

***HEART OF DARKNESS:***  
**THE UNCONVENTIONAL ADVENTURE STORY**

by

Gail Fowler  
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## APPROVAL

Name: Gail Fowler

Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis: Heart of Darkness: The Unconventional Adventure Story

Examining Committee:

Chair: **Dr. Tom Grieve**  
Associate Professor, English (SFU)

---

**Dr. Margaret Linley**  
Senior Supervisor  
Assistant Professor, English (SFU)

---

**Dr. Colette Colligan**  
Second Reader  
Assistant Professor, English (SFU)

---

**Dr. Ilya Vinkovetsky**  
External Examiner  
Assistant Professor, History Dept. (SFU)

---

Date Defended/Approved: August 26, 2008



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## Abstract

This research re-situates *Heart of Darkness* within the contexts of the English adventure fiction genre during the period of high imperialism and brings to light a feature of the novel that has escaped scholarly analysis, that of the racialization of white Europeans. In re-situating *Heart of Darkness* in its literary historical contexts, this thesis identifies the adventure genre as a whole as more complex and ambivalent concerning both race and Empire than has previously been recognized. Although these inconsistencies complicate the genre, adventure fiction nonetheless reinforces the status of whiteness in order to promote contemporary racial hierarchies and imperialism. *Heart of Darkness*, however, does not. Conrad presents his adventure story and its white heroes with a substantial degree and frequency of unconventionality that both critiques imperialism and disrupts its promotion. Moreover, through his unconventional representation of whiteness, Conrad generates a rather startling ambivalence toward white racial identity.

**Keywords:** Adventure, Imperialism, Race, Whiteness, Journey, Narrative

**Subject Terms:** Conrad, Joseph, 1857-1924

Adventure stories, English – History and criticism

Imperialism in literature

White race in literature

Whiteness in literature

Journey Narrative

*To my family, including Jake,  
who have supported me and been so understanding  
during my own long and adventurous journey.  
They have made all the difference.*

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## Introduction

“This after all is a story for boys yet - - - -.”<sup>1</sup>

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, 1902

“Exactly. Out of the material of a boys’ story I’ve made *Youth* by the force of the idea expressed in accordance with a strict conception of my method.”<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Conrad, 1902

According to Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, which appeared as the second story in the three-story volume *Youth* in 1902, belongs within the genre of adventure fiction. “Boys’ stories” are not mere childish entertainment, however. At the height of their popularity (selling millions of copies each year), which coincided with the period of “high” or “formal” imperialism,<sup>3</sup> which extended from approximately the last quarter of the nineteenth-century through the first decade of the twentieth century, adventure fiction performed definitive functions in Great Britain. During this time, intense rivalries developed between European nations for new imperial possessions, and they competed fiercely with each other to acquire as much territory and as many imperial subjects as quickly as possible.<sup>4</sup> Africa became a locus for that imperial competition in what became known as “The Scramble for Africa.”

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Dryden, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1, the section entitled, “Conventions of the Adventure Genre I,” starting at approximately page 24 for a complete discussion of the historical context of “formal” or “high” imperialism and its connection to adventure fiction.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, for example, acquired an additional 5 million square miles and 88 million new subjects in the last 30 years of the nineteenth-century. (Johnson, Robert. *British Imperialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 4.)



The adventure genre engaged with this political and historical moment directly as the ideologies of imperialism and white racial identity (whiteness) are foregrounded in adventure fiction. These stories, however, take a pro-imperial position, and indeed promote Empire as well as representations of whiteness as racially superior. Moreover, these concepts are presented as stable. In part, that stability in the adventure genre is achieved through a heavy reliance on character as well as a traditional narrative and plot structure. The narrative structure may or may not include a frame narrator, but that structure is uncomplicated and precisely chronological, and the plot consistently depicts white men who embark on an imperial journey, undergo significant personal and physical transformations that make them “gentlemen” and “manly men” as a result, “save” the natives, and return home triumphantly to Britain. Adventure stories not only project the numerous benefits of Empire to natives<sup>5</sup> and white men (and their incredible, almost unbelievable superiority of whiteness), but the stories also project these elements with sufficient consistency and repetition that form a self-reinforcing stability. The adventure genre is neither monolithic nor simplistic, however, as inconsistencies do exist. Among the most significant of these inconsistencies are representations of the Other and hybrid figures that reflect an ambivalence concerning race. White heroes and secondary characters also occasionally consist of some imperfection, but these variations ultimately do not disrupt the overall positive representation of whiteness and Empire.

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<sup>5</sup> Given the contextual nature of this discussion, black Africans are referred to as “natives.” Although I personally have an aversion to the derogatory term, its use has historical and contextual significance. Much of the discussion in this paper revolves around the nineteenth-century racial hierarchies and the abuse of power that was exercised by the labeling of Africans in ways that diminished their humanity. To negate its use would deprive the discussion of a full understanding of how these hierarchies functioned.

Although Conrad wrote his adventure story<sup>6</sup> in the historical context of “high” imperialism and the literary context of the adventure genre, a genre that is infused with dominant racial and imperial ideology, *Heart of Darkness* is a most unconventional adventure story in that it generates significant ambivalence around the dominant ideologies of imperialism and the white racial identity that was used to justify it. It is only by resituating *Heart of Darkness* within its original publication context of the adventure genre, which itself consists of some inconsistencies, that we can identify Conrad’s unconventionality and, more significantly, how that unconventionality functions as a critique of race and imperialism. As an adventure story, *Heart of Darkness* does conform to the most basic elements of the adventure genre. His “heroes,” Marlow and Kurtz, are English (or, in Kurtz’s case, partially English but educated in and allied with Britain) and of a higher social class, or they at least occupy an exceptional status. Both men embark on the requisite journey around which all adventure stories revolve. In part, Marlow’s journey even involves participation in a rescue quest, a common structure in the genre. Their motivations for embarking on the journey also conform to the standard imperial incentives: the transformation of the self, wealth, Christian benevolence, and excitement. Once Conrad establishes these foundations in *Heart of Darkness*, enough for the novel to be recognized by its readers as an adventure story, Conrad shifts the form of his presentation to the acutely unconventional.

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, “adventure stories” and the “adventure genre” refer specifically to literature written in Great Britain. The adventure genre was extremely popular in both Europe and the United States, and consumers read the stories of other nationals in large numbers. Given that “race” in the nineteenth-century was associated with ethnicity as well as race and that racial representations in adventure stories are a primary feature of the genre, this differentiation of “English adventure stories” must be made as it bears relevance to the discussions of “white race” herein.

The incredibly superior racial qualities of whiteness, including moral, spiritual, and physical qualities, and the beneficial aspects of imperialism that are depicted with relative consistency in the adventure genre are nonexistent in *Heart of Darkness*. These overall characterizations of white superiority, despite the occasional inconsistency in the genre, justify the racial hierarchies in these stories, and the hierarchies in Britain itself. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, Conrad displaces the standard hero and white racial representations with negative, denunciatory projections of white characters who are presented in every stage of moral and physical decay that reveals their hypocrisy, corruption, complicity, and malevolence. Even the most deceptively benign characters, such as the Chief Accountant, the Russian Harlequin, and Marlow's "excellent" aunt, are unconventionally ridiculous and ambiguous for white characters, and their very presence in or association with the imperial world, and within the genre, are anachronistic and serve as a disruptive influence.

Given that all these characters are positioned directly or indirectly as agents or supporters of imperialism, these derogatory representations of their character function as a critique of the actions and complicity of whites in imperialism. Marlow's innumerable rebukes of their character and actions focus almost exclusively upon some facet of their imperial work or devotion. Although their characterization is integrally linked to imperialism, Conrad seems to move beyond a critique of imperialism only. The critique of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* allows us to see that the genre is constituted fundamentally by a concept of whiteness. Within the context of the nineteenth-century, the ideology of whiteness is problematic, however, in that the category of a "white race" did not exist as such. White Europeans defined the different ethnicities in Europe as disparate "races." Hence, there was the "English race," the "French race," the "German

race,” and so on. This categorization facilitated the creation of a hierarchy of whiteness in which individual “races” inevitably positioned themselves at the top of the hierarchy.

The meaning of “race” with reference to white Europeans thus became highly charged with ideological and political meaning. Racial discourse was often relative to those who participated in the debate, and the racial hierarchy of whiteness significantly excluded some groups who, in the twenty-first century, would be classified as white. English racial discourse, for example, often excluded Irish Catholics as “white,” as well as Europeans from Central or Eastern Europe. Definitions of whiteness are often gendered and classed, as well, and are thus problematized further by the exclusion of women and those of the lower social classes. Although the “definition” of “whiteness” in the English adventure genre is not explicit, we can infer its categorization based upon textual evidence. Given that limitation, “whites” in adventure fiction tend to be English, classed, and most often male.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, specific social classes are not excluded from the category of whiteness, nor are women, particularly given that women occupy prominent and suggestive positions in *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, such projections of whiteness in *Heart of Darkness* produce substantial and compelling ambivalence surrounding white racial identity itself. Conrad does not merely represent

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<sup>7</sup> Although white men in adventure fiction are not necessarily aristocratic or wealthy, they are not of the lower classes. (Even Joseph, Meredith’s white man-servant in *With Edged Tools* appears to be middle-classed.) White women appear infrequently in adventures, and their absence may imply a kind of negation of their whiteness. Significantly, however, when white women do appear in adventure stories, their race is always of consequence as they are often held in opposition to black women with whom white men are sometimes sexually involved.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 2, the section entitled “Women, the Lie, and Imperialism” for a discussion on Marlow’s treatment of women; Chapter 3, the section entitled “The Unconventional Journey and Its Unconventional Rewards,” for a discussion of miscegenation; and Chapter 4, the section entitled “The Unconventionality and Ambivalence of ‘Whiteness’” for a discussion on the anachronistic presence of women in *Heart of Darkness* and the culpability of women in imperial crimes.

these characters negatively but generates considerable instability in their racial identity through the incredible frequency with which all whites are impugned and the myriad of erratically shifting yet symbolic adjectives and metaphors used to present them.

While Conrad derides the agents of imperialism, implying an inherent flaw in the imperial system, he makes a more direct critique of imperialism itself as he provides ample evidence of its horrific operation and influence. Adventure stories typically extol the virtues of imperialism, primarily the benefit it serves to the natives, despite the presumed necessity to kill the “evil” natives among them, as well as the rewards — personal, social, financial, physical and sexual — that it provides to imperial adventurers which motivated their “going out there” in the first place. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, Conrad deprives imperialism of any semblance of the conventional, philanthropic benefits for the natives and, significantly, strips his novel of the singularly unvarying benefits for the white adventurers. Natives are brutalized, deculturated, and murdered without recourse. And white adventurers are manipulated, ostracized and conspired against, and startlingly and die miserable and penniless.

The shock and horror with which Marlow recounts his experiences attest to the genocidal effects of white men in Africa. The details of those crimes are themselves revealing, but this sense of shock and horror, as it is reflected in Marlow’s intense descriptions, frequent hesitations, erratic speech, and indeed the entire nightmarish and fragmented way in which the narrative of Marlow and Kurtz’s experiences are revealed, compound the ambivalence that the novel generates toward imperialism and whiteness. This sense of ambivalence and uncertainty is created in large part by Conrad’s unconventional application of modernism to a very traditional and conventional literary genre. As an adventure story, *Heart of Darkness* is on some level disappointing as a

result of its unconventionality. Certainly, the contemporary critics of the novel mention with varying degrees of displeasure Conrad's complicated and interruptive narrative style that frustrated the readers' "quest of happenings."<sup>9</sup>

Although the novel contains many elements of modernism, and it has been evaluated frequently as such, it nonetheless was clearly situated within the adventure genre in its original publication. Both its publishers and critics identified *Heart of Darkness* as an adventure story, often referred to contemporarily as "boys stories" (see Chapter 1). As the quotation at the opening of this introduction indicates, Conrad purposefully wrote an adventure story. The "strict conception of [his] method" may very well have been an allusion to his use of the modernist techniques and forms. Conrad's use of modernist elements may have been an attempt to move the adventure novel into the modernist genre in an attempt to unite the two literary forms. Nonetheless, the unstable result of that unification creates significant ambivalence and instability with respect to contemporary white racial identity and imperialism. This depiction of instability and ambivalence through modernist techniques in turn supplements Conrad's more direct critique of imperialism and white complicity in it.

Conrad's use of modernist techniques on the traditional features of the adventure genre extends to the journey motif and narrative form as well. The physical journeys of Marlow and Kurtz are highlighted by varying forms of immobility, diversion, distortion, and ambivalence that result in a disruption of the traditional journey. The conventional rewards that are so essential to the story plot and the stability of the adventure genre fail to be realized in *Heart of Darkness*. Notably, these rewards as well as the benefits to the

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<sup>9</sup> Unsigned review, "Some Stories by Joseph Conrad," *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art*, 4 April 1903, 224. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 172.

natives are represented with more consistency than any other aspect in the adventure genre. One of these rewards, the way in which white men are transformed into “gentlemen” and “manly men,” is presented in *Heart of Darkness* as ambivalent, distorted, and inconclusive as both of Conrad’s heroes are transformed into unconventional and undesirable entities. Just as their physical and inner journeys are disrupted, the narrative structure is itself in a similar ambivalent and disrupted state as both Marlow and the frame narrator incessantly interrupt the narrative. Kurtz’s narrative is even more fractured and indeed perverse than Marlow’s, as Kurtz’s story is told to Marlow in bits and pieces, out of sequence, and by many individuals, so that a unified individual is impossible to identify. Certainly, white identity, as signified by *all* of Conrad’s white characters, is fractured and ambivalent.

Recognizing the extent of Conrad’s unconventional ambivalence toward whiteness and imperialism (and their seeming critique) requires re-situating *Heart of Darkness* in its original historical context, nineteenth-century Great Britain, and its original literary context, the adventure genre. Once we establish the historical context, a specific historical moment in which imperialism and, more specifically, the increasing pressures and tensions of formal imperialism, were infused in the social, cultural, political and economic fabric of Europe, we can better determine how Conrad engages with imperialism. By identifying the literary conventions of and the inconsistencies within the adventure genre in similar works of adventure fiction, as well as the ideologies that they advocate and complicate, we are able to situate Conrad’s work in relation to them, specifically where he conforms to these genre norms and ideologies and where he deviates from them.

The adventure stories that are discussed in this paper are all British novels that were published in the late nineteenth-century and feature white heroes who journey to Africa. Two of these novels, George Alfred Henty's *By Sheer Pluck, A Tale of the Ashanti War* and Henry Seton Merriman's *With Edged Tools*, conform to the conventions with a significant degree of consistency. The genre conventions and ideologies are also easily identified in Henry Rider Haggard's novels, *She, A History of Adventure* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Moreover, the dominant ideologies of imperialism and race are fairly evident in these novels. The adventure genre is, however, not monolithic. Both Merriman and Haggard suggest some racial ambivalence in their representations of the hybrid figures, Durnovo and Ayesha, as well as some ambivalence toward imperialism as one of Merriman's heroes, Guy Osgard, and one of Haggard's heroes, Leo Vincey, do not return to Britain but continue to journey abroad. In establishing the norms and inconsistencies in the primary texts, the analysis then moves to an examination of *Heart of Darkness* in relation to these historical and literary conventions. This analysis focuses particularly on character, the rewards of imperialism for whites (social mobility, transformation of the inner and physical self, financial gain, and sex), the benefits (detriment) for natives, disease, communication and voice, narrative structure and language, and the journey motif. Through this analysis, I initially determine Conrad's conformity and then his unconventionality. Subsequently, I analyze Conrad's unconventional representations and structures in order to determine their significance, specifically how his unconventionality generates ambivalence toward the genre itself and, more significantly, white racial identity and imperialism and how it critiques imperialism.

Although scholarship has been thorough in its analysis of *Heart of Darkness* in terms of imperialism and race, at least with respect to African race, scholarship is limited



in its consideration of *Heart of Darkness* within its original publication genre, adventure fiction. As a result, significant generic, historical, racial, and imperial issues in both the adventure genre and *Heart of Darkness* have yet to be analyzed. Linda Dryden and Andrea White have completed the most comprehensive scholarly work on the adventure genre and Conrad's placement within the genre. Their analyses have been limited, however, by the perspective that the adventure genre is a formulaic structure with consistently superior white heroes and their focus on Conrad's early novels rather than *Heart of Darkness* specifically.

Recontextualizing *Heart of Darkness* in its original publication form, however, opens previously unrecognized features of the novel and the adventure genre itself. Scholarship with respect to the adventure genre as a whole has, for the most, been neglectful.<sup>10</sup> The analysis of *Heart of Darkness* within the adventure genre has similarly been overlooked. Analyzing *Heart of Darkness* within its original historical and genre context, allows us to see the adventure genre as whole as more ambivalent and complex, particularly with respect to race and Empire, than scholars have previously thought. Moreover, given the historical relevance of these works, the inseparable connections between literature and Empire, the racial and imperial ambivalence that these novels clearly contain provides new insight into contemporary social and ideological perspectives. It thus opens up new avenues for research into the genre as a whole.

By recontextualizing *Heart of Darkness* in its historical moment and genre format, we are provided with far greater insight into its methods, ambivalence, and critiques.

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<sup>10</sup> This scholarly neglect has occurred mostly because scholars have relegated adventure literature to "popular fiction" and as such consider it unworthy of serious scholarship. *Heart of Darkness*, however, has long been considered "literature" rather than adventure fiction and this has resulted in its exhaustive analysis outside of the adventure genre.

Although scholars have, for example, analyzed imperialism in the novel and identified Conrad's critique, these mostly decontextualized approaches fail to appreciate the full extent and significance of his attempt to critique imperialism, whether successful or not. Given the historical context of the adventure genre, that consisted of the increasing preeminence and urgency of Empire during the period of formal imperialism, Conrad's critique acquires greater significance. In comparing *Heart of Darkness* with similar works in the genre and recognizing these novels' own ambivalence concerning Empire and race, we can better situate Conrad's ambivalence through his methodical unconventionality. While other adventure stories express ambivalence toward race and Empire, ultimately they advocate the racial hierarchy and imperialism, whereas *Heart of Darkness* seems to subvert them.

My approach, moreover, opens the complex issue of whiteness. Aside from discussions of whites with respect to imperialism, the concept of whiteness is a largely unexplored area of *Heart of Darkness*. While scholars have examined *Heart of Darkness* exhaustively in terms of black race (see Chapter 1), the issue of white race has been significantly overlooked. *Heart of Darkness*, like other adventure stories however, is infused with contemporary racial ideologies. Other adventure stories project white racial superiority with considerable consistency, and although minor variations occur in white characters, inevitably the stability and naturalness of the racial hierarchy are confirmed by the dominant image of whiteness. Conrad, however, represents whiteness, without exception, in unconventionally derogatory and ambivalent ways. Within this literary context, Conrad's unconventionality with respect to whiteness, therefore, takes on much greater significance. Moreover, the historical context of nineteenth-century Britain, a period in which the racial hierarchy was "officially" deemed in dominant discourses as

stable and intact, heightens the significance of Conrad's unconventional representations of whiteness. Indeed, within the adventure genre and the historical period, Conrad's racial unconventionality seems profound. This provides my analysis with not only a literary but a historical dimension that informs upon the presumed concepts and stability of race in nineteenth-century Great Britain. It provides new insight into contemporary social, cultural, racial and political discourse on both race and the imperialism that the racial superiority was supposed to justify. Clearly, views on whiteness and Empire were not as rigid as previously believed.

Chapter 1 reviews the overall scholarship of *Heart of Darkness* and identifies where it has been limited with respect to the adventure genre, imperialism and whiteness. The chapter analyzes both the current scholarship and the contemporary reviews of *Heart of Darkness* from its first 1902 publication in novel form. The chapter then identifies the adventure genre conventions specifically by examining the four adventure novels, *By Sheer Pluck*, *A Tale of the Ashanti War*, *With Edged Tools*, *She*, *A History of Adventure* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Chapter 2 considers Marlow as an adventure hero and demonstrates how his unconventional characterization creates ambivalence around whiteness, imperialism, and the failure of the imperial journey, including the traditional transformation to a "heroic" identity. The chapter also analyzes the narrative structure and how that contributes to ambivalence around whiteness as well as analyzing voice and Marlow's unconventional engagement with women.

Chapter 3 considers the "hero" qualities of Kurtz and how his characterization and the severely fragmented narrative structure, which serves as a trope for both his corrupt character and unsuccessful journey, disrupt the representation of superior whiteness and imperialism. Given the significance of the rewards of Empire (personal, social, physical,

financial, and sexual), as well as the benefits for natives, in not only adventure fiction but other discourses of Empire, the chapter concludes with an examination of Conrad's compelling breaches of these specific conventions, including miscegenation, voice (as a symbol of white power and masculinity) and Kurtz's death. Although both Marlow and Kurtz are the primary focus of *Heart of Darkness*, consideration of their whiteness is fairly implicit as I analyze them mostly within the parameters of their position as adventure heroes and their imperial journeys. Chapter 4 thus considers more explicitly the significance and ramifications of Conrad's representations of whiteness as a racial category. Conrad seems to insist upon white racial ambivalence and the culpability of whites in the atrocities of imperialism as he impugns *all* his white characters. The chapter looks at the unconventional representation of whiteness in *Heart of Darkness* in terms of characterization, disease, communication and voice, narrative structure and language, and victimization. This analysis demonstrates the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* disrupts the stability of imperialism as a whole and imperial promotion. Moreover, chapter 4 in particular reveals the incredible level of contemporary ambivalence concerning white racial identity.

## Chapter 1

### The Context of *Heart of Darkness*

Following the initial reviews of *Heart of Darkness* as an adventure story in *Blackwood's Magazine* and in its first book printing, few critics or scholars have returned to Conrad's original genre context for writing and publication, that of adventure fiction. Instead, the majority of scholarship approaches *Heart of Darkness* from various literary perspectives that have decontextualized Conrad's work. Without a full comprehension of the adventure genre, its conventions, and its historical relevance, however, it is difficult to recognize the unconventionalities in *Heart of Darkness* and the ways in which they function as a critique and disruption of imperialism and race. Several scholars, Linda Dryden and Andrea White particularly, have attempted to re-situate *Heart of Darkness* in its original adventure genre context. Dryden focuses on the presumed adventure "formula" (see the first section of this chapter), and White considers the ways in which adventure fiction was consumed by its readers. But an analysis of their research indicates significant gaps still exist.

Representations of the adventure hero, his journey, and the genre narrative structure as they relate specifically to *Heart of Darkness* have not been addressed. Moreover, the racial representations of whiteness in *Heart of Darkness* have not been considered, despite the novella's frequent analysis in terms of race. *Heart of Darkness*, however, diverges from the standard adventure journey and its narrative structure, and these breaches of conventions disrupt the promotion of imperial participation. *Heart of Darkness* also deviates widely from the conventions of the hero and whiteness projected elsewhere in adventure fiction, and in so doing, the novella challenges the ethics and responsibility of imperialism and the acts committed in the name of entrepreneurship (one

prime motivation for imperialism being material gain). Significantly, these unconventionalities also challenge the dominant images of white racial identity.

Notably, the contemporary reviews of *Heart of Darkness* (see the second section of this chapter) in its first publication in book form identify a number of elements of unconventionality in the adventure story, yet these reviews do not attempt to account for them. This paper re-situates *Heart of Darkness* in this original historical and literary context and analyzes these unconventionalities and ambivalences as subversions of imperial and racial ideology that is promoted in the adventure genre. In re-situating *Heart of Darkness*, I analyze the conventions in Henry Rider Haggard's novels, *She, A History of Adventure* and *King Solomon's Mines*, G.A. Henty's novel *By Sheer Pluck, A Tale of the Ashanti War* and Henry Seton Merriman's novel *With Edged Tools*. All of these novels are, like *Heart of Darkness*, adventure stories published in the late nineteenth-century and feature white heroes who journey to Africa. Although these stories are fairly consistent in adhering to the adventure genre conventions, my analysis reveals that inconsistencies and ambivalence do exist. Nonetheless, these adventure novels ultimately advocate for Empire and its racial hierarchy. In analyzing these conventions and inconsistencies, we can more readily identify the unconventionality of *Heart of Darkness* as an adventure story. This unconventionality in *Heart of Darkness* both critiques and disrupts the representations of Empire and, significantly, of white racial identity. Clearly, neither Empire nor whiteness were stable ideologies.

### ***Heart of Darkness*, Adventure, and the Critical Tradition**

Although Conrad and his publishers, reviewers, and contemporary audience considered his novella as adventure fiction, post world-war literary scholars have

typically analyzed the work outside of the adventure genre. In part, this was probably due to scholars' relegation, or rather their demotion, of adventure literature to "popular" fiction. While works such as *She*, *A History of Adventure*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *With Edged Tools*, and *By Sheer Pluck, a Tale of the Ashanti War* were pushed beyond the boundaries of "literature" and serious scholarly consideration, *Heart of Darkness* was gradually deemed not to be an adventure at all. Ironically, some of the unconventional qualities of *Heart of Darkness*, such as its preoccupation with the psychological, the frequent interruptions that strip it of suspense, and long, stylistic descriptions, for which it was frequently criticized in its earliest publication, seem to have assisted in pushing it out of the genre of adventure and into the literary canon. Although some of the earliest reviewers of *Heart of Darkness* classified it as adventure, it was nonetheless considered to possess "literary" qualities which distinguished it from other adventure fictions, and it, therefore, seemed to occupy a privileged, although less popular, space apart from these works.

In 1946 F.R. Leavis differentiated it further by labeling *Heart of Darkness* one of the greatest short novels in the English language. Consequently, *Heart of Darkness* was considered less and less within the genre of adventure and more and more within various branches of literary criticism. Scholars since then have analyzed the novella to extensive degrees from the perspectives of modernism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and even feminism and Marxism.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, *Heart of Darkness* underwent significant

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Valdez Moses, Thomas Cousineau, and Yuan-Jung Cheng have considered *Heart of Darkness* as a modernist work. Michele Levy has analyzed *Heart of Darkness* as postmodern literature. Postcolonial analysis has been made by Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Harry Sewlall, J.U. Jacobs, Marcus Ramogale, Laura Chrisman, Lynda Prescott, and Niyi Osundare. Rebecca Stott and Ruth Robbins have written on *Heart of Darkness* from a feminist approach, while Chris Foss has approached the novella from a Marxist perspective.

decontextualization, including by Chinua Achebe and other subsequent scholars' in the late 1970s and 1980s whose critiques label *Heart of Darkness* and Joseph Conrad as racist.<sup>12</sup> Several scholars have also considered Conrad's attempt to subvert the dominant racial and imperial ideology<sup>13</sup>. But notably a number of these approaches also decontextualize the novella from the political and literary contexts within which it was written, and although they acknowledge a limited criticism of imperialism on Conrad's part, they assert that he should have done more.

Since the issue of racism was first asserted against the novella, a number of scholars have sought through various means to recontextualize the novella within the historical and literary contexts in which Conrad wrote and published.<sup>14</sup> Peter Edgerly Firchow considers how the era influenced the way in which Conrad "envisioned" or

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<sup>12</sup> In 1977 Chinua Achebe first asserted that Joseph Conrad was "a bloody racist" and that *Heart of Darkness* depicts Africans in racist ways. Following his publication, numerous scholars responded to Achebe, and the issue of racism has become a widely written approach to the novella. For additional analysis of African racial representation and racism see Susan Blake, Patrick Brantlinger, Robert Burden, Hugh Mercer Curtler, Seodial Deena, Peter Nazareth, Larry T. Shillock, Frances B. Singh, Dorothy Trench-Bonett, Ian Watt, and Cedric Watts.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Blake and Seodial Deena assert that Conrad fails to subvert those ideologies. Both Blake and Deena decontextualize *Heart of Darkness* in their criticism of its perceived anti-imperial failings. Patrick Brantlinger suggests that although *Heart of Darkness* can be interpreted as both anti-imperialist and advocating imperialism, inevitably the novella "cancels out its own best intentions" (Brantlinger, Patrick. "Heart of Darkness: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?" *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 1985 Fall; 27 (4): 363-385.)

<sup>14</sup> Hugh Mercer Curtler looks at Conrad's own personal history and experience under the domination of imperial Russia and his experience as a seaman in the service of the Societe Anonyme pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo, the Belgian colonial enterprise for which Conrad worked while he was in Africa. Ian Watt and Patrick Brantlinger have looked for authentic historical figures on whom Conrad may have based his characters, particularly Kurtz. Historian Adam Hochschild provides perhaps the most comprehensive historical analysis of *Heart of Darkness*. Hochschild examines evidence of Belgian atrocities perpetrated in Africa and relates it directly to the writing of Conrad and how the novella was utilized by Conrad's friends, politician Roger Casement and publisher E.D. Morel, in the Congo Reform Movement which was initiated about the time of its publication and sought to end the inhumane control by Leopold II of Belgium. Significantly, the Congo Reform Movement utilized *Heart of Darkness* and other correspondence from Joseph Conrad in their campaign with Conrad's permission (see footnote 27 and Hunt Hawkins).



imagined Africa, but Firchow neither considers the conventions of adventure and imperial literature, nor does he examine how contemporary writers envisioned Africa in their work. Instead, he looks at the *Aenid* and *Faust* (25), neither of which relate to contemporary views on imperialism and race. To a lesser degree, scholars have more recently returned to the relationship between *Heart of Darkness* and other contemporary literature in order to explore literary representations of Africa. Patrick Brantlinger, for example, examines a number of contemporary genres, including fiction and non-fiction, particularly travel and anthropological writings, in order to analyze dominant representations of Africans in imperial discourse. He discusses a number of adventure fictions, including Merriman's *With Edged Tools*, two of Haggard's major works, *She* and *King Solomon's Mines* as well as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. But he does so as a survey of racial representations of Africans and does not discuss the conventions of any particular genre, and specifically the conventions of adventure fiction, and is thus not concerned whether or not any specific work conforms to its genre, or the significance of such conformity and non-conformity.

Yet, it is conformity to the adventure genre which promotes imperialism and racial stereotypes, or rather Conrad's lack of conformity to the genre norms, which has yet to be examined. This subversion of the imperial and racial discourses and the ethics behind them were evidently important to Conrad, and recognition of his attempt to disrupt the genre and the promotion of imperialism in it, whether successful or not, provides a far greater insight into the novella than previously identified. Not only are new avenues of analysis opened for *Heart of Darkness*, but comparison and contrast with other works within the genre and an examination of the literary and historical contexts of these works reveal unexamined inconsistencies within the genre itself. This becomes evident when the

limited degree of scholarship on adventure fiction in general and *Heart of Darkness* as an adventure story is considered.

A few writers have refocused scholarly consideration of *Heart of Darkness* in relation to adventure fiction specifically and not merely to contemporary literature. Nonetheless, that analysis has not been done to a degree that recognizes either the subversive instances within the genre itself or the subversion in *Heart of Darkness*. Richard Ruppel, for example, provides a critique of similarities between *Heart of Darkness* and C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne's popular, exotic short story, "The Transfer," which was also published in magazine form. He notes the likenesses of the frame narrator on board a ship who tells about his journey into the Belgian Congo and the atrocities he witnessed there that were committed by an ivory trader who was "Fantee" or had "gone native." The jungle and native peoples also appear menacing as they do superficially in *Heart of Darkness*. Although the elements sound very similar to *Heart of Darkness*, Ruppel notes that the similarities end there. He points out how *Heart of Darkness* differs from Hyne's tale in terms of its condemnation of the economics of imperialism. But Ruppel's work is not concerned with the adventure conventions or with any other similarities or contrasts between Conrad's work and the genre. Instead, he merely demonstrates that mental breakdown in African stories is sometimes a feature of these stories and does not consider the complexities of the adventure genre form.

Bart Westerweel discusses *Heart of Darkness* in relation to *She*, but he concludes that the works are similar only with respect to the imperial gothic. He refers to the language of mystification utilized by both writers and the bond of male friendship which works against the power of the female Other. His discussion is somewhat superficial in its overemphasis of the story plots, and he ignores the morality and ethics projected in *Heart*

*of Darkness* as well as the representations of imperialism and race in both stories.

Tzvetan Todorov also argues that *Heart of Darkness* bears a superficial resemblance to an adventure story, but he goes so far as to claim that Conrad's novella is not an adventure at all. He points specifically to its lack of suspense and the internal conflict of Marlow as opposed to the external conflict which is the primary plot element of adventure.

Following through with this thesis, he considers the unconventionally low level of action, then examines *Heart of Darkness* in terms of Marlow's quest for knowledge and his inability and that of the readers to understand and "to know" either the meaning of the tale or the meaning of imperialism with certainty. Since he argues that the novella is not adventure at all, *Heart of Darkness* cannot be construed as a subversion of the genre. In excluding *Heart of Darkness* from the adventure genre, he, therefore, does not consider the adventure conventions beyond the limited degree of internal and external conflict. In so doing, an entire avenue with which to access *Heart of Darkness* is overlooked, and the adventure fiction genre is dismissed as a subversive form.

Linda Dryden and Andrea White have written the most comprehensive analyses of *Heart of Darkness* in terms of the adventure genre. Dryden devotes her book, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, to the conventions of imperial romance in Conrad's works and frequently elucidates upon its overlap with adventure fiction. She considers at length the formulaic hero, the superiority of Englishness, the similarity of plots (even providing a "formula" for the adventure novel), the othering of natives, the moralizing power of the Christian mission, and the return of the English hero to Britain. Notably, while she discusses the superiority of whites at length, she does not consider where representations of whiteness are inconsistent nor any significant inconsistency in the genre. While much of her work earlier in the book is useful in establishing the basic

foundation for adventure conventions, unfortunately her consideration of *Heart of Darkness* is essentially cursory as her book is concerned with Conrad's earlier Malay fictions and so fails to elaborate upon the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* conforms to this formula or, more importantly, where it subverts it. Some of this information may be extrapolated as applicable to the later *Heart of Darkness*, but that work of analyzing *Heart of Darkness* specifically in terms of adventure fiction and its subversion of these genre norms has yet to be done.

Andrea White has developed the most comprehensive analysis of the novella in terms of adventure fiction in her book, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject*. She, too, considers a number of Conrad's works but also devotes one chapter to *Heart of Darkness*. Her primary concern, however, appears to be how adventure fiction was consumed and the way in which it influenced its readers and encouraged them both to participate in the imperial project and to maintain the racial and imperial status quo. Both White and Dryden recognize *Heart of Darkness* as adventure and subscribe to the theory that adventure fiction promoted imperialism, but in analyzing adventure fiction, they do not recognize where the genre fails in this promotion. Although both scholars consider the genre a stable one with simplified plots and readily identifiable stereotyped characters, both white ones and black, neither White nor Dryden identifies the racial inconsistencies of whites, blacks and hybrids within the genre or in *Heart of Darkness*. Moreover, neither examines the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* promotes imperialism and, most significantly, how the novel's unconventionality subverts imperialism and its promotion. Although White identifies a number of conventions of adventure fiction earlier in her book and uses a number of adventure fictions to provide examples of those conventions (particularly *Allan*

*Quatermain*), when she gets to the chapter on *Heart of Darkness*, she does not analyze the novella either with reference to most of those conventions or in relation to other adventure fictions. Nor does she analyze how Kurtz, Marlow, or any other imperial character fails to manifest generic qualities of adventure heroes or racial whiteness. As well, she overlooks the subversion of the economic and personal incentives for imperialism which in *Heart of Darkness* seem to discourage rather than encourage readers to achieve such rewards for themselves.

### **Publication and Reception of *Heart of Darkness***

In the context of its original publication, *Heart of Darkness* was certainly considered in the genre of adventure fiction. When *Heart of Darkness* first appeared in serialized form in *Blackwood's Magazine* between February and April 1899, contemporary readers likely consumed and interpreted the novella in exactly that fashion. The initial source of publication, of course, encouraged this interpretation. *Heart of Darkness* was first published in the conservative and pro-imperial *Blackwood's Magazine* which prominently featured tales of exotic exploit and colonial adventure. Despite the magazine's very prestigious reputation, the magazine had a relatively small readership at that time with a circulation of only 6,000-7,000.<sup>15</sup> In addition to a solid base of pro-imperial civilian male readers and those employed outside of government, the magazine's readership consistently included large numbers of men from the military and civil service

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<sup>15</sup> William Atkinson notes that the readership of *Maga* "was wealthy, and it was cultivated in the sense that products of the British public school were a breed apart" (372). Although other magazines had wider circulation (*Cornhill* sold about 8,000 copies, the *Pall Mall* 35,000-40,000, and the *Strand* more than 300,000 in England alone), none were as widely subscribed to by the leading gentlemen's clubs as *Maga* (as *Blackwood's* was popularly known). He concludes that "it seems reasonable to conclude that the rich and influential read it and that like a library copy, one subscription would account for far more than one reader" (391).

ranks. It was a fact which did not escape Conrad himself as he wrote to his agent in 1911 concerning publication of his work in the magazine: "One was in decent company there and had a good sort of public. There isn't a single club and messroom and man-of-war in the British Seas and Dominions which hasn't its copy of *Maga*."<sup>16</sup> By a good sort of public, Conrad undoubtedly recognized that his adventure story was well received by that audience, particularly since it was primarily comprised of members of the military as well as civil, and entrepreneurial agents of the Empire who were undoubtedly familiar with and perhaps sympathetic to the adventure conventions he utilizes. Yet, the now-recognized anti-imperialism of *Heart of Darkness* was likely not identified by such readers as it certainly was not by its reviewers. David Finkelstein concludes that, given that Conrad's novella first appeared alongside pieces on Mountain Exploration in the Canadian Rockies, the struggle between France and Great Britain for control of Nigeria, and a narrative of a Malaysian woman caring for her leprous husband, contemporary readers "would not have seen it as anything less than the standard 'Blackwoodian' imperial adventure anecdote."<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, any reviews that may have been written about *Heart of Darkness* when it appeared in *Blackwood's* are no longer available. Nonetheless, given the subsequent publication format and history of *Heart of Darkness*, these later reviews likely reflect much of that earlier reception. Following its serialization in *Blackwood's*, *Heart of Darkness* was published in book form in 1902 and consisted of three short and novella-length stories: *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *The End of Tether* (in that order). It was

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<sup>16</sup> Frederick R. Karl & Laurence Davies, eds., *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Vol. 4 1908-1911*, (Cambridge 1990), p. 130 quoted in Finkelstein, David. "*Blackwood's Magazine Homepage*".

<sup>17</sup> Finkelstein, David. "*Blackwood's Magazine Homepage*".

collectively titled, *Youth and Other Stories*, after its first part. Nonetheless, this format structure also seemed to guarantee its reception as an adventure story as evidenced by the following reviews. Just as its appearance in the conservative and pro-imperial *Blackwood's Magazine* placed it in the midst of other tales of adventure and exotic imperial exploits, the opening and final adventure stories that surrounded *Heart of Darkness* in its first book publication similarly position *Heart of Darkness* as adventure fiction.

Certainly, contemporary reviewers consistently place *Heart of Darkness* within the genre of adventure fiction. Conrad's reviewers typically note the youth of the heroes, the journey motif, the exotic locations, the disparity between civilizations, as well as the romanticism and mystery of Conrad's adventure, and they often compare it to other adventure stories and writers.

Heart of Darkness" is, again the adventure of youth, an adventure more significant than the mere knockabout of the world. It is youth in the toils, a struggle with phantoms worse than the elements, 'a weary pilgrimage amongst hints of nightmares,' a destructive experience.

...

It must not be supposed that Mr. Conrad makes attack upon colonisation, expansion, even upon Imperialism. In no one is the essence of the adventurous spirit more instinctive. But cheap ideals, platitudes of civilisation are shrivelled [sic] up in the heat of such experiences. The end of this story brings us back to the familiar, reassuring region of common emotions, to the grief and constancy of the woman who had loved Kurtz and idealises his memory. It shows us how far we have travelled.

Those who can read these two stories in sympathy with Mr. Conrad's temperament will find in them a great expression of the world's mystery and romance. They show the impact upon an undaunted spirit of what is terrible and obscure; they are adventure in terms of experience; they represent the sapping of life that cannot be lived on easy terms.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Unsigned review, "Mr Conrad's New Book," *Manchester Guardian*, 10 December 1902, 3. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.:

The reviewer expounds upon what he perceives are Conrad's strongest qualities of adventure: youth, travel, struggles and experience, mystery and romance. Given that most adventure fictions consist of younger British heroes who gain experience through an adventurous journey abroad, the review recognizes these elements and places the story in its appropriate genre. Conrad's narrative, however, seemingly exceeds the common place adventure, that of "the mere knockabout of the world," and instead is comprised of the extraordinary. Consistent with the exoticism of adventure fiction, this reviewer also notes the "mystery and romance" in *Heart of Darkness*. His mention of phantoms, pilgrimages, and nightmares suggest a journey of the fantastic. Readers of Haggard's supernatural *She*, as well as the nightmarish Gagool and the extraordinary treasure cave and its booby traps in *King Solomon's Mines*, would perhaps, upon reading such a review, have drawn some similarity with Haggard. Moreover, the reviewer identifies Conrad's romanticization of the adventure journey, by the inclusion of Kurtz's Intended who waits for the "hero" to return home. The reviewer recognizes the essential element of the successful return home, and thus he positions *Heart of Darkness* as a typical adventure in which characters, Marlow at least, and the reader is brought back to the "familiar" and the "reassuring." According to this reviewer, the journey in *Heart of Darkness* is thus interpreted as concluding in conventional form with all the breaches of normality rectified. The reader and characters may "have travelled far," but normalcy is restored. Notably, however, the reviewer does not resolve the issue of the hero's death in Africa.

Travel, exotic locations and the experience of the journey in *Heart of Darkness* are emphasized in the contemporary reviews and allowed reviewers to place the novella unquestioningly in the realm of adventure.

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Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 168-9.



Telling tales, just spinning yarns, has gone out of fashion since the novel has become an epitome of everything a man has to say about anything. The three stories in *Youth* by Joseph Conrad are in this reference a return to an earlier taste. The yarns are of the sea, told with an astonishing zest; and given with vivid accumulation of detail and iterative persistency of emphasis on the quality of character and scenery. The method is exactly the opposite of Mr. Kipling's.<sup>19</sup>

The publication format as well as the settings and plot lend themselves to such a review. As the middle section of a three-story collection of novellas which all take place, to varying degrees, on board ships and boats far from Britain, *Heart of Darkness* could be classified as a sea yarn, a specific type of adventure fiction. Moreover, Marlow "spins his yarn" about his voyage to Africa and up the river to Kurtz on board the *Nellie*. The writer implies that Conrad's conventionality in the telling of the three stories also comprises a nostalgic and romanticized reminiscence for an era of adventure fiction now passed. Conrad, he suggests, has revitalized that sub-genre of adventure fiction. Yet, he still differentiates Conrad's method from that of Rudyard Kipling, who at times wrote ardently imperialistic work. Although the review is not wholly a criticism of Conrad, it nonetheless points out that, while Conrad's recent work is an adventure, it is not analogous to others of the genre.

Although contemporary reviewers frequently cite the novella's adventure qualities and place it in that genre, they also note its divergence from other adventures, even if they do not examine that divergence. Significantly, the difference is more than merely between individual writers, as noted in the review above between Conrad and Kipling. The difference is one in genre convention and expectations. Some reviewers lament the

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<sup>19</sup> "Unsigned review, "Youth," *The Times Literary Supplement*, No. 48, 12 December 1902, 372. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 169.

perceived shortcomings of *Heart of Darkness* as it consistently fails to adhere to the genre conventions and to deliver the kinds of plot development, action, and suspense that readers had come to expect in their adventures.

The three stories by Joseph Conrad in the volume called “Youth and Other Stories” are all of the sea, of strange lands and of abnormal human beings entrapped under abnormal conditions.

...

Apparently he wishes to move swiftly along his line of adventure toward his termination but his progress frequently is checked by the attacks of analytical modification that overcome him at quite regular intervals.

...

These little speeches which occur at — to the reader in quest of happenings — the most inopportune moments when a ship is burning or a man is dying, are undeniably loquacious, although usually [a]pposite enough. They sap one’s vitality of mind and cast the shadow of dullness over what otherwise would be stimulating.<sup>20</sup>

While the earlier review merely notes the disparity between Conrad’s style and that of others in the adventure tradition, this reviewer now criticizes it as a significant failing. Reader expectation is specifically cited in the review. Like other genres, adventure fiction consists of certain conventions and traditions with which readers had become accustomed, the “quest of happenings” being one of the predominant expectations. But Conrad thwarts that desire.

This review and Conrad’s contemporary reviews in general do not look too carefully into Conrad’s motivation for such a disruption of reader desire and expectation. At times, they interpret such transgression as literary errors on Conrad’s part. A few more discerning reviewers, however, read Conrad’s genre transgressions not as a detraction from or error in his writing but they recognize that he had, on some level, created an

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<sup>20</sup> Unsigned review, “Some Stories by Joseph Conrad,” *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art*, 4 April 1903, 224. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 171-72.

atypical adventure novel, one that pushes at the boundaries of adventure fiction, although they fail both to offer a reason as to why he might have done so or to go beyond his superficial differences from the genre norms. Even Conrad's close friend, Hugh Clifford, limits his review to the unconventionality of Conrad's style.

. . . [T]he admission must be made that Mr. Conrad's style is occasionally difficult. It does not run in any well-worn groove, for its owner is no apostle of the obvious; to the casual reader it may at times appear to be laboured, even self-conscious. A closer study of it, however, should lead to the conviction that this style is individual, instinctive, moulded on no ready-made model . . . <sup>21</sup>

Clifford notes Conrad's impressionism, slow pace, and apparently difficult style. Rather than a deficiency, Clifford suggests that his nonconformity makes his work exceptional. Although Clifford notes this one area of divergence, he fails to go beyond style as an example of Conrad's nonconformity or to consider it as more than an expression of his individuality as a writer.

A month later, an unsigned review expands the consideration of Conrad's transgression of the genre by suggesting his methodology is to push beyond the genre boundaries to create a new category of work.

A critical writer has said that all fiction may roughly be divided into two classes; that dealing with movement and adventure, and the other dealing with characterization, the analysis of the human mind. In the present, as in every one of his previous books, Mr. Conrad has stepped outside these boundaries, and made his own class of work as he has made his own methods. <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hugh Clifford, "The Art of Mr. Joseph Conrad," *The Spectator*, 29 November 1902, 827-8. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 166.

<sup>22</sup> Unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, 20 December, 1902, 824. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 170.

The reviewer still recognizes that Conrad has drawn heavily upon the adventure tradition, but suggests that in borrowing those traditions, Conrad has molded them for his own purpose. There is an implicit suggestion that Conrad has united the adventure genre with some elements of what would later be known as modernism and that he has thus pushed the adventure novel into a new category of literature. Although the reviewer identifies a degree of literary shift, he does not explain how or offer a reason why Conrad has traversed the adventure and humanist boundaries in literature beyond the attempt to make his novella exceptional. Nor does he consider the nature, function, or significance of Conrad's analysis of the human mind. Conrad's emphasis on the minds and intentions of his heroes, Marlow and Kurtz, is highly unconventional, however. Although identifying these unconventionalities is important, it is only through an analysis of them that we can recognize the function and significance of the critique and destabilizing influence of Empire and race in *Heart of Darkness*.

One other contemporary review broaches the issue of Conrad's hero, although his conclusion about Kurtz is virtually lost in an analysis, like so many other reviews, of Conrad's style. Given the prominence of the white, English hero in adventure fiction and his overly inflated noble representations, it is surprising that only one reviewer offers any observation and insight into the darkly portrayed Kurtz, and even then to a limited degree.

The concluding scene of the "Heart of Darkness" is crisp and brief enough for Flaubert, but the effect — a woman's ecstatic belief in a villain's heroism — is reached by an indulgence in the picturesque horror of the villain, his work and his surroundings, which is pitiless in its insistence, and quite extravagant according to the canons of art. But the power, the success in conveying the impression vividly, without loss of energy is undoubted and is refreshing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Unsigned review, "Youth," *The Times Literary Supplement*, No. 48, 12 December 1902, 372. Quoted in Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. edited by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke. Peterborough, Ont.:

Style and action seem to be the turning points upon which the reviewer critiques Conrad's adventure. Interestingly, this review's focus seems to suggest that Conrad's style draws the reader away from adventure fiction's usual emphasis on the hero. Although the reviewer acknowledges Conrad's picturesque indulgence of characterization and description, which can be read as the same lack of suspense and action that other reviewers note, this reviewer determines that the power and vividness of that description nonetheless vitalize the novella with energy. Of more significant note, however, he identifies Kurtz as the villain, and yet, he does so without comment. While he blithely credits Conrad for a "refreshing" approach, he makes no suggestion as to the function of and does not comment at all on the half-English white man's unconventional characterization. Scholars since this time period have, like this reviewer, also overlooked how Kurtz's "villainy" contradicts what should be a heroic representation by the standards of the genre. Adventure heroes are typically well defined, despite some inconsistencies in their character, and their function while they are on their adventure journey always reinforces imperial stability and promotion.

That Conrad drew from the traditions of adventure fiction is evident in the writing itself as well as the contemporary reviews. Conrad's own conclusions and responses to critics seem to indicate that he deliberately violated the genre conventions. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch notes, "with a sort of surprise" in his review of *Youth* that "This after all is a story for boys yet - - - -." <sup>24</sup> In response to Quiller-Couch's review, Conrad wrote in a letter to William Blackwood in May 1902: "Exactly. Out of the material of a boys' story I've made *Youth* by the force of the idea expressed in accordance with a strict conception

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Broadview Press, 1999. Edition 2nd ed., 169-70.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Dryden, 15.

of my method.”<sup>25</sup> By “boys’ story,” Conrad refers to adventure fiction which was typically consumed by “boys” of all ages who were fascinated by exotic and imperial stories of adventure. Thus Conrad uses the basic foundations of the genre in which he writes and pushes far beyond that foundation in order to subvert that very genre and in so doing challenges imperial and racial discourse.<sup>26</sup> That Conrad sought to critique imperialism, or at least that part of it that concerned the African regions to which *Heart of Darkness* refers — the Belgian Congo — is suggested in correspondence that Conrad wrote in support of the Congo Reform Movement as well as Conrad’s volunteering of the use of *Heart of Darkness* and his correspondence in their protest movement.<sup>27</sup>

Conrad’s push beyond these boundaries of adventure conventions is further evidenced by a reception that he should logically have expected. Adventure fiction was enormously popular. The genre had a substantial investment in the reading public, and readers had developed substantial expectations of fictions produced in or seemingly within that genre. Writers who delivered on those reader expectations could in return expect sizeable rewards both in literary credibility and financial gain. Both Haggard and

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Dryden, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Although Dryden concludes that Conrad’s “method” includes “a deliberate use and subversion of the [imperial] romance” in his Malayan fiction (15), she does not expound upon that subversion in Conrad’s later *Heart of Darkness*.

<sup>27</sup> On December 21, 1903, Conrad wrote to his friend and British Consul, Roger Casement, strongly condemning Leopold II and the inhumane treatment of Africans by Belgians. He argues the case for just treatment of Africans and the illegality of Belgian exploitation, comparing it to abolished slavery. Just as Marlow argues the humanity of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad insists in his letter to Casement that the black man “shares with us the consciousness of the universe in which we live — no small burden.” (Conrad’s letter is reprinted in its entirety in Hunt Hawkins, 70). Moreover, in his final paragraph, Conrad gives his consent for the use of his opinions in the Reform Movement: “Of course you may make any use you like of what I write to you.” Several days later, he wrote to his friend, R.B. Cunninghame Graham, encouraging him to become involved with Congo reform. *Heart of Darkness* was in fact utilized by the Reform Movement, and on October 7, 1909, after the movement was successful in its campaign, the movement’s founder, E.D. Morel, wrote to Arthur Conan Doyle that *Heart of Darkness* was the “most powerful thing ever written on the subject” of imperial reform (Ibid, 80).

Henty, for example, were highly successful.<sup>28</sup> A writer had a significant interest in delivering to his readers on these expectations, particularly Conrad who had not yet achieved, nor would he achieve, the financial or popular success of either Rider Haggard or Henty. Indeed, Conrad was frequently in acute financial need as evidenced by his frequent requests for publication advances and grants and awards.<sup>29</sup> He likely could have easily achieved such celebrity and sizeable compensation had he followed the established pattern of the adventure genre, even had he included some variations that expressed his unique style. Yet, despite Conrad's own admission that he was well acquainted with the "material of a boys' story," he chose to breach those popular and bankable conventions in overt ways. After Conrad met with William Blackwood regarding plans for the volume *Youth*, Conrad wrote to Blackwood about what he had construed as a criticism of his work during their meeting:

I know exactly what I am doing . . . This is my method based on deliberate conviction. I've never departed from it. I call your own kind self to witness and I beg to instance Karain — Lord Jim (where the method is fully developed) — the last pages of *Heart of Darkness* where the interview of the man and the girl locks in — as it were — the whole 30000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of a whole phase of life and makes of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa. And *Youth* itself (which I

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<sup>28</sup> Sales of Henty's 80 books were estimated at 25 million copies by 1950 (Mawuena, "Cultural Pluralism: Henty and the Ashantis," 85). *King Solomon's Mines* sold 31,000 copies in the first year, with 13 separate editions in the United States alone (Jean Sévry, 8). No figures are available for the circulation history of Merrimans *With Edged Tools*, nor are any reviews available.

<sup>29</sup> For publication of *Heart of Darkness* in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Conrad received 100 pounds sterling, in two payments, an initial installment of 40 and a balance of 60. (Kimbrough, 3rd ed., 208.) Significantly, after having received the initial payment sometime before January 9, 1899, Conrad wrote to Mr. Meldrum, *Blackwood's* literary advisor in London on Wednesday, February 8, very anxious for the balance of payment. (Kimbrough, 3rd ed., 207.) In an application for a financial award of 300 pounds sterling from the Royal Literary Fund, the first of Conrad's grants and awards, under "Cause of Distress," Edmond Gosse cited "Slowness of composition and want of public appreciation" (quoted in Allan H. Simmons, "The Art of Englishness," 13).

delight to know you like so well) exists only in virtue of my fidelity to the idea and the method.<sup>30</sup>

Rather than choosing the popular and very bankable approach to *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad adventurously takes the unique and moral path of an unconventional adventure story. In so doing, *Heart of Darkness* critiques the ethics of imperialism and generates significant ambivalence around white identity.

Some reviewers apparently appreciate this uniqueness, while other reviewers rebuke Conrad's unconventionality. But although reviewers note Conrad's obvious deviations from other adventures, these differentiations are limited to identifying his style and pace, suspense and action, or lack thereof. None of his contemporary reviewers seem to venture to hypothesize the reasons for these distinctions. Despite the bold assertion of one reviewer in labeling Kurtz a villain, the anonymous reviewer does not delve into this gross break with the genre conventions. Nor does any reviewer consider the other conventions that are disrupted. Perhaps caught up in the excitement of imperialism themselves, reviewers failed to critique objectively the anti-generic and anti-imperial ways in which Conrad subverts the conventions of adventure. They similarly do not recognize the ways in which white racial images are destabilized. Nor have recent critics and scholars done so. Those few scholars who examine the adventure qualities of *Heart of Darkness* never move beyond the scope of the assumed narrow formula of the adventure genre. Reviews of the time appear to have had a simple understanding of the genre: youth, hero, excitement, savages, fortune, and return to England. Those few scholars of more recent generations who have considered the novella within the adventure genre have moved little from this formula except to recognize the racializations of natives

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<sup>30</sup> Kimbrough, 210.



and how this functioned in imperial and racial domination. But the adventure genre is complex and consists of notable inconsistencies that reveal racial and imperial ambivalence in themselves. It is only by re-situating *Heart of Darkness* within this context that we can identify Conrad's own unconventionality and how it critiques and disrupts Empire and race.

### **Conventions of the Adventure Genre I**

Despite the fairly formulaic structure, plot, and characters in the adventure genre, the individual stories themselves tend to be complex in their conventional promotion of imperialism as well as the genre inconsistencies that reveal ambivalence with respect to imperialism, life at home, and race. The promotion of imperialism is carried out through the projection of heroes and secondary white characters who idealize the image of what real British imperialists were expected to embody. Hence, they embody incredible, almost unbelievable qualities and characteristics of superiority, and such qualities and the actions that spring forth from them suggest the naturalness of and justification for British imperial and racial domination wherever these fictional characters and real imperial representatives traveled. Conversely, the Other is represented in immoral, savage and primitive ways that require white heroes, therefore, either to save them from themselves or destroy them, and this paternalistic theme justifies continued, indeed, expanded

suppression of imperial subjects<sup>31</sup> and, of course, occupation and exploitation of the territories they inhabit and the resources found there.

Numerous elements that comprise this supposed formulaic representation of character, plot, and race in the adventure genre revolve around issues of class, masculinity, and nation. Imperialism, by its very nature, involved travel, and these journeys represented not only mobility of the body but personal, social and financial mobility by providing Englishmen with unique opportunities that were not available in Britain. Adventure fiction uses these concepts of mobility and thereby makes imperial adventures seem more enticing by allowing readers to envision themselves as adventuring characters from the safety of home and by implying that readers could become such fantastic characters for real as agents of the Empire with all the tangible and intangible benefits that entailed. The tremendous wealth these heroes reap during their journeys relates directly to social and financial mobility that could not be achieved in Britain. Hence, these stories offered contemporary readers more than merely a temporary escape from the economic and social problems at home through the act of reading and voyeurism. Adventure stories suggest the opportunity for actual economic and social escape that they could attain for themselves should they travel abroad in the service of the Empire. In order to achieve that mobility, traditional boundaries of class dissolve in adventure stories as commoners evolve into gentlemen, and young men and boys

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<sup>31</sup> Linda Dryden and Andrea White both discuss this racial formula of the superior white hero and inferior Other and its function in adventure and imperial literature. Neither Dryden nor White discuss how this formula may have encouraged participation in imperialism nor do they acknowledge inconsistencies in the conventions. They also overlook the use of racial conventions and where they are subverted in *Heart of Darkness*. According to Andrea White, heroes were typically Christian, usually of a privileged, if not aristocratic, class and manly, that is, gentlemanly, brave, honest, decisive, hearty, and just, “[a]nd this representation served to justify British incursion, for the Christian hero could only be viewed as benevolent and wise against native ‘savagery’ and incompetency” (White 65).

“become men.” Notably, these transformations make them the more resourceful men required for imperial work. Going overseas, moreover, allows heroes to access and develop their presumed pent up masculinity in its various manifestations, including the assurance of sexual rewards abroad and racially pure procreation at home.

These stories are not monolithic, however, as inconsistencies appear in the characters and plots that reveal ambivalence surrounding the idealized and stable images of imperialism and race. Heroes are not perfect, personally or physically, and issues of social mobility are not universal. While Englishness is projected as superior, the necessity first to leave Britain to attain higher status, and more significantly, the unwillingness of some heroes not to return to Britain or to leave again, only permanently, indicate dissatisfaction with conditions at home. Notwithstanding these inconsistencies, ultimately conventional adventure stories advocate for imperialism, the generally admirable heroes, and their almost universal success in all their imperial endeavours.

Adventure fictions seem to have become a conduit not only for justifying Empire but a recruitment aid to facilitate further expansion. The image of adventure heroes as towers of virtue and superiority, who seemingly aid in the civilizing of supposed savages and garner tremendous rewards for themselves in the process, makes their endeavours more noble and certainly more desirable. That their adventures are so exhilarating and the heroes return so successfully to Britain — and better “men” for it — undoubtedly encouraged some young readers. At least one adventure fiction writer, G.A. Henty, recognized the broad influence his writing had upon British boys and young men and their choice of careers as well as their imperial ways of thinking.<sup>32</sup> Among Henty’s

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<sup>32</sup> Writing for the *Boys’ Own Paper* just before his death — the article was published posthumously in December 1902 — Henty said: “To endeavour to inculcate patriotism in my books has been one of my main objects, and so far as it is possible to know, I have not been unsuccessful in that

readers, Winston Churchill for one admitted the tremendous inspiration and sway that his literature held for him in his youth and in encouraging him to pursue imperial service.<sup>33</sup> Although a direct cause and effect relationship cannot be established between adventure fiction and imperialism and its associated racial discourse, adventures clearly worked in conjunction with the social and political climate.<sup>34</sup> Given the representations of the hero and his actions in the imperial theatre, it is possible to identify how the elements of mobility of social class, masculinity and nation functioned to promote imperialism and racial ideology.

Coinciding with the popularity of these novels was a transformation in the British Empire that seemed to necessitate greater imperial interest and participation in the British public at large. Increased imperial pressure from other European countries, particularly with respect to European possessions in Africa, amplified the, at times, stringent and reactionary demand in Britain for expansion of the Empire and ushered in the period of “formal” or “high” imperialism. From the latter quarter of the nineteenth-century right up until World War I, which more or less corresponds to the period when adventure fiction was at the peak of its incredible popularity, the new form of imperialism could be

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respect. I know that very many boys have joined the cadets and afterwards gone into the Army through reading my stories, and at many of the meetings at which I have spoken officers of the Army and Volunteers have assured me that my books have been effectual in bringing young fellows into the Army — not so much into the rank and file as among the officers.” (Arnold, Guy. *Held fast for England: G. A. Henty, Imperialist Boys' Writer*. London: H. Hamilton, 1980, 63.)

<sup>33</sup> In Arnold, *Held Fast for England*.

<sup>34</sup> Gail S. Clark concludes that while it is difficult to draw a direct cause and effect relationship between Henty’s literature, specifically, or any other writers and the motivations and actions of individuals, these works nonetheless had influence. Clark suggests that when literature models a standard of behaviour and point of view which is widely regarded as approved, the tendency is to conform to those standards for multiple reasons. Whether or not Henty’s readers actually believed in the imperial values he projects, “they at least learned what they ought to believe” (50). See also Edward Said for a thorough discussion of the ways in which literature was influenced by and exerted influence upon Empire.

differentiated from the earlier “informal” imperialism. During the informal stage, Great Britain operated its empire primarily through less formal structures that relied upon economic and political incentives rather than direct political and military control. Moreover, the Empire expanded at a relatively nominal rate. The period of formal imperialism is demarcated as a time of fierce competition between European powers in which these nations vied for as much new imperial territory and as many new subjects as they could acquire.<sup>35</sup> As a result of this rivalry, British and other nations’ imperialism is marked by more formal and direct political and administrative control of colonies and by a rapidly expanding military presence.

Although Britain remained the undisputed leader in the imperial race during this period, more and more Britons debated the kind of empire they should have and how far it should expand in the face of economic and political threats from the Continent. Some Britons wanted the less formal Empire that Britain had operated earlier in the century, while others wanted to check the advancement of European rivals through a more formal and expanding empire, including greater administrative and military control, not merely economic control. These imperial fears and desires transformed over time and are voiced and addressed in the literature of the period, including adventure fictions, which zealously promote the excitement and simplicity and benefits of endeavours carried out under the auspices of imperialism.<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in adventure fiction,

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<sup>35</sup> Between 1878 and 1914 Europe extended its colonial territories more than in the previous three-quarters of the century (Rice-Sayre 356). Britain acquired an additional 5 million square miles and 88 million new subjects in the last 30 years of the nineteenth-century (Johnson 4). But Britain’s chief rival, France, added more than 10 million square kilometers to its colonies over approximately the same period (Rice-Sayre 356).

<sup>36</sup> A correlation between the change in the nature of Empire and changes within certain genres that were being produced seems to exist. In the case of Victorian pornography, for example, a clear differentiation is identified between the racial and imperial representations during the informal empire and formal empire which corresponds to the changing imperial fears and desires that were expressed culturally and politically. It is possible that such differentiations exist in other genres and should be pursued.

ultimately the genre during this time worked in concert with imperial and racial discourses and policy in order to reinforce their validity and maintain the status quo. Moreover, such representations appear to encourage, if not elicit, the volunteers who were so much needed and desired to undertake the duties, entrepreneurship, hardship, and conquest associated with Empire. But these duties were not only a nationalistic appeal as they seemingly served the individual as well.

As with most literature, adventure stories were influenced by, responded to, and had influence upon the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they were written. Rather than simplistic stories, their multiple functions indicate that they are in fact complex on various levels. As the Empire grew, the desire for more exotic commodities increased dramatically, and adventure stories, in part, fulfilled this desire for the exotic without readers leaving the comforts of home. Scholars such as Jefferson Hunter, Linda Dryden, and Andrea White have all noted the escapist qualities that adventure stories provided to some urban readers who had begun to feel disenchanting with the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing British society and its complications.<sup>37</sup> Such analysis, however, does not account for the functions of these stories beyond a voyeuristic escape. In addition to simple stimulation and titillation, they seem to offer readers practical alternatives for their own escape from not only the monotony of urban life and social

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<sup>37</sup> Dryden claims the appeal of adventures “lay in the ability to transport its readers away from everyday concerns and to immerse them in uncomplicated exotic romance. It was pure escapism laced with patriotic overtones and a zeal for imperial adventures” (Dryden 2). White identifies the ways in which the simplicity of adventure fiction contrasted with the urban fictions of George Eliot, Dickens, Gaskell, Hardy, and Gissing that depicted the deplorable Condition of England Question and the plight of the poor against which their heroes were increasingly ineffectual. In adventure stories, readers could delve into “manly, heroic action, uncomplicated by the complex moralities of a modern, democratic world” (White 63). Hunter also suggests that complications of life at home fostered reader desire for simplicity abroad, away from England and its problems. In undiscovered territory, they could find physical danger, cleaner choices between courage and cowardice, and signs of identity could be taken in at a glance (Jefferson Hunter 83).

problems but the severity of economic hardship which gripped vast numbers of British citizens throughout the century. Poverty was common and even if most adventure genre readers tended to come from the upper and middle classes, the fear of deprivation likely pressed upon these readers. Career opportunities were limited in number and advancement, just as rigid social structures prevented most young men from bettering their status. Moreover, even among the aristocratic and upper classes, inheritance laws and preferences prevented multiple siblings from sharing in ancestral wealth. For many young or moderately older men with limited economic options, Empire represented financial opportunities unimaginable at home. Gold, silver, precious gems, ivory, rubber, and spices, were all readily available for plunder and exploitation by white Europeans since the earliest times of exploration and colonization. With the expansion of capitalism and global trade, opportunities abounded abroad for young men, while ironically in Britain few opportunities could not be found.

Adventure fiction, designed in part to promote the advantages of Empire, reinforced these ideas of great wealth and opportunity. Even when adventure heroes obtain rare and exotic substances and resources inadvertently, the underlying and unmistakable message is that the riches are there for the having; and they are to be had in great abundance. One need merely go out and get them. In *With Edged Tools*, Victor Durnovo, who seeks partners for his venture, tells Jack Meredith and Guy Osgood about Simiacine, an extremely rare and mysterious drug with extraordinary therapeutic powers that ensures both good health and incredible strength and prowess. As with ivory in *Heart of Darkness*, or any of the exotic commodities sought after by imperial Europe in the far reaches of the globe, the plant from which the Simiacine is obtained is rare enough to ensure a fortune to those who exploit it. As Durnovo says, a “hatful is worth a thousand

pounds” (49). The very title of Haggard’s novel *King Solomon’s Mines* telegraphs its theme of fortune. The novel is precipitated by the pursuit of a mysterious legend of secret gold mines with unimaginable treasure. Although the search for the treasure is transformed into a rescue mission for George Curtis, Sir Henry’s brother, Quatermain is enticed into guiding them in their search only after Sir Henry offers him ownership of all the treasure and ivory that they may discover. Ultimately, the vast riches are found and divided between the financially constrained Allan Quatermain, retired Captain Good, and Sir Henry’s brother George Curtis, who significantly in terms of inheritance is the younger of the two. The theme here is that all those who are without financial resources will become unimaginably wealthy if they embark on imperial endeavours.

Although Frank Hardgrave does not embark on his journey explicitly as a hunt for wealth, his motive is still one of money as he goes to Africa in the employ of Mr. Goodenough, a naturalist whose only interest is for academic advancement. The intensity with which Henty represents his hero’s despair over the unemployment situation in Great Britain and the desperation for means to support himself and his orphaned sister highlight the financial and career opportunities that imperialism offered abroad, particularly for English youth. Moreover, wealth seems to “fall” upon him; Hardgrave inherits a sizeable estate from Mr. Goodenough and receives the gift of a fabulous gem of enormous value from the African general, Ammon Quatia, for his service to the Ashanti people when Hardgrave is held captive. The underlying suggestion is that riches are to be had in such quantities that one can become wealthy without effort.<sup>38</sup> In advocating this financial

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<sup>38</sup> Only *She* neglects to provide its heroes with the requisite accumulation of wealth. Although this may be inconsistent with other adventures, it is not a subversion of the genre’s imperialism as the wealthy hero has no need for financial gain. Moreover, Haggard insinuates imperial wealth through Leo Vincey’s inheritance which has its origin in ancient, foreign treasure. The ancient artifacts, the potsherds of Amenartas, and repeated mention of Ancient Egypt, as well as other mysterious and ancient civilizations,



advantage, the nation profited directly from exploitation of such resources, but this kind of promotion also drew more and more badly needed participants to the imperial project who could profit individually. A hero may have to go through unimaginable ordeals, but the implicit suggestion is that the reward at the end makes it worth all that the hero endures. Adventures thus offered significant financial and social mobility through its tangible rewards but also through its intangible rewards associated with class and masculinity.

In adventure stories, status is related to both one's Englishness and, of course, one's position in the rigid social hierarchy. First and foremost, heroes of the English adventure story are English.<sup>39</sup> This allowed contemporary readers to identify with the heroes immediately and facilitated their envisioning themselves in such roles. The heroes' English racial purity as well as British imperialism and militarism are both subtle and overt elements in adventures. Although the main action is always abroad, the reader is reminded of the origins and unique racial characteristics of the heroes and how that racial identity impacts upon their superior status. As Jack Meredith slowly recovers from near-death in *With Edged Tools*, Osgard, his friend and partner, is assured of his survival due to his English blood: "He had an enormous faith in the natural toughness of an Englishman" (243). Upon meeting Ayesha for the first time, Horace Holly (*She*) refuses to kowtow or posture submissively before her: "I was an Englishman, and why, I asked

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allude to the excavation and expropriation of sites of various other civilizations by Europeans during the period.

<sup>39</sup> While Great Britain, as a political and geographic entity, consisted of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland as well as England, fictional heroes and other whites in English adventures are specifically English ethnically. References in this paper to the British Empire and its social, political, and military policies are inclusive of all its political parts but are differentiated from both fictional characters and actual English individuals mentioned herein who represent members of a "national race" distinctive from the amalgamated "British."

myself should I creep into the presence of some savage woman as though I were a monkey” (140). The Englishness of the characters is always evident, and British militarism is foregrounded respectively by the character of Captain Good, a retired Royal Navy officer, and the presence of the British army which engages the Ashanti people in war.

Although representations of Englishness in general assume a racial superiority above other races, including other white Europeans,<sup>40</sup> adventure stories promote their heroes as the ultimate example of English breeding, quality and merit. During the Victorian era, qualities of personal character and integrity such as honour, virtue, chivalry, morality, philanthropy, bravery, decisiveness, and reliability were all still associated with the higher classes and white raciality. “Gentlemen,” it was assumed, possess these attributes while men of the lower classes did not. Hence, some of the heroes are of aristocratic origin, such as Sir Henry in *King Solomon’s Mines* and Jack Meredith and Guy Osgard in *With Edged Tools*, or of privileged background such as Leo Vincey, who orphaned since childhood, inherited great wealth. Although these characters are English and of privileged backgrounds, they are still set apart as something exceptional, differentiated from their peers because they alone venture into the realms of the imperial unknown. When Osgard reveals that he, too, is about to embark for Africa as Meredith has, Meredith’s fiancé, Millicent Chyne, states, “It seems to be only the uninteresting people who stay at home and live humdrum lives of enormous duration” (33). Such comments voice the malaise that some readers may have experienced and offers an exhilarating alternative by going “out there.”

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<sup>40</sup> See the Introduction, pages 4-5, for a further discussion on the ways in which Europeans differentiated themselves racially.

But the imperial realm was not within the private purview of the privileged alone. Unlike social structures at home, imperialism is depicted in adventures as comprising a more democratic system in which merit is rewarded, and those of the middle classes are either endowed with these same superior qualities inherently or they could advance socially and personally by undergoing processes of maturation and self-realization that allow them to develop these gentlemanly attributes. Adventurers form essentially a class unto themselves once Englishmen leave the confines of Britain and are allowed to develop into individuals worthy of the title, “gentleman.”<sup>41</sup> In part, this democratization of personal and social opportunity was prompted by the expansion of the Empire and the increasing numbers of participants required as well as the increasing importance that was placed on such attributes which were deemed most essential for British imperialists in order to justify their actions ethically. Hence, adventure heroes also come from more humble beginnings such as Frank Hardgrave in Henty’s *By Sheer Pluck* and Allan Quatermain in *King Solomon’s Mines*. Quatermain is a professional hunter and trader, and although Hardgrave’s father died heroically as an officer in British military service, he himself is destitute. Their more common beginnings do not preclude them from having a virtuousness of character similar to that exhibited by their cohorts from the upper social echelons.<sup>42</sup>

Whether these aristocrats or commoners are endowed with inherent qualities or develop these merits through the various opportunities provided by the imperial world,

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<sup>41</sup> While Hunter and Dryden describe the gentlemanly qualities of adventure heroes, Hunter and Dryden’s descriptions tend to assume the innateness of these qualities rather than viewing them as developing through imperial processes or circumstances.

<sup>42</sup> Dryden notes that “even the fatherless and penniless heroes of Henty and Kingston exhibit the reverence for fair play, patriotism, and ‘stiff upper lip’ determination that characterize the English public schoolboy of the late nineteenth-century” (23).

heroes realize their merits through the act of “going out there.” In turn, this transformation provides the hero with personal satisfaction in his accomplishments. Moreover, he receives the accolades from their comrades and even the public as a result of their exploits. At the outset of *King Solomon’s Mines*, Quatermain defines himself as “a gentleman” (10-11), and he considers in detail all that the term comprises by Victorian standards of impeccableness and morality. But his conclusion significantly is in retrospect of his and his comrades adventure that has transformed them. Although the adventure is indirectly initiated, as the title of the novel suggests, by the search for treasure, it is the loss of contact with George Curtis, the second man to embark on the treasure quest, that transforms the primary journey in the novel into a rescue quest replete with honourable and philanthropic overtones. Moreover, the virtual enslavement and barbaric treatment of the people of Loo by the despot Twala provide ample opportunities for the heroes to prove their virtuousness and superior morality by securing the emancipation of the native peoples.

Although Sir Henry, the main instrument in that emancipation, is of aristocratic background, and on that level some of his virtuousness appears inherent, he is not static. The displays of his incredible heroism arise out of the experiences unique to the imperial world and which would not have been possible within the safe atmosphere of England. For Haggard particularly, these qualities are exhibited through the intense and climatic conflicts between white heroes who are endowed with a noble, Christian aura and the racially portrayed savages. Henry is thus transformed from an aristocratic and lifeless being (significantly, nothing is every known of his earlier life as though he did not exist before his adventure begins) to a man of invaluable service to his comrades.

Quatermain's common background as a professional hunter and trader provides the premise by which he can be born anew as a gentleman. Indeed, his self-professed greed and cowardice (discussed further with respect to inconsistencies in the representations of the hero at the end of this section) demonstrate the transformation of the commoner into a nobler hero. Inevitably, Quatermain insists upon splitting the fortune from the treasure cave equally with Captain Good and even Sir Henry's brother, George, who is found in the last few days of their uneventful return journey and did not participate in either the battle or the discovery of the treasure. He thus exemplifies the sense of morality and fairness that seemingly develops within him as a result of his experiences. Quatermain's account of their exploits, including his self-remonstrations written for the insight of his son, confirms the adventure as a means of personal and collective self-realization and growth. Yet in *Heart of Darkness*, the heroes undergo none of the growth or epiphanies of the adventure hero, at least not in the conventional sense. Both Kurtz and Marlow are already grown, or are perhaps stunted and incapable of character growth, and the epiphanies they experience counter imperial promotion elsewhere in the genre.

Merriman's heroes, Meredith and Osgood, also exemplify nobler traits of honour and chivalry and altruistic acts toward the natives by emancipating them. Although they are aristocratic, like Sir Henry, much of their virtuous service is necessitated by the relative circumstances of the hostile territory and their corrupt hybrid partner, Durnovo, that cause the young men to mature. Early in the novel, Meredith confesses to Durnovo: "I came chiefly to make money, partly to dispel some of the illusions of my youth, and I am getting on very well. Picture-book illusions they were. The man who drew the pictures had never seen Africa" (46). These hard realities require that they repeatedly and steadfastly compel Durnovo to be manly and face the dangers posed by both men and

disease from which he flees. The heroes are horrified to discover that rather than employing their black labour, Durnovo bought them as slaves, and they immediately liberate them. They exercise chivalry toward women, even non-white women as Meredith comes to the rescue of Jocelyn Gordon, his eventual love interest, when Durnovo attempts to extort sexual favours from her. And upon their return from their adventure on the plateau, Meredith and Osgood spare Durnovo's black wife, Marie, from the burden of knowing that her husband had not only abandoned her and their children but that he had exploited the natives through slavery. This transformative nature of adventure is explicitly made by the narrator who concludes that in the end these heroes are "two men who had gone to look for [wealth] two years before — young and hearty — returning from the search successful beyond their highest hopes, with a shadow in their eyes and gray upon their heads" (317).

Henty's young hero, Hardgrave, exhibits an even more overly-developed repertoire of nobility, chivalry and virtue as he moves rapidly from situation to situation seemingly contrived for the purpose of evoking meritorious actions. He rescues his friends and himself from certain death at sea and rescues a young child from a rabid dog that would have killed her even before he leaves for Africa. His young age, 15, and the presence of his mentor, Mr. Goodenough, on his journey, albeit temporarily, overtly implies that his adventure functions as a development of his character, knowledge, and wisdom. He subsequently matures into a responsible young man who altruistically acts in the interests of the natives. Despite being held captive by the Ashanti, he tends to the sick among them and his heroism is recognized by the military leader of his captors, Ammon Quatia who bestows a fabulous jewel upon him for his service. The youth of Leo Vincey and accompaniment on his journey by his guardian and trusted friend, Horace Holly, also

reflect the transformation into an imperial gentleman. Although he tends to be less exemplary in terms of gentlemanly virtue than other heroes, Vincey and Holly's presence in the ancient city of Kôr results in the emancipation of the Amahagger from Ayesha, "she who must be obeyed." Moreover, the almost tutelage structure of Holly's narration suggests guidance of the young Vincey and, perhaps to a degree, that of the audience as well.<sup>43</sup>

## Conventions of the Adventure Genre II

As with the noble attributes associated with the upper classes that develop or are evoked as a result of the imperial journey, aspects of the hero's masculinity are not always readily apparent or displayed at home in Britain but develop or are realized and fully utilized as a result of his unique experiences abroad. Bravery, decisiveness, and reliability, along with pronounced physicality came to constitute key components of adventure heroes during the latter part of the nineteenth-century and are projected as physical manifestations of their gentlemanly inner core. Heroes are, in essence, gentlemen on the inside and "men" on the outside. This importance of manliness came to the fore as British attitudes toward physicality shifted dramatically during the course of the century. Ronald Hyam observes that Britain had developed into "a cult of the emphatically physical (what later generations would call 'machismo')".<sup>44</sup> A popular contemporary

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<sup>43</sup> Clark as well as Logan Mawuena discusses the connection between Henty's work and the education of children and youth, who primarily comprised Henty's readers. This education consists of moral elements, but it also focuses primarily on the instruction of imperial attitudes and expectations for service to the Empire from British youth and appropriate kinds of behaviours while in the territories overseas. Henty's formula for education also typically includes racial representations of assumed white superiority and black inferiority.

<sup>44</sup> Hyam, Ronald. *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, 72.

association between war and pleasure also developed<sup>45</sup> or at least the desirable camaraderie that resulted when men had to endure tremendous physical ordeals together. Hence, adventure fiction is filled with action and suspense, intense hunts for exotic creatures and graphic, aggrandized battles with wild savages which are often projected as a war of civilizations. The journey or quest itself is fraught with perils as the adventurers traverse a wide array of geographical obstacles and terrains, penetrate jungles, trek across deserts and swamps, and hike over precipitous mountains. They nearly starve, and they hunt. They battle fierce warriors, and they prevail.

Haggard's novels in particular are inundated with circumstances that seem to necessitate physical and sensationalistic displays of the heroes' bravery and decisiveness that do more than merely entertain. The battle between the African forces of the white heroes and those of Twala exemplify an overinflated sense of machismo, and the scene appears designed so that the heroes must access that machismo in order to survive and defeat the villain. Equally as powerful is the decisive mortal combat between Sir Henry and Twala in which Sir Henry exerts untapped qualities of his essential and primal masculinity. Although Leo Vincey and Horace Holly do not battle the natives of Kôr, they unflinchingly face the horrors of the Amahagger's savage ceremonies. Regardless of the obstacle, the hero can be depended upon by his white colleagues and African subordinates. In fact, the more insurmountable the obstacle appears, the more resilient the hero is. Meredith and Joseph, for example, resist the onslaught of the cannibals below the

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<sup>45</sup> Although Maria Angeles and Toda Iglesia does not specifically discuss how participation in violence may have attracted recruits to imperial service, she analyzes the way in which Haggard romanticizes masculinity and violence as a pleasurable act. Readers recognizing this pleasure in the experiences of their fictionalized countrymen, may have, as with any pleasure, desired for themselves the experience associated with the pleasure.



plateau for months, and during the final, virtually hopeless battle, both men's bravery and resolve allow them to resist until Oscar arrives in the clichéd "nick of time."

The heroes' bravery and decisiveness is, of course, facilitated by a pronounced physicality which, like these other aspects of masculinity, had been popularized concurrently with the expansion of Empire. An interconnectedness between them appears in which superior physicality was deemed necessary for imperial work,<sup>46</sup> and adventure writers seemed to have responded by constructing their heroes in vivid detail as the epitome of the physical. Certainly, with Charles Darwin's theories on evolution and the growing influence of social Darwinism and eugenics, ideas of survivability of the most fit increasingly gained credence. The "fittest" in terms of human beings was often read as the most physically able-bodied rather than the most intellectual, and this likely accounts for the hyper-physicality of adventure heroes which seems essential in order for the hero to dominate the African, particularly since the conflicts between the races are always reduced to a physical battle.

Unlike Conrad, both Merriman and Haggard endow their heroes with hyper-physicality that makes them emblems for reader admiration and emulation and ensures their "natural" place at the top of the racial hierarchy which justifies white seizure of imperial territory and subjects. The connection between physicality and Empire is made explicitly in *She* as Leo Vincey's physicality is reiterated incessantly, including references to his god-like appearance. Notably, Ayesha, whose own physicality is obsessed over and infused with god-like qualities, in her ancient wisdom, "perceive[s] the germ and

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<sup>46</sup> In 1900, the Earl of Rosebery elucidated upon this macho culture and its direct connection to imperialism by declaring "An empire such as ours requires as its first condition an Imperial Race – a race vigorous and industrious and intrepid. Health of mind and body exalt a nation in the competition of the universe. The survival of the fittest is an absolute truth in the conditions of the modern world" (quoted in Hyam, 74).

smouldering spark of greatness which lay hid within her lover's soul, and well knew that under the influence of her gift of life, watered by her wisdom, and shone upon with the sunshine of her presence, it would bloom like a flower and flash out like a star, filling the world with light and fragrance" (6). She makes clear her intention to return to England with him so that they may rule a vast, even world empire as he seems crafted specifically for imperial rule. Going overseas and experiencing such ordeals allowed "boys to become men," and in an era where physicality and machismo were prized, the forging of English mettle was as desirable as was secret and mysterious treasure since these were the qualities most required for empire building. The physical challenges and arduous adventures transform young Englishmen into responsible, physically fit, powerful and moral men adapted for survival in the fierce contest with other imperial powers and capable of ruling the empire envisioned by Britons. While Ayesha's desire expresses a kind of fear of domination by foreigners, it expounds upon the idealizing power imperialism held for young men.

Although the hero's physicality tends to be inherent, the journey to exotic locations is the conduit through which that physicality can be fully utilized. The large stature of Guy Osgard appears sadly out of place in the aristocratic social circle of England: "He was as remarkable as some free and dignified denizen of the forest in the midst of domestic animals . . . The other young men rather fell back before Guy Osgard — scared, perhaps, by his long stride, and afraid that he might crush their puny toes" (5). It is only in Africa where his physical prowess and that of other heroes such as Meredith, Sir Henry and Quatermain, can reach its full potential. This theme of caged physicality repeats itself in *She* as well when the fictional editor concludes that he was "without exception, the handsomest young fellow I have ever seen. He was very tall, very broad,

and had a look of power and a grace of bearing that seemed as native to him as it is to a wild stag” (1). Although Vincey, does not display the kind of vigorous actions of most other heroes,<sup>47</sup> he, too, possesses a large stature which could presumably be called upon at any moment should the circumstance arise. Although the editor in England recognizes his masculinity and the restraints placed upon it, the full potential of his masculinity and its associated power are recognized only in Africa through contact with the Other. The British nation, on the one hand was presented in dominant culture as powerful, and yet ironically it confined white masculinity. The urban conditions of modern Britain deprived robust heroes of the opportunities for physical action that only the imperial world could supply. By allowing heroes to overemphasize the physical at the expense of the intellect, imperialism opened new worlds not only for exploration in the conventional sense but for exploration of individual self-worth.<sup>48</sup>

The aspect of physical attractiveness is also connected to the concept of masculinity. Physical prowess that ensured victory over savages has its appeal in terms of sexual attraction, but the handsomeness of the hero seems to secure the romantic and sexual relations which in turn was likely of great significance in terms of both the sexual rewards of imperialism and the maintenance of racial purity. More than any other hero, Leo Vincey seems to profit by his overly endowed attractiveness. The unnamed editor compares him to “a statue of Apollo come to life”(1). His journey provides similar

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<sup>47</sup> Bart Westerweel suggests that Leo’s passivity and vulnerability are foregrounded and that this allows Ayesha to dominate in their relationship which represents some of Victorian males’ deepest fears with respect to women.

<sup>48</sup> Dryden and White suggest that qualities of bravery and the physical form an integral part of the formula for the hero but do not suggest why such a formula would encourage imperialism. Nor do they discuss these qualities in *Heart of Darkness*, and they, therefore, do not identify where they have been subverted or are absent.

romantic encounters with Ustane, who marries him in the custom of her people, and of course Ayesha, who has waited 2,000 years for his “return to her.” But the significance of the heroes’ physical attractiveness lay not only in their sexual appeal in the imperial world but in their return to Britain where their virility, coupled with their imperial work, functions as an attraction to their racial equals.<sup>49</sup> The sexual benefits of Vincey’s appearance are immediate as he is surrounded by beautiful, young English women from the moment of his introduction to his final departure from Britain at the end of the novel. Hardgrave settles down to a domestic life at home in Britain after his successful adventure. Like Vincey, Meredith and Osgard are pursued ardently by a beautiful, young English woman throughout the novel, and Meredith ultimately marries a second English woman who is not only strikingly beautiful and graceful but possesses a feminized version of noble English character. The insinuation in adventures other than *Heart of Darkness* is that imperial agents may or may not taste the forbidden fruits of the exotic Other, but for those who desire it they are also ultimately rewarded with domestic bliss at home.

Travel to the imperial world could potentially threaten English masculinity as well as allow it to flourish. Disease posed a significant peril to English imperialists who were not accustomed to tropical environments, and this posed a strong deterrence to potential imperialists and one which adventure writers could not have reasonably ignored. For

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<sup>49</sup> While sexuality in adventures has been discussed, it is consistently done in reference to miscegenation and hybrids (See Anne McClintock, Robert Young, and Robert Hyam). Yet, the frequency of the hero’s return to domestic bliss seems connected with his imperial work, despite the separation of physical space and time. In both *With Edged Tools* and *Heart of Darkness*, the heroes are prompted to go abroad specifically for the purpose of acquiring enough wealth marry. The acquisition of wealth and the exploits abroad of other heroes, Hardgrave, Osgard, and Captain Good, seem to make them more eligible to women at home as Hardgrave later marries and the interests of English women in the other two are mentioned. The impact for reproduction of racial purity elevates its importance, and further research is needed in this area of imperialism.

adventure heroes, however, disease cannot diminish their vigour and robustness. Indeed, writers seem to use the realistic misfortunes of ill-health to reinforce the physical superiority of whites. A number of the heroes in these novels are stricken with exotic illnesses. Vincey, Hardgrave, and Meredith, like Kurtz and Marlow, all struggle with disease while in the imperial theatre. Quatermain suffers reoccurrences of illnesses as well as injuries sustained from a lion attack in a previous adventure. While other heroes such as Sir Henry and Osgood resist contradicting illness entirely, thus confirming their physical superiority, those who do contract illness always recover, even where the indigenous people who have had previous exposure to these illnesses are unable. Regardless of the severity of the hero's affliction, inevitably the ability of the hero to fight against the foreign infection proves his stamina and physical qualification to rule over the feeble Other who succumbs. Unlike Kurtz, death is never a result for the hero, nor indeed for virtually every white character, as white health is ultimately a universal constant.<sup>50</sup> The same conclusion can be made of the hero's ability to resist mental and moral degeneration that in the contemporary discourse was often associated with physical deterioration and disease, particularly those that afflicted lower classes or the racial Other. While imperialism had its negative side of health that could not be overlooked, adventure writers seemingly attempt to dispel or mitigate that negativity through the projection of physical resistance and endurance which ironically bolsters the image of white strength.

The heroes' survival ensures their return to the domestic space of Britain as wealthier and better men, or at least the opportunity to return if they so desired. Adventures could be exhilarating, harrowing, fascinating, even supernatural, but "the

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<sup>50</sup> Mr. Goodenough is the one exception and is discussed later in this chapter in the section on whiteness.

return” was requisite. All journeys end, and the return home signals the re-instituting of social and racial boundaries. With normalcy restored, adventures could advertise the final advantage of imperial exploits: as soon as one was finished with or tired of these adventures, one could simply come back to the comfort and safety of home and the better for it. This return signals the “rightness” of the adventurer and imperialism but also the superiority of Britain as a nation. Yet, ironically, “the return,” or the failure to return, illuminates one of the key inconsistencies in the genre. All is not well in Britain according to the adventure genre. As mentioned earlier in this section, in every adventure Britain’s sons are compelled to leave Britain, whether for personal, financial, or social reasons in order to avail themselves of opportunities which are grossly lacking at home. Once they secure their fortune and attain maturation and development, they ideally return home. While a number do, others inevitably return to the imperial realm to pursue other adventures or live out their days in a kind of self-imposed exile. Guy Osgood, Leo Vincey and Horace Holly leave Britain shortly after returning from their adventures. Even Quatermain does not remain permanently in Britain. As a recurring character in Haggard’s novels, Quatermain ultimately returns to Africa in one of Haggard’s later works. Certainly, the excitement, exoticization and supernaturalism of foreign lands and peoples, particularly the sexual overtones and insinuations of interracial intercourse, intrigued and titillated readers. But that fascination and amusement with the foreign ultimately had to be displaced in deference to the supposed superiority of English life as expressed in the desire of the heroes to return to the normalcy of Britain. The increasing social and urban problems and limitations and the malaise of some segments of British society, however, are revealed through the rejection of adventurers to remain permanently in Britain.

Although adventures are not always rigid in their imperial representations, the inconsistent return of the hero does not appear to subvert imperialism itself. It is possible that the shift in generic plot may have been simply to freshen and revitalize a tired plot line. If a story was too formulaic and predictable, adventure fictions could lose their appeal. Moreover, subsequent adventures for the heroes extended readers' interest and could facilitate subsequent books with recurring adventure characters that ensured the readers' return. Nonetheless, the suggestion in these novels seems to be that those heroes do not want to return home ever. Thus, there is strong suggestion that life at home is not as ideal as might be hoped. While the escapism that adventure provides might have temporarily alleviated the concern of readers with the social and political problems at home, the permanent absence of the heroes suggests the severity of those problems and the despair that they were perhaps irreparable. The hero's rejection of that domestic life appears then as more of a subversion of social and political conditions and policies at home than a subversion of the imperial world. Their rejection of home actually works to reinforce and even encourage expansion of imperial influence. Notably, Osgood travels to India, the jewel in the British crown, to pursue more adventure. His vocalized rejection of English society thus serves as a confirmation and extension of British imperial influence in that part of the world. Similarly, Vincey and Holly's journey to Tibet for more discovery and intrigue must ultimately result in further incursions into foreign territory by whites. Rather than limiting imperialism, the continuation of these heroes' adventures beyond the end of the novel and beyond Africa appears to advocate expansion of the Empire.

Inconsistencies in the representations of the hero, while they exist, ultimately do not subvert the dominant imperial image either, and in some cases actually reinforce

imperial promotion. Other than Leo Vincey and Horace Holly's overinflated sense of pride as Englishmen and a desire to share the knowledge they have discovered from Ayesha with the world, even if such sharing is at great personal and financial expense to them, neither man exhibits any noble nor virtuous acts of note. Ayesha is destroyed as an inadvertent result of her love for Vincey, and this frees the people of Kôr, but while their white presence facilitates these serious of events they do not occur from any overt act on their part. They are merely observers of spectacles that Holly claims are "so absolutely beyond my poor powers" to describe (218) but for which he nonetheless describes. Despite their lackluster performance as "white heroes," they realize one of the primary functions of imperialism: the escape from the monotony of urban and, in this case, scholastic life (Holly resides at an unnamed university and is a professor by trade) when all material comforts are provided. The fact that their adventure is ripe with the supernatural and that they pursue more adventure at the end of the novel implies their function as imperial tourists.

Quatermain by far consists of the most significant inconsistencies in the representation of the adventure hero from among the comparative novels. He repeatedly admits to his readers that he is not brave and professes cowardice(199, 214) when they must fight against the natives. Later, he confesses his fear when they are sealed in the treasure cave by Gagool. He appears despondent, hopeless and ineffectual in contrast to Sir Henry and Captain Good who continue to work towards their escape. Moreover, his greed is the overriding factor in his behaviour while trapped as he is preoccupied with the loot he has plundered and indecisively debates with himself about the worthlessness of the jewels he holds in contrast to the need for air, water, food, and freedom. His ethical ruminations and pragmatism amount to nothing, however, as he considers abandoning his



treasure several times only to change his mind again, despite the fact that it jeopardizes their escape.

Quatermain's shameless display of avarice and rampant imprudence is reminiscent of Kurtz who still covets his ivory even on his death bed and has to have it placed within his line of vision so he can gaze upon it until the end. He also puts his white comrades and himself at risk to quench his greed. Nonetheless, Quatermain's heroic inconsistencies do not subvert the overall endorsement of imperialism in the genre as Kurtz's inconsistencies do. While Kurtz suffers horrendously for his avarice and conceit, ultimately, Quatermain's imperial greed is rewarded with unimaginable wealth and safe return home. As a supporter of imperialism, albeit a certain kind of imperialism, Haggard indicates to his readers the benefits to imperial adventure. Quatermain's covetous actions could thus be interpreted as perseverance. Although at times self-admittedly cowardly, inevitably he faces each challenge, ensuring their survival. It is possible that the subtle effect of his admissions is to aggrandize him as Hardgrave is when the boy repeatedly deflects praise for his acts of bravery, and he thus appears humble, a quality which actually distinguishes his heroic stature more.

It is also possible his inconsistencies are designed so that one of three white heroes is more multi-dimensional and humanized than the genre formula, particularly since Sir Henry and Good are so impeccable, and three such flawless heroes might prove monotonous or unbelievable. Moreover, Quatermain's "fallibility" not only manages to secure a fortune for him and his comrades it illustrates the transformative effect of imperialism for the lower classes. Ultimately, he proves himself a gentleman by his selfless act of sharing his treasure with Captain Good and George Curtis. Although Quatermain, is certainly more complex than the simplified "hero formula" that scholars

assert, these inconsistent characteristics on some level actually function to promote imperialism. Moreover, they are limited in comparison to the overwhelming representations of the hero's righteousness and manliness which promote imperialism in Haggard's work specifically and adventure in general. More significantly, Quatermain's greed and lack of bravery and decisiveness, which are closest in character to Kurtz, as well as the subdued heroic qualities of Leo Vincey, are severely muted when contrasted to the overtly derogatory representations of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Ultimately Vincey and Quatermain's shortcomings do not impact negatively upon the final outcome of the adventure for themselves, others, or imperialism as they do for Kurtz, other whites, and imperialism.

### **Whiteness and Racial Stereotyping**

Racial whiteness in adventure fiction is generally represented in ways that are consistent with the positive representations of white heroes that promote imperial and racial discourse. Although the hero projects the most significant degree of virtuous and gentlemanly conduct, whites in general manifest these representations as though to suggest to readers that even minor players in the imperial project are worthy of emulation.<sup>51</sup> One need not become "an adventure hero" to enjoy the pleasures and rewards of imperial adventure, including social and personal self-improvement. Nonetheless, their reliability and sense of collectivity are essential for that success as they

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<sup>51</sup> Notably, little has been written about the heroes' companions in adventure fiction, and what has been considered is limited to their function as mentors. Although Dryden and White focus on the positive and pro-imperial representation of the white adventure hero, their conclusions support a number of the conventions of whiteness in general as evidenced by the secondary characters in the literature considered for this paper. Issues of reliability and the function of whites as a collective also needs discussion, however, along with the inconsistencies of these representations.

form part of a cohesive racial front. These superior qualities, like those of the hero, are held in opposition to the racialized images of Africans and hybrids which justify both the existence of the racial hierarchies and white incursion into Africa. It was considered natural that the seemingly superior whites should subjugate and control inferior blacks as much for their sake as for white justification. A presumed philanthropy of the imperial enterprise is thus central to the projection of whiteness in adventure fiction. While most individuals in these stories are motivated by personal gain, the underlying function of whites in these stories is to ensure the salvation of the native people regardless of the form which that salvation takes.

Just as with the treatment of the hero, however, racial representations of whites, Africans, and more prominently, hybrid figures in the adventure genre are neither monolithic nor consistent.<sup>52</sup> Haggard, for example, introduces a level of inconsistency in representations of whites and the Other that do not appear in other adventures, and both Haggard and Merriman utilize inconsistent representations of hybrid figures. These inconsistencies reflect a degree of ambivalence with respect to imperialism and race as they are presented in the adventure genre and dominant discourses. Although secondary characters profit overall in terms of social mobility and personal development and can celebrate their physicality freely in the imperial world, much as the heroes do, at times their realization of these aspects of whiteness is limited. While for the hero, a complete democratization of class and physicality exists in the imperial world, this limitation for some white characters indicates a transference of hierarchical structures from Britain to

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<sup>52</sup> Previous scholarship on adventure fiction has assumed formulaic representations of whiteness and the Other. Dryden and White have done the most comprehensive examination of the adventure genre and its racializations. Yet both overlook these inconsistencies in the portrayals of race, nor do they consider the hybrid figure.

the imperial world. Whiteness is not a constant concept. Ambivalence with respect to the Other and hybrids complicates concepts of race further. Blacks are associated with whiteness or represented with white attributes. Hybrids are problematized even more as they are presented physically as white figures and occupy positions of authority and power that such race affords. On one level, these representations reflect the mobility that imperialism offers Englishmen, for instance, “out there” even racial otherness does not preclude one from advancement. But it also reflects white anxiety toward racial Others which was prevalent in Britain at the time. While this ambivalence may also question the racial hierarchy, it does not subvert it as ultimately the racial hierarchy is restored. Non-whites with racially threatening power are destroyed, and white figures must save native peoples from exploitation at the hands of other Africans and hybrid characters and from their own the savagery and superstition.

As with their hero counterpart, the white companions tend to exemplify qualities of gentlemanliness and masculinity, although they too are not wholly formulaic. In some respects, they possess a more developed virtuousness and sense of morality and honour than the heroes given that their function as companions, friends, servants, employers, and mentors which attests in part to their service to others and self-sacrifice which facilitate the heroes’ social and financial advancement. While the heroes’ pursuit of wealth frequently motivates their participation in the imperial adventure, their white companions, Captain Good, Mr. Goodenough, Joseph, and Horace Holly, follow the heroes in order to support them,<sup>53</sup> and they do in all circumstances of the imperial theatre regardless of the

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<sup>53</sup> Frank Hardgrave is the only hero who follows the secondary white character to Africa. But Mr. Goodenough’s position as Frank’s employer, mentor, and, after his death, benefactor indicate his function in support of Hardgrave, as does his name which telegraphs his essential altruistic personal and racial characteristics. The use of the name “Captain Good” also suggests his inherent superiority and altruistic support of his comrades.

personal danger to themselves. Their motives are purely altruistic to other whites. Moreover, the white companions display the same kind of morality and honour toward the native peoples that the heroes do. Joseph, in *With Edged Tools*, is the first to discover that Durnovo purchased their workers as slaves and to insist upon their emancipation. Captain Good is identified implicitly as an English gentleman as a result of his intense loyalty and chivalry toward Foulata. In *She*, Holly grants at least one native, the old man Billali, the distinction of referring to him as a “gentleman” and is disgusted by and pities his debasement of having to crawl on hands and knees in this “undignified position,” even though ultimately Holly is more concerned with his own dignity than the native’s.

To a degree, the white companions thus display their class-based qualities of virtuousness, honour, morality and philanthropy as do the heroes in circumstances unique to the imperial environment. Their capacity for manliness in its various incarnations is equally relative as it is for the hero as circumstances arise in the imperial world that necessitate their vigorous action. As with the heroes, Holly and Joseph resist disease completely, and Captain Good recovers from his near-death sickness. Moreover, as an example of almost universal attractiveness of whiteness, Foulata devotes herself emphatically to Captain Good and even sacrifices her life in an attempt to eliminate the threat to his. Although adventures focus more on the exciting, sometimes graphic actions of the hero, the physicality and significantly the reliability and collectivity of his comrades are projected as key elements of whiteness and are indispensable. Joseph, Meredith’s servant and companion, and Captain Good both exhibit bravery, decisiveness, strength and vigour at crucial moments in intense battles against the savage natives in their respective novels. After Meredith becomes gravely ill, Joseph single-handedly continues their months-long battle against warring cannibals, and his superior command

of their black labourers is crucial in the last decisive battle: “He was everywhere at once, urging on his men, kicking them, pushing them, forcing them up to the stockade” (193). Captain Good proves himself equally vital in the white men’s defense of the people of Loo so graphically and sensationally depicted by Haggard.

But these characters function in a wider capacity than merely as extensions of the heroes and further examples of universal white superiority. Although the heroes are extraordinary and self-reliant, they also rely upon the support of other whites in subduing the natives and achieving their imperial goals. Whites are thus projected as presenting a united front against the Other. This reliability was a crucial element of the imperial agenda as it reinforced for imperial readers that should they participate themselves in Empire, they would never be abandoned “out there” regardless of the circumstances. English comrades would always be available or arrive when needed and the imperial system itself could not fail. As a result of their faithful service, their rewards are comparable with the heroes themselves. Some whites, such as Good and George Curtis, profit enormously from their adventures while, Sir Henry, who is already wealthy, does not. In this way, they exemplify the upward mobility of imperialism in which those with less resources and social standing potentially better themselves. Joseph also receives a share of Meredith and Osgood’s fortune from the Simiacine drug even though he is only Meredith’s man-servant. Although these white figures do not enjoy centre stage in the adventure, they always share in the spoils of imperial adventure, even from seemingly minimal participation.

Although whiteness in general parallels the representation of white heroes and their advocacy of dominant imperial and racial discourse, the inconsistencies in the generic formula of whiteness reveal ambivalence in and anxiety about these discourses.

Adventures highlight the idea of mobility through both actual physical movement to Africa and, particularly enticing for many readers, mobility of status. The latter feature of adventure, as discussed in this section, is frequently born out when even minor characters share in the spoils of Empire. Yet, the full democratization achieved for heroes of lower status such as Quatermain and Hardgrave fails to materialize for others. The companions do travel to Africa, but two of them do so in the service of the hero. Joseph is the manservant of Meredith, and Holly, although originally the paid guardian of a dependent Leo Vincey, remains in his service after he has reached adulthood. Although he acts as a mentor for him, he is paradoxically in a subordinate role as he relies upon financial compensation from Vincey's estate, and his original position as a university professor also translates into a lower social standing, like Good and Joseph. Even Captain Good is not in Africa for his own sake, as he accompanies his friend, Sir Henry, who searches for his lost brother.

To a degree, their literary function as secondary characters implies a literary status subordinate to the hero. Their physical movement and, significantly, their lack of transformation, imply a subordinate social position as the rigid social structures from which many of the heroes seek to escape in Britain appear to be transplanted in the imperial world and are reimposed upon their return. These characters operate more or less as equals alongside the heroes in all their exploits, but like the temporary dalliance with exoticism in imperial adventures, the democratization of social structures appears fleeting. Joseph faithfully remains in the employ of his master, and just as these figures follow their social betters to Africa, they accompany them back to Britain, and in the case of Holly, he accompanies Vincey for still more exploration in Asia. Notably, the aspects of gentlemanly character-building and masculinity associated with the mobility in

imperialism tend to be muted in these characters. Although the imperial world allows them to display their gentlemanly qualities, the kinds of essential transformation and maturation that occur in the hero are not realized in the secondary white characters. In part, this is due to their frequent function as mentors or older men who are fully developed already, and they thus remain fairly static throughout their time in Africa.<sup>54</sup>

Although the masculinity of some of these lesser white characters is crucial to secure the survival of themselves and their hero comrades, several inconsistencies with respect to whites' masculinity reveal ambivalence concerning the superiority of whiteness. Neither Horace Holly nor Mr. Goodenough provides any display of physical "manliness" with respect to battle, courage or decisive action. Holly also subverts the perceived attractiveness of whites as he is described not only as unattractive, but homely: short, hairy and ugly, he reminds the editor of a gorilla. His appearance seems to serve as a contrast to Vincey, the hero, and to accentuate his divine countenance and physique. This lack of "machismo" in both Holly and Goodenough is consistent with their function in the respective novels as observers and scholarly mentors. Their appearance demonstrates the unfavourable qualities associated with scholarly pursuit which was minimized during this period. Manliness and superior physicality were considered essential racial features which would secure the idealized Empire for the English race. Intellectualism was sometimes associated with weakness which diminished the race as a whole. Holly refers directly to this assumption by differentiating the keen-wittedness of Vincey from "the dullness necessary" for scholars such as himself (21). As the only men of intellect in these four adventures, Holly and Goodenough represent the opposite of

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<sup>54</sup> Quatermain is the only more mature character who undergoes some transformation as a result of his experience, but his transformation occurs due to his status as an adventure hero.



what adventuring imperialists were supposed to comprise. Not surprisingly, they do not benefit from the experience as do the more physical characters who conform to the conventions of whiteness. Neither receives treasure nor a relationship with a woman (Holly admits that women hated the sight of him), and Goodenough dies of dysentery.<sup>55</sup>

These inconsistencies in manliness (read as racial weakness) highlight the racial anxiety of Britons who felt increasingly threatened by while at the same time superior to the racially different. These anxieties are expressed even more prominently in the interactions with and representations of the racial Other. Interracial sex and Empire are at the fore of these ambivalences and anxieties, as a schism existed between the espoused viewpoint on miscegenation and the reality. On the one hand, at home in Britain, interracial relations were an established racial and social taboo. Abroad, miscegenation was also to be resisted by imperialists in order to preserve homogeneity and the perceived racial superiority it guaranteed.<sup>56</sup> But as Ronald Hyam, among others, has concluded, sex and Empire were integrally entwined.<sup>57</sup> Thus, although sexual resistance is evident in contemporary literature, miscegenation is equally evident. The literature under

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<sup>55</sup> David Lorenzo discusses Henty's repeated plot structure, one of the key features of which is the free agency of his young heroes. They are orphaned or otherwise left to their own devices after the deaths of adults, and this helps to develop their self-reliance and appropriate moral and personal characteristics in order for them to assume their imperial responsibilities. Goodenough's death follows this Henty plot pattern. While the excessive pro-imperial attitudes in Henty's novel seem to preclude a subversion of racial supremacy regarding Goodenough's death, it does break with the seemingly universal imperviousness of whites to disease in Africa, and his position as an intellectual which was construed as less "manly" cannot be overlooked.

<sup>56</sup> Meyers and Dryden, for example, conclude that the ability of the adventure hero to resist the sexuality of the Other confirms his moral and racial superiority and emphasizes the propriety which adventurers exercise in recognizing the racial gulf that supposedly existed between them. They do not account for the pervasiveness of miscegenation in adventures, however.

<sup>57</sup> Hyam goes so far as to assert that sex was a function of Empire and not merely a benefit of it. Anne McClintock has written extensively on the relationships between race, sex and colonialism. See also Robert Young for discussion on colonial desire as it relates specifically to hybridity.

consideration in this thesis seems to widen this gulf between expectation and reality further, as some of the novels suggest not merely resistance to the Other but the virtually non-existent sexuality of them. Hardgrave does not make significant note of any native woman, despite spending several years in Africa, as though the territory exists in an almost asexual state. Meredith and Osgood, are completely indifferent to Marie, the only native woman with whom they have contact and who is later discovered to be the secret wife of Durnovo. The only insinuation of interracial sex in the novel other than the existence of the hybrid, Durnovo, and his undisclosed marriage, is a threatening proposition as he attempts to extort sex from the young English woman, Jocelyn Gordon. Significantly, his attempt is thwarted by one of the white heroes, Meredith, who later makes his own sexual claim upon her by way of marriage, thus preserving the racial boundaries of sex.

In adventure fiction there is, however, equal representation of interracial sex or romantic entanglements between white heroes and native women. Haggard particularly contravenes the racial divisions for sex and romance. Such relationships may have titillated readers with fantasies of the exotic, but Captain Good's chivalrous romance with Foulata and his continued devotion to her even after his return to Britain — Sir Henry reveals that he will not even look at another woman — indicate more than mere sexual fantasy. She seems to occupy a position that is commensurate with English women or even surpassing these white women, which disrupts sexual norms. Indeed, heroes in neither of Haggard's works return to Britain to marriage as they do in other adventures, perhaps suggesting some ambivalence concerning sexuality at home.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, the

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<sup>58</sup> Toda Iglesia and María Angeles suggest that Haggard's works are a radical rejection of women and heterosexual love, 40.

convention of eliminating racial complications is maintained. Foulata is stabbed by the evil Gagool. In *She*, both Ayesha and Ustane want Leo Vincey as their husband (Ustane even marries Leo according to native traditions), but both women are also killed. Notably, they are killed brutally or horrifically as though to demonstrate the severity of racial transgression. In both of Haggard's novels, native characters (Ignosi and Ayesha) recognize and expound upon the impropriety of native women coupling with the white men. Moreover, these women all die at the hands of other natives or hybrids, not whites, which seems to confirm their adherence to the white men's racial distinctions. This contrasts significantly with Kurtz's racial transgression which is seemingly terminated by other whites (the exact outcome for the black mistress is left in doubt). Racial boundaries, though temporarily violated in Haggard's works, are restored, and the hero is uncontaminated by the experience. The degree to which Haggard subverts genre conventions is somewhat limited, therefore, and even though titillation and subversion are not incompatible with each other, the dallings of whites with the exotic seem to have an overall effect of titillation rather than subversion. The involvement of the white hero seems to serve more as an example of one of the rewards of Empire, the spoils that are enjoyed abroad but which never impinge upon white purity at home. Rather than a blanket statement about sexuality in adventure fiction in which heroes unwaveringly resist the Other, it is therefore more reasonable to conclude that while heroes sometimes resist, they also relent. That indulgence, however, is temporary as racial boundaries are ultimately restored, and both the indulgence and restoration serve to advance imperial desires in readers.

Sexual relations in adventure fictions are not isolated in expressing the racial ambivalence and anxieties of Britons. Representations of natives and hybrids in general

reveal a similar dichotomy that consists of both stereotypes and inconsistencies. Adventure stories, by default, require the substantial presence of indigenous peoples with whom whites could interact and more importantly control. The Empire was populated by vast numbers and varieties of peoples despite the representations of the dominant discourse that projected the idea of an “empty” or “unsettled” land ripe for white colonization and control.<sup>59</sup> Where imperial discourse and literature do include indigenous peoples, these cultures and civilizations are depicted as primitive, inferior and inconsequential in relation to those of white Europeans and therefore were, for all intents and purposes, non-existent. Alternatively, these peoples and their lands are feminized in literature and racial discourses while white Europeans are projected in highly masculinized ways and the conquest of these peoples and lands are portrayed as sexual conquest. Africa, in particular, was commonly represented as devoid of history and culture, and its peoples racialized.<sup>60</sup>

Literature, both fiction and non-fiction, picked up this mantle of non-history and racialization and thus characterize Africa as “empty” of at least “advanced” civilization and Africans as crudely cultured, and the inferior products of that deficiency. Adventure fiction particularly represents African peoples in highly simplistic and racialized ways. Referring to Haggard’s novels specifically, Dryden concludes that natives consist of “the

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<sup>59</sup> In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock discusses the feminization of colonial lands and peoples in dominant discourses and how this facilitated subjugation of both.

<sup>60</sup> Sir Samuel Baker, the explorer of the Upper Nile region who served as governor-general of the Equatorial Nile territory, stated unequivocally at a banquet in his honour in Brighton, England in 1874 that “Central Africa . . . is without a history. In that savage country . . . we find no vestiges of the past – no ancient architecture, neither sculpture, nor even one chiselled stone to prove that the Negro savage of this day is inferior to a remote ancestor. We find primeval races existing upon primitive rock formation . . . We must therefore conclude that the races of man which now inhabit [this region] are unchanged from the prehistoric tribes who were the original inhabitants” (quoted in Cairns 86).

noble savage,” evil and ugly creatures, or sensuous and dangerous beauties (37). Andrea White supplements this definition with other adventure fictions in which colonials are also seen as passive, innocent, child-like, and victims<sup>61</sup> (73). Haggard’s Ignosi and Henty’s Ammon Quatia exemplify the nobleness of the African savage. Even Haggard’s native women, Foulata and Ustane, exhibit these traits of nobleness, possibly in order to make them more worthy of the white men’s attention. Kurtz’s black mistress may similarly be classified as a noble savage. At the same time, these women are certainly sensuous and the threat of miscegenation they pose suggests their racial dangerousness. The essentialized traits of the cruel, evil and hideous natives are over-emphasized in the characters of Twala<sup>62</sup> and Gagool<sup>63</sup> and the warriors of Amahagger.<sup>64</sup> Animalizations comprise key elements of African portrayal, both in individualized depictions and generalizations of them. Moreover, adventure stories exemplify presumed African

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<sup>61</sup> White asserts that both Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson altered representations of natives in adventure stories by projecting them as victims. She suggests that Haggard presents the native “as a potential victim of colonial incursions.” But notably in both *She* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, two of his most popular novels, the native peoples are victimized by their own leaders, not whites, and the destruction of these evil natives is the direct result of the incursions of the white heroes thus reinforcing imperial images. In analyzing racial representation in adventure fiction, this point is significant, however, given that in *Heart of Darkness* the natives are victimized almost exclusively by white imperialists, while other adventures portray natives being victimized by the evil native or hybrid creatures without exception.

<sup>62</sup> Quatermain describes Twala as a truly alarming spectacle: “gigantic, enormous, with “the most entirely repulsive countenance we had ever beheld. This man’s lips were thick as a negro’s, the nose was flat, he had but one gleaming black eye, for the other was represented by a hollow in the face, and his whole expression was cruel and sensual to a degree” (Haggard, *KSM*, 106 ).

<sup>63</sup> Quatermain animalizes Gagool’s appearance, calling her a “wizened, monkey-like figure creeping from the shadow of the hut,” with “a most extraordinary and weird countenance” and “the head of a cobra” (Haggard, *KSM*, 111).

<sup>64</sup> Holly concludes when he first meets the warriors of Amahagger that “I had never seen a more evil-looking set of faces. There was an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty stamped upon them that revolted me, and which in some cases was almost uncanny in its intensity” (Haggard, *She*, 77).

laziness<sup>65</sup> and the bizarre, such as the ghastly Amahagger bonfire ceremony where they burn the mummified corpses of their people and perform animalized rituals.

Like other elements of the genre, however, representations of Africans, and more significantly hybrids, reveal inconsistencies that scholars have overlooked. While Africans are fairly consistently represented in racialized ways, they are occasionally complicated with racial ambivalence. For example, Ignosi is endowed with specific qualities, which repeatedly distinguish him from other Africans and suggest an ambivalence concerning his actual racial status: “a tall, handsome-looking man, somewhere about thirty years of age, and very light-coloured for a Zulu” (37). Although identified as Zulu, his skin colour is differentiated from others. The ambivalence seems apparent as Haggard comes back to colour again: “Certainly he was a magnificent looking man; I never saw a finer native. Standing about six foot three high, he was broad in proportion, and very shapely. In that light, too, his skin looked scarcely more than dark” (39). Although Dryden identifies Ignosi as an example of “the noble savage” (37), the racial differences seem to dissolve as Ignosi’s physical appearance approximates that of the white heroes. Sir Henry stands next to Ignosi and Captain Good observes, “They make a good pair, don’t they? . . . one as big as the other.” (39). The accompanying illustration in which Quatermain and Captain Good seem to survey and discuss the similarities of the two men is suggestive of racial discourse in which races were

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<sup>65</sup> The narrator in *With Edged Tools* generalizes about African laziness: “. . . they were as dumb and driven animals, fighting as they were told, carrying what they were given to carry, walking as many miles as they were considered able to walk. They hired themselves out like animals, and as the beasts of the field they did their work – patiently, without intelligence . . . At the end of their journey they settled down to a life of ease and leisure, which was to last until necessity drove them to work again. Such is the African” (Merriman, 241). Mr. Goodeneough, as a naturalist, lends some authority to similar generalizations as he categorizes various African tribes on a range from the least to the more indolent.

categorized by assumed physical traits. Moreover, given Ignosi's elevated speech that exceeds the white heroes in eloquence, labeling Ignosi as "the noble savage" is an oversimplification as Haggard indicates a degree of racial ambivalence.

Despite Ignosi's association with whiteness, he still occupies a subservient position. He is given speech, but it is granted at the discretion of whites as Quatermain corrects Ignosi for what he perceives is disrespect from a black man toward whites: "I told him to hold his tongue, and leave such matters to wiser heads . . . You forget yourself a little . . . Your words ran out unawares. That is not the way to speak" (38 ). He is also granted power — he is restored to his rightful position as King of Loo — perhaps in recognition of his white affinities, but that reinstatement too is bestowed by the whites who command the African forces that defeat the usurping Twala. Thus while racial ambivalence in Ignosi's connections to whiteness cannot be overlooked, they appear as ambivalence only as the racial hierarchy is maintained. Similarly, in the first few pages of the book, Quatermain may deliberately avoid the word "nigger" and explain his reasoning for doing so because he has known some "natives who *are*" gentlemen and some "mean whites with lots of money and fresh out from home, too, who *are not*," but it is an isolated comment which he ultimately does nothing to substantiate. On the contrary, all his interactions with natives confirm a paternalistic and racist perspective. Whereas Marlow openly questions and debates the issue of race of the Other, Quatermain does not appear to have an intention to subvert imperial and racial discourses. Nonetheless, recognizing his ambivalence reveals that racial attitudes of the period were not formulaic, and it facilitates identification of subversion of racialized representations in *Heart of Darkness*.

The inconsistencies in racial representations in adventures, however, are most pronounced in the hybrid figure. Considerable fear was expressed during the period about the products of miscegenation. While potentially diluting the purity of the race, the children of mixed parentage could also physically pass for white. This anxiety plays out in adventures through the hybrid figures in *With Edged Tools* and *She*. Both Durnovo and Ayesha appear physically as white. As outwardly appearing white figures, they occupy positions of authority and wield power commensurate with whites in the adventure; in Ayesha's case, she actually exercises a power far greater than whites. Yet, from the outset there is sufficient derogatory differentiation made in both their physicality and character that insinuates the negative influence of their mixed blood. Physical flaws appear in them that indicate they are not as exemplary as whites, and corrupt and tyrannical personalities are dominated by their presumably baser African ancestry. They are cruel and vindictive, and they pervert the power they hold, and ultimately that power is revoked, and they are destroyed horrifically.

From his introduction, Durnovo appears white, and as such enters his partnership with Meredith and Osgood on equal terms. It is only later that his partners discover the racial discrepancy. Nonetheless, they honourably maintain their relationship on the same basis. Although he passes as white, he is differentiated from the exceptional physicality of the white heroes with characteristics that manifest his seemingly inherent degenerate personal traits.

He was a small-faced man, with a squarely aquiline nose and a black mustache which hung like a valance over his mouth . . . No one seeing his mouth had before that time been prevailed upon to trust him. Nature has a way of hanging out signs and then covering them up so that the casual fail to see. He was a man of medium height, with abnormally long arms and a somewhat truculent way of walking, as if his foot was ever ready to kick anything or any person who might come in his way (37).



He is animalized, presented with an eagle's sharp hooked nose, and his cruelty and deceitfulness are manifested physically as are his cowardliness and brutality in later descriptions, traits that are often reserved for native representations in adventures. He runs off when there is small pox in the village and abandons his partner on the plateau to be killed by the natives, examples of cowardice for which his white partners must later force him to act responsibly and manly. From the outset, his treatment of native peoples is to resort to violence and slavery, an abomination so repellent to the white characters, and presumably the reader, that he is ultimately punished horrifically. As a man who is outwardly white, he occupies a position of authority, but his rule and decision-making in that position seem inherently perverted by the influence of a supposedly inferior race. In essence, he becomes like the African despots in other adventures who must be destroyed.

Ayesha occupies a racial position of even far greater ambivalence. Having originated in ancient Egypt and now inhabiting and ruling over distinctively black Africans, Ayesha is technically African. Even though Egyptian and other Muslims of northern Africa are often differentiated from black Africans, Ayesha herself is presented with significant racial ambiguity which reveals the inconsistency of race within the genre. Haggard depicts her physically as white. Unlike Ignosi who possesses affinities with the white heroes, Ayesha is unequivocally white. Moreover, like the central white hero of the novel and other heroes in adventure fiction, she is depicted not merely as "white" but she possesses superior qualities that are, in this case noble, imperial, even god-like:

. . . robed in a garb of clinging white that did but serve to show its perfect and imperial shape, instinct with a life that was more than life, and with a certain serpent-like grace that was more than human . . . About the waist her white kirtle was fastened by a double-headed snake of solid gold, above which her gracious form welled up in lines as pure as they were lovely, till the kirtle ended on the snowy argent of her breast, whereon her arms were folded. I gazed above them at her face, and — I do not

exaggerate — shrank back blinded and amazed. I have heard of the beauty of celestial beings, now I saw it (155).

Everything associated with or upon her is glaringly white or golden. The whiteness, imperialism and godliness include even her hair: “It lay rather, if it can be said to have had any fixed abiding place, in a visible majesty, in an imperial grace, in a godlike stamp of softened power, which shone upon that radiant countenance like a living halo” (155).

Haggard may have projected the African queen as white because she wields such extraordinary power to manipulate nature in ways that even Holly, as a scholarly Englishman, does not understand. In this sense, she is superior to the Englishmen, and Haggard may be trying to reconcile this discrepancy of power by making her white.<sup>66</sup> Inevitably, the African queen’s authority is undermined as she is quickly revealed as a tyrant and is, therefore, racialized in ways common to the genre. Although pure, even saintly in appearance, the repeated use of serpent imagery is injected whenever she is described which destabilizes her otherwise stately and immaculate physicality through both its animalizations and Biblical allusions to evil in the Garden of Eden. Her character traits are equally tainted. Projected as a white woman, she wields mysterious, inconceivable, and immeasurable natural power that threatens not only the hero’s masculinity but genuine white racial power. She rules by absolute right, suggestive in its supernaturalness of “divine right,” and like some of the divine rulers of Europe’s past, is a cruel and vindictive tyrant. Upon meeting Holly and Vincey, she espouses a perspective which eerily recalls to mind Kurt’s “Exterminate the brutes!” prescription: “But stay, oh Holly, stand not there, enter with me and be seated by me. I would not see thee crawl

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<sup>66</sup> Significantly, the then British monarch, Victoria, was both a woman and the longest ruling monarch to date, having reigned in excess of 50 years at the time of the publication of *She*. Ayesha’s incredible rule of 2,000 years may be associated with Victoria, who was designated as “Empress” and ruled over the British Empire during its ascension to global preeminence.

before me like those slaves. I am aweary of their worship and their terror; sometimes when they vex me I could blast them for very sport, and to see the rest turn white, even to the heart” (145).

The cruelty with which Ayesha rules the people of Kôr is consistent with Durnovo’s brutalizations of the Africans he enslaves. Paradoxically, while both hybrids’ brutality and animalizations exemplify their inherent ‘Otherness,’ these former qualities must also be connected to their whiteness, in Ayesha’s case so glaringly projected. Her cruel administration of her subjects and Durnovo’s overseeing of the partners’ labour capsule the contemptuousness of some whites towards Africans. Notably, even Horace Holly himself, as an otherwise honourable white man, wants to kick the old man, Billali, who crawls and grovels too slowly for his liking before Ayesha. It is a cruelty symptomatic of imperialism that is also exposed in the attitudes and actions of whites throughout *Heart of Darkness*. One cannot help but also compare Ayesha’s god-like position to Kurtz’s establishment of himself as a god to be worshiped in *Heart of Darkness*. Whether Ayesha and Durnovo are made purposefully or inadvertently as examples of white European tyranny over Africa is not clear, but their cruel and evil elements confirm the negative influence of their darker racial origin. The narrator is explicit that Durnovo’s excesses are the result of the mixing of the races and that he inherited the worst of each. Thus, rather than a comment about the savagery of whites in Africa, Durnovo seems to serve as a cautionary against miscegenation. While both characters generate significant racial ambivalence, their ultimate outcome seems to resolve social fears concerning mixed races. Despite their whiteness, their power is revoked and they are destroyed horrifically. Significantly, they are both dehumanized in the process of their destruction as though their illusions of whiteness are revoked before

their deaths.<sup>67</sup> They are reconstituted as the Other and then killed. With their deaths, the temporary blurring of racial boundaries is eliminated. These racial inconsistencies, like other breaches of conventions in the genre, indicate that adventure fiction is far from monolithic. Moreover, they allow us to recognize the significant deviations in *Heart of Darkness* that challenge and complicate imperialism and race.

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<sup>67</sup> After the natives Durnovo enslaved mutiny against him, they mutilate and strip him of all semblance of humanity: “The thing that stood there – sickening their gaze – was not a human being at all. Take a man’s eyelids away, leaving the round ball staring, blood-streaked; cut away his lips, leaving the grinning teeth and red gums; shear off his ears – that which is left is not a man at all. This had been done to Victor Durnovo. Truly the vengeance of man is crueller than the vengeance of God!” (282). Significantly, his dehumanization is linked directly to an act of punishment. While it is explicitly for his offense of slavery, it is implicitly for his racial transgression of passing as white and that transgression must be righted.

When Ayesha steps into the supernatural pillar of flame, she is instantaneously aged physically to her actual chronological age: “‘*Look! — look! — look!* she’s shrivelling up; she’s turning into a monkey!’ . . . smaller and smaller she grew; her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its lustre it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment. She felt at her head: the delicate hand was nothing but a claw now . . . Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a baboon . . . She, who but two minutes before had gazed upon us the loveliest, noblest, most splendid woman the world has ever seen, she lay still before us, near the masses of her own dark hair, no larger than a big monkey, and hideous — ah, too hideous for words. And yet, think of this — at that very moment I thought of it — it was the *same* woman!” (293-4). The process reverts her racially to a non-white by contrasting her now dark colouring with her whiteness moments before. She is then animalized and dehumanized as a living mummy. Once stripped of the outward appearance of whiteness, her inner essence is revealed, and she is destroyed.

## Chapter 2

### Marlow: The Unconventional Adventure Hero

It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me — and into my thoughts. (*HD*, 11)

When Marlow qualifies his tale with the above assumption, he indicates to his audience on the *Nellie* and to the reader that they are about to hear an adventure journey that altered him profoundly. The journey motif is the singular aspect around which all adventures revolve. Heroes travel to exotic lands and experience the unusual and the unique. More than the mere physical movement through space, adventures offer white males opportunities for personal and social mobility. This mobility involves the development of the kinds of superior, inner qualities of gentlemanliness associated with the higher classes that justify both imperialism and their own participation in it. The frequent rewards of adventures imply the movement of heroes to higher social status. Similarly, the heroes realize their “manliness” through overt displays of masculinity and physicality that also contribute to this overall development as “heroes.” These fairly consistent attributes and plot structures of the journey suggest stability in the Empire that was likely reassuring for readers. Moreover, for contemporary readers, these transformations to upper class “gentlemen” and “manly men” held significant appeal when opportunities for such mobility seemed extremely limited at home in Britain, and they thus saw the advantage of imperial service.

Marlow’s declaration at the outset of his narrative likely nourished this same expectation and desire in the reader. Marlow’s journey, however, fails to function as it should, and Marlow never realizes these conventional transformations of the adventure hero. He does not attain “gentlemanly” and “manly” qualities, and instead, he reveals

himself to be virtually the antithesis of the adventure hero. Since these qualities helped to justify imperialism and promote imperial participation among readers (see chapter 1), Marlow's failure to attain this realization of heroic status during his journey critiques that imperial image and promotion. Ironically, however, on some level Marlow's journey is transformative, but the changes that occur are likely not what readers and Marlow himself would have expected or desired most. On some level, he transforms into the Other, shedding his Englishness. Moreover, he attains enlightenment as he realizes the fallacy and hypocrisy of the idea of imperialism as well as the supposed inhumanity of Africans. Although he is unsuccessful in his journey in the conventional sense, he realizes far more than he or anyone else might have expected. He recognizes the flaws inherent in imperialism as well as the recklessness of those who participate in it. Marlow's unconventional character and journey demonstrate the degree to which he critiques imperialism and the adventure genre for its complicity in it. Adventure stories assume imperialism and racial hierarchies consist of stability and moral rightness, but Marlow creates significant ambivalence toward both. These highly popular stories also project tremendous advantages for Englishmen who participate in imperialism, but Marlow discredits this image, too, by offering the reader a radically different journey and outcome.

A number of scholars have written about Conrad's critique of imperialism and race (chapter 4 outlines imperial criticisms specifically) and Marlow's representation. Much of the criticism about Marlow focuses on his role as narrator and his unreliability in that capacity,<sup>68</sup> as well as Marlow's participation (and complicity) in imperialism.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Marlow's position as an unreliable narrator is generally accepted and many scholars often refer to it in passing even when their larger discussion concentrates on other aspects of the novel. Of those critics who focus specifically on Marlow's reliability, Sung Ryol Kim examines Marlow's reactions and

Scholars often connect both the issue of his narration and imperialism to the lie he tells the Intended that seems to conceal the truth of what he witnesses. Scholars, whether discussing the lie specifically or in mentioning it as part of a larger discussion focusing on other issues, generally accept Marlow's lie to the Intended as an endorsement of imperialism.<sup>70</sup> The lie is also interpreted as part of Marlow's unreliability of narration.<sup>71</sup> Although several discussions have examined *Heart of Darkness* as a journey, these analyses typically consider the journey in terms of a spiritual journey which do not take into account the imperial ramifications of that journey.<sup>72</sup> These approaches do not,

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unreliability in narration as being precipitated by his human reactions to traumatic situations; Marlow tries to create emotional distance in his narrative to hide his true feelings of the impact of the violence and horror he witnesses. Peter Nazareth suggests that Conrad uses the ambiguity, ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox in *Heart of Darkness* as "strategies to get passed mental and political barriers" which, given the context, prevented Conrad from making direct criticism.

<sup>69</sup> Edward Said connects Marlow's language to imperialism suggesting that language unsettles reality itself as the world is "made and unmade more or less all the time" (29); as a result of this instability, Empire is thus unstable. Said concludes that despite this disruption of Empire, Marlow and Kurtz, like Conrad, are "creatures of their time" (30). Susan Blake, Seodial Deena and Patrick Brantlinger recognize the elements of imperial subversion (Blake particularly notes Marlow's criticism and mockery of the colonial venture) but they suggest that ultimately Conrad fails to subvert it.

<sup>70</sup> In discussions focussing specifically on the lie, Fred L. Milne concludes that the Intended represents western civilization and the act of lying to her exposes the great lie that she embodies.

<sup>71</sup> Edward H. Hoepfner describes the lie as a "dislocation" of Marlow's language that reveals the limitation of language and the inability to know precise meanings. See also Sid Ray.

<sup>72</sup> Sudarsan Rangarajan views Marlow's journey as the hero's descent into the underworld. Daniel R. Schwarz looks at Marlow's trek as a spiritual journey of the inner self. Albert J. Guerard considers it a journey of self-discovery and "potentialities of self" connecting much of Marlow's journey to the unconscious, dreams, and the unspeakable. While the latter bears some relevance to this discussion, it overlooks the adventure genre completely which allows us to see how the journey, which was inscribed with significant imperial expectations, fails to actualize in Marlow and how that becomes a critique of imperialism and disruption of its promotion for readers.

however, consider Marlow and *Heart of Darkness* within the novel's original genre context which consists of fairly specific imperial conventions.<sup>73</sup>

While these discussions offer some insight into Marlow's character and his connection to imperialism, they are limited in revealing the extent of his subversive representation. This chapter examines Marlow as an adventure hero within the literary context of adventure fiction that advocated imperialism at a time of significant imperial fervour and anxiety. Adventure stories set the bar very high in their expectations of imperialists and what they achieved. They transform in ways that benefit themselves and the British Empire, thus stabilizing white racial identity and imperialism. Marlow, however, fails to achieve that conventional movement of the inner and outer person. Instead, he attains a highly unconventional transformation that results in a more critical vision of imperialism and a disruption of its promotion. Moreover, Marlow's unconventionality suggests ambivalence regarding his racial identity. We are thus able to perceive both a genre and a period of time which were not as monolithic in its ideas of race and Empire as has been previously assumed.

Although the adventure genre is not rigidly consistent in its pro-imperial representations of the hero or the Other, ultimately those inconsistencies do not disrupt imperialism or its promotion. In *Heart of Darkness*, the inconsistencies both critique and disrupt the dominant images of race and imperialism. By contextualizing *Heart of Darkness* with respect to these other adventure stories, we can determine the novel's unconventionality and its function as a critique and destabilization. The first section of

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<sup>73</sup> Given the little analysis of *Heart of Darkness* as adventure fiction, not surprisingly, scholarship has yet to examine Marlow's role as an adventure hero. Linda Dryden and Andrea White, as discussed in Chapter 1, have completed the most comprehensive work of situating *Heart of Darkness* within the adventure and imperial genres. Their analyses, however, do not examine Marlow in terms of the conventions for adventure heroes and their transformative journeys.



the chapter initially illustrates the ways in which Marlow conforms to the standards of the adventure hero: his Englishness, privileged social position, and, of course, the journey itself and his suggestion that it somehow changed him. Beyond the superficialities of his heroic status, however, Marlow quickly reveals his unheroic nonconformity: his ambivalent Englishness, frivolous motivations for embarking on his journey, and questionable and unconventional tactics for getting to Africa, his ridiculousness, dehumanizations and animalizations, and emasculation. His journey fails to transform him as it should, and his unconventional narrative structure for his journey, marked by disruption and fragmentation, symbolizes that failure. The final section of the chapter discusses Marlow's unmanly and ungentlemanly manifestations with respect to women and the telling of the infamous lie. Given the relevance of the lie to imperialism, the chapter concludes with Marlow's nonconformity with respect to his interactions with Africans and his critique of imperialism. Ultimately, Marlow's unconventionality disrupts imperialism and its promotion by making him an unstable imperial figure who would likely have been undesirable for emulation.

### **The Adventure Hero**

In addition to the requisite journey by the hero in adventure fiction, Marlow conforms to the other most basic requirements for an adventure hero. First, he is English, and his Englishness is foregrounded, just as it is in other adventure stories, particularly in the early sections of the novel. The tale begins and ends in London, and all aboard the *Nellie* have their home there. The frame narrator alludes to English history and the long tradition of exploration to which they are connected when he begins the novella by recounting the exploits of early English explorers. Conrad reinforces Marlow's

nationality when Marlow surveys the map of Africa in the office of the director in the sepulchral city that displays the various imperial territories and notes with satisfaction the British-held territories. When he visits the company doctor, his English nationality is confirmed. As with other adventures, the Englishness of the characters in *Heart of Darkness* is always foregrounded, and their individual racial superiority serves to bolster the national image. In Marlow's case, as we shall see presently, his Englishness and thus racial superiority are subverted by the derogatory depictions of him and his actions.

While not an aristocrat, Marlow does seem to be of a privileged class. His family, if not he himself, is wealthy. He has a number of relatives who possess the financial means to live on the Continent. One of them, his aunt, is positioned high enough socially as to obtain employment for Marlow as captain of a steamer through her social contacts: "I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration and also a man who has lots of influence with, etc. etc." (12). Marlow himself does not seem to want for money. He is not an ordinary seaman, but a captain, and his employment in Africa is motivated by a desire for novelty and an end to his boredom rather than by financial gain. In this respect, he is again consistent with the conventions of the adventure genre in which excitement and the alleviation of the monotony of life at home are the prime motivations for some heroes' journeys. Moreover, while Marlow continues to follow the sea, his closest friends onboard the *Nellie* all occupy higher socio-economic positions — the Accountant, Lawyer, and, occupying the highest and most influential position of all, the Director of Companies — which suggest Marlow's own higher status. Marlow's implied higher social status, often associated with more moral and virtuous qualities than that of individuals of lower social rank, establishes his identity initially as a typical hero who, by

default, should be endowed with superior qualities which, if faithful to the genre, manifest readily in the imperial world.

While none of these former seaman “follow the sea” any longer, Marlow’s continued pursuit of this profession, like Allan Quatermain’s status as hunter and guide, compounds the sense of adventure and exploration. The strategic placement of Marlow and his friends on board the *Nellie* and their preparation to put to sea superficially seem to imply an adventure consistent with the genre. But notably, just as Marlow’s journey fails to transform him into a conventional hero, and in that sense it is incomplete, Marlow’s friends fail to complete any journey of their own, neither physical nor spiritual. The *Nellie* is a sea yawl, but it is confined to the estuaries of the Thames River. The imperial friends miss the “turn of the tide” and remain anchored. Had they put to sea, they nonetheless would likely have had a limited journey only since none of the men, except Marlow, are seamen by profession any longer, and their duties undoubtedly restrict them in their ability to journey abroad for lengthy periods. Significantly, or perhaps ironically, those professional duties are imperial in nature, yet they seem to limit them in their physical movement much as professions likely limit their ability to see the significance of imperialism. We get our first indication that the actual movement, physical and otherwise, associated with imperial adventures is arrested. Immobility is symptomatic of most of the physical movement in the novella and forms a trope for Marlow’s failure to discover and transform into the conventional hero. The inertia of the men on the *Nellie* throughout the duration of the story is, of course, associated with the steamer on the river in the Congo. But whereas the immobile *Nellie* symbolizes the failure of the British imperialists to change, both it and the fogged-in steamer represent the obstructions that prevent Marlow from ultimately reaching his heroic status. Marlow is immobilized

throughout much of the novel. Marlow is hampered from getting to Africa on his own and must enlist the aid of women to get there. He is delayed by interviews and examinations in the sepulchral city. His journey to the Coastal Station is interrupted by numerous stops, and he must get from there to the Central Station in progressive and tedious steps. Once he finally gets there, he is delayed for months waiting for the rivets with which to repair the damaged steamer. All of these delays and interruptions come to symbolize his stunted inner journey.

Initially, the narrative structure that is established in this physical space on the immobile *Nellie* does not preclude its consistency with the imperialism genre either. Adventure stories are often presented in this format with groups of men retelling stories to each other as a form of bonding or learning experience. Some even use frame narrators such as the unnamed editor in *She*.<sup>74</sup> Typically the narrators, whether primary or secondary, are older or more experienced men who have traveled considerably, and their audience is frequently younger and less traveled and hence less experienced. Allan Quatermain and Horace Holly typify such experienced narrators.<sup>75</sup> Because adventure heroes develop and change in conventional ways as a result of their journey, their fictional audience of boys and men learn from their experience and wisdom, and although the audience does not move physically, its members are mobile spiritually. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, there is no indication that any of the members of Marlow's audience

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Ruppel notes the similarity of the narrative structure in *Heart of Darkness* with that of C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne's short story, "The Transfer," in which a frame narrator on board a ship tells about his journey to the Congo. Except for this similarity and the ivory trader who "goes native," Ruppel differentiates the stories completely.

<sup>75</sup> Both Quatermain and Holly write down their adventures expressly for the purpose of imparting knowledge and guidance to their audience. Quatermain states in the Introduction that his record is for the benefit of his son, and Holly goes to significant personal and financial expense to publish and share the knowledge of Ayesha with "the world."

onboard the *Nellie* change as a result of his narrative, and their physical inertia thus symbolizes their static inner essence. Marlow also does not change, at least not in the conventional sense, and the inertia of both his audience and himself, serve as a trope for that failed transformation. The audience goes nowhere in this journey, and their immobility at the end suggests that they, who are so representative of Conrad's pro-imperial English readers,<sup>76</sup> would not be willing to follow on such a journey of their own in the real world.

While such a narrative structure is in itself not inconsistent within the genre, its function in *Heart of Darkness* is altered in subtle, yet unconventional ways that reveal its contribution to the overall critique of imperialism. Typically, while frame narrators introduce adventure stories and sometimes conclude them, the integrity of the adventure hero's story itself exists undisturbed in its entirety. This tends to provide stability to the story and some degree of authority to the storyteller by allowing him to operate independently from the frame narrator. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, the narrative structure is disruptive, particularly at the outset, as the frame narrator interrupts the flow, or journey of Marlow's narrative. Marlow utters a sentence that seems to initiate something profound — "And this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth" — only to have the narrator sidetrack his narrative with a long description that offers the narrator's assessment of Marlow. He commences twice more, and twice more the narrator

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Shaffer suggests that Marlow's audience is a stealthy commentary on Conrad's turn-of-the-century British pro-imperial audience and that he uses the audience as deflection so as not to make direct assault on his readers (which would likely have resulted in his not being read or published). Shaffer suggests further that the narrator and certainly Marlow's other listeners receive the tale more as an unsuccessful entertainment, for purposes of passing the time, than as a narrative with any unsettling political or ethical relevance to their own situations or world (70). The men on the ship may not have taken it seriously, or worse not even been listening, and they are highlighted by their inability to grasp his understanding.

interrupts. While he does provide information about Marlow,<sup>77</sup> the narrator's interruptions are abrupt and intrusive, and in a subtle way are symbolic of the intrusions of whites into Africa. Given the narrator's transformative depiction of Marlow as the Other, the structure mirrors the dominate/subordinate relationship of race. One is reminded particularly that upon meeting Ignosi for the first time, Quatermain interrupts and corrects Ignosi's comments when he construes them as racially disrespectful. Such an example highlights the racial power of speech and illuminates greater significance to the interruptions of the frame narrator.

In part, the narrative structure reflects the shift to modernism and creates ambiguity in addition to Marlow's own explicit expressions of ambivalence.<sup>78</sup> But in terms of adventure fiction, the structure indicates how that Marlow's adventure is unsuccessful in its conventional progress and conclusion. The launch of Marlow's narrative is unsettled by sudden turns, and the destination is unclear. Marlow adds to that uncertainty with his Roman analogy, then his realization of the hypocritical idea, and finally his account of Kurtz. Rather than a straight path, both Marlow and the narrator take unconventional twists that seem to obstruct the way. The narrator makes further comments throughout the novel, so that ultimately Marlow's narrative is not one continuous journey. Typically the journeys in adventures, consisting of the literal, personal and narrative journeys, do not deviate from their final, pro-imperial destination, despite the occasional inconsistencies of race and characterization. Similar to other tropes

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<sup>77</sup> Lidan Lin suggests that the frame narrator manifests from the modernist perspective of the elusive nature of truth; his primary function is to provide information about Marlow and through him, Conrad hopes to give Marlow's tale more credibility. Lin thus asserts that the narrator "intervenes" in Marlow's narrative, suggesting a supportive function rather than a disruptive one.

<sup>78</sup> Other modernist aspects of *Heart of Darkness* and how they contribute to the inconsistency and critique of the novel are discussed later in this chapter.

of immobility and discontinuity, the frame narrator and Marlow's own narration with all his interruptions, sarcasm, and unclear commentary, are symbolic of Marlow's failed realization as a conventional hero that readers would have expected and desired.

The mobility offered by imperialism, so appealing to its audience, consistently allows for the development of gentlemanly character or, in the case of aristocratic characters, the freedom to display that inherent character. In Marlow's case, movement facilitates the revelation of unconventionally flawed aspects of the English imperialist. His physical journey is comprised of steps, yet each movement closer to his final destination to the heart of darkness, reveals greater inconsistencies in his personal journey in which he cannot fully realize all the qualities of the hero that he should. The limitations of his journey are readily apparent as the frame narrator, even before Marlow begins his narrative, depicts Marlow as racially ambiguous, stating that "Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol" (7). Later, he refers to him specifically as "a Buddha preaching in European clothes" (10). Although the allusion lends credence to the wisdom of the man who has traveled far and experienced much, this implied racial hybridity seems to contribute to Marlow's inability to fulfill his journey and achieve heroic status. Moreover, it disrupts the dominant racial representation by redefining the adventure hero, who, despite occasional suggestions of interracial transgressions in other adventure stories, is always a paragon of white racial purity.

The narrator dissolves the racial boundaries between whites and the Other, but he also dissolves the ethnic boundaries between the English and other Europeans.<sup>79</sup> Marlow is differentiated from the pronounced whiteness of other Europeans by his own observations of the “pale plumpness” of the Belgian director, the dazzling whiteness of the Chief Accountant’s starched collars and clothes, and of course, the ivory, skulls, and bones associated with Kurtz. Significantly, this physical whiteness is bestowed on non-English figures, against whom Marlow’s own yellowed complexion is contrasted. English adventure heroes are not merely white, they are specifically English. Despite the hybridity suggested by his posture and complexion, the novel is unequivocal in Marlow’s English origin. Yet, Marlow himself also destabilizes his identity as he recalls his response to the Company Doctor who was intrigued to examine his first Englishmen: “I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical” (15). Marlow’s physical representation thus destabilizes not only the conventional physicality of the hero but reveals ambivalence about and a weakness in the perceived racial superiority of Englishness and the humanity of the Other, whose identity the hero, Marlow, has assumed.

Once Marlow initiates his narrative, the frame narrator immediately interrupts that movement of narrative again by establishing the unconventionality of both Marlow and his explorations. Similar to his Englishness, his social position is also not entirely consistent as the frame narrator makes it explicit that Marlow is atypical even within his class of sailors.

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<sup>79</sup> In the context of the nineteenth-century, white Europeans differentiated their ethnicities from one another as “races.” This differentiation resulted in a hierarchy of whiteness in which individual “races” naturally positioned themselves at the top of the hierarchy. Conrad’s demarcation of Marlow’s identity from other white characters is thus infused with ideological meaning. See the Introduction, pages 4-5, and chapter 1, note 46.



The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order . . . In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance (9).

On one level, the narrator's assessment of Marlow confirms the mobility function of imperialism in that it emphasizes greater exploration of both lands and the self, although in so doing the narrator significantly disparages other adventurers who do not venture ashore. The reader himself might expect to discover more in this adventure than in others, but those expectations likely still fell within the parameters of the conventional ideology. The narrator builds on this expectation by emphasizing the exceptionalness of the adventures Marlow retells.

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted) and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze . . . (9).

The frame narrator actually makes implicit commentary about the adventure genre itself and differentiates Marlow's narrative from them. Marlow searches, but that quest is for enlightenment. While adventure heroes evolve during their journeys, the evolution is limited to very specific, imperial qualities, like the limitation of the seaman's yarns to which the narrator refers. Heroes never question the meaning of their own actions let alone those of the imperial enterprises that their adventures advocate. Marlow's quest thus reveals the immorality and complicity inherent in adventures due to the heroes' failure to question the injustices they witness and perpetrate.

Once Marlow is finally on track with his narrative, the first step in his journey, like all other adventures, begins with the motivation for the journey itself. While Marlow

has no financial imperative, like many other heroes, the unconventionality of his desire to go to Africa challenges the more sincere premises of imperialism<sup>80</sup>. The motive which prompts Marlow to seek a position with the colonial enterprise in Africa comprises no higher “ideal” than a means to end his boredom: “I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilise you” (11) His words ironically allude to imperialism’s Christian undertones that called for the civilizing of heathen peoples for their supposed betterment, and the presence of white heroes in imperial adventures inevitably betters the position of natives. But Marlow’s own spiritual exercise perpetrated against his friends is expressed specifically in terms of an “invasion,” and rather than “civilizing” them, his efforts are in fact a “hindrance.” His specific vocabulary foreshadows his later framing of white presence in Africa and his unconventional insinuation of the negative and unlawful incursion of whites into places they do not belong.

Although the latter part of Marlow’s journey is transformed into the rescue of Kurtz, which might imply a transformation into or realization of the desirable hero, his initial motivation is far from altruistic or purposeful. His choice of Africa is merely the culmination of a childhood whim to visit and fill the blank spaces on the maps that in his youth were a “delightful mystery . . . to dream gloriously over” (12). Significantly, his journey causes him to revert backward chronologically and developmentally. Rather than progressing forward and becoming more manly, Marlow’s journey arrests that

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<sup>80</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, heroes are typically motivated to embark on their adventures for noble and virtuous reasons: a rescue, a quest, and/or personal fulfilment (*King Solomon’s Mines*, *She, A History of Adventure* and *With Edged Tools* fall into these categories). Even the search for treasure or wealth is usually prompted by nobler motives than sheer greed: Quatermain (*King Solomon’s Mines*) must support his son who is studying medicine; the penniless orphan Hardgrave (*By Sheer Pluck*) struggles to support himself and his sister in a Britain with no employment opportunities; and a disinherited Meredith (*With Edged Tools*) seeks the wherewithal to marry his fiancée.

development and indeed he degenerates. Moreover, he dehumanizes himself in recalling what drew him to Africa: “And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window it fascinated me as a snake would a bird — a silly little bird” (12). In describing how he is mesmerized by the lure of the river, the significant feature that is overlooked when this passage is cited, is that Marlow belittles himself and his own personal imperial exploits.<sup>81</sup> He settles on Africa, prompted by nothing more than the impulsiveness of window shopping.

In an ironic twist, Marlow demonstrates how adventures do indeed transform or evoke from the heroes new behaviours that do not readily manifest outside of imperial influence. Once he settles upon the location of his adventure, he employs all means to obtain an appointment to the Trading Society which operates in Africa, including resorting to the manipulation of female family members. Although Marlow acknowledges and regrets his out-of-character behaviour, this acknowledgment of fault, rather than making him appear self-effacing as it does for Frank Hardgrave, underscores the dishonourableness of his unchivalrous behaviour:

I am sorry to own I began to worry them. This was already a fresh departure for me. I was not used to get things that way, you know. I always went my own road and on my own legs where I had a mind to go. I wouldn't have believed it of myself, but then — you see — I felt somehow I must get there by hook or by crook (12).

Marlow's actions reflect a significant departure from both his own “normal” behaviour and from the actions of other heroes. He exhibits an almost dishonest reasoning and stoops to behaviour incredulous for him as he manipulates women. Marlow insinuates an alteration which, although not as severe as the one which Kurtz undergoes, nonetheless

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<sup>81</sup> In comparing the novels of *Heart of Darkness* and *Allan Quatermain*, Dryden suggests that Marlow is “motivated by romantic impulses” in his desire to go to Africa in this scene. (*Heart of Darkness* and *Allan Quatermain*, page 183). Although she considers *Heart of Darkness* overall as subversive of the romance genre, she sees numerous romantic qualities in Marlow and the novella itself.

evidences white selfishness as Marlow's desire to go to Africa consumes him: "Well, you see, the notion drove me" (12). The emphasis Marlow places on his behaviour highlights the concepts of internal movement. In order to achieve physical movement to Africa, he shifts in character, but rather than upward mobility of class, the journey represents a downward spiral into a less noble character.

Of equal significance, Marlow paints his conduct while in the service of the imperial venture with similar ridiculousness and animalizations of and approximations to the natives that demean the heroic nature of what white imperialists supposedly do and become in Africa. In addition to being a silly bird, he calls his imperial work "my monkey tricks" (36). He admits his own laziness and dislike of work. He does not join the natives that he hears sing and dance on shore, as he expresses the distant desire to do so, but he and the boilermaker dance their own frantic and clamorous jig when they discover they are finally to receive rivets for the repair of the steamer, and he notes that they behave like "lunatics," in the same way he describes Africans. Much later, when Marlow tries ineffectually to convince Kurtz to return to the steamer after escaping into the jungle, Marlow transforms himself even more radically as he admits "I had even like the niggers to invoke him — himself — his own exalted and incredible degradation" (65). While earlier he unknowingly behaves like the Africans, here he states unequivocally that he is no different than them. The journey has been transformative for Marlow, but it is an alteration which for many contemporary readers would have been undesirable. In making himself in essence African, Marlow questions the supposed superiority of difference of whites.

Transformations or realizations of the self that are facilitated through adventure journeys profit not only the individual but the nation as a whole by providing it with men

who possess not only the gentlemanly qualities necessary to help Britain administer its Empire but the “manliness” in order to secure and expand it. Masculinity, in a Darwinian sense, was considered essential in Victorian visions of Empire which were typically projected as a struggle for survivability and superiority between the races.<sup>82</sup> Hence, adventure stories are replete with glowing descriptions of “manly” men and graphic action that allow them to display their extraordinary masculinity in its various forms. Haggard and Merriman, in particular, invigorate their texts with battle scenes, whether open warfare or personal combat, and the valiant rescue of natives and perilous hunts for dangerous beasts that specifically facilitate the representation of white racial superiority and the naturalness and justness of imperial domination.

As with most conventions of the hero, Marlow fails to realize his masculinity, and instead the reader repeatedly sees manifestations of Marlow’s inaction, indecisiveness, uncertainty, and, ultimately, impotence in the face of imperial forces. The rescue mission itself should be the most intense aspect of the adventure with abundant opportunities for the hero to be brave and confirm his racial superiority, but Conrad denies Marlow the standard these confrontational opportunities. The natives certainly attack the steamer, at Kurtz’s direction, but Marlow characterizes the attack, despite the one casualty, as specifically without menace: “Sticks, little sticks, were flying about, thick; they were

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<sup>82</sup> The biological and anthropological status of different races was a hotly debated topic during the Victorian period, and much scientific and pseudo-scientific discussion revolved around the origin and thus categorization of non-whites. Discourse was essentially split between two significant branches of racial discourse. The monogenist theory held that human races are comprised of one species which contrasted with the polygenist theory that the races were actually comprised of a number of sub-species of human beings. Racial discourse often adopted Darwin’s evolutionary theories to represent the presumed racial struggles between human beings as the survivability of species in which the most fit, read as the most physically able-bodied, would dominate other species and ultimately survive while other species perished. See Chapter 1 for further discussion of masculinity. See George Stocking for an in depth analysis of Victorian anthropology.

whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house . . . They might have been poisoned, but they looked as though they wouldn't kill a cat (46). Other than steering the steamer, Marlow does nothing to repel the attack, and his gestures contradict the grandiose, intense, and often graphic and specifically decisive battles that emphasize the hero's transformation into a "man."

Marlow does not even come face to face with the natives, catching only fleeting glimpses of them as the steamer brushes passed the thick vegetation in which they hide. He is distanced from them, in much the same way as the reader is left on the outside, isolated just as Marlow and the pilgrims are eventually isolated when the fog strands the steamer in the middle of the river. The fog certainly blinds Marlow and his audience from seeing and understanding, but it also obstructs Marlow from decisive action. The steamer stands "nowhere," and the kind of intense, close-fighting, the confrontation of civilizations in Haggard, Henty, and Merriman is impossible. Marlow is not only cut off from experiencing the imperial world by distance and from seeing it by obstruction, he is frozen in movement as he can neither move forward or backward. The actual physical interruption of his journey becomes symbolic of his inability to discover his masculinity and other conventional attributes. Unlike the imperial world elsewhere in the genre, the imperial world in *Heart of Darkness* is emasculating and thus destabilizes white supremacy that was highlighted by pronounced masculinity.

Arguably, Marlow exhibits one act of bravery as he jumps ashore alone at night to retrieve Kurtz after he escapes from his sickbed and attempts to rejoin his followers. Notably, this brief interlude is Marlow's only venture from the security of the steamer which, while providing protection, confines him to the role of observer. But even in this

singular act of seeming bravery, Marlow fails to manifest behaviour which other adventurers typically display.

The fact is, I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was — how shall I define it — the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second and then the usual sense of commonplace deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much that I did not raise an alarm (63).

Marlow's initial reaction of terror and shock is itself unconventional in its betrayal of the brave hero image. Although Quatermain expresses his lack of bravery on several occasions, he presents his admission as an expression of honesty and modesty that serve as a base line by which his later valiance and honourableness toward his white comrades can be judged in his transformation into "hero." Although honest about his reaction, Marlow is certainly not modest, and his "heroism" is not vindicated later. The emotional reactions of the men also differ in both intensity and kind. A lack of bravery is profoundly different than "sheer blank fright" and "pure abstract terror."

Marlow's "unmasculine" reaction and immobility take on greater significance as the conflict in traditional adventure stories clearly shifts from the physical to the internal in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow says his contemplation of the discovery lasted "the merest fraction of a second," yet he relays it at considerable length and detail which reflect hesitation and ambivalence (as well as a warping of time) that are symptomatic of the restrictions placed upon his mobility throughout the novel. Once he finally decides to move and he tracks Kurtz through the jungle, Marlow expresses a primitive desire to pulverize him when he reaches him. Ironically, the only potential hand to hand combat in

*Heart of Darkness* is between two white men, and specifically the heroes, not between the hero and a savage despot or corrupt hybrid which effectively shifts the identity of the Other, remapping it onto the white Kurtz. Despite his desire to beat Kurtz, he does not, and his failure to exert his masculinity through violent action highlights how the journey for Marlow at least has not delivered in the realization of “manliness.” Marlow instead resorts to a more intellectual act — he talks with Kurtz. This is because Marlow is a thinker and speaker, not a man of action.<sup>83</sup> He observes, philosophizes, and discourses. His observations and his struggle to comprehend events, conditions and people are the only things that fuel the snail-paced plot, and the novel is highlighted by emotional, psychological, and impressionist examination and introspection.

To a degree, this shift to internalization<sup>84</sup> reflects the development of the modernist novel which, among other things, emphasizes such conflicts of the mind, feelings, and impressions, and its subsequent, almost inherent inconclusiveness. The journey within *Heart of Darkness* takes on greater significance as it in essence also comprises a journey outside of itself through the evolution of the novel genre. While a full discussion of modernism with respect to the adventure genre is beyond the scope of this paper, it must be noted briefly how this transitional mode, Conrad’s straddling of both the adventure genre and modernism, impacts upon his adventure hero’s conventional

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<sup>83</sup> According to Dryden, in adventure stories: “Physical fitness amounted to purity and proof against degeneracy, introspection, and unmanliness . . . Athleticism was elevated and intellectualism almost ignored . . . This is true of Haggard’s heroes and also of Henty’s boys, who are never intellectual, but instead display physical prowess and courage” (27). Dryden unfortunately does not make this link to Marlow who is very intellectual and does not display physical prowess or any courage.

<sup>84</sup> Although Todorov does not identify *Heart of Darkness* as a modernist novel, he claims that the internal conflict alone negates the classification of *Heart of Darkness* as adventure. This, of course, overlooks the numerous generic aspects of the novella, including the development of the inner self through the journey, albeit disrupted in Marlow’s case, as well as Conrad’s own and his contemporaries’ classification of the novel as adventure, despite its unconventional qualities.



development. This shift to the modernist structure emphasizes the unconventionality of Marlow. Heroes are not thinkers; they are men of action. Their masculinity situates them in the concrete world. While the arduousness of the journey allows them to develop internally as gentleman, or in the case of aristocratic heroes to access those qualities that were dormant in the urban world, this change must be supplemented by their development or activation as “manly men” in order to arrive at their position as racially superior beings fit for running the Empire. Marlow, however, in an ironic twist of the trope of mobility, moves beyond that concrete world by engaging with the meaning of events rather than merely the physical manifestations of those events and can thus get to a critique of the imperial world he experiences. In so doing, Marlow demonstrates his unconventionality in both the *act* of thinking and *what* he thinks. The modernist structure thus appears incompatible with the adventure genre. Conrad may have experimented with the modernist structure in his adventure story in a failed attempt to unite the two. This would account, too, for the ambiguity throughout the novel. Given the overall imperial critique, however, and the way in which the modernist elements disrupt the conventional hero, Conrad may have used the modernist structure to facilitate that critique.

Certainly, moving the action from the external to the internal, grinding physical movement to a halt, highlights how the mobility of adventure stories, in all its desirable facets, is disrupted. Reliance upon the physical in adventures negated questions concerning Empire and its administration. Lengthy and repeated descriptions of manly and admirable physicality are common. Plots are simplified with intense action. The complexity of issues that surround racial superiority, justness, and humanity disappear with these features and structures, and the existing political, economic, military, and racial structures are reinforced since the strong, that is the white heroes, always prevail. In

essence, the physique of the hero which is displayed through the action-filled plot served as a distraction from the serious and complex issues of imperialism. By distancing *Heart of Darkness* from the physicality of adventures and over-emphasizing the psychological and emotional, Conrad destabilizes this reliance on simplicity. Lacking the physicality to commit graphic acts and deprived of the opportunities to engage in them, Marlow is compelled to consider the meaning of all he witnesses. In so doing, the excesses and abuses inherent in the system become uncovered. The absence of the physical with respect first to Kurtz and then to Marlow, Conrad's less degraded hero, ensures that the reader will be exposed to an unsanitized version of racial and imperial representation and that he may then question the validity and indeed desirability of these pursuits.

Conrad takes this modernist approach of internalization beyond merely the de-emphasis of physical action that is essential to the adventure genre, going as far as the level of negating corporeal form virtually in its entirety. We "see" Marlow almost entirely through his observations and thoughts. Words are essential to Marlow, and like Kurtz, his corporeality is displaced by his ability to speak.<sup>85</sup> Several times the frame narrator describes Marlow's own recitations in terms almost identical to Marlow's fantastic assessment of Kurtz as a disembodied voice:

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence,

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<sup>85</sup> Several significant discussions regarding voice have been written concerning *Heart of Darkness*. A number of these analyze Kurtz and his gift for speech. Those that concern Marlow revolve around narrative voice and reliability. Dhareshwar discusses Marlow's inability to understand and, therefore, to explain adequately what he has experienced. Charles Eric Reeves suggests that the narrative voice for *Heart of Darkness* is obsessed with "its own limits, powers, efficacy, self-delusion" (286) and that ultimately it cannot recapture the nightmarish essence of Marlow's experience. Joseph Dobrinsky connects Marlow's narrative voice with Conrad's personal experiences and the emergence of his authorial voice.

for the word that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips . . . (30).

The disconnection between the spirit and body disrupts the concrete physicality of the adventure hero, but at the same time, reality itself becomes suspect, as the hero becomes “no more to us than a voice,” losing all other relevance. He is dehumanized, and the physical, which had attained cult status in late Victorian England, particularly for the promotion of imperial justification and participation, is dissolved. Readers dismayed at the dehumanization of Kurtz, discover that Conrad’s other, less flawed hero is equally without tangible form. The implication of these disembodied heroes could well have signaled to readers the inconsequence of imperial agents. Rather than concrete forms of admiration, they are substance-less abstractions. Although a lack of corporeal form translates into both impotence and immobility for the hero, this abstract intangibility reflects the complexity of the issues with which Marlow is concerned but for which he is ultimately unable to comprehend. The Empire and the white men who manage it are thus destabilized..

Although Marlow’s impotence arises partially from his unconventional physicality that prevents him from acting, it also registers the inability of any one individual to change the complex conditions of imperialism. The imperial system’s pervasiveness, relentless operation, and resistance to change, ensure it is beyond the actions of individuals to alter it. Marlow himself recognizes his helplessness to intervene in events and becomes resolved to initiate nothing.

I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz, but before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what any one knew or ignored? What did it matter who was Manager? One gets sometimes such

a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach and beyond my power of meddling (40).

Marlow observes and contemplates but does little else as events repeatedly transpire beyond his ability to act. He pilots the steamer upriver and down but does so largely blind, as the bends, snags, and jungle occupy his time and keep him from contemplating events too deeply or from doing more than reacting to the obstacles. They discover Kurtz alive, but Marlow is powerless to explain the genocide he has committed or to ease his mental anguish other than to pacify him with the false promise of securing his reputation. But Marlow can do little to intercede on his behalf with respect to his reputation in the company either: “The pilgrims looked upon me with disfavour. I was, so to speak, numbered with the dead” (67). He is not merely impotent, having lost his power to act as a hero, he has ceased to live. Although Marlow almost does die later, to be discounted as one of the dead in terms of one’s power to intercede in events radically subverts the potency of white English heroes who project the certitude of British imperial power through their manifestations of manliness. Marlow thus comprises a most unconventional and, in terms of his significance for imperialism and racial identity, an undesirable hero.

### **Women, the Lie, and Imperialism**

Representations of women and Africans also play a significant role in the adventure genre. Marlow’s unconventional portrayal in his interactions with both women and Africans, however, disrupts the conventions of imperialism and whiteness. The imperial world is filled with natives and typically few women, whether white or native, although the latter often are integral parts of the story. The hero’s interactions with them indicate both his arrival as a “hero” and the justification and promotion of imperialism.

Heroes are chivalrous to women and benevolent to natives, ironically or perhaps particularly when circumstances necessitate that the hero kill the natives. Marlow subverts these expectations first through his unconventional treatment of women. Although the protective lie he tells the Intended seems finally to indicate his development as a hero, his act is ultimately discredited. The lie seems to conceal the horrors of imperialism, but Marlow's management of it reveals his inconsistency as an imperial hero. Moreover, his interactions with Africans reveal inconsistent attitudes even within himself as he develops a humane yet unconventional morality toward them while at the same time doing nothing to help them. These unconventionalities and ambiguities are all, in the final analysis, part and parcel of the greater critique of imperialism.

Heroes are typically associated with an archaic sense of nobility, even chivalry, in their actions. Such romanticized portrayals, in keeping with the representations of the hero's morality and virtuousness, appeal to the nostalgia of a perceived idyllic earlier age.<sup>86</sup> These features elevate the hero, of course, and likely made some readers aspire to become him. Haggard particularly develops this romanticized version of imperial might. The loyalty of the heroes to each other and the intense warrior bond that develops between the white men and Ignosi and his black forces, as well as Captain Good and Leo Vincey's chivalric admiration (albeit distanced by their race) and desires to protect their native women (which at the same time suggests that they treat native women as possessions), all project this kind of nobility and reaffirm the superiority of the white adventurer and his imperial actions. Meredith and O'Connell also exercise a code of chivalry when they lie to Marie, their black servant, in order to conceal Durnovo's abandonment

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<sup>86</sup> Dryden, White and Hunter connect these romanticized features to the genre's tendencies toward escapism. Yet scholars do not consider how Marlow fails to manifest this romanticism.

of her and their children when faced with disease. The former example is particularly significant given the similar lie Marlow tells Kurtz's Intended. Heroes act chivalrously toward women in their adventures, regardless of the women's race, even though that chivalry may at times treat native women as inferior. Although other characteristics may occasionally be subverted, the nobility and chivalry exhibited to their fellow whites are unimpeachable (Quatermain's greed is perhaps the only exception in these works, but it too is mitigated, as explained in Chapter 1).

Marlow, however, explicitly lacks virtually all nobility and chivalry with respect to women.<sup>87</sup> He manipulates women for his own purposes: "Then would you believe it — I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work — to get a job! Heavens!" (12). In trying to obtain employment with the company, Marlow reveals his own lack of restraint similar to (although certainly not on the scale) of Kurtz. In the final few moments of the novella, Conrad grants Marlow some semblance of a hero with respect to his loyalty to Kurtz and the lie he tells Kurtz's Intended in order to protect her from the truth of his degradation.<sup>88</sup> Conrad likely could not have completely disrupted the hero image lest Marlow ceases to be recognized as a hero completely, even if only a masquerade of one, and become unbelievable. Yet even in Marlow's singular display of nobility, Conrad deprives him of genuine nobility worthy of emulation. Marlow's motives in protecting Kurtz's Intended are not an exemplification of gentlemanliness but rather a desperate act of profound pity and compassion laced with fear. Before she enters the

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<sup>87</sup> Kurtz's African mistress is discussed later in this chapter in relation to imperialism and African race.

<sup>88</sup> While considerable discussion has revolved around the lie (see notes 70 and 71 of this chapter), discussion has not considered the significance of the chivalrous aspects of the lie, and its later revelation, and how those function with respect to imperial promotion.

room, Marlow questions himself as to what he is doing there, doubts the correctness of which personal belongings he retained for her and which he gave away, and seems altogether uncomfortable. He feels trapped by the urgency with which she pleads with him for some memory to which to cling, and his primary concern is how to get away, not an exercise of gallantry to protect her. As soon as he utters it he is desperate to leave: “It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape” (76). Rather than chivalry, his lie appears almost the work of a coward who cannot face the enormity of his difficult task.

Marlow himself strips his compassionate act of any semblance of nobility. He sarcastically belittles the magnitude and consequence of his presumed chivalric lie by suggesting first that the house would collapse and then “that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle” (76). More significantly, Marlow condemns the act of lying and recoils from his part in it.

You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies — which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world — what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick like biting something rotten would do (29).

Marlow's only genuine “heroic” act is marred as detestable. He taints it with death. Indeed, the lie he tells covers up and seemingly perpetuates the genocide Kurtz has committed. On one level, Marlow's seeming complicity in telling the lie thus breaches the standards of morality and philanthropy. Ironically, within the context of adventure genre Marlow is honourable because of his loyalty to Kurtz, the other white hero, and his action reflect the honour and virtuousness which like Meredith, Osgood, Sir Henry, Good, and Quatermain exercise toward other white men. But that loyalty to Kurtz is singularly misguided. After the monstrosity of his acts is discovered, Marlow still defends Kurtz to

the Manager, but even Kurtz's own last tormented utterance of "The horror. The horror" which seems to indict Kurtz's actions indicates that Marlow's loyalty to the man is grossly unwarranted. Marlow himself apparently recognizes the ignobleness of his loyalty to the debauched Kurtz, or at least an ambivalence of its value: "it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares" (62). He values having a choice between the horrors perpetrated by Kurtz and those of the pilgrims and the imperial system they personify even though it is clearly an unsavoury choice.

The lie of Kurtz's crimes is, of course, symbolic of the greater lie of imperialism and the hypocrisy utilized to mask the brutality in imperial operation. Its content is thus profound, and Marlow's telling of it is generally viewed as an endorsement of European imperialism. As an adventure story, it is seemingly consistent with the genre with respect to its protection of imperialism (despite the horrors in its operation) and through its chivalrous aspects toward the Intended and loyalty toward Kurtz. Yet Marlow shatters that chivalrous secret by revealing both Kurtz's debauchery and the ignobleness of protecting the lie itself to his friends aboard the *Nellie*, all of whom are significantly influential imperialists, thus seemingly counteracting the inconsequential though symbolic lie to the likely less influential Intended. To some degree, Marlow seems compelled to reveal the horrors he has witnessed as his disgust toward lying, expressed so intensely early in his narrative, seems to push him to admit to the lie. While his "disloyalty" may be more philanthropic and moral than silence, and in this respect counteracts his momentary endorsement of imperialism, his revelation breaches the standards of the honourable hero both in its commission and in its content. Oscar and Meredith's lie to Marie in *With Edged Tools* is known to the reader only through omniscient narration. Within the realm of that adventure story, the chivalrous heroes keep



the secret of Durnovo's cowardice and treachery to themselves. Marlow does not. His necessity to reveal the truth to his friends outweighs the honourable obligation he has to conceal it, and in that sense he ungallantly sacrifices the Intended for his own sake. And in breaking the lie, he also sacrifices his loyalty to Kurtz. Marlow's actions thus both reinforce and contradict the pro-imperial actions of the traditional heroes, creating significant ambivalence.

Marlow's need to inform is, of course, precipitated by the brutality and corruption inherent in the management of the imperial venture and, particularly, the hypocrisy necessary to mask these flaws. Historically, the primary element in that hypocrisy was Christian benevolence and the civilizing mission that served as philanthropic motivation and justification imperial incursion. In adventure stories, these themes of altruism and morality play out in the exemplary actions of the hero. Although the overt "missionary" influence had diminished in imperial representations in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, particularly in adventure fiction, notions of the white man's burden to civilize and educate the presumed ignorant lower races continued to be a prominent element in official policy and cultural works. While the Christian mission specifically is somewhat muted in the adventures of Merriman, Haggard, and Henty, the betterment of the natives due to white influence is always present. In *Heart of Darkness*, that Christian and civilizing benevolence are foregrounded as Conrad surrounds Marlow's journey to Africa with Christian ideology, just as he does with Kurtz. The difference in that imagery, however, is that Kurtz, at least initially, believes in the idealism of that Christian approach. Marlow, on the other hand, discredits, with considerable sarcasm, any virtue or validity of the Christian civilizing mission and rejects all association of his work and himself with that supposed philanthropy.

When his aunt espouses the dominant rhetoric by suggesting that he is to be “something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle” who is going to wean “those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (16), Marlow is fairly gentlemanly with her when he points out that the company is run for profit. When he relays the incident to his imperial friends, however, he is blunt in condemning the “rot” (15) and “humbug” (16) of European beneficence. Significantly, he also reveals that after his visit with her “a queer feeling came to me that I was an impostor” (16). Marlow refers to the hypocritical representation of both himself and the entire imperial “mission.” Moreover, he certainly appears as an English hero masquerading in a supposed adventure story, as he repeatedly and sarcastically impugns that depiction of himself and that of other heroes. Marlow’s use of the word “impostor” is significantly suggestive of the morality behind the endeavour. As he quickly discovers, the entire system is devoid of any shred of humanity. The morality of its operation is without foundation and that deficiency is hypocritically and ominously concealed both in the sepulchral city and in Africa.

The enormity of the false morality of the mission of benevolence becomes evident even before Marlow reaches Africa, when immediately after his interview with the head of the company he recognizes the criminality of what he has just signed onto

I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy — I don’t know — something not quite right, and I was glad to get out (14).

Adventure fiction may have had its conspiratorial elements with imperialism in that they functioned symbiotically, but white characters are certainly never conscious of that conspiracy nor do they project it within the pages of those fictions. Marlow, however,

exhibits significant unconventional morality through his progressive observations that question the ethics of imperial motivation and management. Where other heroes never question the purpose of white intrusion into Africa, nor indeed do they portray it as an intrusion or invasion, for Marlow it is a running concern: “I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here?” (29).

Other heroes appear virtuous, moral, and noble largely due to their acts of salvation in rescuing blacks from other blacks. The actions of whites or the imperial system are never questioned. Marlow reverses this racialized representation as he gradually recognizes the inhumanity and injustice of whites and the system itself the further that he travels. At every turn, he observes suffering and torment, a new horror perpetrated by whites against Africans: the dead man with a bullet hole in his head on the road to the Central Station, the chain gang, the grove of death, the man beaten as the presumed culprit of the shed fire, the starving cannibals, and the victims of Kurtz’s genocide. Marlow’s dread, disgust and sarcasm at each discovery exhibit a morality regarding white interference and management absent anywhere else in adventure fiction. Ironically, Marlow is the only hero of the adventure stories considered to exhibit a sense of genuine morality with respect to white occupation and management. Moreover, despite his occasional default to racializations, he insists on African humanity and enters a discursive structure to argue it.<sup>89</sup> While a primary feature of other heroes is a kind of morality, the brand of morality that develops in Marlow differs markedly from that of the

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<sup>89</sup> Dryden suggests that the dialogical structure of much of Marlow’s narrative is a discussion between the older, experienced Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* (which appeared last in the original book publication) and the younger, naive Marlow in *Youth* (which appeared as the first of the three stories). This, however, does not take into consideration the original publication format in *Blackwood’s* in which *Heart of Darkness* appeared independently of any other Conrad work.

Christianized, nationalized, and racialized morality of superiority that serves to reinforce the imperial status quo. Marlow has morality, but the wrong kind of morality for an imperialist and adventurer. Where other adventurers do not question the imperial system or African humanity, Marlow seeks to gain understanding of them. But significantly they are unfathomable. His journey is in effect a moral quest, but one which readers likely would not have relished.

While this introspection and quest for knowledge and morality sets Marlow apart from other heroes, his introspective versus pro-active morality also prevents him from acting effectively in response to what he witnesses. Apart from Marlow's retrieval of Kurtz, which in itself is shrouded in dubiousness and unconventionality, Marlow's only other seemingly decisive, and in this case moral act, his attempted protection of Kurtz's mistress and the local natives, is ambivalent in its execution and effect and ironically serves to impugn the benevolence and bravery of whites in general. As the steamer departs from the Inner Station and the pilgrims prepare to fire upon the superb African woman and other natives gathered on the shore, Marlow blows the ship's whistle to disperse the crowd and hopefully prevent the slaughter. Marlow is given this opportunity to be the "manly" hero, but although he acts quickly, his actions are muted in comparison to other heroes. He is not brave and does not place himself at any risk for his actions; he merely pulls a string to release some steam out of a pipe. Given the gravity of the situation and the imminent death of so many innocent victims, his action seems grossly pathetic. He does not even commit himself sufficiently to confront the pilgrims directly in their cowardly attack against the unarmed natives on the shore. As with the natives' attack, Marlow is distanced from any confrontation with the pilgrims as they stand on the deck and he is confined yet again within the wheelhouse of his steamer. Moreover, his

muted act of bravery is shrouded with uncertainty as to its effectualness. The pilgrims open fire, and given the amount of smoke produced by the volley, they may have inflicted considerable injury, but the smoke obscures his vision, and neither he nor the reader can know if his weak act is successful.

Adventure heroes' actions with respect to Africans are always decisive and brave in their paternalistic supervision and protection. Marlow's one and only moment "to save" any African in *Heart of Darkness*, however, is tentative at best and emphatically ambiguous. Whereas adventure heroes typically secure the salvation, both physical and spiritual, of Africans, not one individual and certainly no group benefits from Marlow's intervention. He observes tremendous suffering but does nothing to alleviate it. He offers neither comfort nor any recourse to the men in the chain gang or to those in the grove of death. He insists that they are *men* and feels profound sympathy for them,<sup>90</sup> but despite that insistence on their humanity and his own sympathy, he extends no gesture of humanity to them. He recognizes the injustice of the beating endured by the black man who purportedly caused the fire at the station, but does not intervene to stop it. Certainly, Marlow's inadequacy represents a failure of the hero's nobility and morality as well as the purported philanthropy of the trading venture, as he seems unwilling to act, in part, because of a lack of will. He seems content on some level to observe rather than act, which would require him to exhibit the bravery and decisiveness of conventional heroes and, ironically, on some level their morality.

In part, Marlow's failure to act on behalf of Africans may be due to the fact that he is an imperialist himself who freely participates in the operations of the imperial

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<sup>90</sup> Ludwig Schnauder suggests that Marlow is able to step outside of imperial ideology and find new ways of seeing Africa and Africans including developing empathy and modern cultural relativism. Unfortunately Marlow does not display this cultural relativism while in Africa.

Company as the captain onboard the steamer. Both Susan Blake and Andrea White assert that, despite Marlow's critiques, he participates and is thus implicated in the atrocities of imperialism. This, however, is precisely Conrad's point. Marlow *is* an imperialist. Moreover, he is an English imperialist in a novel full of international imperialists: Russian, Dutch, Swedish, Belgian, French. Yet, he uses his position as an imperialist and superficial appearances of an adventure hero in order to subvert the imperial adventure starting from its earliest reckless motivations. As the only fully English imperialist in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow initially acquires an authority and credibility not available to any other character. These credentials are supplemented by his position as an imperialist, which of course provides him with unique access to the scenes of atrocity. As an "insider" he is privy to more information than a reformer working from the outside, and he can critique the system from the inside in ways that even his friends onboard the *Nellie* cannot.

Marlow is thus an informed observer. His observations are certainly not unbiased — he is an imperialist with a conscience, and this makes him unique. Nonetheless, as an imperialist, he, too, is profoundly faulted. Marlow reveals his own hypocrisy and moral and emotional failings as he fails to intercede on the natives' behalf or make any criticism directly to the pilgrims of whom he is later so scathingly critical, despite his sarcasm at the time. Ironically, while he fails to express any rebuke to the pilgrims, he is angered by and reacts as such to the Harlequin and initially the Intended, the two least sinister white characters in the novel. His cause of retrieving Kurtz and protecting his reputation is neither just nor righteous, and his loyalty to him seems grossly misguided. As the only completely English character in Africa and the narrator-hero, Marlow should ideally be

placed above reproach. But Conrad does not position him there. Instead, he is faulted just like other imperialists.

One of Marlow's significant faults arises from his profound uncertainty and ambivalence. While many of his actions indicate his failure to realize his conventional hero proportions, he explicitly vocalizes his uncertainty himself. Marlow *thinks*. But his thoughts are muddled. The meaning of events and people always eludes him, and he repeatedly expresses his ignorance, unease, indecisiveness, and ambivalence. Although other heroes such as Meredith, Osgood, Vincey, Hardgrave and Quatermain all strive for personal growth through confirmational imperial knowledge and experience, Marlow seeks imperial and racial truth that is *not* known. Of equal import is that Marlow cannot achieve that realization. Other heroes are primarily simplistic characters with simple understandings of the world so that uncertainty of the events and questions regarding imperialism and race could specifically be avoided. Their decisiveness of action, certitude of belief, and the stability this produces reconfirm the dominant racial and imperial images.

Marlow cannot find understanding, however, because Conrad reveals the imperial world to be far more complicated and beyond the understanding of any individual. From beginning to end, this uncertainty and ambivalence is directed toward everyone and everything connected to his journey, whether it is the company itself, the director, the knitting women, the station, the manager, the accountant, the brickmaker, the pilgrims in general, the Russian Harlequin, his steamer, the jungle, or the natives. To some degree, contemporary and modern readers and critics could not expect Marlow to be more informed, given his position as an imperialist. Although Achebe and scholars since him suggest that Marlow's repeated references to the indefinable and inexplicable are racist

since they seem directed at Africans, Marlow's most frequent uncertainty and shock surrounds the unfathomable mysteries connected to white imperialists. He cannot and indeed chooses not to understand the motivations of the whites at the station and thus turns his back on them literally and figuratively as he sets to work on his steamer.

Marlow's greatest ambivalence, of course, revolves around Kurtz as the flaws and hypocrisy of imperialism are more prominently epitomized in the one man. Before he reaches Kurtz, Marlow overhears the story of Kurtz's random decision to return to the station alone after paddling hundreds of miles down-river, and Marlow thinks he "sees" Kurtz for the first time:

It was a distinct glimpse: the dugout, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home perhaps, setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive (34).

Ironically, Marlow says the image he sees is a "*distinct* glimpse," a contradictory observation that reveals how little Marlow actually sees or knows of the adventure hero. Everything he overhears or is told of Kurtz at the Central Station is in hushed and conspiratorial tones or in bits and pieces so a clear picture always eludes him. When he finally meets Kurtz, Marlow's own descriptions of him vary and are transposed from monstrous hideousness to animal and to death incarnate as though Marlow cannot confirm his own perception of the man. Heroes are generally well defined and simplistically structured, but Marlow cannot understand this other hero. Kurtz is an unstable figure, yet Marlow's uncertainty about him ironically destabilizes his own representation as a hero of decisiveness and certitude.

To complicate matters, while Kurtz and everyone else are beyond Marlow's comprehension, Marlow cannot even understand himself or his own actions. When



Marlow calls upon Kurtz's Intended in the sepulchral city, his ambivalence surfaces repeatedly: "I don't defend myself. I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty or the fulfilment of one of those ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went" (71-72). The significance in Marlow's visit rests in his inability to understand his own self or the motivations which drive him. Whereas the hero is always decisive in his actions, Marlow panics over his decision to meet with the Intended, but he is too late: "I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold" (73). Even this place, the home of the Intended, is full of mysteries and strangeness which he cannot resolve, and he does not know how to act whether he is in the imperial world or in the European world.

In hindsight and with full reflection, Marlow ultimately cannot define or understand the effect of the adventure upon himself: "It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me — and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough too — and pitiful — not extraordinary in any way — not very clear either. No. Not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light" (11).<sup>91</sup> His speech is unclear and disconnected. Even when purposeful in speech, such as his use of sarcasm, Marlow lacks clarity which destabilizes the text and frequently leaves the reader unclear about what he means. His verbal twists serve to complicate rather than simplify the story, so much so that the reader and critic are themselves often left to wonder and reconsider the meaning of the narrative. It is not sufficient, however, merely to identify that uncertainty and ambiguity exists in his

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<sup>91</sup> Vivek Dhareshwar uses the tropes of the darkness of night and the light of day to suggest the limitations of Marlow's narrative. Similar to night, his ability to comprehend is obscured by the restricted visibility. Without the ability "to know," he cannot retell precisely what has occurred.

narrative and that it perhaps therefore makes Marlow less reliable. In order to understand the fuller extent of how it functions as a subversion of imperialism, Marlow's account must be taken in context of the adventure genre. The hero always understands other characters and events, and he particularly understands himself. The meaning of the narrative is straight-forward, as is the narrative structure. Readers are easily able to construe the legitimization of imperialism. Mystery can and certainly does surround the exotic Other and the dark landscape, but imperial operation and the intentions and actions of whites are always known. To make them unknown is to question, to suggest flaws in the system and agents.

This uncertainty suggests weakness in the hero where none should exist, at least none of such magnitude and consequence, but it also suggests weakness or flaws in the entire imperial system of which he is a representative. While Marlow has not reached his quest for understanding when the frame narrator opens his narrative, significantly he seems to achieve it immediately before he begins his narrative about Kurtz when he tries ambivalently to expound upon the redemptive "idea" of imperialism.

" . . . What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea — something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . ." [his ellipses]

He broke off . . . but it was only after a long silence, when he said in a hesitating voice, "I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit," that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences (10-11).

Marlow's statements seem to suggest an initial attitude of superior British imperialism which presumably possesses the virtues of efficiency and an "idea" that redeems its operation. His delivery, however, reveals the opposite as his speech reveals weakness. Rather than flowing smoothly, his speech is interrupted by commas, dashes, pauses and

hesitations. He attempts to clarify and qualify his meaning of an unselfish belief, only to have his words come out in a garish parody of the formulaic rhetoric of Christian benevolence and civilized enlightenment which he later emphatically condemns. Moreover, Marlow ironically sets up “the redeeming idea” as something that people should “bow down to” and “worship,” just as the pilgrims worship ivory. This constructed worship of “the idea” is, however, more strikingly analogous to the malevolent Kurtz who forces the African people to bow down to him, crawl in his presence, and worship him falsely, an image so abhorrent to Marlow that he yells at the Harlequin that he does not want to hear any more.

Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, Marlow suddenly realizes the gross hypocrisy of his comment and the horrific consequences of such an idolization of the “idea” of a more efficient and benevolent imperialism. He is shocked and unable to speak. His uncertainty lingers in a long pause as he struggles for meaning in front of his audience on the *Nellie*. Even after his experience, he evidently still clung to the last remnants of a more noble perception of white and English imperial intervention. But “the idea” is a false idol, just like Kurtz. Significantly, the frame narrator’s persistent interruptions are symbolic of Marlow’s disrupted inner journey which in that very moment seems to have reached some conclusion long after his physical journey had ended. The awareness he achieves, however, disturbs him severely. His subsequent speech patterns and attitudes are marred by indecisiveness and uncertainty that undermine the legitimacy of those earlier beliefs. When he finally resumes his narrative, he does so in a “hesitating voice,” as his awareness of even “efficient” imperialism compels him to reveal what he has witnessed of the anglicized hero, Kurtz. Marlow’s break in speech is symbolic of a break from the dominant discourse and the conventions of adventure fiction

that propagated the fantastic vision of imperialism. He is no longer certain about his experience, Kurtz, or even himself, and certainly not imperialism, regardless of its stripe.

Conrad makes his English narrator and secondary hero, Marlow, uncourageous, unreliable, uncertain, and indecisive, and he stands in direct opposition to traditional adventure heroes and narrators who could always be depended upon by other characters and readers to do the just, noble, and “English” thing and in the straightest, most direct, and unquestioning way. As shining and stalwart exemplars of heroic virtue in their conquest of the earth, fictional adventure heroes thus promoted the cause of imperialism at home and abroad, whether their representation was true or not. In subverting the English narrator-hero, Conrad subverts the imperial ideology promulgated elsewhere, and we are left with no genuine heroic figure anywhere in the novel. Within the context of adventure fiction, where heroes and narrators are unequivocal in their certitude of attitude toward their own race and native populations and are brave and decisive in their exploitative actions, Marlow must be considered a significant subversion of that relatively stable ideology. Quatermain, Leo Vincey, Meredith, Osgood, and Hardgrave possess no such ambivalence. Their understanding of events is clearly charted in the novels in which they appear, and this understanding is neatly condensed into stereotyped roles of “good” and “evil” and presented through simplified plots that confirm the hero as the unequivocal superior of all others. According to Conrad however, *no one* is above reproach. By making even his English narrator an unheroic imperialist, he points to the fallacy of adventure fictions which promote imperialism, and, if the fictions are a sham, it calls into question the legitimacy of imperialism itself.

Adventuring heroes are seldom flawless paragons of virtue. At times, small chinks in the shining armor appear, but even these subtle imperfections serve their purpose.

Graham Greene suggests that the flaws in the heroes and their admission of them exemplify their integrity and a kind of mentorship role in demonstrating how they may be overcome. Quatermain and Hardgrave's modesty and Meredith's pride which prevents him from acceding to his father's wishes or accepting his help in overcoming challenges fall into the categories of role model. Unlike Kurtz, who does not recognize his flaws, at least not until his end, and certainly does not overcome them, Marlow repeatedly demonstrates or refers directly to his own fallacy and inadequacies. But rather than serving as example of how those faults can be overcome, Marlow's actions and admissions reveal his personal shortcomings of conviction and character and ultimately the shortcomings of the genre representations and imperialism in general. His unconventional and ignoble behaviour disrupts imperial representations by indicating the more realistic and human fallacies of those who toil in imperial service. He is foolish, ludicrous, and unchivalrous, even disloyal, and he also possesses an obvious defective morality. While not to the degree of Kurtz's deficiency or the pilgrims', Marlow's failings seem to indicate that Conrad subscribes to the belief that there is no "good" imperialist or "good" imperialism. Flaws will exist wherever individuals trespass where they do not belong. Whereas some heroes in adventure stories continue to travel abroad because of the success of their imperial journeys, Marlow's decision to remain at home because "the glamour's off" (11) from adventure confirms his recognition that no form of imperialism is unimpeachable.

Although Marlow reveals his numerous inadequacies, particularly the doubt with which he shrouds the genre and the imperialist quest, he offers no recourse or solution for the reader. His fallacies and uncertainty hamper the reader even more so because he is our gateway into this fantastic world but he, too, lacks comprehension of its meaning and can

offer no guide for the reader. Perhaps guidance is not forthcoming because Marlow, like Kurtz, is designed exclusively to disrupt the English heroes as they are presented in adventure stories and thus the imperialism they promote. It is also doubtful whether Marlow would have the capacity to act unilaterally as the hero. As an individual, it is unlikely and much more realistic of imperial operations that he would not exercise such influence as other adventurers seemingly do. Moreover, it is also possible that such a figure would not possess the capability of formulating new methods of interracial and international relations. Perhaps no alternative model for these relations is proposed because for Conrad it was sufficient for white presence and intervention abroad to end. He refers often enough to the naturalness of Africans being in Africa and the unnaturalness, indeed, the “invasion” and “infestation” of whites in a place in which they do not belong, thus questioning the right of whites to “be there” at all. It may be that for Conrad, it was enough to crack the monolithic stone of racial and imperial discourse in the adventure genre, that in creating such a fissure, others such as his friends, politician Roger Casement and editor E.D. Morel who founded the Congo Reform Movement, could propose alternative policies. Making his English hero foolish, ignoble and unchivalrous and with inadequate morality, and glaringly so, at least disrupts the advancement of the imperial project as readers might question what Marlow questions. At a minimum, readers may have desired not to be the ambivalent and flawed figure he comprises.

## Chapter 3

### Kurtz, The Other Hero

I had a vision of him on the stretcher opening his mouth voraciously as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me, he lived as much as he had ever lived — a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities, a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence (*HD*, 72).

Kurtz is, as indicated by the above quotation, truly a uniquely unconventional adventure hero. More so than Marlow or any other hero, Kurtz disrupts the promotion of Empire by illuminating how the adventure journey fails to provide imperialists with all the intangible and tangible benefits that the mobility of imperialism was supposed to offer. It may be difficult to envision Kurtz as a hero, given the enormity of his depravity and crimes. Although we tend to think of a hero as “good,” Kurtz does, in many respects, adhere to the conventions of the hero in the adventure genre. Conrad endows him with an essentially “English” identity and positions him, if not in a privileged class, at least as a “unique” individual with connections to and affinities with the upper classes. Moreover, he embarks upon a journey of personal discovery and social mobility that is the requisite of all adventure stories. What Conrad suggests through Kurtz, however, is that the mobility and rewards (personal, social, financial, and sexual) offered by imperial adventure stories fail to be realized. Kurtz is corrupt in every aspect of the conventional hero, and that image of the hero, which signifies the stability of imperialism and the certitude of social and personal mobility, is destabilized severely. Kurtz’s unconventional character and his perverted journey in turn subvert the promotion of Empire by presenting readers with a much more ghastly, though possibly more realistic outcome for them should they also participate in the imperial project. Moreover, Kurtz’s corrupt identity

shifts incessantly through multiple and varied incarnations as the narrative structure in which he is revealed is fragmented. This corruption and fragmentation of his identity in turn severely destabilizes not only the image of the hero and imperialism but white racial identity itself.

Scholarship on Kurtz predominantly consists of views of his corruption and how that corruption represents the evils of imperialism.<sup>92</sup> These critiques often focus on some specific element that symbolizes Kurtz's corruption.<sup>93</sup> Some scholars analyze Kurtz's corruptibility and his struggle against his darker inner core and view it as symbolic of the struggle of humankind against its baser instincts.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, the latter discussions tend to be metaphysical in nature and do not deal with imperialism or race. Several aspects of race as they pertain to Kurtz have been discussed, however, and are of particular note. Kurtz has been discussed with respect to the "superb" African woman, as well as the Intended.<sup>95</sup> These discussions tend to be from various feminist and

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<sup>92</sup> While Kurtz is mentioned frequently in scholarly discussions about imperialism and racism, this section reviews those criticisms that focus specifically about Kurtz.

<sup>93</sup> Ren Neilson, for example, concentrates on Kurtz's use of speech and hypocrisy which hide the true nature of imperial abuse. Mark Sexton addresses Kurtz's sketch in oil which, while indicating a mind that seeks to grasp and interpret experience is ultimately frustrated by a profound sense of life's complexity and an awareness of the ultimate inadequacy of terms like "light" and "darkness" to describe reality. The abandonment of his oil painting symbolizes his abandonment of his ideals.

<sup>94</sup> Walter E. Anderson focuses on Kurtz's "heart of darkness," as a metaphysical struggle between light and darkness in the soul of man and how Kurtz loses this struggle and descends into darkness. Andrea Church discusses Kurtz's descent and degeneration which she views as a result of the wilderness and the isolation he endures.

<sup>95</sup> André Viola does not view the African woman in a derogatory, sexual, or savage way but interprets her as a goddess figure, Athena specifically, and as such a woman possessed of power and courage but denuded of sexuality. Rita Bode, while recognizing that Kurtz's mistress represents the darkness that embraces him, suggests that the African woman works as part of a "sisterhood" with the Intended in which each works to further and complete actions begun by the other." Since they have equal power, they are able "to bring on the darkness" as they embody ambiguity that controls meaning. According to Padmini Mongia, the African Mistress (who is differentiated from the Intended) is the most threatening of gothic women because of her sexual power and because the journey is not only to Africa but



postcolonial perspectives, and although some of them take imperialism into account in their consideration of the Mistress, they do not contextualize her within the adventure genre, a genre that is comprised of very specific representations of miscegenation. Similarly, Harold Collins and Frances Singh have associated Kurtz with cannibalistic actions,<sup>96</sup> but that association takes on far greater significance and seems to have more critical impact in the context of adventure fiction.

Thus the most notable limitation in the existing analyses of Kurtz is, like Marlow, its lack of contextualization within the adventure genre. Research has failed to consider Kurtz as an unconventional “hero” who disrupts the generic and racial representations of the white hero elsewhere in the genre.<sup>97</sup> Although literary work has examined *Heart of Darkness* in terms of the journey of the self, they focus predominantly on Marlow. This may be due to the fact that Kurtz dies, and his adventure, therefore, does not conform to most journey archetypes. The incompleteness of Kurtz’s journey, however, has profound significance in the adventure genre, as does its unconventional narrative structure.<sup>98</sup> The adventure genre has fairly specific conventions for the journey in terms of both plot and

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backward in time, and she thus represents the fear of retrogressions; Africa is inscribed as malevolent and she incorporates this malevolence

<sup>96</sup> Both Harold Collins and Frances Singh at some point assert that Kurtz is more savage in his actions than the natives in the novel, likening him to the actions of a cannibal. Collins focuses on detribalization of Africans, while Singh examines how Kurtz’s “cannibalism” fits into an overall argument that a “state of terrorism” is constructed by imperialism in general.

<sup>97</sup> Although Dryden and White have done the most extensive work in discussing the adventure hero in relation to Conrad, they see the adventure hero as formulaic. Moreover, their work has not focused on *Heart of Darkness*, so neither scholar has considered Kurtz or Marlow in relation to this formula, how they promote imperialism, or, more significantly, where these characters subvert that promotion.

<sup>98</sup> Literary discussions on the narrative structure tend to focus on Marlow and the frame narrator. While ambiguity is a common feature of these discussions, they tend to be very limited with respect to Kurtz. Moreover, those discussions on narrative structure do not take into account the structures in the adventure genre.

narrative structure.<sup>99</sup> Although inconsistencies exist in the genre with respect to heroes' character and the desire of some heroes not to remain at home in Britain, these inconsistencies appear random and do not subvert imperial stability or the overall promotion of imperialism. It is only when we contextualize the unconventionality of Kurtz and his journey within the adventure genre that we see not random inconsistency or ambivalence toward race and Empire but subversion of those conventions and ideologies and the imperial promotion that they fostered. Given the incredible appeal that the conventional hero and his rewarding journey held for readers who may have imagined themselves as these heroes or aspired to participate in similar exploits in the real world, the subversion of these pro-imperial conventions is significant. Moreover, Kurtz's corrupt and fragmented representation severely destabilizes the dominant image of racial whiteness.

As the opening of this chapter demonstrates, Kurtz possesses the most essential of these conventional qualities, at least at the outset of his journey. The first section of the chapter then focuses on the ways in which Kurtz's transformation into a heroic figure with all his "gentlemanly" and "manly" qualities is incomplete, and he instead develops in acutely unconventional ways. His Englishness, like that of Marlow, is ambivalent as he takes on characteristics of the Other. Moreover, Conrad uses Kurtz's presumed Englishness to critique both the heroes within the genre and British imperialism through his ghastly representation. Rather than accessing and manifesting any convention of nobility and masculinity, Kurtz is rapacious, megalomaniac, unmanly, vicious, and homicidal. The second section of the chapter focuses on Kurtz's journey and his

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<sup>99</sup> Notably, the adventure genre as it pertains to nineteenth-century imperial adventures in general has been overlooked in terms of narrative structure. It is an area of research, like a number of other aspects of adventure fiction, which needs more analysis.

“rewards” and examines how these non-conforming features disrupt imperial promotion. The financial, social, and sexual rewards elude Kurtz, and his journey is thus deprived of its primary appeal to readers who saw in adventure stories the opportunity for their own gain. One of these appeals, the sexual enticements of miscegenation, is covered in significant detail in the opening of the second section. The final part of this section then deals with Kurtz’s physical and narrative journeys which, like those of Marlow’s, are highlighted by immobility (indeed termination) and that ambiguity destabilizes imperialism and white racial identity.

### **Kurtz: A Uniquely Unconventional Adventure Hero**

On the most basic, though highly significant level, Kurtz does represent the conventional hero who embarks on a physical journey to Africa that presumably will improve his personal, social, and financial status. Moreover, like his counterparts, Kurtz has direct English connections that allow readers to receive the novella as an adventure similar to those of G.A. Henty, Henry Merriman, and Rider Haggard. Although Kurtz’s name is German, Marlow learns that Kurtz is actually a compilation of nationalities: “His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (50). In making his condemnation of imperialism via Kurtz, Conrad appears to make a sweeping inclusion of all imperial powers. Yet, England is clearly the imperial nation that dominates in Kurtz’s identity.<sup>100</sup> After meeting Kurtz, Marlow notes

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<sup>100</sup> The issue of Kurtz’s partial Englishness and compilation of European nationality is cited frequently but briefly and without significant analysis. Brantlinger and Blake assert that Conrad criticizes imperialism but only up to a point, that he distinguishes between the good or “redeemable” imperialism of Britain and the bad and inefficient imperialism of other European powers. In drawing this conclusion, they use both Marlow’s comments about the map in the Director’s office that displays the different imperial nations’ possessions and Marlow’s ironic assessment about the “redeeming idea” of imperialism, which is supposedly the form exercised by Britain. Kurtz’s ethnicity is never used in determining Conrad’s

his opportunities for long discourse with him: “This was because it [Kurtz] could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England and — as he was good enough to say himself — his sympathies were in the right place” (50). Conrad specifically indicates that in addition to Kurtz’s English bloodline both his education and allegiances are with England. Kurtz is thus identified as English and conforms to the most fundamental requirement of an English adventure hero.

Kurtz’s social class and background conform to the standards of the adventure genre as well and appear essential in establishing his position as an adventure hero. Kurtz seems to be a man of some connection, or at least an uncommon background, as his Intended is clearly of wealth and position herself. Although he may not actually belong to that privileged class, he is presented as an accomplished and extraordinary man, who possesses enough of the finer qualities of a gentleman to have earned the explicit devotion of his Intended. He is repeatedly touted as “a universal genius,” a man of immeasurable and cultured talents: painter, poet, writer, and musician. In order to develop such skills to a “genius” proficiency, he must have had some classical education and training. As with heroes such as Allan Quatermain, Kurtz also possesses extraordinary practical talents as he obtains more ivory than all the Company agents combined. Moreover, Marlow later discovers that before Kurtz left Europe he demonstrated his political aptitudes and was a charismatic public orator. For a Victorian audience, Kurtz’s obvious associations and affinities with the upper classes elevate his stature. Readers would undoubtedly have associated him with the higher moral and personal qualities that the upper classes were presumed to possess, and they likely identified him as the gentleman who heroes were considered by default to be.

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sympathies.

Despite his seemingly superior personal background, Kurtz lacks the financial resources that would make him a “gentleman” in all respects. He is, in this regard, similar to a number of adventure heroes, such as Henty’s Frank Hardgrave and Merriman’s Jack Meredith, who come from superior family stock but lack personal financial resources. As with Meredith specifically, Kurtz is compelled to go to Africa to obtain the needed capital to marry his Intended, and Marlow wonders if perhaps “he had not been a pauper all his life” (74). The reality of financial constraint, which undoubtedly pressed upon the minds of many contemporary readers in their own lives, is highlighted throughout the adventure genre. In the case of Frank Hardgrave, it becomes desperation. The representation of the penniless hero thus provides one of the primary motivations for the hero to undertake the overseas journey. Notwithstanding the philanthropic justifications for imperial incursion, Empire was largely about wealth and power for both the individual and the nation, and adventure stories advertise the acquisition of wealth as one of its central tenets through the depictions of characters of meager means or lower social position who acquire fabulous riches as a result of their adventure. Since not all readers of adventure fiction would have been of a privileged class either, it was essential for adventure writers to illustrate how these readers, too, could achieve power and success.

Associated with this concept of upward mobility is the hero’s realization of his status as a “gentleman”<sup>101</sup> and a “man” both inwardly and outwardly that was considered inherent in the upper classes. The seeming promise of the imperial journey is that it facilitates the hero’s transformation into this desirable man. Kurtz’s supposed qualities of virtuousness, nobility and Christian benevolence in Africa that Marlow hears about prior

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<sup>101</sup> Jeffrey Richards notes that in the nineteenth-century context these “gentlemen” became “the embodiment of bravery, loyalty, courtesy, modesty, purity, and honour and were endowed with a sense of *noblesse oblige* towards women, children and social inferiors” (quoted in Dryden 18).

to meeting him suggest that his journey, too, is meant in part to fulfill that upward mobility of the self. The heroes of adventure fiction are men of extraordinary personal merit, who might have been worthy of emulation by contemporary readers (see chapter 1). The realization of these qualities, the transformation of the inner man into “hero” status, is fostered by the physical movement from the complacency of life at home in Britain, which kept the hero’s gentlemanliness and manliness dormant, to the uniqueness of experience and challenge in the imperial world.

For Kurtz, this journey and its transformative power go horrifically awry as they deviate widely from the conventions of the adventure genre. Certainly, Kurtz possesses the “enlightened” ideals of Christian salvation and the virtuous and moralistic betterment of natives when he first arrives in Africa. At the Central Station, where his philanthropic reputation lingers, echoed by the envious and scornful pilgrims, the brickmaker describes Kurtz as “a prodigy . . . an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else” (28), the ideal representative to fulfill the Company’s mandate, “the cause entrusted” to the imperial agents by those in charge in Europe (28). Kurtz ostensibly continues to possess these higher moral virtues and intelligences when he ventures onward to the Inner Station, as evidenced by his earlier composition in the Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. His final entry in the report, the genocidal prescription, however, reveals the way in which that enlightened virtue has been realized to be a sham both in himself and, as Marlow discovers through his own journey, in the entire imperial operation.

Between these points on Kurtz’s journey, he develops or realizes qualities which are radically unconventional for an adventure hero. While Conrad establishes Kurtz’s English associations, he later impugns that Englishness, much as the frame narrator

impugns Marlow's own English identity, by his insinuations of Otherness. Kurtz deteriorates physically, wasted by disease and moral corruption, and his appearance and indeed behaviours approximate the "savages" typical in adventure stories. Conrad uses Kurtz's English identity, as he does with Marlow's identity, to generate ambivalence regarding English racial and moral superiority. More than ambivalence, however, Kurtz's English identity seems to subvert that image and suppress the enticement that such English superiority may have formed. Moreover, Britain and its imperial policies become the objects of critique. Notably, Kurtz's representation exceeds Marlow's in intensity and kind, and Kurtz is an English character to which no one would likely have wanted to aspire. Arguably, Conrad makes Kurtz partially-English only, rather than fully English, as a means of deflecting criticism away from his British audience.<sup>102</sup> If Conrad wanted to deflect criticism away from Britain, however, he most likely would not have made Kurtz English at all. That he deliberately makes Kurtz even partially-English, given his corrupt and hypocritical nature, suggests Conrad is condemning Britain in the imperial project, as well as other nations, and is trying to dissuade English readers who may have identified with this English hero.

The imperial world allows this English "racial" superiority to manifest itself through the pronounced masculinity of heroes that Victorian imperialists deemed was so crucial for its imperialists but which was ironically stifled at home. Heroes in the genre are typically a decisive, hearty, just, and "manly" breed. This made them objects of envy and possible duplication in the real world. There is no one they fear and no earthly or unearthly creature they cannot face and defeat. Adventure writers thus provide numerous

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<sup>102</sup> Although Brian Shaffer does not refer to Kurtz's English identity at all in his critique, he indicates that Marlow's audience on board the *Nellie* represents Conrad's own British audience. As such, Conrad could make indirect criticisms of them only otherwise he would not have been read or published.

depictions of their heroes in sensationalistic action scenes that highlight their masculinity. One of Conrad's glaring omissions is any manifestation of this kind of masculinity in Kurtz. The fierce, often graphically portrayed battles between whites and natives or whites and dangerous beasts, which allow the heroes to display courage, gallantry, and physical strength, are noticeably absent in *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, Conrad offers not a single example for the readers "to see" Kurtz in action. The Russian Harlequin speaks of raids that Kurtz launched, but it is here-say only and inadequately described by the standards of adventure fiction. Marlow prevents his audience aboard the *Nellie*, and Conrad his audience of readers, from witnessing the acts themselves.

Conrad, instead, allows his audience to witness only examples of Kurtz's indecision and cowardliness, qualities to which no one in either Marlow or Conrad's audience presumably would aspire. The Harlequin reveals to Marlow that for months Kurtz has wavered between returning home and remaining at the Inner Station. He suddenly and inexplicably reversed his course and headed back by canoe to the Inner Station the previous year when he had almost reached the Central Station. But even when faced with his white comrades, Kurtz wavers indeterminately and endangers them all. When the rescue party arrives, he first orders the steamer to be attacked. Once Marlow and the pilgrims finally dock, Kurtz orders his black followers to carry him out to the steamer to be transported back to the Central Station. He then later contradicts himself again as he sneaks off the ship and crawls through the jungle toward the drums and, ultimately, relents when Marlow captures him. Although the primitive lure of the drums seemingly pulls him back, suggesting his submission to the natives, Kurtz is clearly in charge of them, if not in charge of his own corrupt passions, as evidenced by his absolute and brutal control of the natives. But that control, as indicated by his impulsive and



wavering decisions, contrasts starkly with the decisive men of action in other adventure stories whose bold and clear-cut moves ensure the success of white men as well as the presumed salvation and bettering of Africans. Significantly, Kurtz's indecisiveness is symbolic of his entire ambivalent identity that at times shifts as erratically as his actions.

What the reader sees of Kurtz's expected masculinity is not only unconventional but disturbing. Ultimately, Kurtz's fear and terror besmirch the image of the brave hero: "I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror — of an intense and hopeless despair" (68). Although his fear and despair may be somewhat understandable, albeit unconventional, given the realization of his own death, the most lasting image of cowardliness is perhaps the staked heads of the natives in his yard that were evidently executed after a battle when Kurtz was of a more sound body. The decapitations certainly reveal Kurtz's excessiveness and lack of restraint, as Marlow notes, but the heads also strip Kurtz of any presumed bravery or nobility that could be associated with a hero's victory over the natives. Battles with natives in adventure stories can certainly be gruesome. Sir Henry Curtis cuts off the head of Twala, but it is a swift blow in the midst of heated battle, and he does not parade it as a trophy for admiration. It is the sudden consequence of hand to hand mortal combat that actually functions to elevate the bravery of his act, as the adventure hero frequently must resort to basic means of defense, either his own hands or primitive weapons. In Sir Henry's case he must use a battle axe. Although it is a reversion to an earlier stage of technological and social development, the hero's reliance upon primitive weapons and the body harken back to heraldic ages which accentuate the hero's masculinity and gallantry. Kurtz, however, relies upon technologically advanced weaponry in confronting the natives — he "came to them with thunder and lightning . . . and they had never seen anything like it" (56) — and

this distances him from the glory of knightly heroes. Moreover, because he uses guns as his weapons of choice, the redundant decapitation of his dead victims reveals his naked viciousness.

Ironically, a paradox occurs as a result of both the movement from “civilized” Britain to “uncivilized” Africa and the man/gentleman transformation that this movement and the ensuing adventure create in the hero. The journey into the imperial world facilitates that development by allowing the presumably inherent, yet latent qualities of superiority within the hero to come forward. Although Britain is projected in dominant ideology as superior, the “safety” of urban living and democratic forms of social organization that are integral parts of the advanced civilization at home deprives the hero of his ability to exert his masculinity and become a genuine imperial hero. He is, in effect, restrained from being a “man.” Travel to the imperial world allows that masculinity to move from dormancy to primacy. But the “man” that he becomes contradicts the “gentleman” into whom he is also desirably to transform since the masculinity of heroes is integrally connected to the primal.

Although the hero’s masculinity, including his bravery and decisiveness, is presumably superior to that of Africans, as evidenced by his inevitable conquest over them, ironically his masculinity is also not rational or civilized. Instead, these attributes are presented as “savage” and naked, stripped of their urban cloak. In the imperial world, the “primitive” Englishman is thus unrestrained, free to move as his passions drive him.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Haggard presents Sir Henry’s mortal combat over several pages and in graphic and glorifying detail. Its entire depiction is worthy of analysis, but is presented here only in part: : “There he stood, the great Northman, for he was nothing else, his hands, his axe, and his armour all red with blood, and none could live before his stroke. Time after time I saw it sweeping down, as some great warrior ventured to give him battle, and as he struck he shouted ‘*O-boy! O-boy!*’ like his Berserker forefathers, and the blow went crashing through shield and spear, through headdress, hair, and skull, till at last none would of their own will come near the tall white “*umtagati*,” the wizard, who killed and failed not” (169).

The “gentleman,” into whom the hero is also supposed to transform as a result of his experiences, conversely connotes civilization: honour, loyalty, nobility, chivalry, charity and benevolence. These qualities are not only specifically associated with the idealized, heraldic age, they also rely upon rationality and compassion, conditions which nineteenth-century racial ideology did not extend to primitive non-Europeans. Although the savagery of battle is also associated with this idyllic age, and the line between the “civilized” and the “savages” in adventure stories is thin and can be easily breached, ultimately that racial line is maintained. In Kurtz’s case, clearly it is not. Conrad significantly takes this concept of restraint and release of the inner man and gentleman to its extreme, though logical conclusion. If the hero is allowed the freedom to express these qualities at will in adventure stories, why not other, equally “primitive” attributes.

In bringing forth the primitive nature of the hero, however, Conrad suggests that there is nothing more to Kurtz’s inner essence than that nature. The supposed heroic qualities that are accessed by other adventure heroes are a sham, and except for the raw primitiveness, there is only a void. The hero cannot move into a better social or moral position because there is no inherent superior quality from which to draw. Kurtz does not “go native” or “fantee,”<sup>104</sup> which in itself would significantly subvert the notions of English superiority since adventure hero ultimately resist the lure of the dark and

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<sup>104</sup> In analyzing *Heart of Darkness* in relation to similar exotic stories of the 1890's, Richard Ruppel suggests that the main similarity between Conrad’s novella and Cutcliffe Hyne’s short story, “The Transfer,” is that the main character goes “fantee” or native. He views Kurtz’s degeneration almost as a kind of mental deterioration rather than the manifestation of inherent baser instincts once the character has been removed from the reach of social authority. He also does not consider Kurtz’s actions as a methodology. It is brutal and unrestrained certainly, but nonetheless a methodology with an all-too tangible objective.

mysterious jungle and the exotic and sensual inhabitants.<sup>105</sup> His absolute and ruthless control over the natives — the Harlequin is emphatic that the natives are a “simple people” who “would not stir til Mr. Kurtz gave the word. His ascendancy was extraordinary” (58) — indicates that Kurtz does not acquiesce to exotic enticements. Instead, Conrad accounts for Kurtz’s debauchery as the realization of his true, unheroic self, once the facade of civilization that masks it is removed.

. . . but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him — some small matter which when the pressing need arose could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can’t say. I think the knowledge came to him at last — only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude — and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core . . . (58) [his ellipses]

Marlow’s long pause echoes meaningfully. His summary judgment of Kurtz emphasizes that the void was always there. Africa merely reveals that inherent emptiness.

While Conrad may superficially appear to conform to long established stereotypes of the seductive power of the Dark Continent and the Other in degenerating Kurtz, Conrad provides ample evidence that the deficiency within Kurtz’s heart already existed prior to any influence of the jungle or the natives. Marlow repeatedly hammers this point home as he continuously refers to Kurtz’s hollowness and the “shade,” “shadow,” and

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<sup>105</sup> Occasionally, heroes do not resist the Other. Both Leo Vincey and Captain Good, for example, become romantically or sexually involved with African and hybrid women. Nonetheless they remain upright English gentlemen at all times in these relationships, and fate always intercedes to force the restoration of racial boundaries and sexual normalcy. See the second section of this chapter for Kurtz’s relationship with the African Mistress.

“sham” of which he is comprised (50, 59, 64, 65, 67, 72). His journey to Africa merely exposes that deficiency by removing all social restraints that impose and maintain his inhibitions for anti-social behaviour.

You can't understand? How could you — with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums — how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude — utter solitude without a policeman — by the way of silence — utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion. These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness . . . (49-50).

Kurtz's inherent void and depravity were there all along. Civilization merely masked it and created an illusion of civility. Social restraints, in the form of legal authority and social criticism and taboos, maintain that mask through the mild coercion of the society's members, who recognize these restraints and conform. Where other adventure stories celebrate the removal of social restraints in the imperial world, as it allows the masculinity of heroes to run rampant, Conrad vilifies it through the monstrosity of Kurtz's malevolence, as he sets himself up as a false god who corrupts, humiliates, and butchers Africans. Going “out there” does indeed force the discovery of what is inside the hero. At one point, Marlow ironically suggests that the cannibals are “fine fellows . . . in their place” (36). One's place is crucial, but it is not Africans who need to remain in their place, rather it is white men who must remain in theirs in order to maintain their cloak of civility.

These starkly unconventional, inherent qualities of depravity and emptiness that Kurtz accesses through his journey manifest in comparable physical deformity that is induced by disease. Masculinity, including outward physicality, is essential to the

realization of the hero (see chapter 1 on the cult status that manliness had achieved in Victorian Britain). Moreover, the inward qualities of individuals are often represented in contemporary literature, particularly adventure fiction, as physical manifestations. Readers who consumed such representations were perhaps encouraged to become such exemplars of physical might in reality and to enjoy similar rewards that such physicality provides, including the admiration of one's peers and the sexual rewards. In Conrad's adventure, however, his role model repulses and disrupts the desire for physical emulation.<sup>106</sup> He possesses none of the robust vitality nor manly strength and endurance that we see in Quatermain, Sir Henry, Vincey, Meredith, Osgood, or Hardgrave. Instead, the physicality in which we witness Kurtz is disturbing and loathsome and projects a ghastly and retributive image of the English hero and imperialism as it is conventionally represented. Although Kurtz apparently once possessed almost "superman" proportions of masculinity — he survived alone at the Inner Station for more than a year, delivered such quantities of ivory that exceeded all other agents combined, and paddled 300 hundred miles upriver by canoe, a journey the pilgrims must complete by the mechanized aide of the steamer — Kurtz's physicality has already been consumed. By the time Marlow meets Kurtz he is a shrunken and emaciated shadow of his former self, a feeble specimen that completely contradicts the traditional heroes' embodiment of imperial might.

Significantly, Kurtz is animalized and dehumanized in the same ways that Africans and hybrids are in other adventure stories, and these depictions create significant racial ambivalence. In his first view of Kurtz, Marlow calls him an "apparition" and an

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<sup>106</sup> Except for discussions concerning voice in *Heart of Darkness* and the physical degeneration of Kurtz, the masculine physicality requisite for adventure heroes, or lack of it with respect to both Kurtz and Marlow, has yet to be considered in scholarship.

“it” (59), and later “something” that is dropped into a muddy hole after its death (67, 69). When Kurtz escapes from the steamer, he is “crawling on all fours” (64), and Marlow tracks and hunts him down as though he were an animal. Moreover, Marlow’s descriptions of Kurtz are anatomized with a touch of the macabre.

And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this — ah — specimen was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him and — lo! — he had withered (49).

Rather than a human head, Kurtz’s head is a ball, and not just any ball but one made of ivory, and that lucrative substance gives his head the appearance of a skull. Just as King Midas is cursed by his avarice for gold with a touch that destroys all living things around him by transforming them to gold, Kurtz’s avarice for ivory transforms him into the lifeless substance which he covets, and everything and everyone around him is similarly cursed.

Perhaps more so than any other image, however, Kurtz has been transformed into death incarnate. Kurtz is never seen in the novel except in a decrepit physical state on the verge of death, and he has become a barely living, physical manifestation of the genocide that he perpetrates.

I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks . . . His covering had fallen off and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze (59).

Again, Kurtz’s body parts ostensibly encompass the whole man, or what is left of him. Even his movements of these parts are grotesque and awkward and suggest a warped

physicality more akin to the representations of the Other than whites.<sup>107</sup> Notably, Kurtz's emaciated condition contrasts with the Africans who carry and accompany him and who, although also dehumanized at some point, are likened to superb statues. Marlow inverts the images of physical health and "normality" reserved for whites in adventure stories with the disease and physical abnormality used to portray Africans and hybrids. Gagool, for example, is emaciated and convulsive; Durnovo is eventually mutilated and diseased; and even Ayesha becomes deformed and writhes on the ground when she is consumed by the supernatural flame. Although white heroes, at times, also suffer from exotic disease in Africa, their illness is never portrayed in ways that suggest racial or physical weakness or deformity. Moreover, Merriman, Vincey, and Hardgrave all recover, and their ability to do so attests to their racial superiority. Conversely, Kurtz, and the white imperialists and adventurers he represents, generate a sweeping, pestilence-like death in Africa, that Kurtz not only comes to embody but to which he ultimately succumbs himself. In making Kurtz a universal representation of death, Conrad projects a broad image of the face of imperialism. Such horrific representation would undoubtedly have repulsed readers at the prospect of deteriorating into a similar state and ending as grimly.

Just as the diseased physicality of Africans and hybrids in other adventure stories are manifestations of their presumed inherently deficient inner selves, Kurtz's physical form is an expression of his inner debauchery and inferiority. One of the most undesirable

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<sup>107</sup> Revathi Krishnaswamy concludes that white men and colonial males are differentiated in the contemporary literature through physical appearance and gestures as well as projections of health and disease: "If masculine beauty was an expression of white European racial, moral and cultural superiority, ugliness was evidence of nonwhite, non-European inferiority. The disorderly appearance attributed to diverse groups of foreigners and social misfits referred not only to physical deformity, but it also implied lack of mental discipline and emotional moderation. Modern medicine and psychology played a powerful role in solidifying the link between body and soul through the very process of designating and defining as diseased those who did not fit in" (16).



of these inner aspects is Kurtz's insatiable greed that symbolizes imperial greed in general as his rapaciousness exceeds that of all the imperial agents combined. While his quest for wealth remains his unflinching concern (the pilgrims must stack the ivory on the deck so Kurtz can view it right up until his death), his megalomania drives him to fantastic desires for possession of objects, people and even reality itself.

You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my . . .' everything belonged to him . . . It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him — but that was a trifle (49).

Marlow sarcastically assesses the enormity of Kurtz's greed and ego that encompass everything he sees. Such insatiable greed, not surprisingly, has led Kurtz to exercise draconian and inhumane tactics toward the local populations in his quest for ivory. But there is, perversely, method in his seeming madness. In the most strict and brutal terms, Kurtz does achieve his goal of acquiring ivory, but it comes at an unimaginable cost not only to the natives but to Kurtz himself.<sup>108</sup> Marlow hammers away at the extent of that consuming drive by depicting it in grotesque and monstrous ways that signify how Kurtz's greed has, ironically, consumed him while he attempts to consume all else: "I saw him open his mouth wide — it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (59).

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<sup>108</sup> Kurtz's mental and emotional condition is commonly referred to as a kind of degeneration, de-evolution, or descent into madness. Ruppel has specifically discussed the issue of Kurtz going "fantee" or native. Chinua Achebe labels the depiction of Kurtz as "the break-up of one petty European mind" (in Kimbrough, 257). A few critics, however, have mentioned the acts that Kurtz perpetrates against Africans as a critique of actual practice with respect to the ivory trade. Historian Adam Hochschild, in *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, has completed the most extensive research on the inhumane policies and practices utilized in the administration of the Belgian Congo and has devoted some of his book to the ways in which Conrad exposes these atrocities.

It is precisely the greed for and methods used in the acquisition of imperial wealth in general that Conrad exposes by subverting the otherwise sanitized versions of exploitation in other adventure stories.<sup>109</sup> Significantly, adventure heroes do engage in war with Africans that ultimately results in white men's wealth, and heroes even display greed occasionally. The authors of these stories, however, present interracial war as a battle between civilization and savagery that ultimately benefits the native peoples. Imperial war is never against peaceful or defenseless natives. Such wars also arise only out of sheer self-preservation for the heroes who would otherwise be slaughtered by the natives. Greed or other dishonourable motivations are minimized. Although Quatermain displays greed in the treasure cave following the battle with Twala's forces, it is measured in comparison to Kurtz and is well-mitigated by his otherwise noble acts. Moreover, although Quatermain questions the pragmatic value of his treasure, there is sufficient suggestion that some lust for wealth is required in order to attain that wealth in the face of all the adversities that arise in the imperial territory. Quatermain, after all, profits tremendously from his greed. Kurtz does not profit from his greed. Conrad, moreover, discredits the greed that motivates imperialists and the acts they commit as he projects Kurtz with a rapaciousness that is so hideous that it haunts Marlow long after his return to Europe: "I had a vision of him on the stretcher opening his mouth voraciously as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me, he lived as much as he

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<sup>109</sup> Although heroes in other adventure stories also indulge in procurement systems that lack fairness, anything like a reasonable remuneration, or, at their worst, basic humanity, including murder and war, adventure writers project this procurement as a natural and racially justified process. The superior qualities and knowledge of the heroes, the sacrifices they endure, and the ultimate improvement for the natives that results from their influence seem to justify the taking of resources and treasures from Africans who are inferior, threaten the white men, and are completely ignorant of the value of and have no use for the wealth that the white men exploit.

had ever lived” (72). In his pursuit for wealth Kurtz transforms into a symbolic cannibal.<sup>110</sup>

Although a certain level of greed is implicit for adventure stories in which treasure or other exotic commodities are the incentive for embarking on the journey, Marlow’s descriptions of Kurtz’s transformation into such an unconventional and undesirable figure likely appalled and repelled readers. More significantly, the acts that Kurtz committed in order to satiate his greed and ego reveal the extent of that perverted transformation. Kurtz proposes and executes a policy of genocide and mounts the trophies of that slaughter in his yard, with the heads of his victims facing his house for his full admiration. Yet, the Russian Harlequin repeatedly assures Marlow that the local Africans are a “simple people” who have no quarrel with him or other whites (the attack on the steamer is specifically launched on Kurtz’s order). The wars he initiates thus appear without foundation, and the altruistic mission with which he began is subverted.

Kurtz is able to execute his “exterminate the brutes” philosophy, in part, because he establishes himself as a vengeful god who is worshiped falsely by the local peoples in much the same way that Ayesha is deified in *She*. This feature of “godly” worship of white characters is fairly common in adventure stories as other heroes allow Africans to view them as gods, a perception that is precipitated by the advanced technology or distinctive social habits of whites. Mr. Goodenough, for example, uses a lantern to project slides onto a sheet that terrifies the natives and makes them conclude that the white man possesses great power. The people of Loo similarly see Captain Good’s half-shaven face

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<sup>110</sup> Harold Collins links Kurtz to the cannibals aboard the steamer and other detribalized natives and implies that Kurtz is more savage than they are. Frances Singh also associates Kurtz’s actions with cannibalism. Neither extends this comparison by suggesting a transference of racial positions, that Kurtz becomes the Other, but their comparison is significant.

and are awed that he can grow facial hair on one side of his face only. But heroes permit such mistaken divinity only for the sake of self-preservation. Moreover, their conduct never degrades Africans, and indeed it always benefits them in some way, as though the heroes are munificent gods. Kurtz, on the other hand, impersonates a deity to feed his own megalomania and greed. He commands the natives, but he in no way benefits them. Instead, the natives' adoration of Kurtz debases them as the Harlequin describes Kurtz and the natives' respective positions, "His ascendancy was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl . . . ." (58).

Ironically, the Christian ideals which Kurtz originally possessed have disappeared, and rather than accessing aspects of his inner essence that enhance his heroic status, he develops into a figure that blatantly violates both white representation and Christian teaching. Marlow is so intensely appalled as a result of Kurtz's abomination of setting himself up as a false god and the humiliation to which he subjects the natives that he shouts his revulsion at the Harlequin: "I don't want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz" (58). Significantly, Marlow's reaction contrasts with Horace Holly's when he wants to kick the old native who similarly crawls before Ayesha because, notwithstanding his modicum of uncomfortableness over the old man's degradation, the slow pace at which he crawls irritates and embarrasses Holly. Ultimately, Holly offers no genuine sense of impropriety about the natives' worship of Ayesha once he sees her apparent whiteness just as the Manager insincerely condemns the "unsoundness" of Kurtz's "method."

Certainly, the similarities between the seemingly white Ayesha and the racially white Kurtz cannot be overlooked. Just as Kurtz exercises absolute power over his native

subjects, Ayesha holds the power of life and death over her subjects as she threatens to “blast them for very sport” and later carries out her threat. Kurtz’s own callous and succinct recommendation for the genocidal management of his subjects and his apparent implementation of that recommendation demonstrate the result of that absolute authority. The only divergence of the characters, other than gender, is that Ayesha’s actual non-white origin isolates her false-god behaviour as peculiar to her raciality, and this ensures her destruction. But Kurtz is unequivocally white and male. Moreover, he is “English.” His absolute power is thus represented not in isolation, but rather it appears as an extension of white power in Africa in general. He brutalizes the natives, but so do other white men in *Heart of Darkness*, as evidenced by the multiple beatings, exploitations, and murders. Kurtz is thus representative of a pervasive abuse of authority that results from the absolute control white men have over Africans. Significantly, both Kurtz and Ayesha’s god-like status imply a divine right similar to that exercised in previous centuries in Europe. Just as that divine right of kings was abused by European monarchs and had to be abolished, at times through the execution of the monarchs, Ayesha and Kurtz pervert their power and are seemingly punished for it. Notwithstanding Kurtz’s whiteness, and suggestively that of other Europeans, Kurtz’s ruthless rule approximates the behaviours of native tyrants, such as Twala and Gagool, hybrid overseers, such as Durnovo,<sup>111</sup> and the god-like Ayesha who must all be destroyed.

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<sup>111</sup> Although the hybrid Durnovo, who also appears white physically, does not occupy a god-like position, his appointment by his white partners to a position that is, in effect, an overseer gives him absolute control over the Africans in their employ. The white men later discover that the Africans are not paid labourers but were purchased as slaves by Durnovo, and this confirms his overseer position. The power that this actual relationship generates establishes him as an absolute ruler over them, and significantly he abuses that power with similarly brutal consequences to the Africans. Just as Ayesha and Kurtz are destroyed seemingly for their corruption and tyranny, the Africans mutiny against Durnovo and mutilate him horrifically in retribution for his abuse.

## **The Unconventional Journey and Its Unconventional Rewards**

Kurtz's destruction is pivotal in terms of the stability of imperialism and its promotion in the adventure genre. Death not only cuts off his access to the conventional mobility that allows heroes to transform into the nobler gentlemen associated with the higher classes, it deprives the adventure story of its other natural conclusion and appeal — the triumphant return home with the very tangible rewards. The return of the hero is a requisite of the genre, but he also returns better for his journey, not merely a better man but a man with financial resources and sexual prize(s). Rewards confirm that the hero has behaved correctly and, equally if not more significantly, that all the hardships he endures are ultimately worth the sacrifices. Heroes may suffer tremendously, including from horrendous exotic disease. Nonetheless, they always return healthy and wealthy and frequently with the ideal English girl. This was the promise and the lure of Empire to its citizens. But Kurtz dies miserably, alone, disgraced and significantly unrewarded.<sup>112</sup> The ivory and wealth he sought elude him, and even in death he remains the “pauper” that he was before he left Europe. When he is rescued, the Manager confiscates Kurtz's ivory, presumably in the name of the company. The only two possessions of Kurtz's that Marlow can take with him back to Europe consist of a stack of personal papers and the Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. As though to accentuate the point of his financial ruin, various associates and relatives of Kurtz in the sepulchral city scramble after even these meager belongings.

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<sup>112</sup> Donald A. Bloom concludes that Kurtz's accomplishments, although horrifying in their acquisition, “are spectacular” (58). He asserts that Kurtz has strived for and achieved his goals of treasure and women. This conclusion, however, ignores the fact that he never actually attains full possession of either, and the pleasure he is to derive from them eludes him.

The sexual rewards that are so often present in adventure stories, whether received from white women or the Other, also elude Kurtz or take highly unconventional and unsatisfying forms that deprive *Heart of Darkness* of the titillation and sexual desire that enhance imperialism elsewhere throughout the adventure genre. Even while Kurtz is alive, he is cut off physically from the Intended in Europe, and his death ensures that he cannot marry. Although white women are often conspicuously absent in adventure stories, many of these stories end with the announcement of marriage or the insinuation of the sexual interest of Englishwomen at home toward the hero upon his return.<sup>113</sup> Miscegenation is, however, equally represented in the adventure genre, and it, too, serves as a tempting reward for the adventure hero during his journey.<sup>114</sup> Just as Kurtz' adventure genre counterparts indulge in interracial sex, Conrad includes ample insinuations that Kurtz is sexually involved with the magnificent African woman.<sup>115</sup> Although Marlow does not explicitly identify the woman as Kurtz's mistress,<sup>116</sup> her presence at his sick bed parallels Foulata's devotion to Captain Good. Moreover, the African woman's act of spreading her arms out over the water, as though beseeching the

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<sup>113</sup> Chapter 1 discusses in some detail the racial and procreative implications of both intra-racial and interracial sexual relations. Intra-racial sexual relations are vital in that they restore any breaches of sexual behaviour that occur in the imperial world and they ensure the procreation of racially "pure" English progeny.

<sup>114</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, interracial sex was an integral component of Empire in literature as well as in reality. Meyers and Dryden's claim that the impeccable adventure heroes resist the sexual lure of the Other is, at times, supported by examples in adventure fiction such as in *By Sheer Pluck* and *With Edged Tools*. But adventures are also just as likely to emphasize the sexual rewards of imperial adventure, such as in *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*.

<sup>115</sup> Padmini Mongia suggests that women in *Heart of Darkness* are used for masculine purposes in order to enhance the man's glory and burden, but also his anxieties.

<sup>116</sup> André Viola notes that the African woman is never referred to as Kurtz's "mistress." From that, Viola asserts that she represents a figure of power and courage but denuded of sexuality.

steamer not to take Kurtz away, parallels the Intended's mourning gesture and indicates an involvement with him that is deeper and more profound than the corrupt influence he has over other natives.

While Conrad's depiction of interracial transgression is not radical for the adventure genre, Kurtz's carnal weakness diverges widely from those of Haggard's heroes. Unlike Kurtz, Captain Good and Leo Vincey openly exemplify the chivalric behaviour associated with romantic love. Captain Good admires Foulata's devotion to him and mourns her death relentlessly even after their return to Britain and apparently shall continue to do so beyond the end of the story. Leo Vincey joins Ustane in a tribalized "marriage," and he, like Captain Good, later seems permanently aggrieved at the loss of Ayesha. For their part, the women are loyal to the white hero even unto their own deaths, which significantly occur while in the act of protecting the white men from physical harm or protecting their relationships with them. Although both novels recognize the racial impropriety and social complications of such involvement, they do not project any other derogatory or demeaning associations in these romances.

Conrad, however, demeans the supposed chivalry and romantic notions of miscegenation in adventure fiction, and he instead depicts it, like all other actions and interactions initiated and controlled by white men, as tainted and unwholesome. Rather than displaying Kurtz's interracial attachment openly, he insinuates it, and his behaviour where the African woman is concerned contravenes the romantic images of other heroes. As with so many facts, experiences, and qualities about Kurtz, Conrad unravels Kurtz's sexual transgression through shadowy hints and glimpses that ultimately reveal nothing for certain. But unlike many of his other transgressions that are so ponderously represented, Conrad inserts his relationship as a fairly minor element, as though Conrad



introduces it for the sole purpose of subverting its occurrence in adventure stories and in the imperial territories.

Although the superb black woman exemplifies the virtuous qualities of loyalty and submissive love of the female Other, Kurtz manifests none of the hero's chivalric qualities of romantic love in return. In fact, he speaks nothing of the woman. She remains a mystery, an unknown element. By keeping the exact nature of his relationship secret, Kurtz taints that involvement and prevents it from becoming the romanticized version of miscegenation that is standard in the adventure genre. On some level, she does appear as "a noble savage" similar to Foulata or Ustane. But because Kurtz keeps her hidden, she is diminished to a position as "the Other woman." Significantly, both Captain Good and Leo Vincey in Haggard's adventures are unattached bachelors. But Kurtz's Intended occupies a pivotal position in the novel as she not only serves as the impetus for both Kurtz's trek to Africa and for Marlow's lie, but her presence complicates the representation of miscegenation. Kurtz's unchivalrous and unconventional behaviour in keeping her so secret presents his involvement with her as lurid and debauched rather than romantic and noble and something to be desired.

Given that adventure writers foreground and idealize interracial relationships in their stories in order to both titillate their readers and promote Empire through its sexual benefits, Conrad's minimalization of Kurtz's relationship seems to frustrate this sexual appeal. The insinuation of sex in literature and art could act as an incentive for would-be imperialists. Such portrayals, of course, titillated readers and pandered to sexual fantasies. But they also highlight one of the basic (and baser) rewards of imperialism and thus acted as a lure for British consumers of exoticized literature and art who may have wanted to experience these sexual fantasies for themselves. Exoticism, whether in commodities or

people, fascinated Britons, and exposure to the exotic stoked the desire for even greater quantities of the strange and unusual in British consumers.<sup>117</sup> But Conrad frustrates this desire for titillation and the advertising potential which it held for imperial recruitment by distancing Kurtz and the reader from the black woman. They are never seen together, including when Kurtz is taken away on board the steamer. Instead, they are distanced by white intervention and technology while she remains rooted in the imperial world.

The only time that Kurtz and the African woman are with each other is told secondhand by the Russian Harlequin who, rather than recalling any submissiveness or adoration on her part, can only describe how she upbraided him so severely, as though scolding a child, that he is afraid of her. The pilgrims, too, fear her, and only Marlow portrays her appearance and demeanor as noble and “magnificent.” But significantly Marlow is also distanced from the woman as she stands and walks on the shore while he remains stationary on the boat. The white men on the steamer nor the reader ever get close to her. Notwithstanding its romanticization in adventure stories, miscegenation is generally viewed as racial and sexual transgression, a form of corruption. While Kurtz’s other corruptions and transgressions are foregrounded and depicted overtly and repeatedly, by minimizing this aspect of his corruption, Conrad deprives his audience of the titillation and the sexual reward they had come to expect.

The outcome of Kurtz’s experience, personal and sexual, confirms the disruption of imperial promotion that is offered by the access to interracial sex. As concluded in

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<sup>117</sup> As empire grew and access to exotic commodities increased, consumer demand increased for the exoticism of foreign lands, produce, commodities, animals, and even people prevailed in the market place. Hence the rapid expansion of museums, zoos, exhibitions, bazaars, shops, and boutiques throughout England that catered to imperial tastes. The desire for overseas travel also increased as well as art, literature, and other kinds of publications which featured the exotic. See Anne McClintock for a comprehensive discussion on the commodification and advertisement of the various products and peoples of Empire for British consumption.

Chapter 1, although sexual indulgence promoted imperialism by appealing to readers' baser instincts, this indulgence is always temporary. The restoration of racial and sexual boundaries and the return to the sexual "normalcy" of Britain is essential and typically achieved when the female Other is killed. Haggard rigidly maintains these conventions in both *King Solomon's Mines* and *She* when he engineers the deaths of Foulata, Ustane, and Ayesha. Haggard dallies with miscegenation, but he is unequivocal of its place. Notably, when Ayesha discovers Ustane's love for Vincey, she chastises her for the impropriety of her actions: "Thou hast done evil, woman, in taking this man, who is a stranger. He is not a man of thine own race, and the custom fails. Listen: perchance though didst this thing through ignorance, therefore, woman, do I spare thee, otherwise hadst thou died" (206). Ayesha, does subsequently kill her, however. Given that the deaths of all the African and hybrid women are the direct consequence of their relationships with white men, their deaths are seemingly a punishment for their racial and sexual transgressions.<sup>118</sup> Although the white man also indulges his sexual desires, he returns to Britain unscathed and untainted. He does not suffer for his it, and certainly does not die.

Conrad, however, reverses these outcomes based on race and disrupts the sexual rewards connected with imperial adventure. Unlike other adventure stories, the status of sexual normalcy in *Heart of Darkness* is far less certain. The departure of the steamer from the Inner Station is shrouded in confusion, fear, ambivalence, and considerable amounts of smoke, as the pilgrims open fire on the crowd of unarmed natives and Marlow blows the steamer's whistle to disperse them. Although it is possible

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<sup>118</sup> Ayesha uses her omnipotent power to kill Ustane specifically because she refuses to end her relationship with Leo Vincey. Ayesha is later killed, herself, by the supernatural flame of life, but significantly her death occurs as soon as Vincey accepts his fate with her. Foulata is stabbed by Gagool when she tries to prevent her from trapping her beloved Captain Good and his companions in the treasure cave.

that their gunfire strikes the woman as the steamer paddles away, one is reminded of the pilgrims' gross ineptitude in trying to shoot the hippopotamus that lumbers through the Central Station at night, as the pilgrims, en masse, "empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him" (31), but they still fail to hit the massive and essentially stationary target. The reader cannot be in the least bit certain what becomes of the magnificent African woman. Marlow's actions seem small, but they may be sufficient to disrupt the pilgrims' cowardly actions.<sup>119</sup> Although their relationship is terminated when Kurtz is taken from the African woman, she, herself, may survive the assault and live out her life in the normalcy of African society. That Conrad conceals her fate behind a cloud of white smoke leaves this possibility open.

Unlike other adventure writers, Conrad is not adamant that the Other is punished in order to restore racial boundaries. The hero, however, does suffer severely. Kurtz is completely degenerated physically, morally, emotionally and mentally. Ultimately, he succumbs to the accumulation of all his transgressions. Although Kurtz indulges in numerous transgressions of socially and morally acceptable behaviour and hero conventions, his death and race with respect to his sexual transgression cannot be overlooked when taken in the context of the adventure genre. His death ensures that no return to sexual normalcy can occur. The deluded state of the Intended, as well as her physical manifestation and associations that, like Kurtz, resemble death, also deny an image of sexual normalcy. She is, in effect, buried with him. Thus, while Kurtz has tasted the sexually exotic, just as he has indulged in other taboos, Conrad disrupts two key aspects of the promotion of Empire: the desire for the Other and white marriage. In *Heart*

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<sup>119</sup> Notably, the African woman is not killed by other Africans or by her own misguided actions, such as when Ayesha steps into the supernatural flame, unaware that it would deprive her of the life it originally lengthened. In *Heart of Darkness*, the white men attempt to eliminate her.

of *Darkness*, one can taste the forbidden exotic fruit, but there are deadly and racial consequences.

Kurtz thus not only fails to realize the transformation into the nobler qualities of a gentleman and “manly man,” he fails to achieve his rewards. The hero is thus thwarted in his journey toward his highly conventional goals. The destination proves unattainable, and Kurtz’s physical journey, which is highlighted with kinds of immobility and diversions, becomes a trope for his failures to achieve his conventional and pro-imperial objectives. Although other inconsistencies exist in the genre, the physical journey is always consistent in its spatial movement. It is always moving forward and simplified. The hero’s journey is typically perilous, but the dangers and obstacles serve as challenges for the hero that only add to his development. They do not impede his progress, and they are always temporary obstructions that ultimately do not divert him from his objective. This stability, in turn, signifies the stability of both the imperial world, as it is presented in the adventure genre, and the possibility of reaching the goals of personal and social fulfilment and reward.

Although superficially following a traditional path, Kurtz’s physical journey is actually disrupted by immobility<sup>120</sup> and interruptions that prevent him from reaching both

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<sup>120</sup> Although Kurtz’s physical journey is demarcated mostly by its immobility, one part of it is highly active and seemingly daring. But it, too, serves as a trope of Kurtz’s failed transformation to a conventional hero. Kurtz travels further than any other white men in *Heart of Darkness*, having gone beyond the Inner Station alone to explore the far reaches of the country. The “farthest point of navigation” in Kurtz’s journey into this unknown territory is symbolic of his inner journey in which he ventures into unknown or at least unrecognized reaches of his self and presumably of white men in general. But the transformation of his character is highly unconventional and undesirable, denoting a profound diversion from his original course. Although heroes in the adventure genre physically explore territories unknown to white men, on one level the function of the physical journey as a trope for their inner journey contradicts the theme of “discovery” since the transformations that the heroes make are consistently limited to the conventions of the adventure genre. Heroes become noble gentleman and masculine men only. Kurtz becomes something altogether different as signified by his quest beyond the Inner Station, but that change severely disrupts the stability of imperialism and image of heroes.

his spatial destination and his transformative and rewarding objectives. The physical journey thus serves as a trope for the failure of the inner and outer man. Kurtz's physical journey is punctuated by brevity and the absence of his presence, which in themselves indicate a kind of immobility. The most glaring aspect of Kurtz's journey is how little of it Marlow, and thus the reader, actually hears and sees. In part, this is due to the narrative structure which is discussed presently. But even though Kurtz's narrative is recounted by others, a structure not uncommon in the adventure genre, the actual negation of Kurtz's movement is unconventional. Marlow retells pieces of Kurtz's journey, but not in its spatial entirety. Marlow hears about Kurtz at every point along the same route that Kurtz presumably travelled from the Government Station on the coast to the Central Station, and ultimately to the Inner Station. But that journey remains a mystery and suggests ambiguity as Kurtz seems to have appeared at the Inner Station almost by force of will rather than by an arduous and adventurous journey. The physical journey in the adventure genre is grounded in the concrete, and the heroes' movement through space, even with its obstacles, follows a progressive, detailed, and virtually plodding path that reflects the stability which heroes are (and their imperial counterparts in the real world were) supposed to expect in Africa.

Just like Kurtz's name, which means "short" in German, those parts of Kurtz's journey of which Marlow does learn are brief and few, as they are repeatedly interrupted and highlighted by immobility. Marlow discovers that the previous year Kurtz had started on a return journey, traveling 300 miles by canoe from the Inner Station part way to the Central Station, only to interrupt his journey and go back. Kurtz's physical journey is interrupted again when he becomes gravely ill and immobile, and others are forced to travel to him. When the pilgrims arrive and retrieve him from the Inner Station, he travels

from the station house to the steamer, but he must be carried for this brief trip since his convalescence prevents him from walking. Later, he escapes from the ship at night but must crawl through the bush on his hands and knees because his weakness again prevents him from full motion. Eventually, the ship takes him away from the Inner Station back to supposed civilization, but it is an abbreviated voyage only, as he dies days later and is buried in a muddy hole along the river bank before reaching the Central Station. The movement toward home, like the progress toward transformation into the man and gentleman to which heroes and their readers aspire, can never be reached. Kurtz's death is of profound consequence to imperial promotion. The singular, unshakeable norm of the adventure genre is the survival of the hero. Adventure stories are specifically arduous with many dangers, but the hero *always* returns safe and triumphant. His death thus radically subverts the imperial promotion in adventures by depriving the reader of the illusion of safe return. The unconventionality of Kurtz's journey instead offers Conrad's readers a more realistic outcome for their own possible journey.

In the concrete genre of adventure fiction, the physical journey is central, but the journey also consists of an equally important and significantly stable narrative journey that, like the physical journey, serves as a trope for the hero's transformation to heroic status. Kurtz's narrative, however, is comprised of a most untraditional method. It is severely fragmented and ambivalent, and given the symbolic nature of the narrative structure, it registers both the inability of Kurtz to reach his conventional realization as a hero and the failure of imperialism. First and foremost, Kurtz's journey is not even *his* journey, not in a narrative sense. He does not tell the story of his journey, Marlow does. Moreover, Conrad complicates the narrative structure even more by not only the use of a frame narrator but numerous individuals who relay Kurtz's story to Marlow.

Ownership of Kurtz's narrative is, therefore, destabilized as does it even belong to Marlow, as is implied by his finalizing duties: "All that had been Kurtz's had passed out of my hands . . . There remained only his memory and his Intended — and I wanted to give that up too to the past, in a way — to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate" (71). Marlow's telling of Kurtz's story on the *Nellie* signifies his "giving up" the memory of Kurtz's ghastly voyage. Kurtz's narrative journey thus travels through all these people (who also "give it up"), to Marlow, to the frame narrator, and finally to the reader who in turn applies his own interpretation of Kurtz. Although Marlow's narrative journey is also interrupted, literally and symbolically by the frame narrator (see chapter 2), in Kurtz's case this interruption is amplified by all these extra voices, much as his diversion from the conventional hero is widened to an extent far greater than Marlow's own. This intercession of outside parties disrupts the flow of the narrative journey, but it also destabilizes it in its content.

Marlow relays his experiences with Kurtz and the conversations he has in their brief time together, but these are, for the most part, merely supplements what Marlow hears from other sources: the Chief Accountant, the Manager, the brickmaker who is the Manager's spy, the Russian Harlequin, and finally the Intended. They all add their own accounts to the story of Kurtz, biased as they are by their personal agendas and feelings toward him, and these accounts comprise, and compromise, the balance of Marlow's narrative about him. But these are, of course, bits and pieces that are snatched from, whispered by, insisted upon, and lamented over by numerous individuals, so that a holistic image of him and his journey are impossible. No single narrator can offer a full view of Kurtz, and he is, in essence, thus obstructed from completion. The half glimpses



that each can offer, notably consist of some element or elements of the adventure hero: virtuousness, integrity, chivalry, Christian benevolence, bravery, decisiveness, and physical manliness. There are, of course, derogatory elements as well. Yet, just as each of their narratives about Kurtz cannot complete the entire story of his journey, each conventional element of the hero is never realized within him.

Although other adventure stories have frame narrators or narrators other than the hero, the narratives are much simpler forms that reflect the supposed stability of the genre and imperialism. The integrity of the narrative journey is not violated by other parties, nor is the sequence of events disrupted. In *She*, the unnamed narrator introduces and concludes the story which is told uninterrupted by Horace Holly and which follows a conspicuously linear path. Even when the narrator is not the “hero,” such as Holly, or when he shares that distinction, such as Allan Quatermain, who narrates his and Sir Henry’s journey to the city of Loo, the narrator’s perspectives on the hero is wholly his own and is unswerving in its chronology. Indeed, these adventure stories become almost ponderous in their precision of events as they unfold.

Kurtz’s narrative, however, is disjointed and warped, with no clear linear path. Events of Kurtz’s journey are told out of sequence. In part, this is because Kurtz’s narrative is dependent upon the information Marlow learns about him, and that information is gathered at different times. Although Marlow’s recollections of his own experience are relatively discontinuous, the narrative that reconstructs Kurtz’s journey is severely fragmented in time as Marlow tells about Kurtz in the order he chooses and that order often appears disjointed. He informs his audience about Kurtz’s Englishness and conversations he has with him as well as his death far in advance of telling them about his and Kurtz’s meeting at the Inner Station. When he reaches the point in his story about the

Inner Station, Kurtz's narrative shifts back and forth erratically between the past as Marlow recollects it and the earlier past as the Harlequin recollects it. Marlow also anachronistically mentions the Intended, a meeting that occurs after Kurtz's death, before Marlow meets him. He then returns to her part in the narrative much later when he learns about the earliest stages of Kurtz's journey, before its inception in Europe. Oddly, the beginning of Kurtz's journey is told virtually at the end of Marlow's and after the end of Kurtz's.

Although various people relay their stories about Kurtz to Marlow, Kurtz does manage to tell something of his journey himself. But Kurtz's account of himself is also highlighted by ambiguity and disconnection that destabilizes what he says and the image that he presents. Just as Kurtz's presence within the narrative and his movements are limited, so too are his narrative contributions. By the time Marlow meets Kurtz, he is literally on his deathbed and thus has few opportunities to share his own story. What he does manage to relay to Marlow is, like the many other voices that add up to the fractured sum of his story, fragmented at best as he deviates between lofty ideals, romantic devotion, pragmatism, and contemptible childishness. Indeed, Marlow impugns the content of Kurtz and other white men's vocalizations.

Oh yes, I heard more than enough. And I was right, too. A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard — him — it — this voice — other voices — all of them were so little more than voices — and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean without any kind of sense. Voices, voices — (48-49).

The content of his erratic narrative reveals his hypocrisy, idiocy, and horror. Despite all his noble intentions, his deeds are overridden by his fantastic ego and greed as everyone and everything seemingly exist to serve him.

Although the content of Kurtz's account is disjointed and destabilized, the method of that delivery is equally if not more destabilizing to and ambivalent of his image and that of imperial superiority. Kurtz is represented as merely a voice with no physical substance that disrupts the seeming stability of adventure heroes.

There was a sense of extreme disappointment as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with . . . I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing . . . The point was in his being a gifted creature and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words — the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness (47-48).

Unlike other adventure heroes, Kurtz is a man of "words" and "ideas," and his preeminent gift is speech, not action. The adventure genre, however, overemphasizes the physicality of its heroes. Their "sense of real presence" lay in their physical concreteness, not their ability to speak, and this tends to be a stabilizing influence. Kurtz, conversely, is an atypical hero as a result of his ideas and their vocalization. On some level, the ideas themselves thus seem atypical and work as a destabilizing influence in the genre and imperial discourse.<sup>121</sup>

That voice, which deprives Kurtz of tangibility and thus stability, is of course tainted by deception, cruelty, and hypocrisy. Beyond Kurtz's lies and grandiose

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<sup>121</sup> As mentioned in chapter 2, Edward Said suggests that the ambiguity of the novel destabilizes reality itself by making and unmaking the world. It thus follows that such ambiguity must destabilize Empire also, and this forms a critique of imperialism. While speaking of the novel's ambiguity in general, Said's conclusion can be applied to the specific example of Kurtz's voice and words. Given the excessive reliance that adventure writers placed upon their heroes' concrete representations (and de-emphasis of the intangibles of voice and ideas and incorporeality) to stabilize and promote imperialism, Conrad's unconventional usage of Kurtz's voice and ideas negate that promotion.

intentions, “draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence,” there is nothing except his own egomaniacal self. No virtue exists, but there is no sense of body either.<sup>122</sup>

Notably, Ivan Kreilkamp discusses Kurtz’s voice in terms of the then technological advancement of the phonograph and its capacity to allow the voice that is recorded to be heard long after the death of its subject. Certainly, this associative death quality that results from the physics of the phonograph supplements Conrad’s depictions of Kurtz as death incarnate. But the physics involved with his projection of voice, coupled with the content of Kurtz’s words, destabilize the hero image and serve as a warning of imperial flaw: “The voice was gone. What else had been there?” (69). This feature of incorporeality may add to an element of the surreal, the nightmarish quality of Kurtz and Marlow’s psychological and emotional experience that is reinforced by the death-like images of Kurtz, but it emphasizes the disconnection of Kurtz’s voiced narrative from that of the adventure genre.

Conrad’s overemphasis of Kurtz’s voice and lack of corporeal form, moreover, creates tremendous ambiguity in his identity. Kurtz’s intangibility, along with multiple narrators through whom Kurtz’s journey is told, generates ambivalence about who he is. His image is not only fragmented by the numerous storytellers, it alters that image into multiple people. Depending on who is talking to Marlow, or if Marlow is the one doing the talking, Kurtz is an ass, bringer of light, sham, shadow, phantom, genius, first rate

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<sup>122</sup> Voice is discussed most often in terms of the narrative voice and then with respect to Marlow or the frame narrator. Vincent Pecora considers the voices in *Heart of Darkness* as more than merely an aspect of literary technique and is concerned mostly with the philosophical aspects of identity, morality, conscience and spirituality associated with the words that Kurtz and Marlow speak, rather than their physical properties or their connections to any genre. Dhareshwar concludes that Marlow’s narrative voice is impeded by the inability to know or comprehend what he has experienced. Only Kreilkamp has written on voice in terms of its physical quality, but does so specifically in terms of technology. He considers the phonology of voice and associates it with death as the physics of recording allows the subject’s voice to live on even after his or her death.

agent, painter, politician, and remarkable man. He becomes a different man and different things to different people. In the adventure genre, the hero is constant in his representation. His identity is not weakened by dependency upon others, nor is it destabilized by incorporeality and essentialization as a voice.

This ambiguity, as well as the multiple narratives and discontinuity of time that represents paths in Kurtz's journey that are taken but which do not lead anywhere, is consistent with Conrad's intermingling of modernism with the adventure genre (see chapter 2). These fragmentary elements of Kurtz's narrative are symbolic of his incomplete transformation into a conventional hero. The symbolic nature of the narrative structure thus also highlights instability and ambivalence with respect to the adventure hero who is, notwithstanding occasional inconsistencies, supposed to confirm stability and desire for imperialism. Just as the structure of Marlow's narrative of his own journey facilitates Conrad's critique of imperialism, Kurtz's fractured and disorderly narrative similarly suggests instability and ambivalence. Significantly, when Marlow reaches the Intended, in essence returning to Kurtz's beginning, the reader already knows the physical end of Kurtz's journey, death, and the spiritual end, his failure for conventional development and realization of his own depravity. In showing Kurtz's start position, after his horrific end, Conrad punctuates the foolish idealism, the selfish delusion, and rapacious hypocrisy of imperialism and those who pursue it.

## Chapter 4

### Racial Whiteness

Whiteness<sup>123</sup> in the adventure genre tends to be fairly consistent. Although the genre contains various inconsistencies, one of the more stable elements is its representation of whiteness. As discussed in Chapter 1, white characters in adventure stories, regardless of their status as hero or secondary character, are distinguished by their supposedly superior personal, moral, and physical qualities that are contrasted with Africans who are supposedly inferior in these same aspects. These racial distinctions justify white domination and the paternalistic “bettering” of Africans that were an integral component of imperial operation. These distinctions of superiority for white characters also justify and create the opportunities for the substantial imperial rewards that appealed to readers and thus tended to promote imperialism. Although these racial elements of the adventure genre justify and promote imperialism, the consistency with which these elements are projected implies a supposed stability in the Empire and they thus serve as a stabilizing influence to readers who may have been comforted and reassured by these familiar representations.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, unless otherwise specified, such as its use for descriptions of objects, “whiteness” refers to all white Europeans and their racial attributes. The concept of “whiteness” in the nineteenth-century context is problematic as there was no “white race” as such. Europeans categorized different white ethnic groups, and at times even different social classes and women, as disparate “races” rather than a homogenous concept of it. See the “Introduction” for an in depth analysis of white raciality in its historical context.

<sup>124</sup> In both *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said examines in significant detail the reciprocal nature of western literature and imperialism. While literature borrowed the racial hierarchy and stereotyping that existed in European empires and reproduced them in its fictional worlds, the racialized images and naturalness and morality that they projected of imperialism perpetuated these structures.

In *Heart of Darkness*, however, Conrad disrupts these images of white racial superiority and the assumed morality, justification and incentives associated with all the imperial endeavours of whites. Far from the exemplary representation of whiteness in other adventure stories, whiteness is projected as ignoble, mean, and debauched. Moreover, the entire imperial system is immoral, and everyone associated with it is in some way implicated in the atrocities that are perpetrated in the name of imperialism. Rather than a philanthropic undertaking to benefit Africans, white influence is catastrophic. In illustrating how white influence is so devastating in Africa, indeed genocidal, Conrad makes direct and sweeping criticism of imperialism and those who participate in it. His inclusion of so many white figures throughout the entire novel, whether in Great Britain, Europe or in the imperial world, seems to indict white Europeans as a whole. Although scathing and significant in its condemnation of whiteness, *Heart of Darkness*, however, moves far beyond mere direct criticism of imperialism and imperialists. Conrad's representations of whiteness are highly unconventional in the genre. They work against the white images in the adventure genre that are, with only few exceptions,<sup>125</sup> homogeneous. Conrad's images of unconventional whiteness generate significant ambivalence and instability in both the adventure genre and whiteness in general. Given that all these white characters, including those in Europe, are either directly or indirectly representatives of some form of imperialism, be it

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<sup>125</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Quatermain is somewhat unconventional in the greed that he displays in the treasure cave. Inevitably, however, he is redeemed as a character, and ultimately the pro-imperial story does not disrupt the image of imperialism or its promotion. Indeed, that his greed is so excessively rewarded seems to confirm the benefits of Empire. Horace Holly also consists of a strikingly unconventional physicality. But his ugliness seems to be attributed more to his status as an "intellectual" which, in late Victorian Britain, had become a position of some derision with the rise of what Ronald Hyam calls the "cult" of the physical (masculinity).

European or British, the ambivalence that surrounds these images of whiteness disrupt the stability of imperialism and its promotion.

Considerable scholarship has been done concerning imperialism and race in *Heart of Darkness*. That scholarship is divided into several perspectives which see the novel, in varying degrees, as either a critique of or complicit in imperialism and racial stereotyping. Those criticisms that recognize Conrad's critique of imperialism, either explicitly or implicitly, frequently make connections to whites as a part of an imperial group, specifically as an organized system.<sup>126</sup> Other critics focus on the behaviours and actions of Kurtz<sup>127</sup> or symbols associated with him.<sup>128</sup> A few scholars assert that Conrad's work fails to disrupt imperialism, indeed that it functions as an endorsement of imperialism.<sup>129</sup> Complicating these critiques are the scholars who, although recognizing Conrad's attempt to critique imperialism, suggest that he ultimately fails in the attempt.<sup>130</sup> The more

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<sup>126</sup> Sung Ryol Kim suggests that white viciousness takes the form of "organized violence." Interestingly, he focuses on Marlow's reactions to this systemic violence as trauma from which he must distance himself. Singh's main argument projects whites as terrorists in their operation of imperialism who establish "a state of terrorism" in Africa. Fred Madden recognizes the pervasiveness of moral corruption and the necessity to condemn it.

<sup>127</sup> Both Harold Collins and Frances Singh assert that the brutality with which Kurtz operates his imperial ivory trade is so severe that it is more "savage" than the Africans in the novel and liken him to a cannibal. Significantly, neither Collins or Singh examine Kurtz's cannibal-like behaviour in terms of white racial representation.

<sup>128</sup> Mark Sexton discusses Kurtz's sketch in oil of the ominous looking white women with the torch. Although she represents his enlightened ideals that were an integral part of imperialism, Kurtz's abandonment of his oil painting symbolizes his abandonment of those ideals. Renn Neilson sees Kurtz as a symbol of imperialism's evil but specifically examines his use of speech and hypocrisy in order to perpetrate that evil.

<sup>129</sup> Susan Blake and Seodjal Deena, although recognizing a limited attempt on Conrad's part to challenge imperial and racial ideologies, ultimately endorses imperialism and its racial hierarchies.

<sup>130</sup> Patrick Brantlinger suggests that although *Heart of Darkness* can be interpreted as both anti-imperialist and advocating imperialism, inevitably the novel's intention to disrupt imperialism is negated by its imperial endorsement.



informed of these latter critiques also recognize the historical constraints under which Conrad wrote, Edward Said being perhaps the most cited critic in this respect when he recognized that Conrad was “a creature of his time.”<sup>131</sup> Although some of these approaches attempt to contextualize *Heart of Darkness* to some degree, Said chief among them, they do not contextualize the novel in its original adventure genre. Moreover, they all fail to situate *Heart of Darkness* within a context of contemporary white racial representation. In so doing scholars deprive the analysis of significant historical and literary contexts.

The scholarship that has been done on *Heart of Darkness* in terms of the adventure genre has unfortunately not considered whiteness specifically. Dryden and White have completed the most comprehensive work on the adventure genre, and, although they do not approach “whiteness” specifically as a racial category, by examining the images of the adventure hero as part of an implicitly racial category they provide some insight into whiteness. Their analyses, however, are significantly hampered by their monolithic approach which considers whiteness as a category of racial superiority only. Such an approach is problematic in that it cannot account for the inconsistencies in white representation, the short and ugly physicality of Horace Holly in *She* being a prime example. Moreover, while they examine the adventure genre and imperial fiction, including some earlier works of Conrad, neither scholar examines *Heart of Darkness* specifically in terms of its white characters.

Significantly, discussions on whiteness in *Heart of Darkness* are virtually nonexistent. Although the negative image of whites can be inferred to a limited degree

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<sup>131</sup> In *Cultural and Imperialism*, 30. Ludwig Schnauder also recognizes that, although Marlow is able to step outside of imperial ideology, specifically in its racialized view of Africa and Africans, Marlow does not display this more progressive attitude while he is in Africa.

from previous scholarship that has considered imperialism, that scholarship does not consider whiteness as a racial category and does not contextualize that category in its historical and literary contexts. Where “race” has been specifically considered in *Heart of Darkness*, it has been limited to Africans only.<sup>132</sup> Although some of these analyses further our understanding of Conrad’s critique of imperialism and race, at least in so far as African representation is concerned, Conrad’s representations of whiteness seem to provide the most significant critique of imperialism. It is only when we examine whiteness as a racial category in *Heart of Darkness*, and specifically within its historical and literary contexts of the adventure genre, that we can evaluate the full extent to which Conrad both critiques and destabilizes Empire and its white representatives.

Imperialism and whiteness, the central ideologies of the adventure genre, are disrupted in *Heart of Darkness*, and Conrad reveals an ambivalence toward both that have yet to be recognized. Moreover, the way in which Conrad projects his white characters, not only in his derogatory content but by using modernist technique, suggests significant ambiguity in the genre which has traditionally been viewed by scholars as an extremely stable form. This ambivalence with respect to the adventure genre, imperialism, and whiteness in *Heart of Darkness*, bears not only literary importance in terms of how the adventure novel transformed with the advent of modernism it has historical significance in that it indicates that Empire and white racial identity were not as monolithic as previously believed. My approach to whiteness in *Heart of Darkness* attempts to bridge that significant gap in scholarship. By examining whiteness in its historical context of

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<sup>132</sup> These discussions frequently take the colonial and postcolonial approaches in which the supposed racism of Conrad and the novel are considered. See Chinua Achebe, Susan Blake, Patrick Brantlinger, Robert Burden, Hugh Mercer Curtler, Seodial Deena, Peter Nazareth, Larry T. Shillock, Frances B. Singh, Dorothy Trench-Bonett, Ian Watt, and Cedric Watts.

imperialism and its literary context of the adventure genre, I discuss how Conrad destabilizes that contemporary view of whiteness and the genre of which it was such an integral part. Given that the adventure genre projects the merits of and stability in the Empire and promotes participation in imperialism, I will demonstrate how in being so unconventional, Conrad disrupts not only the genre and whiteness but both the image of Empire and its promotion.

To this end, the first section of this chapter focuses on the unconventional aspects of some of Conrad's many white characters in *Heart of Darkness*. The first of these white characters are Marlow's friends aboard the *Nellie* in the opening frame. Given their position as both Englishmen and imperialists, their subtle yet unconventional representation is particularly significant in terms of the projection of both whiteness and imperialism. Moreover, their ambivalent function in the frame, a fairly common adventure genre narrative technique, disrupts the stability that this structure tends to provide for adventure stories. The white characters associated directly with the imperial Trading Company on the continent and its stations in Africa are, of course, presented more directly in derogatory terms that severely disrupt the image of whiteness and imperialism and suggest a cultural and social ambivalence in both. Marlow's recognition of the conspiracy into which he has been introduced demonstrates unconventional racial disunity that subverts the stability in whiteness as well as the stability necessary for imperial operation. The women who are anachronistically inserted into *Heart of Darkness* indicate the consistency of the detrimental influence of whites in Africa, regardless of gender, as all white individuals seem culpable. Moreover, their presence in the "man's world" of imperialism serves to destabilize both the genre and Empire. The final part of

this section exemplifies how that guilt and conspiracy manifest themselves in the atrocities committed against Africans.

While the first section of the chapter discusses Conrad's critique of imperialism and whiteness in terms of their supposed philanthropic dimensions, the second section of the chapter focuses on those aspects of imperialism that are comprised of the more self-centred motivations: the transformation of white men into "manly men" and gentleman and their triumphant return to Britain with extraordinary wealth. As this section indicates, Conrad disrupts these essential features of the adventure genre by depriving his white male characters of the conventional masculinity deemed so essential for British imperialism. Instead, Conrad's white men are cowardly and physically emasculated. Moreover, Conrad dehumanizes and animalizes his white characters in the same way that the natives typically are. These animalizations, however, are not only physical but oral as Conrad animalizes the communications of whites thus stripping them of their authoritative white and manly power. The unconventional weakened physical state of white men in *Heart of Darkness* naturally leads to disease which, unlike other adventure stories, runs rampant among the white population. White men die in large numbers, and more importantly, they die without consequence or compassion as they are victimized by the very system that elsewhere in the adventure genre furnishes incredible rewards. The chapter concludes with an analysis of this victimization of whites which severely disrupts both the conventions of the adventure genre and the supposed racial superiority of whiteness. Ultimately, that disruption to the stability of the adventure journey deprives imperialism of its promotion.

## The Unconventionality and Ambivalence of “Whiteness”

Conrad’s representations of white characters are highly unconventional, and that unconventionality creates significant ambivalence around the adventure genre itself as well as white racial identity and imperialism. This first section of the chapter discusses how these white characters are presented unconventionally and how the ambivalence that is generated impacts upon the genre, whiteness and imperialism. The initial discussion analyzes the frame narration and all the English imperialists in it, including the frame narrator himself and the ambivalence they create. Just as Marlow’s journey progresses to the Continent and to Africa, the section shifts first to the white characters in the sepulchral city and then to the “pilgrims” in Africa where the white characters consistently disrupt the traditional images of whiteness and the stability of imperialism through their conspiratorial and criminal actions. The pervasiveness of this conspiracy and the atrocities perpetrated is reflected in Conrad’s anachronistic inclusion of women in *Heart of Darkness*. Their anachronism in the “man’s world” of imperialism, moreover, generates ambivalence in the imperial world and reality itself. This first section of this chapter concludes with the manifestations of that conspiracy: the atrocities committed against Africans.

As discussed in depth in Chapter 1, and touched upon again in Chapter 2 and 3, white figures in adventure fiction are a fairly constant construct. Adventure writers project white characters as models of racial superiority. Not only the white adventurers themselves but all those engaged in imperial and exploitative pursuits are held up as paradigms of physical and moral virtue. The racial image of whiteness, particularly of the heroes, is almost a cliché of goodness and exception in every aspect of character and physicality that Britons had come to expect in imperialists. Although the hero is the

primary vehicle for white representation, whiteness itself had been endowed with a universal extraordinariness in literature and discourse. With only rare exception, even secondary characters in adventures personify the goodness and superiority projected by white heroes. Minor inconsistencies may exist in these conventions, but they do not displace the dominant image. The stability of these characters, the plot, and narrative structure in which they operate, signify stability in not only the genre, but in the Empire and whiteness itself. To that extent, adventure stories are characterized by more traditional forms and representations. Conrad, however, inundates *Heart of Darkness* with white characters, many simply in fleeting glimpses, but each and every one of those white characters, regardless of their nationality, is sufficient to confirm their highly unconventional immorality and contemptibility. Those representations generate significant ambivalence around the adventure genre and whiteness specifically. But as representatives of imperialism, their ambivalent images also disrupt the stability of Empire.

The pilgrims<sup>133</sup> and Kurtz are perhaps the most obvious indication of Conrad's subversion of these qualities of whiteness, although to a degree Marlow also disrupts the image of whiteness. Nonetheless, his depictions of all whites, even the most minor characters, deviate widely from the conventions of racial superiority. Even before Marlow begins his narrative laced with biting sarcasm toward the pilgrims, Conrad utilizes his

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<sup>133</sup> Marlow sarcastically uses the word "pilgrims" to refer to the white imperialists in Africa. The specific use of this label connects the imperial operation with the religious components that historically had been intertwined with imperialism. The Christian mission of "civilizing" imperial subjects was frequently used as justification for the expansion and maintenance of Empire. Conrad thus associates the white imperialists in *Heart of Darkness* with these ideals of Christian benevolence through Marlow's specific use of the word, but he uses it ironically as none of the pilgrims possess any semblance of Christian philanthropy or altruism. In using the word, Marlow actually creates significant ambivalence concerning the identity of characters.

frame narrator in order to subvert the image of whiteness. This utilization of the frame narrator, who adds his voice to Marlow's in his denigration of whites, is significant because it is inclusive of Britain's imperialists, as Conrad apparently seeks to indict all of Europe in the perpetration of imperial atrocities. Moreover, as an outside agent, one from home who presumably has not been affected by outside influences, the narrator adds some authority and credibility to Marlow's account and its disruption of the dominant image of whiteness.<sup>134</sup>

Significantly, the one who assesses the inconsistency of Marlow's own white raciality is the frame narrator. He describes Marlow in the pose of Buddha and his skin tones and unmasculine physicality. It is also the narrator's determination that Marlow is not typical of his class of seamen, although he states that this is "the worst that could be said of him" (9) as though to qualify his statement in order to authenticate the reliability of Marlow. Nonetheless, his image of Marlow is unconventional and fairly ambivalent, particularly given that Marlow is the "hero" in this adventure story.<sup>135</sup> Although frame narrators are not uncommon in the adventure genre, they tend to serve as a voice of authority who attest to the credibility of the hero and serve as a stabilizing influence for the text. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, the frame narrator generates significant ambivalence about not only Marlow but more significantly their British imperial friends and even Marlow, himself, that disrupts the superior images of whiteness. Moreover, his

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<sup>134</sup> Lidan Lin suggests that Conrad uses the frame narrator in the hopes of providing Marlow's tale with more credibility by providing background information about Marlow. This need for credibility arises due the modernist perspective which sees truth as elusive. He asserts, therefore, that the narrator's primary function is supportive. While he does support Marlow in this regard, the overall effect of that support is to disrupt the image of whiteness.

<sup>135</sup> Chapter 2 covers the unconventionality and ambivalence surrounding the representation of Marlow in significant detail.

unconventional ambivalence disrupts the text suggesting instability in the genre and imperialism.

As Marlow's narrative unfolds and both Marlow and the frame narrator interrupt the flow of Marlow's narrative, it is the frame narrator's interpretations of his white comrades on the *Nellie*, and not Marlow's, which colour the image of Britons and whiteness in general. In the first paragraphs of the novel, the frame narrator assesses his companions in unconventionally superficial terms. At first glance, the assessments seem benign, but when contrasted with white representation in other adventure stories, an entirely new and subversive vision of them is formed. The men are of considerable social rank and all of them occupy some imperial function: the Director of Companies, the Lawyer, and the Accountant.<sup>136</sup> Yet, except for their position and a few short notes about them, nothing else is forthcoming, either in the initial scene or anywhere else in the novel, as the reader is distanced from them. One never gets a genuine sense of these men as anything more than props. Although they are minor characters, their position in the frame suggests some import. Moreover, as imperialists and former adventurers themselves — at one time all the friends had “followed the sea,” although Marlow is the only one of them to do so still — they should be represented with some degree of detailed and vivid descriptions which exemplify the superiority of imperialists and adventurers. Certainly other adventure writers tend to present their white characters in excessive detail, in part to heighten their image of racial superiority but also to ground them in the concreteness which the adventure genre emphasized. These conventions, however, are notably absent with the British men aboard the *Nellie*.

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<sup>136</sup> Brian Shaffer suggests that Marlow's audience on board the *Nellie* represents Conrad's turn-of-the-century British audience and thus comprises a stealthy commentary about British imperialism and his contemporary readers.



Instead, Marlow and the narrator's friends not only fail to exhibit any characteristic of honour, virtue, morality or philanthropy so common to whites in the adventure genre they seem not to be comprised of any corporeality at all. They are stunted, and their presence is almost as "hollow men," just like Kurtz and the pilgrims. They model the same kind of empty and trivial actions as the pilgrims, as there is a sense of "play" and the "unreal" surrounding the British friends' imperial positions rather than the kind of responsibility, philanthropy and morality represented in other adventure stories. The Director of Companies "resembled a pilot" as he steers the yawl, yet his work is not "out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom" (1). The professional man essentially pretends he is still a seaman, and his identity is thus not stable. Moreover, the frame narrator's depiction of London as "the brooding gloom" insinuates some ominous element to Britain.

The Lawyer merely lays on the only cushion and rug on deck, while the Accountant also plays. Significantly, he has already brought out "a box of dominoes and [is] toying architecturally with the bones" (1). The symbolic allusion to bones, particularly given Kurtz's atomized representations as bones and skulls, implicates the Accountant in the multitude of imperial deaths just as his depiction as an "architect" in the imperial game implies his culpability. The frame narrator's specific use of language, his "toying" with symbols of death, suggests the triviality with which Europeans approach the many lives that they disrupt. Like Marlow's whimsical, boyhood desire to go to Africa, the Accountant tinkers with these symbols of human life and death just as a boy would play a game. Moreover, their identities are disrupted as they seemingly revert to boys. Although the adventure genre was often presented and advertised as a genre specifically for boys, including "boys" of all ages, the white men in the stories are

consistently presented as “men.” The instability suggested by such shifting identities reflects a degree of modernist angst which not only services Conrad’s condemnation of imperialism, it disrupts both the adventure genre and the image of whiteness it projects.

Most significantly of all, the British imperialists exhibit or express no sense of virtue or morality throughout Marlow’s entire account. They learn of unspeakable atrocities, and yet they do not respond. Although Marlow is sufficiently disgusted and appalled by all he witnesses, at times being silenced himself by the recollection of horror and shock, his audience does not express one word of sympathy, shock, or compassion. Worse still, they listen, but do not offer the slightest suggestion for a solution for either the natives, who are brutalized and killed, or the young white imperialists, who similarly suffer and die.<sup>137</sup> Imperial adventurers throughout the genre embody honour and virtue, and their deeds, if not motivated by philanthropic desire “to save” natives, at least result in their improvement. Whites always come to the aid of their fellow whites in order to ensure the preservation and perpetuation of the race. In the imperial world, whites operate in a kind of racial unity. Yet, these British imperialists provide no recourse whatsoever for the natives or white imperialists sent out like so much fodder to die. They sit in silence, individuals who possess great influence for change, but do nothing. Their silence implicates them in the workings of the imperial operation. Of equal import in Conrad’s condemnation of whites is the frame narrator’s own failure to voice any objection to the horrendous exploitation by whites. He retells Marlow’s narrative, and he uses what may be construed as his own derogatory language toward his white friends, but ultimately he

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<sup>137</sup> Shaffer suggests that Marlow’s listeners on the ship consider his story as unsuccessful entertainment for the purposes of passing the time rather than as a narrative with any unsettling political or ethic relevance to their own situations or world. He suggests they may not take his story seriously, or worse not even be listening

remains silent like his friends. Even his thoughts are devoid of moral or philanthropic rebuke.

Conrad does not seem to wish to exonerate British imperialists either through his complicated utilization of the frame narrator as a supplement to Marlow. Both the frame narrator and Marlow specifically refer to British imperialists of the past as “knights” (8, 9), harkening back to a gloried age of British exploration and presumed chivalry. The narrator implies honour and nobility connected with their exploits, yet at the same time, he insinuates that their history and legend are somehow tarnished when he identifies them as “Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame . . . [who] had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire” (8). First and foremost, wealth is cited as the motive for exploration, followed by personal glory. The benevolence of their ventures implied by the torch and sacred fire is immediately suspect from their juxtaposition with the sword. These men may have had some altruistic motives prompting them, yet they bear no more than merely “a spark” from the sacred fire, and the violence deemed requisite for that “humanitarian” work is ever present with its connection to weaponry.

Given Kurtz’s genocidal perpetration, the violence of these earlier imperialists may have also been the method that became the end unto itself. The historical figures themselves are not without controversy or an implied unlawfulness in their acts as the narrator expressly refers to “the dark ‘interlopers’ of the Eastern trade and the commissioned ‘Generals’ of East India fleets.”<sup>138</sup> The interlopers to which he refers were, according to Kimbrough, “ships that trespassed on the rights of the trade monopolies such

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<sup>138</sup> Kimbrough, Robert. IN Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. Robert Kimbrough (ed.) 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988, 8.

as the East India Company.” He qualifies the interlopers as “dark” just as he qualifies “the commissioned ‘Generals’” with quotes as though questioning the validity of their position. The frame narrator may espouse a level of imperial endorsement,<sup>139</sup> yet, that endorsement is not absolute as he sets the stage for Marlow to discredit any nostalgic notions of heraldry and nobility or morality and philanthropy associated with white imperialism. Marlow’s consistently and highly unconventional representations of immoral and corrupt white characters and their actions, both in Europe and the imperial world, throughout the entire novel, create significant ambivalence around and disrupts not on the adventure genre but whiteness and imperialism, regardless of its national stripe.

The frame narrator’s insinuation of violence and dark intention and methods with respect to imperialism are taken up by Marlow as he demonstrates how all white figures are the antitheses of the honourable, moral and philanthropic whites that are standard in the adventure genre. Marlow’s visit to the Trading Society is shrouded with allusions to darkness and corruption, and everyone and everything connected with it appear tainted in some way. The sepulchral city has, of course, its Biblical allusion to the hypocrites of the whited sepulchre (Matthew 23:27), but it is equally an allusion to tombs for the many dead that the city’s trading companies produce. The headquarters itself and its location on “a narrow and deserted street in deep shadow” (13) with its “dead silence, [and] grass sprouting between the stones” (13) gives the place the eerie appearance of a cemetery with its stillness and stones like grave markers. Inside the building, the head of the Company who “ha[s] his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions” (14)

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<sup>139</sup> The frame narrator is generally accepted as a voice of imperialism, given his references to the celebrated explorers as “knights” and seemingly glowing description of Britain’s early colonial exploration. Significantly, however, his comments are also ambivalent which hint at some ulterior malevolence with British imperialists.

approaches his interview with Marlow with a distinctly unconventional carelessness and triviality for a man who has such responsibility and power over “millions.” The entire interview process takes “about forty-five seconds,” and Marlow recollects that “the great man’s” only concern, as “he murmured vaguely,” was the quality of Marlow’s French (14). Significantly, not one person from among the many representatives of the Company whom Marlow meets ever implies in the smallest way any philanthropic connection to their entrepreneurial concern.

Rather than the conventional virtue, morality, and philanthropy associated with imperial adventures, there is indifference and, as Marlow aptly observes, a sense of a conspiracy connected with all the white individuals within the Company as racial unity that is so integral to the adventure genre disappears in deference to profit.<sup>140</sup> The Company clerk who, while on duty, drinks alcohol with Marlow and confesses that he is “not such a fool” as to go “out there” (15), insinuates that something is gravely wrong with the imperial undertaking, and yet he does nothing to forewarn Marlow or alter circumstances for the many whites who enter and are processed in their offices. Instead, he glorifies the Company’s operations just as they are. The Company Doctor also seems privy to the darker side of the imperial venture, but he too does not share that information with Marlow. When he informs Marlow that he never exams those men who return, since all their “changes take place inside,” he merely “smile[s] as if at some quiet joke” (15).

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<sup>140</sup> Both Sung Ryol Kim and Frances Singh suggest the imperial operations of white Europeans take a systemic form. Kim discusses the “organized violence” of white viciousness, and Singh examines how whites (who she designates as terrorists) establish “a state of terrorism” in Africa. Both analyses imply white men working together for some common objective. Although all the pilgrims certainly desire money, their actions are demarcated by racial disunity in which, although they all work for the one organization, they not only do not work together they work against each other.

In the adventure genre, racial solidarity is essential as it allows white men to function in a united front against the overwhelming, yet inevitably vanquished, forces of the “evil” natives and hybrids. Notably, on one level, white men also work against the “compliant” Other, despite the fact that he or she usually becomes the white man’s ally or love interest. Their opposition to these “good” natives is evident in the sense that they act in concert with other white men in ways that reinforce the racial hierarchy. This element of white unity not only facilitates the generic plots it is particularly representative of the supposed stability in the Empire. White men who went “out there” could always rely on each other for support or for their mutual preservation even in the direst of circumstances. Such reliance also implies the stability of white identity — white men are always stalwart. They never work against other whites. This sense of team work is particularly evident in the partnership of Jack Meredith and Guy Osgood and the gentlemanly agreement in the trio of Sir Henry, Quatermain, and Captain Good. This solidarity, a product of the supposed superiority of whites, is in contrast to the disunity, disloyalty, and treachery of the Other that is frequently presented in the adventure genre.

In *Heart of Darkness*, however, both the racial unity and morality of white men in adventure fiction are glaringly absent, particularly given the large numbers of white men who universally disrupt these features. Once out in Africa, Marlow experiences the same kinds of conspiracies and racial disunity and disloyalty among whites as he does in the sepulchral city. The individual pilgrims operate specifically *as* individuals, in fragmented fashions as each pilgrim is out to grab as much as can he can get for himself. They all want to go into the Interior so they can “earn percentages,” and they stop at nothing to achieve their ends. The white men plot, conspire, spy, argue, and ridicule against and about each other. Suspicion, intrigue, and paranoia comprise the environment in which

they operate. The brickmaker is the Manager's spy among them, but it is a poorly kept secret, and the other pilgrims must be cautious to guard their speech when he is in their vicinity or excuse themselves hastily from discussions when they notice his presence. He opens and reads private correspondences and official Company documents, and his motive for his clandestine activities is prompted by his selfish desire to become Assistant Manager under the present Manager. Although the brickmaker's covert and disreputable behaviour is in complete contrast with the model behaviour of whiteness throughout the genre, it more profoundly disrupts the racial unity that all white characters display toward each other in the adventure genre and supposedly display in reality.

The pilgrims' disunity, the fragmentary nature of their selfish actions themselves, accentuates the ambivalence of whiteness. The pilgrims operate with an "every man for himself" mentality that is the epitome of fragmentation. The "imperial society" they comprise is severely fractured. Unlike the modes of traditional representation in the adventure genre which highlights the stability of white racial unity, Conrad employs a modernist approach to this traditional genre and, as a consequence, disrupts the notion of stability for white imperialists who risk their lives in imperial service. Modernism emphasizes the uncertainty and instability as well as the isolation of individuals and their disconnection from others. Whites in the imperial world in *Heart of Darkness*, and indeed whites in Europe, cannot rely on each other. Instead, they work against and indeed are pitted against one another by those with more power, like the Manager, who manipulate them. Through the pilgrims', and indeed all white men's, and women's, racial disunity, Conrad destabilizes the certainty of white racial unity.

Although the pilgrims and all those in the service of the imperial Trading Society breach the boundary of racial unity in *Heart of Darkness* through their selfish and

fragmentary actions, this racial disunity manifests itself in its worse incarnation through the ostracization and dehumanization of white men which inevitably facilitates their elimination. Marlow is separated physically and philosophically from the white men on both the *Nellie* and the French steamer that carries him to Africa. When he arrives at the Central Station and recognizes their activities, Marlow turns his “back on that station” (26) willingly, just as he sits apart from his friends on the *Nellie*. The mechanics at the station are “naturally despised” by the other pilgrims (31), although Marlow befriends them. No one will speak to the Russian Harlequin except Marlow. Even Kurtz is abandoned and left alone in the wheelhouse with Marlow after the pilgrims rescue him and discover his atrocities. Marlow, too, is “numbered with the dead” (67) once he voices some favour for Kurtz.

The extent and profoundness of this ostracization are perhaps most keenly evident in the inversions of the racial hierarchy in which white men reposition other white men below the natives who are supposedly inferior to whites. The Manager begins this process when he repositions his white comrades physically and symbolically around the circular dinner table built in order to end the incessant bickering of the pilgrims over seating protocol. The Manager’s position is, of course, “the first place — the rest were nowhere” (25). Reality itself for the pilgrims seems to be dislodged. More profoundly, he displaces them in the racial hierarchy when he “allowed his ‘boy’ — an overfed young negro from the coast — to treat the men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence” (25). Such lowering of the racial status of whites is unprecedented in the imperialism genre. Despite some differences of class among white figures in adventures or differences in designations as “heroes” and “secondary characters” and the accompanying inconsistencies in representation that account for these variations, white men are more or



less comparable in terms of stature and quality. They are never considered by any other white figure as less worthy than other white men, and are never positioned lower than natives.

Just as the Manager inverts the racial hierarchy by placing his “boy” in a domineering position over the pilgrims, Kurtz similarly lowers the racial position of his only white friend, the Russian Harlequin, in relation to his African mistress. The Harlequin reveals that when he and the mistress quarreled that had it not been for Kurtz being too ill to care, “there would have been mischief” (60). Clearly, the extent of Kurtz’s subversion of the racial order has more significant consequences as the Harlequin insinuates the trouble that Kurtz would otherwise have caused him in deference to the African woman, and given the evidence of Kurtz’s lethal wrath — he had threatened to shoot the Harlequin previously — it is probable that he would have been killed. The Harlequin admits he does not understand Kurtz’s action, but the contemporary reader similarly must have been left puzzled by the dismantling of the racial hierarchy as Conrad leaves his readers with natives who are dominant and whites who are subordinate.

This displacement <sup>141</sup> of the racial status of whites is essential in order to initiate criminal actions against one another. Such inversion of race serves as a kind of dehumanization. Once the importance of individual whites is lowered, the consequence of acts committed against them is equally diminished, and whites feel unrestrained by any sense of loyalty, law, justice, or social taboo. Just as Kurtz threatens to kill the Harlequin, the Manager threatens to hang the white man believed to be operating in Kurtz’s territory. Significantly, the assumption that he is English does not prevent the Manager from

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<sup>141</sup> Andrea White notes that adventure stories establish that “they” are “barbarians and savages” who pose a definite threat to “us” (67). In *Heart of Darkness*, of course, it is the “us” who pose the threat to others.

threatening harm against him. Although Marlow later discovers that the Russian Harlequin has no designs for encroaching on the ivory trade and, indeed, is perhaps the least menacing white figure in the novel, the threat to his life seems genuine as Marlow forewarns him of the danger and encourages him to escape as quickly as possible.

Although Kurtz and the Manager both utter threats of murder, the Manager evidently expedites Kurtz's death, and in this sense participates implicitly in homicide.<sup>142</sup> When the shed fire occurs, Marlow overhears the end of the Manager and brickmaker's conversation about Kurtz and the Manager's suggestion to "take advantage of this unfortunate accident" (26), implying that the long delay to rescue the gravely ill Kurtz could work for the Manager's benefit. Certainly, the Manager's reckless attempt to rescue Kurtz on his own by steamer without the benefit of a qualified ship pilot that results in the damage to the steamer and his apparent inability, despite his position as Manager, to get rivets for its repair even after months of time reveal his malevolence and his ability to act with absolute impunity.

Repeatedly, Marlow emphasizes the necessity of the social structure at home which imposes restraints, referring specifically to the need for the "anchors" of the butcher and policeman. The Manager's ominous assertion, following his suggestion to hang the unknown white trader, that "Anything — anything can be done in this country" (34) provides practical evidence that no one, not even white English men, are safe from each other. The threats and actual criminal acts committed by white men against other white men certainly exemplify white immorality and racial disloyalty, the

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<sup>142</sup> Concepts of crime, including murder, were of course racially based in the nineteenth-century imperial territories as Africans were not entitled to the same protection under the law as whites. Significant historical evidence corroborates Conrad's depictions of brutality and crimes against Africans (see Adam Hochschild). Conrad, however, disrupts this racially based criminality by demonstrating how even the safety of whites was not secure and that the perpetrators of that crime could act with impunity.

unconventionality of which severely disrupts the image of whiteness. Of equal significance, the genuine threat that the white men pose to the safety of other whites disrupts the image that the white men can move fairly freely throughout the imperial world without significant danger. Although natives are always menacing in the adventure genre and the potential for white men's deaths are implied, the racial inferiority of the natives precludes their actual victory over whites. In *Heart of Darkness*, because white men who possess significant racial power pose the threat to the lives of other white men, the actual safety of these imperialists is much less certain, and indeed, in the case of Kurtz, that security of life is violated. As the brickmaker warns Marlow himself "No man — you apprehend me? — no man here bears a charmed life" (31). For Conrad, the safety and stability that the adventure genre provides white men is nonexistent.

The pervasiveness of this racial disunity and the degree to which Conrad disrupts the image of whiteness is furthered by Conrad's anachronistic inclusion of white women in *Heart of Darkness*. The adventure genre is relatively exclusive in terms of gender. Its audience tended to be largely boys and men, and *Heart of Darkness* was likely received by this same audience.<sup>143</sup> Within the adventure stories themselves, white women occur only rarely. Although native women are typically a prominent feature in the genre, white women are almost nonexistent. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, white women do not occupy much of the narrative, although significantly neither do most of the white men in it, nonetheless they comprise prominent and anachronistic positions which destabilize the

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<sup>143</sup> Conrad himself recognized that he was writing a form of "boys' story" when he wrote to William Blackwood in 1902 (Quoted in Dryden, 15). And later, in 1911, when he wrote to his agent, he again recognized that the first publication of *Heart of Darkness* in serialized form in *Blackwood's Magazine* was largely read by men, imperial agents, and British military: "There isn't a single club and messroom and man-of-war in the British Seas and Dominions which hasn't its copy of *Maga*." (David Finkelstein, "*Blackwood's Magazine* Homepage")

otherwise masculine world of the adventure genre and whiteness in general.<sup>144</sup> Some of them, such as the knitting women in particular, are significant participants in the imperial operation, and despite Marlow's assertion that women should be "out of it" completely (49), they are completely in the midst of "it." By utilizing white women specifically, Conrad seems to implicate the entire white race. There is a universality to the conspirators and perpetrators of death as even women seem equally culpable. Moreover, the idea that women "do not belong there," either in the novel itself, or in the case of the knitting women, in the office of the imperial company, implies how whites do not belong in Africa either.

The women's culpability in the administration of that imperial world indicates the extent to which whites are responsible for the atrocities committed. The two knitting women in the Company's head offices who sit "guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall" (14) suggest equal if not more frightening representations of whiteness given the traditional view of women as "nurturers." Significantly, their symbolic knitting, an act of creation, ironically and tragically foreshadows the widespread death that the Company generates in its operation. The women, dressed in black as though for a funeral, represent the entry point through which Marlow and others must pass to begin his journey, but they project a profound indifference toward their fellow whites that counters both the image of white women and the high regard with which white men are held elsewhere in the genre. In concealing the knowledge of actual

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<sup>144</sup> Gabrielle McIntire discusses how the women in *Heart of Darkness* are static in their spatial positions and unable to wander between cultural, ideological, and national boundaries, as do Marlow and Kurtz. Although they may not travel within the story, they are included in significant numbers in a genre that typically has none. By traveling *into* the masculine world of the adventure genre, they serve as a destabilizing influence of that world. Moreover, while they do not physically move into the imperial world, they are integral to the operation of the imperial company.

conditions from the foolish young men who they greet and “introduce to the darkness,” both women and the management of the Company are indisputably linked to the horrors perpetrated against not only the native population but white men as well.

Just as white women who appear in other adventure stories are themselves above reproach and are endowed with their own admirable qualities of virtue, nobility, morality and philanthropy comparable to their masculine counterparts,<sup>145</sup> women in *Heart of Darkness* are as culpable as white men as they participate directly or surreptitiously in the administration of atrocity. Marlow’s aunt is, of course, complicit because she gets Marlow the job as the steamer captain with the Trading Society. His aunt thus facilitates its operation. Her espoused religious and moralistic rhetoric regarding Marlow’s role in enlightening the “ignorant millions” in Africa implicates her further in the atrocity. Her own profound ignorance of actual conditions there and the humanity of Africans, which Marlow asserts emphatically to his imperial friends, indicts her further. Kurtz’s Intended is equally ignorant of reality in all its gruesomeness, and her continued oblivion, through the mercy of Marlow’s lie, foregrounds the hypocrisy and collusion necessary for the perpetuation of the status quo. Moreover, her own morality and philanthropy become suspect. While she is still grieving over Kurtz more than a year later, the focus of her discussion with Marlow is exclusively on Kurtz and her own selfish need for some morsel of information about him to which to cling. Her conversation is noticeably devoid of any consideration of those he was supposedly intended to save. She asks for his last words but absently not his last actions, what he was doing when he died or from what he died. As with the reader of adventures and the supporters of imperialism, she obtains only that

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<sup>145</sup> Jocelyn Gordon, in *With Edged Tools*, and Frank Hardgrave’s mother, in *By Sheer Pluck*, are prime examples of superior white women. They are virtually saintly in their conduct in their respectively traditional roles as fiancé and mother.

which she expects as she expresses to Marlow when he lies to her about Kurtz's last words: "I knew it—I was sure" (76). On one level, her inclusion seems to confirm imperial expectations, but her obtuseness and selfish singular concern reconfirm the disruption of white representation. At issue is perhaps not so much that white women are unconventionally included as it is that their inclusion exemplifies the totality of racial disruption. Whites are the source of all death, brutality, and horror whether they are male or female or British, foreign, or multinational.

While the knitting women's anachronistic presence in *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates this pervasiveness of guilt, their anachronism also creates ambivalence that unsettles the "masculine" imperial world, and indeed reality itself. While women rarely appear in adventure stories, they occupy consistently traditional roles outside the sphere of imperial operation. In *Heart of Darkness*, the knitters are embroiled in its daily operation and are included in the conspiracy which sends out the unsuspecting young men. Moreover, their appearance and activity are shrouded in ambivalence and unreality. Other than greeting the young men, the only "imperial" service they perform is knitting, an act completely out of place for its location and business operation. The women wear slippers which, when coupled with the somnambulistic state of the younger one, insinuates the casualness, inefficiency, and laxness with which whites approach the entrepreneurial operation and the moral responsibility connected to it. Their anachronistic appearance and the associations of the two women with sleep also suggest a disconnection from reality itself, not merely the masculine world. Conrad thus generates significant ambivalence that implies the instability of the actual imperial world.

The inclusion of both white women and the black woman particularly allows Conrad to disrupt another of the primary tenets of white raciality in adventure fiction, the

honourable indeed chivalrous treatment of women. In *Heart of Darkness* the standard displays of male gallantry and honour toward women are glaringly absent in the behaviours and depictions of white men. Marlow's act of mercy toward Kurtz's Intended by sparing her from the truth of her fiancé's debauchery and homicides comprises the only chivalrous act by any white character toward women, even though it too is surrounded by considerable ambivalence.<sup>146</sup> Marlow himself belittles his aunt, who obtains the position with the Trading Society for him, as foolish and with paternalistic condescension. He says, "the excellent woman living right in the rush of all that humbug got carried off her feet" (16).

The most startling deviation from conventional noble whiteness, however, is the attitude and actions of white men toward the magnificent African woman. The Russian states his frantic intention to shoot her had she tried to board the steamer. Later, when the steamer retreats from the Inner Station, the entire group of pilgrims opens fire on the unarmed woman as she stands on the shore. Their ignoble act is an astounding divergence from the honour with which white men treat women in adventure stories and presumably the way they were to treat them in reality. White adventurers approach women, including native women, in a manner which encapsulates the nostalgia of an earlier age of chivalry.<sup>147</sup> Although native women who pose a racial threat through miscegenation are killed in these works, it is never by the hand of white men. They meet their demise through their own undoing or by the acts of other natives. In *Heart of Darkness* white

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<sup>146</sup> See chapter 2 on Marlow, the section on "Women, The Lie, and Imperialism"

<sup>147</sup> Chapter 1 considers the way in which the native women, Foulata, Ustane, and Marie, are handled in their respective novels. White women, of course, receive flawless consideration by the white men in their novels.

men not only fail to exalt women they disparage and physically attack them as evidence of their cruelty and ignobleness.

The pilgrims' assault on the African woman is the climax of white aggression and its shock value was undoubtedly not lost on readers, but it is certainly not perpetrated in isolation as whites brutalize natives from the moment of Marlow's arrival until his departure. These blatant acts serve as direct critique of imperial operation, but Conrad uses more ambivalent critiques in order to subvert the philanthropic premise behind imperialism. And the nature of those critiques themselves serve to generate significant ambivalence and destabilization of whiteness. He specifically and repeatedly refers to white presence in Africa as an "invasion" and an "infestation." He not only insinuates the unlawfulness of imperialism but inverts dominant racial imagery in which foreigners, particularly non-whites, were often depicted as a disease or infestation which infected the "body" of Britain and white society. Marlow expands his assessment of the Eldorado Expedition from infestation to more criminal depiction:

Their talk however was the talk of sordid buccaneers. It was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage. There was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe (32-33).

Marlow's derogatory characterizations of the Eldorado Expedition are consistent with the "robbery" and "murder" as generic means of imperial exploitation which he highlights in his Roman analogy.

Morality, a sense of right and wrong, in the imperial theatre is, of course, inextricably linked to the supposed philanthropy of the trading concerns, not only in *Heart of Darkness* but throughout the adventure genre and imperial discourse. The



necessity to educate and “civilize” the “ignorant millions,” as Marlow’s aunt defines them, is presumably undertaken not for conquest and exploitation but as an altruistic desire to improve the social, material and spiritual conditions of native peoples: the white man’s burden was all about the obligation to do the “moral thing.” And adventure stories were one of the chief mediums for the dissemination of this philosophy of native salvation as ultimately the actions of whites benefit natives in their physical and social lives. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, the entire assumption of white philanthropy is debunked, not only by the evidence of Kurtz and the men of the head office, but out in the field directly. Far from being benevolent, white presence in Africa is brutal and genocidal. Marlow’s traumatic experiences of witnessing the horror in the grove of death and the chain gang at the Central Station provide him with ample evidence of the cruelty of white influence.

This suffering is not isolated, however, as Marlow witnesses such acts repeatedly throughout the novel: the native who is beaten severely as punishment for his supposed responsibility for the shed fire, the cannibals who are starved because the pilgrims throw their supply of hippo meat overboard, and entire local populations that are displaced or flee in terror from white intrusion. Even the cause of action that provides Marlow with the opportunity to take his position as steamer captain exemplifies the manner in which whites abuse natives to whom they are supposed to aid. The previous captain, Fresleven, is killed because he viciously beats an elderly native chief with a cane over a trivial dispute concerning two black hens, and the man’s son, who comes to his defense, “tentatively jabs” him with a spear (13). Whites abuse and murder natives indiscriminately everywhere Marlow ventures, and whites’ appalling indifference regarding it compounds the injustice of their acts. The sarcastic bluntness with which

Marlow suggests that the black man with the bullet hole in his head is a “permanent improvement” for the upkeep of the road appears on one level to be an expression of the carelessness of white administration. Although Marlow seems indifferent, his sarcastic observation, taken in the context of his many critiques, is intended to ridicule that administration.

The viciousness of white imperial administration takes on even greater significance when considered within its original genre context. In the adventure genre, white interactions with blacks conform to specific standards. White adventurers kill only those natives who “deserve it.” The morality of “right and wrong” is constant in their exercise and philosophy of violence. There are no inconsistencies. Innocent or “good natives” are not killed by whites, even by accident. When those natives, such as Foulata or Ustane, who are designated as “good” are killed, it is only by other natives or hybrids. The function of whites in adventure stories with respect to natives is to improve their conditions and lives, whether the white men started out with that intention or their beneficence is an inadvertent side effect of their actions. In *Heart of Darkness*, whites worsen the conditions of natives and deprive them of life both inadvertently and intentionally.

Even for those natives who are not killed in *Heart of Darkness*, their situations are worsened as a result of white contact. They suffer physical abuse, at times horrific, and are dislocated and detribalized.<sup>148</sup> Marlow mocks the way in which whites have culturally and socially contaminated natives with their influence. Those natives, like the Manager’s

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<sup>148</sup> See Harold R. Collin’s article “Kurtz, the Cannibals, and the Second-rate Helmsman” for a discussion on the effects of detribalization. Although Conrad pre-dates the anthropological recognition and terminology of detribalization, Collins notes the way in which Marlow identifies symptoms and causes of social dislocation and cultural destruction.

“boy,” the firemen on the steamer who looks like a parody of a dog in breeches, and the man with the rascally grin who drives the chain gang, are all sarcastically portrayed. They are depicted as corrupted as a result of white contact, while those Africans with fewer and less influential contact with whites are seen as more wholesome and even admirable. Rather than a Christianizing influence of enlightenment, civilization and salvation, white influence is sinister and dark. Ironically, the jungle and natives do not corrupt white men, rather the whites are the ones who corrupt. Conrad drives his thesis home through his relentless subversion of white philanthropy in which he utilizes and reverses this Christian mission. Rather than saviors, the pilgrims are devils. As soon as Marlow arrives at the Central Station, he immediately deduces the nature of white influence and progress in Africa:

I’ve seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but by all the stars these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils that swayed and drove men — men I tell you. But as I stood on this hillside I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly (20).

As with all of Marlow’s observations and assessments, his representation of whites as devils, and specifically the worst kinds of agents of hell, is acutely contrary to the image of whites and all their philanthropic activities. His conclusions emphasize the corruptive influence which whites have on Africans and the seductive temptation that whites represent. Marlow refers to the brick-maker as a “papier-mâché Mephistopheles” (29), one of Satan’s chief devils and, of course, the tempter of Faust. He attempts to bait Marlow into revealing some vital piece of information which may further his own position in the Company, and though he does not succeed, the brick-maker is

representative of a larger system of temptation and corruption that seemingly lures in white men and alters them much as Faust was corrupted.

Significantly, Conrad inverts the conventional representations of temptation that the darkness of Africa and its peoples, particularly sensual native beauties, are supposed to embody. Instead, it is white men, the brick-maker in this specific case, who are the tempters. Conrad not only impugns the concepts of the Christian mission associated with imperialism, he disrupts white racial representation by shifting the identity of white men, making them less stable. These transformations are continuous throughout, however, as Marlow shifts erratically between Christian images of good and evil, labeling them pilgrims and apostles, as well as devils.

. . . the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show. White men with long staves in their hands appeared languidly from amongst the buildings strolling up to take a look at me and then retired out of sight somewhere (24).

Although the long staves connote holy men, “the flabby devil” who runs the show conflicts with and debunks the religiosity and philanthropy that the imperial operation supposedly possesses. Moreover, their identity is not stable. Marlow mixes his metaphors, so that no clear picture of the white men can be formed. He sarcastically dubs the imperialists at the Central Station as “pilgrims” implying a Christian mission, but that devotional imagery is at the same time tainted by false idol worship:

They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all like a whiff from some corpse (26).

Ironically, the “faithless pilgrims” are again virtually transformed into the supposed heathens whom white imperialists “saved” and used as justification for imperialism. The

white men are bewitched and pray to a false idol, and there appears little distinction between them and the “sorcerer, some witch-man” who wanders around the bonfire the night before the rescue party departs with Kurtz. This implied transference of race unsettles the otherwise stable image of whiteness. Although natives and hybrids may occasionally be presented with some inconsistency in the adventure genre, the line that demarcated whites from them was not breached. Marlow’s incessant shifting in their Christian identity, from good to evil, however, as though he himself could not identify them, disrupts white identity as a whole. In alluding to pilgrims, Marlow also reminds his audience of how whites are supposed to function, but their greed and hypocrisy negate any possibility of benevolence. That Conrad writes within a genre that extols the virtues and sage benevolence of whites, to suggest anything other than benevolence on the part of whites, and specifically such detrimental and genocidal results, subverts both the genre representations and imperial promotion.

### **Communication, Disease, and Victimization**

Imperialism, particularly by the late nineteenth-century, was of course not entirely motivated by altruistic intention to better the natives, not in the real world or in the fictional world of the adventure genre. As with their real life counterparts, fictional Englishmen embark on adventures for highly personal reasons as well. This final section of the chapter focuses on the ways that these less than altruistic pursuits are presented in *Heart of Darkness* and how the failure of these objectives impacts on the adventure genre, whiteness and imperialism. While white characters throughout the adventure genre always achieve their conventional objectives to varying degrees, Conrad frustrates the expectation and desire that readers likely had when reading an adventure story. The

conventional masculinity of whites that is realized in the imperial world is negated as Conrad deprives his white characters of both bravery and the manly physicality which came to epitomize whiteness throughout the genre. Instead, they are cowardly in their deeds and appear in anachronistic physical states of ridiculousness and effeminacy which disrupt both the dominant image of masculinity and whiteness. Moreover, Conrad animalizes white men, particularly in terms of communication which, although not a tangible part of the body, serves to strip whiteness of any semblance of authorial power. Whiteness is, in fact, stripped of its very power of life. Whereas white men in adventures realize their manly essence, whites in *Heart of Darkness* are weakly and degenerate from disease and die. Just as with Kurtz, they do not receive any reward, personal, financial, or sexual. Instead, Conrad reveals how they are victimized by the imperial system and thus destabilize its promotion.

Masculinity in nineteenth-century Britain had, according to Ronald Hyam, attained “cult” status. This idolization of “manliness” was rooted in the belief that the masculine had a very pragmatic imperial use. The rush to expand the Empire at the expense of other imperial nations and colonial races was typically presented in terms of physical struggle, and imperialists had to possess the physical manliness to defeat challengers to the British Empire.<sup>149</sup> Adventure writers, both responded to and reinforced these physical representations of superior Englishness by defining whiteness in extremely pronounced physical terms. Intense action, aggrandized battles with natives, and heroic deeds highlight the plot structure of adventure fiction. These elements not only entertained and titillated readers they offered an incentive to them by implicitly

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<sup>149</sup> See chapter 1, note 46, Earl of Rosebery’s comments concerning the necessity for the British Empire to have a “fit” race of men.

suggesting that they, too, could become such manly men simply by venturing out into the imperial world. Moreover, this kind of intensity and action grounds adventure stories in the realm of the physical. Thus both the simplicity of the plots and the concreteness they create function as a stabilizing influence for whiteness and imperialism.

Conrad, however, strips *Heart of Darkness* of these suspenseful scenes and strips his characters of any semblance of conventional bravery in their dealings with the presumed savages. Their only displays are of cowardliness which at times approximate the supposed cowardliness of the natives. After Fresleven is killed, Marlow observes that the reaction of both races to the incident is exactly the same: “Then the whole population cleared into the forest expecting all kinds of calamities to happen, while, on the other hand, the steamer Fresleven commanded left also in a bad panic . . .” (13). Fresleven’s white crew leaves in such a panic that they do not even gather up his body. Their less than heroic reaction and those of other pilgrims allow Marlow to equate their bravery with the supposed unmanly fear of natives.

The most commonly expected act of white bravery, the climactic struggle against presumed hostile natives, fails to materialize and the reactions of whites to the limited assaulted that is launched, is precisely that, fearful reactions rather than decisive initiations. When the pilgrims are confronted by an actual hostile encounter with the natives, they behave in acute contradiction to conventional white behaviour. They whisper and murmur their fear of being attacked and “butchered” to Marlow. While their fear and incompetence to defend themselves are contrary to the image of whiteness, the greater subversion is the contrast of the white men’s terrified reaction with that of their presumed racial inferiors:

The faces twitched with the strain, the hands trembled, slightly, the eyes forgot to wink. It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the

white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression, but their faces were essentially quiet . . . (41-42).

When the natives do attack, Marlow specifically downplays the assault, despite the death of his helmsman, as though to deprive the incident of any possibility of intensity and brave response, characterizing it as nothing more than a shower of “[s]ticks, little sticks” that whiz by his nose which, although they might have been poisoned, “looked as though they wouldn’t kill a cat” (46). When the pilgrims finally do shoot at the natives who attack the steamer, they do not aim at anything and end up shooting too high, and later foolishly applaud themselves for their self-assumed magnificent, yet ineffectual action. Significantly, one pilgrim brags about their actions and presents them as unconventional barbarism, calling it “a glorious slaughter.” Yet for all his bragging, Marlow reveals that the man nearly fainted when he saw the wounded helmsman.

Much as Conrad distances Marlow from direct action, the pilgrims are frequently distanced from the kind of brave action that defines adventure stories. When they are positioned close enough to natives to engage in the standard kind of conflict, they avoid any physical contact. It is only when they have been removed from actual danger that they brandish their weapons. To compound their cowardliness, the pilgrims’ assault is launched against unarmed and unthreatening individuals who at first remain harmlessly on the shore and then, when Marlow screeches the whistle, disperse and run in “abject terror” (66) from the scene. Only then do the whites fire upon them as they retreat. Their “battle” is a merciless slaughter. More than cowardly, their actions are bloodthirsty. As Marlow yanks the whistle, one pilgrim cries, “Don’t! don’t you frighten them away” (66)



as they eagerly seek to murder them. The desire for the slaughter of innocents surely startled adventure readers more so than the weak disposition of the pilgrims and their aversion to manly conflict. Ironically, such uncharacteristic savagery was likely more associated with the natives than any white as Conrad continues to disrupt whiteness by essentially transforming the pilgrims into the racial Other.

The graphic and passionate displays of masculinity of white men in the adventure genre is facilitated by their pronounced physicality. The superiority of that physicality confirms the superiority of whiteness in general. Just as the physical acts themselves stabilize whiteness and imperialism by grounding them in the concrete, the corporeality of the body of white characters also stabilizes them. In *Heart of Darkness*, however, the physicality of whiteness in general, like that of its heroes, is subjected to radical revision. White physicality becomes a mockery. More so, whites are dehumanized and their physical gestures are equated with the so-called savages over whom they are supposed to be superior. The outlandish physical appearance and behavioural characteristics of whites completely subverts the notions of white supremacy as they appear in other adventure stories. Moreover, a number of whites are hopelessly anachronistic, and their presence in the imperial world insinuates that white men do not belong there at all.

Both the Chief Accountant and the Russian Harlequin are unconventional in physical appearance and attire. While they do appear ludicrous, which in itself creates ambivalence around the image of whiteness and imperial power, their effeminateness and anachronism destabilizes reality itself. Marlow actually states the unexpectedness of meeting the Chief Accountant, thus also implying a critique of the genre in which “the expected” was preeminent.

I met a white man in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high, starched collar, white

cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing and had a pen-holder behind his ear (21).

His “elegant” state and effeminate manner — he even totes a parasol — indicate his emasculation. He has all the trappings of a fop or a dandy who seems glaringly out of place in an era of the cult of the masculine as exemplified by the popularity of vibrant adventure heroes. His delicate and precise makeup may have been appropriate for a person of his clerical position in Britain, but men in such employ do not even exist elsewhere in adventure fiction. Although clerks, bookkeepers, and accountants were employed in great numbers in these trading companies, including out in the imperial territories, they are not the images that the adventure genre projects. Though surely memorable, the Accountant is hardly inspiring as either an adventurer or as a white man. That he is so drastically out of place in *Heart of Darkness* emphasizes the unnaturalness of white presence in Africa as well particularly given his position within the imperial company.

The Russian Harlequin, like the Accountant, is anachronistic and emasculated. But more than any other character he generates the most significant amount of ambivalence for Marlow. Although Marlow is amazed by the Accountant’s appearance, for him the Harlequin is “insoluble,” “inconceivable,” “improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering,” and he cannot understand why he does not “instantly disappear” (54). While the Harlequin also destabilizes the image of whiteness, he possesses a quality of the absurd that seems reserved specifically for this most devoted follower of Kurtz. Indeed, while the Accountant seems to possess the singular identity of “a hairdresser’s

dummy,” the Harlequin is comprised of a literal patchwork that reflects the fragmented image of whites throughout the novel.

He looked like a harlequin. His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, patches on the front, patches on elbows, on knees, coloured binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers, and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. A beardless boyish face, very fair, no features to speak of, nose peeling, little blue eyes, smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow on a wind-swept plain (53).

He, too, is no longer a man, as he is reverted back to a “boy.” His marked clownishness, if more pronounced than other whites’ ludicrous appearance, is perhaps a manifestation of his acutely misguided naivete with respect to Kurtz. He, more so than anyone else, has witnessed Kurtz’s atrocities first-hand and the truth hidden behind the benevolent and progressive facade of imperialism, yet he remains Kurtz’s loyal disciple. Moreover, his is one of the most ironic and hypocritical perspectives because he sincerely espouses the kind of condescending Christian paternalism towards the natives that imperialists used as justification for their subjugation. Repeatedly, he calls the natives a “simple people” (53, 62) and “harmless” (53). Yet, he blithely turns a blind eye to Kurtz’s atrocities, and like Marlow’s friends on board the *Nellie*, he fails to condemn him. Conrad thus seems to set aside a special position of ridicule for him.

White identity continues to shift throughout *Heart of Darkness*. Each white character who enters is portrayed in yet more derogatory ways that shift in their adjectives and metaphors so that a permanent pattern of identification is impossible to recognize. Notably, Conrad animalizes and dehumanizes whites in ways that approximate the racial stereotyping of natives throughout adventure fiction, and his tactics of equating whites with blacks effectively questions the justification of white racial domination. The

Manager's uncle has a "short flipper of an arm" (35), and his entire expeditionary company is ascribed a value lower than the lowly beasts of burden: "Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals" (35). When Marlow lowers the body of his dead helmsman over the side of the steamer after the attack, the panic-stricken pilgrims congregate on the deck "chattering at each other like a flock of excited magpies" (51). After the renewed assault on the steamer, the pilgrims "howl" at Marlow with indignant protests when he blasts the whistle to disperse the natives to prevent the pilgrims from slaughtering them (52).

Arguably, the animalizations of whites are analogous with those used with respect to some of the native peoples in Conrad's own work; the notable difference, however, is that while Conrad does rely on an occasional generic image in his treatment of blacks, his characterizations of whites are acutely incongruous with the adventure genre. Moreover, there is a relentlessness to the frequency and alteration of these images that seems to prevent the reader from acquiring a clear picture of them. Their representation is distorted and moving, but it is always derogatory and repeatedly approximates the supposed savages. After the attack on the steamer, one red-haired pilgrim "was beside himself" over the "glorious slaughter" they presumably made by repulsing the native attack on the steamer, and Marlow observes that he "positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar" (52). In fact, whites howl, dance, grunt, crawl and grovel their way throughout the novel more often than the perceived savages.

Significantly, after Marlow calls himself a performer of "monkey tricks" (36), he classifies his English friends, all of them representatives of British imperial interests, as animal performers upon their own "respective tight-ropes for — what is it? half a crown a tumble" (36). The source of the defensive response to Marlow's belittlement of his

friends remains unidentified, consisting only of “a [disembodied] voice” from out of the dark, as they are both animalized and dehumanized just as are the two heroes, Kurtz and Marlow. Moreover, the response is “growled” in an animalized utterance. When Marlow later links whites to blacks in a shared human kinship, one of the imperialists responds skeptically with grunts, and Marlow wants to know, “Who’s that grunting?” (38). Marlow cannot identify the guttural communication although coming from a familiar source, and he receives no answer. Moreover, there is no indication that the grunt and growl even originate with the same source or from two different individuals, thus destabilizing the white men’s identity further. Although Marlow originally derides his friends by animalizing them, it is the seemingly pro-imperial frame narrator, and not Marlow, who characterizes their unidentified friend(s)’ growled and grunted responses. Significantly, although natives are frequently animalized in the adventure genre, and Marlow himself resorts to racist representations of the natives’ speech,<sup>150</sup> in other adventure stories even natives’ oral communications are not demeaned as severely as the frame narrator demeans his friends.

Although Marlow uses animalized depictions of African speech, he more often uses such oral animalizations in his projections of other white men’s speech. The Manager, his uncle, other pilgrims, and the Russian Harlequin all howl, choke, jerk, gabble, and rattle on and out their words. Conrad disrupts even written communication of whites, which was often touted historically as evidence of white superiority over indigenous cultures that tended to be oral, by presenting it in crude and primitive forms. The signature of the Russian is illegible, and Marlow complains about the “imbecility of

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<sup>150</sup> See Chinua Achebe for a discussion on the representation of African speech. Achebe asserts that Africans are deprived of speech except in the most rudimentary means.

that telegraphic style” (39) in which the Russian writes his message warning his fellow whites about the possibility of an impending assault. Another piece of script, this one written by Kurtz in his Report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, was “scrawled evidently much later in an unsteady hand” (51).

Authoritative voice, despite its intangibility, is a conduit for white power as it conveys commands and facilitates strategizing and racial solidarity among whites. Brute strength, of course, supplements that authority as it ensures that whites can defeat any native or hybrid adversary, regardless of their own notable physicality, should they not concede to white authority. Communications between whites, and between authors and their audience, whether oral or written, are held in contrast to the primitive oral communication of natives. Adventure novels thus accentuate the eloquent speech and dominant language of white characters. These characters may not be presented as intellectuals, but they certainly possess a flair for vivid and refined language and, most significantly, for authoritative speech, despite pretenses to the contrary. Allan Quatermain, for example, in the Introduction of *King Solomon's Mines* apologizes for his “blunt way of writing” claiming that he is “more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot make any pretence to the grand literary flights and flourishes which [he] see[s] in novels.” Nonetheless, he, like other narrators of adventure, expresses many examples of lengthy description and vivid imagery. But the paramount feature of white dialogue is how it depicts whites’ attitude toward natives and their ability to distinguish themselves from natives through their more ‘civilized’ and ‘evolved’ manner of communication which ensures their ability to command them. Quatermain, for example, specifically corrects Ignosi’s speech for his presumed impertinent comments as he orders him “to hold his tongue, and leave such matters to wiser heads . . . You forget yourself a little . . .

Your words ran out unawares. That is not the way to speak” (38 ). Other novels maintain a similar air of authority over native subalterns as whites express dominating speech to which natives comply and even parrot the racial ideology at the back of it.

The ‘superior’ level of whites’ communication in *Heart of Darkness*, however, is diminished, de-evolved, or duplicitous. While critics frequently cite Conrad’s portrayal of African speech as one of the best examples of Conrad’s supposed racism,<sup>151</sup> the startling image of white speech and its disruption of racial superiority is the more glaring theme. The lies of whites are, of course, the most identifiable element of their subversive quality of speech. The biggest lie of all is imperialism itself, as Marlow asserts immediately that the pilgrims’ bickering and backbiting is “as unreal as everything else — as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work” (27). Marlow makes a strong case throughout the novel of the hypocrisy of imperialism in general, not merely the Belgian variety, as the speech of all whites, regardless of nationality, only serves to cloak the great lie behind an appearance of civility and philanthropy. Marlow’s own lie, with a “taint of death” (29), evidences the duplicity of white speech and the extensive complicity required for imperial operation. He perhaps achieves some absolution or at least mental relief by unburdening himself of the lie to his friends, but his narrative reveals the complicit nature of white communication and how it deprives presumed white superiority of any justification for imperial and racial domination. Conversations in the head office with the Doctor and the clerk insinuate, yet at the same time veil, the secret knowledge of what transpires in Africa. The Manager’s deceptive and inscrutable smile, with which Marlow is so disturbed from the start, seals

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<sup>151</sup> One of Achebe’s key arguments in his assertion of Conrad’s racism is the primitive patterns of speech he attributes to Africans and his deprivation of any speech at all to most Africans.

every statement he makes with an incomprehensibility and duplicity that one is never certain of the truth or genuineness of any utterance from him. The pilgrims, as noted, while away their time gossiping, conniving and backbiting, and the ideas that the members of Eldorado Exploring Expedition express are “the talk of sordid buccaneers” (32).

There is a sinisteress to the pilgrims’ communications, but for all its hypocrisy and danger, white speech is also incomplete, guttural, and nonsensical. When Marlow first meets the Manager, he says that “[h]e was a chattering idiot” (26). The brickmaker follows Marlow around as the supply shed burns, gossiping in a “scathing murmur” at Marlow’s ear about the various intrigues at the station. (28), and later he “jabbered about himself” (29) When the uncle of the Manager arrives at the head of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, Marlow recalls that he and his nephew could be seen incessantly with “heads close together in an everlasting confab” (33). What conniving communication of theirs Marlow overhears inadvertently while he tries to sleep on his steamer is fantastical, made up of “several bizarre remarks” and “bits of absurd sentences” (33). It is indicative of the general pattern of nonsensicality and duplicity of white speech throughout the entire novel: “other voices — all of them were so little more than voices — . . . like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean without any kind of sense. Voices, voices — even the girl herself” (48-49). Significantly, this nonsensicalness approximates the supposed inferior speech of natives in both *Heart of Darkness* and the adventure genre.

Unlike other whites characters in the adventure genre who declare decisive speeches and definitive commands at crucial moments of armed conflict, whites in *Heart of Darkness* utter feeble, ineffective, dumbfounded and petrified sounds and exclamations



or are struck dumb completely. The night before the fog envelops the steamer when the natives release a cry of profound melancholy and grief, the pilgrims become frightened and faltering in speech:

It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes . . . ‘Good God! What is the meaning . . .’ stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims . . . Two others remained open-mouthed a whole minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand darting scared glances (41).

Before the natives attack the steamer the next day, the Manager “muttered something about going on at once” but without conviction (43). During the attack, at the moment of highest crisis, the utterances come quickly and confusedly and reveal the pilgrims’ helplessness and panic: “Two pilgrims were quarrelling in hurried whispers as to which bank . . . You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no heart to grin or even to revile me . . . Below me there was a great scuffle of feet on the iron deck; confused exclamations; a voice screamed, ‘Can you turn back?’” (43-46). Such scattered ramblings contrast with adventure fictions where whites, including subordinate characters, commonly issue decisive orders in moments of crisis that reinforce their ability to lead. In *With Edged Tools*, for example, Joseph, the hero’s white man-servant, commands the black labourers to “Fight, yer devils — fight! . . . Hell — give ‘em hell!” (193). His forceful directions maintain their defenses until relieved.

In Conrad’s work, no such orders are issued by white men and their lack of physicality to enforce any commands does not exist even if they were issued. Although Achebe is critical that Conrad deprives Africans of speech or grants them only primitive utterances, except for Marlow white characters are granted the most cursory of speech only and some are granted none at all. Moreover, the fragmentary and ineffectualness of

white speech in general diminishes the potency that the power of speech affords whites elsewhere in the genre. Although the frame narrator commences the narrative in literary form, he actually initiates no oral communication throughout the novel, nor do any of the other imperialists on the *Nellie* speak to any significant degree. Other than the one or two of them who “growls” and “grunts” his or their displeasure and skepticism at Marlow in animalized utterances, no one speaks except for Marlow. Even when they growl and grunt, the speaker or speakers are never identified, so no white individual, and more specifically, no English imperialist, on board the *Nellie* is attributed with the power of language, rudimentary as it is. Instead, the friends are passive subjects as many blacks are in adventure stories in which they either are spoken to or about, or they merely parrot the racist views of their white superiors such as the lengthy and eloquent translations of Ignosi when he recognizes the racial distance between himself and Sir Henry, Good, and Quatermain.

On the river steamer in Africa, the Russian Harlequin and Kurtz<sup>152</sup> are, aside from Marlow, the only whites empowered with any significant amount of language, but the Harlequin nonetheless subverts that empowerment with every utterance. His speech both reveals his foolish nature and conforms to the deficient and fragmentary communications of other whites.

possessed himself of both my hands, shook them continuously while he gabbled: ‘Brother sailor . . . honour . . . pleasure . . . delight . . . introduce myself . . . Russian . . . son of an Arch-Priest . . . Government of Tambov . . . What! Tobacco! English tobacco; the excellent English tobacco! Now, that’s brotherly. Smoke! Where’s a sailor that does not smoke’ (54).

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<sup>152</sup> See Chapter 3, the section on “The Unconventional Journey and Its Unconventional Rewards” for a discussion of Kurtz’s inferior speech.

Later when he takes his leave from the ship, Marlow hears the Harlequin “mumbling and stammering again this time something about ‘brother seaman — couldn’t conceal — knowledge of matters that would affect Mr. Kurtz’s reputation’” (62). His communications are disjointed, and he, too, is virtually incomprehensible, much like the natives with whom he claims to have friendly affinities. He follows the patterns of Marlow’s own “hesitating voice” (11) in which he interrupts himself with asides, sarcastic fillers, interjections, pauses, and stops and starts (see Chapter 2) which fail to convey an appreciable understanding for himself or his audience about the people and events of which he speaks.

The Harlequin also admits his inability to “understand” and does so over and over again as though caught in a verbal loop. His recognition of his failure to comprehend his fellow white man, Kurtz, and the passivity he expresses in his idolization of Kurtz echoes the subservient parroting which natives in other adventure stories utter regarding the existing racial order. His verbal idolization leads Marlow to conclude that if it came “to crawling before Mr. Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all” (58). The Harlequin, like whites throughout the novel, is reduced in racial stature to the level of the natives. Whites in adventures, however, are held out as bastions of civilization in the milieu of savagery and primitiveness. Their speech as well as other aspects of their physicality set them apart and above natives. Their capacity for thought and level-headedness and their ability to articulate their intellect allows adventure stories to confirm the imperial project as natural, justified, and a success. But in Conrad, white men’s thoughts, behaviours and language diminish their stature and make them virtually indistinguishable from the natives.

Conrad's ambivalence around whiteness, however, his effective transformation of white identity into black, diminishes white racial identity perhaps most acutely in its associations with disease. Marlow describes the notorious Eldorado Exploring Expedition, despite the unmistakably adventurous name that many contemporary readers surely would have associated with more valiant motives, as pirates who commit robbery and murder. Although criminal in nature, their characterization as buccaneers at least retains the identity of men. Marlow, however, diminishes their identity further, calling the expedition "an invasion, an infliction, a visitation" (32). It is an "It," and Marlow portrays this "gang" as a pestilence that "infested the station" (33).

In late Victorian Britain, the intense fears of whites regarding racial and social contamination by foreigners and non-white immigrants in Britain increased dramatically, as did the fear of actual contagions from them. In Victorian literature, these fears are often projected in unhygienic terms of disease and infestation. Conrad reverses this representation of unhealthy contact from foreign bodies by positioning whites as the sources of and medium by which the contamination is spread. Conrad's depiction of this foreign intrusion by white men in Africa, presented specifically in unhealthy terms of affliction, could not have escaped contemporary readers who would have recognized its similarity to the dominant projections of the perceived parasitic infiltration of Britain by outsiders in the latter part of the century. Moreover, in the adventure genre and dominant discourse, disease is a physical assault that is presumed to originate within Africa itself and is spread by the supposed weakness of native peoples. This supposed physical inferiority to whites naturally results in their frequently succumbing to the sickness they generate, while the whites are either immune to or defeat the foreign malady. Disease never originates with or is spread by white characters.

In *Heart of Darkness*, however, the disease-like ravages that are perpetrated originate solely with whites: hunger, malnutrition, abuse, displacement, disease, and murder. Even the frame narrator's nostalgic reminiscences of Britain's imperial days of glory with figures such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin are subverted by racial inversion as he claims that these men created "the germs of empire," (8) a play on "germs" as both seeds and disease.<sup>153</sup> White presence and influence is thus dehumanized in bacteriological terms that are ironically linked to the actual physical manifestations of disease in whites. While whites generate pestilence for Africans, their own weaker dispositions reveal their inferiority to rule over native peoples. Unlike other adventure stories, disease runs rampant among white figures. Kurtz and Marlow both fall prey to exotic fever. Although Marlow does manage to survive, Kurtz and most other whites who become ill do not, and the numbers of those who are sick are overwhelming. During Marlow's sea voyage to Africa with its many stops at ports along the coast, he learns that the men onboard a French man-of-war are dying of fever at the rate of three a day. In the office of the Chief Accountant at the Coastal Station, a white man lingers on the edge of death, but the Accountant's assessment of him indicates that he would soon be dead. Marlow's companion on his overland trek to the Central Station is eventually stricken with fever and must be carted like baggage the rest of the way.

The significance of all this disease lays not only in the contraction of diseases, since whites in other adventures also contract exotic illnesses, but in their diminished physicality that results in their contraction of and death from disease. Jack Meredith (*With*

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<sup>153</sup> Robert McGill discusses how Victorian anxieties concerning colonials and foreigners within Britain were expressed in terms of disease and infestation that could devastate English health and racial purity. He demonstrates how these anxieties are represented in literature, including Conrad's work with respect to non-whites.

*Edged Tools*), Leo Vincey (*She*), Captain Good (*King Solomon's Mines*), and Frank Hardgrave (*By Sheer Pluck*) all contract an exotic, often mysterious malady. The difference, however, is that while whites suffer, their superior physicality ensures their survival.<sup>154</sup> These figures are possessed of incredible health, and their ability to survive confirms that extraordinariness. Moreover, these few examples of illness are the exception among specimens of otherwise universal good health. In *Heart of Darkness*, whites become infected by, deteriorate, and frequently die from disease largely due to their generic initial weak physicality. The pilgrim who accompanies Marlow to the Central Station is significantly overweight, but he also has “the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides” (23). Clearly, he is not physically up to the challenge of adventure and this contributes to his susceptibility to foreign disease. The Manager, although of ordinary physicality himself, seems the only white immune to the virulence of tropical diseases, and his general good health illustrates the randomness of white survivability. Rather than a marker of white physicality or a manifestation of a superior moral character, the Manager’s wellness can be attributed to nothing more than chance. “Like a charm — like a charm,” he informs his uncle in describing his general health. “But the rest — oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven’t the time to send them out of the country — it’s incredible!” While other whites seem to perish for no other explainable cause than random chance, the Manager’s suggestion, when almost all his agents in the Station are stricken, that “Men who come out here should have no entrails” (25) does attribute their suffering to their own weaker physical disposition. That so many whites suffer so acutely in *Heart of Darkness*, unlike other white adventurers,

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<sup>154</sup> Exotic disease proves fatal for only Mr. Goodenough in *By Sheer Pluck*. Chapter 1 explains how the death of this parent-figure follows the basic plot structure of all of Henty’s works in which all parents are eliminated by some circumstance which has no connection to race or location.

insinuates a plethora of inadequate physicality. Far from the bulwarks of health and strength deemed necessary for imperial rule, *Heart of Darkness* presents whites who are feeble, flabby and prone to disease. They are not fit to run any aspect of their trade let alone command entire populations of indigenous races.

As a result of their unfitness for their imperial role, white men in *Heart of Darkness* receive rewards which are commensurate with this and other numerous shortcomings. Whites fail to achieve the kind of self-idealization realized by imperialists in other adventure stories or any of the more tangible rewards for their efforts. All the pilgrims appear unchanged for their experience in Africa. Their impotence throughout much of that experience seems to ensure that no personal growth can occur. Their final actions and attitudes toward Kurtz and Marlow reflect their stunted character and breach of conventional development. Except for Kurtz, none of the pilgrims are ever assigned to their own station, so they also fail to achieve the wealth they desire. Profit, as Marlow explains to his naive Aunt, is the primary mandate for the Trading Company, and agent after agent reminds Marlow of this purpose, regardless of the heavy price it exacts from them. Marlow's ailing road companion is astounded that Marlow would question him about risking to venture out there for money, despite his condition. Yet, unlike other adventures where even secondary characters such as Joseph, Captain and George, Sir Henry's brother, find wealth in great abundance, the attainment of any financial reward eludes them. Their continued status as generic pilgrims indicates, too, that they never rise beyond the pack of indistinguishable imperialists.

Victimization and the pervasiveness of disease are, instead, the most compelling results of white men's excursions into Africa. In complete reversal of the outcomes for whites throughout the genre, they die in appalling ways and numbers. Perhaps most

disconcerting of all for would-be imperialists among the audience of readers is the apparent victimization of whites at the hands of other whites that results in their suffering and death, as Conrad clearly erases the sheen from imperial adventure by illuminating a perhaps more realistic fate that awaits those who undertake such exploits. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the racial solidarity so vital to white success does not exist among whites in *Heart of Darkness*. But while individuals, such as the Manager, his uncle, and his brickmaking spy conspire intensely against their white comrades and join the less influential machinations of the other pilgrims, the entire imperial system seems to work against most if not all imperial volunteers. They become its hapless victims, as control over their own fate eludes them.

Whites throughout the genre are always in control. They are never victims. Although in *Heart of Darkness*, sinister figures such as the Manager and the Company Director with his “grip” on so many millions, at least appear to exercise some control, this too is largely illusionary as neither man ultimately has control over Kurtz nor Marlow. The diabolic uncle of the Manager, ironically, also ends up a victim of forces beyond his control. The Manager may have outlived all other agents and bullies his white subordinates, but he is afraid of Kurtz and must bow to the whim of those in Europe who do not favour him in deference to Kurtz. Although whites also abuse the blacks they oversee, their impotence at the Inner Station reveals their own ultimate lack of control. Excluding these few superficial instances, whites have no control. They drift much as the steamer drifts in the fog on the river, helpless and at the mercy of external forces, although they fail to recognize or acknowledge their own victimization.

Dehumanization and indifference are keys to this process of victimization which deprive whites first of control and then their lives. Whites in *Heart of Darkness* are



depersonalized and some of them appear almost interchangeable, lacking any genuine sense of individuality. Notably, Conrad refrains from using virtually any names anywhere throughout his narrative which facilitates white dehumanization. While Marlow may fail to use individual names for whites, so too does the frame narrator, the Manager and the Chief Accountant, and the application of these tactics of dehumanization by so many whites are symptomatic of a systemic victimization. Although Marlow and Kurtz are the only primary characters bestowed with personal identification, even Kurtz is at times reduced to a nameless figure. Marlow identifies him frequently by his pejorative appearances and behaviours: “shadow,” “phantom,” and “it.” But when Marlow overhears the Manager and his uncle discussing Kurtz, he specifically notes how they too depersonalize Kurtz: “His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was: ‘that man.’” (34). Their conversation, full of animosity, fear and ill-will toward Kurtz, demonstrates how the reduction of Kurtz to a nameless figure facilitates their plots against him. The Chief Accountant is annoyed by “the groans of this sick person” (22) who is placed in his office for some relief from the heat before he dies. His refusal to identify the man, to label him only as “this sick person” allows him to distance himself from the man and to focus on his accounts. Stripping individuals of the most basic traces of identity dehumanizes them and facilitates their exploitation and victimization much as the “universal” natives are exploited and victimized throughout the genre. Marlow recognizes the significance of labeling and the power of language when he scoffs at the labels of “enemies” (17), “criminals” (19), and “rebels” (58) applied to Africans by the various arms of imperialism: the military, law, and commerce. When one is labeled as a nameless thing and stripped of humanity, it becomes very easy to exploit and kill them.

Such dehumanization is layered, however, as it strips characters of identification as well as any pity which Marlow's audience and Conrad's audience of readers may have otherwise experienced. These whites are thus victimized further by Marlow, but the frame narrator also appears unable or unwilling to disassociate himself from the seemingly systemic process of dehumanization. With the exception of Marlow and Kurtz and the passing mention of two minor characters, Fresleven, and Van Shuyten, every other individual is designated only according to their assigned function within the imperial enterprise or by their unfavourable description: the knitting women, the "great man" (the Director of the Continental Trading Society), the Doctor, the Manager, the Chief Accountant, the pilgrims, the brickmaker, the boiler-maker, the man with the moustaches, and the pilgrim in pink pyjamas. Regardless of an individual's position or the favour they find with Marlow, each white is so diminished. Marlow befriends and spends all his time with the boiler-maker and the other mechanics, yet Marlow impersonally designates them, too, only by their function as he seems to adopt, at least temporarily, the demeaning attitude of the pilgrims toward the skilled labourers. Marlow's aunt is simply "my excellent Aunt". The Harlequin and even the Intended, who are only indirectly connected to the imperial enterprise through their relationships, are so designated. More than any other character, the Intended is perhaps deserving of some pity and compassion. Yet Marlow strips her, too, of a human face by referring to her only as the Intended or "the girl", despite her matrimonial ties to Kurtz who is bestowed with a name. As she is reduced to a label, the degree of emotionality offered by both audiences is perhaps mitigated by the fact that she forms a type rather than an individual with a name with whom the audience could identify. Her label is, instead, cold and impersonal and seems to

allude to “the best intentions” with which Kurtz came out to Africa but which fail to be realized. Her type, in effect, represents an abstract concept rather than a face of humanity.

Although Marlow uniquely characterizes many white figures, albeit briefly at times or with vague impressions only, the depersonalized manner of reference suggests that they could be anyone or many people. They thus become representative of groups and classes which not only diminishes sympathetic reactions for them as individuals it affords a more sweeping condemnation of imperialism in general. Moreover, the act of depersonalization functions as a critique of these characters in itself as none of these representative characters are worthy of the kinds of distinguished identifications ascribed to white characters in adventure fiction. Genre conventions provide for the depiction of each white character *as* an individual with pronounced characteristics, specific modes of speech, and unique names. Despite their rather formulaic essence, readers could nonetheless distinguish specific characters within any given novel and from one novel to another. Captain Good is distinguished from his white comrades by his physicality and behaviour, as are Horace Holly and Leo, Jack Meredith, Guy Osgood and Joseph, and Frank Hardgrave and Mr. Goodenough. Even their names, as discussed in Chapter 1, reflect their individuality and often their functionality in the story and as symbols of presumed racial qualities. In *Heart of Darkness*, whites have no such individuality as they are depicted generically despite Marlow’s prolonged professional relationships with so many of them or his brief, yet profound encounters with characters such as the Russian Harlequin and the Intended. The close bond of experience and trust of the frame narrator with his white friends on board *the Nellie* does not stop him either from stripping them of their humanity. They are classified impersonally by imperial function: the Director of Companies, the Lawyer, and the Accountant. Moreover, they are deprived of any

description to distinguish them and are merely types. He identifies only Marlow by name and significantly his own identification is never mentioned, so that he too could be anyone or everyone.

Generalization functions as a broad comment on white influence, but it particularly reverses the dehumanization exercised against blacks in the genre by applying it to whites. The “reclaimed” African who lackadaisically drives the chain gang suddenly assumes an air of seriousness in his duty when he sees Marlow, a white man, and Marlow concludes that his reaction is because “white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be” (19). He recognizes that blacks may see whites in racialized ways no differently than the way in which whites view blacks. Moments later, Marlow demonstrates this relativity when he recites a typical black racialization in the grove of death when he qualifies his estimation of the young age of one of the men, “— but you know with them it’s hard to tell” (20). While he occasionally panders to the stereotypes of blacks, it is whites with whom “it’s hard to tell” who they are as they are consistently denied their conventional markers of identity. Even the nationalities of much of the cast of characters is a hodgepodge or is ambiguous altogether. There are Englishmen, a Russian, Dutch, Swede, Dane, and presumably Belgians, although the nationality of virtually all the pilgrims is never known. Instead, they are generic individuals, and just as Kurtz is a “universal genius,” whites in the novel are universal figures which appear to subvert the ideas of supremacy and individual glory.

These distinctions are, along with the tangible rewards of imperialism, pivotal in adventure stories. The accounts of white men’s exploits and the celebrity it affords the characters in the novels themselves and among the audience of readers comprises a primary part of the success for fictional and potentially real imperial adventurers. In

*Heart of Darkness*, whites remain nameless and faceless cogs in a machine. If they are like blacks, “all alike,” without anything exceptional to them, they become expendable. Unlike other adventures, whites do indeed die just as frequently and with as little consequence as blacks. That the origin of so much of that white suffering and death is rooted in the imperial system itself functions as a subversion of the genre and apparently a critique of imperialism. Writers such as Haggard, in particular, do lament in his fiction and personal writings the invasive form of new imperialism which altered his romantic vision of the imperial realm, but his expressed desire was for a return to that romantic vision for his own pleasure. His novels reflect that desire by aggrandizing whites for the most part. They are never victimized. In *Heart of Darkness*, rather than venerated heroes, whites are extraneous and expendable. The Company and imperialism in general marches on completely indifferent to the suffering or loss of any one of them, white or otherwise. Fresleven, the man Marlow replaces as captain of the river steamer, dies and is left where he is killed. No one troubles themselves to retrieve his body or at least bury him, and Marlow emphasizes this indifference as long after the fact he literally stands in the man’s place where the grass now grows up between the exposed ribs of his decomposed body. Only Marlow expresses some concern by at least making note of his and other men’s passing. On Marlow’s seafaring trip to the Central Station onboard the French steamer, men who are put ashore at earlier stops routinely die in the process of disembarkation without regard: “Some I heard got drowned in the surf, but whether they did or not nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went” (16). Schedules must be kept and the healthy garner no more concern for their life than the sick, nor do the considerable numbers of whites who die have any impact upon the impersonal system. Later, Marlow witnesses a French man-of-war firing in futility on the

continent. He recalls that “We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on” (17). The delivery of the mail, an integral function in the system, continues despite the conditions in which the recipients find themselves or in which the courier finds them. The fact that they “went on,” a repetition of the process that occurred with the drowning men at all the ports, indicates the imperviousness of the system to interruption. Notably, Marlow mentions the high death rate as a parenthetical comment between two steps in the schedule, as though the deaths of these white men are indeed merely an aside, irrelevant to the larger process. And it is this process to secure profits that is foregrounded throughout the novel by the inclusion of the employees who perform bookkeeping, accounting, and clerking duties. Notably, these are the only trades that appear to be performed adequately, albeit again at the expense of white suffering. As the Chief Accountant works at his books, he is acutely indifferent to the dying man lying in his office and indeed is annoyed that his groans “distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate” (22).

A lack of racial solidarity which facilitates individual victimization is symptomatic of a flawed system, and white victimization on such a scale can only be achieved systemically. At the head offices of the company, Marlow is processed in an impersonal bureaucracy. He is greeted, escorted to various departments, must sign documents, and is examined by the company Doctor much as military recruits are processed at induction centres. The automated nature of the operation is reflected in the somnambulist knitting woman who can approach and direct the new recruits without seeing them or where they are going. The two women knit “black wool feverishly,” uninterrupted by the continuous stream of people arriving and the necessity for the

younger one to talk back and forth introducing them. The process continues to function unabated by those of them who will perish in its operation. Marlow's favoured status of his influential hiring seems irrelevant as he is transferred from department to department with no consideration of his individuality. He is not distinguished by the Company in any way from the many young men who arrive and are similarly processed. Although the gullibility of these young men inevitably contributes significantly to their demise, they are essentially sacrificed as so much fodder for the imperial machine.

Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinising the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. "*Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant.*"<sup>155</sup> Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again — not half — by a long way. (14).

Marlow expresses a distinctive fatalism and futility over the death of so many young men in the name of imperial profit, but it is more than the absolute and cold indifference of so many individuals that underlies Marlow's observations. It is a problem in the system itself which seems to breed callousness in the white men who participate in it and which functions as a kind of contagion in itself. The Swede Captain Marlow befriends on the second leg of his journey to the Central Station is indifferent to his fellow countryman who hanged himself just the other day. Marlow himself adopts a cavalier attitude towards the loss of at least some whites. The members of Eldorado Expedition who die in totality are "less valuable" than the donkeys which carried them, and Kurtz is "something" that is dropped "in a muddy hole" after he judges himself and dies (69). Except for the Intended, Marlow's only genuine compassion for the suffering and death he witnesses is for blacks only. While Marlow's lack of compassion for whites

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<sup>155</sup> "Hail . . . Those who are about to die salute you."

may be attributable to his evaluation of these men's destructive impact in Africa, and to some degree justifiable given the trauma he witnesses, he manifests a general dearth of concern and compassion for white men that pervades throughout the imperial system.

Even for Kurtz, the shining star of the imperial Trading Society as its most profitable agent, the rescue mission mounted to retrieve him has in actuality nothing to do with the preservation of Kurtz's life for his own sake. Marlow explains that the Manager's urgency in wanting to reach Kurtz in time is only to "preserve appearances" (43). When the rescue party finally arrives, Kurtz himself recognizes the true nature of the "rescue mission" and his own inconsequentiality: "Save me — save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me! Save *me!*" (61). He is insignificant and irrelevant in the greater imperial scheme. Ironically, Marlow's reaction to Kurtz's death by remaining at the dinner table, perceived by the pilgrims as callousness, is rooted in a more humanistic perspective than the pilgrims' own. Once Marlow returns to the sepulchral city, the singular desire of the Company official to obtain Kurtz's documents in order to protect the Company's interests, with no regard to the man himself, reveals the unimportance of their "most valuable agent."

The prevalence of death and the disregard the pilgrims manifest toward others of their kind, including Kurtz, despite his "favoured" status, does not dissuade them from their participation. Ironically, even with this knowledge of their own pitiful worth in the eyes of the Company, the individual imperialists are seemingly indifferent to how they are valued. Profit, or "percentages" as the pilgrims' call it, is the bottom line, and their lives are virtually as expendable to themselves as they are to the Company. Whether their self-victimization exists prior to going to Africa or the transformation occurs, much as the



Company Doctor unknowingly implies, as a result of their exposure to the impersonal system, their compliance forms an essential part of the system of their victimization.

While the avaricious exploitations of the pilgrims and Kurtz may have shocked and repulsed readers, their status as hapless victims of the imperial machine generates a level of sympathy for these characters, despite Conrad's depersonalization of them.

Although many are architects of their own death, contemporary readers may still have felt a measure of sympathy for the men thrown carelessly out into the surf to drown or for the man deranged by fever in the Chief Accountant's office. Even Kurtz, for all his diabolism, can still be seen as a wretched creature tragically consumed by his own corruption and, ultimately, self-loathing. If we do not pity him directly, Marlow at least leads us to pity his Intended whose delicate naivete compels Marlow to hide the abhorrent truth from her.

In the adventure genre, regardless of the ordeals and tribulations that white characters endure, it does not seem that the expectation is for the reader to pity them. Their favoured status, exemplary qualities, rewards, and heroic merits, including the defeat of disease and death, preclude anything except admiration and jealousy on the part of readers. In *Heart of Darkness*, imperialism is sadistic and malicious to natives, but it is also perverting and destructive to whites. In this regard, *Heart of Darkness* functions similarly to the rhetoric of the British anti-slavery campaigns earlier in the century in which abolitionists sought to build sympathy for both the slave *and* master. According to the rhetoric, those who did the exploiting and abusing are as equally victimized as those they exploited and abused.<sup>156</sup> Slavery degenerates white owners. They become savage, unchristian, relentless and, at times, consumed by remorse and self-loathing, the exact

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<sup>156</sup> See *The History of Mary Prince* for examples of anti-slavery rhetoric.

qualities that Kurtz exhibits. *Heart of Darkness*, in its complexity, thus seems to imply a necessity for at least reform of imperialism if not abolition in order to eliminate the victimization of whites.

Whites are both abusers and victims in *Heart of Darkness* and that unconventionality suggests not only the weakness of white racial identity but flaws in the imperial representation within the adventure genre and in the imperial system itself. Far from being heroic, whites appear as corrupted, morally and physically as they are full of avarice, jealousy, malevolence, criminal intent, and disease. They are the antithesis of everything that white adventurers in Africa were expected to be and are in other stories within the adventure genre. Adventure fictions promote imperialism through the glowing representations of white characters, their exploits, and their validation as signified by the accumulation of tangible and intangible rewards in the imperial field and at home. This made them a source for emulation among the pro-imperialists who comprised much of the reading audience for the adventure genre. But in *Heart of Darkness*, white adventurers and their experiences are nothing desirable to which to aspire. No one, not Marlow or even the Intended, are above derision as ultimately the novel mocks, accuses, dehumanizes, animalizes, and victimizes *all white characters*, and the reader is left with no imperial figure with whom to identify.

For those whites who venture out there, there is no fame, nor fortune, only death. Their experience, as illuminated by the anticlimactic plot in *Heart of Darkness* that anomalously plods along without suspense or excitement, is grounded in the drudgery, dreariness and cold-brutality of a life of isolation and self-reliance. Kurtz, as the epitome of white fate in Africa, is literally consumed alive and dies penniless, but so, too, do whites in general. They do not become rich and famous, and there is no glory in what they

do. Their experiences are anything but adventurous as they die without consequence or compassion. The scathing depiction of the brutal indifference of imperialistic enterprises was undoubtedly viewed by some young, male readers as a deterrent to joining the imperial cause or from pursuing careers in the far flung Empire. Alone in remote regions, faced with disease and death, depersonalized and degraded, with no recourse and no mercy from those in authority who sent them out there, more than a few may have been less inclined to join in the endeavour.

When one considers *Heart of Darkness* as an adventure fiction within a genre which so enthusiastically advocates imperialism by advertising the valour of its agents, the benefits they received, and the value with which they were held in esteem, the subversive nature of the novel becomes evident. Conrad, after all, was not writing his novel to be read by Africans or even those already convinced of the cruelty and horrors of imperialism. He wrote for boys and men, who were still “boys at heart,” and who wanted to read about fantastic adventures and desired to emulate them. How better to destabilize imperialism and its white racial justification than to illustrate for those who would participate in that imperial adventure that the glory depicted in their more favoured genre is an illusion, that they instead face a cruel, forsaken, and pernicious reality. The unconventional aspects of Conrad’s novel, frequently considered “unadventurous” in the time of its original publication, are in actuality a tremendous leap by an adventurous spirit who wishes to break the conventions and ideologies of the adventure genre in order to present an “idea” beyond the confines of what adventures, up to that point, had generally done.

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