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MEN AVOIDING LOVE IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *VICTORY* AND YUSUF ATILGAN'S *AN IDLE MAN**

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ABSTRACT

As profoundly self-conscious and reflective men, Axel Heyst in Joseph Conrad's Victory and C. in Yusuf Atılgan's Idle Man are immobilized and incapacitated by their excessive reflective faculty and suffer from disappointment in their romantic relationships due to their avoidant attachment styles. Lacking a caring mother figure who could provide them with loving compassion, they are brought up by emotionally unavailable fathers who are clearly not attuned to the needs of their sons. So while growing up their attachment needs are clearly not met by their primary caregiver who neglects and occasionally abuses them instead. Growing up to become "avoidant" adults, they experience problems with intimacy, invest little in social and romantic relationships and are unable or unwilling to share thoughts and feelings with others.

In what follows, I will examine comparatively the psychological dynamics underlying Heyst's and C.'s avoidant attachment styles and explore how their gender performances are fraught with anxieties and insecurities. Ultimately, I argue that the traumatic deprivations of Heyst's and C.'s childhoods significantly hamper their ability

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to form strong and lasting emotional bonds, making it impossible for them to find satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Key words: attachment theory, avoidant attachment style, romantic love, Joseph Conrad, Yusuf Atılgan

Joseph Conrad'ın Zafer ve Yusuf Atılgan'ın Aylak Adam Romanlarında Aşkta Kaçınan Erkekler

ÖZET

Joseph Conrad'ın Zafer romanının ana karakteri Axel Heyst ve Yusuf Atılgan'ın Aylak Adam romanının kahramanı C. çok fazla düşünen, düşündükçe paralize olan ve yakın ilişkilerde bağlanma sorunu yaşadıkları için romantik ilişkilerinde bir türlü aradıklarını bulamayan karakterlerdir. Onlara sevgi ve şefkat sunacak bir anne figüründen yoksun olan Axel ve C., oğullarının ihtiyaçlarına karşılık veremeyen duygusal olarak mesafeli babalar tarafından yetiştirilirler. Gelişme çağında ebeveynlerinden yeterli ilgi ve sevgiyi göremeyen ve ihtiyaçları görmezden gelinen bu iki karakter yetişkinlik çağına geldiklerinde karşı cinsle yakınlık kurmakta zorluk yaşayan, hatta romantik ilişkilerden olabildiğince “kaçınan”, bu tür ilişkilerde çeşitli sorunlar yaşayan kişiler olurlar. Bu makale, Heyst ve C.'nin “kaçınmalı bağlanma stili”nin ardındaki psikolojik dinamikleri karşılaştırmalı olarak inceleyerek, çocukluk döneminde yaşadıkları duygusal travmaların kişiliklerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve yetişkinlik çağına geldiklerinde güçlü ve kalıcı yakın ilişkiler kurmalarını ve/ya bu ilişkilerde tatminlik duygusu yaşamalarını nasıl imkânsız hale getirdiğini ortaya koyar.

Anahtar kelimeler: bağlanma teorisi, kaçınmalı bağlanma stili, romantik sevgi, Joseph Conrad, Yusuf Atılgan

Joseph Conrad's *Victory* (1915) explores the plight of the morally sensitive individual in a corrupt, fallen world. Axel Heyst, the son of a Swedish philosopher who is described as “the destroyer systems, of hopes, of beliefs” (Conrad 1995: 175)¹, resolves to lead a life in accordance with the philosophy of his father, whose dying injunction to him was to “look on - make no sound” (175). Having inherited his father's intellectual pessimism, Heyst lacks the spontaneity

¹ Only page numbers will be given from here onwards.

of the natural man of action and chooses a life of drifting free of attachments or goals: “It was the very essence of his life to be a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes” (90). Although Heyst believes that his chosen path will render him “invulnerable because elusive”, his impulsive involvement first with Morrison and then with Lena prove otherwise. Lena, with whom Heyst experiences “the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman” (150), offers him a way out of his morbid nihilism. However, Heyst is disastrously incapable of making the vital moves to protect her and himself when he succumbs to his habitual weary fatalism at moments of crisis.

Published in 1959, Yusuf Atılgan’s *An Idle Man* explores the existential drama of a similarly thoughtful, depressed young man who is desperately looking for love in the big city. Emasculated by a consciousness that has grown separate from itself, C. spends his days searching for a kindred spirit who will complete him and endow his otherwise pointless existence with meaning. Burdened by his catastrophizing imaginative faculty and intellectualism, C. is an idler who lives on the money left to him by a father he passionately loathes. Despising the society in which he lives and the people he interacts with, he remains a solitary individual who finds a ‘safe’ haven in his shell, his personal and portable hell. C. is alienated from others as well as himself and suffers from a profound sense of existential ennui and attachment trauma which paralyzes his efforts to connect with others. Ultimately, C.’s extreme self-absorption condemns him to a life of perpetual boyhood while his “masculinity” remains troubled at best.

In *Attached*, Amir Levine and Rachel Heller argue that understanding attachment styles is an easy and reliable way to understand and predict people’s behavior in any romantic situation: “In fact, one of the main assumptions of attachment theory is that in romantic situations, we are programmed to act in a predetermined

manner” (2010: 16). As profoundly self-conscious and reflective men, both Heyst and C. are immobilized and incapacitated by their excessive reflective faculty and suffer from disappointment in their romantic relationships due to their avoidant attachment styles. Lacking a caring mother figure who could provide them with loving compassion, they are brought up by emotionally unavailable fathers who are clearly not attuned to the needs of their sons. So while growing up their attachment needs are clearly not met by their primary caregiver who neglects and occasionally abuses them instead. Growing up only to become “avoidant” adults, they “experience problems with intimacy, invest little in social and romantic relationships and are unable or unwilling to share thoughts and feelings with others” (20).

The DSM-IV manual defines Avoidant Personality Disorder (AvPD) as “a pervasive pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation ... present in a variety of contexts” (1994: 662). Avoidants typically show restraint in intimate relationships because of their fear of being shamed, rejected or abandoned. Thus, they are usually reluctant to take personal risks and are often inhibited in new personal situations. In the words of Martin Kantor, avoidants suffer from: “anxiety about becoming dependent; anxiety about being controlled, and as a result being overwhelmed by, trapped in, and engulfed by the closeness and intimacy of a committed relationship; and anxiety both about winning (a fear of success) and about losing (a fear of failure)” (2003: xi-xii). As Kantor further suggests, the avoidant’s social anxiety is characterized in the main by “a deep, ongoing, pervasive, multilayered *relationship anxiety* that makes it difficult for them to meet, connect with, and get close to someone, to form meaningful permanent relationships, and to then maintain and sustain them over time” (xiv, *italics original*). Many life altering shifts occur in our infancy, often beyond our conscious awareness. When the quality of the bonding that we have with our primary caregivers who we depend on for our survival is compromised or insecure, we experience

attachment injuries which cumulatively lead to attachment trauma. According to the famous relational theorist Philip Bromberg:

Psychological trauma is a developmental inevitability and is part of what shapes everyone's personality. If early in life the disruption of human relatedness is experienced for the most part as interpersonally repairable, then the influence of developmental trauma on adult living tends to be largely containable as internal conflict and available to self-reflection and potential resolution as part of the give and take of a relationship. But for others, the impact of developmental trauma leads to something very different. Their journey through life is not simply a voyage but two voyages: one accessible to consciousness and choice, and the other a shadowy presence within the first – a dissociated voyage with a life of its own that channels each choice toward a variation of the same, seemingly predestined outcome (2010: 444).

Drawing on Bromberg's insights quoted above, one could suggest that developmental attachment trauma comes from attachment injuries we all experience during our formative years. If the psychological damage caused by the injury is somehow addressed and repaired before it becomes a wound, the effects of the developmental trauma can be resolved or at least contained by the individual who experiences it. However, if the trauma is repressed and left unresolved, the individual remains plagued by the destructive psychological effects of attachment trauma. People who suffer from unresolved attachment trauma shy away from depending emotionally on other people for fear of being hurt. As a result, attachment trauma continues to produce profound insecurity in close relationships and becomes the model for how traumatized individuals relate to other people in their life. Because they associate trauma with intimacy, whenever they get intimate with other people they start distancing themselves because it does not feel safe.

As Levine and Heller point out, avoidants "have attachment needs but actively suppress them" (31). In what follows, I will examine comparatively the psychological dynamics underlying Heyst's and C.'s avoidant attachment styles and explore how their gender performances

are fraught with anxieties and insecurities. Ultimately, I argue that the traumatic deprivations of Heyst's and C.' childhoods significantly hamper their ability to form strong and lasting emotional bonds, making it impossible for them to find satisfaction in romantic relationships. In their adult relationships when they are with someone, they experience high levels of concern, confusion, distress and emotional anxiety.

Heyst's father, who casts a long shadow in his life, is described as a thinker, stylist, and man of the world in his time, who "had begun by coveting all the joys, those of the great and those of the humble, those of the fools and those of the sages. For more than sixty years he has dragged on this painful earth of ours the most weary, the most uneasy soul that civilisation had ever fashioned to its ends of disillusion and regret. One could not refuse him a measure of greatness, for he was unhappy in a way unknown to mediocre souls" (91). Heyst never knew his mother but lives with his father for three years after leaving school at the age of 18. We are told that "Three years of such companionship at that plastic age and impressionable age were bound to leave in the boy a profound mistrust of life. The young man learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost. It is not the clear-sighted who lead the world. Great achievements are accomplished in a blessed, warm mental fog, which the pitiless cold blasts of the father's analysis had blown away from the son" (100). Heyst's 'mistrust of life' is manifest in his subsequent refusal to engage with life and people, and to get involved in human affairs. Taught by his father that "he who forms a tie is lost" he avoids human company and seeks peace in solitude. Moreover, the clear-sightedness coupled with the philosophical pessimism he inherits from his father renders him unfit for heroic action, an idea that is reinforced when we are told that despite the obvious resemblance he carries with the portraits of Charles XII hanging on his wall, "there was no reason to think that Heyst was in any way a fighting man" (6).

The father's legacy which is supposed to keep Heyst from harm becomes, in effect, incapacitating, robbing him off the necessary skills

for survival. This legacy also undoubtedly has a devastating impact on Heyst's emotional development and relationships with people when he becomes an adult. In the words of Kaplan: "From the cumulative disconfirmation by his father of all loving and trusting self-states Heyst experienced as a child and young adult, he came to see all tender feelings, all deep attachments, as "not-me" (2010: 443). Unable to grow out of his childhood conditioning, Heyst builds his identity on the (mistaken) assumption that closeness with others would only pose a burden and impinge on his autonomy as an individual. Thus, he seeks to become and remain emotionally self-sufficient by ignoring his deep-rooted attachment needs.

Although Heyst's father is a haunting presence throughout the novel, the essence of his legacy is fully revealed in Part three, when Heyst meditates upon the significance of his involvement with Lena. In the first chapter, we learn that the father bequeathed the son "his contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort" (173) which makes him regard action as "a barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations!" (174). Never questioning his father's assumptions, Heyst shuns all effort believing that he can protect himself from disillusionment and failure if he avoids involvement. As a result, "Heyst is driven by his spiritual inheritance both to embrace the negative itself as the principle of all life and to reject love, friendship and their correlates as appearances" (Raval 1980: 431).

So Heyst decides to drift without an ultimate goal, secure in the belief that he will be 'safe' if he is a wanderer/spectator rather than an active participant. Without schemes, plans or attachments, he considers himself detached and invulnerable – yet deep inside he craves connection. Although he seeks detachment from the world at his father's injunction, we are told that he is "not a hermit by temperament", the sight of his kind is "not invincibly odious to him", and "the wandering, drifting, unattached Swede" shares the "innate curiosity about our fellows which is a trait of human nature" (40-41). In

other words, Heyst can neither be completely ‘detached’ from nor wilfully ‘involved’ in worldly affairs since he is profoundly aware of the potential for contradiction, doubt and regret in both cases. Caught up between his father’s bidding and his own (neglected) desire for human connection Heyst feels “disenchanted with his life as a whole” (67). We are told that he was moved “by the sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation” (68) and later “was hurt by the sight of his own life, which ought to have been a masterpiece of aloofness” (149).

Despite his deep distrust in action and his unwillingness to bond with people, Heyst’s detachment is not complete. Although he keeps on living according to the ideas instilled in him by his father, he is ultimately confronted with the impossibility of complete detachment by a series of chance occurrences, more or less brought on by his own straying from his father’s principles. His sympathetic interest in and involvement with first Captain Morrison and then with Lena contradicts the fatalistic philosophical outlook of his father and leads him to take actions with far-reaching consequences. For the purposes of this paper, I am particularly interested in Heyst’s involvement with Lena as it is especially through this ill-fated romance that the implications of his avoidant attachment style are revealed.

When visiting Sourabaya, Heyst notices a young woman working in a travelling orchestra in Schomberg’s hotel and intervenes impulsively to save this damsel in distress from the sexual advances of the odious Schomberg and her nasty superiors. Yet, even from the very start, Heyst shows significant resistance towards Lena, doubting her sincerity. As they converse in Schomberg’s music hall, Heyst asks her to a smile so that they don’t arouse suspicion. “The effect was mechanical; the ordered smile was joyous, radiant. It astonished Heyst. No wonder, it flashed through his mind, women can deceive men so completely. The faculty was inherent in them; they seemed to be created with a special aptitude” (79).

Nothwithstanding his misgivings, Heyst elopes with Lena and starts living with her in Samburan. Yet, despite his obvious attraction to her, he is far from being unconflicted or at ease with her or the feelings she inspires in him. We are told that her presence seems “to infect his very heart” (84), with the result that “weaknesses are free to enter” (210). He also feels himself “enveloped in the atmosphere of femininity as in a cloud, suspecting pitfalls [...] afraid to move” (221-222). Even after living with Lena for some weeks, Heyst is still conscious of “the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force – or simply an abysmal emptiness, reserving itself even in the moments of complete surrender” (192). Heyst’s inability to read Lena and the fear and discomfort he feels as a result create a distance that cannot be bridged between the two lovers. As an avoidant, Heyst is also quite bad at reading Lena’s verbal and nonverbal cues, and she remains for him a script written in an unknown language. So while it is true that in committing to Lena, Heyst seems to turn his back on his father’s legacy, he still finds it very difficult to connect with her as well as his with his own emotions: “Formerly, in solitude and in silence, he had been used to think clearly and sometimes profoundly, seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness. But now he was troubled; a light veil seemed to hang before his mental vision; the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman” (82).

Lena, for her part, feels understandably upset and insecure given Heyst’s aloofness: “her tone betrayed always a shade of anxiety, as though she never were certain how a conversation with him would end” (186). Lena craves for Heyst’s closeness as he quickly becomes her attachment figure on whom she completely depends. Since Heyst fails to assure her by being emotionally present, Lena feels decreased security and greater distress in this relationship. And having an anxious attachment style, she takes Heyst’s emotional distance to be a symptom of lack of love. “You should try to love me” she pleads with him

adding: “sometimes it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever” (221). As Suresh Raval claims:

Lena seems to recognize not merely that Heyst does not really love her but that, given his rejection of the world as evil and friendship as appearance; he cannot possibly feel or experience love. This recognition compounds her sense that she has been liberated from her past only in a superficial sense, that she has not been really rescued from the destitution and abuse that make up her life in the past, that she cannot feel the security of the self derived from a knowledge of genuine human reciprocity. As she tells Heyst: “I can only be what you think I am”. Thus Lena’s sentimental desire for love here occurs in a context where she has an unflinching sense of obstacles against it. (1980: 427)

Heyst cannot really reciprocate Lena’s feelings since he associates the feeling of love with weakness and entrapment. It is possible to suggest that Heyst’s responses are, to a great extent, determined by his past experiences and not having had the experience of genuine attachment for another person, Heyst cannot trust his feelings for her (Raval 1980: 425). Having “never killed a man or loved a woman – not even in his thoughts, not even in his dreams” (212), Heyst proves disastrously incapable of rising to the challenge when confronted with the prospect of engaging in both actions. For the sceptical Heyst, love and murder are passions that keep one ensnared to life, and he separates himself from others who are possessed by such passions. Since the days of his youth, Heyst had been used to “seeing life outside the flattering optical delusion of everlasting hope, of conventional self-deceptions, of an ever-expected happiness” (122). Yet with Lena, he realizes “his sceptical mind was dominated by the fullness of his heart” (125). Nevertheless, his deep rooted attachment issues in addition to the negative prior learning imparted by his father prevent him from trusting and committing to Lena fully. Arguably, it is Heyst’s lack of assertiveness both as a man and as a lover that accounts for his fatal indifference to the intruders - the evil trio sent by Schomberg to the island in search for a rumoured treasure - that

prevents him from acting in the present, thereby contributing to the tragic outcome.

Overcome with the desire to prove her love for him and make him reciprocate, Lena sacrifices her life to save his. In the words of Knowles:

The progress of this female, waif-like “child of the streets” is one of becoming conscious of her destiny as a woman and of her female powers: she is driven by overpowering instinct - by a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose; she practices the arts of dissimulation to gain indirect mastery of a situation in which Heyst is pathetically inactive, and the victory is specifically presented as a womanly victory, the victory of the female who has been prompted not by her will, but by a force that was outside of her and more worthy. (1975: 5)

Lena craves intimacy, but the inconsistently available Heyst never makes her feel safe and secure in their relationship. Heyst clearly values his freedom and autonomy more than his relationship with Lena and fails to appreciate her efforts. Consequently, Heyst and Lena are tragically caught up in a repeating pattern whereby the closer Lena wants to get the more Heyst withdraws. Neither can Heyst quell her fears and insecurities by taking constructive action – showing or telling that he ‘loves’ her. As an avoidant, Heyst has difficulty talking about what’s going on between him and Lena, not even sharing with her the terrible suspicion that she might be unfaithful. Heyst’s increasing aloofness and alarming silences only serve to activate Lena’s vigilant attachment system, leading her to take the very drastic and desperate action of sacrificing her life to ‘prove’ to Heyst that she loves him. As Harrington maintains “Lena’s death did indeed fulfill Heyst’s desire to be left alone in the image of his father and not to be subject to his emotions; and, yet, in typical Conradian irony, it is only through her death that he realizes his desire to be intimate with another person to relieve his profound solitude. Heyst can transcend neither his father’s “wrecked philosophy” nor his hidden fears about the danger presented by female sexuality until it is too late and no semblance of their Edenic idyll can be recovered” (2017: 90).

Similar to Heyst, the protagonist of *An Idle Man* never feels secure or at home in the presence of other people who he dismisses as hypocritical and selfish. His subsequent alienation from society does not however bring him any peace of mind since he desperately longs for a companion who will cure his loneliness. Unlike Heyst who seeks shelter in the remote corners of the world, C. is a big city dweller who suffers from loneliness in the crowd. He says: “Ever since I saw the hypocrisy, phoniness, ridiculousness of society’s values, I have been looking for the only handle that’s not ridiculous, true love”² (Atılğan 2017: 183).

The famous Turkish poet and critic Can Yücel considers the novel to be “the drama of a man who has not yet reached psychological freedom; the freedom to choose one’s actions and the depression that follows can only come after one achieves this psychological freedom. This young man has psychological prejudices that make it impossible for him to act freely” (in Yüksel 1992: 151). Yücel adds that the *An Idle Man* depicts the story of a guy who cannot grow up and become a man due to his psychological complexes (161). Like Heyst, C. has cut himself off of society and tries to keep his interactions with people to a bare minimum. He is a drifter who lacks a particular goal, occasionally spending his time in bohemian circles hanging out with artists and actors. C. also harbors a profound contempt for ordinary people who lead habitual lives and is terrified of the possibility that he might be turned into one of them one day. According to him: “The only thing people who live under the same roof have in common is that they believe in the necessity of living together... I do not believe that. All I need is a single person; the society comprised of two people who make love. Since we are social beings, isn’t the best form of society this narrow, problem-free society of two? (134).

Although C. is quite literally obsessed with finding this dream woman who would be his secure base, his relationships with real

² All translations from Turkish to English are made by the author of this article.

women reveal that he shies away from commitment. Thus, when his girlfriend Güler mentions her dream of living in a three bedroom flat, a kitchen and two children - a girl and a boy – he quickly decides that she is not the right person for him. What freaks him out even more than the prospect of being trapped in a conventional marriage is dealing with the emotions of women. When he tells Güler that he would not want her to think about him often, she responds by saying “I cannot do that because I love you”. The ease with which Güler expresses her love for him takes C. by surprise and leads him to think that people attribute different meanings and values to concepts such as love. If people mean different things when referring to the same concepts, they are practically speaking different languages he concludes (89). Elsewhere, when Güler asks him why he is so pessimistic, he answers: “Why are you not? Don’t you see the world around you?” (97).

In fact, C. is quite simply looking for a female version of himself; a woman who thinks, feels and loves alike (183). His relentless search for this elusive woman is motivated by his belief that it is only through union with her that he will achieve wholeness and self-actualization. Thus, as Özher remarks, his search for this ideal woman who will complete him is simultaneously a journey of self-discovery (2006: 129). As C.’s story aptly illustrates, embracing the notion of the “perfect” partner is one of the most powerful tools an avoidant can use to keep someone at bay (Levine and Heller 2010: 60). And C.’s belief that the right person is just around the corner is his way of undermining himself in love. Although his relationship with the painter Ayşe with whom he reunites following a brief break-up seems to be more promising, C. cannot help falling back to his habitual patterns eventually. Ayşe certainly seems to be a closer match for C. since she shares his contempt for the conventional norms of society and seems to have a better understanding of him as an individual, yet C. finds himself gradually drifting away from her soon after he declares his love and then opens up to her about his life.

When pressed by Ayşe to reveal more about himself, C. decides to tell his story. “Everything you see in me” he says “begins with my father” (149). In fact, C.’s personality is largely shaped by the enduring hatred he feels for his father who fails miserably both as a parent and role model. As the owner of a prolific real estate business, C.’s father neglects his home and rarely shows any affection towards his son. In fact, C.’s most vivid memory of his father is him saying “put the kid to bed” to his aunt Zehra, his mother’s sister, so that he can enjoy some privacy with her. Although C. learns - at an early age - that his father is an incurable sex addict who sleeps around with various women including their maids, he is deeply scarred when he finds out that he also sleeps with his aunt. Having lost his mother when he was only one year old, C. is brought up by his aunt to whom he feels deeply attached. This aunt, who also embodies C.’s conception of the ideal/unattainable woman, is sexually harassed by C.’s loathsome father who represents the brutal, domineering and suppressive aspect of masculinity. Growing up, C. witnesses his father having sex or sexually harassing women on several occasions and feels disgusted with everything he stands for. Whenever he walks on his father simply out of spite, he is slapped by him. And whenever he comes back from school with scars and bruises, his father says: “This kid will never become a man”. Hearing this would fill C’s heart with joy since he really does not want to become a man anyway if that means becoming like his father. C. also decides to get higher education simply because his father, who wants him to become a businessman like him, does not want him to do so. Traumatized by the treatment he is subjected to as well as the graphic scenes he is exposed to throughout his formative years, C. vows at a very young age never to become a man like his moustache wearing, womanising father, yet there is plenty of evidence in the novel to suggest that he clearly is made by the father he rejects. As Ugurlu argues, C.’s “opposition against the established order” is not without its internal contradictions since his ability to sustain his “idle” lifestyle is made possible by the opportunities provided by his father’s legacy. No matter how much C. hates and rejects him “The dead father shows up like a shadow almost

in every phase of his son’s daily life and plays an important role in his plans related to the future” (2007: 1720).

In short, C.’s childhood experiences of physical and emotional abuse shape his personality and contribute to personality disorders in him that damage all his relationships, particularly those with women. In his Freudian reading of the novel, Yiğit Smbl suggests that “what C. seeks from women is actually a combination of maternal compassion and sexual satisfaction; in which he is always doomed to fail” (2013: 1405). Everytime he gets closer with a romantic partner, C. feels they are encroaching on him and fears being engulfed. So although he desperately wants to meet “the one”, he somehow “always finds some fault in the other person or in the circumstances that makes commitment impossible” (Levine and Heller 2010:100). His partners do their best to communicate their needs but C. either does not seem to get the message or else ignores it. As an avoidant, he is “quick to think negatively about his partners, seeing them as needy or overly dependent but ignores his own needs and fears about relationships” (111). He thus employs a number of deactivating strategies, such as chasing a phantom woman that does not seem to exist, avoiding physical closeness, pulling away when things are going well, in order to suppress his attachment system, squelch intimacy and sabotage his relationships (112-113). Simply put, he is for ever caught up in the vicious cycle of getting closer and withdrawing, believing all along that once he finds “the one”, he will effortlessly connect on a totally different level.

To conclude, both Heyst and C. are encumbered by an overwhelming amount of interpersonal stress that is chronic. As I have argued throughout, both characters typically exhibit an avoidant attachment style which determines, to a great extent, what they expect in relationships, how they interpret romantic situations and how they behave with their romantic partners (Levine and Heller 2010: 112). Whether they are single or involved in a relationship, both Heyst and C. are always manoeuvring to keep people at a distance in order to protect their autonomy. The experience of closeness with women, in particular,

activates the part of them that is ensconced in their memory of relational trauma and makes it impossible for them to enjoy lasting emotional intimacy. As a result, “they feel a deep-rooted aloneless, even while in a relationship” (116). As their stories show, even when they connect with their partners, they always maintain some mental distance and (possibly) an escape route (111). It comes as no surprise that their inability to successfully accommodate physical and emotional proximity to a lover leads to relationship dysfunction. However, it would be wrong to assume that these characters are simply devoid of the need to meaningfully connect with a significant other. It is rather their inability to acknowledge and come into terms with their emotional needs that inevitably lead to an impasse in their romantic relationships. In the words of Levine and Heller: “Feeling close and complete with someone else – the emotional equivalent of finding home – is a condition that they find difficult to accept” (111). Simply put, their unacknowledged emotions and emotional needs run their lives. To conclude, in the words of Heyst: “Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love – and to put its trust in life” (410).

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As profoundly self-conscious and reflective men, Axel Heyst in Joseph Conrad's Victory and C. in Yusuf Atılgan's Idle Man are immobilized and incapacitated by their excessive reflective faculty and suffer from disappointment in their romantic relationships due to their avoidant attachment styles. Lacking a caring mother figure who could provide them with loving compassion, they are brought up by emotionally unavailable fathers who are clearly not attuned to the needs of their sons. So while growing up their attachment needs are clearly not met by their primary caregiver who neglects and occasionally abuses them instead. Growing up to become "avoidant" adults, they experience problems with intimacy, invest little in social and romantic relationships and are unable or unwilling to share thoughts and feelings with others.

Joseph Conrad's Victory (1915) explores the plight of the morally sensitive individual in a corrupt, fallen world. Axel Heyst, the son of a Swedish philosopher who is described as "the destroyer systems, of hopes, of beliefs" (Conrad 1995: 175), resolves to lead a life in accordance with the philosophy of his father, whose dying injunction to him was to "look on - make no sound" (175). Having inherited his father's intellectual pessimism, Heyst lacks the spontaneity of the natural man of action and chooses a life of drifting free of attachments or goals. Although Heyst believes that his chosen path will render him "invulnerable because elusive", his impulsive involvement first with Morrison and then with Lena prove otherwise. Lena, with whom Heyst experiences "the awakening of a tenderness, indistinct and confused as yet, towards an unknown woman" (150), offers him a way out of his morbid nihilism. However, Heyst is disastrously incapable of making the vital moves to protect her and himself when he succumbs to his habitual weary fatalism at moments of crisis.

Published in 1959, Yusuf Atılgan's An Idle Man explores the existential drama of a similarly thoughtful, depressed young man who is desperately looking for love in the big city. Emasculated by a consciousness that has grown separate from itself, C. spends his days searching for a kindred spirit who will complete him and endow his otherwise pointless existence with meaning. Burdened by his catastrophizing imaginative faculty and intellectualism, C. is an idler who lives on the money left to him by a father he passionately loathes. Despising the society in which he lives and the people he interacts with, he remains a solitary individual who finds a 'safe' haven in his shell, his personal and portable hell. C. is alienated from others as well as himself and suffers from a profound sense of existential ennui and attachment trauma which paralyzes his efforts to connect with others. Ultimately, C.'s extreme self-absorption condemns him to a life of perpetual boyhood while his "masculinity" remains troubled at best.

Both Heyst and C. are encumbered by an overwhelming amount of interpersonal stress that is chronic. Whether they are single or involved in a relationship, both Heyst and C. are always manoeuvring to keep people at a distance in order to protect their autonomy. The experience of closeness with women, in particular, activates the part of them that is ensconced in their memory of relational trauma and makes it impossible for them to enjoy lasting emotional intimacy. As their stories show, even when they connect with their partners, they always maintain some mental distance and (possibly) an escape route (Levine and Heller 2010: 111). It comes as no surprise that their inability to successfully accommodate physical and emotional proximity to a lover leads to relationship dysfunction. However, it would be wrong to assume that these characters are simply devoid of the need to meaningfully connect with a significant other. It is rather their inability to acknowledge and come into terms with their emotional needs that inevitably lead to an impasse in their romantic relationships. In what follows, I will examine comparatively the psychological dynamics underlying Heyst's and C.'s avoidant attachment styles and explore how their gender performances are fraught with anxieties and insecurities. Ultimately, I argue that the traumatic deprivations of Heyst's and C.'s childhoods significantly hamper their ability to form strong and lasting emotional bonds, making it impossible for them to find satisfaction in romantic relationships.