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ROMEO AND JULIET: A NEW CONTEXT FOR *VICTORY*?

In his famous extended essay, "Joseph Conrad and Shakespeare", Adam Gillon has done a remarkable job of tracing the many textual and thematic parallels between Conrad's major works and virtually the whole Shakespearean canon. He begins by pointing out that Conrad could read *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the age of eight, as his father was translating many of the Bard's work into Polish around 1856. As is often the case, Shakespeare must have been one of the first writers that the young and impressionable Conrad was exposed to, and certainly one of the first English writers. Another significant detail noted by Gillon is that Conrad read A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* while he was writing *Victory*, one assumes with a view to giving his work a tragic or more specifically Shakespearean note. In fact, Conrad admits just this in a letter to Edward Garnett, when, recalling his father's translations of Shakespeare while they were on exile together in the Ukraine, he remarks, "I have always intended to write something of the kind for Borys. So as to save all this from the abyss a few years longer."[1] If we combine this statement with Conrad's "secret"[2] yet oft-expressed desire to produce a play, culminating in his daring albeit ill-fated stage adaptations of *Victory* and *The Secret Agent*, then we get a picture of a writer with dramaturgical not to mention tragical aspirations. Gillon's essay suggests as much and, besides noting that "many of [Conrad's] novels and stories were conceived in dramatic terms" (90), he argues that the two writers have certain common preoccupations such as the idea that life is a dream or an illusion, the destructive darkness that negates human aspirations, and the trial that tests the hero's mettle. Conrad is thus presented by Gillon as essentially a tragedian who, besides subscribing to the Shakespearean metaphor of the world as a stage, the *theatrum*

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[1] G. Jean Aubrey, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, I, Letter to Edward Garnett, January 20, 1900, p. 292, quoted in Gillon p. 51.

[2] Letter Eric Pinker, 8 October 1922, Ibid. 2:276.

mundi, does not interpret "man's failure, the futility of his efforts, and finally his death" (59) as defeat.

Although it is difficult to disagree with Gillon's claim that there is "a measure of affirmation in Shakespeare's tragedies" (59), it does not follow that Conrad is similarly affirmative or equally tragic. If we accept Nietzsche's theory that the death of tragedy began with the growing Socratism in Greek culture, killing the emotional element of the genre as embodied in music and the chorus, then even Shakespeare's works can be said to have suffered a tragic decline. Hence, in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the Prologue, a direct descendent of the ancient chorus, appears only in the first two acts and disappears thereafter, as though put to shame by the self-revealing, sole-bearing tendency of the protagonists themselves in this modern tragedy. Naturally, the rationalistic tendency is even more pronounced in the late modern Conrad and results in the emphasis being placed not on action, which Aristotle insisted was the most important ingredient in tragedy, but on character. Conrad's works should then be viewed as psychological dramas rather than tragedies in the Aristotelian sense, displaying the Hamlet theme of knowledge as a counter-motive to action – a theme very much evident in *Victory* whose protagonist is said to have cultivated the "pernicious" modern habit of "profound reflection" (*Victory* 12), making him unfit for crime, virtue, and even love. Even if the tendency to over-rationalize is presented by Conrad as Heyst's tragic flaw, such a solipsistic man who has "said to the earth that bore [him]: 'I am I and you are a shadow'" (*Victory* 281) has gone far beyond the self-consciousness of a Hamlet and is thus quite unable to play the role of the tragic hero. Hence, Conrad's reference in the Author's Note to how Heyst is disqualifying himself from "perfection" and "excellence in life" (*Victory* 12) as a result of his habit of "thinking too precisely on th' event" (*Hamlet* IV.4) is as much an ironic comment on the idealistic goals set by modern civilization as of the difficulty of attaining them.

It is widely assumed that tragedy is founded on the belief in a universally valid moral code, a communally shared system of transcendence, capable of transforming the ostensible defeat and physical destruction of the individual victim into a meaningful self-sacrifice and moral victory. The fact that this is missing from Conrad's works becomes all the more evident when, stripped of the sceptical, angst-ridden ruminations of their narrators and protagonists, his novels appear as little more than melodrama in adaptation. Conrad is in fact wrestling with precisely the difficulties raised by the absence of the tragic framework in modern

culture, so the effort of trying to bolster traditional moral categories in an age of "universal scorn and unbelief" (*Victory* 169) is presented in his work as a tragic because ultimately futile struggle to wrestle meaning out of absurdity. The result is that the self-obsessed Conradian male, like Jim, has to culturally regress to a lost, un-fragmented *Gemeinschaft* like Patusan if he wants to play the hero, or give up the field to the vital Conradian female who, like Lena, represents "something as old as the world" (*Victory* 289) and is therefore regarded as relatively uncontaminated by the modern malaise of excessive contemplation that afflicts her lover. However, although Lena the individual is certainly "convinced of the reality of her victory over death" (*Victory* 324) and thus of the value of her romantic self-sacrifice, the reader of the novel and by extension the culture which (s)he represents is reaffirmed in precisely the opposite opinion, despite the author sympathetically lending his voice to his heroine's cause. Similarly, the apparent moral of *Victory* spoken by Heyst and reiterated by Davidson, "woe to the man whose heart has not learnt while young to hope, to love – and to put its trust in life!!" does not actually affirm the ideals it seems to promote, only the need to espouse them while one is still young and impressionable – for practical reasons, as it were. What *Victory* is then affirming is the need coupled with the difficulty of affirmation and the fact that "every age is fed on illusions lest men should renounce life *early* and the human race come to an end" (89, emphasis added) – hardly a very optimistic position since it seems to imply that men naturally tend to renounce life, sooner or later.

When he comes to *Victory*, Gillon quite rightly asserts that "Conrad's use of Shakespearean archetypes [...] reaches a culminating point" which reflects "the overwhelming impact of Shakespeare on Conrad at the time of his writing the novel" (85). Yet, like most critics before him he assumes that Conrad's novel draws mostly from *The Tempest*, which it outwardly resembles with the Prospero-like Heyst trying to protect the Miranda-like Lena from the hostile invaders of their island refuge.[3] In comparing these two works, Gillon briefly mentions some common images found in *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet*, but these are viewed as

[3] For previous studies on this subject, see Jocelyn Baines (*Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*, 1960), Frederick R. Karl (*A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad* , 1960), David Lodge, "Conrad's *Victory* and *The Tempest*: An Amplification", *Modern Language Review*, LIX (April 1964) pp. 195-99, and Donald A. Dike, "The Tempest of Axel Heyst." *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Sept. 1962) pp. 95-113.

relating more to recurring Shakespearean motifs rather than being preoccupations of the particular works in question. For example, he notices that names and books seem to be significant in both works, but he links the former symbol more with *Coriolanus* and the latter more with *Hamlet*. This commentator also observes in the presentation of *Victory*'s characters the "animal imagery, so often employed in Shakespeare" (92), but he fails to relate this imagery specifically to *Romeo and Juliet* in which the Prince, having interrupted the escalating (is there a pun on Escalus?) street brawl in the first scene, chastises his unruly subjects with the memorable phrase "What, ho – you men, you beasts" (I.1.83) which introduces the central theme of uncontrollable instincts in Shakespeare's tragedy as well as inaugurating a typical wealth if human-animal comparisons. Gillon does however claim that "Conrad's ironic treatment of love in *Victory* draws on the genuinely romantic imagery of *Romeo and Juliet*" (112), but one may counter by saying that the treatment of love in Conrad's novel may not be so "ironic", nor the romantic imagery in Shakespeare play so "genuine" as all that.

The link between *Victory* and *The Tempest* which most commentators on the novel's Shakespearean quality have focused on is considerably more problematic than has hitherto been assumed. For one thing, *Victory* is not centred on a father-daughter relationship as is Shakespeare's comedy but on an illicit love affair between an older man and younger woman whose age difference does however point to a paternal impulse operating in the male, very much like that which characterizes Prospero. Heyst is indeed old enough to be Lena's father (she is not yet twenty and he over thirty five), but the erotic element in their relationship is crucial because it is that, masquerading as chivalry, which has the power to breach the man's stoical defences, and lure him into action. Heyst Senior had foreseen precisely such an eventuality when he wrote, "Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love – the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams" (*Victory* 184). Where the comparison between *Victory* and *The Tempest* breaks down, however, is that Shakespeare's magician/artist is virtually omnipotent on his island in stark contrast to Heyst, whose inability to impose himself turns out to be the single most important contributing factor in the ensuing tragedy. Heyst is much closer to Romeo in this respect who, entertaining suicidal thoughts after being exiled by the Prince, is reprimanded by Friar Lawrence with the prophetic words: "Wilt thou slay thyself?/ And slay thy lady that in thy life lives" (III.3.116-7). Indeed, in both *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet* the patriarchal power structure of *The Tempest*'s

central relationship is noticeably subverted, with Lena being turned into a protective mother-figure for her would-be Quixotic deliverer, just as Juliet is transformed literally overnight from a typical teenage daughter of the Renaissance aristocracy, into a heroine of tragic stature. Given that Shakespeare and Conrad are writing from opposite ends of the humanist tradition, one could argue that *Victory* constitutes a parody of *The Tempest*. Hence, Prospero's Enlightenment dream of unlimited power to regulate the disruptive forces in nature and man, producing the humanist utopia of a "brave new world" (*Tempest*, V.1), is mocked by the pitiable demise of the T.B.C.C. and the "stride forward" in "the general organization of the universe" (*Victory* 21) which "that once sanguine enterprise" (*Victory* 149) was supposed to represent.

If we compare the plots of *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet* we find that they are virtually identical in essentials, suggesting that Shakespeare's play must have been on Conrad's mind when he was composing his novel. Thus, both works begin with a disillusioned idealist trying to flee from his inner conflicts by pursuing solitude and avoiding involvement in life. The perfect solution to this character's emotional problems appears in the form of a female love object which breaks down his reticence and engenders the fantasy of romantic escape. The initial joy of the lovers' meeting and courtship gives way to a sense of despair as they face the obstacles that bar their union and make it difficult for them to enjoy their new-found love. This difficulty is temporarily overcome by the elopement plan which allows the lovers to get "out of the world" (*Victory* 77) and create an erotic haven that is, however, associated with the deceptiveness of nocturnal fantasies and therefore presented as vulnerable to the sunlight of waking reality. It is interesting that Romeo and Juliet's private world of love representing the desire to return to the primordial union of the two sexes is realized in *Victory* in the form of Samburan where Heyst and Lena retire to live alone like a prelapsarian Adam and Eve. The complications begin when a man's death in which the tragic hero is directly or indirectly implicated (Tybalt-Morrison) sets into motion a chain of events that leads to the forced separation of the lovers and threatens their relationship. To add to this, a rival suitor appears (Paris-Ricardo) and, taking advantage of the absence of the hero, tries to claim the heroine for himself. At this point a second plot is set into motion in which the heroine is meant to play dead until the threat of the suitor is surmounted and the hero can return and reclaim her. However, due to a combination of bad luck and a breakdown in communication, the plot backfires and the lovers end up confronting death separately and alone, succumbing to the latent

death-wish that was an essential part of their motivation from the start.

Of course, there are differences of emphasis. What is not so obvious in *Romeo and Juliet*'s plot but which Conrad brings out more in the novel is that it is not only the heroine who is courted throughout by a rival lover, but the hero too; this rival is none other than Death, the attraction of which/whom appears too powerful to resist once the heroine is out of the picture. Also, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the tension is produced from a seemingly external conflict between civil law, on the one hand, and sexual desire, on the other, making the play something of a social drama. In *Victory*, on the other hand, the basic tension appears to result largely from the inner conflicts of the protagonist himself and in particular his conscious intention to avoid attachments of any sort vs. his unconscious social/sexual needs, suggesting more of a psychological drama. Moreover, whereas Shakespeare places the emphasis on the conflict between the generations, showing how the young lovers through their exemplary self-sacrifice manage to overcome their parents' enmity, Conrad structures his work more on the theme of gender and shows the women redeeming the men.

The power of fate to influence human affairs is equally stressed in both works, making them tragically pessimistic. Thus, although in *Romeo and Juliet* there are many points in the action where the plot could have taken a different turn, resulting in romantic comedy, this never happens, for the lovers are exceedingly unlucky, or "star-crossed" (i.e. crossed/crucified by fate), to use the prologue's famous phrase. Similarly, *Victory* emphasizes the inability of human beings to determine the course of their lives, as in Davidson's concluding words, "There was nothing to be done [...] Nothing!" (*Victory* 328), which recalls Friar Lawrence's fatalistic remark at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, "A greater power than we can contradict/ Hath thwarted our intents" (V.3.153-4). Also, there is an echo of Friar Lawrence's words, "Heaven and yourself/ Had part in this fair maid. Now heaven hath all" (IV.5.66-67) in Davidson's remark at the end of the novel, "Let heaven look after what has been purified" (*Victory* 327). In fact, the traditional tragic epilogue in *Victory* mirrors that of Shakespeare's play quite closely with a high-ranking authority figure being wheeled on stage for purposes of closure and the customary restoration of order. However, both Prince Escalus in *Romeo and Juliet* and His Excellency in *Victory* are deliberately drawn rather flat so that the stable world of social hierarchy and cultural values they are supposed to represent pales before the chaos and carnage that has just preceded, thereby heightening the tragic effect.

Far from being a *Tempest*-like comedy, then, *Victory* resembles a romantic tragedy like *Romeo and Juliet*, albeit with a greater emphasis on the tragic element than the romantic. Yet, the fusion of different or incompatible genres that Shakespeare so masterfully pulls off in his work is also noticeable to a certain extent in Conrad's novel. *Romeo and Juliet* constitutes a typical example of Renaissance experimentation with form in that it begins as a comedy and gradually becomes darker and more tragic as it goes along, without however completely relinquishing it's comic side. What is most innovative about Shakespeare's romantic tragedy are the frequent alternations between comic and tragic situations and characters, resulting in many scenes provoking both pity and merriment. These include Mercutio's death scene, the scene where Romeo is complaining of his banishment to the Friar, and the discovery of the seemingly 'dead' Juliet on the morning she is to marry Paris. *Victory* too progresses through various genres which often appear to overlap due to the temporal dislocations of the narrative and the coincidence of different types of characters. Thus, taken chronologically, the story begins as black farce with the mismatched Morrison–Heyst partnership producing the absurd dream of tropical coal, then moves to romance with Heyst's rescue of Lena, and finally ends as tragic allegory with "evil intelligence, instinctive savagery" and "brute force" (*Victory* 267) being said to invade the lovers' sanctuary on Samburan. Moreover, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, a comic or ironic element is rarely absent from the narrative and is often associated with the two stock comic characters found in the novel: Schomberg, the mercenary innkeeper, lecher, and poltroon; and Ricardo, the wily servant and braggart turned unlikely courtly lover. We even find the typical Shakespearean juxtaposition of wedding and funeral in *Victory* as, the day after the liquidation of the T.B.B.C., Wang marries his Alfuro wife on Samburan, attended by the customary wedding celebrations. The tone in *Victory* is also inconsistent because Heyst is often in a state of veiled mourning, even when he is supposed to be in love, and Lena's rescue is a somewhat desperate affair, becoming hopeless when her supposed protector realizes he is "disarmed". Finally, both works depict a horizontally structured society, ranging from the higher nobility to the menial classes. However, although *Romeo and Juliet* reaffirms the aristocratic ideology of Aristotelian tragedy by founding class differences on ethical differences, *Victory* is more comic in subverting this model. Hence, the narrator of the novel ironically claims that Morrison, "besides being a gentleman, was also an honest fellow" (*Victory* 29), thereby differentiating the two concepts, while Conrad

presents the lowborn Lena and not the highborn Heyst as "heroically equal to every demand of the risky and uncertain future" (*Victory* 16).

The next level of affinity between *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet* concerns similarities between the individual characters. Although Shakespeare's tragic hero and heroine are in their early teens and from families "both alike in dignity" (The Prologue), they can be said to constitute the prototypes for Conrad's protagonists in many respects. Firstly, Heyst's reputation as "the wanderer of the Archipelago" (*Victory* 68) on an "aimless pilgrimage" (*Victory* 39) around the islands of North Borneo is surprisingly close to the meaning that Romeo's name had in Shakespeare's time, that is 'a pilgrim to Rome' a 'roamer' and 'wanderer'. The first impression we get of Heyst is of someone suffering from depression, for he is not only disappointed with himself for having got involved with Morrison, but he is said to be "disenchanted with life as a whole", for those "sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings" (*Victory* 68). Similarly, Romeo, another "gentleman" (I.5.66), dreamer, and utopist, is initially heart-broken over Rosaline, but this seems to be part of a more widespread dissatisfaction, as the following oxymoronic lines suggest:

> O anything of nothing first create!
> O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
> Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
> (I.1.178-82)

Moreover, these disappointed idealists are both initially presented as mysterious, aloof, and antisocial, associating themselves more with the natural world than with the human. Thus, Romeo is said to be "Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs" (I.1.133), while the smoking Heyst is compared to the volcano, "making in the night same sort of glow and of the same size" (*Victory* 20). In the heyday of the T.B.C.C., Heyst is said to become "very concrete, very visible" (*Victory* 35) but when the dream of tropical coal fades, he becomes invisible again, recalling Romeo's habit of vanishing and reappearing as he falls in and out of love. Although Heyst is determined after the liquidation of his company to remain "inert" (*Victory* 19) and abstain from social intercourse altogether, yet "the sight of his kind was not invincibly odious to him" (*Victory* 40) and he suddenly reappears in Schomberg's hotel where he forms his second and ultimately fatal attachment with

another suffering human being. Similarly, Romeo vows that he will never love again after Rosaline, yet he is enticed by his friends to attend the Capulet feast where he meets the woman that puts an end not only to his old obsession with Rosaline but also ultimately his life. "Take thou some new infection thy eye", advises Benvolio, "And the rank poison of the old will die" (I.2.49-50), implying that relationships are like more or less fatal diseases or, in Heyst's words, "he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered his soul" (*Victory* 169).

Concerning the female protagonists, although the phrase, "that poor little girl" (*Victory* 208), which Heyst applies to Lena seems more suitable for the fourteen year-old Juliet when she is lying in the Capulet monument than the experienced and plucky orchestra girl, it does betray Conrad's intention of modelling his tragic heroine on Shakespeare's. There is, however, a child-like quality observable in both young women as when the newly wedded Juliet describes herself as "an impatient child that hath new robes/ And may not wear them" (III.1.30-31), and the wounded Lena is said to take Ricardo's knife into her hands "with the innocent gesture of a child reaching eagerly for a toy" (*Victory* 323). Both Lena and Juliet are, moreover, only daughters marked with a history of death in their families since Lena has lost both her parents and Juliet has lost a number of siblings. Thus, Juliet is presented as a girl wedded to death while Lena is called "a girl wedded to misery" (*Victory* 204). The similarities extend even to the two young women's parents, as Lena's father is said to have been a musician in theatre orchestras – a detail which seems to ally him to the fun-loving Capulet who hosts the feast in Act I. The two tragic heroines also seem to share common character traits particularly that of fidelity which prompts them to be loyal to their chosen partners even unto death. Thus, just as Juliet promises Romeo that she will "prove more true/ Than those that have more cunning to be strange" (II.2.100-101), Lena asserts that she "may not be of much account" but she knows "how to stand by a man" (*Victory* 84). They also display a pragmatism not normally associated with adolescence which is moreover noticeably absent from their older male partners and enables them to "defend [their] own" (*Victory* 244), even at the cost of compromising their moral standards. Hence, both women have no qualms in employing subterfuge to overcome the impasse they find themselves in, with Juliet pretending to her father that she is content to marry Paris, having repented "of the sin/ Of disobedient opposition" (IV.2.17-18) to his will, and Lena hiding her true feelings from Ricardo for as long as it takes to disarm him. Finally, both heroines display remarkable courage with Juliet being

willing to "copest with death himself to 'scape from it" (IV.1.75), and Lena defending herself against Ricardo "with a determination which could hardly have been expected from a girl" (*Victory* 239). Clearly, the behaviour of the tragic heroines reveals the shortcomings of patriarchal stereotypes relating to gender, or as Davidson remarks to Heyst about Mrs. Schomberg's part in the elopement, "There's a lot of unexpectedness about women" (*Victory* 57).

Another character comparison that can profitably be made is between Davidson and Friar Lawrence. Like the Franciscan friar in *Romeo and Juliet*, Davidson is described as a "stout" (*Victory* 49) yet "sensitive" man (*Victory* 48) with a "capacity for sympathy" (*Victory* 49) and an "invincible placidity" (*Victory* 50). He also represents something of a reality principle in the novel, calling Heyst's elopement, "Wonderfully quick work" that is nevertheless likely to lead to "Repentance" (*Victory* 50), which recalls Friar Lawrence's comment to Romeo to "love moderately. Long love doth so./ Too swift arrives as tardy as too late" (II.6.14-15). Nevertheless, as Heyst's "self-appointed protector" (*Victory* 44) and the man who hears Heyst's "confessions" (*Victory* 41), Davidson similarly assists in the ill-advised elopement by returning Mrs. Schomberg's shawl and regularly passing by Samburan to discreetly check that the lovers are alright. Like Friar Lawrence who arrives just too late to save Romeo in the tomb, Davidson lands on Samburan on the night of the storm but is unable to influence the tragic course of events. Both men moreover speak the traditional tragic epilogue.

Regarding the minor characters, Tybalt's role is initially played by Schomberg who, like Juliet's cousin, ultimately takes revenge on his rival for the insult he perceives in the lovers' encounter scene, finally making Heyst "pay for [his] fun" (*Victory* 305). In his vanity and foolishness, Schomberg also resembles Romeo's other rival, Paris, as both men assume that their masculine charms render them irresistible to the tragic heroines. Thus, Schomberg is said to pardon Lena's signs of aversion to him "on the score of feminine conventional silliness" (*Victory* 88), while Paris similarly misinterprets Juliet's snub in Lawrence's cell as feminine modesty coupled with the effects of mourning for her cousin's death. In his role as the "Prince of cats" (I.4.19) who can "scratch a man to death" (III.1.100-101) with one cut from his sabre, Tybalt closely resembles Ricardo, "the stealthy, deliberate wildcat turned into a man" (*Victory* 105), who is equally famed for his skill in the use of a knife and is also presented as a rival for the woman's love. Interestingly enough, both these much vaunted duellists fail to live

up to their reputations, but not before they have seriously compromised their rivals. Death, which plays such a prominent part in *Romeo and Juliet*, especially on the morning Juliet is discovered having drunk the sleeping potion (c.f. Capulet's exclamation, "Death is my son-in-law. Death is my heir./ My daughter he hath wedded" [IV.5.38-39]), appears in *Victory* in the guise of Mr. Jones, the "masquerading skeleton out of a grave" (*Victory* 312), who similalry deprives the tragic hero of his beloved, indirectly taking his life too. Finally, if Mrs. Schomberg can be considered the lovers' female go-between or matchmaker akin to the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, then it is difficult to imagine two more contrary creations for the former resembles a mechanical and lifeless automaton who barely opens her mouth, while the latter is one of the most lively, spontaneous, and voluble characters ever to appear on stage. Nevertheless, things may not be so simple because Mrs. Schomberg's comatose outward appearance turns out to be little more than a comic mask concealing the life-affirming desire to "defend her position in life" (*Victory* 58) and making her, according to Davidson, "the greatest wonder of all, astonishing and amusing" (*Victory* 61).

The next level of affinity between the two works relates to scenes that mirror each other. The most obvious example of such mirroring connects the Capulet feast in *Romeo and Juliet* and the Zangiacomo concert in *Victory* where the lovers first meet. It is interesting that Conrad should give the latter scene the flavour of a Renaissance feast by calling Lena's smile "the best of masks" (*Victory* 85) and also referring to the "music of the spheres" (*Victory* 68) that dreamers like Heyst are wont to hear. Moreover, Lena's orchestra is given a Latin theme, reminiscent of the Italian setting of *Romeo and Juliet*, yet the fact that Signor Zangiacomo is "really a German who only dyes his hair and beard black for business" (*Victory* 46) while none of the performers in his orchestra are actually Italian, serves to de-romanticize the situation in preparation for the more self-conscious modernist version of the archetypal love scene that follows. When Romeo first sets eyes on Juliet, he exclaims, "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight/ For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (I.5.52-3), and Heyst is likewise struck as if by a unique albeit more cerebral experience, observing in Lena's features "more fineness than those of any other feminine countenance he had ever had the opportunity to observe" (*Victory* 74). The imagery used by both writers to describe the women in these scenes is surprisingly similar, from Davidson's observation that "some of these orchestra girls are no chicks" (*Victory* 47), recalling Romeo's image of Juliet as a "snowy dove

trooping among crows" to the light imagery associated with Lena's "white muslin dress", "slender white bust", " white shoes" (*Victory* 71) etc., which recalls Juliet's teaching "the torches to burn bright!" (I.5.44). Even Romeo's famous comparison of Juliet to a "rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (I.5.46) may be echoed in Lena's admission that the "quantities of 'black men' all about frightened her" (*Victory* 77), suggesting the distinctiveness as well as the vulnerability that is typical of tragic protagonists. Indeed, Lena feels that Heyst is "as different from the other men in the room as she was different from the other members of the ladies' orchestra" (*Victory* 73).

In keeping with the courtly love tradition that informs the lovers' relationships in both works, the love object is idealized and the erotic impulse spiritualised, to align it with religious devotion. Thus, the Swedish Baron is inspired to speak to the so-called "princess of Samburan" (*Victory* 165) using such phrases as, "pray command me" (73) or, "Is it your wish that I should leave you?" (73), while encouraging Lena to cling to her prince "after the manner of supplicants all the world over" (80) at the same time as feeling that she could never "appease some exalted and delicate desire of his superior soul" (268). Moreover, in the encounter scene, Romeo sees in Juliet a "Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear" (I.5.47), while Heyst gets the impression that "everything in the hall were dirt" (*Victory* 72) under Lena's feet. Consequently, the men adopt the persona of a worshipper of the deified female who must, at least initially, remain cold and aloof to sustain the masculine fantasy. In response to Romeo's playing the role of the pilgrim approaching to kiss his saint's statue, Juliet at first keeps him at bay by saying that pilgrims can also obtain favour by simply touching their idol, while in answer to Heyst's chivalric "Excuse me but that horrible female has [...] pinched you, hasn't she?" (*Victory* 73), Lena replies, "Suppose she did - what are you going to do about it?" (*Victory* 73). Of course, in Shakespeare's time, the courtly love tradition had only recently been imported from Renaissance Italy thereby justifying Romeo's and Juliet's florid Petrarchan conceits and stylised courtship. But the same can hardly be said for *Victory's* unromantic era in which there is "nothing worth knowing but facts" (*Victory* 22), so Heyst's behaviour in this scene is as misplaced as Heyst himself is in Schomberg's hotel. Indeed, although the occasions for both encounters are ostensibly festive, the fact that the male lovers represent intruders, having gate-crashed the party, as it were, creates an atmosphere of imminent danger that intensifies the erotic element by bringing out its transgressive nature, just as the inaccessibility of the beloved

heightens the excitement of the lover in the courtly love tradition. Thus, Schomberg who is observing Heyst throughout this scene, is incensed by the presence of his arch enemy and proclaims, "I really don't know why he has come to stay in my house [...] for twopence I would ask him to go and seek quarters somewhere else" (*Victory* 68), a sentiment which is remarkably close to Tybalt's, "What dares the slave/ Come hither, covered with an antic face, [...] Now by the stock and honour of my kin,/ To strike him dead I hold it not a sin" (I.5.55-9).

Of course, given all these similarities between *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet* on the level of genre, plot, and characterization, it would be surprising if common themes and motifs were not explored also, and here we find the deepest level of affinity between the two texts. One of the many such common preoccupations, also briefly mentioned by Gillon, is the theme of names and books. This is more significant than Gillon implies because it refers to the problem of language, the symbolic order of culture, and the relationship between signifier and signified at the heart of textual problematics. Although Gillon connects *Victory* with *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*, in this regard, nowhere in Shakespeare's work are these issues more central than they are in *Romeo and Juliet* which contains that most famous of lines, "O Romeo, Romeo! – wherefore art thou Romeo?" (II.2.33), as well as the related "that which we call a Rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet" (II.2.43-4). One may well ask why Gillon or other critics have not noticed this rather obvious connection. The answer lies, I believe, in the fact that *Romeo and Juliet* has crossed the random yet academically significant line separating highbrow literature from popular romance – a line which, by the way, Conrad's work makes a habit of crossing – resulting in its often being deemed unworthy of serious scholarly attention.

Nevertheless, following up the name and book theme in Shakespeare's romantic tragedy, we could say that just as Lady Capulet views Juliet's feminine form as the perfect dressing or complement for Paris' masculine content, so Romeo the name is viewed by Juliet as an artificial and relatively inconsequential appendage to something natural and real called Romeo the man. Yet, it is the one thing that cannot change, for Romeo falls in love, marries, kills, and dies but his name survives all these events that are seemingly more significant than his baptism. Similarly, although Heyst resolves to live in state of nature, outside the oppressive conventions and corrupting influences of society, on the desert island that since *Robinson Crusoe* has denoted the sovereign and self-determined individual, still he ventures as far as Sourabaya

to see "if there were any letters for him at the Tesmans" (*Victory* 40) and gets involved in communal life. For, if Heyst the would-be hermit needs "letters", then he needs words, language, and the whole social structure that goes with them. "What's in a name?" (II.2.43), asks Juliet, indirectly questioning society's power to determine individuals, but the answer turns out to be quite a lot, for by the end of the balcony scene she is imagining making the voice of the mythical Echo hoarse "With repetition of [her] Romeo's name" (II.2.161-3).

In fact both pairs of lovers aspire to a metaphorical rebirth through their sexual union and the adoption of a new identity symbolized by a new name. Thus, Lena says to Heyst, "you give me a name [...] something quite new"(84), while Romeo says to Juliet, "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized./ Henceforth I never will be Romeo" (II.2.50-51). However, the name which Heyst comes up with for Lena is essentially no different from the "Magdalen" with which she was sometimes known in the past, (Magdalen –> Magdalena –> Lena) and although Romeo and Juliet call each other "love" quite frequently, this adopted persona doesn't have the power to expunge not so much their Christian names, but the irreconcilable social differences between their families conveyed in their surnames. The controlling power of the name and of the society to which it belongs is emphasized by the book image which returns in both texts to remind the lovers of the inflexible nature of the law as represented in the long-term cultural inscriptions passed down from one generation to the next through writing. Thus, Romeo says to Juliet as they are about to part, "Love goes towards love as schoolboys from their books" (II.2.156), while the lovers in *Victory* conduct their affair in the shadow, both literally and metaphorically, of the late Heyst Senior's library that has invaded the refuge of Samburan from London as destructively, one could say, as the desperadoes do so from Sourabaya.

Language is viewed in both texts as a means of social control and the prime expression of the subject's will-to-power, for an object is named in order to be dominated and a word indelibly brands the thing it seems to innocently attach itself to. Thus, Heyst has the misfortune not only to be labelled in diverse ways by people that are generally hostile to him, but that anything anyone says about him "stuck to him and became part of his name" (*Victory* 22). "My name [...] is hateful to myself", says Romeo to Juliet, "Because it is an enemy to thee" (II.2.55-6), while Heyst who is slanderously labelled "the Enemy" by Schomberg seems to suffer from the same problem: how to get rid of the names that other people randomly attach to him. "Tell me", asks Romeo, "In what vile part of this

anatomy/ Doth my name lodge? [...] that I may sack the hateful mansion" (III.3.106-9), which of course implies that one cannot excise one's name and survive the operation. Heyst ironically seems to be destroyed by nothing more than the epithet the "destroyer" (*Victory* 35) that is given him by Schomberg. The etymology of Heyst's name deriving from the German verb *heissen* ("to name") sums up the problem very well, for if a thing is defined by its name, then the Swedish Baron is nothing more than the act of naming and the sum total of names that other people give him. The image of Heyst as Adam trying to name the other creatures of "that Paradise which he was so soon to lose" (*Victory* 149) suggests that Lena is just another creature of that Paradise awaiting to be verbally possessed by the proprietor of language, or the "talking animal" (55), to borrow a phrase from *Under Western Eyes*. However, Conrad makes the linguistic appropriation fail, since Lena disobeys Heyst's instructions on the night of the storm and carries out her own plan to defeat the desperadoes. Nevertheless, the fact that Lena, besides being presented as subject to patriarchal control, is also cast in the role of Heyst's and other men's lost Paradise, then even the ideal of a pre-linguistic utopia is linguistically constructed, like Lena's identity itself, so there is no escaping words, either in the social or the psychological domain.

The exploration of names and the problem of language that it is linked to comes to a head in two related recognition scenes in *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In Shakespeare's tragedy this is the scene in which the Nurse is trying to inform Juliet of Tybalt's murder but is initially misunderstood by her charge who thinks that Romeo is the one who has died. The result is that Tybalt's murder only gradually dawns on Juliet just as in *Victory* it takes a long time for Lena to realize that the name which she has heard referred to in Sourabaya in connection with a vile crime is the name of Heyst's late friend and business partner, Morrison. In both cases, the power of language seems to be at least as great as that to which it refers to, for the mere mention of the dead men's names, like the mention of the word "banished" which is pronounced by the Prince as punishment for Romeo's crime, has the power to kill the listener. Thus, when the truth dawns on Lena, she whispers the name of Morrison twice and her head is said to droop as though anticipating her death scene (*Victory* 173), while Juliet exclaims "'Romeo is banished' –/ There's no end, no limit, measure, bound,/ In that word's death" (III.2.124-6). Even if these texts may not find it so easy to affirm with St. Paul that "the spirit giveth life", they leave no doubt about the fact that "the letter killeth" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

It must be clear by now that *Romeo and Juliet* has been neglected by those critics that have sought parallels between Conrad's and Shakespeare's work, especially in the case of *Victory*. Indeed, a close comparative reading of these two romantic tragedies reveals very specific affinities on the level of genre, plot, characterization, with whole scenes in Conrad's novel mirroring those in Shakespeare's play. In addition, the affinities between *Victory* and *Romeo and Juliet* can be seen to extend to the exploration of common themes and motifs such as that of naming which refers to the crucial problem of language and signification in both texts. An *exegesis* for this must be sought either in Conrad's conscious imitation of Shakespeare's plays – and there is considerable evidence in the letters to suggest precisely this – or in a kind of involuntary emulation whereby the novelist had so assimilated the Bard's work that he could recall it automatically and unconsciously while composing his own fiction. If the former is the case, it by no means lessens Conrad's achievement in such works as *Victory* which reveal a remarkable power to collate existing literary styles and modes into vivid and compelling narrative, comparable to the synthesizing tendency of Renaissance poets. If the latter is closer to the truth, then we are confronted with a most extraordinary example of *cryptomnysia*, or "hidden memory", which has yet to be explored at any depth but which may hold the key to one of literary Modernism's greatest achievements, the phenomenon called Joseph Conrad.

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