a form of interpretative activity is called for in the process of deciding what combination of his father’s influence and later experiences, especially his feeling driven to involve himself in the affairs of others, would make Heyst ‘feel that the world was against him.’ However, this is a ‘lower-order’ form of interpretative activity, such as is typically regarded as suitable for Standard Grade candidates, which is ironic in that more socially relevant issues do not necessarily require more complex thought. 3 (B) can be answered so as to discuss Schomberg’s emotional condition in such terms: that is, as a form of alienation rooted in greed, the effects of class-consciousness, and lust related to sexism. Most Standard Grade pupils would have no difficulty grasping and using such concepts. The role of the teacher in promoting and enabling such discussion is, as ever, crucial.

3 (C) is a test of ‘close reading’ and valid as an option carrying a quarter of the marks available. Assisting pupils to be aware of and challenging them to develop and express their own views on socially significant matters is important; guiding them in the

¹ Inconsistency of use of quotation marks as in the original question.

development of the habit of examining any and all discourse critically, indeed sceptically, is important; traditional 'close reading' is necessary if these other capacities are to be effectively engendered and enhanced.

It is likely that full marks for 3 (D) can be achieved by demonstrating a basic ability to read closely and an elementary understanding of characterization. However, the passage and question do prompt consideration of destructive effects of class-structure and -consciousness.

3 (F) is the most complex question in this section. It could well be set at the Higher Grade and found testing. Equitable Standard Grade marking would require a lenient attitude. The first part-question ('Why has Heyst misunderstood Lena's sacrifice?') appears demanding. It can carry only about two marks of the five available for 3 (F) as a whole, and it would be hard to compress discussion of Heyst's complex pattern of ignorance and defensiveness, and the difference between his sensibility and Lena's, into, say, five of the ten lines candidates are told are sufficient for the whole answer. The Standard Grade examiner certainly expects little or no such discussion beyond the heads of argument, simply expressed. A relatively sophisticated answer might touch on sexual politics, but teachers of Standard Grade classes are unlikely to guide discussion so as to illuminate passages such as that provided in these terms. For that matter, the issue would be absent from discussion in many Higher Grade classrooms, although the influence of critics such as Robert Hampson (see below: 141 ff) and of feminist-influenced discourse generally makes such discussion increasingly likely as time goes on. My strong impression is that in 1984 consciousness of sexual politics was significantly less likely to be a component of literary analysis in the classrooms than it is now.

In 1984 or more recently, the reasons for the lack of Standard Grade classroom attention to the issue would be not only failure to perceive the capacity of the novel to generate consideration of it and/or ignorance of its significance, but also invalid assumptions about what Standard Grade pupils can cope with.

The second part of the question ('Say what you learn of Lena from the passage') is open-ended. The implied encouragement of a possible variety of opinions is welcome. It is to be hoped that the freedom of response implied in the wording was matched by open-mindedness in the marking. This example provides an opportunity for a comment on institutional factors operative here. I do not assume but know that the system of marking and moderation does not guarantee this and that a great deal depends on the attitude of the individual examiner. In this regard, I think that the freedom of individual examiners should be circumscribed in order to promote justice for the individual candidate. It would be hard to achieve this, but it would be served by making it compulsory for all examiners to do what the best ones do. Their procedure is to provide marking memoranda which include as wide a range of possible responses as possible; these memoranda are then made even more comprehensive by the addition of ideas generated by markers at brainstorming sessions before marking commences and further supplemented by coherent possibilities culled from answer scripts as marking proceeds. Implementation of such a blanket rule would be the responsibility of moderators. The moderators, in turn, would be instructed and monitored by the provincial Examinations Board (who are subject to the South African Certification Board [SAFCERT], the national body which certifies that examinations are suitable for matriculation purposes).

If a given Board does not itself take this initiative, a part could be played by pressure groups such as teachers' associations and unions, as well as by members of various Education department committees. Standard organizational politics apply.

Finally, there is no doubt that, for Lena at least, 'Ricardo's dagger was her symbol of victory' - it is for her 'the spoil of vanquished death' (405) - and the question is a reasonable test of understanding of the cited detail and does not assert that Lena's 'victory' is to be understood as unproblematic (although it is possible that some teachers and pupils perusing this paper in later years would interpret it as making such an assertion).

1984: HIGHER GRADE

5. Essay question

"Ah, Mr Heyst ... ¹ you and I have much more in common than you think." Jones and Heyst reflect each other with a sort of perfection, the way an object is reflected in a mirror. Each is the other seen the wrong way round.'

Trace what Heyst has in common with Jones and critically examine the assertion that in Conrad's thematic development 'each is the other seen the wrong way round.'

* * *

This question focuses on a point made by various commentators and well-grounded in the text that Heyst and Jones ought to be compared, and the implications of their similarities and differences carefully considered. The Heyst-Jones dyad can validly be regarded as a major feature of the structure of the novel, productive of crucial aspects of meaning. Issues which could be raised when answering this question include the nature, ethics and effects of the relevant forms of capacity and incapacity for inter-personal relationships, the nature and implications of criminality, the ethics of social responsibility, the significance of social class and the effectiveness of structuring devices such as the pattern of similarities and dissimilarities of Heyst and Jones.

The question is a good one, in large measure because it is of the 'best-of-both-worlds' variety for which competent examiners strive: on the one hand, it ranges widely in its capacity to elicit discussion of a variety of major aspects of the text; on the other, it requires careful adherence to a specific aspect of 'content' and does not readily enable mere regurgitation of prepared essays on 'the themes of the novel'.

It does not explicitly signal to teachers that substantial consideration of matters of societal import is important when teaching. It would have been useful to include in the question explicit suggestions as to aspects of 'thematic development' which the individual candidate might consider writing about. (Phrasing should make it clear that these are suggestions and not requirements: whatever my or any other teacher or

¹ Ellipsis of 'he said' in the quotation (from 321) as it appears in the question.

examiner's convictions about value might be, candidates must be free to make up their own minds about the relative importance of possible meanings.)

A further virtue of the question is the provision of an 'assertion' and the instruction to deal with it 'critically'. An implication is that one ought to beware of naive acceptance of any pronouncement, no matter how seductively clarifying, about what can be taken as an important aspect of structure. The point might appear obvious, but there is a tendency on the part of naive readers, including some teachers and published critics, to clutch on to points such as that made by Jones in the quoted detail and turn them into formulas which describe aspects of structure in terms of simplistic oppositions and symmetries. The formula denoted by the 'mirror' metaphor which the question can be read as problematizing is a case in point. (This is not to suggest that discerning oppositions and symmetries in or conferring them on a text is invalid: it is to warn against over-simplification and reduction of richness of meaning.)

Moreover, question 5 in general terms suggests that the novel ought to be considered in a problematizing way and that viable meanings are not necessarily definitive.

6. Contextual question

From

... he snatched her up bodily out of the chair,

To

while her hands fell powerless by her side.

(404-406; indication of ellipsis as in the original question)

- (a) Comment on how effectively the second sentence, from 'The limpness ...' (line 3) to 'absolutely idle' (line 8), sets Lena's death scene. (4)
- (b) What is the effect of Davidson's entry on the scene? (3)
- (c) How appropriate is Conrad's explanation of Heyst's groan: 'the heavy plaint of a man who falls clubbed in the dark' (lines 18 to 19)? (3)
- (d) Comment on the full impact of the sentence:

'They stood ...' (line 20) to '... sacred whiteness' (line 22). (4)
- (e) Explain the significance of the contrast between Lena's response in lines 29 to 31, from 'Her eyelids ...' to '... of love', and Heyst's in lines 24 to 28, from 'Heyst, calm ...' to '... mortal flesh.' (6)
- (f) What ironies are implicit in the sentence:

'Davidson put ...' (line 36) to '... a toy' (line 38)? (4)

- (g) Give a reason for Lena's insistence on 'Kill nobody' (lines 39 to 40) when she offers the dagger to Heyst. (3)
- (h) For what reasons does Heyst lay the dagger on Lena's breast? (3)

* * *

The various parts of the contextual option deal with effectiveness of novelistic presentation - the 'art' of the writing, as it were - and the contrasts between the viewpoints of Heyst and Lena. The contrasts are interrogated so as to elicit responses to do with the privately inter-personal relationship of the lovers. 6 (f) requires analysis of a detail which can be read as subverting the naive romanticism of Lena's attitudes. These are substantial matters, but the focuses of this set of questions lack variety and balance inasmuch as they do not suggest that teachers need or ought to deal with issues such as would make of *Victory* an instrument of relevant education from a socially activist perspective. (By the same token, a cartoon-Marxist set of questions which confined itself to such issues would be unbalanced.)

1990: STANDARD GRADE

3. "Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life!"

In an essay, discuss to what extent you think this comment is true of Heyst's own life.

* * *

This is the most predictable essay question on *Victory*. The most-discussed detail of the novel is quoted and its validity is asked about. It is true that such a question enables regurgitation of memorized material from study-aids such as *Guidelines* and equivalent notes produced by teachers, and rewards rote-learning. Despite the words, 'to what extent you think', the candidate who has been primed (or who has primed herself) to 'beat the system' without authentically coming to grips with the text for herself will succeed. Otherwise, the question is valid, especially in a paper set for pupils who, in the main, find academic study difficult. Indeed, the issue is substantial for any student or reader, however able, who considers or is guided to consider the text as more than 'culinary'. It is possible for a pupil, in however elementary a way, to include in his answer consideration of the problem of Heyst as a social being in a manner which calls attention to substantial social issues. However, it is also possible to respond to the question so as to focus on individual relationships in a manner which is pointless only from a left-radical point of view, but which is oblivious of larger social context: an essay would no doubt score rather well were its sole material Heyst's inability to develop a successful private love-relationship and to fend off criminals who appear from nowhere.

It would not strain the ability of Standard Grade candidates to challenge them explicitly with a question about the social irresponsibility of detachment, or about the origins of attitudes and behaviour - not only of Heyst, but of other characters as well - in social circumstances: the ideas need not be presented so as to make them more difficult than those required to answer the essay question which was set. If teachers were to know that the issues presented in this thesis as particularly significant were going to be prominent among the focuses of public examinations, they would be far more likely to deal with them in class than they are now.

Unlike their Higher Grade counterparts, the contextual questions are not given a number different from that of the essay question. They are also question 3 and are simply labelled (A) to (E). The italics are as they appear in the questions.

- (A) From Davidson's purpose in addressing the hotel-keeper
To The girl is nothing to me.'
(46-47)

What impression do you form of Schomberg from this passage and from the novel as a whole? In your response, comment especially on his relationship with his wife and his attitude towards Heyst. (5)

- (B) From 'No doubt, no doubt,'
To but his mind was clear.
(75-76)

Explain carefully why, at this stage of the novel, Heyst's *"feelings were in a state of confusion"*. (5)

- (C) From Three years of such companionship
To there was no other worthy alternative.
(91-92)

Heyst says:

"This shall be my defence against life".

Using your knowledge of the novel explain how Heyst's attitude towards life helped to contribute towards his death. (5)

- (D) From Together, one on each side of the screen,
To but what about the welcome?
(328-329)

"Here they are, the envoys of the outer world. Here they are before you - evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back."

Using your knowledge of the novel explain whether you agree or disagree with Heyst's observations of Mr Jones, Richardo (*sic*) and Pedro. (5)

- (E) From 'Who else could have done this for you?'
To seeking for his glance in the shades of death.
(406-407)

Explain what is Lena's "*tremendous achievement*" and say what your feelings are towards her at this stage of the novel. (5)

* * *

Question (A) calls for a characterization of Schomberg and 'his relationship with his wife and his attitude towards Heyst'. It could be answered in a way which merely presents Schomberg as a bad man who is nastily bullying and vindictive. It could call for a more socially aware response to do with envy, resentment and bullying rooted in the exploitativeness engendered by a culture which promotes financial greed, the importance to one's self-esteem of advancement in the pecking-order and male domination. These ideas can be presented well enough even by someone with a mediocre vocabulary and they are not difficult for most Standard Grade candidates. As ever, the role of the teacher is crucial.

In asking about the reasons why 'Heyst's "feelings were in a state of confusion"', contextual question (B) invites an answer to do with the contradiction of Heyst's standard attitude of detachment by his attraction to Lena. The focus is a common one in the teaching and examining of *Victory*. However, a question about the implications of another detail of the provided passage would be no more 'higher order' yet more socially substantial. Consideration of Lena's words, "'They are too many for me'" would require candidates to think about the exploitation of someone who is both poor and female. The

examiner's choice of focus is reflective of the dominant heuristic and pedagogical habits of members of the sub-culture of white South African teachers and of the society of which they form a part rather than of any inherent property of the text, and serves to reinforce these habits with its institutional authority.

Question (C) is, in essence, a miniature variant of the essay question, and the above comments on the essay apply *mutatis mutandis* to it.

Full marks would, I imagine, be awarded to an answer to question (D) which simply agreed with 'Heyst's observations of Mr Jones, Richardo¹ and Pedro' and offered plausible supporting evidence from the novel as a whole.

Heyst's sardonic sketching of the three forms of viciousness he sees the desperadoes as embodying is in general congruous with the way in which they are presented by the narrator. Question (D) does not demand any response which departs from study-aid-level formulas: there is plenty of textual evidence to support explanation of Jones as the most intelligent and the most diabolical of the three, Ricardo as the embodiment of animal (cat-like) violence and Pedro as stupid, physically powerful and brutal. If a Standard Grade candidate can find her own words for these ideas and produce a couple of details of 'content' in support of each, well and good. She has shown that she can read and understand closely enough.

However, key details such as that quoted have more useful potential. Stylizations have their value as clarifying and dramatic devices. The grim humour which can be read as intrinsic to the cartoonish aspect of the characterizations has, potentially, various values. These include the further illumination of Heyst's sensibility, although precisely how is in good measure a matter of individual response, and the simultaneous reduction of the humanity and further demonization of the three villains. Although the level of difficulty involved would be valid in a Higher Grade question, it would not be fair to ask Standard Grade candidates to discuss the quoted detail in such terms. However, a Standard Grade candidate with a socially down-to-earth view of the novel - whether self-generated or suggested by a teacher or a published commentary - should be able to discuss, howbeit briefly for five marks, the desperadoes as criminals whose specific characteristics have been moulded, in significant part at least, by their differing social origins, and whose common criminality is related to pervasive, if often denied, values in a society in which a dog-eat-dog attitude toward financial gain and other forms of personal gratification is fostered. As it stands, question (D) gives candidates the opportunity to respond in this way, but does not require them to do so. They could - I think they should - be explicitly invited to relate the components of the description of 'the envoys of the outer world' to the social origins of the three characters.

This does not imply that a religious, socialist or any other utopian social ethic ought naively to be offered as an axiological panacea. What is implied is that criminality ought not to be seen as an aberration detached from social determination, and that *Victory* need not be read as suggesting that it is thus detached. Alternatively, a reader who decides that the novel does make such a suggestion ought not to accept it unproblematically. No view understood by a reader as propagated by any text ought to be uncritically accepted. This

¹ The same mis-spelling occurs in question 6 (f) of the 1990 Higher Grade paper. The Higher Grade and Standard Grade papers are set by different people and the error is likely to be a quirk of a single typist.

is not obvious to all pupils or to all teachers. The naive tendency to assert that a literary text 'proves' something about extra-literary reality is common among pupils and I have noticed it in the discourse of some teachers as well.

Finally, question (E) would be improved by phrasing which does not implicitly accept a naive view of Lena's "tremendous achievement" and which indicates that the achievement is in her eyes or otherwise problematic. The second part of the question ('and say what your feelings are toward her at this stage of the novel') is commendably open-ended. Misty-eyed beatification of Lena is a possible - and likely - response, but so is a presentation of her perceptions as illusory. In class, teachers should invite discussion of the proposition that Lena is the victim of some combination of sexual politics, her own poverty and religious background, and the rapacity of others. Such ideas should not be difficult for Standard Grade pupils.

1990: HIGHER GRADE

I have a photocopy of the Marking Memorandum prepared by the examiner for the guidance of sub-examiners (markers) of this paper.¹ In the discussion which follows, and in respect of the essay question and the set of contextual questions in that order, an impression written before reading the Marking Memorandum and therefore not influenced by it and on the same footing as impressions of all other questions considered in this chapter will be presented. Discussion of the material in the Memorandum will then follow.

The Marking Memorandum is prefaced:

The following 'answers' are merely suggestions or ideas as to what might be considered when assessing candidates' responses.

This is in keeping with the assurance given to candidates on the first page of the question paper:

Do not hesitate to give your personal opinions frankly. The examiners will judge your answers on the competence with which they are expressed and the understanding of the books or poems they reveal.

The commendably open and generous attitude thus indicated is increasingly professed, although commonly not adhered to in practice, by teachers of English.

The essay question has been quoted above (27). To repeat it:

5. Essay question

'Conrad's contrasting treatment of the evil characters - Schomberg, Mr Jones, Ricardo and Pedro, and the good - Lena and Heyst, shapes

¹ I do not have a copy of any of the Marking Memoranda applicable to the other question papers in which Natal Senior Certificate candidates have been examined on *Victory*. These documents are regarded as highly confidential, and special permission was necessary before I could obtain a copy of the 1990 Higher Grade Memorandum. This permission accompanied permission to scrutinize a sample of the 1990 answer scripts and was given with the proviso that confidential material be used only for the purposes of this thesis.

the central arguments of the novel.

To what extent do you agree with this view?

* * *

The weakness of this question is that it might direct candidates to discuss the novel as, in effect, a straightforward and rather abstract morality tale. That there are problems of interpretation is not mentioned. Consideration of concrete social issues which have a bearing on both the period in which the novel is written and that in which the candidates are living is not explicitly required.

It is common practice for examiners to present provocative opinions in quotations (or pseudo-quotations) in order to stimulate candidates to engage in spirited debate and the presentation of their own opinions. A case in point is the 1984 NSC Higher Grade essay question on *Hamlet*. Here, Hamlet is treated in a very unsympathetic manner such as is not currently the norm in our classrooms:

‘Hamlet’s pre-occupation with the moral dilemma of his revenge on Claudius:

“And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,”

leads to his thoughtless destruction of the innocent Polonius family. He cannot escape condemnation for this.’

Discuss the accuracy of this comment.

Michael Jarvis, the examiner who set this question, has told me that he intended it to provoke lively disagreement on the part of candidates, although full credit was given to any cogently argued viewpoint.

Another species of question is that in which significantly alternative views are presented, and the candidate is invited to choose between them. The 1977 NSC Higher Grade essay question on *Othello* is flawed in its suggestion that there are only two possibilities and that they are mutually exclusive; this criticism holds even if, as was probably the case, a candidate who refused to make the simple choice indicated was given due credit. Despite the flaw, the question serves as an illustration:

Iago can be viewed as either the incarnation of evil, or an initially normal man warped by envy and understandably driven to seek revenge.

Consider each of these views with close reference to the play, and say which one you find the more acceptable.

By contrast, the 1990 essay question on *Victory* presents a view which is neither clearly marginal (it accords with a common way of reading the novel) nor explicitly contrasted with an alternative perspective. It therefore does not pressure the candidate whose head is filled with simplistic notions culled from popular study-aids and/or inadequately directed classroom discussion to deal with problems of interpretation.

On the other hand, the crucial last line of the question (‘To what extent do you agree with this view?’) enables a candidate to problematize simplistic formulas; indeed, the

question is fully 'open' and in effect asks the candidates to tell what they think the novel is centrally about. Candidates who are aware that *Victory* can be read in a more complex manner than the offered quotation suggests are not constrained by the question.

It must also be noted that it is readily possible to agree with the quotation and support one's position with argument which includes substantial treatment of socio-politically significant causes and effects of what are termed 'evil' and 'good'. It is not necessary to treat 'evil' and 'good' in either theologically rooted or crypto-Darwinian terms, although a socio-politically informed response can include reference to such patterns as aspects of the structure (as opposed to meaning) of the text. Alternatively, it could accuse the novel of promoting thinking which is inimical to constructive consideration of social issues.

A better kind of essay question would explicitly oppose major alternative ways of reading the text, point toward its larger social implications and make it plain that the individual candidate should present her own viewpoint. The 1995 Western Cape Education Department paper provides a good example:

Kiernan Ryan (1989) has claimed that "*in loving and marrying each other Othello and Desdemona instinctively act according to principles of racial and social equality ... [but] the prevailing social and ideological tides ... sweep them unawares out of their depth.*"

Another view of the play is that the tragedy springs from inherent character flaws rather than from "*social and ideological*" factors.

What is **your** view?

(Italics, bold print, interpolation and ellipses as in the original.)

This question allows the candidate to interpret *Othello* in traditional schoolroom terms as a play centrally about 'fatal flaws', but also indicates that reputable approaches to interpretation can differ greatly and that 'social and ideological' issues are important. I suspect that the English departments in numerous Western Cape schools are going to revise their practice as a result of this latter feature of the question especially.

The 1995 KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture Literature paper, by contrast, shows some advance on the 1990 NED paper, but its concerns are consistently 'traditional'. Here are the three essay questions:

A critic argues of Macbeth that '*with each step in the protagonists' degeneration, we experience a mounting pity which counteracts our horror*'.

Assess the truth of this assertion.

In Hard Times we are faced with a backward Sissy Jupe, a psychologically crippled Louisa, and an unconvincingly reformed Gradgrind.

The reader might prefer the cunning, relentless Bitzer and

Mrs. Sparsit.

Do you agree?

"Lawrence detested an excessive 'consciousness' which drew its power from misdirected or thwarted emotional forces. Its symptoms included sentimentality, flirtatiousness, idealism, and a will to dominate others. These all pointed to life shallowly lived, and fatal relationships."

Show whether Lawrence's preoccupation with life 'shallowly lived, and fatal relationships' is a theme in the short stories you have studied. (Refer to at least two stories. Draw on the italicised quote where you find it useful).

Considered as a group, these questions make clear that responses can legitimately vary and that the opinions found in published criticism should not be regarded as definitive. The question on *Hard Times* also invites the candidate to respond personally and problematizes the legitimacy of the intention which is traditionally and reasonably attributed to the novel and/or its author. But there is no indication that ideological or larger social issues are of moment.

In neither the 1995 WCED nor the 1995 KwaZulu-Natal paper is there a clear suggestion that the candidate should consider either her own thinking or that of other readers as ideologically influenced.

To return to the 1990 NED essay question on *Victory*. The brief note on question 5 in the marking memorandum reads:

Evil portrayed stereotypically; good characters become real.
Ultimately evil is seen by Conrad in an unconvincing way.
Heyst & Lena, combinations of both good and evil, embattled
by life itself, centre of meaning.

Students' responses must reflect the above and indicate a confidence in working with the novel.

It is fortunate that the contents of the Marking Memorandum are 'merely suggestions'. By the same token, the analysis which follows is not dogmatically asserted interpretation which is meant to be superior to the examiner's ideas: it is a set of indications that the prescriptiveness implied by the examiner's phrasing is not justified.

The note is simplistically assertive of the difference between the portrayal of the 'evil' characters and that of the 'good' characters. The idea that the 'evil' characters are mere stereotypes is problematized below (160-161); the verisimilitude of the portrayal of Lena is also vulnerable to adverse criticism (see below: 129 ff).

'Embattled by life itself' is too loose even for a brief note such as this. 'Life' is a nebulous term in context. The characters are 'embattled by' specifiable aspects of their own natures and specifiable¹ hostile individuals and social forces.

To situate Heyst and Lena as the 'centre of meaning' is to adopt an obvious position which is certainly viable, but not necessary: it is typical of traditional Anglo-American thinking to centre characters; however, the tension between groups and/or socially determined categories of interest and/or philosophies (whether formal or informal) can also be viewed as the 'centre of meaning', with the characters displaced to the role of dramatic representatives and/or vehicles for such tension/s. This is not a mere quibble: a candidate might disagree with the view expressed in the quotation-stimulus on the ground that it is not characterization which 'shapes the central argument of the novel' but the portrayal of the axes of tension which the characterization serves (as opposed to shapes).

The dogmatism of 'Students' responses *must* reflect the above is unrigorously and unfairly prescriptive.

This dogmatism conflicts with the open-mindedness of the remark prefatory to the Marking Memorandum as a whole. In practice, as is evident from Chapter One above, open-mindedness prevailed over dogmatism. It is nonetheless bothersome that the examiner is prone to the inadequacy of response to the text manifest in the note on question 5 and the inconsistency of attitude reflected in the self-contradiction indicated.

Finally, it must be noted that the assertion that Heyst and Lena are 'combinations of good and evil' is untenable. Heyst and Lena can be accused of defects of sensibility, but the notion that they manifest 'evil' would require a definition of 'evil' so broad as to be eccentric except in terms of a fundamentalist ethic such as can be associated with religious extremism.

6. Contextual question

From

'I steamed into one of those silly thunderstorms that hang
about the volcano,

To

and fire purifies everything.'

6. (a) Comment on the significance of the reference to the '*thunderstorm*' and the '*volcano*'.² (lines 1 - 2) (3)
- (b) Davidson says:

His futher seems to have been a crank, and to have upset his

¹ 'Specifiable' and not 'specific' is used because the latter term suggests definitive identification of the causes while the former more readily suggests the involvement of the reader in determining what they are

² Italics here and in the rest of the part-questions, as well as the underlining of 'poor girl die' in 6 (d) below and various ellipses, are as in the original.

head when he was young.
(lines 20 - 22)

To what extent do you agree with this assessment? (3)

(c) What is revealed about Davidson in the second paragraph of the extract (‘*He admitted ... unwarrantable intrusion*’)? (4)

(d) ‘*I arrived in time to see that poor girl die*’.

Explain what this line reveals about Davidson’s view of Lena’s death and contrast his view with the way in which she herself perceived it. (5)

(e) Refer to lines 24 - 25 (‘*Ah, Davidson ... trust in life!!*’).¹

Paying particular attention to tone, show what these lines indicate about Heyst’s understanding of himself. (3)

(f) Some critics have argued that Richardo² is a caricature. To what extent do the description of his voice as ‘*a snarly sort of voice*’ (line³ 27 - 28) and his retort in lines 31 - 33 (‘*Jeeminy! ... ever since*’) help you to support or reject this judgement? (4)

(g) Refer to lines 34 - 37 (‘*Well, here I am ... into the house.*’)

(i) What are the implications of the line ‘*This time he has not missed him*’? (2)

(ii) Why does Heyst speak ‘*bitterly*’ (lines 36 - 37)? (2)

(h) Considering the way in which ‘*fire*’ has been used by the author throughout the novel, do you see Heyst’s death by fire as an act of purification? Support your view. (4)

* * *

¹ The double exclamation marks are in both the extract as printed in the question paper and this question. In both of my copies of *Victory* - the 1962 Dent and the 1989 Penguin editions - there is only one exclamation mark.

² See above: 90 fn.

³ *Sic*. The error is repeated in question 6 (g) (ii).

This contextual question is typical of NED Literature papers of the last thirty years or so. (The 1995 paper of the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture - the NED's successor - is indistinguishable from it in general approach.) The governing paradigm can be described as traditional Anglo-American. 6 (a) enquires about the use of imagery. 6 (b) invites critical consideration of the validity of a standard opinion of the philosophy of detachment and its effect on Heyst; however, three marks seem to be an inadequate mark-allocation if the question is to be answered at all substantially: succinctness might be a virtue, but it is undesirable to make cursoriness its obverse. 6 (c) draws attention to the characterization of a secondary character and 6 (d) to the issue of contrasting perspectives. 6 (e) focuses on 'tone' (a key aspect of 'close reading' much emphasized in NED schools) and on Heyst's self-awareness at the end of the novel; again, the mark-allocation seems meagre. 6 (f) again tests 'close reading' and is praiseworthy in its enabling of problematization of the standard view of the presentation of Ricardo and in its drawing attention to the non-definitive nature of critical authority. (The benefit would be to future teaching in that, as noted above [77], teachers scrutinize past papers for direction.) 6 (g) is to an extent a 'content' question, but it includes the need for some interpretation. 6 (h) is 'higher order' at school level in that the issues of the validity of Heyst's attitudes and the significance of his final act are problematized.

The issue of mark-allocation is not trivial, not only because it affects the justice which a candidate can do to an issue, but also because it can influence teachers' emphases on aspects of textuality. This concern aside, however, question 6 is well-balanced in traditional terms: it covers a range of aspects of *Victory* and of writing in general. Some of its parts are at first glance useful as indications of substantial heuristic and epistemological concerns, although, as indicated below in the discussion of the Marking Memorandum, adequate justice is not done to aspects of text. Furthermore, there is no attention to matters of social and political relevance either in the world in which *Victory* was originally produced or in the South Africa of 1990. There is no clear basis for speculation as to whether the cause is residual concern - on the part of either the examiner or higher authority - that such issues might be regarded as taboo by government or by parents or both, or simple obliviousness on the examiner's part of the value of such a focus.

In the Marking Memorandum, the two-line guide to marking 6 (a) is:

Refers to opening of novel.

Violence in nature → violence in man.

This is apparently innocuous. The question is a simple and obvious one of the kind which 'eases in' a candidate. It might be hair-splitting to suggest that the Memorandum focus on the technical device of the pathetic fallacy more carefully, since any candidate who approached the question in these terms would, there can be no doubt, be fully rewarded, and the Memorandum can be interpreted as simply indicating that a candidate not equipped with the technical vocabulary but with the general idea ought to be allowed to score full marks. The arrow seems to suggest something like 'link between', with the nature of the link unspecified so that a non-prescriptive approach is indicated. This would be fair enough from the viewpoint of most teachers, although from a Marxist perspective it is possible to fault such an approach on the ground that it is in essence

tolerant of a mystificatory metaphysic of inevitable violence as an aspect of universal human nature irrespective of social determination (even if it is conceded that social conditions mould the natural impulse to violence into specific forms). If the arrow is more specifically interpreted to mean 'leads to' (as its direction tends to suggest ought to be the case), this metaphysic is an inescapable implication.

The suggested answer to 6 (b) reads:

Heyst's inability to commit himself fully to life was the result of the early teachings by his father who advised him to stand on life's bounds and refrain from involvement and commitment - a position Heyst could not maintain.

There is nothing here which deals with the validity of seeing Heyst's father as a 'crank', and the treatment of how Heyst's 'head' might have been 'upset' is oblique. That the examiner does not suggest an answer to part of her own question suggests a lack of rigour. Moreover, the significant issue of the degree to which the elder Heyst's attitudes can be regarded as valid is thus ignored.

The suggested answer to 6 (c) is:

Similarity to Heyst. 'Delicacy' about involvement.
Fighting his own instincts.

The most puzzling thing about this question and the guide to marking it is that it is worth as much as four marks. Otherwise, it is a straightforward test of close reading and no substantial comment is warranted.

The suggested answer to 6 (d) is inadequate to a question which itself skirts an important issue:

He pities her - saw her death as tragic.
She saw it as a victory over evil. (Candidates should link this to what actually happened.)

Asking about contrasting perspectives is sound, but the question requires no critical judgement of and hence no substantial thinking about the perspectives. Moreover, mere mention of Lena's idea that she has triumphed over evil omits her vision of the relationship between her death and both her sense of guilt and her love for Heyst.

In question 6 (e), the crucial 'Ah, Davidson' speech is accorded only three marks and the problems attending it are brushed aside in a suggested answer which does not imply understanding that the question can validly be read as asking for a critical consideration of the extent or validity of Heyst's 'understanding of himself':

Pain and hurt at his own failure to respond to life.
Guilt at his inability to love Lena in the way he wished. Aware of his own failure.

The suggested answer to 6 (f) is oblique. The particular irony of such obliqueness is that it is standard practice for teachers to emphasize the need for pupils to read the question carefully and beware of indirect answering. The following suggested answer does not deal with whether or not Ricardo is a caricature:

Amazing 'boyishness' (Jeeminy) married to underlying savagery (snarly) contributes to our disturbed response to the uncontrolled and savage Ricardo.

The implication of this answer is probably that the examiner does not see Ricardo as simply a caricature. That this is a view with which I sympathize is of no consequence. Even though the answers in the Memorandum are presented as 'merely suggestions', the lack of rigour - or even elementary care - in their framing is cause for concern.

Moreover, the apparent (howbeit uncertain) implication of the suggested answer that Ricardo is not to be seen as simply a caricature is at odds with the note on the marking of the essay question (see above: 94): 'Evil portrayed stereotypically ... Ultimately evil is seen by Conrad in an unconvincing way'. Either the implication which I have decoded from the suggested answer to 6 (f) is not intended by the examiner - in which case the phrasing is even more muddled than I have suggested - or the examiner contradicts herself in the space of less than an A4 page of handwriting. Given an alert set of sub-examiners, substantial discussion of the Marking Memorandum before getting down to marking, and a non-prescriptive general approach, such flaws need not be prejudicial to just evaluation of answers. However, their presence in as significant a document as the initial Marking Memorandum suggests a disturbing inadequacy of rigour on the part of the 1990 Higher Grade Literature examiner, the moderator and, indeed, the examination system.

Here are the suggested answers to 6 (g) (i) and 6 (g) (ii):

- (i) This time he was killed - reminder that it has been tried before.
- (ii) Heyst's sense of the scene playing itself out now irrelevant. Lena's death & the pollution of Samburan have destroyed his life.

These are adequate answers to a pair of 'lower-order' questions of the kind which allows less able candidates who have some elementary understanding of the text to score a few marks.

Finally, the suggested answer to 6 (h) is fully open-ended:

Any view - but needs to be supported by references to the novel & the way in which 'fire' has been used elsewhere.

This lack of prescriptiveness might warrant some applause, but there is an incongruity in that there is no logical reason for questions such as 6 (b), 6 (e) and 6 (f) to be treated differently in the Memorandum.

The Marking Memorandum is remarkable for its slapdash quality. The questions give the impression of obliviousness of the potential of *Victory* to generate discussion of social issues in either the early-twentieth-century colonial world or 1990; the suggested answers confirm this impression.

In general, the NSC questions on *Victory* are traditional in their focus on elementary aspects of prose rhetoric, characterization and essentially Leavisian moral issues. There is the occasional suggestion of problematization of interpretation and the occasional detail which, probably fortuitously, enables (but does not demand) a response which bears on social issues beyond the immediately inter-personal. Considered as a whole, the questions are of scant relevance to the problems attendant on living in late-twentieth-century South Africa.

As noted above (7), the NED syllabus asserts that

Literature can arouse pupils to question and to re-define
for themselves their assumptions, attitudes and values,
open their minds and hearts to new ideas and sensations.

It follows that examinations of pupils' understanding of literature should also have this function. In the main, the questions set on *Victory* over the years - and they are representative of NED Literature questions generally - do not serve this end with regard to pupils' interrogations of the validity of social structures and practices.

It is valuable that 'close reading' is promoted by the questions. Precise concentration on details of a text in the context of the work as a whole is a crucial stage in the development of the ability to subject any and all forms of social data to accurate analysis. Examinations should take the process further by focusing more attention on what is called in current colloquial idiom, 'where someone is coming from'. The assumptions, perspectives and motives underlying the utterances and behaviour of narrators and other characters are sometimes asked about. This is good, but more should be done. Teachers should advise pupils to include in any literature essay - or any discursive essay, for that matter - an explicit formulation of the assumptions which govern the opinions they present, and questions, particularly essay questions, should explicitly require candidates to clarify the bases in belief - in ideology - of their opinions. Moreover, prescription, teaching and examining ought to extend beyond investigation of the primary text to include analysis and evaluation of a representative sample of critical responses. The sample would need to be small and carefully chosen so as to be digestible, and it would not compromise the applicable pedagogical aim to edit them so as to make them more digestible. This aim would be to develop in pupils a critical consciousness of the relativity, provisionality, contingency and ideological rootedness of reading and interpretation. My assumption is that a contribution to the development and maintenance of a democratic social order would thus be made.

It is in order now to move on to a consideration of secondary sources which have had a particularly good chance of influencing NED classroom discourse about *Victory*, the case-study text for this thesis, in 1990, the year in which the essays discussed in Chapter One above were written.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMENTARY ON *VICTORY* GENERALLY MOST AVAILABLE IN NED SCHOOLS IN 1990

Mary Johnstone, the NED Superintendent in charge of English Curriculum Affairs until her appointment as a headmistress from the beginning of 1993, has made available to me copies of all of the commentaries and fragments of commentary sent to NED teachers in order to assist them in their teaching of *Victory*. There are six commentaries and two sets of fragments of commentary.

The institutional authority of commentary distributed by those in high office is at times reinforced by means of memoranda to schools. Take, for instance, a document dated 1 February 1984 (a year in which *Victory* was prescribed for 'matric' in NED schools), addressed to principals, marked 'For attention: Subject Head / English First Language' and signed 'M.B. Schroenn / Principal Subject Adviser'. It draws attention to 'enclosed copies of criticism on the novel *Victory*', namely those by Karl, Lewis and Hewitt identified below. The memorandum vigorously promotes 'such articles of criticism' as aids to teaching, and includes details such as 'It is essential to discuss such literary criticism and to return to the novel itself in order to verify responses and interpretations' and 'Please ensure that these articles of criticism are carefully filed for future reference.'

The commentaries provided by Johnstone are Chapter 9 ('*Victory*' of Douglas Hewitt's *Conrad: A Reassessment* (1952); RWB Lewis's 'The Current of Conrad's *Victory*' (1960), from *Joseph Conrad - a Collection of Criticism*, edited by FR Karl (1975); the first twenty pages of Chapter 7 ('*Victory*') of FR Karl's *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad* (1960); Chapter 5 ('*Victory*: Conrad's indictment of detachment') of Daniel R Schwarz's *Conrad: the Later Fiction* (1982); Dorothea Meihuizen's 'The Matriculant's Encounter with *Victory*', from *Crux* (April 1984); the four-page section devoted to *Victory* in Norman Page's *A Conrad Companion* (1986).

Of these, that by Meihuizen warrants further introductory comment. In 1984, she was teaching at the Natal Training College in Pietermaritzburg and was a well-known and generally well-regarded member of the fraternity of teachers of English in Natal. In that year, she gave a talk on *Victory* to the Midlands branch of the Natal Association for the Teaching of English (NATE). 'The Matriculant's Encounter with *Victory*', an article based on the talk (yet to be given) was published in the April 1984 number of *Crux*. This journal is ubiquitous on the shelves of secondary-school teachers of English throughout South Africa. Meihuizen's approach to *Victory* is trebly institutionally authoritative: she gave a lecture to teachers under the auspices of their professional association, her article appears in a journal likely to carry weight with a high proportion of teachers, and copies of the article were sent by 'head office' to the English departments of NED schools. Her article is readily available to schools not only because of its publication in an issue of *Crux*: NATE-organized talks on prescribed works are almost invariably well-attended, what is presented at them is often tape-recorded and further distributed, and word-of-mouth dissemination of such material is also normal. The easy accessibility of Meihuizen's concepts would also recommend her material to both teachers and pupils. It

is more succinct than and as uncomplicated as anything study-aids such as *Guidelines* has to offer.

The two sets of fragments distributed to schools have been typed out to form a single handout a little over two A4 pages long. Almost two pages are occupied by fragments of FR Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1948); there is less than eight full lines of transcription from Jocelyn Baines's *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (1960). The influence of *The Great Tradition* has waned in our universities in recent years, as the practices of the Cambridge School have been problematized in the light of rival paradigms. Nonetheless, because, during their university years, a high proportion of teachers in positions of authority in NED schools have had Leavis presented to them as a major intellectual mentor and *The Great Tradition* as a major critical text, there are copies of the book on numerous senior teachers' shelves and it can be assumed that in 1990 a fair number of teachers went beyond the NED handout in referring to Leavis's work on Conrad. It is therefore valid to consider all of the section on *Victory* in *The Great Tradition*. On the other hand, it would be surprising were any teachers to have a copy of Baines's *Critical Biography* at home, and it would be almost as unlikely for any of them to borrow a copy from a library, except in the improbable event of there being one in the school library. In the great majority of cases, secondary-school teachers are like their pupils in being unwilling to use material except that which is ready to hand. Baines's influence would be limited in all or nearly all schools to the tiny fragment distributed by the Superintendency.

Bev Moolman's 'Some Thoughts on Conrad's "Victory"' was published in *The NATE Journal*, number 17 (1990). This periodical is the official organ of the Natal Association for the Teaching of English. The article was based on a talk given to Natal teachers earlier in the year under the auspices of NATE. With regard to preparation for the 1990 Senior Certificate examination, it is reasonable to assume that the circumstances of the delivery of the talk and the publication of the article gave Moolman's commentary institutional authority greater than that of any other, especially since the overlapping membership of and close personal ties among members of the NATE Committee, the Superintendency, the NED ENGM Subject Committee and the Senior Certificate Higher Grade Literature examining body were well known among teachers. This does not mean that the opinions of Moolman or any other person reputed to be a member of any 'inner circle' carried particular weight with public examiners. Close direct observation over more than ten years tells me that they did not. Teachers' *perceptions* of authority are important, however, as is the easy availability of material; such material is particularly sought-after if it is known that it has been designed for consumption by teachers and pupils working toward a particular examination by someone intimately acquainted with teaching and examining within the system. Moolman's work qualifies exactly.

Robert Hampson's Introduction to the 1989 Penguin edition of *Victory* appeared in time to be one of the most readily available and institutionally authoritative commentaries on this novel for those writing the 1990 NSC examinations. (Earlier printings of the Penguin *Victory* do not have a critical introduction.) Penguins are more likely to be used in schools than any other edition because of their institutional respectability, their relative inexpensiveness and the tendency of leading Natal booksellers to stock them.

The volume on Conrad in the *Twentieth Century Views* series (1966) contains Thomas Moser's 'Conrad's Later "Affirmation"', which is about two-thirds of Chapter 3 ('The Later Conrad's "Affirmation"') of his *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline* (1957). There is no clearly demarcated section on *Victory* in it: consideration of *Victory* is interwoven with discussion of *Chance*, *The Shadow Line* and *The Rescue*, with a glance at 'The Planter of Malata' and comparisons of aspects of *An Outcast of the Islands*, 'The Secret Sharer', *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent*, *Nostramo* and 'The Rescuer' (the early version of *The Rescue*). The *Twentieth Century Views* collection on Conrad is therefore less likely to influence secondary-school reception of *Victory* than the other commentaries cited; nonetheless, the ready availability and fame of the series, together with the need of teachers and pupils to find encapsulated and encapsulating readings of a prescribed text, warrant its discussion.

A large proportion of secondary-school pupils and numerous university, training college and technikon undergraduates rely heavily - in many cases virtually exclusively - on the cheaper study-aids neatly characterized by Eagleton as 'bluffer's guides' (1983: 23). So do many secondary-school teachers. In South Africa, the most popular of these aids have for some years been those in the *Guidelines* series. If teachers' impressions are anything to go by, the 1990 *Guidelines* on *Victory* had a wider circulation than any other commentary on Conrad's novel. Even the Introduction to the Penguin edition is unlikely to have had more readers in 1990, as numerous schools were still using stocks of old, pre-Hampson copies. Whatever the intentions of the publishers might be, the structure of the *Guidelines* study-aids encourages mere regurgitation and even a neglect to read the primary texts at all. For these reasons, and because aspects of interpretation offered are often simplistic and even absurd, some teachers regard them as *bêtes noires*; others rely on them as much as their pupils do.

Key concerns of commentary on *Victory* will be identified and the applicable parts of the cited secondary sources will be discussed. There will not be an attempt to explore every issue dealt with in the commentaries, the NED Senior Certificate questions or the selection of 1990 essays. Selection of certain concerns is determined by the likelihood of their being given prominence in classroom discussion. My sense of this likelihood is influenced by my own experience as an NED teacher and by tendencies in both the question papers and the sample of essay answers. The assumption, again empirically based on my own experience, is that discussion of the selection is representative of discussion which would apply to secondary sources commonly available to and used by NED teachers.

It is in the nature of literature and commentary that such concerns overlap and that there is some artificiality in sectioning the patterns of meaning that have been perceived in or conferred on the text. However, discourse about Conrad's novel - in classrooms, examination questions and answers and published commentary - does suggest a basis for dividing discussion of commentary. The sections are headed 'Centring Heyst and Leavis's Conception of "Life"', 'Social and Political Implications, including the Policy of Detachment, but excluding Sexual Politics', 'Lena and Sexual Politics', 'Whose "Victory"?' and 'Allegory and Caricature'. In none of these sections will there be an attempt to include discussion of all of the secondary sources listed above. Prominence in

in a given commentary with concomitant likelihood of making an impression on teachers and/or pupils will determine selection for case-study purposes.

In a given section, criticism will be discussed in an order determined by date of original publication.

Centring Heyst and Leavis's Conception of 'Life'

The presentation of Heyst is of central concern. Of related importance is the issue of whether to centre or to decentre the protagonist when deciding where to locate the crucial significances of the novel.

Leavis's typically liberal humanist approach approvingly presents as central the moral development of Heyst the individual who comes to realize the importance of inter-personal relationships. It can be suggested that he does go beyond what can be categorized from a Marxist perspective as the crassly individual-centred to acknowledge 'the sense in which reality is social' (230). However, the notion is not developed satisfactorily in terms of such a perspective.

Leavis calls *Victory* 'a study of Heyst's case' and says of the character that 'he is indisputably at the centre of the book' (222). He outlines 'Conrad's main theme' (229) thus (223):

Intelligence and fine consciousness in Heyst are represented as very specially conditioned; perverted, in fact, by the influence of a father who is a kind of genius of disillusion, and the 'victory' is a victory over scepticism, a victory of life. The tragic irony that makes it come too late and identifies it with death doesn't make it less a victory; it is unequivocal:

He then quotes the 'Ah, Davidson' speech.

An implication of Leavis's way of centring 'Heyst's case' is to promote a classically liberal humanist consideration of the experiences of and changes in an individual such as registers the identity of that individual as a social being, but deals with the social, political and economic roots of his relationships in a perfunctory way. If the novel can itself be shown to avoid consideration of such roots, the ideologically limited nature of the text can be exposed; whatever the propensity of the primary text in this regard can be taken as being, the commentary which fails to interrogate such roots is politically obfuscatory from a Marxist-influenced (although not necessarily doctrinaire-Marxist) viewpoint.

That Leavis has a tendency to slip into special pleading in his commitment to the idea that 'Heyst's case' is the supremely dominant consideration can be demonstrated by means of 'close reading' which challenges the adequacy of his own. For instance, he asserts (229) the lack of 'irresistible significance in relation to Conrad's main theme' of 'the antithesis of lust in Ricardo and woman-loathing in Jones on which the dénouement depends'. The cited characteristics of Jones and Ricardo are presented as primarily plot-devices designed to bring about 'action' the purpose of which is to 'bring that theme to a poignant crystallization'. Leavis thus marginalizes the contrast between the warped

sexualities of Jones¹ and Ricardo and sexuality which is healthy because based on mutual regard and not parasitical and which is apparent in the Heyst-Lena relationship, however emotionally problematic that relationship might be. This marginalization is unnecessary in terms which Leavis himself (it can be fairly assumed) would find congenial.

Leavis's centring of Heyst and of the moral and emotional development of the individual can be shown to be related to his (Leavis's) concern with what he calls 'life'. Throughout his discussion of *Victory*, Leavis displays this concern, one which has become closely associated with his name. In Chapter 1 of *The Great Tradition* he presents as a major distinguishing mark of 'the major novelists' and 'the major poets':

that they are significant in terms of that human awareness
they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life (10).

He writes of 'the great English novelists' that

their interest in their art gives them ... brought to an intense focus, an unusually developed interest in life. For, far from having anything of Flaubert's disgust or disdain or boredom, they are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity (17; my ellipsis).

Of Conrad specifically he makes a point clearly applicable to all members of 'The Great Tradition':

to appreciate Conrad's 'form' is to take stock of a process of relative valuation conducted by him in the face of life: what do men live by? what *can* men live by - these are the questions that animate his theme (42; Leavis's italics).

In the section of *The Great Tradition* dealing with *Victory*, Leavis asserts that the implication of Heyst's 'Ah, Davidson' speech, as discussed above, is that the 'victory' is 'over scepticism, a victory of life', and 'an ironical victory for life, but unequivocally a victory' (223, 230). Unsurprisingly, Leavis does not query Heyst's meaning when the latter speaks of the need of the "heart" to "put its trust in life".

But what does Leavis mean by 'life'? For that matter, what does Heyst mean by it? Leavis seems to imply that he and Heyst (and, implicitly, Conrad) mean the same thing (and perhaps they do, but the matter cannot be certain).

Elsewhere, Leavis admits to and suggests the necessity of the vagueness of the term:

It doesn't take a great deal of reflection to establish that 'life' is a large word and doesn't admit of definition. But some of the most important words we have to use don't admit of definition. And this truth holds of literary criticism. Not only can we not, for instance, do without the word 'life'; any attempt to think out a major critical issue entails using positively the shifts in force the word is bound to be incurring as it feels its way on and out and in towards its fulfilment. And it would hardly be questioned that there is point in saying that a critic who would be intelligent about the novel must be intelligent about life: no discussion of

¹ See below: 161.

the novel by any other kind of critic is worth attention ('James as Critic', 1963, in James 1968: 17).

The admission that 'life' cannot be defined is honest, but the justification for using the term is untenable. Leavis coercively and irrationally asserts the necessity of the indefinable concept. The 'it would hardly be questioned' is typical and symptomatic: the person who would dare to question the point being made is clearly beyond the pale and not to be considered. Leavis is unlikely to be guilty of bad faith; more likely is an honest confusion of his own ideologically determined perceptions and 'commonsense' fundamental validity. And it is an ideology which is unconscious of itself *as* ideology (and therefore contingent, provisional and relative) which tends to be particularly prone to assert conceptual hegemony on the basis of circular argument and the authoritarianism of 'natural' rightness.

We need to go somewhere other than to Leavis himself for some clarity in answer to the question of what Leavis might mean by 'life', and, for that matter, what Heyst might mean by it.

PJM Robertson, an admirer (although not an uncritical worshipper) of Leavis, gives this answer (1988: 46):

Conrad through Heyst affirms life. By extension he shows that life means more than mechanically existing or living in despair; that, rather, life has a meaning and a purpose in that it contains possibilities of hope for better things, of growth, and of spiritual renewal. He shows, in short, that life is both worth living and worth living for. *Victory* embodies very strikingly Leavis's conviction that great literature is an affirmation of life in that it articulates and celebrates man's finest spiritual potentialities.

It is hard to imagine Leavis's not approving of this explanation. In traditional liberal terms it is impeccable. What needs to be noted is that it is the product of a particular ideological perspective, on the evidence reasonably imputable to the writer of *Victory*, to Leavis and to Robertson. It would be difficult to understand Robertson as implying anything other than the exclusively individual experience of 'mechanically existing', 'living in despair', 'meaning', 'purpose', 'hope', 'growth', 'spiritual renewal' and 'spiritual potentialities'. 'Life' is that which is experienced by the individual and it has the potential for development into that which is enriching for the individual. This experience and potential are not presented as divorced from social conditions, precisely; however, they are not presented as crucially aligned to any conception of the determining force of social structures for the condition of the individual either; neither are the responsibilities of the individual to the society of which he is a part presented in more than vague terms as necessary to his chances of happiness. In 'Re-Reading the Great Tradition', Catherine Belsey analyses Leavis's covert ideological bases. Michael Chapman's summary of Belsey's attack on Leavis is useful in its lucidity:

Belsey attacks what she believes are the underlying assumptions of Leavis's famous book, in which are posited extremely selective and, as she feels, narrow criteria of literary and moral value. Leavis's views on 'life' (individualistic; a passage through ignorance

and misunderstanding to new and more stable sets of relationships) are seen to be ideologically circumscribed and to reinforce what are called 'hierarchies of subjectivity' (Leavis himself might say, 'relative human value'). In this way - the terms are Belsey's - the ruling elite within state apparatuses of education and cultural practice help to inscribe social difference and to provide the bourgeoisie with a sensibility that is the source and guarantee of its right to control and administer experience (1985: 9-10; reference is to Belsey in Widdowson 1982: 121-135).

Chapman uses Belsey to demonstrate that Leavis's notion of 'life' is an ideologically charged construct with important socio-political implications, and not to be taken for granted as 'natural' or universal. Similarly, Eagleton argues that

The *Scrutiny* case ... represented nothing less than the last-ditch stand of liberal humanism, concerned ... with the unique value of the individual and the creative realm of the interpersonal. These values could be taken as 'Life', a word which *Scrutiny* made a virtue out of not being able to define. If you asked for some reasoned theoretical statement of their case, you had thereby demonstrated that you were in the outer darkness: either you felt Life or you did not. Great literature was a literature reverently open to Life, and what Life was could be demonstrated by great literature. The case was circular, intuitive, and proof against all argument (1983: 42; my ellipses).

One might see Eagleton's attitude to the long-term viability of liberal humanism as merely a Marxist's wishful thinking, but his classification of the ideological nature of Leavis's key concept, 'life', is valid. Chapman, Belsey and Eagleton are committed to left-radical ideological perspectives and should not be accepted as any more oracular than Leavis; however, their critiques of Leavis serve to demonstrate the merely relative and provisional nature of Leavis's basic principles and should help to undermine the claim to fundamental 'commonsense' reliability made on their behalf by so many secondary- and tertiary-level teachers during the past few decades.

Moreover, registration of the problematic nature of Leavis's use of the term 'life' should alert one to the problematic nature of Heyst's use of it. It is difficult to avoid the sense that Heyst means by 'life' pretty much what Leavis is approvingly explained as meaning by it by Robertson and disapprovingly by Chapman/Belsey and Eagleton. The teacher ought not to take its implications for granted, and its value as an object-lesson in the essential provisionality and ideologically governed nature of even the most apparently 'natural' concepts ought to be seriously considered.

Social and Political Implications, including the Policy of Detachment, but excluding Sexual Politics

Initially, I attempted to write about 'Detachment' as a 'theme' separable from the strictly social and political implications of the novel. I found the task impracticable as the two are too closely bound in some, if not all, of the commentaries. It also proved

unsatisfactory to separate for the purposes of discussion socio-political issues not bound up with the issue of detachment from those which are: in some commentaries, the borders are too blurred and distinctions invalid. This is not surprising. For Heyst, and for people in general, avoiding being tied to others means attempting to deny identity as a social being not only as regards private relationship.

It has, however, proved possible to discuss commentary on Lena and the politics of gender separately.

* * *

Leavis's interpretation of the 'Ah, Davidson' speech and of the novel in general obviously means that he sees the philosophy of detachment Heyst inherits from his father to be inimical to 'life'. The social and political implications of Leavis's approach have perforce been discussed in the context of consideration of his centring of Heyst's case. What remains to be noted in this regard is that it is of value to consider such matters as the role of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, the role of social and economic conditions in determining the specific forms of degeneracy manifest in Jones, Ricardo, Pedro and Schomberg, and the relationship of the forms of alienation suffered by Heyst and Lena to social class and (in the case of Lena) gender. What Leavis seems to be unaware of or to deem not worth emphasis can be shown to suggest his ideological orientation.

* * *

Hewitt's discussion of Heyst's detachment is an aspect of his dissatisfaction with the novel.

He adversely criticizes the portrayal of Heyst because his 'flaw is never made real' (107). He claims that this is so because

it is so generally and so vaguely expressed, and because it
it is swamped by the response of admiration which he receives
as a man who is in touch with the beauty and tranquillity of
the islands. We feel, rather, that in some subtle way he is
superior to the generality of men (106).

A consideration of the distinction between the *hamartia* - tragic error of judgement - of Classical Greek tragedy and the 'fatal flaw' (of character) of Shakespearian and other Elizabethan-Jacobean tragedy is useful here. It is apparent that Hewitt thinks that disastrous misdirection needs to be related to moral inadequacy. This invalid notion causes him to feel that the lack of a serious moral distortion in Heyst detracts from the success of the novel as tragedy. He validly characterizes Heyst's 'detachment from normal human feelings' as 'a disastrous aberration' (106), but errs in assuming that this needs to be presented and understood as so profound a moral flaw that it is incompatible with the attractive aspects of Heyst's character or, at least, disqualifies Heyst from being 'superior to the generality of men'.

Hewitt makes a valid point with his (partially) rhetorical question:

Is not Axel Heyst a man who intends to do good but who brings
about evil because altruism is mixed in him with a coldness

which is partly his own responsibility, partly an inheritance from his father? (103)

But he confuses this *bringing about* of 'evil' with *essential* 'evil', as is evident in his indication that 'a complex awareness of the mingling of good and evil in human nature' is discernible in the presentation of Heyst, and in his mention of 'the awareness of Heyst that the inhuman detachment of Mr Jones is akin to his own' (*ibid*). This 'awareness' is however not explicit in the text even though it might be inferred by many readers; indeed, Heyst tells Jones that "We don't speak the same language" (388).

Recollection of the concept of *hamartia* not only problematizes Hewitt's reading of an aspect of *Victory* but would assist in presenting an important idea to pupils: general and conventional moral superiority might not save one from disastrous misdirection. Indeed, such a contrast between potential and fate is of the essence of traditional tragedy.

Moreover, Hewitt misses an important implication of one of his own points:

Yet when Heyst says: 'I cared little for life and still less for death'

or:

I, Axel Heyst, the most detached of creatures in this earthly captivity, the veriest tramp on this earth, an indifferent stroller through the world's bustle ... I, a man of universal scorn and unbelief. ...'

we echo Lena's comment: 'You are putting it on'

(107; quotations from *Victory*: 325, 198-199; Hewitt's ellipses).

Despite Heyst's insistence, in response to Lena's scepticism, on his self-characterization, the reader might well take and extend her point and consider that Heyst has succumbed to self-dramatization (derived from his father's script). The role of the detached arch-sceptic is significantly at variance with the actor's original or potential sensibility, but through acceptance and habituation has been reified as integral with that sensibility. If, therefore, 'we' agree with Lena, 'we' are not necessarily dismissing the presentation of Heyst as unconvincing - as Hewitt seems to imply - but grasping the extent to which Heyst might be trapped in a self-theatricalization in which his imagination is so enmeshed as decisively to trap him existentially. This entrapment qualifies as a 'flaw', certainly, but is not incompatible with fine sensitivity. Heyst needs to be productively grasped as a divided personality, the divisions being distinguishable by the reader, but not objectifiable, reconcilable or separable by the character himself, except partially when tragedy has forced the issue.

* * *

A longhand note in what seems to be Superintendent Dr Schroenn's handwriting cites the Farrar, Strous (New York) edition of 1969 as the source of the twenty-page handout from Karl's chapter on *Victory*. I have had access to the original British edition from Thames and Hudson (1960). The pagination of the two editions is the same.

Karl deals with Heyst's detachment in the light of what he perceives to be references to *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *Axël*, and Goethe's *Faust* and focuses on Heyst's impotence in the face of the challenge posed by destructive forces.

Karl asserts that 'The reference to *The Tempest* is not fortuitous' (253). He refers to Conrad's use in various other texts of epigraphs from and clear allusions to Shakespeare. He also adduces biographical data indicative of Conrad's interest in and knowledge of Shakespeare. These points are convincing, but not definitively so: Karl does not present textual echoes so explicit as to make doubt about authorial intention in this regard irrational. Baines, for one, has such doubts: he also hears 'echoes' of *The Tempest* in *Victory*, but writes that they are 'presumably fortuitous' (1960: 396 fn). It is impossible to tell which of them is right about the provenance of the echoes.

However, productive dialogizing of the two texts does not have to depend on conclusive proof of authorial intention. Registration of the possible links, especially if suggested by 'authority' such as that attributed to published commentary, is sufficient to generate the process and have an influence on interpretation (and evaluation).

Karl notes that

When violence does come to Heyst, his defenses cannot be changed, and unlike Prospero he has no magic wand to do his bidding (252-253).

Furthermore, when Heyst's idyllic ('though not Edenesque') world 'is suddenly invaded by violence, deceit, and dissembling outer-worlders',

Lacking magic, Heyst must call upon his own resources, which are unable to respond; and so, unlike Prospero, he cannot command the scene. However, while differing in their respective abilities to reach decisions and carry them out, both the weary Heyst and the aging Prospero possess an emphatic awareness of self. Both see in foreign intruders a blow at personal equilibrium, and both find their existing worlds too heinous for participation. The result for each is a way of life in which self is supreme, in which important decisions are minimized or postponed, and in which peace can be obtained only by evading action. As Prospero must protect Miranda, so Heyst is responsible for Lena; but while Prospero through magic can hold in abeyance the uncivilized Caliban and the civilized intruders, Heyst is unable to handle either the savage Pedro or his perverse masters. After the violence has ended, Prospero is let to live in peace and quiet, while Heyst, ineffectual and surely a failure, dies, although, it must be recognized, with his dignity intact (255).

Karl's reading of *The Tempest* is not convincing. He seems to be forcing an interpretation of the play into the mould of his thesis that there is a relationship between it and Conrad's novel. Even allowing for plurality of reading does not justify the notion that Prospero sees 'in foreign intruders a blow at personal equilibrium': Prospero takes the opportunity afforded by the proximity of the ship to this island to cause the shipwreck, teach his former oppressors a lesson and restore legitimacy and justice, with no sense at any stage of being threatened, in his 'personal equilibrium' or in any other way. Moreover, Karl's implication seems to be that the Prospero of the island is as reclusive as Heyst, whereas in fact Prospero retires from active involvement in affairs of state in his earlier life. Moreover again, there is no clear evidence that Prospero as

reclusive scholar finds his 'existing world too heinous for participation': he is simply a single-minded scholar to whom 'the liberal Arts' are 'all my study' (1.2.73-74) and to whom 'my library/Was dukedom enough' (1.2.109-110); his noting that Miranda's 'O brave new world,/That has such people in't' results from her inexperience - 'Tis new to thee' (5.1.183-184) - is an indication of his sense of the 'heinous', but not that he cannot participate in 'the existing world'. Finally, the Prospero of the island is the opposite of one for whom 'important decisions are minimized or postponed, and in which peace can be obtained only by evading action': his actions are consistently decisive and effective; and the earlier Prospero is not so much evasive as oblivious of the requirements of his office.

Such flaws aside, Karl's comparison of play and novel has useful aspects, one of which is the emphasis on the necessity for action.

It is a pedagogically productive practice on the part of some English departments to prescribe for standard 9 study a work which casts light on a text due for prescription the following (Senior Certificate) year. Setting *The Tempest* with an eye on standard 10 study of *Victory* would make sense. Ironically, one of the things which could be done when dialogically relating the two texts would be to consider, *pace* Karl, that Prospero's vigorous interventions bring about a 'happy' resolution while Heyst's inability to act contributes to tragedy. In this regard, a teacher ought to be careful not to suggest or allow as an implication that Prospero-like vigour is necessarily conducive to success. All that can be asserted is the potentially disabling effect and lack of guaranteed safety of removal from action. Reference to *The Tempest* proves nothing in extra-literary terms (see above: 32).

Karl considers *Victory* also in the light of *Hamlet* and compares the 'idealism' of the protagonists of the two works. It is valid to see Heyst's policy of detachment as a form of 'idealism'; an early textual suggestion to this effect is the description of Heyst by a 'disreputable white man' as 'a ut-ut-utopist' (8). Karl cites 'an early reviewer' and James Huneker in *Ivory Apes and Peacocks* as seeing Heyst as 'a veritable South Seas Hamlet, but essentially a Hamlet of our days' (254). His initial reference to Hamlet as 'this "Hamlet of the South Seas"' is in the context of quoting from the last sentence of the opening chapter of the novel - "... there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man" - and suggesting that 'the smoking volcano, ironically juxtaposed to Heyst in these pages, prefigures the sudden violence that is to engulf him and Lena' (248; Karl's ellipsis; quotation from *Victory*: 9). Echoing Hamlet's dying words, 'the rest is silence' (5.2.350), Karl goes on to write that

amid the wreckage that he has helped create, [Heyst] finally recognizes Lena's triumph as the victory that has regenerated even while destroying him. The rest is truly silence (248-249; my interpolation).

Karl is careful to warn that 'Heyst and Hamlet in their common plight have certain similarities that should not, however, be forced.' This notwithstanding, he notes that

In the common tensions of Hamlet and Heyst between detachment and involvement, between a destructive idealism and a violent reality, and between the pulls of the past and present which each tries to synthesize, the two figures must

face similar problems in a way that eventually proves fatal to both. In the carnage that clears the stages of *Hamlet* and *Victory*, the protagonist of each succumbs to the forces of destruction (254).

Karl's understanding of *Hamlet* is coherent and valid, if not definitive. One cannot attack it as one can his use of *The Tempest* (except for his comparison of Lena and Ophelia; see below: 138-139). However, it can be pointed out that Hamlet's 'idealism' is not necessarily 'destructive'. It is not unarguably the case that Hamlet might act otherwise and achieve indisputable good. Fortinbras is indubitably decisive and unhindered by Hamlet's form of 'idealism', yet clearly prone to destructiveness. I, for one, find it altogether unclear what Hamlet might do in order to achieve some kind of satisfactory good that does not result in 'carnage', other than miraculously develop perfect perception. The assertiveness of interpretation carries over into an aspect of interpretation of *Victory*. It has the potential to promote a fixing of a certain understanding of the novel as definitive. The references to *Hamlet* are used to support a proposition that the 'idealism' of Heyst is 'destructive', with the implication that it is necessarily invalid. This supporting of a proposition can easily have the effect of an influential truth-claim. The authority teachers, tertiary-level students and pupils often grant commentators, in concert with the mystique vaguely attached to the name of Shakespeare (even by pupils and students who loathe studying his works but are coerced by a belief in his institutionalized 'power') might have such an effect. Besides, and especially because of the mystique cited, argument based on the allusion would be regarded as likely to impress examiners. The task of the teacher-mediator ought to be the problematization of all such allusions (which does not imply their necessary abandonment or dismissal). In 1990, none of the pupils who chose the Conrad essay in the NED Higher Grade Literature paper mentioned any possible allusion to Shakespeare. Nonetheless, the point holds in general principle and it is a safe bet that the Karl handout is on file in numerous KwaZulu-Natal English departments.

Karl warns that the 'similarities' of Heyst and Hamlet 'should not ... be forced'. For some, this would diminish the assertive authoritativeness of Karl's points about the imputed 'similarities'. Ironically, however, it might reinforce this quality for others, in that the claim to caution can suggest particular care on Karl's part to avoid strained argument, so that the arguments which are presented gain in credibility. I do not imply that Karl is being manipulative, but it is nonetheless generally the case that a mediator's cautions against 'forced' or otherwise invalid understanding of an aspect of mediation have the potential to be thus ironically toxic to critical engagement with such mediation by some readers. Teachers should bear in mind the importance of consistent and explicit emphasis on the provisionality of all reading, especially the mediator's own.

A few commentators compare Heyst and the eponymous hero of *Axel*. Baines is one (1960: 399-400), and in this regard he acknowledges the work of Katherine Haynes Gatch in her 1951 essay, 'Conrad's Axel' in *Studies in Philology* XLVIII: 98-106. John A Palmer briefly notes (1968: 169) that there are 'obvious parallels' between the two texts. Karl compares the two characters thus:

Unlike Stein,¹ the elder Heyst could not live by means of illusions while tacitly doubting their existence. Axel is a true offspring of that silent advocate of "Look on - make no sound"; long buried with his father is a substantial part of the son. Retreating into himself, Axel tried, like Villiers' Axel, to avoid the compromising contamination of human matter. But unlike Villiers' Axel, he even disbelieves in the efficacy of spiritual perfection; his despair is secular, heaven holds no reward and hell no punishment for his disenchantment. What is not dust is ashes; love is vanity, and attachment is momentary weakness. The pure life, the perfect life, is not for him a perfect ordering of virtuous acts, but a complete negation of action (251; Karl's omission of the diæresis from 'Axel').

Villiers's *Axel*, as Baines's summaries and quotations make plain (1960: 399-400), can be read as promoting romantic optimism and/or the fetishizing of a love-ecstasy-death nexus.² Reading Baines might prompt a dialogizing of the two texts so that *Victory* can be interpreted as contradicting the ideology or ideologies which can be attributed to *Axel* and similar works. Karl's emphasis is different from Baines's. He registers that Heyst is incapable of the kind of optimism which *Axel* evinces, but reads this strictly as an attribute which the novel presents as invalid. He asserts that 'Heyst must be chastened into realization' of the wrong-headedness of the policy of detachment (252). In this regard, Karl follows the standard line most associated with Leavis. He shows no sense that the novel might be read in a more complex way as leaving unresolved - or at least incompletely resolved - the debate between engagement and withdrawal. Like Karl and many others, I dislike the policy of detachment: I see it as both socially irresponsible and sadly defeatist; nonetheless, it is necessary to register that, despite the 'Ah, Davidson' speech, Heyst's father can be viewed as having a point, in that Heyst does bring pain and destruction upon himself when he compromises his detachment. Perhaps Karl is subject to a common tendency to read texts which the commentator likes as asserting the 'morally positive'. This liking can wholly or in part be due to interpretation that the text does promote values congenial to the interpreter. One can speculate, however, that sometimes the liking - however otherwise founded - can be prior, and in product with the interpreter's ideological proclivity conduce to the congenial interpretation. This possibility applies to pupils and teachers as much as it does to published critics, and all of us readers should be aware of it.

In discussing the relationship between *Victory* and Goethe's version of *Faust* Karl acknowledges Alice Raphael's work in *Goethe the Challenger* (1932). Various other

¹ In *Lord Jim*; see below: 114-115.

² In passing, it might be noted that this is not a necessary reading of *Axel*. Baines in effect presents (*ibid*) the attitudes of the characters, Axel and Sara de Maupers as identical to those of the text. But close reading of the passages Baines quotes suggests that *Axel* sets up an implicit interior dialogue and that Sara, at least, can be understood as interrogating rather than affirming ultra-Romantic notions to do with the truth of infinity and the illusoriness of finite existence.

commentators have come to perceive the Faust archetype in certain of Conrad's characters. Cedric Watts, for instance, sees in 'Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* or Gould in *Nostramo* ... continuity, albeit partly parodic, with the Romantic Promethean and the Faustian traditions' (1984: 58).

Karl writes that Raphael 'sees in Heyst, Lena, and Jones the Faust, Margaret and Mephistopheles of the twentieth century' (254). In his critical discussion of and elaboration on Raphael's ideas about *Victory*, Karl comments:

Heyst is early Faust, the diligent student and detached viewer, certainly not the later *bon vivant* who seeks after freedom and pleasure with abandon (262-263).

This idea is not developed. Karl's dialogizing of *Victory* and *Faust* is productive of discussion of other aspects of Conrad's novel, even if it is problematic (see below: 138), but not of the philosophy of detachment.

However, elsewhere he discusses the 'spirit of withdrawal' as 'it extends from the individual to the society at large' (251). He thinks that 'Heyst must be chastened into realization' (252) of a fundamental moral imperative of which his (Heyst's) whole society needs to become aware:

Heyst's attitude is a clear indication of certain late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas, which strongly imply that before 1914 man could make a pretense of detachment, but that, eventually, everyone must become involved in life. In Conrad's prophetic novel, Heyst's trouble on the island amid the violence of the predatory Jones and Ricardo is, so to speak, his own world war (247).

The idea is further emphasized:

The narrative of his chastening is the allegory of an age that chose detachment in the face of violence ... immersion in the realities of life ... is ... the only way to survival (252; my ellipses).

Karl understands the 'Ah, Davidson' speech as echoing 'Stein's advice in *Lord Jim* (265). He discusses this 'advice' in an earlier part of his book (126-127). Neither Stein's words nor Karl's interpretation of them is in the handout; moreover, despite the status of Stein's 'In the destructive element immerse' speech as one of the most discussed details of *Lord Jim*, most NED teachers would not immediately understand the reference to Stein in the handout, as *Lord Jim* is seldom prescribed at either secondary or tertiary level in Natal and my impression is that it is not often 'private reading'. Neither would teachers who read the handout be likely to research the reference to Stein. They would, I surmise, not regard it as necessary to their understanding of Karl's essential point and would be satisfied to note the familiar reference to Donne's 'No man is an island' which immediately follows the allusion to *Lord Jim*.¹

The unfortunate consequence is to make unlikely a significant possible effect of Karl's dialogizing of *Lord Jim* and *Victory*: the generation of the idea that seeing 'human

¹ Donne's words are quoted in a number of the 1990 examination essays: some teachers might have picked up the idea from Karl, but it is so well-known and obviously relevant to discussion of *Victory* that this is not necessarily the case.

fellowship' as illusory might be metaphysically sound but, contrary to the Heystian doctrine of detachment and withdrawal, must be resisted if survival is to be possible. This is in line with the standard interpretation of Stein's words, such as is provided by, among others, Tony Tanner:

The world itself ... is the 'destructive element': man must learn to live in it (Tanner 1963: 43; my ellipses).

What is present in the handout, however, is the related point that Karl makes in connection with Heyst's 'Ah, Davidson' speech:

The social significance of his words is plain, for, as William Bancroft comments, Heyst is a living example of Donne's proposition that no man is an island unto himself, and that human solidarity must often take precedence over the individual will (265).

Although Karl's discussion of the socio-historical implications of *Victory* is significantly more extensive than Leavis's, he is essentially saying what Leavis does, with the addition of a registration that *Victory* can be read as the product of a specific historical moment in which the invalidity of a policy of detachment is particularly pronounced because of the way in which vast international conflict makes it especially difficult to escape the reality of mutual human impact, for better and for worse, as well as the concomitant reality that in order for the individual to survive in the face of the general threat, 'human solidarity' is necessary. The point that such 'solidarity must often take precedence over the individual will' is standard liberal humanist: within the ideological discourses variously traceable to Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment assertions of the centrality of the individual, one would have to go to a marginal doctrine of extreme (if anti-anarchistic) individualism, such as that of Ayn Rand, to find a contradiction of this ideological position, and even she thinks that 'the individual will' is not totally sacrosanct.¹ All major religions and the various forms of socialist thinking also include this stress on 'human solidarity'. It is so pervasive an ethic that there is some danger of its becoming over-familiar and losing its impact in classroom discussion: it has for years been a comfortable classroom cliché which has little if any power to provoke young members of the historically dominant (and, in 1995, still economically privileged) South African ethnic group to examine their politico-economic condition critically. The teacher needs to ensure its freshness and immediate applicability by relating it to specific social realities which clearly impinge on the pupils' own lives. Meihuizen and Moolman both make this point, although I do not think they go far enough (see below: 123, 126-127).

In the course of his comparison of Heyst and Hamlet, Karl presents Heyst as a representative of his age:

The melancholy Swede perhaps speaks for the early twentieth century as much as the melancholy Dane speaks for Elizabethans three hundred years before (254).

¹ For Rand, no-one has 'the right to force his ideas on others' and it is important that 'men of good will ... come together for the purpose of upholding reason and establishing a rational society' (1961: 57; my ellipsis).

It is reasonable to speculate that the historical specifics of 1914-1915 might influence the writing of *Victory*. Of greater value would be a consideration of how the novel might be read as having a bearing on the reader's attitude to her own historical moment. There is a danger that some readers might take Karl's point that *Victory* can be seen as 'the study of an age' and historicize the text so as to seal it into late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century referentiality. (This would not be Karl's fault.) The bearing of the issue of detachment as opposed to social involvement on South Africa during the current period of upheaval ought to be obvious. The simple point is that the teacher ought to allow - to generate, if necessary - discussion of such a bearing.

* * *

Schwarz's '*Victory*: Conrad's indictment of detachment' can be described as radical liberal in its socio-political perspective. It displays or at least strongly suggests acceptance of traditional liberal humanist values while paying constant attention to historical and politico-economic determinants of interpretation such as indicate the influence of Marxist or Marxist-derived thinking on modern liberalism. For this reason, it is a valuable secondary source in terms of the perspective of this thesis: teachers, pupils and tertiary-level students ought to be aware of such determinants and of their extra-literary corollaries.

A potentially significant feature of the circulated photocopy of Schwarz's chapter on *Victory* is that certain details have been underlined. It is also likely to be important that certain details have not been. It is of no moment whether the NED Superintendent is responsible for the underlining or whether the copy was marked by a previous user: the potential exists for teachers and pupils to be guided in their evaluation of the relevant significance of details by what might well appear to be a graphic indication of the attitude of institutional authority.

The significance of politico-economic considerations in Schwarz's sense of the meaning of *Victory* is evident from the beginning of the commentary and maintained throughout it.

In the first paragraph, Schwarz writes of 'the crisis of values which Conrad believed was undermining Western civilisation'. He elaborates:

For Conrad, the crisis was epitomised by imperialism, capitalism, the decline of family and national ties, and the replacement of human relationships based upon personal ties with relationships based on economic consideration. *Victory* depicts an 'age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel' (p. 3). Schomberg's hotel becomes a mnemonic device to recall that image, and Schomberg's malice, enervation, lust and greed are the quintessence of that age. In a world dominated by various forms of materialistic adventurism - from the coal-mine in the tropics, Zangiaco's travelling band, and Schomberg's parody of a hotel - Heyst's courtesy and delicacy stand as a vestige of an older tradition. But his manners and formality also serve as a barrier not only to reaching a complete

understanding of Lena, but also to contending with the forces of economic barbarism - Jones, Ricardo and Schomberg (60).

Schwarz refers to the Tropical Belt Coal Company as 'imperialistic' (*ibid*). He characterizes the England in which *Victory* is produced as

Beset by political turmoil in the form of labour unrest, the Women's Movement and the excesses and zeal of the Conservative opposition, which threatened to undermine parliamentary government (61).

Later, he explains Heyst's escapism:

Faced with the hurly-burly of economic competition in modern life, Heyst seeks refuge in detachment disguised as polish and courtesy (65).

The idea that *Victory* is importantly an indictment of morally debilitating capitalism is variously emphasized:

The conduct of Schomberg, the Zangiacomos, the Portuguese officials who would auction Morrison's brig testifies to the displacement of human relations and amenities by economic considerations (66).

Schwarz sees Heyst as 'entangled in the web of imperialism and venture capitalism that Conrad always despised after his 1890 Congo trip' (68). He looks specifically at the relationship of certain key characters to the England of the early twentieth century:

Dorset (the setting, Conrad knew, of Hardy's pastoral world) is a place to which Morrison succumbs to the 'native climate'. Lena is a 'child of [London's] streets' in 'the hopeless grip of poverty' (p. 78). Jones retains the forms but not the morality or energy of his class. Ricardo recalls C. F. G. Masterman's gloomy description of a new type of Englishman to be found in the cities: 'easily wearied: yet voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina, or endurance - seeking stimulus in drink, in betting, in any unaccustomed conflicts at home or abroad' (73; Schwarz's interpolation; Schwarz cites Samuel Hynes's quotation from Masterman's *The Heart of the Empire*, in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*: 61-62).

Ricardo, this 'new type of Englishman', is 'an English sailor who has renounced the maritime ethic that Conrad embraced' and is 'Without personal or national ties, without any values but survival' and 'Allied with a decadent upper class personified by Jones and a barbarous lower class epitomised by Pedro' (74).

Schwarz vigorously pursues his line of thought. The following quotations are illustrative but not exhaustive:

Conrad is concerned with the kind of men that capitalism has produced: Schomberg, Jones, Ricardo, the Zangiacomo band and the Tropical Belt Coal Company are symptomatic of the rampant commercialism of an age Conrad despises. Schomberg is the archetypal capitalist, whose credo is ironically summarised by the narrator: 'business is business, and its forms and formulas

must be observed'; for him, people are 'accounts' (p. 98) (76).

Preying upon the hopes and dreams of others, Jones's gambling becomes a trope for the commercial impulse (*ibid*).

When Jones says, 'I am the world itself', we realise he epitomises the cynicism, commercialism, exploitation of the modern world (77).

Ricardo is a cartoon of British class worship; he assumes that Jones's supercilious and condescending attitude is part of the mysterious rites of a gentleman (*ibid*).

It is of value for pupils that they be assisted toward an awareness of socio-economic bases of the various specific forms of destructiveness which throng the pages of *Victory*. Teachers ought to stress the applicability to extra-literary reality. Schwarz's commentary is therefore potentially of particular value in its discussion of the destructive capacity of capitalism, imperialism and class-based socio-political authority. This does not imply advocating a simplistic demonizing of capitalism as such. But rapacious capitalism, like any other mechanism for the empowerment and enrichment of some at the expense of unempowered others, is incompatible with the human rights culture promoted by the current South African government and accepted as a worthy ideal in this thesis. Similarly incompatible is imperialism (Marlow's 'robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a grand scale' [see above: 22]) and social hierarchization rooted in the assumption that merit can validly be based on anything other than individual productivity and social responsibility.

Schwarz's emphases are not consistently congenial to a reading of the novel in either left-liberal or Marxist terms.

He implies that the 'maritime ethic that Conrad embraced' and which Ricardo has 'completely renounced' is a moral positive. This 'ethic' is not adumbrated in *Victory* or in Schwarz's commentary. His mention of it is therefore unlikely to have any effect on classroom reception. It might be noted, however, that trans-textual analysis would reveal it to be the product of a nostalgic hankering after a mythical past organic society under a benevolent despotism: a society like that disrupted by Wait and Donkin on the *Narcissus*. Certain details of Schwarz's commentary harmonize with this interpretation of what he means by a 'maritime ethic':

Among other things, *Victory* is about the decline of the class on which Conrad believed European civilisation depended for its moral leadership (74-75).

Heyst and Jones represent this decadent class. Of Heyst, Schwarz writes that his 'consummate good-society manner' also enables him to avoid personal commitment and makes him a representative of the Edwardian aristocracy (73),

who,

With his polished, complacent attitude to imperialism, and his disdain for personal health, ... seems a cartoon of the Edwardian progressive (68; my ellipsis).

As for Jones, his 'moral indifference is a cartoon of Heyst's own' (70) and he is a gruesome prognostication of the direction in which the English gentleman is moving. Jones retains the forms but not the morality or energy of his class (73).

This implies that the 'moral leadership' of the traditionally dominant class is acceptable as long its members retain their 'morality' and 'energy'. This is not far from acceptance of the socio-political hegemony of this class, since it is unclear how 'moral leadership' can be entrenched without institutional authority, as is Captain Allistoun's aboard the *Narcissus*. An aporetic feature of Schwarz's work is that he fails to reconcile (he seems not to notice the need) this implication with his sense that 'The relationship between Jones, Ricardo and Pedro parodies the obsolete social hierarchy of the past' (77). His commentary wavers between apparent acceptance of the abiding validity of morally vigorous leadership by a gentlemanly class and acceptance that the hierarchization crucial to such leadership is 'obsolete'.

In addition, Schwarz suggests that *Victory* might be hostile to a leftist solution to the social ills besetting Conrad's society:

Ricardo's disdain for exchanging labour for wages, as an excuse for outlawry, may be like Michaelis in *The Secret Agent*, a contemptuous cartoon of Marxism (74).

The endnote referred to at this point reads:

Conrad may be satirising the labour unrest of 1910-1914, which was threatening to undermine the social and political fabric of pre-war England. Dangerfield writes of 'the sudden class-hatred, the unexpected violence, the irrational moods' which characterised what he calls 'The Workers' Rebellion' (p. 217). Workers were no longer content with the shibboleths that preached that each man should soberly accept his station in life and that an honest day's work was the noblest (79)

The NED handout ends here. I doubt that the omission of the portion of the endnote on p 80 of Schwarz's book would make a substantial difference to a reader of the handout, since the attitude to what Ricardo represents is sustained.¹ It is pertinent to recall that Schwarz sees *Victory* as lamenting 'the decline of family and national ties, and the replacement of human relationships based upon personal ties with relationships based on economic consideration.' This is a theme picked up and emphasized at various points in Schwarz's critique. There is therefore avoidance of the idea that 'economic consideration' might be a valid aspect of one's understanding of one's social condition

¹ The omitted portion reads:

work of god. As Dangerfield puts it, 'The workers did not want to be safe any more; they wanted to live, to take chances, to throw caution to the winds: they had been repressed too long' (*The Strange Death of Liberal England*, p.235). Ricardo, of course, rejects the work ethic of Victorian England. Ricardo represents, perhaps, what Dangerfield calls the 'increasing horde of the casually employed, the unemployed and the unemployable [who] drifted through the country' (ibid., p 233). (80; Schwarz's interpolations and failure to capitalize 'god'.)

and role, provided that one is conscious of them in a socially responsible manner which might enable one to participate in social restructuring which links the common and the individual good. In this regard, Schwarz's argument lacks a qualification disabling a blanket association of 'economic consideration' with brigandry and/or a rapaciously capitalistic attitude.

Relatedly, Schwarz's phrasing suggests acceptance as valid of what he takes to be Conrad's valorization of 'national ties'. Casual acceptance of the value of 'national ties' offers implicit approval of what is in essence sentimental tribalism inimical to that human solidarity which is a fundamental *desideratum* in both liberal and Marxist terms.

One potential value of using Schwarz's critique in teaching would be to interrogate these aspects of his approach and query whether they are of ideological and social consequence, as long as the teacher is particularly conscious of the need discussed above (18) to avoid engaging in ideological conditioning.

The underlining of and the (perhaps more significant) failure to underline certain details of the distributed photocopy warrant discussion each time an aspect of it is discussed.

On p 61, there is underlining of material to do with 'Conrad's recurring fear' of the possible inadequacy 'to the demands of action' of the 'thoughtful, intellectual man ... especially if that man is also a romantic' (my ellipsis). The underlining is reinforced by a marginal 'NB'. Immediately subsequent details to do with the 'detachment' of Heyst and the 'tempting' nature of this detachment to (the historical) 'Conrad' are also underlined, as are expansions of these ideas on pp 62 and 63. Attention is drawn and added weight is given to the notion that Heyst and his father reflect aspects of Conrad, culminating in:

Heyst's gradual growth away from his father's scepticism and negativism reflects a recurring movement of Conrad's from detachment and cynicism, attitudes to which he retreated at times of personal and professional disappointment and frustration (63; underlining as in NED handout).

The later underlining is largely if not solely of details which develop these aspects of Schwarz's commentary: the invalidity of the Heystian policy of detachment and Conrad's own related problems.

The underlining of details of the discussion of the world in which *Victory* is produced is in effect a development of what might be called the theme of the invalidity of detachment, in that attention is called to the idea that the novel 'represents the ennui, anxiety, and moral and intellectual confusion of pre-war England' (73) and that

Heyst is the introspective self-distrusting ironist who has replaced the Victorian man of action; the latter, despite some doubts, believed in his values and principles and knew that life was worth living (74).

There are two instances of underlining which point toward the possibility of reading *Victory* in a more political manner. These are not, however, among the more telling of such details:

Among other things, *Victory* is about the decline of the class on which Conrad believed European civilisation had depended

for its moral leadership (74-75).

Victory is a novel which attacks imperialistic pretensions, decadent aristocracy and business morality, only to give these forces the laurel of victory (75).

In order to complete the picture of the effect of the added emphases, here is a selection of details which have *not* been underlined: 'For Conrad, this crisis was epitomised by imperialism, capitalism, the decline of family and national ties, and the replacement of human relationships with relationships based on economic considerations' (60); 'the forces of economic barbarism - Jones, Ricardo and Schomberg' (*ibid*); 'the imperialistic Tropical Belt Coal Company' (*ibid*); 'Faced with the hurly-burly of economic competition' [which begins a sentence which continues and concludes with the underlined 'Heyst seeks refuge in detachment disguised as polish and courtesy' (65)]; 'Jones is a satire of amoral capitalism' (76); 'Jones's gambling becomes a trope for the commercial impulse' (*ibid*);

Conrad is concerned with the kind of men capitalism has produced; Schomberg, Jones, Ricardo, the Zangiacomo band and the Tropical Belt Coal Company are symptomatic of the rampant commercialism of an age Conrad despises (*ibid*).

The overall tendency of the underlining is to stress heavily the reasonable idea that *Victory* is about the undesirability of the policy of detachment; the politico-economic implications of *Victory* as interpreted by Schwarz are not entirely disregarded but are implicitly marginalized.

* * *

Meihuizen explicitly points to that which she defines as 'racialism' in Morrison's attitude toward the Portuguese officials:

Morrison, kindly and good-natured, even avuncular man though he is, cannot regard them as really White, and everywhere in the novel there is evidence of the white man's contempt for and disregard of the feelings of the 'natives'. Pupils might find a good deal in this they can recognize (14).¹

The South African liberal appropriately points out the importance of using elements of the text so as to confront pupils with the relevance of aspects of *Victory* to the central issue of the South African tragedy.

Her idea ought to be supplemented by attention to the attitude of the whites to Wang and his to them: *Victory* presents alienation and conflict rooted in ethnic difference most often and prominently in connection with him. It seems to me that the novel is interestingly ambivalent in its treatment of him. He is decisive and bold in action, he is firmly loyal to his wife and adopted tribe and willing to fight to defend them, and he strikes the last blow against the villains when he shoots Pedro dead after having "followed Heyst and the girl through the forest *from pity*, and partly out of curiosity"

¹ Page references are to the April 1984 edition of *C'rux*. Meihuizen's article appears on pp 11-17

(411; my emphasis). If Pedro is the representative of the colonized among the trio of desperadoes, Wang is his counterpart among the 'good' trio who are invaded. In addition, the narrator is aware of the alienating effect of a relationship between members of a dominant imperialist-colonialist culture and those who are subordinated by it:

Wang in his native province in China might have been an aggressively, sensitively genial person; but in Samburan he had clothed himself in a mysterious stolidity and did not seem to resent not being spoken to except in single words, at a rate which did not average half a dozen per day. And he gave no more than he got. It is to be presumed that if he suffered constraint, he made up for it with the Alfuro woman (180-181).

This perception of Wang deserves to be seen as enlightened in the context of the racism which is prevalent in the high-colonialist period in which *Victory* is written. Yet aspects of that racism might be discerned as co-existing with the enlightenment: calling vegetable gardening 'a Chinaman's ruling passion' (181) smacks of the patronizing stereotype and the emphasis on Wang's trick of mysteriously appearing and vanishing suggests employment of the stock figure of the inscrutable Oriental. It could be proposed that *Victory* wavers between presenting the 'Chinaman' as appealingly 'human' and as a stereotype. Classroom discussion could relate this ambivalence to the ways in which members of the various ethnic groups in South Africa see one another.

Meihuizen identifies 'the central theme' of *Victory* as 'of course, Heyst's attempt to detach himself from the mainstream of life, to drift through life without becoming involved' (13). One elaboration on this idea is that Heyst's 'virtue is his undoing', because 'pity', which is the one emotion his father concedes to, if one *must* feel ... he says, is a form of contempt and perhaps the least difficult of feelings' (13; Meihuizen's italics; my ellipsis). Another is that

When Lena tells him what people are saying about his part in Morrison's death, he is aghast and quite unable to cope with the fact that he is being misjudged and his actions misinterpreted (14).

So detachment is not feasible for Heyst, and Jones, Ricardo and Pedro are the final destructive indications that this is the case and that the attempt to be detached is wrong-headed in essence, because

Like the duke and the king in *Huckleberry Finn*, they represent the world in a particular shape ... In a way, they have the same function as Schomberg, who also represents a form of the world, or evil, and whose dislike of Heyst is at first gratuitous and then becomes virulent when Heyst and Lena run away together. Heyst is quite oblivious of the need for caution in regard to these people because of his awareness that he is innocent of any attempt to harm or injure them. He has not learned that one is hunted or hated however little one may have done to incur wrath or jealousy. Schomberg invents scandal about Heyst, and Jones and his

henchmen come to rob him of treasure he does not possess. In both cases, the attacks are groundless but Heyst has not been schooled in the fact that this is the way of the world. Similarly, action has become paralysed in him through lack of practice, and he lets chance after chance go by to defeat either Jones or Ricardo before they destroy him (15; my ellipsis).

Crucial to this approach is the idea that 'this is the way of the world'. The brigands 'represent the world in a particular shape'. Meihuizen begs the questions: why is this the way of the world and what forms the world in this particular shape? If Macherey's critique of ideology (see above: 4-5) is applied to Meihuizen's work, it can be argued from a Marxist standpoint that her form of liberalism is 'not ... able to hear' these questions; more precisely, in context, it does not reflexively ask them. She does not ask about the likely contribution of socio-economic causes to the behaviour of the unsavoury characters in *Victory*. Unlike Schwarz, she does not consider the part played by degenerate capitalism. Similarly, the racism she registers is not related to any causes. 'Evil', whether it manifests as racism, jealousy or violent criminal avarice is 'anti-life' and an aspect of how the world simply *is*. There is here a metaphysic such as inhibits investigation of material causes of 'evil'. Meihuizen insists that pupils be assisted to enquire about the effects of 'evil', but discusses causes only insofar as Heyst's misdirection is put down to an invalid philosophy. She insists in this regard on the importance of

the kinds of questions one can ask the pupils to consider, giving specific examples related to the particular life-styles of the pupils one is teaching. This should help them to understand Conrad's conviction, portrayed in this novel, that a failure to become involved is a betrayal of life that might recoil on one (17).

Meihuizen thus stresses the ethic of social responsibility, but is vague about what becoming 'involved' actually means. There is an implication that it is self-evident. Such an issue should not be treated as self-evident, in 1984 or at any other time, although ideas about what it can be taken as meaning can vary from time to time and from ideological standpoint to ideological standpoint, and although the ideological nature of these ideas should be identified in classroom discussion.

In 1984, the year of Meihuizen's lecture and article on *Victory*, pupils in NED schools were mainly white, socio-economically comfortable and institutionally privileged. Views overtly disruptive of bourgeois capitalist assumptions were almost completely absent from written and filmed texts likely to be read by most pupils attending these schools. Very seldom would the classroom provide exposure to such views either. In 1990, the situation was much the same. In the late 1990s, the situation has changed: most traditionally 'white' schools have an increasing enrolment of pupils from other ethnic groups and the socio-economic mix of pupil bodies is generally more varied than it used to be. In most of these schools, the backgrounds and perspectives of pupils are increasingly heterogeneous. In this context of change, Meihuizen's commentary remains potentially influential each time that *Victory* is set. It is likely to be on the shelves devoted to *Cruel* in school libraries and the studies of senior teachers, or at least on file in

photocopy form. Critical understanding of the provisionality of discourse could be served by interrogating the dyad of her text and Conrad's in their respective historical and ideological contexts, by inviting the responses to the dyad of pupils from different backgrounds and by enabling dialogue among these pupils. This applies to all primary text-secondary source dyads, but is perhaps particularly likely to be fruitful when the secondary source is local in its origin and explicitly concerned with applicability to South Africa, since it is explicitly saying things about 'us'.

* * *

Hampson mentions the effect of social class on Heyst and Lena:

Heyst's manner is partly the product of a particular psychological configuration, but it is also obviously the product of his class background. Lena herself suffers from a sense of lack of worth on both social and moral grounds, and Lena's insecurities interact with Heyst's internal conflicts to produce the maze of misunderstandings that is their relationship. Lena and Heyst misunderstand each other in their verbal exchanges partly because of these social and psychological determinants, partly also because each is pursuing their own thoughts and struggling with their own psychological problems (28).

There is a potentially highly productive line of interpretative argument here. Social class relations and sexual politics ought indeed to be explored with a view to a consideration of the power relations in both Conrad's society and our own, and in social structures generally. In this connection, they can be productively discussed as a dynamic dyad, but they can also be looked at separately, and Hampson's contribution to discourse about gender issues in *Victory* will be discussed below (142-145).

Hampson's touching on 'class background', 'social ... grounds' and 'social ... determinants' might well provide an alert teacher (or pupil) with the basis for politically valuable discussion. However, there is no mention of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, the corruption of colonial officials, the parts played by Wang and the Alfuro villagers or the implications of their origins in specific and distinct social classes of Jones and his men. Economic determination is not specified and only a reader with the appropriate prior supply of hermeneutic tools would infer it from Hampson's commentary. The implications of Heyst's 'class background' are not explored. Neither are the 'social determinants' of the Heyst-Lena relationship, which are effectively rendered peripheral to the 'psychological exploration' (*ibid*) which Hampson sees as an important aspect of *Victory*. Thus the late-twentieth-century liberal commentator displays an awareness of the existence of the considerations stressed especially in Marxist discourse, but presents them (almost certainly not deliberately) in such a way as to afford them relatively minor significance.

An interesting feature of Hampson's commentary is related to his noting that 'Davidson ... has a "sympathetic soul" (p. 87)' and 'acts as a role model: he encourages a sympathetic curiosity in the fate of the protagonists' (22: Hampson's Penguin page-

reference corresponds to Dent 40; my ellipsis). This assertion is an aspect of Hampson's concern to establish the importance of 'sympathy' both as one of Conrad's intentions and, implicitly, as a general value. His comment on Davidson is preceded by:

Conrad described his artistic method in *The Secret Agent* as one that allowed him to combine 'scorn' with 'pity'. The scepticism of *Victory* is similarly counterbalanced by compassion. In Heyst himself, as his response to both Morrison and Lena demonstrates, there is a potential for sympathy that is at odds with his asserted detachment (*ibid*).

So what is wrong with detachment is that it interferes with 'sympathy'. The idea is valid, although it needs to be extended and defined to encompass sympathy (unpatronizingly) understood as applying to victims of social circumstances in general. A problem is that because of his capacity for 'sympathetic curiosity', Davidson is identified as 'a role model' in a way which would imply for some readers that this character is *the* 'role model' in *Victory*. Earlier, Hampson discusses the 'plurality of viewpoints' (18) he understands as deriving from the heterogeneity of structural features of *Victory*. He also refers to the 'contradictory implications' of Lena's name as 'not flaws in the novel but rather the means by which Conrad creates an open-ended, multi-valent narrative' which 'is particularly appropriate to *Victory*, given the novel's scepticism about truth, facts and reason' (19). In seeing Davidson as 'a role model' and not mentioning the possible suitability of any other character for this function, Hampson to an extent ignores his own sense of the open-endedness of the text. Why Davidson only? Wang has always been my own preferred 'role model' among the characters in *Victory* since I respect what I see as his perspicacity, decisiveness and ability unsentimentally to do what is necessary in his own interests and those of his adoptive tribe; moreover, my political ideology has what Eagleton calls an 'affective [dimension]' (see above: 6) which makes me prone to align myself with characters representative of subordinated groups. I have taught pupils who argue strenuously that Lena is the embodiment of all that is worthy of emulation. I cannot objectively ascribe these differences to variations in levels of readerly competence. What is indisputable is that they are products of distinct psyches with, finally, distinct ideological proclivities. Hampson's way of emphasizing Davidson's status as 'role model' so as to suggest pre-eminence over other characters in this regard betrays a specific axiological squint which could be identified in the classroom as such and related to its potential implications in social terms. There would be value in thus exemplifying problems of interpretation and in initiating discussion of the bases in belief of pupils' own choices of role models (and, in some cases, refusal to acknowledge any characters as qualifying).

* * *

Guidelines presents the 'victory' of the title as being 'the Triumph of Good over Evil'. This will be discussed below (156-157) in the 'Whose Victory?' section. It is mentioned here because of its social implications. A complex text is reduced to a simplistic morality tale barely beyond the primary-school level in its ability to generate thinking. *Victory* as mediated in *Guidelines* is trivialized not only because it is outrageously over-

simplified, but because of the specific nature of the over-simplification: in effect, the novel is presented as being 'about' semi-abstract, implicitly universal moral collisions of the 'white-hat-versus-black-hat' variety. There are no substantial indications of the material causes of 'Good' and 'Evil'. When causes are mentioned elsewhere in the study-aid, they are vague and incoherent. This is typical:

Beneath the surface appearance of human events there are mysterious forces at work - physical, social, psychological, metaphysical (religious, if you like) and even mythological forces (41).

Aside from the blurring of the distinction between 'metaphysical' and 'religious', this comment makes the incomprehensible statement that 'mythological forces' affect 'human events'. 'Social' forces are mentioned, but the commentary does not analyse them. There is no discussion of matters of socio-political substance anywhere in the most ubiquitous secondary source of material on *Victory* on the bookshelves of pupils in NED (and other South African education department) schools.

* * *

Like Meihuizen, Moolman is contextually concerned with the relevance of *Victory* to pupils. Early in her article, she characterizes it as 'quintessentially a twentieth century novel' which

stands almost as a symbol of the modern age, of which we are all very much a part. It deals with essentially twentieth century feelings of angst and detachment, feelings which are manifested increasingly around us, especially by young people. The temptation to 'drop out' and isolate oneself from the madness of the modern world is one with which we can all identify (44).

Her interestingly unconventional but problematic view of the meaning of the title of the novel (see below: 154-155), is that 'the victory' is that 'of the maniacal forces of the universe which claim everybody in the end' (45). More conventionally, she describes Heyst's detachment as 'aloofness from man, a conscious purpose to drift and refrain from ties' and posits that what is wrong with it is that it is 'fatal to the human spirit and inexorably leads to destruction' (49). In contrast to Heyst, 'We must "hang together" in the face of the unknown and unknowable [because or therefore] human solidarity is one of the highest social and moral principles' (*ibid*; my interpolation to replace Moolman's dash). Moolman thus stresses the social value of *Victory*, but does so in a fairly nebulous way. There is no mention of the socio-economic and general political origins of 'the madness of the modern world' presented in it. Reference to 'the maniacal forces of the universe' and 'the unknown and unknowable' are emptily metaphysical and need to be problematized if they are attributed to Conrad or his novel. To assert the need for 'human solidarity' is valid but vague and of dubious capacity to provoke the minds of the predominantly white NED pupils of 1990 (see above: 115). I doubt its ability to make much impact on pupils of any group if it is not glossed so as to focus attention on issues of class privilege, political control and economic determination. It would be interesting and educationally productive, in the later 1990s, to discuss it in a racially mixed

KwaZulu-Natal classroom in the context of IFP-ANC-alleged 'Third Force' violence, white fears about alleged 'reverse discrimination' and displacement by blacks, and black suspicions and frustrations deriving from the perception that whites still have the lion's share of economic privilege.

Meihuizen's article is in general less overtly sophisticated than Moolman's and its political limitedness is mentioned above (121 ff); however, it displays some consciousness of the political dimensions of *Victory* and in this regard is more useful than Moolman's.

There is value in relating *Victory* to the social alienation of some 'young people'. Ironically, though, it can be argued that Moolman's commentary panders to the very decadence which it purports to confront. Using *Victory* to counter 'angst and detachment' and the 'temptation to "drop out"' with a pious and politically undefined doctrine of 'human solidarity' is capable of paralysing discussion of social dysfunction. Vague notions of benevolence toward other people and believing in the value of unspecified human relationships might be all that is understood from Moolman's words. A teacher who chooses to use Moolman's work could fruitfully make this point and challenge pupils to gloss the ideas in it, and could, if and when appropriate, prompt them to think about a full range of specific behaviours varying in implication from the most intimately inter-personal to the most all-encompassingly political.

Moolman relates 'detachment' to what she sees as the novel's presentation of the dysfunctional use of the intellect:

The tragedy of detachment, intellectual fastidiousness and refined senses is not only that they incapacitate the thinker when assertive action is necessary, causing him to lose the 'habit' of asserting himself, they also subtly displace emotional responses with intellectual ones. The impulse to involve oneself with others, in Heyst has its roots in compassion, yet its outworkings are in terms of taste and delicacy, fastidiousness and gallantry. The ability to allow the emotions unrestrained expression is refined out of existence (50).

This line of argument climaxes with the assertion that Heyst
 can neither follow his father nor involve himself fully with Lena.
 He is caught between the two, paralysed in a limbo between
 fastidious frigidity and human passion, intellectual detachment
 and emotional commitment (*ibid*).

Certainly, *Victory* presents intellect which interferes with 'emotional commitment' as problematic. Even if it is not *necessary* to read *Victory* as being among other things a straightforward adverse criticism of the avoidance of commitment, given the real problems such commitment brings, Moolman makes a valid point that Heyst's being caught 'in a limbo' of conflicting imperatives is destructive. One might gloss her point by adding that the failure to reconcile such imperatives, or to make a confident and comfortable choice is wrenching and potentially tragic.

One might note, however, that there is a highly dubious point embedded within this otherwise reasonable argument. For Moolman, *Victory* suggests that it is desirable 'to

allow the emotions unrestrained expression': this *desideratum* is purportedly one antithesis of detachment. Moolman ignores the ease with which the novel can be read as problematizing Lena's rhapsodies and the fact that Jones and Ricardo indulge destructive passions which ought to be restrained. Conrad cannot validly be read as having abandoned the ethic of 'restraint' which is stressed in 'Heart of Darkness'.

Moolman makes the interesting yet partly problematic point that

Detachment in itself does not lead to destruction. Wang is, in fact, more thoroughly detached than Heyst, yet he acts with a practical single-mindedness that saves his life and the village ... The difference between the two is that Wang does not complicate every moment of his life with reflections, analyses and imaginative posturing. Heyst is not only incapacitated by a lack of assertive will, but also by a concern for how his actions against the three men will appear to the outside world. For Wang, action is life, reflection simply an instinctive assessment of circumstances ... Wang is, indeed, earlier on the evolutionary scale than Heyst. He is an agrarian man, who grows his own food, builds a primitive home for himself and his wife and generally follows instincts, which are not veiled by abstract issues. His actions have the instinctive spontaneity of a civilised animal. Heyst, representing a far more advanced, complex evolutionary milestone, is no better for his progression (49; my ellipses).

Moolman usefully warns against simplistic reading of the idea of 'detachment'. However, her discussion of the word is significantly flawed. In a sense, Wang can be described as 'detached': he lacks debilitating sentimentality and is efficiently objective in his assessment of his interests and those of the Alfuro into whom he has married; moreover, although there is some implicitly racist stereotyping in his depiction (see above: 122), his motives are made clear, and they are crucially not those of a detached person. As Moolman herself points out, Wang forms attachments. He does so in a way which is straightforwardly traditional in European, Chinese and Alfuro terms: he takes a wife, settles down as a member of a stable community and readily accepts the responsibilities concomitant upon such ties. He is not at all 'detached' in the Heystian mode. To argue that 'Detachment in itself does not lead to destruction' might be valid, but to do so on the basis of Wang's success is not. Paradigmatic layers of the term 'detachment' are not differentiated.

Also dubious is Moolman's treatment of the Darwinian pattern of the Heyst-Wang relationship. (She explicitly identifies desperadoes as 'represent[ing] a Darwinian progression up the evolutionary continuum' [47], and her sense of the 'evolutionary' difference between Heyst and Wang is clearly of a piece with this.) It is valid to discern or confer this pattern: Wang is 'an agrarian man' who in a substantial sense antedates Heyst the socially and philosophically alienated modern man. But to characterize him as one who 'follows instincts' and whose 'actions have the instinctive spontaneity of a civilised animal' is to lapse into cultural chauvinism such as might (unintentionally in the case of Moolman) reinforce racism. The narrator refers to Wang's gardening as 'instinct' (181) and there are a few other details which might give some support to Moolman's

reading. For political and pedagogical reasons often indicated in the course of this thesis and with which I am sure Moolman would be in sympathy, her commentary ought to problematize such a tendency of the text, but it does not. In addition, the text does not consistently treat Wang in such terms. Heyst tells Lena that Wang

“... told me with horrible Chinese reasonableness that he could not let us pass the barrier, because we should be pursued. He gave me to understand that he would shoot me with my own revolver without any sort of compunction, rather than risk a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians for my sake ...” (347).

Whether or not a given reader sympathizes with Wang's morality, his actions are clearly based on reason and not 'instinct'. Neither is Wang presented as consistently remorseless in his 'reasonableness'. He follows Heyst and Lena through the forest partly because of 'pity' (411). He can validly be seen as 'earlier' than Heyst in his not being prey to debilitating philosophizing and indecisiveness. But he is not 'a civilised animal'. To assert that he is to suggest that the distinction between animals and human beings is the Heystian form of detachment, which would be absurd. Moolman is either applying the 'Darwinian' model simplistically or she is lapsing into loose rhetoric which has, no matter how unintentionally, the potential to reinforce racist or at least pejorative cultural stereotypes against which the degree of approval of Wang she evinces might not effectively militate.

Lena and Sexual Politics

Some commentary is aware that the presentation of Lena is capable of generating consideration of issues of sexual politics and some is not.

Although from a feminist perspective it is incomplete, Hewitt's criticism of the presentation of Lena is in the main well-founded.

Hewitt asserts (110-111) that

she is palpably a creation of the writer for his scheme and a projection from his romantic conception of woman ... she is flawless. And to persuade us to accept her at his valuation he lavishes much rhetoric upon her, rhetoric which produces for the critical reader the opposite result from what is intended. It abounds in clichés ... : 'There was a flash of fire in her mysterious eyes - a red gleam in the white mist which wrapped the promptings and longings of her soul' (399), 'every modulation of her enchanting voice' (404), 'the faint smile on her deep-cut lips waned, and her head sank deep into the pillow, taking on the majestic pallor and immobility of marble' (406). Above all, the note of surrender is dominant in the pages which describe her death (page-references replace Hewitt's superscript indicating them in endnotes; my ellipses).

Hewitt then quotes the last two sentences of Part 4, Chapter 13 (407):

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 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.

Hewitt's case is strong. His illustrations are all taken from late in the novel and are the words of the narrator. The nature of this narrator is problematic. Initially, he is a vaguely identified patron of Schomberg's hotel and, in terms of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's useful 'typology of narrators' (1983: 94-96), 'extradiegetic', in that he is "above" or superior to the story he narrates, as well as 'homodiegetic', in that he 'takes part in it, at least in some manifestation of his "self"'. Yet he seems to fade out to be replaced by an 'extradiegetic-heterodiegetic' narrator, of the traditional 'omniscient' variety. He does not even have a foregrounded 'personality' such as is characteristic of the narrator of *The Secret Agent*, who, although 'extradiegetic', occasionally uses the first person and admits to imperfections of awareness. Therefore it is hard to see the later narrator's view of Lena as anything other than that of the novel itself and of what many pupils (and teachers) would call 'the author's message'.

The one possible weakness in Hewitt's choice of illustrations is that the last of them for the most part reflects Lena's rapturous view of her situation ('she saw herself'). Nonetheless, 'that divine radiance on her lips' seems to be seen and characterized by someone else.

In roughly the first half of the novel, the treatment of Lena is less mythic (to use a term which is not pejorative) or melodramatic (or clichéd, if one follows Hewitt). The young woman whom Heyst meets in Part 2, Chapter 1 is for the most part viewed from outside and has a certain air of mystery appropriate to the later presentation of her, but her speech is 'realistic' and unheroic, as in "“Never sang a note in my life”" (74), "“I don't remember that I ever had much reason to sing since I was little”" (74-75) and "“They are too many for me”" (76). Any suggestion that she is somehow transcendental is mainly a function of Heyst's excited imagination and the text *per se* can be defended against accusation of idealization at this stage: 'But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most amazing things' (74). However, it is the Lena who engages with the desperadoes who is likely to remain in the memories and imaginations of most readers:

A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated in the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself, in a great exaltation of love and self-sacrifice, which is woman's sublime faculty (317).

Here, it is the narrator and not Heyst or Lena herself who makes the stereotypic claim about 'woman's sublime faculty'.

It is (initially) possible to defend the presentation of Lena on the ground that literary forms can be productively combined and that figures reminiscent of myth and romance can interact with a central figure who can be viewed as a complex 'anti-hero' of Modernist fiction.

Northrop Frye, for instance (1957: 140) cites Conrad as one of a list of authors who 'all provide examples' of 'ironic literature', which 'begins with realism and tends toward myth'; one of the functions or effects of 'its mythical patterns' is that 'sometimes it simply continues the romantic tradition of stylization.' Wallace Martin (1986: 34), in mediating Frye, diagrammatically sums up the category in question as 'apprehended' in 'terms' which are 'personal' (as opposed to 'intellectual') and mixed 'extroverted' ('producing a record of the world') and 'introverted' ('producing ... a vision of reality as transformed by the imagination').

Why, then, may Lena not be accepted as a stylized and idealized figure of, say, wronged, redeemed and self-sacrificing womanhood in opposition to the desperadoes, who can be and often are viewed as stylized figures of evil who constitute the novel's Unholy Trinity? The answer is that whether or not the historical Conrad suffered from the misogyny often attributed to him, the effect is all-too-readily to reduce the female to something approaching the status of a cypher, since Lena is the only female character of major importance. The other female character who might warrant some attention is Mrs Schomberg, and she is a minor figure who is useful to the mechanics of the plot; her most striking feature is perhaps that she is, as Davidson puts it to himself, 'a miracle of dissimulation' (59), another typical aspect of male-sexist perspective on women promoted by the text.

Dickens's treatment of the Jew, Fagin, in *Oliver Twist* provides a case comparable in an important regard to Lena's. When Mrs Eliza Davis, a Jewish admirer of Dickens, complained to him that the depiction of Fagin 'has encouraged a vile prejudice against the despised Jew', Dickens replied, *inter alia*, that 'all the rest of the wicked dramatis personae are Christians'. Mrs Davis's response was that the criminal Christians 'are at least contrasted with the character of good Christians. This poor wretched Fagin stands alone, "The Jew"'.¹ So, too, there are no female characters in *Victory* to represent the woman as more than the stylized (and stereotyped) combination of seductress, redeemed whore, vessel of elemental passion and saintly self-sacrificing devotee of the male who saves her: one of Lena's names, Magdalen (88), indicates the role explicitly.

In strictly feminist terms, *Victory* is an unfortunate novel, as *Oliver Twist* is in Jewish terms.

The presentation of a character such as Lena can covertly convey a sexist view of women and, in concert with the multitude of other covert embeddings of such a view in various forms of discourse in our society and other societies, has the potential to affect the perspective of a naively receptive reader.

Hewitt does not draw attention to the covert sexism of *Victory* in explicit terms such as a feminist-influenced commentary would use. The closest he comes to doing so is his attributing to Conrad a 'romantic conception of woman' (110). His book was first published in 1952, and feminist discourse was not yet strongly influential on literary criticism. But a virtue of his work is that it can provoke consideration of sexual politics, although it needs to be 're-written' or 'co-written' in feminist terms.

¹ As reported in 'When Dickens Apologized for the Character Fagin', an article by 'B. Z. A.' in the *Pretoria Jewish Chronicle* of September 1984: 73, 75. Mrs Davis 'kept all Dickens's letters to her, and copies of her letters to him'; the correspondence was published in full in 1918.

A closing *caveat* is in order here. A feminist perspective on *Victory* - or on any other text - ought not to be presented in such a way as to promote a simplistic and potentially damaging notion of female-male opposition. In the course of her discussion of Hélène Cixous's "'deconstruction" of the feminine/masculine opposition', Toril Moi makes a point (in Jefferson & Robey 1986: 212) about the trap into which a feminist would fall if she were 'to continue advocating binary thought'. The point can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to any maintenance of 'binary' thinking about the nature of or relationship of the genders, no matter how non-sexist or anti-sexist in intention:

The idea of a unified *female* opposition pitting itself against a *male* front would not be a possible ... strategy for the defeat of patriarchy: on the contrary, it would shore up the very system it seeks to undo (Moi's italics; my ellipsis).

* * *

The *Twentieth Century Views* extract from Moser's *Achievement and Decline* commences with Marvin Mudrick's bracketed editorial summary of that which directly precedes it:

[In the works of Conrad's later period, his interest in the significance of test and betrayal seems to] yield to an acceptance of chance as the force controlling human action (Mudrick 1966: 145).

Moser asserts that it is chance that brings to Lena a test in the form of Ricardo. This point is associated with the observation that

Ricardo represents for Lena the wickedness of other people. This is very different from *Heart of Darkness*. When Kurtz is confronted by an instinctive savagery far more powerful than Ricardo's, Kurtz is able to pronounce judgment, not only against the world, but against himself (148).

Moser then argues, by comparisons with 'The Secret Sharer', *Chance* and *The Shadow Line*, as well as other aspects of *Victory*, that, although

These opposite responses to crises might seem simply to reflect Conrad's inability to understand women, his tendency to sentimentalize female characterizations (*ibid*),

the essential cause of the difference is the notion to be discerned in Conrad's later work that 'we are basically sound' and 'When trouble comes to us, we are in no way responsible for it. The fault lies elsewhere, in other people' (150). This is developed further and Moser concludes that 'the heroes and heroines of the later Conrad are sinned against, themselves unsinning' (151). Moser doubts that there is 'any positive value in the later affirmation':

In the early Conrad, we found that the unquestioned values were integrity and work for its own sake. Marlow says in *Lord Jim* that the "only reward" of life at sea is the "perfect love of the work." The value of the work is rarely referred to in the later period: instead Conrad asserts that man can achieve goodness and fulfill himself through romantic love. While

the affirmation may be defensible, we should scrutinize it carefully to see whether Conradian love is really positive and creative. (*ibid*).

Moser's answer to his own query is in the negative: 'Although the early Conrad associates love with death, as *An Outcast of the Islands* makes abundantly clear, he nevertheless views that association with horror'; whereas in the later work one finds 'Conrad's willing acceptance of the association between love and death' (152). This is linked to Moser's idea that

the later Conrad has a new attitude toward the world, though hardly an affirmative one; he now considers evil to be external to his heroes and heroines and sees man's greatest good to be complete repose, usually achieved through love (153).

Moser takes as an emblem for this 'new attitude' Renouard's suicide in 'The Planter of Malata'. For Moser,

Renouard is another Heyst, sensitive, romantic, withdrawn from society. Like Heyst, Renouard has retired to an island after gaining a dubious reputation from explorations that cost several of his associates their lives. Renouard falls in love and takes his beloved with him to his private island. ... Renouard equates his love for Felicia Moorsom with a return to unconsciousness, even before he has lost her and decided to commit suicide (152).

Moser quotes from the last paragraph of 'The Planter of Malata' so as to make plain Renouard's lapsing into the peace and quiet death seems to offer. Moser then asserts that the evidence is that 'Conrad has accepted this attitude and expected as much of the reader' (153). In effect, then, Moser sees *Victory* as one of those later Conradian works which, among other things, accept an unhealthily and morbidly escapist association of love and death.

Of particular significance to discussion of the depiction of Lena is Moser's seeing as linked functions of Conrad's psyche this decadently romantic love-death association and his difficulty with the presentation of female characters. For Moser, this difficulty is more than merely an 'inability to understand women' and Conrad's presentation of them is more than a 'tendency to sentimentalize female characterizations':

Conrad's moral sense, demanding that his characters act upon their own volition, conflicts with his misogyny. Woman in action, woman as the competitor of man, is insufferable. Thus, Conrad's sympathy with the homeless waif vanishes as soon as she makes a gesture of self-assertion (163).

A concomitant of Conrad's misogyny, for Moser, is that female characters are usually cyphers:

Lena and Arlette¹ are swiftly transformed into symbols of sexual power and the life force; Conrad seems to hope that they will achieve the complex humanity of Shakespeare's Cleopatra. But

¹ In *The Rover*.

only in Amy Foster and Winnie Verloc¹ does Conrad dramatize successfully sexual force, and in neither characterization does he attempt to be explicit. Rita de Lastaola² apparently represents Sex as well as Society; Mills calls her "old Enchantress." The reader is not fooled, however, knowing that one reference to Shakespeare does not make a Cleopatra. (165).

In sum, Moser sees Lena as a 'popular-magazine heroine' typical of the later works of Conrad and comments that 'The only bright spot in the later characterizations, the handling of Flora³ and Lena in certain scenes, seems rather the reflection of Conrad's sympathy for lonely figures than of any new perception into his characters' (*ibid*).

Moser's arguments in the course of criticizing the presentations of other characters as stereotyped and derived from what Jauss would call 'culinary' literature are not compelling (see below: 161-163): for instance, his discussion of the presentation of 'the unremittingly black villain' (161) can be shown to be flawed, as, in Eco's terms, it 'could not coexist with other hypotheses that proved to be reliable in order to explain phenomena that [the explanation being criticized] did not explain' (see above: 70). However, his disapprobation of the characterization of Lena is in general (if not always in detail) well rooted in the text (*cf* 130-131 above). Moser's critique was originally published in 1957 and is a product of its moment in that it is not conceptualized in terms overtly influenced by feminism and does not engage with sexual politics as explicitly as, for instance, Hampson's does. Yet there is substantial social and pedagogic value in its potential to act as an antidote to naive acceptance of Lena as some kind of ideal female. Moser's introduction of the idea that, in *Victory*, 'Woman in action, woman as the competitor of man, is insufferable', and his clear rejection of it, is particularly useful in that it focuses attention on a central and ubiquitous feature of sexism and does so in terms readily understandable by most senior-secondary pupils. Moser's discussion of the love-death nexus he finds in *Victory* and other works by Conrad is less easy to deal with in most classes at this level. The teacher could, however, strive to clarify for her pupils and open discussion of the proposition that *Victory* promotes acceptance of a sense that love is conducive to a form of deathliness - ultimately figured in the text as death *per se* - which grants release from the 'evil' with which the world assails one. This view would be hard to reconcile with the more standard proposition - the one that could conveniently be called 'Leavisian' - that love is presented in *Victory* as the antithesis of the deathly and/or escapist.

Despite its virtues, Moser's discussion has tendentious aspects. It can be argued, for example, that there is little foundation for the claim that 'Conrad's sympathy with the homeless waif vanishes as soon as she makes a gesture of self-assertion'. Lena is killed as a result of her assertiveness, and the presentation of her self-sacrifice is sentimental, marked by stereotyping and lacking in verisimilitude, but these characteristics of the text do not *necessarily* stem from a lack of 'sympathy'. Moser has a tendency to make

¹ In *The Secret Agent*.

² In *The Arrow of Gold*.

³ In *Chance*.

psycho-biographical assumptions which he asserts with unjustified didacticism. There would be little if any value in engaging in classroom discussion of the psychology and biography of the historical Conrad, beyond registering that the implicit sexism in his work can be related to his historical moment, is a function of ideology, however unconscious and affective (see above: 6) and ought to be critically examined.

* * *

Some important aspects of Lewis's discussion of Lena are dealt with below in the 'Whose Victory?' section. In the current section, there will be an attempt to isolate the material which most clearly relates or can be made to relate to sexual politics.

In contrast to Moser, Lewis is not adversely critical of the presentation of Lena. In feminist terms, he fails to perceive a crucial implication of his generally convincing discussion of what he takes to be the 'existentialist' aspects of *Victory*.

He attributes to the novel

an elaborated image of human isolation: the isolation not only of man from man, but even more from his metaphysical environment - Axel Heyst, the rootless drifter, who has settled alone upon a singularly remote little island, near an abandoned coal-mine, there to meditate in silence his late father's reflections upon "the universal nothingness" and "the unknown force of negation." Here, too, is the familiar counter-attack upon metaphysical isolation, the unsteady impulse towards human fellowship - those compassionate gestures towards Morrison and the girl called Lena which belie Heyst's habitual detachment and are the source of his misfortunes and maybe of his redemption. Here is the articulated obsession with the feeling of existence and of non-existence, as clues both to character and action. "If you were to stop thinking of me, I shouldn't be in the world at all," Lena says to Heyst (Karl 1975: 102; Lewis quotes from *Victory*: 219, 220 & 187).

Lewis's use of the phrase, 'the fundamental mysteries of being and nothing' strongly gestures toward Sartre, whose *Being and Nothingness* is the best-known twentieth-century formal philosophical work classified as 'existentialist';¹ indeed, Frederick Copleston, arguably the century's most prolific and helpful summarizer-mediator of Western philosophy, notes (1977: 135) that

as far as definite acceptance of the label 'existentialist' is concerned we seem to be left with Sartre, who has described

¹ Lewis's commentary also refers to 'existentialist' *fiction*, but by way of suggesting what *Victory* is *not*: 'Nor is it a calculated work of metaphysical revolt, like Camus's *The Plague*' (103). It is in his use of 'being and nothing' that Lewis can be read as affirmatively relating *Victory* to an existentialist text, hence the dialogization with Sartre's formally philosophical book and not with the fiction of Camus, Sartre himself, or any other 'existentialist' writer.

himself in this way¹ and has expounded what he considers to be the essential tenet of existentialism.

It is not anachronistic to relate Sartre and Conrad, and Lewis is not unusual in his basic approach. John A Palmer notes (1968: 196), in the course of his commentary on *Victory*:

Very recently, critics have begun to comment on the affinities between Conrad and such writers as Sartre and Camus; and despite some obvious differences, these comparisons are useful. Themes of isolation, alienation and guilt, a willed commitment to human solidarity in the face of a metaphysical void, exist in all these writers, in some broad form.

In a footnote, Palmer refers to an unpublished dissertation he has not read, Joan Parson Wang's "Joseph Conrad, Proto-Existentialist: A Comparative Study of Conrad, Camus and Sartre" (Indiana, 1965). Wang's term, 'proto-existentialist' usefully conveys the idea that Conrad can be viewed as a relatively early product of a philosophical trend which is apparent in much twentieth-century fiction, including that which is conventionally categorized as 'existentialist' and which achieves formalization in twentieth-century philosophical discourse most influentially in *Being and Nothingness*. Moreover, the formal philosophical roots of existentialism are much older than Conrad and it is conventional to see Kierkegaard, who died in 1855, as an important figure in its development. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre makes assertions which in good measure harmonize with aspects of *Victory* to which Lewis points. Lena's sense that her '[being] in the world' is dependent on Heyst's 'thinking' of her would be absurd unless she is understood as meaning that her existence is given its significance in her own mind by his regard; in Sartrean existentialist terms, her essence (and not, as her words literally signify, her existence) is conditioned by her recognition of her identity with herself as constituted as an object by the Other. In his exemplificatory analysis of the experience of shame, Sartre writes (1958: 222):

Shame is by nature *recognition*. I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me. ...

Thus the Other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications. This being was not in me potentially before the appearance of the Other, for it could not have found any place in the For-itself. Even if some power had been pleased to endow me with a body wholly constituted before it should be for-others, still my vulgarity and my awkwardness could not lodge there potentially; for they are meanings and as such they surpass the body and at the same time refer to a witness capable of understanding them and to the totality of my human reality. ...

¹ Copleston refers to major philosophers. John Macquarrie makes much the same point (1973: 18) when he says that 'it would be difficult to find many philosophers prepared to acknowledge themselves existentialists at all'. Of course, various epigones see themselves as existentialists. Copleston and Macquarrie both ignore Viktor Frankl, who defines his viewpoint as existential, but Frankl is eminent as a philosophical psychiatrist rather than as a formal philosopher, and none of the three dictionaries of philosophy in my possession - Lacey 1976, Runes 1976 and Urmson 1975 - allocates him an entry.

Thus shame is shame *of oneself before the Other*; these two structures are inseparable. But at the same time I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being (my ellipsis; italics in the original).

If one were to recast this passage, substituting suitable terms antithetical to 'shame', 'vulgarity' and 'awkwardness' and imagining Lena capable of utterance in Sartrean terms, it would well express what she can be taken as meaning when she tells Heyst: "If you were to stop thinking of me, I shouldn't be in the world at all" and "I can only be what you think I am" (187).

If it were not for the narrator's telling us that Heyst develops a sense that Lena 'gave him a greater sense of his own reality than he had ever known in all his life' (200), *Victory* could stand accused of propagating a particularly offensive sexist notion: that the only major female character depends on the male in her life (and only on him) for her very selfhood, her sense that she has any kind of meaningful identity. As it is, the text is more even-handed, but the teacher has a responsibility to ensure that her pupils do not focus on p 187 and fail to note the less dramatically striking detail on p 200. If one is concerned with the potential of the dyad of prescribed text and critical commentary to affect perceptions related to gender, it is a shortcoming in Lewis's analysis that he does not mention the latter detail in the course of his discussion of the "existentialist" qualities of *Victory*: his commentary mentions Lena's 'existential' debt to Heyst but not his to her.

There is here an example of the way in which a teacher could use the primary text-secondary text dyad to generate discussion which goes beyond what the prescribed work can be read as being about. What Lewis focuses on, what he does not focus on and the implications for the understanding of a hypothetical naive reader of both *Victory* and Lewis could be a fruitful topic of classroom discussion and written or oral assignment.

* * *

The fragment of Jocelyn Baines's work on *Victory* sent to NED schools is a scissors-and-paste transcription of details from pp 379-398 of his 1960 *Critical Biography*. The fragment reads:

Heyst is the only three dimensional character in the book. Lena has no dimensions at all; she is a shadow, the least convincing of any of Conrad's characters. (women). She reacts merely as the situation demands and there is never any individuality in her words or her actions. Schomberg, within his limitations, is wholly convincing ... Jones, Ricardo and Pedro are figures of melodrama: as Lena is the flawless heroine, so they are villains without a redeeming quality.

J. Baines

Heyst is perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most

complex character Conrad created. (see above) .
 (Alteration of sequence of details, interpolations, ellipsis and
 punctuation as in the handout.)

Reference to Lena looms large in this snippet from Baines. It could therefore influence reception in NED schools. It is difficult to contradict the adverse criticism of the presentation of Lena (see above: *passim*), but it would be unfortunate were she to be dismissed from serious consideration: even if a given teacher or pupil agrees wholeheartedly with Baines's evaluation of her as shadowy and unconvincing, this evaluation in itself can be made to generate fruitful discussion of sexual politics.

For most pupils and some teachers, these scissors-and-paste sections from critical works are more digestible than long critical essays, and I do not think that there is anything inherently wrong in distributing them, provided that the removal from context does not distort their implications and they are more carefully transcribed than in the above case. However, I would like to see them accompanied by some (explicitly non-definitive) guidance as to the issues which consideration of them could generate together with a note insisting on their lack of final authority. I think that this latter kind of annotation is particularly needed in the case of a handout such as that under discussion. The very brevity of the selected details might otherwise conduce to their being received as institutionally sanctioned: the impression could be that they have been especially singled out because of their value. Those responsible for the handout might have intended to spark discussion of one or more controversial aspects of *Victory*, and it is most probable that in some - perhaps many - staff-rooms and classrooms this has been the effect. But the substantial danger remains that a number of teachers and pupils might uncritically parrot what appears to be either the official line or at least a line which can be regarded as 'safe'. Such an effect is inimical to the development of the heuristic and epistemological abilities of the pupils. The possible damage might be limited by the circulation of other commentaries and by the examiner's standard adjuration to candidates to 'give your personal opinions frankly' (see above: 91). Nonetheless, the apparent institutional approval of certain ideas is likely to weigh more heavily than this instruction in some schools and with some individual teachers and pupils. There is a real tendency to search for institutionally sanctioned 'understanding of the books or poems' (*ibid*); without consistent explicit problematization of the authority of any and all views, especially those circulated by head office, this search will all-too-often culminate in heuristic closure and the silencing - or at least muting - of the dialogic process which is of the essence of the novel and of the kind of thinking which I see as a *sine qua non* of education in a democratic society.

* * *

Karl validly accords Lena 'a central and pivotal role' (250). In the course of his dialogizing of *Victory* and *Hamlet*, he calls her Heyst's 'own sacrificial Ophelia' (254). Certainly, Lena and Ophelia both die tragically, victims of the warfare into which they have been precipitated by their relationships with the respective protagonists of the two texts. It is reasonable to view them both as sacrificial victims. But Karl's equation is too pat and is misleading. Even if one allows for variability of interpretation, it is rationally

undeniable that the vulnerability of Ophelia contrasts fundamentally with the nerve of Lena, even if this nerve is seen as quixotic.

Karl pursues the idea that Lena is an innocent victim when, in the course of his discussion of the relationship between *Victory* and Goethe's *Faust*, he applies Alice Raphael's ideas about the latter text (see above: 113) and provisionally equates 'the innocent Lena and Margaret'. He writes that they are 'sacrificed' to the 'selfishness' of 'Heyst and Jones' and 'Faust and Mephistopheles' respectively (262). Ironically, he cautions against 'any extended comparison' of *Victory* and *Faust* on the grounds that 'the differences are too numerous' (*ibid*). It is further and particularly ironic that he considers that 'the "sacrificed" Lena is too active and too self-willed for her similarity to Margaret to be more than superficial' (263). Ophelia's name might easily be substituted for Margaret's in this assertion. Karl's treatment of Ophelia is aporetically riven. Some teachers (or pupils) might confer coherence on it by focusing on the idea that Lena is 'active and self-willed'. Since *Hamlet* is frequently prescribed in NED schools and most teachers and pupils do not know Goethe's version of *Faust*, others might be taken by the comparison with a familiar figure and view Lena in the light of their sense of Ophelia. This is not to suggest a definitive understanding of Ophelia as simply passive and/or weak. However, she lacks control over the situation in which she finds herself, loses her wits and dies as a result (perhaps by suicide). Lena reports having found the world too much for her and having contemplated suicide. The superficial similarities would be striking for some. But Lena's relationship with Heyst gives her a reason to live and to confront adversity. She is active and assertive to an extent which makes the comparison with Ophelia at least misleading and at worst fatuous. (It is not germane to this point that Lena is caught up in a rapture of self-sacrifice and that she can be seen as being under the sway of an illusion.) The potentially patronizing notion of the female as helpless victim should be subverted in our classrooms. If a given female character is definable as such a victim, the social causes of her status should be interrogated, and if the text is regarded as not indicating such causes, its implicitly patriarchal ideology requires exposure.

Despite his belief that Lena plays 'a central and pivotal role', Karl does not develop his discussion of her beyond the comparisons and comments reflected above. He does not explicitly or implicitly draw attention to sexual politics. If Karl's critique is used in teaching, the teacher would have to draw attention to this absence (if a pupil does not do it first) and perhaps initiate discussion of whether or not it is evidence of residual and unconscious patriarchal orientation in the thinking a generation ago of even a liberal academic who believes in 'human solidarity'.

* * *

Schwarz makes an interesting contribution to discussion of the presentation of women in *Victory*. He argues (72) that

To an extent one can justify the much-criticised narrator's view of women. The narrator's generalisations about women are in the context of his indictment of men whose conduct lacks stability and purpose. The narrator is generalising from the world within the novel when he speaks of 'a woman's innate

mistrust of masculinity, of that seductive strength allied to an absurd, delicate shrinking from the recognition of the necessity of facts, which never yet frightened a woman worthy of the name' (p. 308). The narrator is proposing that the salvation of the race lies in women because contemporary life shows that men have forfeited the right to moral leadership and because it is women more than men who have retained the necessary passion and energy. None the less, because his view of women is so different from ours, his interpretation of character is often at odds with our reading of a scene. Because of the incongruity between his view and ours, he finally becomes a spokesman for an obsolete cultural perspective.

This view felicitously harmonizes the sexism of the narrator's perspective with his apparent reverence for Lena. It is also useful in alerting teachers and pupils to the attitudinal - indeed, ideological - differences between cultural formations, even if they are separated only by time and not by other shaping influences. (In the specific case under discussion, 'other shaping influences', such as Schwarz's membership of the American 'liberal arts' academy as opposed to whatever aspects of Conrad's background and socio-ideological context one might, always in good measure guessingly, choose to place in opposition to it, are in essence less determinably significant than the diachronic factor.) Schwarz's point about the narrator's attitude to Lena also alerts the reader to the need to place attitudes readily attributable to a given text in historico-cultural perspective. Finally, it can be used by a teacher to help her pupils think about the ways in which their own readings of texts as well as their 'readings' of the 'texts' of extra-literary reality are conditioned by their social contexts.

The problematic details of this passage are the use of 'ours' and 'our' and a possible implication of 'obsolete'.

In using 'ours' and 'our', Schwarz seems to assume that the reader is not prone to sexist assumptions. Perhaps, in the late twentieth century, most male academics are thus free. I can testify from personal observation that, despite the clear anti-sexist stand taken by the current government and written into the new constitution, many male South African pupils, students and secondary-school teachers of all ethnic groups are not. Even today, a substantial number of their female counterparts are conditioned to accept these assumptions. The teacher could use Schwarz's comment on the presentation of women in *Victory* to make a small contribution to the flow of discourse which is slowly eroding male sexist hegemony.

The use of 'obsolete' might be understood as implying that a 'cultural perspective' enabling a deforming perception of women had a degree of validity in the past. Such an understanding would be an invalid relativizing of cultural values, as it would conduce to an obscuring of the crippling effects on women of their historical marginalization. If the accusation is levelled that this is quasi-Derridean (or any other form of) nit-picking, the retort must be that nits often carry disease: it is as well to be cautious about the influence of words.

There is one instance of added underlining of a detail of Schwarz's commentary pertaining to the presentation of women.

Interestingly, while 'it is women more than men who have retained the necessary passion and energy' is underlined, the immediately following indication that this way of regarding women is to be looked at askance is not. One cannot tell whether the reason is simplistic feminism, an unconscious patronizing of women, a lack of rigour while searching for points, or, perhaps, a simplifying presenting of points meant to be digestible by teachers and pupils in the belief that problematization of the lurking ideological tendencies of the text is not important for secondary-school purposes. Whatever the reason, the effect might be inimical to such problematization. The teacher could, however, cause the underlining to have a very different effect by demonstrating its potential influence in the same way that she might initiate discussion of the effects of non-verbal signifying features in commercial advertisements, political pamphlets and the like.

* * *

The dominant aspect of Hampson's reading is summed up in the idea that, 'In Conrad's version' 'what Hugh Kenner has called the "Uncle Charles Principle"',¹ one idiom is subverted by another, one view of the world is challenged by the next' (17). Hampson goes further in his use of Kenner's ideas as a heuristico-hermeneutic paradigm:

Kenner's explanation of Joyce's 'mystical method' in *Ulysses* provides the key to another, characteristically modernist, device that Conrad uses in *Victory*:

Joyce discerned homeomorphic structures in the *Odyssey*, *Hamlet*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and his own life. This suggests a grammar of generative plots.

(Hampson: 17; Hampson quotes Kenner's *The Pound Era*: 169-170 and on 'mythical method' refers to TS Eliot's 'Ulysses, order and myth'.)

Hampson then explores the relationship between *Victory* and *Axël*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, the Christian creation story, and the story of Troy, all of which antecedents, save the last, have been mentioned in the course of discussion of Karl's commentary (see above: 109 ff). The influence of Cedric Watts² and Baines³ is acknowledged in respect of the dialogizing of *Victory* and the Trojan myth and *Axël* respectively, and Donald Dike's

¹ Hampson's explanatory note reads:

Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). The 'principle' is that 'the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's' (p. 8) but one of the character's

² In 'Reflections on *Victory*' in *Conradiana*, XV: 1 (1983): 75.

³ In *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. In his endnote. Hampson cites both the original 1960 Weidenfeld and Nicolson edition and the 1971 Penguin edition, and specifies 'p. 479'. This must be the page in the Penguin, as the applicable pages in the original edition are 399-400.

'The Tempest of Axel Heyst'¹ is cited in an endnote referring to a point not directly to do with Shakespeare's play. By 1989, an abundance of material discussing these and other possible antecedents was available, and mention of these inter-textual relationships is not in itself an addition to Conrad scholarship, but they might well be revelatory for many a secondary-school teacher and capable of stimulating both interest and a new way of reading in secondary-school pupils. There is always the danger that such stimulation can conduce to the reduction of the text to a kind of academic crossword-puzzle, and the teacher needs to be on guard against this tendency since it can conduce to a blurring or even ignoring of possible text-world correspondences. I have found that a substantial proportion of pupils (not only the high achievers) enjoy such academic crossword-puzzles, so it is in general beneficial to discuss inter-textual relationships as long as the applicable *caveat* is heeded. What is particularly significant about Hampson's use of this kind of material is his assertion that *Victory*, like *The Tempest*,

synthesizes various pre-existing forms and traditions ... and it uses this synthetic form as the vehicle for a plurality of viewpoints. There are gaps between different characters' understanding of their situation, and there is a further gap between most of the characters' understanding and that of the audience (18; my ellipsis).

In the case of Lena, specifically, 'In Conrad's version [of the relevant Christian Biblical narratives],² Lena is a tempted Eve who sees herself as the Virgin Mary triumphing over Satan' and also 'the young and innocent Miranda' of *The Tempest*. Moreover,

The name 'Lena' can be seen as an abbreviation of 'Helena' - the name of Helen of Troy. The action of *Victory* is a parodic counterpart to the legend which prompted the *Iliad*,

with the implication that

The gift by Heyst of the name Lena is appropriate both to Heyst's sense of her seductiveness and to his sense that involvement with fellow-humans leads to disaster (19; the discussion of the imputed allusion to the *Iliad* is a quotation from Cedric Watts, *op cit*: 75).

Hampson's point is that

These contradictory implications are not flaws in the novel but rather the means by which Conrad creates an open-ended, multi-valent narrative. Conrad's mythical method, like Joyce's, operates through the superimposition of pre-existing 'plots', and the contradictions between the various 'plots' build a certain amount of interpretative play into the novel. This open-endedness is particularly appropriate to *Victory*, given the novel's scepticism about truth, facts and reason (*ibid*).

¹ In *Nineteenth Century Fiction*. 17 (September 1962)

² My interpolation.

Some readers might reasonably find the occasional detail in the above over-ingenious: this is particularly so of the link to the *Iliad* via 'Lena-Helena'. However, the fact is that Cedric Watts, a 'name' critic, has made the association and Hampson has repeated it in a book which guarantees it large-scale dissemination among readers necessarily eager for striking insights, and it must therefore become an established aspect of the meaning-generating matrix of discourse about *Victory*. The material realities of institutions and other societal structures are crucial to the making of meaning as crystallized in the consciousnesses of consumers.

The teacher needs to guard against potential misunderstanding and misapplication of a critic such as Hampson. The blurring or ignoring of text-world correspondences has been mentioned. An alternative, and even more deplorable, danger is that the evocations of the figures of Helen, Eve, The Virgin Mary and Miranda - and, for me most obviously, Mary Magdalen - can conduce to the reinforcement of stylized and stereotyped perceptions of women in a sexist society: Helen and Eve the dangerous temptresses; Miranda the innocent who needs male care; the remote and impossible ideal of the semi-deified Virgin Mother; Magdalen the whore-*cum*-saint redeemed by association with the pure male. The sentimentality and stylization which characterize Conrad's presentation of Lena initiate this danger, and discussion of possible allusions to female archetypes engendered in patriarchal cultures can aggravate it if the ideological qualities of these archetypes are not exposed.

There are aspects of Hampson's commentary which display what is likely to be the influence of feminism.

Hampson deals with Schomberg's reasons for wanting Lena. They are more complex and psychologically interesting than unadulterated lust. Moreover, Hampson suggests a fruitful line of enquiry into Heyst's emotional condition:

In the face of the threat embodied in Jones and Ricardo, Schomberg feels the need for a corroboration of his 'manliness' that the diminished Mrs. Schomberg cannot supply:

What he needed was a pair of woman's arms which, flung round his neck, would brace him up for the encounter. Inspire him, he called it to himself. (pp. 151-2)

By juxtaposing the narrator's account of Schomberg's feelings to the translation of that account into Schomberg's own idiom, Conrad economically discloses Schomberg's self-delusion: he displays the verbal strategy by which Schomberg muffles and masks the precise nature of his need. But the strategy has implications that go beyond the psychology of a particular individual. By that word 'inspire', the man's need for reassurance from a woman is expressed in a way that fits it back into patriarchal attitudes. Instead of openly acknowledging male vulnerability and emotional need, this formulation presents the man as active and the woman as merely the passive inspiration of male action ... through Schomberg, Conrad develops a questioning of 'masculinity' that bears upon our interpretation of Heyst. By hinting

at analogies between the two characters, Conrad creates for his readers an open-ended exploration of masculinity, male sexuality and sexual politics (25-26; Hampson's Penguin page reference corresponds to Dent 120; my ellipsis).

Hampson's use of phrasing such as 'male vulnerability and emotional need', as well as the term 'sexual politics' itself, situates his reading of the novel's dramatization of gender issues firmly in the current era. For reasons discussed below (145), a reader interested in recouping the ideological origins of the text at the time of its production, or in making assumptions about authorial intention, would be on shaky ground offering the precise emphases Hampson does. My sense is that what we have here is Hampson's own valid 'co-writing' of Conrad's text in terms of discourse current in our era, rather than 'Conrad's exploration of sexual politics'. Be that as it may, Hampson's points have strong educational value for young people growing up in South Africa, where male sexism and a significant degree of female enabling of male sexism are prominent in all ethnic groups and social classes. If the potential of commentary such as Hampson's is to be realized, however, teachers, superintendents in the advisory services and public examiners should focus attention on the relevant issues. I have set internal examination questions which direct attention to sexual politics in various prescribed texts, but I do not recall seeing similar direction in secondary-school papers set by anyone else. This does not mean that such questions necessarily do not exist; it probably does mean that they are rare.

Hampson goes on to note what he calls 'Jones's most prominent characteristic: his fear and hatred of women' (27).

Whether or not this is in fact his 'most prominent characteristic' is a matter of opinion: general homicidal viciousness would be the candidate of many readers; representativeness of upper-class degeneracy would be mine. Perhaps the currency of the feminist intervention in the literary and larger socio-political debate influences the late-twentieth-century liberal humanist academic to centre Jones's pathological misogyny, as Marxist perspectives influence my own tendency to register power-struggles, often but not always related to group-interests, more frequently than most of my colleagues do. A given pupil must be free to place her emphases where she wishes, but ought to be aware that the choices involved are ideological and that when a commentator (including herself) says, in effect, 'This is so', the statement should be understood as being consciously or unconsciously coloured by a specific way of refracting data, unless the statement can be shown to be truly 'scientific' and objectively verifiable irrespective of perspective. That Jones is misogynistic to a pathological extent is objectively the case; whether this is his 'most prominent characteristic' is not.

Hampson's conferring of pre-eminence on Jones's attitude to women introduces his immediately following point that

The set of relations established between Heyst and Jones raises questions about Heyst, but does not supply answers: it prepares us, however, for the novel's exploration of sexuality and sexual response in Parts III and IV (*ibid*).

This point comes to a focus on Lena's

displacement of erotic feelings into idealistic self-sacrifice. She

commits herself to self-sacrifice in order to win Heyst's love. This is, in part, a continuation of Conrad's exploration of sexual politics. As Mill observed:

All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves ... they are universally taught that they are created and born for self-sacrifice (28; quotation from JS Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, 1869; Hampson's ellipsis).

The quotation from Mill together with even a cursory knowledge of the social history of Conrad's day makes it clear that criticism of sexist attitudes was well-established when *Victory* was written. However, Hampson does not deal with indications that *Victory* can readily be taken as promoting sexist attitudes. His commentary leaves unexplained details such as that glanced at above (130), where it is pointed out that it is the narrator and not Heyst or Lena who makes the stereotypic claim about 'woman's sublime faculty'. Certainly, a narrator is not necessarily the omniscient repository of a novel's 'truth', but the narrator of the later parts of *Victory* has lost most, perhaps all, of his initial (and never more than partial) intradiegetic and homodiegetic identity, and it would require special pleading to deny the extent to which he can validly be taken as the dominant 'voice' of the text. And this voice is not what a late-twentieth-century reader influenced by the feminist revolt - or Mill, probably - would regard as liberated from sexism. Hampson's reading is flawed by what seems to be an imperative to present *Victory* as uncontaminatedly 'modern' and ideologically 'correct' in terms of the values currently dominant in what Michel Foucault would call the 'discursive formation' he inhabits. Alternatively, his reading is insufficiently 'close'. This means that Hampson's socially useful discussion of sexual politics in *Victory* requires supplementation which a teacher could provide.

Finally, immediately after his placing 'Heyst's manner' as partly 'the product of his class background', Hampson comments that Lena 'suffers from a sense of lack of worth on both social and moral grounds', and discusses the way in which her 'low self-evaluation' is related to her 'displacement of erotic feelings into idealistic self-sacrifice' as well as the relationship of this behaviour to 'Conrad's exploration of sexual politics' (28). This reading provides a coherent sociological and psychological explanation of Lena's behaviour and can act as an antidote - or at least an educationally useful supplement - to merely sentimental responding. Hampson relates the politics of class and the politics of gender. This is a particularly valuable aspect of his commentary, as it demonstrates that the distribution of social power is the common denominator of all politics and that the separation of discussion of politics into categories such as 'class' and 'gender' is convenient and often necessary but not basic. I think that this idea is easily accessible to anyone in a senior-secondary class.

Whose 'Victory'?

The title of this novel has led to much discussion in critical commentary. It is inevitably discussed in class. It is safe to assume that many an internal essay assignment has been based on it. Decision as to who, if anyone, achieves a victory is central to interpretation of the text.

In the service of his characteristic ideological commitment to moral values in accordance with what he takes to be the highest requirements of 'life', Leavis accepts the 'Ah, Davidson' speech at face value as the novel's (and its author's) ultimate credo. The 'victory' is thus 'over scepticism, a victory of life' which is 'unequivocal' (223).

Certainly, it is likely - if not beyond doubt - that Leavis's interpretation harmonizes with Conrad's intention. But Davidson's speech - and therefore the novel as a whole - does not have to be read in this way. Heyst's words to Davidson are uttered in specific circumstances in which he despairingly feels that the disabilities he summarizes have led to appalling tragedy; these circumstances, moreover, might be taken as demonstrating that 'life' is capable of offering savage menace such as could confer some respectability on the attitude to it of the elder Heyst. The schoolboy writer of Essay H 1 pertinently notes that 'all the primary participants, the antagonist and the protagonist all die' and asks 'so where is the Victory, where has all this characterisation and contrasting treatment of the central characters led to - immolation, crypts - graves?' The candidate decides that there is after all a 'Victory of death over evil, and good over death', but his question can result in a different answer. Leavis merely asserts of 'the victory of life' that 'The tragic irony that makes it come too late and identifies it with death doesn't make it less a victory; it is unequivocal'; he does not deal systematically, by way of logical refutation, with the potential of the 'tragic irony' concerned to bring about a sense of the 'victory' as equivocal. The novel can be productively read, that is, as posing an existential problem and as resisting pat 'moral-of-the-story' formulations. In response to Leavis's assertion that 'scepticism presents itself as specifically conditioned, and, in the upshot of the action, it is renounced' (222), it can be pointed out that it is *Heyst* who renounces it, while the novel as a whole can be read as less clear on the issue. Whether it would be socially desirable for anyone - Conrad, Heyst, Leavis or the reader - to renounce it is a different matter: one might sympathize with Leavis's hostility to blanket scepticism without accepting his dogmatism about the 'meaning' of the novel. Pupils must be free to agree or disagree with Leavis or anyone else as much as they choose (provided that their arguments are coherent in Eco's terms), but they must also be assisted to grasp the inherent variability and limitations of interpretation, their own included.

* * *

For Lewis, the 'victory' is Lena's as well as that of 'the novel'. The former attribution is the one more emphasized and in its nature more accessible by pupils and of interest to their teachers. It is also certain that no examination question is going to require dealing with the idea that 'the novel' enjoys any kind of 'victory': people involved in secondary-

school education would regard it as too recondite. The latter attribution will therefore be ignored here.

Lewis begins his essay with consideration of a pattern discernible in the first page of *Victory* and which he takes to be central to it:

a profound conflict rooted in opposition and likeness, and which has to do with coal, diamonds and an island; but the first effect of such dialectical teasing is the imparted sense of enlargement and creativity, of some idea or insight being made to grow.

Lewis contrasts this initial sense of potential growth with what he understands by the last few lines of the novel, culminating in Davidson's "Nothing!":

Between that initial sense of conceptual growth, with its cautious jocularly, and the thoughtful sadness of the closing negation there lies the truth of *Victory*, and its reality.

Victory is, in fact, a novel intimately concerned with questions of truth and reality, as it is with lies and illusion (101).

Lewis sees Heyst, Jones and Lena as 'the three key figures in the story' (106) and concludes his essay with a summary of the 'truth' and 'reality' he takes to be presented in the novel:

The action disclosed by the effect of these three upon each other is the gradual location of ... the very domain of reality and truth. The domain lies somewhere between the dialectical stirrings of the book's first page and the observation of nothingness on its last - somewhere, as it turns out, between the intellectualism of Heyst and the deathliness of Jones. Between the two kinds of failure, Lena's victory is squeezed out in a way that is a victory both for her and for the novel in which she has her being. As against Jones, Lena has dedicated herself to the actual cause of living; and as against Heyst, she has seized with fingers of steel upon the immediate and necessary facts of behaviour. Her practicality (again the book's first page is recalled) derives from a mystical exaltation that transcends the particular situation and attains to universal value while remaining sharply and intently focussed upon the single figure of Axel Heyst. Lena's accomplishment reflects the accomplishment of the novel. *Victory* is, in a sense, a reproach to the fascination with death of so much modern fiction (119; my ellipsis).

Lewis's dialectical conception of the relationship of Heyst, Jones and Lena is classically triadic, with, however, Lena the synthesis not of the characteristics of Heyst and Jones but of the antitheses of their undesirable characteristics. Heyst over-intellectualizes for someone not temperamentally capable of complete scepticism and is consequently paralyzed when menaced, while Lena grasps what is necessary to do and does it. Jones has 'a strenuous but insufficiently examined faith in the power of death' (117), while Lena 'has dedicated herself to the actual cause of living' - she is a morally positive

figure in the strict Leavisian sense. She is practical in that her commitment to the Leavisian and generally traditional liberal-humanist values of 'life', love and another person or other people is synthesized with a capacity for concrete action determined by the demands of circumstances and aiming at the good of the love-object. The impracticality of Heyst derives from the incompleteness of his scepticism - the irreconcilability of his inherited philosophy and his 'urge toward reality and communion' (118).¹ The impracticality of Jones consists in the incompleteness of his belief in 'universal fraudulence' (119): he believes Schomberg too readily² and trusts too much in 'the strength of his authority - his graveyard power - over Martin Ricardo' (*ibid*). The implication seems to be that, as a corollary of her 'practicality', Lena is complete, in the sense that a harmonious synthesis of characteristics can be discerned in her nature. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Lewis accepts that the 'victory' of the title is Lena's.

Lewis confuses a specific ideology of morality with a metaphysic of absolute morality. In asserting that 'Lena has dedicated herself to the actual cause of living', he equates Lena's ethic of self-sacrificing love with 'the cause of living' in general terms. He explicitly registers that what he sees as Lena's 'practicality ... derives from a mystical exaltation'. His claim that this 'exaltation ... transcends the particular situation and attains to universal value' is to an extent problematic if one reads his words as being not merely an interpretation of the text but applying to reality in general. It is debatable whether any kind of rhapsodic 'exaltation' has 'universal value'. It is hard to establish any materialist and empirical basis for belief in the 'universal' validity of any system of values and to assert such validity always runs the risk of tendentiousness. This notwithstanding, it is fair to say that Lena's values and emotional imperatives (if not her 'mystical exaltation' as such) are fully compatible with the maintenance of a social order in which people can co-exist harmoniously.

If Lewis's words are regarded as limited to interpretation of an aspect of the novel, they are more definitively indicative of the ideology of his own text than of Conrad's: *Victory* need not be read as endorsing Lena's idealism as universally valid. According to Lewis,

The novel's final word - "Nothing!" - is ... less a cry of appalled metaphysical recognition than the quiet acknowledgement that the adventure is over and the art that described it has peacefully exhausted itself (103; my ellipsis).

Thus would Lewis deny that the closing word has any force within the dialectic of attitudes toward behaviour which can be discerned in or conferred on the novel. He removes it from that dialectic altogether. The notion is ingenious but not compelling.

¹ Lewis speculates that 'if Heyst had mistrusted life more completely, he would perhaps have been a better match for Jones from the outset. As it is, the novel catches him when mistrust is giving way to an urge toward reality and communion' (117-118).

² An incidental observation is that Lewis reads carelessly here. He considers that Jones has 'overlooked the possibility of mere vulgar vindictiveness in Schomberg' (119). But Jones remarks to Ricardo: "And perhaps that hotel-keeper has been lying to you about him. He may be a very poor devil indeed" (264). Jones tells Ricardo that he has not thought much about the whole affair before embarking on their expedition, he "was bored" (265). It is apparent that the alleviation of boredom is at least as important a motive on Jones's part as greed, and that he is not naively taken in by Schomberg.

“‘Nothing!’” might well be indicative of ‘metaphysical recognition’ (‘appalled’, ‘bemused’, ‘numbed’, ‘resigned’, ‘saddened’ or however qualified) or perhaps of metaphysical blankness.¹ Such interpretation - Schwarz’s is a case in point (150-152 below) - would conflict with Lewis’s thesis that Lena has a real victory and that, as a corollary, ‘Heyst, by acknowledging his failure and perceiving its cause, has in the literary manner of speaking been saved. He is, at the last, completely in touch with truth’ (112). Lewis’s argument merely denies what his phrasing suggests is a more obvious way of understanding the last word of the novel and does not demonstrate that his own has any cogency: what turns out to be the linch-pin of his reason for giving the ‘victory’ to Lena is insecure. However, problematizing Lewis’s argument that the novel does not have any tendency toward metaphysical nihilism and that the ‘victory’ is unequivocally Lena’s does not detract from the real force of his demonstration that Lena can be seen as manifesting self-sacrificing love and bold, active practicality. What I for one see as the heroism of this combination can be recognized even if one views the presentation of Lena as flawed in the ways discussed above (*passim*) and even if her heroism is attributed wholly or in part to what Hampson calls ‘displacement of erotic feelings into idealistic self-sacrifice’ (see above: 145).

* * *

Karl also gives the ‘victory’ to Lena. He writes that
 amid the wreckage that he has helped create, [Heyst] finally
 recognizes Lena’s triumph as the victory that has regenerated
 even while destroying him (248-249; my interpolation).

Then:

When Lena’s victory is complete and her love has triumphed
 over death, the thunder ceases to growl (264).

And:

The victory of the title, as Conrad emphasized in the Author’s
 Note, is surely Lena’s. Her sacrifice, in this sense like Margaret’s
 in *Faust*, forces Heyst to recognize the inadequacy of his personal
 philosophy (265).

Karl goes on to explain that ‘the social significance’ of the ‘Ah, Davidson’ speech ‘is plain’: ‘Heyst is a living example of Donne’s proposition that no man is an island unto himself’ and ‘human solidarity must often take precedence over the individual will’ (*ibid*). He also makes the point that Lena ‘comes to represent Heyst’s concession to society at large; to “save” her he must ask himself new questions and find new answers’ (261).

Three issues strike me as arising here. One has to do with the reference to the Author’s Note and will be discussed below under ‘Provisionality of Interpretation’.

¹ These metaphysically aligned reactions need not be ascribed to Davidson. The novel might suggest them independently of his state of mind, even though it is he who says “‘Nothing!’” Whatever the case, Davidson’s tone is of ‘placid sadness’ (412).

The second is that Karl's idea of Lena's victory echoes the crypto-theological notion of redemption through perfect self-sacrificial love, an echo made louder by his comparison of Heyst's being 'chastened into realization' with Faust's having 'to recognize the depth of his sins before Goethe allowed him to be redeemed' (265). Much liberal humanist discourse, even if divorced from Christian theology *per se*, shows evidence of the Christian referential framework which is an important component of its historical provenance. The secularized form of this theology is apparent in Karl's interpretation, even though this individual 'represent[s] [his] concession to society at large'. God is absent from the hierarchy of love-objects, but is replaced by the human beloved, often, as is the case in *Victory*, as benefactor and/or beneficiary of self-sacrifice. *Victory* does invite (although it does not definitively require) such a reading and Karl's interpretation is coherent. It is a way of viewing the 'victory' apparent to varying extents in a number of the 1990 NED essays. The teacher should, however, draw attention to its ideological and provisional nature. Both teaching and examining should juxtapose it with alternative positions so as to encourage the kind of epistemological wrestling which this thesis posits as beneficial.

The third issue has to do with a simple but pedagogically useful idea. Whatever the extent to which a given pupil feels that Heyst's father has a point, it is clear that Heyst's 'personal philosophy' is 'inadequate' to the challenges posed by the entry of Lena into his life and the invasion by the desperadoes; so 'new questions and new answers' are necessary. It is possible to bracket the related issues of the validity of Heyst's answers and the extent to which *Lena* can be credited with a 'triumph' or 'victory' while noting that failure to subject attitudes to constant reassessment is presented as potentially harmful to both oneself and others. This holds whether the attitudes are formally subscribed to, manifested as reflexive responses at the affective level or, as in Heyst's case, both. Educated adults who would see this idea as obvious and even trite often deny it by their actions. It is of value to expose pupils to it, especially if one would like them to be 'liberal' in the broad sense and democrats. There is a kind of 'victory', whatever its provenance, in the loosening of heuristic constraints. However complete or incomplete one might take it to be, the painful freeing of Heyst from such constraints is a 'concession to society at large': flexibility of interpretation of and response to circumstances is necessitated by one's inability to avoid - as Heyst discovers - being 'immersed' in the largely unpredictable and potentially 'destructive element' of society (see above: 114).

* * *

Schwarz has a very different view. Section V, the last part of his chapter on *Victory*, starts: '*Victory* is an ironic title for what may well be Conrad's most pessimistic novel. Malice, not love, has triumphed' (78). Details related to this way of seeing the title include: 'Those who argue that *Victory* is an affirmative novel ignore the narrator's cynical, melancholy tone' (71) and 'The action confirms the narrator's gloom. Like Heyst, he sceptically questions the sense of *any* action' (*ibid*; Schwarz's italics).

An implication of Schwarz's interpretation of the title is that the novel presents species of what the 1990 NED Higher Grade Literature examiner calls 'evil' as triumphant.

'Malice' - clearly that of Schomberg, Jones and Ricardo - has the 'victory'; destructive social, political and economic forces such as crude materialism, venture capitalism and imperialism (see above: 116-117) combine to create such 'malice' and contribute to the circumstances in which Heyst and Lena are defeated by it.

Whether or not a given teacher agrees with Schwarz, his position is useful in that it problematizes what seems to be the majority view. When central ideas in a secondary source clash with dominant positions in the discourse influencing a given reader or group of readers, a valuable effect would tend to be the countering of any tendency to automatization of interpretation.

After defining the title as 'ironic', Schwarz proceeds:

Heyst's 'infernal mistrust of all life' keeps 'the true cry of love from his lips' even after Lena saves him (p. 406). Given Conrad's lack of belief in the hereafter, there is nothing purifying about Heyst's funeral pyre for Lena and his self-immolation. Isn't his suicide a continuation of his search to separate the strand of his life from a cosmos he despises? Davidson's final word [*sic*], 'Nothing!', spoken to give emphasis to his previous comment, 'There was nothing to be done there', is a suitable epigraph that not only summarises what Heyst and Lena have accomplished in their desperate quest for love and happiness, but also stands as Conrad's comment on what man can achieve in this world. With its plethora of murders and suicides, the melodramatic climax ... explodes the possibility of a meaningful conclusion. In a sense, the ending undermines the viability of an allegorical interpretation by discarding a dialectic of values in favour of a sea of blood (78).

Schwarz makes a strong case, well-rooted in the text. It is not cast-iron, however. If Leavis fails to deal with the possibility that the 'tragic irony' he identifies might bring about a sense that the 'victory' is equivocal (see above: 146), Schwarz's more cogently argued opinion, which is antithetical to Leavis's, also fails at least to acknowledge this possibility. If the narrator (or the novel in general) 'sceptically questions the sense of *any* action', this is not the same as definitively answering the question in any specific way. The narrator's tone might be 'melancholy', but it is not necessarily 'cynical': the descriptions of Lena's self-sacrifice can be read as laced with irony, but there is no compelling need to dismiss as purely ironic the reverence (or respect or tenderness) with which the narrator treats her in the closing pages. The 'melancholy' tone is appropriate to tragedy; cynicism and/or a form of existential nihilism is not a *necessary* corollary.

A value of Schwarz's position is that it might inhibit any tendency on the part of a reader to adopt a sighingly sentimental view of the novel. But a teacher who uses it ought to dialogize it with material such as Leavis's, Lewis's and Karl's so as to avoid foreclosure of consideration of the more 'positive' meanings which interpretation of the title can provide.

Surprisingly, there is no underlining of any material in Section V of the NED photocopied handout of Schwarz's chapter on *Victory*. Since there is no underlining of any details after p 75, and Section V occupies pp 78-79, there might be no consequential motive for it. The effect could be to de-emphasize the discussion of the title for some readers, but I suspect that any teacher or pupil who bothered to read the whole chapter would have her eye caught by the opening words of the section - '*Victory* is an ironic title ... ' - and read carefully, as material on titles is in general much sought by both teachers and pupils. Questions about, for instance, whose 'victory' it is, whether Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* is 'great' and what 'things fall apart' in Achebe's novel are commonplace and answers are wanted..

* * *

Meihuizen climaxes her interpretation of the novel with:

Whose is the victory? Well, in one sense, of course, it is Lena's, because she dies gloriously, filled with a sense of achievement and believing at last, I think, that Heyst loves her, but most of all convinced that she has saved Heyst from danger. But on another much deeper level, it is a victory of life over Heyst's former philosophy. This may sound paradoxical, because the novel ends with the death of five people, but Lena dies in an attempt to save a life she believes much more valuable than her own and in the full conviction and acknowledgement of life-values like love and loyalty. It is in the same sort of spirit that Heyst dies - he has finally rejected his commitment to detachment and in his suicide has accepted the values that Lena dies for. The ultimate expression of this victory is in Heyst's acknowledgement of the poverty and inadequacy of his *Weltanschauung* when he says in anguish: "'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love - and to put its trust in life!'" ... The death of the three evil men is deeply significant in that the life-values represented by Lena and Heyst have defeated the anti-life forces, even if Lena and Heyst too have had to perish. *Their* deaths are glorious and triumphant, those of Jones and company ignominious and ignoble (16-17; Meihuizen's emphasis; my ellipsis).

This is thoroughly Leavisian. In particular, 'it is a victory of life over Heyst's former philosophy' is a paraphrase of Leavis's 'the "victory" is a victory over scepticism, a victory of life' (Leavis 1962: 223). The above comments on the views of Leavis and Lewis (104ff & 146, 146 ff) apply *mutatis mutandis* and need not be repeated here. It is worth noting, though, that Meihuizen confronts the 'paradoxical' nature of seeing a 'victory of life' in the midst of what Schwarz calls 'a sea of blood'. Her resolution of the paradox can be used as a coherent and valid rejoinder to Schwarz's position, even if it

ought not to be regarded as definitive for reasons adduced above (*passim*). Because of her institutional authority, Meihuizen's adoption of the above approach would tend to have more force than Leavis's or Lewis's and it probably played a significant part in bringing about the tendency of so many of the 1990 NED candidates to stress the 'victory' of Lena.

* * *

Page writes:

The struggle between the two sides on the island resolves itself into Lena's attempt to save Heyst; and the climax is reached with her dying conviction that she has both saved him and won his love. This is Lena's 'victory' - but it is difficult to see the novels' title as anything other than ironic, for her conviction is groundless, Heyst is unable to respond to her sacrifice with spontaneous words of love; and, realizing that his lack of 'trust in life' and the capacity to love have been a fundamental error, he commits suicide. Leavis's interpretation that the victory is Heyst's, 'a victory over scepticism, a victory of life', undiminished by his death, is persuasively rejected by Baines, who sees the 'victory' as Lena's, and bitterly ironic ('though absolutely real to her' it 'has no objective reality'). The choice here is between an optimistic affirmation of the validity of Heyst's 'progressive self-discovery' (in Leavis's phrase), with the emphasis on that 'trust in life' of which Heyst speaks at the end, and a pessimistic acceptance that Lena's sacrifice has been in vain and her dying belief ('I've saved you!') groundless (116; quotations from Leavis 1962: 223, Baines 1960: 396 & *Victory*: 410, 406; the cited details from Baines are not in the NED handout).

Baines's position, which Page accepts, has what in context is a very slight amount in common with Lewis's - the 'victory' is Lena's - but much more in common with Schwarz's view of the 'victory' as 'ironic' and the climax of the novel as 'pessimistic'. A value of Page's contribution is that he succinctly gives a textual basis for both the position he prefers and its contrary. Its greater value, however, is that, although he clearly asserts which is his preferred reading, he posits a 'choice' between two clearly demarcated opinions. Thus teacher and pupil are presented with the disagreement of two commentators and clear, succinct illustration of the relativity and variability of interpretation. (If the teacher and pupils are aware that the two commentators are 'big name' figures, so much the better.)

But the teacher ought not to leave matters at such a point, either here or in any analogous case. Certainly, pupils should individually choose the opinion of the 'victory' they prefer. Further possibilities, such as my own preferred reading that the title is equivocal, should also be available. In addition, they should be aware that there is a limit to which they can assert that one opinion is 'better' - as opposed to preferred - than another. Up to a point, there can be forensic debate based on competitive 'close

reading', but the role of assumption, whether attributable to ideology, temperament or any other cause, should be isolated and interrogated so that the inherent contestability of 'knowledge' not amenable to definitive scientific scrutiny can be demonstrated.

* * *

Like Schwarz, Baines and Page, Moolman sees *Victory* as pessimistic, but in her discussion of the title of the novel she qualifies this position. In doing so, she is careful to indicate the provisionality of her responses and thus does not fall prey to self-contradiction.

She accepts Heyst's idea that 'the universe is a "bad dog that will bite"' (45)¹ and considers that

The 'Great Joke' that Heyst speaks of² is, I believe, the illusion that man persists in sustaining, that we are in the hands of a benevolent Creator who, as Lena says, sees the sparrow fall. To Heyst, the sparrow falls regardless, so of what use is it that we comfort ourselves with the belief that the Creator cares? For me, *Victory* is overridden with a pervading pessimism, over which I do not feel that Lena's love triumphs. Conrad's own life, according to his diaries and letters, was a chronicle of despair and pessimism ... He spoke of the universe as an absurd knitting machine that knits us in and knits us out - man has no control over his destiny. This is surely one of the central statements of *Victory*. Heyst could not leave the world simply because he chose to. The world sought him out and destroyed him. Is this not a particularly prevalent source of anxiety to (20) man, that he is simply a victim of forces too great to comprehend which do not seem to have his interests at heart? ... The 'victory' of the title of the novel could well be the victory of the maniacal forces of the universe which claim everybody in the end (45; my ellipses).

In concluding her article, Moolman qualifies this idea. Her opening conditional clause saves her from any accusation that she is contradicting the cited ideas from p 45:

If there is a real victory in the novel, then, for me, it is not Lena's victory over death, or over skepticism, but rather the victory of one idea over another. Heyst now discovers a greater sense of his own reality than ever before. It is the idea of social and emotional commitment over the idea of isolation and detachment. Heyst, after realising this, is no

¹ The phrasing in the novel is "The world is a bad dog. It will bite you if you give it a chance" (57).

In Moolman's published article, 'mad' is used instead of 'bad'. Moolman informs me that there must have been a typing error.

Page-references are to *The NATE Journal* 17 (1990). Moolman's article appears on pp 44-51.

² On p 198

more capable of commitment to the human world than before and dies in the fire that he creates. His victory is perhaps a Pyrrhic one.

The final cry of the novel is not 'victory' but 'nothing' (51; Moolman's underlining).

Moolman thus initially rejects any neatly comforting Leavisian interpretation of the title and hence of the novel as a whole. However, she finally posits as a possibility what boils down to a modified yet essentially Leavisian reading, in that if 'the idea of social and emotional commitment' is victorious 'over the idea of isolation and detachment', the *novel* is supportive of the former idea, irrespective of Heyst's emotional condition.

Moolman is not guilty of unsteady manoeuvring among readings here. Earlier in her article (44-45) she enunciates a principle of hermeneutic openness and it can be asserted that in suggesting alternative perspectives she is being true to this principle: her use of 'could well be' and 'If there is a real victory ... then, for me' clearly indicates as much.

Moreover, the reading posited on p 45 and which would attribute a nihilistic pessimism to the novel is not in context contradicted by the 'optimistic' reading on p 51. The notion of the 'victory' of 'the maniacal forces of the universe which claim everybody in the end' is a metaphysical construct, as Moolman explicitly indicates when she writes that Conrad

portrays the existence of a metaphysical power which is inexpressibly threatening and horrifying, latently malevolent to man and which lurks beneath the surface of all things (45).

By contrast, the idea of the 'victory' of an 'idea' which can govern human behaviour is psychological and axiological. The two 'victories' are ontologically distinct and not mutually exclusive, and the latter can be posited as a desirable assumption in the face of the bleakness of the former. Moolman indicates as much when she says that 'We must "hang together" in the face of the unknown and unknowable' (49).

Page suggests a 'choice' between 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' readings. Moolman's idea would be more hermeneutically satisfying for some because it resolves the 'paradox' which Meihuizen registers and also resolves (see above: 152) and which some internationally published critics appear to have avoided confronting (see above: *passim*). Meihuizen and Moolman solve it differently; so another 'choice' emerges for those - and there are probably many in NED institutions - who carefully read both Meihuizen and Moolman. This is all to the good in terms of the assumptions of this thesis.

As noted above (126), the ideas - or idea, in essence - of 'the maniacal forces of the universe' and 'the unknown and unknowable' should be problematized. There is no incompatibility of text and reading here, so the problem is not so much hermeneutic as (in context) pedagogical. Pupils should be asked whether the reading has anything to do with their flesh-and-blood personal and social reality. From a Marxist perspective it does not, except as an example of a 'co-writing' which is obfuscatory of real issues. The idea could make perfect sense to adherents of certain forms of religion or people with certain forms of mystical orientation. It might also seem sound to others who regard themselves as materialist in their outlook but conceive of the universe as mysterious and menacing in its material (as opposed to mystical or supernatural) qualities. Moolman understands

Conrad to have this kind of outlook, for instance. Her argument, based in part on Conrad's well-known letter to RB Cunningham Graham of 20 December 1897, is reasonable although not definitive: not everyone takes the letter's 'knitting machine' metaphor at face value and Allan Hunter, for instance, thinks it is used 'ironically' and doubts that 'Conrad's correspondence' should be 'interpreted as depressive at this time' (1983: 12). Again, what is pedagogically important is the avoidance of heuristic closure and hermeneutic dogmatism, with concomitant inculcation of an awareness of problems of reading and understanding, together with suggestion of the significance of text/s-'real' world correspondences and social issues.

* * *

In *Guidelines*, there is a 'Themes' section only about a two-column A 4 page long. This apparent solution to the problem of understanding *Victory* is quickly and easily digestible by the large number of pupils and fair number of teachers who use the study-aid. I have no objection in principle to the issuing of 'notes' which make aspects of texts more accessible, although I think that a more pedagogically sound method is the judicious use of worksheet questions with memoranda carefully structured so as to inhibit heuristic and hermeneutic foreclosure, but the *Guidelines* on *Victory* is the kind of thing which (understandably) makes some conscientious teachers hostile to anything which resembles a 'quick fix'.

The conclusion of the 'Themes' section is headed 'The Major Theme of the Novel' and reads:

The Victory is the Triumph of Good over Evil. It is the proving that no matter how man may try to destroy his fellow men he will never succeed, for LOVE conquers all (33; caps as in the original).

The typographical emphases provide the insecure reader with a set of elementary points which can be used to structure response to the novel. It is apparent from inspection of the 1990 essays from ten NED schools that a fair number of such readers did so.

The comments made above (125-126) about the reduction of *Victory* to a simplistic morality tale apply. The 'victory' is given to 'Good' and to 'LOVE'. So one can place the writer of this opinion in the same camp as critics such as Leavis and Lewis who see Conrad's novel as being what Page calls an 'optimistic affirmation' (153 above). But in *Guidelines* there is no textually based substantiation or argument of any kind in support of this position. Moreover, the compiler seems to forget his initial direction. 'Detailed Commentary', the longest section of the *Guidelines*, concludes with 'Comment' on the last chapter of *Victory*:

Why did Heyst die in this fashion? Davidson has the answer when he says, "I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body - and fire purifies everything" ... evil, grief, lies, pretence, loneliness, death itself. Heyst the civilized thinker, finally resorts to a pagan ritual.

We have been presented with many disturbing facets of human existence in the novel. But the most disturbing is that implied

by the very last word of the novel, the single word “Nothing”.

We are reminded of Macbeth’s words about life:

*“it is a tale
told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
signifying nothing”*

Perhaps Heyst’s father was right when he spoke of “the universal nothingness” (144; my ellipsis).

This idea is evidence of thinking more substantial than that in the ‘Themes’ section, but its value is reduced by its implicit, unexplained (and no doubt unconscious) contradiction of what is expressed in the earlier section: that ‘The Victory is the Triumph of Good over Evil’ and that ‘LOVE conquers all’. The suggestion that the novel might have a species of nihilistic implication does not harmonize with the confident assertion that its meaning is a repetition of what boil down to traditional moral pieties.

A pupil who assiduously studies this commentary could be forgiven for feeling confused. There are numerous pupils who would not feel confused because they would learn what would seem to be the painlessly encapsulating material in the early pages and not attend to anything which complicated matters. A sad implication is that even academically unsuccessful pupils have in general the potential to wrestle constructively with ideas which have a substantial bearing on their lives, but *Guidelines* would tend to interfere with the activation of this potential *vis-à-vis* the study of *Victory*.

Experience shows that trying to ban the use of *Guidelines* is futile, but perhaps some damage control is possible for the alert teacher. Specific aspects of *Guidelines* could be discussed in the light of specific details of the primary text which problematize those aspects. Positions adopted in the study-aid could be compared to alternative positions. Self-contradictions such as that discussed above could be demonstrated so as to initiate discussion of the applicable issue in the primary text as well as to illustrate in general terms problems of interpretation and epistemology (although terms such as the latter should be used, if at all, only in the teaching of academically able classes). The very qualities which make *Guidelines* a *bête noire* for many conscientious teachers (and public examiners) - its ubiquitousness, familiarity and seriously flawed nature - could enable it to become a constructive teaching aid.

* * *

Allegory and Caricature

Commentators frequently examine the possibility that there is a strong element of allegory in *Victory*. The stylization which tends to be a feature of allegorical figures is sometimes seen as caricature, a term usually applied with derogatory connotations in the case of this novel. Because the proposition in the 1990 NED essay question starkly opposed ‘evil’ and ‘good’ characters, a fair number of the candidates who wrote the essays referred either explicitly or implicitly to this aspect of structure.

Leavis acknowledges the potential of *Victory* to be read as essentially or mainly an allegorical or synecdochical representation of a universal struggle of good and evil:

Heyst is studied at length; yet it may be argued that, convincing as he is, the extreme case that he is offered as being really amounts to a kind of Morality representation of the human potentialities he embodies, so that he is fittingly brought up against these embodiments of counter-potentialities. (Of Ricardo we are told that to Lena 'He was the embodied evil of the world'.)
(229; quotation from *Victory*: 298)

The 'counter-potentialities' are 'the antithesis of lust in Ricardo and woman-loathing in Jones' (*ibid*). Leavis sees them as important to the '*dénouement*' but having 'no irresistible significance in relation to Conrad's main theme' (*ibid*), which is the 'victory of life' (see above: 104). He therefore dismisses a reading of the novel as predominantly allegorical as misdirected, while registering the real basis of such a reading.

Leavis's centring of the development of the individual's capacity to grasp the importance of an engagement with 'life' is problematic for the reasons given above (104ff), but has the virtue of avoiding interpreting the novel as essentially an updated Morality fable with 'cosmic' metaphysical implications; such a reading has the potential to render human issues in terms so abstract as to be of scant if any social value. It is true that both Leavis's form of liberal humanism and Marxism also have the potential to conduce to unproductive abstraction. However, interpreting the text in crypto-theological terms would be a more likely distortion among our pupils and some of our teachers: it has been my consistent experience that South African society - and this applies to all ethnic groups - is much imbued with fundamentalist forms of religious belief (not only Christian); this is true to the extent that many who are not particularly devout reflexively reproduce responses which are theological in their origins, taking these to be 'right', 'natural' or 'normal'.

Despite seeing Ricardo and Jones as embodiments of "lust" and "woman-loathing", Leavis regards them as in the main "convincing" and reminiscent of 'Dickens - a Dickens qualified by a quite un-Dickensian maturity' (*ibid*). The attitude to Dickens is one which Leavis qualifies years later in *Dickens the Novelist*, but is not of importance here except insofar as it might to some extent - if not greatly - contribute to a view of the desperadoes as so highly stylized as to be caricatural. Whether or not a given reader 'likes' a given form of caricature, it would be an over-simplification to understand the presentation of the desperadoes in these terms. The psychologies of Ricardo and Jones are explored in a way to which allegations of over-stylization and caricature do not do justice. Hewitt is one of those who make these allegations and in doing so undermine the productive potential of *Victory*.

* * *

Hewitt's objections to the presentation of Lena are an aspect of his critique of the novel as damagingly reliant on stylized characterization and have been examined above (129ff). He sees the presentations of the other major characters as similarly flawed.

Hewitt considers that 'in contrast to his enemy's baseness', Heyst 'is presented as a romantic figure - something indeed of a stock character' (105). In support of this claim, Hewitt firstly quotes Heyst's reaction to Morrison's complaints about the Portuguese:

Heyst makes 'with his eyebrows, a slight motion of surprise which would not have been misplaced in a drawing room', and listens to his story with 'that consummate good-society manner of his' (*ibid*; quotations from *Victory*: 13, 18).

Hewitt's quotations are not accompanied by explanatory comment: the implication seems to be that such comment would be unnecessary as the reader ought to be able to take the point without it. What would be taken by *the reader* as 'a stock character' is socio-historically variable, but it can be assumed that a substantial proportion of NED teachers and pupils would recognize in the details cited by Hewitt an element of the traditional, usually British, gentleman portrayed in various media. But from its opening pages *Victory* can invite a reception and conception of the traditional restrained gentleman as more broodingly complex beneath the fastidiously 'proper' surface than Hewitt allows. The picture of Heyst brooding amid 'shadows' in the second paragraph of the novel can be read as establishing a sense that the fastidiously gentlemanly manner overlays an at least potentially interesting pattern of conflict between aspects of the protagonist's sensibility. Hewitt claims that

we are forced to ask ourselves whether the unnatural detachment, the inhibition of feeling which [Heyst] so bitterly laments in his last words, is ever more than something about which we are told (104).

Certainly, there is throughout the novel heavy reliance on the narrator's intervention. But, given the nature of Heyst's sensibility, it is in the service of verisimilitude that his conflicts be presented as occurring inwardly and as not orally expressed except during climactic crises. Such a crisis is occurring when Heyst's tells Lena of his anguished sense of entrapment in and by his conditioning:

"They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time - anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. Since you have told me of that abominable calumny, it has become immense - it extends even to myself" (329-330).

What other possibilities of treatment are there? Conrad is capable of a form of stream-of-consciousness writing where first-person narrative is possible (as in the Marlow texts), but it would tend to be counter-productive here, where the distancing of the protagonist can be viewed as a productive aspect of his being presented as detached from, and inadequately capable of, communication or other interaction. The remaining possibility is complexity, conflict and contradiction as manifest in action, and this is centrally present in Heyst's involvement with Morrison and Lena despite his ideology of non-intervention.

Moreover, the accusation that Heyst is a 'stock character' misses the point that, even if it be granted that there is something about Heyst of the stereotyped proper gentleman of refined feeling, given to conventionally restrained responses such as faint movements of his eyebrows, it is this very entrapment in 'stock' characteristics which can be read, firstly, as ironically subversive of Heyst's illusion of escape from 'the world' and,

face of challenges offered by 'the world', which is ever dynamic, resistant to stasis and potentially destructive especially of the inflexible.

Hewitt is not well justified in seeing Heyst as 'a stock character'; neither is he justified in adversely criticizing any and all 'stock' elements on principle, as it were. A more generous receptiveness to the possibilities of the text would benefit his readers, who would be, in the main, people who teach Conrad's novel and those whom they teach at secondary and/or tertiary level. The benefit would consist in their being assisted to make more of *Victory* and its relationship to extra-literary reality than simple acceptance of Hewitt's criticisms would bring about. Hewitt is also entitled to generosity of treatment, and a teacher using his critique ought to present it as coherent and requiring agreement or disagreement (or a mixed response) coherently based on the primary text. To adduce objections such as mine as definitive would be as pedagogically unsound as claiming that Hewitt is 'right'.

Hewitt objects to the element of the 'melodramatic' (108) and to 'caricature' (109) in the presentation of the villains. This objection can to an extent be met by the points made above (131) in this connection and culled from Frye and Martin. However, one observation (108-109) needs further attention:

It was, perhaps, unfortunate for Conrad that he was writing at a time when literary conventions did not permit him to introduce any strong oaths into his books, for the result of his attempts to convey Ricardo's speech is at times perilously close to the idiom of the schoolboy's adventure story:

[Hewitt then quotes a sample of Ricardo's speech from *Victory*: 149:]

But these Dutchmen aren't any good. They never seem to get warmed up properly, win or lose. I've tried them both ways, too. Hang them for a beggarly, bloodless lot of animated cucumbers!

Next, Hewitt makes this judgement on the presentation of Ricardo:

He is, in short, a pasteboard figure overdrawn to the point of caricature. We cannot take seriously a man who speaks thus:

[A quotation from *Victory*: 231 follows:]

Aha, dog! This will teach you to keep back where you belong, you murdering brute, you slaughtering savage, you. You infidel, you robber of churches! Next time I will rip you open from neck to heel, you carrion-eater!

Hewitt's idea that Ricardo's diction is affected by the norms constraining Conrad is sound. Still, the absence of obscenities aside, Ricardo's use of something approaching 'the idiom of the schoolboy's adventure story' can be more productively read than Hewitt allows. An initial simple point is that Ricardo is consistently self-theatricalizing and garrulous, and his often comic verbosity is a manifestation of both his egotism *per se* and his enjoyment of conveying menace. That this diction is reminiscent of that of a stock villain in a juvenile melodrama can be read as an index of the immaturity of his *self*-melodramatization. It is easily credible that Ricardo's conception of self has been conditioned by precisely the kind of 'schoolboy's adventure story' (and its ultra-'culinary' adult equivalents) common in Conrad's day and to which Hewitt refers. How

far such a reading accords with Conrad's intention cannot be confidently guessed. The point is that Hewitt applies a particular assumption about verisimilitude in respect of the treatment of the villains and does not take account of possible readings which do not coincide with that assumption. My own preferred perspective is that seeing Ricardo's risibly extravagant expression as an aspect of his presentation as a lethal buffoon helps reception of him as a disturbing character. The commingling of the ludicrous and the homicidal has the power to intensify the sense of the sinister.

Hewitt regards Jones as even more simplistic an embodiment of evil, since he grants that 'Conrad makes more effort to enter into the workings of Ricardo's mind' when the thug 'discovers Lena in the bungalow': 'it seems that he is to be presented to us as a sadist - in the strict meaning of that much abused term' (108). Like Moser a few years later, Hewitt disapproves of the creation of what Moser succinctly characterizes (1966: 163) as 'an unremittingly black villain'. If a character such as Jones (or Iago, to cite his most celebrated fellow in English literature) is presented as a complete scoundrel with no redeeming moral qualities, he ought not to be seen as lacking verisimilitude if his psychology is delineated comprehensively. Jones can be viewed as what in later years would be termed a sociopath: his utter egocentricity, vanity concerning his social class, resentment at his social alienation, affectations of class and manner, pathological fear and hatred of women, sexual perversion, need to dominate, *ennui*, craving for dangerous thrills, sadism and murderousness constitute a complex and valid psychopathological profile.

An issue not directly stemming from Hewitt's commentary arises at this point. One of Jones's deplorable qualities - an aspect of what can be regarded as his 'evil' - is his sexuality. There is no good reason to mistrust Ricardo's account of Jones's lying

"full length on a mat, while a ragged, bare-legged boy that he
had picked up on the street sat in the *patio*, between two
oleanders near the open door of the room, strumming on a
guitar and singing *tristes* to him from morning to night" (151).

What is indicated here is maudlin sentimentality in concert with pædophilia, which, together with Jones's violently misogynistic trait, must constitute a manifestation of warped sexuality and emotional sensibility except from the perspective of the most radical and marginal moral and psychological relativism. Teachers ought to make this point in class. Homophobia is prevalent in our society and it is undesirable for Jones to be understood as in any way typical of homosexuals. If *Victory* is suspected by anyone in the classroom of suggesting such typicality, the teacher ought to suggest that bigotry and injustice can be promoted by such one-sided presentation of a group. The comments made above (131) in the discussions of Lena as exclusively representative woman and Fagin as exclusively representative Jew apply *mutatis mutandis*.

* * *

Moser appears to be influenced by 'archetypal' and 'psychoanalytic' models of reception, both of which are current when he writes in the late 1950s. There are various aspects of his discussion of Conrad which suggest this. The one which most clearly does so is also very likely to be absorbed by teachers and pupils because it is easily understood

so is also very likely to be absorbed by teachers and pupils because it is easily understood and confers a fairly simple structure on important aspects of the primary text. It lends itself with particular facility to answering questions such as that discussed in Chapters One and Two above. Moser argues that identifiable clusters of representative figures are central to Conrad's texts at various stages of his career: these include the 'faithful seaman', the 'vulnerable hero', the 'untried boy' and the 'impeccable hero'. Moser seems indebted, therefore, to concepts which are especially rooted in, although not necessarily taken directly from, the work of Freud, Frazer, Jung and Cassirer, and which in the 1940s and 1950s penetrate Anglophone literary theory most famously (although not exclusively) by means of Northrop Frye's book on Blake (*Fearful Symmetry* [1947]), public lectures at Princeton in 1954, and fourteen essays and articles which appear from 1942 to 1955 (see Frye 1957: vii-viii & Lentricchia 1983: 4).

The book from which the contribution to the *Twentieth Century Views* volume on Conrad is extracted is called *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*. *Victory* is classified as a novel of Conrad's period of 'decline'. A problematic element in Moser's comparison of representative or archetypal characters in what he takes to be the contrasting Conradian periods is his approval of the 'faithful seaman', the 'vulnerable hero' and 'the perceptive hero' as elements of a successful art, and his disapproval of 'the untried boy', 'the impeccable hero', 'the popular-magazine heroine' and 'the unremittingly black villain' (Mudrick 1966: 165). The 'faithful seaman', for instance, is no less open to the charge of being a sentimentalized figure than any of the types of which Moser disapproves. Singleton (in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*) might appear with scant alteration in a popular 'culinary' text. 'The perceptive hero' is as likely to be open to the accusation of inadequate verisimilitude as 'the impeccable hero' if that is all he is. He is more, but clarification is not available in the *Twentieth Century Views* text. It is to be found in Chapter 1 of *Achievement and Decline*, which is unlikely reading among NED teachers and pupils. As it stands in Mudrick's version, the disparagement of the 'impeccable' hero in the context of the indication that *Victory*, as one of the later novels, has such a hero rather than a 'vulnerable' or a 'perceptive' one, might suggest that Heyst lacks vulnerability, which could cause puzzlement (even confusion), and perceptiveness, which might have the virtue of helping to generate discussion of how well he perceives.

In Chapter 1 of his book, Moser bases his argument on the assumption of the superiority (in what Jauss would call non-'culinary' terms) of the heroes who have manifest or latent moral deficiencies (Kurtz, Marlow, the young captain in 'The Secret Sharer', Jim, Nostromo and Decoud) over those in later Conrad texts who lack them (such as, *inter alia*, Heyst). Although the clarifying context is missing, it ought to be clear to the reader of the *Twentieth Century Views* entry that Moser considers the lack of a serious moral deficiency to be inimical to a hero's claim to be considered seriously. Whatever his flaws, it is certainly hard to justify seeing Heyst as other than 'impeccable' in traditional liberal humanist moral terms, even though a strictly religious Christian, Moslem or Jew might deplore his all-embracingly sceptical stance and a doctrinaire Marxist his involvement in imperialism and exploitative capitalism. However, Moser can be answered by the simple observation that corruption in these terms is not the only way in which people can be significantly flawed to the detriment of themselves and

contribute to his own destruction and that of others by a failure to engage actively and militantly with destructiveness.

Moser's disapproval of what he regards as 'the unremittingly black villain' has been discussed above (161) as have his comments on the presentation of Lena (132ff).

In general, it is unfortunate that this aspect of Moser's contribution to the *Twentieth Century Views* collection is likely to be appealing to those having to deal with *Victory* in the secondary-school context. He draws diagrams which are too neat and which might interfere with the development of a sense of the complexities of the novel and therefore of the possible extra-literary or 'real world' referents of its aspects. On the other hand, a teacher might benefit her pupils by inviting them to validate or invalidate Moser's ascriptions of stereotyping to Conrad's characters by close reading of the primary text. This can of course be done with any and all commentary, but it would be particularly easy to do so in a case such as that under discussion. In the process, the concepts of the archetype as well as of stereotyping and caricature could be clarified and their relative possible capacities interrogated. These capacities include signification of the enduringly significant and/or essential as well as distortion by over-simplification. The development of pupils' epistemological sophistication would be aided by such interrogation.

* * *

Lewis differs greatly from Hewitt and Moser. He thinks that *Victory* is an admonition about the tendency of both fiction and criticism to intellectualize the art - to lose the drama in the allegory; or to deform the art - to lose the novel in the drama. The form of *Victory* grows dramatic, and it gives forth intimations of allegory. But it remains faithful to its own nature, for it never makes the mistake of Mr. Jones - it never fails to take account of the variable and highly unpredictable character of human beings (119).

The value of this is that it can prompt a sense that one can have one's cake and eat it when considering the element of stylization in *Victory* and not feel constrained to be dismissive of the 'real-world' referentiality of a character such as Jones because one has discovered that he is a 'symbolic', 'mythic' or 'allegorical' figure: a sense that the psychology of a character is 'realistic' in its complexity is presented as compatible with an understanding of that character as having a symbolic or allegorical function.

Earlier details of Lewis's commentary are clarified by this point. In the course of his attribution to *Victory* of 'existentialist' qualities, Lewis comments that Jones's "I am he who is" is announced 'in a breath-taking moment which, in context, has an overwhelming propriety' (102; quotation from *Victory*: 317). Jones's words can be read, in terms compatible with Sartrean existentialism, as signifying an absurd claim to a fully realized essence, implicitly self-determined and independent of relatedness to or definition by others. Such an interpretation would harmonize with the allusion to

Jehovah (see above: 58) and, in context, Satan¹ and therefore with both a conception of Jones as an emblematic and partially mythic element in the text and with an understanding of him as a dementedly vainglorious character who must also, in more neutral terms, be a philosophically deluded one.

It is particularly necessary to bear this principle of harmonization of verisimilitude and allegory in mind when reading (or re-reading, since it appears nine pages earlier) Lewis's characterization of Jones as 'the champion of the anti-real' who 'represents the source of non-being' because of his 'fundamental hostility to existence' (110). Read in isolation, this detail could suggest that Jones is merely allegorical-symbolic. It is only superficially reasonable thus read. Lewis presents Jones as hostile to 'existence' in that he has no respect for anyone else's life or feelings; Lewis also equates 'existence' with the 'real'. It is undeniable that Jones is utterly self-oriented, hostile to socio-moral convention and destructive of others; ubiquitous death-imagery is associated with him and necessitates seeing him as a killer and as a bringer of doom, and together with the devil-imagery as an evil man. This all makes him a criminal, not a metaphysical enemy of 'existence' or of the 'real', even though he be the novel's arch-representative of criminality. But Lewis hierarchizes adherence to and deviation from standard moral attitudes in ontological terms: the former is presented as 'real' while the latter is not. This probably derives from Lewis's own ideological impulse to establish an absolute basis for standard ideas of morality. It might also be partly attributable to his forgetting or not seeing a deabsolutizing implication of his own point that Jones 'is not *the* devil, any more than *Victory* is an allegory' (*ibid*).

Provided that it is read carefully and critically, Lewis is useful in making of the stylized aspects of the presentation of Jones something more useful than Hewitt and Moser do. This is beneficial to the capacity of the presentation of Jones to generate discussion of his 'evil' in concrete and not vague and abstract terms.

* * *

As Baines sees Lena as 'the flawless heroine', so he sees 'Jones, Ricardo and Pedro' as 'figures of melodrama ... villains without a redeeming quality'. The comments made above (137-138) about what the brief circulated extract presents of his view of Lena also apply to the comments on the desperadoes, with this difference: the disapprobation of the presentation of Lena is more justified than that of the presentation of the villains. Justification of the portrayals of Jones and Ricardo appears above (*passim*). It might be added that Pedro is certainly an ape-like cypher lurking in the background and painted with very broad and few strokes indeed. It cannot with any confidence be estimated to what extent, if at all, Conrad intended Pedro to represent the native of what today is often called the 'Third World' and who is the brutalized victim of European imperialism and colonialism. But the teacher could suggest that he might be understood in this way and that his very marginalization within the text is appropriate to a sense of his marginalization in a context in which the Europeans take centre stage in dramas which

¹ As not merely rival and antithesis, but also parodic distortion of Jehovah-God. Explicitly, Jones, like the Satan of Milton and Byron, has, in his own eyes, "been ejected ... from his proper social sphere", and, like the Satan of *Job* 1:7, "was coming and going up and down the earth" (317-318).

they produce and in which South American peasants, East Indian tribesfolk and Chinese workers are reduced to bit parts, adding local colour and manhandling the props. That Conrad marginalizes Pedro as much as Ricardo and Jones do might be discussed as possibly symptomatic of Conrad's own early-twentieth-century Eurocentricity, despite his understanding of the criminality of colonialism and imperialism (see above: 21-23).

* * *

The adverse criticism of the element of over-stylization attributed to some of the characterizations in *Victory* can in good measure be put down to dissatisfaction with an imputed muddling of generic codes: expressive realism co-exists with allegorical representation and the latter is seen as unacceptably caricatural in the context of the former. Page explicitly identifies this dissatisfaction:

Part of the problem seems to be that Conrad is working simultaneously in two modes of fictional genres: whereas Heyst represents the method of psychological realism, the three villains are grotesques and caricatures, and the insistent (to some tastes over-insistent) imagery used to invoke their bizarre presences is working in a non-realistic mode of poetic symbolism. The effect is rather as if, say, Dickens and George Eliot had collaborated on a novel (117).

Leavis also sees something Dickensian in the presentations of the villains, but credits Conrad with more success than Dickens in the use of stylization (see above: 158). Few secondary-school teachers have read *Daniel Deronda* or *Felix Holt* and are likely to note that the Jewish characters in the former and the eponymous hero of the latter can readily be criticized as simplistically idealizing. Moreover, the creator of David Copperfield and Pip (in *Great Expectations*), to cite two instances among many, ought not to be presented as relying overwhelmingly on caricatural representation. Page implicitly acknowledges this himself when he comments that

In *Victory* we encounter a phenomenon similar to that found in, for instance, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, where such characters as Quilp and Dick Swiveller exist on different fictional planes but nevertheless come face to face within a single work (117).

Still, Page's stereotyping is shared by many and therefore useful to the communicating of his point concerning generic hybridization. Given the institutional respectability of Dickens (I do not recall hearing him mentioned by a secondary-school English teacher without deep respect), his work could be cited in order to problematize adverse criticism of the alleged mixture of generic codes in *Victory*: what is sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander. It has been adduced above (*passim*) that, while Conrad's novel might have an allegorical level, there are substantial grounds for contesting the view of the presentations of the villains as unrelievedly unrealistic and caricatural. If, however, a given reader insists on seeing them in this way, there is no imperative rooted in the ontology of texts classified as novels for her to adopt a hostile attitude to the imputed mixture of generic conventions and codes.

A generous response to the co-presence of 'modes of fictional genres' would be to see them as co-operating so as to enrich the capacity of the text both to entertain at the 'culinary' level and to generate ideas relevant to extra-literary reality. Page's work can be useful to stimulate discussion along these lines, but needs the kind of glossing and modification - of 'co-writing' - I have suggested if there is to be realization of its potential to assist in the development of pupils' understanding of the potential of *Victory* and their epistemological competence in general. This is particularly so because Page thinks that Jones and company are 'less the world than the evil that is in the world' and comments that 'As in a morality play, the forces of light and darkness are marshalled against each other' (115). Page does not suggest that the symbolic presentation of evil he ascribes to the novel ought to be problematized in substantial socio-political terms.

* * *

Moolman is among those who see the desperadoes as caricatures, but regard this imputed aspect of presentation not as a fault but as intrinsic to the meaning-generating structure of the novel. She insists at length on the unreality of Jones and, crucially, on 'his thematic role as a malevolent representative of abstract forces' of evil (47). She evinces no criticism of what she takes to be this defining quality of the arch-villain and the 'wickedness' and 'evil' he is designed to 'parody' (46). Neither does she mention what non-abstract 'evil' is signified. Like Page, Moolman turns the 'evil' dramatized in *Victory* into a metaphysical construct. It presents Jones as a vehicle, the tenor of which is explicitly 'abstract'. In effect, Moolman presents Jones as a vehicle of a vehicle: there is no useful discussion of any real-world referent, either in 1915 or in 1990, although the novel provides clear indications of such referents in the material to do with the Coal Company, the colonial officials, the references to social class, the relationships between members of different ethnic groups and sexual politics. Even if Jones is a caricature - and I do not think that he is (see above: *passim*) - his behaviour and that of his associates is non-abstract: cheating at cards, robbery, murder and, in Ricardo's case, attempted rape. Moreover, were the novel to fail to provide such referents, this in itself would be worthy of critical examination.

In Ricardo's case, what I see as a crucial flaw in Moolman's commentary is compounded:

Ricardo's allegorical role is as a representative of a form of evil and savagery within the heart of the world ... we cannot identify with his behaviour or understand his motives because he does not act as a human being would (47; my ellipsis).

Moolman's assumption about how human beings might act is questionable. Ricardo is conditioned by the class-structure in which he has been brought up to follow a member of the 'gentlemanly' class. He has a sexual fetish which makes him kiss Lena's foot greedily (400-401), a form of playing with subservience which coherently relates to his need to follow a social superior. He reveals his essential resentment of the socially superior class to which Jones and Heyst belong by striving to link his sexual needs with a form of class-rebellion: he tells Lena: "'They [Jones, Heyst and their class] make a convenience of people like you and me'" (397; my interpolation). He is a socially

alienated criminal, a violent thief and a would-be rapist. He engages in self-dramatization which suggests influence by common 'culinary' writing (see above: 160). Ricardo's mentality, like that of Jones, is explored coherently and in some detail in the course of the novel. A reader could justifiably object to the iteration of the 'cat' imagery as irritating, but the psychopathology of Ricardo is not merely fanciful. Moolman detaches Ricardo from useful discourse about destructive behaviour and its causes not only in Conrad's novel but in extra-literary reality.

An aspect of Moolman's discussion of the 'Darwinian' element in *Victory* is her ascription of Ricardo's nature and behaviour to his being at 'a certain stage of evolution';

he is

a civilised savage who has been socialised sufficiently to participate in human society, but whose savagery is still sufficiently near the surface to control his behaviour at times (47).

It is valid to see Jones and his men as differentiated in 'Darwinian' terms, but Moolman's commentary seems to endorse a naive crypto-Darwinism which boils down to the notion that 'evil' is innate and a function of what is, implicitly, biologically determined primitivism. It has something in common with the old pre-biological and pre-sociological metaphysic of the rootedness of the beast in man and is in effect a kind of non-theological avatar of the doctrine of original sin. If the novel is seen as promoting such an interpretation of human behaviour, its discourse ought to be problematized in terms of a more sociologically sophisticated perspective; as it is, the reading is presented as unproblematic.

This aspect of Moolman's commentary climaxes with the idea that

It is interesting to note that as the apparent 'intelligence' of the three allegorical characters diminishes, so too does the 'evil' in their natures. Pedro, Ricardo and Jones can be seen to represent a Darwinian progression up the evolutionary continuum. What Conrad seems to imply is that the appearance of reason in man has brought with it the concomitant knowledge of good and evil (47-48).

This idea is apparently rooted in Christian notions of the Fall of Man and the loss of innocence resulting from having a mind and free will. It is valid insofar as it discerns in or confers on aspects of the presentation of the trio a coherent figurative identity (as opposed to meaning), but of little or no value in substantial socio-moral terms. I regard as deplorable the strongly possible implication that the novel conveys an unproblematic disparagement of 'intelligence'. Alternatively, the last sentence of this extract is incoherent in the face of the question, 'So what?' Moreover, if 'evil' as presented in 'the three allegorical characters' is roughly proportional to 'intelligence', what is the relationship between 'evil' and 'savagery'? In her discussion of Ricardo, Moolman indicates that 'evil' is a function of 'savagery'. Yet her 'Darwinian' model posits an inverse relationship between 'intelligence' and 'savagery'. The aporia is apparent, and Moolman's discussion of 'evil', 'intelligence' and 'savagery' is, finally, incoherent.

As some of the essays discussed in Chapter One above show, the ready availability as well as the institutional authority of discourse which has provenance such as Moolman's has a particularly direct effect on classroom reception. It should be part of the teacher's function to problematize any and all commentary and not to disseminate it without critical discussion. Those who determine what goes into syllabuses and public examination question papers, and the Subject Advisers who have the professional brief to suggest pedagogical practices, ought to do whatever they can to promote this function.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION: SOME SUGGESTED PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, USING *VICTORY* AS EXAMPLE

In the Introduction to this thesis, the values assumed as basic in key documents on educational practice in post-apartheid South Africa are cited and accepted. In terms of these values, it would be unacceptable to suggest that the use of any secondary sources disseminated in the past by the NED ought to be discontinued. But they should be supplemented by more overtly 'political' criticism. Moreover, selected criticism could with advantage be formally included in the syllabus, and the relationship between primary text, secondary material and the pupil's own responses to her social reality interrogated in examinations. It is suggested that such practice would facilitate the use of the prescribed primary text as an aid in the development of both the pupil's awareness of social issues and her epistemological competence, without losing sight of the real value of the more traditional schoolroom considerations such as the psychology and morality of immediate inter-personal relationships, what might be meant by 'good' and 'evil', and the implications of distinguishing between 'appearance' and 'reality'; these traditional focuses of secondary-school discourse would, however, be more problematized in terms of social determinants of value than has generally been the case in the past.

Overtly 'Political' Criticism: Collits as Example

'Imperialism, Marxism, Conrad: a political reading of *Victory*' by Terry Collits appears in *Textual Practice* 3.3 (Winter 1989). It is not presented here as 'the answer' or even as necessary reading *in itself*, although, were I to have any say in the matter, it would be one of the commentaries distributed to secondary-school English departments when *Victory* is prescribed. It is an example of the *kind* of criticism which has not been generally available to teachers in NED or KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture schools and which I think that the Superintendency should disseminate in order to supplement the material discussed in Chapter Three above.

Collits makes significant use of models of reception which in themselves are likely to be too academically abstruse for secondary-level digestion. Principally, he applies 'the Greimassian semiotic rectangle' (314 *et passim*) employed by Fredric Jameson in his analysis of *Lord Jim* in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). In the discussion which follows, I will avoid reference to the 'semiotic rectangle' because it is not the kind of concept which is directly useful to schoolteachers and their pupils.

Collits calls *Victory* a 'barely canonical, resolutely anti-political high romance' (309), which identifies his sense that the political content of the novel needs deliberate recuperation in the face of its overt nature. He goes on to aver that

Victory is the one major novel after *Nostromo* which, in returning to the exotic, colonized East of Conrad's earliest fictions, unexpectedly represents his final, and, in one direction at least, most far-reaching insight into the meaning of modern imperialism (*ibid*).

Collits thinks that

As Conrad's Sourabaya and the island of Samburan seem a long way from imperialism's centres of power *Victory* is an unlikely text to read in conjunction with Marxism and imperialism. A kind of middle-aged *Lord Jim*, its opening 'strategy of containment' is not simply to distance the political but absolutely to reverse the Marxist privileging of the political and the economic over the personal and private (*ibid*, 'strategies of containment' is a term quoted and borrowed from Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*).

If there is anything 'unlikely' about an appropriation of *Victory* to Marxist polemics, it is because the novel does indeed seem to privilege 'the personal and private', and, as Collits points out,

Perhaps the most severe limitation on Marxist literary historiography has been its almost exclusive attention to texts which foreground the political, the economic, and class-consciousness (306).

Collits's point is well taken. It may be added that it is not only Marxists who have devoted relatively little attention to *Victory*, at least in widely disseminated published commentary. As above discussion indicates (*passim*), *Victory* is fertile territory for both the literary analyst interested in 'archetypal' readings and the kind of reader who is interested in the political aspects of literature. But Claire Rosenfield's *Paradise of Snakes: An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Political Novels* (1967) ignores *Victory*. Allan Hunter writes a book called *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism* (1983). Moolman's discussion of *Victory* demonstrates how open this novel is to the discernment or conferral of a 'Darwinian' meaning-generating aspect of structure. Hunter says that he notes 'direct debts of Conrad to most of the major writers on evolution in his day' (6), but he ignores *Victory*. Criticism which recognizes Conrad as a 'political' novelist tends to marginalize *Victory*. Irving Howe, a more 'Marxist' critic than most of those whose work on Conrad has received wide attention, devotes a chapter just under thirty-eight pages long to Conrad in his *Politics and the Novel* (1957 & 1987), but does not deal with *Victory*. Eloise Knapp Hay divides her book, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1963 & 1981), into eight chapters, six of which bear the titles of works by Conrad; *Victory* is not one of them and the very few brief allusions to this novel do not deal with its political implications. Avrom Fleishman titles a book *Conrad's Politics* (1967) and devotes a whole chapter to each of *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, but glances at *Victory* only in passing and on only a few occasions. Benita Parry is an overtly Marxist critic who writes *Conrad and Imperialism* (1983), in which she argues:

In a situation where imperialism had been naturalised by fiction, Conrad's writings, which refused legitimacy to the imperialist vocation, entered literature as a protest against the canonical account of its intent and destination. Because he lived on the borderlines of various transitions, Conrad occupied a vantage point beyond the outlook of disaffected political writers who like him reviled the materialism of their society, deplored the motives of a ruthless colonialism and were alarmed at the flagrant chauvinism this had excited,

but believed imperialism to be a malaise within capitalism ... and retained faith in liberal democracy to regain the ground lost to the new ethos. ... while liberal critics of empire defended the principles of bourgeois humanism against the aggressive tendencies of a rabid colonialism, Conrad's fictions, which represent the victory of the new values as a sign of a bankrupt social order, reveal imperialist theology as a facet of capitalism's ideology (128-129; my ellipses).

Passages such as this could be included among commentary distributed to secondary-school English departments and be both provocative and productive for teachers mediating *Victory*, but Parry does not herself directly deal with this novel.

In choosing *Victory* as the subject of an analysis which is possible when 'one frees oneself from ... a too narrow sense of the political' (309; my ellipsis), Collits takes a leaf out of Jameson's book where the latter's discussion of Conrad

begins not with *Heart of Darkness*, which deals more or less directly with imperialist exploitation and the ideological fault-line in nineteenth-century Europe's belief in progress and civilization, but with *Lord Jim*, a novel whose very 'strategies of containment' seek to hide such a content (306).

It would be reasonable speculation, but still speculation, that *Victory* is marked by such 'strategies' as a function of conscious or unconscious authorial intention. It is demonstrable, given the dominant patterns in both NSC questions over the years and the 1990 essays dealt with above, that a prevalent *effect* of the treatment of *Victory* in the NED has been to 'contain' or 'hide' the potential of Conrad's novel to bring about discourse centred in 'the political and the economic'. I know from direct observation that there has been no deliberate 'containment' or 'hiding' on the part of NED functionaries. I put their practice down to their ideological orientation: they have not thought it necessary - it has probably not occurred to them - to search for critical material which goes beyond Schwarz's in investigating *Victory* in terms which Marxist discourse has centred. During my years as a member of various committees which had a say in the administration of ENGM in the NED, it did not occur to me either. As Kevin McAnda suggests (see above: 2), we tend to be conditioned by 'the system'. (That 'the system' needs revision is by the mid-1990s accepted by those who have authority in the national and provincial education departments. This thesis deals with certain aspects of 'the system' and suggests possible revisions which are simple at first glance but potentially radical in their implications.)

For Collits,

The novel opens with a commentary on a failed capitalist adventure ... which deftly touches on 'commodities', 'wealth', 'property', and 'finance' in a tone calculated to prevent thought about such matters (p.3). This noncommittal opening ... issues in a highly centred and character-bound narrative (309; my ellipses).

Whether or not the indicated effect of this 'tone' is literally 'calculated' by the author is speculative only; whether Collits intends 'calculated' to be taken literally or idiomatically is unclear to me. It is however clear that there has not been much 'thought

about such matters' in schools under the direction of the NED or, as the 1995 Literature paper suggests (see above: 93-94), its successor in the KwaZulu-Natal provincial system. In our schools, *Victory* is generally treated as 'a highly centred and character-bound narrative'.

Collits mentions the frequent tendency in commentary to centre the allegorical in *Victory*, as well as the novel's 'affiliations with popular culture':

Significantly, Conradians who wanted to rescue *Victory* from its demotion to a piece of failed realism began by recuperating its allegorical mechanisms, and pointed to those inherited models visible in the text as the source of the novel's real meaning. Unashamed of its allegorical mode and affiliations with popular culture alike, *Victory* may still be read as psychological realism, but a realism which displays its origins as the rewriting of melodrama's aristocratic seduction of an innocent working-girl; or antithetically, the modern fairy-tale rescue of a poor girl by a prince; from a longer perspective still, as a rewriting of the biblical Adam-story. The novel's Eden, the tropical island of Samburan, is open to all these interpretations: the Orient and the island are traditional sites for romance and enchantment, while the colonized east becomes a place for 'going native', a space for guilty libidinal investment. The repressed themes of sin and sexuality, pushed to the edges of the text or transmuted into melodrama, recall Adam in his flawed innocent garden, as well as the whole nineteenth-century sub-genre of exotic adventure tales (310).

Collits suggests that a 'distan[cing] of the themes on which Marxism thrives' (*ibid*) is manifest here, and argues that this distancing is furthered by the centring of a figure who is the veritable antithesis of the life of the polis: Axel Heyst, hermit, alone in the silence of an empty island, meditating on the futility of action (*ibid*).

In consequence,

The narrative proper banishes the activities of colonialist business as well as the colonized 'natives' to the very periphery of the text, and contemplates instead a life, paralysed from its early beginnings, committed to non-action (*ibid*).

To summarize, then, the proportion of the text of *Victory* devoted to the politico-economic as opposed to the 'personal and private', the tone with which the former kind of subject matter is introduced, the mythologizing effect of the allegorical aspects of structure and the centring of Heyst conduce to a degree of marginalization with consequent blurring of 'the themes on which Marxism thrives'. Collits's argument is valid. If a reader does not approach the novel equipped with a predisposition to read in Marxist or Marxist-influenced terms, or at least a knowledge that such terms constitute one of the possible paradigms of reception, *Victory* would be unlikely to energize much consideration of social, political and economic issues. It is clear that, if these issues are as worth the attention of teachers and pupils as I believe them to be, the intervention of 'higher authority' is necessary (with the *caveat* against stepping over the line into authoritarianism and indoctrination always to be borne in mind).

Collits makes an illuminating point when he discusses the policy of detachment. He defines the elder Heyst's '[claim] for mankind [of] that right to absolute moral and intellectual liberty of which he no longer believed them worthy' as riven by an 'aporia' and 'sheer contradictoriness' (310; quotation from *Victory*: 91; my interpolations). It is easy to develop argument in support of Collits's contention. The elder Heyst does not judge humanity to be merely misdirected, socially unevolved or otherwise crippled by relative and at least theoretically remediable dysfunction: he regards humanity as in essence and thus irremediably corrupt. There is something of the notion of original sin here, but in secularized form and totalized so that redemption is ruled out. So why does he claim 'absolute moral and intellectual liberty' for the species? The implication would be that the 'liberty' is freedom to continue making a criminal botch of relationships on both the immediate inter-personal and the larger social levels. Jones would indeed be 'the world itself'; moreover, although one cannot simply assume that the elder Heyst means that people like Jones should have a right to pursue their ends as they see fit, that is what his words imply. There is, finally, no clear basis for the elder Heyst's axiological imperative in the context of his moral judgement on the putative beneficiaries of that imperative. The elder Heyst is like the Lear who, in his utter disgust with himself and those he has trusted but who have betrayed him, says: 'None does offend, none - I say none' (4.6.168). The refusal to judge is the obverse of complete alienation and the antithesis of that productive social concern which a claim for 'absolute ... liberty' would superficially imply. Utter despair and totalizing adverse judgement lead in the case of Lear (temporarily) and of the elder Heyst (finally) to a refusal to discriminate morally. The essence of the aporia is that the refusal to discriminate depends upon a discrimination. There can be no coherent disagreement between liberal humanism, religious idealism and Marxism in this regard.

Collits has a conventional and also reasonable sense of the implications of his father's heritage for the sensibility of Heyst, who suffers from a 'dangerous rift between thought and feeling' (310). However, he establishes the difference between a Marxist view of the 'Ah, Davidson' speech and the common Anglo-American approach. He argues that 'trusting in life' is a timid first step in the direction of action, a long way from an horizon which includes the possibility of changing the world (311).

Thus Conrad's text can be seen as

a strangely recidivist exercise in fiction as well as a counter-revolutionary tract which, appearing in England in the first year of the Great War, reduces to mere exotic setting the richly active world of Southeast Asia at this time (*ibid*).

Collits grants that the story of the Tropical Belt Coal Company accords with a sense of the decadence of "finance capital" as the means of engaging the metropolitan bourgeoisie in what Lenin called "the highest stage of capitalism" (*ibid*; the reference is to Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*). But 'if the TBCC does not prove a "great stride forward" for the region, nor does it do much harm', and, even if 'the scandal of joint-stock running amok is seen from the point of view of the remote corners of the earth',

Europe is marginalized, left outside the novel's real, said to be

'removed from the world of hazard and adventure' (p. 23) ... that antipodean perspective is carefully contained: the novel centres a rather seedy bunch of enervated expatriates, while the indigenous life of the region becomes 'a play of shadows' (312; quotation from *Victory*: 167; my ellipsis).

Furthermore, the bumbling antics of Morrison, Davidson's being in the employ of 'a paternalistic Chinese boss' and Heyst's relationship with Wang are seen by Collits as characterized by 'Whimsy and comedy and a taste for the absurd' which 'effectively repress serious analysis of European colonialism at an important moment of its history', while 'the Dutch get barely a mention'. Consequently, 'Apart from the comedy, what holds the fore-stage is a sad and tragic love-story' (*ibid*).

Collits does not contemptuously dismiss the 'love-story', and rightly so. It would be an unrealistic form of vulgar Marxism which would deny the real importance of the struggles involved in intimate relationships. It is educationally sound to stress the importance of exploration of psychology and morality at the private and personal level, as long as there is inclusion of the role of class politics (in some cases), as well as economics and gender politics (empirically evident in all cases, in my view) in the determination of the trajectory of relationships.

But Collits points to the obscuring of the political which is concomitant upon the centring of the love story. The teacher could refuse to read the novel as necessarily centring that story; she could 'co-write' the novel so as to recuperate that which is 'contained' or marginalized for, it would seem, most of the novel's readers.

Collits thinks that 'the reader' is never allowed to 'reach a stable attitude to Heyst' because of 'a mobile play of voice, consistently and disconcertingly detached' (*ibid*). He asserts that 'If *Victory* is to have value in terms of political insight, it must be reached partly through this voice, the characteristic tone of the novel' (312-31). The conclusion reached is that this defining aspect of 'style' places *Victory* as 'best read as a comic novel, as long as the term is not taken too lightly' (313). He acknowledges that

What mitigates [*sic*] against a comic reading is not just the presence of tones that are solemn rather than always light, but all of those interpretive invitations in the text which have encouraged allegorical or archetypal readings, what Eagleton calls (in reference to Hardy) 'the immobilizing perspectives of myth'. ... It was an important moment in Conrad studies for the demotion of *Victory* as failed realism to be redeemed by archetypal readings, the basis for which resides abundantly in the text itself. But no one archetypal reading adds up: the clues are too many and often collide with and cancel one another. (313; quotation from Eagleton 1978: 131; my ellipsis).

Collits goes on to argue that the archetypal 'clues' are like the various 'self-contradictory yet apposite' nicknames which contradict one another and which he lists (*ibid*). The nicknames 'are shown to be as inadequate to contain Heyst as the text's habit of caricaturing is inadequate to the mission of realism' (*ibid*).

A defence of the hybridization of generic modes is offered above (165-166) as is a caution against being too ready to see certain characterizations as caricatural (*passim*).

The nicknames are certainly contradictory - 'Hard Facts' and 'Utopist', for instance, do not seem to square - but there is no problem here. An average 'Standard Grader' could volunteer the observation that people are complicated and that various other people see one in various different ways, none of which is altogether right and none of which is altogether wrong. If the archetypal clues are also contradictory, they are not analogously so. Collits considers that 'the Genesis/creation myth is shadowed by an equally potent, but complicating or even cancelling one, Darwin's theory of evolution' (313). He does not think that Ricardo can be both 'the tempting serpent in the garden' and 'a lower form of life' which 'is hell-bent on achieving a higher stage of existence' (313-314). I do not see why Ricardo cannot be both; there is no *aporia* here. The 'higher state' Ricardo wants is material and social rather than intellectual, moral or to do with any aspect of consciousness. And Ricardo the moral barbarian is like the 'the tempting serpent' of *Genesis* in resenting and wanting to undermine the overlord, whether the more powerful entity be God or the socially 'superior'. (There is no contradiction between such reading and the specific criticism of Moolman's 'Darwinian' reading offered above [128-129].)

Collits's demotion of an archetypal reading of *Victory* is flawed in the form he makes it, but the alternative he offers is socially valuable:

... Ricardo, with his incipient class-consciousness, might just as well be read as representing, in a somewhat *lumpen* form, the miseries of the proletariat, his *ressentiment* burgeoning into full class solidarity with Lena (314).

As for the Heysts, father and son:

The elder Heyst might now be read as representing a specific moment in the long movement of European history towards what we have come to know as 'late capitalism': his moment marks precisely the change from passionate conviction for reform to its ruthless dying, laying out the life-field for Heyst's near-total estrangement from all but negative convictions. But if Heyst's story can now be read as a kind of historical allegory, the ground has not yet been fully cleared for a political, rather than allegorical, reading of the novel: what is not yet grasped is the motivation for Conrad's radical relocation of a moment of European impasse in the exotic setting of oriental romance and in the form of a love-story (*ibid*).

The issue of this 'motivation' is later (317) put this way:

The narratorial belittling of the Tropical Belt Coal Company yields to the high seriousness of the Heyst-Lena story and the mechanistic and psychological links between these two aspects of Heyst's engagement with 'the world' mask the apparently arbitrary choice of setting this love-story in the exotic space of the 'East'.

Collits focuses on a question Lena asks of Heyst: 'Why are you here?' (317-318; quotation from *Victory*: 194):

The seriousness of the question emerges when the boatload of strangers arrives on the island: what disturbs Heyst (he must now ask why they are here!) is that they are white men. For a moment

he experiences, without recognizing the experience, the shock of feeling something like the premonitory fear of 'the natives' on seeing Europeans for the first time, the lost originary moment of the long history of imperialism (318).

Collits then quotes (*ibid*) the detail from *Victory*: 227-228 in which the Polynesian myths of 'gods or demons, bringing good or evil to the innocence of the inhabitants' are invoked in relation to the 'apparition' of the desperadoes. Collits points out that 'Heyst fails to *ask* the question which would have devastated at once their designs on his supposed riches: "Why are you here?"' (*ibid*). This might at first be countered by the observation that Heyst sees three men in serious trouble (which would make 'Why are you here?' inappropriate for a man as decent as he), is utterly astonished and does in fact voice to Ricardo his "'wonder at your arrival in your boat here'" (237). In support of Collits, it can be counter-argued that the narrator specifically notes that, while the water from the iron pipe is gushing over Jones,

Ricardo did not explain to Heyst how it happened. At that precise moment he had no explanation ready for the man on the wharf, who, he guessed, must be wondering much more at the presence of his visitors than at their plight (232).

This can be read as suggesting - even if it does not definitively mean - that there is a moment of relative helplessness on the part of the visitors during which their plans might be nipped in the bud. The point of Collits's argument is that Heyst misassigns the threat to himself when he worries that Wang might have stolen his revolver with a view to turning on him. Collits quotes (318) Heyst's musing that "'Wang would hardly risk such a crime¹ in the presence of other white men (p. 257)'" and comments that 'the colonialist Heyst reassures himself.' Collits then develops his argument that Heyst and Lena have a 'profoundly eurocentric world view' which prevents them from seeing the islands as other than 'a non-place, a simple setting for life's romantic adventures', because

The source of Heyst's failure to negotiate that fundamental question at the heart of all colonialisms is not so much to do with the difficulty of its *why* as the non-referentiality of its deictic *here* (*ibid*, Collits's italics).

The native villagers are 'beyond [Heyst and Lena's] ken and separated from them by a symbolic island barricade' and are 'engaged in an island economy beneath the attention of the manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company' (*ibid*, my interpolation). The climax of this part of Collits's commentary is his conclusion that

In the shift from a reading of Heyst and Lena's love-story to that greater repressed narrative these two 'sympathetic' characters must now be recognized as, among other things, unconscious racists incapable of recognizing fully where they are (*ibid*).

In further support of his thesis, Collits quotes a passage ending with Heyst's typically

¹ The 'crime' - not quoted or otherwise specified by Collits - is summed up by Heyst as "'Shoot and inherit'" (257).

'benign' racist¹ remark that "'One Chinaman looks very much like another ... We shall find it very useful to have him here ...'" (p. 182)' (319; first ellipsis mine). Then comes adumbration of Wang's development into 'a real character, with a consciousness and a history' (*ibid*), culminating in the assertion that Wang comes to serve

the diagnostic purpose of showing the deep racist assumptions underlying Heyst's dreamy existence on Samburan and proves himself, and not Mr Jones, the true narrative challenge to Heyst's Adamic mission' (*ibid*).

Wang's shooting of Pedro after the 'melodramatic finale' of 'this sad white man's vanishing burden of populating a world he has not noticed is already populated' places him (Wang) as 'the shadowy pretender ready to materialize beside Lena on that difficult-to-fill chair, the ideal resolution which belongs properly to the poetry of the future' (319-320).² Collits concludes his commentary thus:

Without doubt, *Victory*, (unlike *Nostromo*) underestimates the power of economic forces in sustaining European imperialism. What *Victory* does recognize (beyond *Nostromo* and beyond Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*) and insinuates as a resonant discord into the 'innocent' discourse of the popular romance, is that racism lies at the very heart of imperialist ideology. While remaining focused on the European consciousness of its long historical trespass, the novel's dazzling deployment of and final abandonment of the modes of classical realism signal an ultimate crisis for imperialist ideology and literary colonization alike. It marks the end of the old colonial novel and, in those intriguing glimpses into that 'other' world of Wang, anticipates the new grounds for English-language fiction in a 'post-colonial' world (320).

Certainly, there are tendentious elements in Collits's analysis. His use, for instance, of 'true narrative challenge' obfuscates the Marxist ideological pressure of his interpretation. There are other flaws in his reading. It is not indisputably the case that '*Victory* ... underestimates the power of economic forces in sustaining European imperialism': it would be more precise to point out simply that it does not centre them as obviously as *Nostromo* does. The Coal Company, Schomberg's feverish capitalism, the corruption of Dutch and Portuguese officials and the rapacity of murderous robbers who can be read as representing both the traditionally dominant upper class and the restless underclass of British society all suggest that economic considerations have everything to do with why Europeans are on the islands. Morrison's misadventures and the failure of the Coal Company can be read as suggesting that a critical stage has been reached or is approaching in the history of European intervention in the East and that the economic muscle of colonialism and imperialism is slackening. This reading can be supported by registration that the novel climaxes with a holocaust which leaves four Europeans and an

¹ "'Benign' racism' is Collits's own term (319).

² In an endnote, Collits acknowledges Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* as the source of the phrase, 'the poetry of the future'.

appropriated 'Third World' peasant dead while Wang and his adoptive Alfuro compatriots are left in command of Samburan. The ultimate 'victory' can therefore be seen as belonging to Wang and those with whom he aligns himself, his fellow representatives of the marginalized and exploited inhabitants of lands subjected to European invasion. An early hint at this tendency of the text is Morrison's inability to 'Squeeze the So-and-So village at the first time of calling' (11).

Commentary which centres the political as Collits's does is valuable in and on its own terms as offering insight into the economic and political bases of both writing and extra-literary reality. Since South African history is profoundly a history of colonialism, imperialism, economic exploitation, racism and class-struggle - even politicians of the 'far-right' acknowledge this, howbeit with emphases different from those of liberals and 'leftists' - it is of specific value to our teachers and pupils. Moreover, like the other commentaries discussed in the course of this thesis, and indeed commentary in general, Collits's can be analysed so as to reveal how interpretation is influenced by ideology (in his case, Marxist). What is also important is that a counterweight or set of counterweights is needed to the kind of critical discourse which has most influenced reception in our secondary schools. It needs to be stressed that, however influenced by Marxism I might be, a democratic pedagogy would not valorize an approach such as Collits's to the extent of relegating Leavis, Lewis, *et al* to a dustbin of discredited bourgeois obscurantism. If the institutionally authoritative commentary in our schools were to centre the social, economic and political and marginalize the personal and private aspects of human experience, it would be valid to call for rehabilitation of traditional 'liberal' Anglo-American criticism into what could be termed the canon of critical writings in the discursive formation of secondary-level educational institutions.

Prescription of Secondary Sources

Secondary sources have never been prescribed in our schools. They have been used as aids to teaching and learning. I suggest that there would be value in the actual prescription of a few carefully selected critical texts, varying in the models of reception they exemplify and in their ideological perspectives.

There is a variety of ways in which this could be done, and extensive discussion would be needed, as well as negotiation of any difficulties caused by copyright laws. Marked ingenuity seems to me to be unnecessary and so I can suggest obvious approaches.

It is possible to establish a non-exhaustive set of crucial issues pertaining to a particular text. This has been done above in Chapter Three. Entire critical texts or passages from them could be prescribed so as to reveal how reception/interpretation can differ. By means of the dissemination of explanatory metacommentary (see below: 180-181) supplemented by in-service courses organized by the provincial educational authorities and the teachers' unions and associations, teachers could be made more conscious of the theoretical debate than they have generally tended to be; discussion could focus on the specific forms of assumption underlying the prescribed secondary sources.

Problems immediately arise. The first is that selection of specific aspects of novels, novellas, short stories and plays is potentially straitjacketing of personal responses on the

part of both teachers and pupils. There would also be a new species of hermeneutic and heuristic foreclosure: the implication would be, for instance, that *Victory* is 'about' 'Lena and Sexual Politics', 'Whose "Victory"?' etc, to the exclusion of issues not on the list. One solution would be to abandon the idea of the list of aspects and to prescribe the critical commentary without it. However, it would be possible, I think, to have the list and examination questions based on it together with the guarantee that the public examination paper would include questions which did *not* narrowly focus on the listed aspects: for instance, contextual questions could be of this latter kind while essay topics concentrated on the list.

Then there is the danger of 'spotting': it can reasonably be argued that the existence of an institutionally approved list of aspects of a given 'setwork' would conduce to mindless memorizing of a few model essays and equally mindless regurgitation of them in answers to examination questions. But the provision of such lists has been widespread at the school (as opposed to education department) level for as far back as any teacher remembers. I have been a member of an English department the members of which calculated that there were no more than five or six broad aspects of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* which were likely to be dealt with in 'matric' (as opposed to tertiary-level) essay questions; so we coached our pupils in these aspects while warning them to adapt their material to the precise questions set and to be ready to deal with more than one of the identified issues if a question required it. The assumption proved successful. My contention, then, is that the list would be unlikely to make 'spotting' more prevalent than it already is. It must be the task of examiners to structure questions so as to make it as likely as possible that pupils 'think on their feet' while answering public-examination questions, however much they have prepared specific responses. A final point in this connection is that it is not indubitably the case that specific guidelines necessarily inhibit personal responses: 'Whose "Victory"?', for example, has a number of possible answers, quite likely including some of which I for one am as yet ignorant. Competent teaching and guidance from 'higher authority' must encourage critical attitudes to any and all interpretation and confidence that the individual pupil's hybridization of established positions and development of new or apparently new ones would be respected (provided that Eco's principle [70 above] is borne in mind).

Another problem is that published critical commentary is usually couched in language which the majority of Senior Certificate pupils would find cripplingly difficult. The first response to this must be that the primary texts are in the main not much easier to understand and that one should not underestimate the capacity of pupils to learn provided that the support-structures are sound. The NED set Melville's *Billy Budd* in 1987 and early in the year there were protests from teachers and pupils throughout Natal about the opacity of the language and the arcane nature of the imagery. Nonetheless, the bullet was bitten and Mary Johnstone, the NED Literature examiner in that year, commented that she had never seen such an excitingly 'good' set of answers to a prescribed work. It is reasonable to speculate that the very magnitude of the challenge brought out the best in teachers and pupils alike. *Great Expectations* and a choice between *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are among the texts prescribed for the Western Cape Education Department Senior Certificate examinations in 1996; most pupils, even most of those from privileged 'white' backgrounds, cannot cope with texts such as these without a great deal of help:

they cannot even understand a substantial proportion of the words used. But teachers are getting down to the task of making the material accessible to their charges, including those who are Second Language learners living in impoverished conditions with scant privacy in which to study and suffering from the disadvantages brought about by the apartheid-era education system. Nothing in this thesis can provide an antidote to the damage done by domestic conditions inimical to learning. Moreover, a high proportion of our pupils - specifically those who were in schools administered by the old Department of Education and Training - suffer from a legacy of educational impoverishment which has aspects which are beyond the scope of any dissertation on Senior Certificate 'English' to remedy. Nonetheless, support-structures are a crucial issue, and resources previously available to the politically privileged are now available to all: the national and provincial education departments aside, these resources include institutions such as NATE in Natal and the Teachers' Centres in the Western Cape. SADTU has a very large membership, and, under the new dispensation, a great deal of institutional power throughout the country: it has the capacity to provide large-scale assistance to both teachers and pupils, as have the smaller teachers' organizations. The facilities exist to make difficult material accessible.

The second response to the hypothetical objection that critical commentary is usually hard for most pupils to read is that it can be simplified. This does mean that language not much different from that used in *Guidelines* would be employed. I cannot see any valid objection to this. More sophisticated and complex diction has no intrinsic value for our pupils as long as they are still coming to grips with 'everyday' expression such as is used in 'culinary' written, filmed and televised texts. (The minority of pupils who are linguistically relatively advanced would be catered for as they are now in a number of schools and taught in ways which extend them.) Much work would have to be done in order to edit and gloss published commentary, but this is not beyond the capacity of the provincial subject advisory services, and the assistance of teachers' organizations and tertiary institutions can be called on.

It has been suggested above (178) that metacommentary could be distributed to schools. Much theoretical writing is dauntingly complex and many of our teachers would not be well served by having such material foisted upon them. But there are pieces which are relevant to teaching at secondary level, readily available, and in part at least easily digestible by the average teacher. An example is the locally published *An Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory*, edited by Rory Ryan and Susan van Zyl (1982). Dorothy Driver's chapter on 'Feminist Literary Criticism' (203-213), for instance, contains material which could generate productive thinking about the presentation of Lena, as the following details exemplify:

The earliest concern of current feminist literary criticism was to analyse the stereotypical portrayal of women in literature, the attitudes that these stereotypes betoken and their effect on male and female consciousness (206).

... Jean Kennard (1978), focusing on the two-suitor convention in nineteenth-century British literature, discussed the sexism

implicit in those fictional structures which demand an ending in either marriage or death for the heroine (207).

Clearly, feminist literary criticism is a reactive discipline: it defines itself in relation to a male model, and works through a mode of negation: 'we are saying no to a whole series of oppressive ways, images and falsehoods that have been perpetrated against women both in literature and in literary criticism' (Donovan in Donovan, 1975: 76).
(210; quotation from *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory*, edited by Josephine Donovan)

Much of the presentation of Lena is vulnerable to adverse criticism from a feminist perspective (see above: 129 ff) and straightforward material such as the above can assist in provoking and toward clarifying the issue for teachers. Many senior-secondary pupils could also absorb it directly. Ryan and Van Zyl's book is a product of the early 1980s, but it should not be regarded as dated for the purposes under consideration. It is cited as containing the kind of material which would be useful, but if more recently published suitable material is found, it should be preferred.

It would be ideal were teachers to read widely among theoretical works, but, because of a lack of time and training, the great majority of them are simply not going to do so. The education departments need to take the initiative to distribute some carefully selected articles and passages from articles. Mary Johnstone's distribution of extracts from Orkin's *Shakespeare Against Apartheid* (1987; see above: 39) was calculated to make teachers more aware of the relationship between prescribed primary texts and large social issues; much more needs to be done, and done systematically, in this regard.

Suggested Senior Certificate Examination Questions

Most of the following questions are viable even if critical commentary has not been prescribed as part of the syllabus. Number 1 would be fair as it stands only if the two commentaries referred to have been prescribed. If there has been no such prescription, the phrasing would have to be modified somewhat so that the meanings of 'at the centre of' and 'political interpretation' are indisputably clear.

Purely for purposes of exemplification in the context of this thesis, the commentaries referred to in the questions will be from among those discussed above. Numbering is for the purposes of this thesis only.

Higher Grade Essay

1. F R Leavis calls *Victory* 'a study of Heyst's case' and says of the main character that 'he is indisputably at the centre of the book.' Terry Collits agrees inasmuch as he says that 'at the centre of the novel sits [Heyst]'.

Yet there are major differences between these two critics.

Leavis is satisfied with the centring of Heyst but Collits argues for a 'political' interpretation of the novel.

Do you think that the one reading is more valid than the other? In the course of your essay, you need to indicate the ideology/assumptions/values which underlie your thinking.

The centring of Heyst and the political dimensions of *Victory* are interrogated here. Moreover, there is emphasis on the ideological nature of interpretation, not only of published commentary but of the pupil herself. She has to ask herself what underlies *her* way of responding to the novel. It is standard practice to invite candidates to present their own views; it has not been standard practice to direct them to place their views in an ideological context.

2. For R W B Lewis, the 'victory' is Lena's and 'Her practicality ... derives from a mystical exaltation that transcends the particular situation and attains to universal value'. Clearly, he sees her 'victory' as real.

But Terry Collits writes that 'The victory is ironically given to Lena' and by the end of his essay one gains the sense that Wang and the Alfuro are the real victors.

Do you agree with Lewis, with Collits, or with neither of them? Or do you think that it makes sense to see them both as right?

In the course of your essay, indicate what seem to be the assumptions and values behind their interpretations as well as your own.

The possible political implications of the novel are thrown into relief against the central and much-canvassed 'Whose "Victory"?' question. There is explicit bringing to the surface of the ultimately ideological and often submerged systems of assumption and value on which readings are based. Again, it is not only the published commentators the relativity, contingency and provisionality of whose readings are indicated, but the candidate's own.

3. Daniel R Schwarz looks upon Jones, Ricardo and Schomberg as representing 'the forces of economic barbarism'.

Bev Moolman, however, argues that Jones is 'a malevolent representative of abstract forces' of evil and that Ricardo has an 'allegorical role ... as a representative of a form of evil and savagery within the heart of the world'. She goes on to say of

Ricardo that 'we cannot identify with his behaviour or understand his motives because he does not act as a human being would.'

Is it possible to reconcile these views and the ideological assumptions they suggest? And what is **your** opinion of the roles of Jones and Ricardo?

The extent to which and, indeed, whether, Jones and Ricardo are 'allegorical', what the imputed allegory might be about, the possible relevance of *Victory* to consideration of the shaping effect on human life of politics and economics and the role of ideology in interpretation are at issue here, while the candidate's personal reading is explicitly asked for. It is also left up to the candidate to decide on the extent to which one way of interpreting an important aspect of the text necessarily excludes a distinctly different way.

4. 'Lena is a ridiculous stereotype of womanhood, part loose woman ("I am not what they call a good girl") and part self-sacrificing saint. She is enough to make male sexists rejoice and any self-respecting woman see red.'

Do you agree with this statement?

[If critical commentary has been prescribed as part of the syllabus, the following could be added:

In the course of your answer, refer critically **any two** of the commentaries on *Victory* you have studied.]

Sexual politics has not been highlighted in NSC question papers. Despite the currency in recent years of issues central to feminist discourse and the prominence given them in South African political debate, especially since the major break, dating from 1990, with the undemocratic past, they have not featured in secondary-level public examinations. Concomitantly, classroom discussion of such issues has not been institutionally encouraged even though individual teachers have been free to introduce it 'in the margins', as it were. 'Official' noting of the significance of such discourse by the provincial education authorities and the appearance of examination questions which are rooted in it would promote not only a richer reading of certain prescribed texts (such as *Victory*) but awareness of sexual politics, the historical subordination of women and the importance of current efforts to redress the applicable imbalances and injustices at the public and institutional level and to heighten the consciousness of both males and females at the private, inter-personal level.

5. What relevance might *Victory* have to a South African living at the end of the twentieth century? Confine your discussion to **either one or two** of the following issues:

- attitudes and behaviour based on race or ethnic identity;
- the relations between the sexes;
- the effects of social class;
- the policy of detachment.

Please note: 1 that you are free to see *Victory* as being as relevant or as irrelevant to us as you see fit;
2 that you must constantly refer to the novel in the course of your answer.

[If commentary has been prescribed, the candidates can be instructed to refer to two or three critiques in the course of answering.]

Such a question would make it clear that the novel ought not to be viewed as an object of academic study detached from extra-literary reality or what pupils tend to call 'real life'. It would draw attention to the politics and moral issues related to ethnicity, gender and social class not only in the world of the novel but also in the society in which the candidates have to live. An individual candidate would be explicitly assured that her own sense of the issues involved would be respected by the markers. Accompanying this kind of question is a greater-than-usual danger that some candidates might drift off into a general discursive essay inadequately related to the prescribed text, so an injunction such as that labelled '2' would be advisable.

Standard Grade Essay

Prescription of commentary would probably be unfair at the Standard Grade level. However, Standard Grade candidates could reasonably be expected to deal with more explicitly social and political issues than has been the case in the past. The kind of short essay set in the 1990 NED Standard Grade paper (see above: 87) could be replaced by what is called a 'structured essay' such as has been set as an option in Cape Education Department First Language Standard Grade papers and has now been institutionalized in the 1996 Western Cape Education Department for the English Second Language (Higher and Standard Grades) papers. I am a member of the panel of three examiners setting the 1996 WCED Second Language papers for both grades and, were I setting a First Language Standard Grade or a Second Language Higher Grade essay on *Victory*, this is the kind of question I would ask, provided that school English departments have been briefed on the principles under discussion:

In *Victory*, the backgrounds of various characters are important in making them what they are.

Discuss the ways in which the backgrounds of any **three** of the following characters affect the ways they think and behave. Give approximately equal space to the three you choose.

- Heyst
- Lena
- Mr Jones

- Ricardo
- Wang.

A question such as this would enable the pupil to score marks by discussing the policy of detachment Heyst's inherits from his father, even if the more complex political implications of the policy were not dealt with. However, the majority of Standard Grade candidates would have no undue difficulty in grasping and writing about the influences of class in all four of the other cases, of gender in the case of Lena and of ethnicity in the context of colonialism and imperialism in the case of Wang. Guideline documents sent out by the provincial education authorities could alert teachers to the value of initiating discussion of such issues and to the possibility of their appearance in the public examination.

Focus on consciousness that the viewpoints of characters can differ as a result of social determinants, as well as recuperation from the margins of considerations which traditional classroom discourse tends to decentre or even ignore, can be promoted by the inclusion of First Language Standard Grade and Second Language Higher Grade questions such as these:

Imagine that you are Wang. Explain your attitude to the arrival of the three desperadoes on the island and why you take the actions told about in *Victory*.

Imagine that you are Lena. You are planning to save Heyst from the desperadoes. Explain two things:

- how being a woman has affected what has happened to you in the past;
- how being a woman influences you to do what you are about to do.

Such questions could be set together, for half the available marks each, if it is decided that it would be too demanding to require candidates to write an entire essay on one of them.

* * *

In the essays discussed in Chapter One above, traces of Moolman's article, the *Guidelines* booklet and, to a lesser extent, Leavis's chapter on *Victory* are overtly present, while the other distributed commentaries and snippets of commentary do not show themselves directly (except for a single echo of Schwarz). Relative ease of assimilation in the cases of Moolman, *Guidelines* and Leavis, imputed superior institutional authority within the NED in the case of Moolman, and powerful reputation in the case of Leavis would be the reasons. However, the general pattern of answers (exceptions were minimal) reveals that candidates were unaware of the political dimensions of *Victory* and that, in the main, they followed a more-or-less standard line indicative of teaching which tended toward implicit formalism such as failed to situate interpretation as related to extra-literary reality: the text seemed to be mediated as autonomous to an extent which had the potential to turn it into an examination-oriented exercise and not much more. A number of essays reveal that candidates were capable of authentic personal grappling

with ideas, but had not, for the most part, been exposed to concepts other than the morality of inter-personal relationships, generalized notions of 'good' and 'evil' and the use of archetypal and other figurative devices. The phrasing of the essay question readily allowed more socio-politically relevant responses, but did not explicitly invite them, and the failure of most candidates to include them indicates the norm of teaching practice in this regard. In 1989, Njabulo Ndebele wrote about the direction which South African primary texts need to take. He argued that

the greatest challenge of the South African revolution is to search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression. ... The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society (in *Pretexts* 1.1: 45).

In 1990, it could be validly and without qualification claimed that 'the entire social imagination' of the oppressor needed analogous freeing. Half-a-decade later, our schools are increasingly racially integrated and it would seem that the 'laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society' have been undermined for both the oppressor and the oppressed classes of the old order. But it would be naive to think that there is no longer a need to explore the social nature of 'good', 'evil' and political power both overt and covert and related to ethnic, class and gender determinants. There needs to be classroom discussion of our own past, present and hypothetical future, as well as historical and literary analogues which assist in such discussion. This is true of any society; it is particularly true of one as marked by social stratification, political hostility and a problematic future as ours.

An implication is that the effects of ideology - whether formal and conscious or reflexive and affective - on the heuristic process and the interpretation of all 'texts', including the 'text' of extra-literary reality, need to be an important pedagogical consideration when designing syllabuses, setting examination papers and teaching in the classroom. A corollary is the inculcation of awareness that knowledge is relative, provisional, contingent and should never be regarded as closed to modification: even formally scientific knowledge is subject to this limitation, as the constant refinement at least, and radical revisions from time to time, of models of physical reality attest. The simplest expression of the desired social end is that freedom be optimized.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Documents Pertaining to Curriculum Development and Teaching Practice

A Policy Framework For Education and Training.

15 March 1995. Pretoria: the Government Printer.

Cape Education Department Senior Certificate Examiners' Reports: English First Language Higher Grade 1994.

1995. Cape Town: Western Cape Education Department.

'Criteria by which literary works are judged for study in primary and secondary/high school'.

1995. Cape Town: Western Cape Education Department. (Unpublished; for WCED internal use.)

Curriculum: Report of the NEPI Curriculum Research Group.

February 1995. Cape Town: Western Cape Education Department.

Draft White Paper on Education and Training (Government Gazette Vol 351, No 15974).

23 September 1994. Pretoria. The Government Printer.

English Guideline Document for Curriculum Development.

October 1993. Pretoria: Core Syllabus Committee for English, Department of National Education.

Interim Syllabus Changes/Tussentydse Sillabusaanpassings: English.

January 1994. Johannesburg: Education Department, African National Congress.

Natal Education Department Syllabus for English First Language Higher Grade: Standards 8, 9 and 10.

1986a. Pietermaritzburg: NED.

Natal Education Department Syllabus for English First Language Standard Grade: Standards 8, 9 and 10.

1986b. Pietermaritzburg: NED.

National Education Policy Bill.
Schroenn, MB

1995. Pretoria: the Government Printer.

1982. *Pedagogic Implications of Existential Choices as Reflected in English Literature* (unpublished doctoral thesis). Pretoria. University of South Africa.

-----.

1 February 1984. *Literary Criticism: 'Victory' - J. Conrad.* Circular letter For Attention: Subject Head English First Language (sent to all schools under NED authority).

Stenhouse, Lawrence.

1975. *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development.* London: Heinemann.

-----.

1983. *Authority, Education and Emancipation.* London: Heinemann.

White Paper on Education and Training (Government Gazette Vol 357, No 16312).

15 March 1995. Cape Town & Pretoria: The Government Printer.

Literary Theory

- Abrams, MH. 1993 (1941). *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Sixth Edition). Fort Worth, etc: Harcourt Brace.
- Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; Tiffin, Helen. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, MM. [Holquist, Michael (ed) & Emerson, Caryl & Holquist, Michael (trans). 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: Univ of Texas Press.
- Belsey, Catherine. 1980. *Critical Practice*. London & New York: Methuen.
- Butler, Christopher. 1984. *Interpretation, Deconstruction and Ideology: An Introduction to Some Current Issues in Literary Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Chapman, Michael. 1985. *Literary Studies in South Africa: Contexts of Value and Belief*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- . 1995. 'Making a Literature: The Case of Namibia'. In: *English in Africa* 22:2 (19-28). Grahamstown: ISEA.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1978 (1976). *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London: Verso.
- . 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Eco, Umberto. 1992. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Goldstein, Philip. 1990. *The Politics of Literary Theory: An Introduction to Marxist Criticism*. Tallahassee: Florida State UP.
- Frye, Northrop. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Hawkes, Terence. 1977. *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Methuen.
- James, Henry [Shapira, Morris (ed)]. 1968 (1963). *Selected Literary Criticism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin (Peregrine).
- Jauss, Hans Robert. [Benzinger, Elizabeth (trans)]. 1974 (German original 1967). 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'. In: Cohen, Ralph (ed). *New Directions in Literary History*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 7-37.
- [Bahti, Timothy (trans)]. 1982 (German original 1967). *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Jefferson, Ann & Robey, David (eds). 1986. *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* (Second Edition). London: BT Batsford.
- Lodge, David (ed). 1972. *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*. London: Longman.
- Lentricchia, Frank. 1983 (1980). *After the New Criticism*. London: Methuen.
- Macherey, Pierre [Wall, Geoffrey (trans)]. 1978. *A Theory of Literary Production*. London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Martin, Wallace. 1986. *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca & London: Cornell UP.
- McGee, Patrick. 1992. *Telling the Other: The Question of Value in Modern and Postcolonial Writing*. Ithaca & London: Cornell UP.
- Ndebele, Njabulo. 1989. 'Redefining Relevance'. In *Pretexts: Studies in Literature and Culture* 1.1: 40-51. Cape Town: Arts Faculty, University of Cape Town.
- Rice, Philip & Waugh, Patricia (eds). 1992 (1989). *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. London. Edward Arnold.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. 1983. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London & New York: Methuen.
- Robertson, PJM. 1988 (1981). *The Leavises on Fiction: An Historic Partnership*. Basingstoke & London: Macmillan.
- Ryan, Rory & Van Zyl, Susan (eds). 1982. *An Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker.
- Widdowson, Peter (ed). 1982. *Re-Reading English*. London & New York: Methuen.

Interpretative and Critical Commentary on Conrad's Works

- Baines, Jocelyn. 1960. *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Collits, Terry. 1989. 'Imperialism, Marxism, Conrad: a Political Reading of *Victory*'. In: *Textual Practice* 3.3 (303-322).
- Fleishman, Avrom. 1967. *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Guidelines Study Aids: Victory by Joseph Conrad: A Study Guide*. 1990. Johannesburg: Guidelines (The Blue Book Series).
- Hampson, Robert. 1989. Introduction to Conrad, Joseph. *Victory: An Island Tale*. Harmondsworth: Penguin: 9-32.

- Hay, Eloise Knapp. 1981 (1963). *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* With a new Preface. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press (a Midway reprint).
- Hewitt, Douglas. 1975 (1952). *Conrad: A Reassessment* With a new Conclusion. London: Bo. Bowes & Bowes.
- Howe, Irving. 1987 (1957). *Politics and the Novel*. New York: Meridian.
- Hunter, Allan. 1983. *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism*. London & Canberra: Croon Helm.
- Karl, Frederick R. 1960. *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad*. New York: Farrar, Straus.
- (ed). 1969. London: Thames & Hudson.
1975. *Joseph Conrad: A Collection of Criticism*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Leavis, FR. 1962 (1948). *The Great Tradition: George Eliot; Henry James; Joseph Conrad*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Lewis, RWB. 1975. 'The Current of Conrad's *Victory*'. In Karl 1975: 101-119.
- Meihuizen, Dorothea. 1984. 'The Matriculant's Encounter with *Victory*'. In Saycell, KJ (ed). *Crux* April 1984. Pretoria: The Foundation for Education, Science and Technology: 11-17.
- Moolman, Bev. 1990. 'Some Thoughts on Conrad's "*Victory*"'. In Pratt, Brenda (ed). *The NATE Journal*, 17: 44-51.
- Moser, Thomas. 1966 (1957). *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline*. Hamden: Archon.
- Mudrick, Marvin (ed). 1966. *Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall (*Twentieth Century Views* series).
- Page, Norman. 1986. *A Conrad Companion*. London & Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Palmer, John A. 1968. *Joseph Conrad's Fiction: A Study in Literary Growth*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Parry, Benita. 1983. *Conrad and Imperialism*. London & Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Rosenfield, Claire. 1967. *Paradise of Snakes: An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Political Novels*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Schwarz, Daniel R. 1982. *Conrad: The Later Fiction*. London & Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Tanner, Tony. 1963. *Conrad: Lord Jim*. London: Edward Arnold (*Studies in English Literature* series, no 12).

Works of Joseph Conrad Referred to

- An Outcast of the Islands.* 1975 (1896). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Typhoon, The Shadow-Line.*
1945 (1897, 1903, 1917). London & New York: Dent & Dutton.
- The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Typhoon, Amy Foster, Falk, To-morrow.*
1974 (1897, 1903). London & New York: Dent & Dutton (Everyman).
- Lord Jim.* 1949 & 1957 (1900). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether.*
1946 (1902). London: Dent.
- Nostromo.* 1975 (1904). London: Dent.
- The Secret Agent.* 1974 (1907). London: Dent.
- Chance.* 1974 (1913). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Victory: An Island Tale.* 1962 (1915). London: Dent (Everyman).
- 1989 (1915). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Within the Tides* (includes 'The Planter of Malata').
1978 (1915). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- The Arrow of Gold.* 1972 (1919). London: Dent (Everyman).
- The Rescue, A Romance of the Shallows.*
1975 (1920). London: Dent (Everyman).
- The Rover.* 1965 (1923). London: Dent (Everyman).

Letters by Conrad

- Watts, Cedric (ed). 1969. *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunningham Graham.* Cambridge: OUP.

Other Articles and Books Consulted

- 'B.Z.A.' September 1984. 'When Dickens Apologized for the Character Fagin'. *Pretoria Jewish Chronicle*: Pretoria.
- Copleston, Frederick. 1977. *A History of Philosophy, Volume 9, Part II, Bergson to Sartre.* New York: Doubleday Image Books.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1991. *Ideology: An Introduction.* London & New York: Verso.
- Lacey, AR. 1976. *A Dictionary of Philosophy.* London, Boston & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Macquarrie, John. 1973. *Existentialism.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Magee, Bryan. 1973. *Popper.* London: Fontana.
- Orkin, Martin. 1987. *Shakespeare Against Apartheid.* Johannesburg. Ad. Donker.

- Rand, Ayn. 1961. *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. New York: Signet.
- Runes, Dagobert D (ed). 1976. *Dictionary of Philosophy*. Totowa: Littlefield, Adams.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul [Barnes, Hazel E (trans)]. 1958. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. London: Methuen.
- Shakespeare, William. [Alexander, Peter (ed)]. 1951. *The Complete Works*. London & Glasgow: Collins.
- The New Study Bible: New International Edition*. 1985. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers.
- Urmson, JO (ed). 1975 (1960). *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*. London & Johannesburg: Hutchinson.

Conversations with:

Michael Jarvis, Mary Johnstone, Kevin Mc Anda, Anne Schlebusch,
Manfred Schroenn, Phumla Satyo and Basil Snayer
