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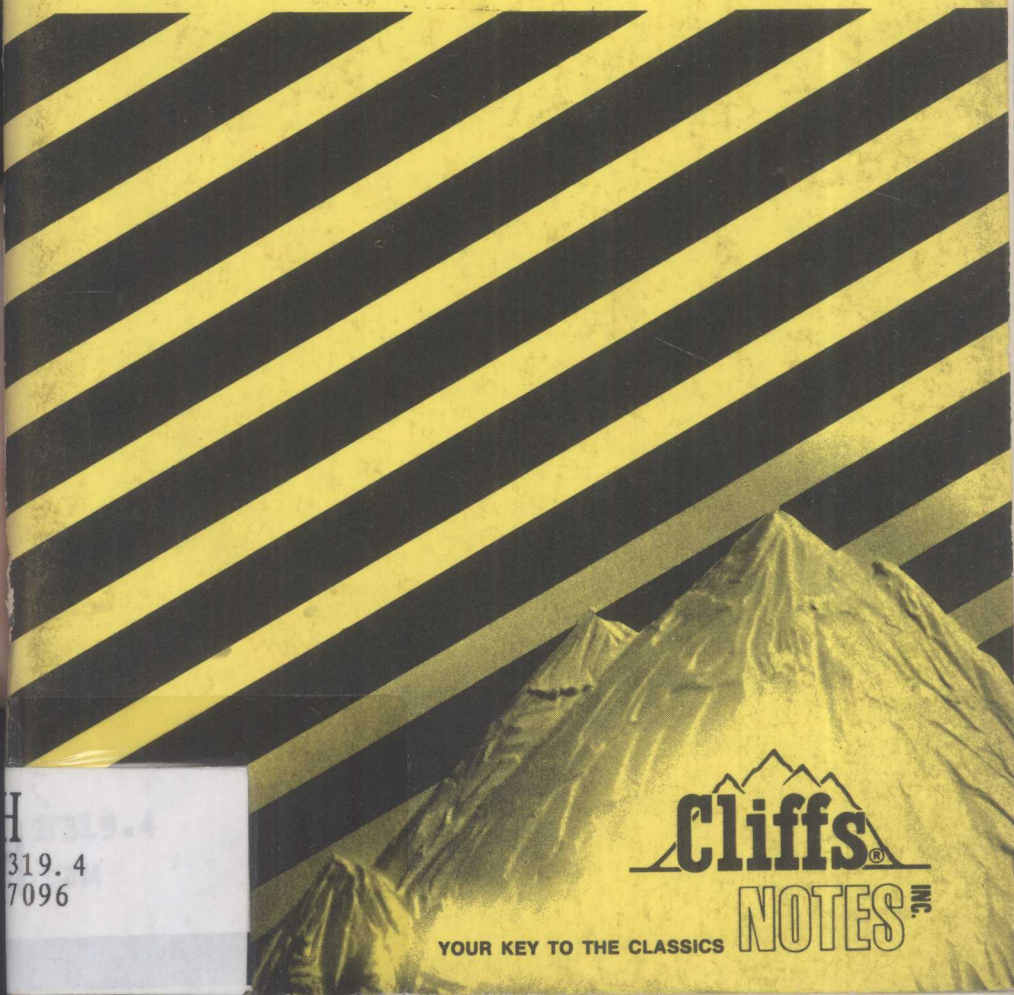
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VICTORY



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# VICTORY

## NOTES

*including*

*Introduction to the Novel*

*Brief Synopsis of the Novel*

*Critical Commentaries and Analysis*

*Structure of the Novel*

*Conrad's Narrative Technique*

*Character Analyses*

*Symbolism in the Novel*

*Questions for Review*

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*The islands are very quiet.  
One sees them lying about,  
clothed in their dark gar-  
ments of leaves, in a great  
hush of silver and azure,  
where the sea without murmurs  
meets the sky in a ring of  
magic stillness.*

**Victory**



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## INTRODUCTION

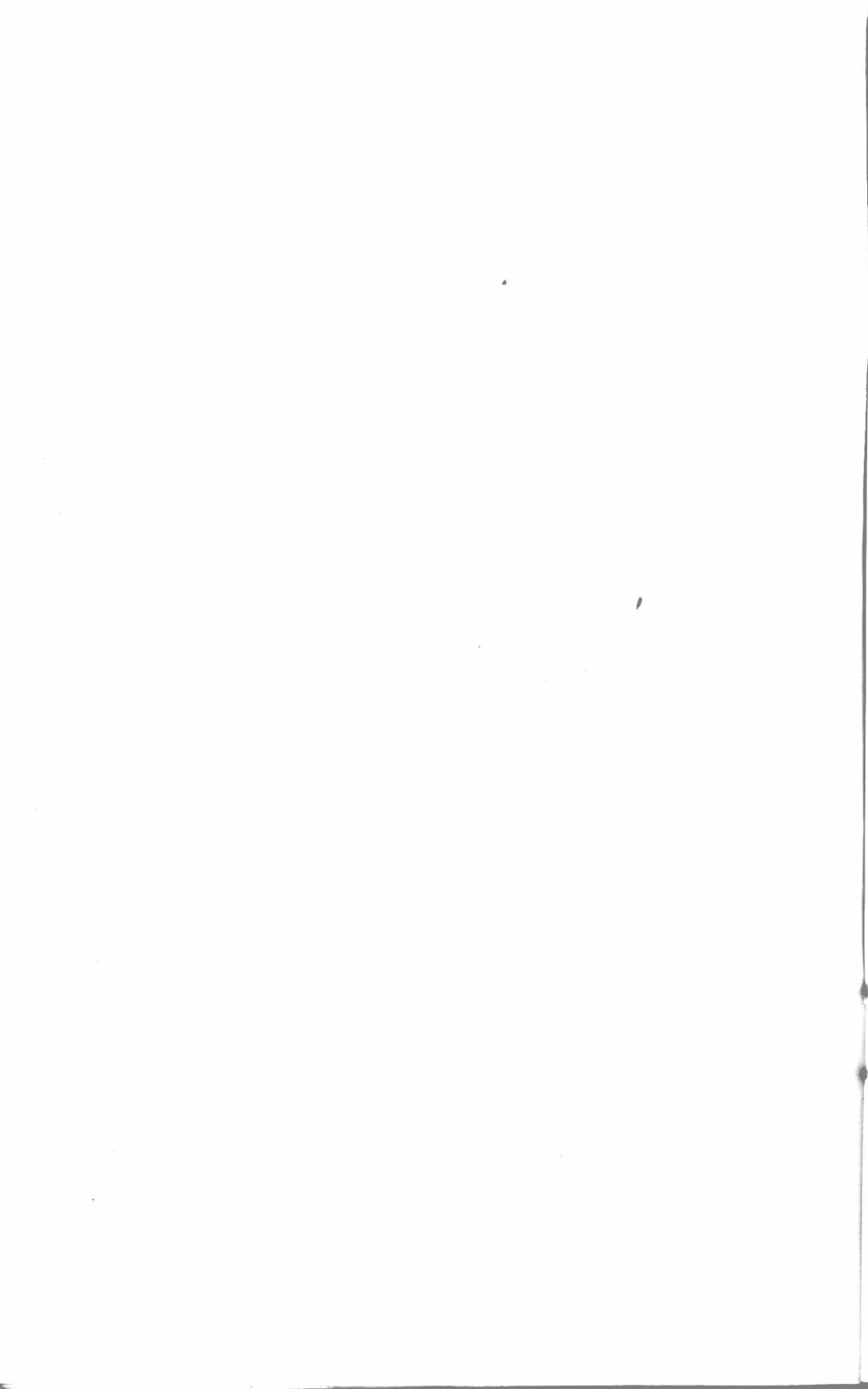
Are there good reasons for reading Conrad's *Victory*? Yes, of course. Everyone who reads a worthy book is enriched by the experience. The subtle character portrayal, symbolism, and suggestion throughout the story challenge the reader and stimulate his thinking.

Society is confronted today with the problem of those who for various reasons withdraw from their fellows. Conrad's themes are as modern as tomorrow.

This outline is not intended as a substitute for the book, but rather to make the adventure into Conrad's world of romance and drama a memorable experience.

The tragedy of the man who mistrusts life and shuts himself away from intimate contact with others has never been more skillfully revealed than in Conrad's *Victory*.





# VICTORY

## GENERAL SUMMARY

Axel Heyst, born of titled Swedish parents and raised in England, accepts his philosopher father's concept that life is essentially evil and that participation in it can only increase the evil and involve a man in trouble. The elder Heyst has taught his son that one's only condescension to life should be to watch it from a detached distance, never to partake in its action.

Such a philosophy ingrained in Heyst during his impressionable youth leads him to withdraw from life. His inheritance is small, but the income from it will support him in the Malay archipelago where he has chosen to live the life of a wandering gentleman.

Fifteen years pass and nothing occurs to change Heyst's philosophy. He is now in his middle thirties and confirmed in his pattern of life. Then an unexpected happening throws latent forces in his character into conflict. He finds a man, Captain Morrison, in trouble with Portuguese authorities in Timor over a small fine. For lack of a trifling sum of money, Morrison is about to lose his ship.

Compassion for this fellow white man in distress leads Heyst to offer his help. Morrison accepts, but is so deeply grateful that he insists on Heyst joining his now ransomed vessel. Heyst, embarrassed and ashamed of his involvement, goes along with Morrison. When Morrison decides to organize the Tropical Belt Coal Company, he makes Heyst his manager for the tropics, with headquarters on the island of Samburan about three hundred miles from Sourabaya.

On a fund-raising trip to England, Morrison catches a chill and dies. The Tropical Belt Coal Company folds and Heyst, after dismissing company employees, continues to live on Samburan with no companion but a Chinese servant, Wang.

Heyst has no idea of the scandal being raised about him in Sourabaya where Schomburg, the hotel-keeper, tells all who will listen that Heyst has cheated Morrison out of enormous sums of money and then sent him home to England to die. Schomburg says Morrison's death is murder and Heyst is the murderer.

Another master of a sea-going vessel, Captain Davidson, passes Heyst's isolated island at regular intervals and being a humane person he interests himself in Heyst and, when passing Samburan,

he swings in near enough to be hailed from the shore if Heyst should want anything.

Heyst, after eighteen months of solitary existence on Samburan following the collapse of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, hails Davidson and travels with him to Sourabaya on business. Knowing nothing of Schomberg's hatred of him or his malicious gossip, Heyst takes up quarters in Schomberg's hotel.

A troupe of traveling musicians, Zangiaco's Ladies' Orchestra, is playing every evening for guests at the hotel. Heyst is annoyed by the wretched music, but out of boredom and mild curiosity he ventures, one evening, into the room where the orchestra is performing. There he sees a young English girl, Lena, being abused by the dragon-faced wife of the orchestra leader. Immediately compassion rises in Heyst—the same emotion of pity and kindness that involved him with Morrison. He befriends the girl and when he discovers that the obnoxious hotel-keeper, Schomberg, is pressing his attentions on Lena, he abducts her and carries her to his lonely island of Samburan.

Schomberg has hated and slandered Heyst for years; now he is filled with mad fury against the man. Although he and Zangiaco are deadly enemies, he joins the orchestra leader in trying to hunt down the couple. Their search of the harbor is fruitless and Schomberg returns to his hotel to plot revenge.

Schomberg has a colorless wife who appears to know nothing, be nothing, and care nothing for what transpires around her, but it is she who has helped the girl, Lena, to elope with Heyst. She is more perceptive than she looks.

Other visitors arrive in Sourabaya, a trio of desperadoes, who make their headquarters at Schomberg's hotel and quickly black-mail him into allowing illegal card games and other gambling in which they profit while amusing themselves. Mr. Jones, leader of the three, seems to be a gentleman of good birth, yet so demonic in all his aspects that he appears more of a malevolent spectre than a human being. His "secretary," Ricardo, a cat-like villain with murder continually on his mind, complements Mr. Jones' talents. Their servant, a sub-human gorilla of a man called Pedro, strikes terror into Schomberg. The hotel-keeper sees himself being ruined and destroyed by these three. His own guilty conscience reacts on him and fills him with terrible fear. At last, in a confidential talk with Ricardo, he mentions Heyst and the pile of money Schomberg is sure Heyst has concealed in Samburan. Ricardo picks up this information, relays it to Mr. Jones and with Schomberg's eager assistance the three set off for Samburan in an open boat.

Meanwhile Heyst and Lena have enjoyed three months of

idyllic happiness on Samburan. Yet both of them have reservations. Heyst realizes that he has again involved himself in life and regrets it. He feels that by opening his heart to Lena he has opened the door to trouble and has been untrue to himself.

Although Lena has come to love Heyst with both gratitude and devotion, she sees that, in spite of himself, he regards her with mixed feelings. Her concern crystalizes into a desire to prove her love for him in some way which will forever allay his doubts and cause him to accept her fully. She has not long to wait; opportunity is on the way.

The three bandits arrive on Samburan more dead than alive. Their trip in the open boat has almost killed them, but under Heyst's surprised ministrations, they quickly recover and a deadly battle of wits ensues. Heyst soon realizes that these visitors are desperadoes of the worst sort. He knows that he and Lena are in terrible danger. Wang, the Chinese servant, compounds the difficulty of their situation by stealing Heyst's only weapon—a revolver.

Ricardo has concealed from his master, Mr. Jones, the fact of Lena's presence on Samburan. Mr. Jones has such an aversion to women that it borders on insanity. He abhors them. Ricardo does not share his feelings. He spies on Lena in her bedroom and makes a vicious sexual attack on her. Lena with unexpected strength, repels his advances and wins his respect and admiration as well as his fierce affection.

Knowing that Heyst is in mortal danger, Lena has only one intention—she must disarm Ricardo and save Heyst. In order to accomplish her purpose she deceives Ricardo into thinking that she is favorable to his plan for stealing Heyst's "treasure" and destroying both of the gentlemen. Lena knows that Heyst has no hidden cache of gold, but she plans to use Ricardo's infatuation and his avarice to disarm and destroy him.

On the last evening, Heyst sees that they are trapped. He is sure that he cannot escape, but tries to save Lena by insisting that she put on a black dress and slip into the forest to hide. He hopes she will escape detection until morning when she can go to Wang and the natives on the other side of the island for protection. Heyst leaves for a talk with Mr. Jones sure that whatever happens to him Lena will be safe.

Lena has no intention of obeying Heyst. She knows that Ricardo carries a dagger strapped to his leg and that he intends to murder both Heyst and Mr. Jones this very night. She sits in the candle-lighted house waiting for Ricardo. When he comes, she charms him with her show of sweet compliance with all his wishes. He allows her to handle his dagger, which she conceals in the folds

of her dress. She pushes out her foot for him to caress. He is in the act of kissing her white ankle when Heyst and Jones appear in the door. Heyst has just revealed to Jones that he has a girl here on Samburan. Jones is furious with Ricardo for concealing this information from him. He knows what a fool Ricardo is about women. Jones is in a murderous rage.

Mr. Jones shoots over Heyst's shoulder into the room. The bullet glances off Ricardo's head and pierces Lena's breast. Heyst is so taken back by what he thinks is Lena's betrayal of their love that he is confused and doesn't realize what has happened. Jones slinks away. Ricardo leaps up and rushes out into the night. The two are left alone. Lena is ecstatic. She has disarmed the enemy and saved Heyst; but Heyst turns from her remarking that it is all very "amusing." He is wounded by what he thinks is her falseness, yet his old habit of detachment prevents any angry denunciation.

Now she droops before him; there is a look in her eyes which seems to have awful portent. He catches her up and lays her on the bed, puzzling over what can possibly be wrong with her. At this moment Captain Davidson, whose suspicions have been aroused by the discovery of Pedro's body in an open boat drifting off the island, comes in with the dagger, Ricardo's dagger, which he has picked up from the floor. Heyst, horrified at the idea of a secret dagger-thrust, tears Lena's clothes open and reveals the tiny black wound of the revolver bullet. Lena is dying and she begs for some assurance from Heyst that she is at last permitted to enter the intimate inner circle of his love. He is unable to give the cry of love she wants to hear, and which he wants to give. His habit of isolation and detachment is still too strong. He does lift her up into his arms and she mistakes this for the surrender she has given her life to win. She dies in an illusion of glorious triumph—a victory which transcends all suffering and all joy.

Meanwhile Mr. Jones seeks out Ricardo and shoots him dead. Then he stumbles to the jetty where Wang has already shot Pedro and shoved off the boat. Either by accident or intention Jones falls into the water and drowns.

Heyst makes his last sad pronouncement to Davidson:

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

Davidson tells the "Excellency," who has called him in to account for the Samburan tragedy, that Heyst then asked to be left alone with his dead. Later Davidson discovers that the bungalow is on fire. Unable to do anything to save the property, he sees every building consumed. Later, with Wang, he sifts the ashes and

knows that Heyst has died with his beloved Lena.

"There was nothing I could do." Davidson tells the "Excellency"

NOTHING!

## SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS WITH CRITICAL COMMENTS

### PART ONE

#### CHAPTER ONE

##### Summary:

Upon liquidation of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, Axel Heyst, its Swedish manager does not leave the tropics. Isolated on his own little island of Samburan, he still attracts the attention of his fellow white men in that region. He is all alone except for the shadows of passing clouds and an active volcano.

Men in the offices where Heyst conducts his business cannot make him out. He does not appear to be interested in making money. In his playful, courteous way, he speaks of "The great stride forward for these parts." Heyst is not a traveler. Travelers move on to other parts of the world. Heyst does not move on. He stays. Yet he moves about in a circle with a radius of eight hundred miles drawn round a point in North Borneo. The circle touches both Manila and Saigon. He has been seen in both places. Within this area he is known as "Enchanted Heyst."

He is called "Enchanted Heyst" because he once remarked that he was enchanted with these islands. He has other names, too. In his early days he once stated that "There is nothing worth knowing but facts, hard facts." So he is also called "Hard Facts." His sayings stick to him and men remember them.

He moons around the Java Sea in trading schooners and then disappears in the direction of New Guinea. After men have almost forgotten him, he returns in a native proa full of Goram vagabonds. He is burnt black by the sun and very lean. His hair has thinned and he carries a portfolio of sketches under his arm. He shows the sketches, but makes no comments about his sojourn in the New Guinea area.

Years pass; the last vestiges of youth leave his face and all the hair is gone from the top of his head. His redgold mustaches have grown to noble proportions and now another white man gives him an epithet, "Utopist."

At the time events chronicled here take place, Heyst has

reached his full physical development. Of broad and martial presence, he resembles portraits of Charles XII. Yet no one thinks of Heyst as a fighting man.

**Commentary:**

Conrad introduces his hero character in a situation of failure. The T.B.C. Company is defunct and Heyst lives on Samburan alone. His companions are shadows and a volcano—both symbolic of his fate.

Mark Heyst's reference to the "great stride forward." He will express an opinion about it later.

Heyst's character begins to emerge even in this first chapter. The names given him, "Enchanted Heyst," "Hard Facts," and "Utopist," all show that his sayings impress men and they remember. His martial appearance wins him notice, too, but his outstanding characteristic is a "finished courtesy of attitude, movement," and his delicately playful manner of speaking. Most men like him.

The reference to his contact with New Guinea savages and his remark that it "was amusing" is significant. The fact that he is artist enough to make sketches of what he saw in New Guinea must be kept in mind.

## CHAPTER TWO

**Summary:**

One day Heyst turns up in Timor and meets, on the streets of Delli, a Dorsetshire Englishman, Captain Morrison of the trading brig, CAPRICORN. Morrison is in grave trouble. The Portuguese port authorities have inflicted a fine on him and arrested his brig. If he fails to raise the money in one week's time, they will sell the CAPRICORN at auction, ruining Morrison. The week is almost up.

With the utmost courtesy, "as one prince to another," Heyst begs Morrison to allow him to pay the fine. Morrison's intense gratitude and relief embarrass Heyst. Later, on board the brig, Morrison figures that he can never repay Heyst and declares that he has robbed his benefactor. Heyst is deeply touched.

At last Morrison hits on the plan of taking Heyst with him as a partner on the CAPRICORN until the debt is paid. Both men agree to keep the matter secret. Morrison is embarrassed and doesn't want to be joked about his trouble with the Portuguese authorities. Heyst's "natural delicacy" makes him eager to maintain silence. Morrison's intense gratitude, however, leads to some small remark which sets the island gossips whispering. An opinion wins wide circulation that Heyst has leached onto the generous Morrison and is sucking him dry.

The origin of these vicious suggestions is Schomberg, the hotel-

keeper in Sourabaya, a big, bearded German with a suspicious mind and a slanderous tongue. He styles himself a Lieutenant of the Reserve.

On seeing Heyst and Morrison pass his hotel one day, he remarks to his guests, "The Spider and the fly have just gone by, gentlemen." Then he cautions them, in an important and confidential tone, never to get mixed up with "that Swede."

**Commentary:**

Morrison is "one of us." Heyst is not. Throughout this chapter Conrad emphasizes Heyst's consummate courtesy:

... a prince addressing another prince.  
 A slight motion of surprise which would not  
 have been misplaced in a drawing-room ...  
 ... that consummate good-society manner of his.  
 ... with a delicate intonation ...  
 His politely modulated voice ...  
 He continued with austere politeness ...

Conrad presents Heyst as a man who masked his detachment from life with princely courtesy and playful politeness. Yet he is a "hollow" man, incapable of real cordiality.

In this chapter, Conrad sets the pattern of behaviour which will bring calamity upon Heyst. He comes out of his isolation and is moved by pity to perform a kind act for a fellow human being, but he is able to give only politeness—never real warmth.

### CHAPTER THREE

**Summary:**

Many persons believe Schomberg's gossip. Others regard it as funny to call Heyst "The Spider" behind his back. Heyst knows nothing of any of his nicknames.

Soon everyone has more important matters to discuss. Morrison makes Heyst manager on the spot of the newly organized Tropical Belt Coal Company with offices in London and Amsterdam. Heyst's "great stride forward" has begun.

Morrison takes leave of his brig and goes home to England to push the coal company, but he contracts a fatal illness. Heyst is shocked at his partner's death and disappears for a time. When he reappears he shows a guarded attitude, almost as though he expects to be reproached for Morrison's death, although it could not possibly be his fault.

The hotel-keeper, Schomberg, however, months after the disaster, makes up a piece of sinister gossip. He declares that Heyst squeezed Morrison like a lemon and then sent him home to die. Meanwhile Heyst's appointment as manager of the T.B.C. Com-



pany is confirmed and he chooses Samburan, or Round Island, for the central station. Engineers come out, coolies are imported, bungalows are erected on Samburan and some coal is mined. There is talk of large contracts and a large fleet of steamers. Never has Heyst been so much talked about. People remember that he is of noble birth—a Swedish baron. And now they begin to regard Heyst as “the enemy” because everyone fears the new coal company and what it may do to their own trade.

Schomberg alone hoots at the idea and prophesies doom for the T.B.C. Company and its manager. He is right. The company folds and Heyst disappears. Almost everyone forgets the Swede, but not Schomberg. Hatred seems stronger than casual friendship and Schomberg hates Heyst with all the strength of a blind fool.

Then Schomberg gets news of Heyst. He is still on Samburan. He has dismissed all company employees and lives there alone. Captain Davidson, coming by from the west, has seen Heyst on the wharf at Samburan, has put off in a small boat and talked with him. Schomberg gloats over his notion that Heyst can't possibly have anything decent to eat on the deserted island of Samburan.

#### Commentary:

This chapter develops Schomberg's character more fully, showing such motivation as exists for his enduring hatred of Heyst.

Conrad attributes Schomberg's stupidity, his cowardice, his unreasoning hatred to the fact of his being German. “Observe the Teutonic sense of proportion and nice forgiving temper.”

Conrad wrote *Victory* between October, 1912, and May, 1914. It was published during the first months of World War I. Conrad never had any use for the Germans. His dislike stemmed from his own Polish ancestry, but was fortified and augmented by sympathy with his adopted country—England. These prejudices appear in other places throughout the book.

## CHAPTER FOUR

#### Summary:

Certain persons go to Captain Davidson of the *SISSIE* to learn more of his contact with Heyst. He tells them that Heyst looks exactly as always, with a book in his hand, very neat. Heyst has explained to Davidson that he always had a taste for solitude. Davidson, himself a fellow of fine feeling is one whom Heyst's finished courtesy of manner most strongly disconcerts, yet his fineness is real enough so that he makes a practice of taking the passage along the north shore of Samburan, within a mile of the wharf.

Few people are interested enough to ask about the lonely white