

MEETING THE CIVILISED BARBARIAN:
BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA AND JOSEPH
CONRAD'S HEART OF DARKNESS



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Joseph Conrad had neither met Bram Stoker nor read *Dracula* (1897) before writing *Heart of Darkness*, originally serialised in *Blackwood's Magazine* a year and a half after the publication of Stoker's novel.¹ Nor did early or late reviewers notice any analogy between these two texts.² Other texts of the 'imperial Gothic' subgenre, to use the term Patrick Brantlinger first used,³ might seem to have closer links with *Heart of Darkness*, especially H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, published, like Conrad's novella, in 1898. Kurtz, like Ayesha and Dr. Moreau, reigns supreme over natives subordinated to their own barbaric exploitation of power. Brantlinger notes in reference to the autobiographical basis of *Heart of Darkness* that "in simplifying his memories and sources, Conrad arrived at the Manichean pattern of the imperialist adventure romance, a pattern radically at odds with any realistic exposé intention" (1988: 263).⁴ Still, he artificially separates Conrad from the authors in his list of imperial Gothic writers, which also includes Stoker, feeling a certain unease about classing Conrad with the fantasy writers. Yet the themes that Brantlinger identifies as the centre of this subgenre are also present in *Heart of Darkness*: individual regression (or, going native), the fear of the invasion of civilisation by the forces of barbarism or demonism, the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world and the Darwinian ideology of imperialism. Conrad seemingly differs from his peers only in his ignoring their interest in the occult and the supernatural.

The arbitrary separation between the canons of realism and fantasy has made Conrad appear as a rather isolated proto-Modernist paving the way for the flood of literary fiction on the British Empire that followed his own work and E.M. Forster's. Conrad did not move exactly in the same circles as Haggard, Stoker or Wells but he participated in debates on the underside of Victorianism, debates that involved them. He actually wrote for the same, still remarkably unfragmented, readership fond of adventure fiction,⁵ the popular reflection of Victorian imperialism. Both *Dracula* and *Heart of Darkness* can be said to invert the expectations of adventure fiction readers by offering a distressing collision with terror instead of the exhilaration of the encounter with the exotic in overtly imperialistic texts. Stoker's and Conrad's stories deal with the meaning of evil; in them, the horrific is closely associated with fears of masculine degradation brought about by contact with a foreign culture and is associated with a situation of invasion and of 'natural' or supernatural colonial conquest on different sides of the barrier. The effects of degradation are epitomised by a mythical man —Kurtz, Count Dracula— who cannot tell his civilised self from his barbaric persona. His problematic and foreign patriarchal masculinity is presented as a model threatening the stability of a younger Englishman, a representative of modern business, sent to meet him in his domain: the primal central African jungle or Transylvania, the land beyond the forest in the centro-European heart of darkness.

Despite their different uses of the supernatural, *Dracula* and *Heart of Darkness* clearly spring from a similar late Victorian cultural atmosphere. Both use a Gothic framework for their work which allows them to delve into the domain of evil while eluding the more controversial political implications of their mythical parables. Their common concerns —the problematic control of foreignness and Otherness, the status of Englishness, the tensions accruing about the central position of masculinity in modernity— are cast in narratives with remarkable points of coincidence. But this Gothic foundation is precisely what problematises a reading of these texts based on a narrow notion of their historical context or their literary status. These texts are new myths about modernity which spring from both ancestral and historical fears. Gothic, as David Punter notes, is not only a mode of revealing the unconscious and exploring the boundaries of the primitive, the barbaric and taboo, but also a "mode of history, a way of receiving an obscure past and interpreting it" (1980: 58).⁶ Abandoning the medievalising atmosphere of 18th century Gothic, late 19th century imperial Gothic interprets the present rather than the past.

surrounding them; their interpretation, though, rejects the rational notions of historiography and the realistic Victorian novel,⁷ preferring instead the intuition of other discourses that would articulate individual and collective life in the 20th century. For, if *Dracula* "seems frozen at the threshold between Victorian evolutionism and psychoanalysis" (Pick 1988: 72), which Freud would develop in the decade following the publication of Stoker's masterpiece, "the symbolic structure of *Heart of Darkness* illuminates Jung's theories years before he had articulated them" (Young 1982/83: 588).⁸ Kurtz and Dracula are, as Nina Auerbach says of the Count, less specters of the undead Victorian past than harbingers "of the world to come, a world that is our own" (1995: 63). They belong simultaneously to history and to the mythic subtexts that Gothic sustains alongside history.

Leaving aside Freud and Jung, for they would be part of another project, I want to focus here on the shift in masculinity at the turn of the century that Conrad and Stoker dramatise in their Gothic narratives, especially as regards the status of Englishness and the rejection of man's shadow or dark double. Their narratives reorganise this moment of chaos for a sympathetic audience. Conrad sees a way out of the horror in the attention of the male peers to whom he addresses his tale, the women being left aside. Stoker's relies, rather, on his heroine Mina to articulate the fragmented narrative of his characters' encounter with evil. Forcing her out of the women's too beautiful world (Marlow's words), Stoker makes Mina face the same dangers as the men around her; together, they can finally look forward to a brave new future symbolised by her baby son, a future conspicuously missing in *Heart of Darkness*.

I

Stoker and Conrad narrate similar descents into hell in which a young Englishman —Jonathan Harker, Marlow— is dispatched by a paternalistic employer to meet a foreign patriarch figure who rules a wild, remote country outside Western European civilisation.⁹ The journey marks for Marlow and Harker a rite of passage into the male domain of business, but also an awakening to a more mature, bitter reality that changes them for ever, especially as regards their view of themselves as men. The journey works as a test of manhood for them in which they must prove that faced with the

out his memories of the time spent in Dracula's castle. Marlow reluctantly forces himself to lie to Kurtz's Intended so as not to disclose the dubious rituals that took place in Kurtz's jungle feud and his own equivocal opinion of them.

Gothic narratives like Conrad's and Stoker's dramatise the beginnings of a slow change in patriarchal masculinity that has not run its full course. This is tied to the deconstruction of Empire and the resistance against its hypocritical ideology of domination. Conrad's Marlow is frank enough about this. At the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* he interrupts the narrator's imperialist reverie, in which the river Thames is said to have helped "the dreams of men, the seeds of commonwealth, the germs of Empire" (47),¹⁰ with his melancholy "and this has also been one of the dark places of Earth" (47). As the text moves forward, Marlow is heard mocking the "noble cause" (54) that inspires the Belgian colonisation of Congo; he has only words of condescension towards Kurtz, who, despite the admiration he elicits from others, is for Marlow "hollow at the core" (131). Conrad's intention, however, is not so much to dismiss the idea of Empire as a whole, as to condemn the colonisers who surrender to the temptation of abusing the power in their hands and, also, the hypocrisy about the actual materialistic ends of colonial exploitation. His narrative hints that Englishmen alone among the European colonisers are free from what he calls the fascination of the abomination. "What saves us", he tells his English colleagues, "is efficiency—the devotion of efficiency" (50). The efficiency of the English in the face of darkness and evil is also what Stoker endorses in *Dracula*. The Count is ultimately defeated because his "self-educated, gentle, ultimately 'amateurish' mastery of British ways cannot compete with the modern systematic data processing of the English" (Gagnier 1990: 151). The surrender to Dracula's empire is avoided just like Marlow avoids his own surrender to Kurtz's jungle, thanks to a self-reliance based on a staunch belief in the superiority of the civilised English man over the foreign civilised barbarian.

This superiority, though, is not as straightforward as it might seem. *Dracula* and *Heart of Darkness* bespeak clear signs of the loneliness and disorientation of modern man in the face of the dark side of the imperial, patriarchal models. The anxieties about masculinity present in Conrad's and Stoker's texts are anticipated by other late Victorian Gothic texts such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), which effect a view of masculinity split between the respectable man on the one and his dark twin, or shadow, the barbarian who must be rejected on the other. Jekyll and Gray show the limits of masculinity

but, specifically, in the respectable Victorian man. Through Moreau and Kurtz, Wells and Conrad use the same idea to question the moral and spiritual soundness of the male coloniser. Dracula, on his side, forces the men of England out of their complacency by seducing their women and threatening to destroy them. The only solution left to the men in Stoker's novel is to show themselves as they are, with all their weaknesses, before the women they are to protect.

The confrontation between man's dark and light sides is possibly as old as mankind, but its fictional representation enters a new cycle with the beginnings of Gothic fiction and the rise of the Gothic villain. Gothic indicates that the source of evil lies in human psychology, not in an external moral or religious agency. The issue of the human nature of evil becomes almost an obsession in late Victorian times due, among other factors, to the overwhelming impact of Darwinism on religious beliefs. Social Darwinism eased the anxieties of many by convincing them that western man—British man—was the summit of creation and that all the 'others' were inferior: objects of the curious gaze attuned to the charms of exoticism, of xenophobic hatred, of colonisation. Upholders of the British Empire subscribed to this view while hypocritically presenting it as the white man's civilising mission to save the Other from degradation. Crucial to an understanding of this obsession is the notion of degeneration, the fear that contact with 'inferior races' would reverse the evolutionary path of the white man, but also the fear that individual men losing their vitality to the attractions of unbridled sexuality would revert to a previous evolutionary stage, as seems to happen to Dr. Jekyll or Dorian Gray.¹¹ Victorian intellectuals such as Herbert Spencer spoke at the turn of the century of the "process of rebarbarisation" of British society,¹² which surely sprang from the self-consciousness of Britain's dominant position in the world and the fear of losing that privileged place in the sun.

David Punter notes that the problem of degeneration dramatised in late Victorian Gothic texts is formulated as a "question appropriate to an age of imperial decline: how much, they ask, can one lose—individually, socially, nationally—and still remain a 'man'? One could put the question much more brutally: to what extent can one be 'infected' and still remain British?" (1996: 1). The end of the 19th century is perceived as a moment of decline possibly not so much due to an actual loss of power as because it is felt that privileges cannot be enjoyed indefinitely. The question should be rephrased, then, as 'how much can one risk to maintain one's place as a privileged

also by women through sex, seems to have been a major obsession for turn-of-the-century men afraid of becoming less than men. Conrad and Stoker clearly perceived their contemporaries' anxiety about the limits between the civilised and the barbaric and their fears that the blurring of boundaries between man and animal, the rational and the irrational, the primitive and the modern, the centre and the margins, man and the New Woman would lead to a state of terminal degeneration for the 'race' and, specifically, for the men running the Empire.

Degeneration, however, is only part of the problem in these texts: after all, Kurtz and Dracula are true survivors who adapt very well to their new environments and who may appear thus to be fitter in the Darwinian sense than average men to carry out their 'mission'. As Marlow notes, communication with Kurtz was impossible because Marlow could appeal to nothing that made sense to him; instead, he had to "invoke him —himself— his own exalted and incredible degradation" (144). Late Victorian Gothic fiction reflects, thus, not only a fear of racial degeneration but also a secret fear that evolution may bring about a successful mixture of the civilised and the barbarian, that progress may prove to be in alliance with Kurtz's amoral, barbarian 'degradation' rather than halted by it. When a journalist tells Marlow that Kurtz could have been "a splendid leader of an extreme party", (145) any party, he seems to be drawing the portrait of someone who could be a forefather of 20th century Nietzschean fascism rather than the herald of impending racial involution. Dracula's conquest, which involves turning the English into an immortal, superior race of vampires, also seems to point to the fear that evolution, in this case away from death, may entail the paradoxical degradation of civilisation.

These fears have to do, specifically, with what "*Englishness* (that is, "Britishness") means. For English/British men see themselves in this period as the peak of civilisation and also as its most vulnerable manifestation—they seem to feel that the only way forward once the summit has been reached through the building of the British Empire is towards evil and chaos. Both *Dracula* and *Heart of Darkness* anticipate thus one of the central topics of 20th century Western culture: the discovery that the modernity of the Western world cannot hold at bay the archetypal darkness lying in ambush not beyond the margins of civilisation but at its very centre. Kurtz and Dracula epitomise the definitive failure of the Enlightenment project of the 18th century, which the original Gothic fiction set out to deconstruct. What Conrad and Stoker propose is that, as countless Gothic villains had hinted, the civilised man is the worst barbarian. And if Englishmen are the most civilised of all, they must also be in the greatest danger of becoming the

extremest barbarians. To exorcise this fear, the civilised barbarian is represented, as happens in these two texts, as the European Other, a European Other the more threatening because of his remarkable knowledge of English culture.

The means the European Other uses to communicate with the English man—Marlow or Harker—is the English language. Both Dracula and Kurtz are described as men gifted with an impressive, deep voice. Marlow remarks in his journey upriver that Kurtz's voice is his real destination, though we finally hear very little of Kurtz's wondrous speeches. The voice that Marlow so much yearns for, honours him nonetheless with its confidence because "it could speak English to me" (117). Kurtz, Marlow continues, "had been educated partly in England, and—as he was good enough to say himself—*his sympathies were in the right place*. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (117, *my italics*). To be precise, all of Western Europe. All of Eastern Europe, on the other hand, contributed to the making of Count Dracula, originally one of the warriors entrusted with the defence of Europe from the 'darkness' of Islam. The historical figure who inspired Stoker, the Wallachian fifteenth-century Prince Vlad Tepes, was a hero whose reputation had suffered because of his 'unsound methods', a frontier warrior defending the cause of the white man against the dark Islamic man. When Harker meets him Eastern Europe has been freed and has no place for him. The Count is then planning the conquest of England, not because England is an enemy but because he has fallen under the spell of English culture.

Harker expresses little admiration for Dracula's speeches but he is subjected to endless hours of conversation, lasting from dusk till dawn. In these the Count displays his impressive knowledge of Britain and uses Harker both to practise English and get rid of the foreign accent that troubles him so much, and to gather more information about the land he calls "my dear new country of England" (25).¹³ The Count reverses the method of Stoker's and Harker's research on Transylvania—both use the information on this land available from the British Museum Library¹⁴—constructing a mental picture of his idealised new home through books. The Count may well be the first 'Oriental' to deconstruct Western man's Orientalisation of Eastern Europe by using the white man's own tools, namely, texts. Just as Transylvania was a text and not an experience for Stoker, so England (Britain) is for Dracula, primarily, a text: "These friends"—and he laid his hands on some of the books—"have been good friends to me, and for some years past, ever since I had the idea of going to London, have given me many, many hours of

pleasure. Through them I have come to know your England; and to know her is to love her..." (20).

Conrad himself must have surely entertained similar thoughts. It would certainly be preposterous to suggest that Conrad and Dracula share exactly the same position as foreigners within English culture. Yet, when reading passages like this in which the Count eulogises the England of his books, no foreign student of English culture can help feeling in sympathy with him. The same happens when one learns of Conrad's titanic efforts to master the English language. Yet, little indeed has been made of Conrad's miraculous conversion to Englishness. Neither does Harker appreciate Dracula's sensitivity towards English culture—in fact, he fears it. This is because, as *Dracula* suggests, one of the consequences of the elaborate bureaucratic machinery of the British Empire was to get to know the Other, in which information was the first step towards manipulation and colonisation. The fear Stoker's novel dramatises is that this highly efficient system might be used against England itself; a fear that is hard to dispel despite the impressive example that Conrad himself provides of positive assimilation into English culture.

Kurtz moves to the heart of Africa from the core of civilised Europe, soon regressing to a state of barbaric bliss not unlike that enjoyed by Dracula in his own backward domain:

... the wilderness had found [Kurtz] 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 his great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. (131)

An abstract wilderness is made responsible for his fusion with the barbaric land—or rather with Kurtz's version of Africa as a barbaric land—in which he, nonetheless, wants to be still a master and not a slave. Dracula, himself a warrior representative of feudalism, a barbaric system of power that is dying if not undead, moves from the heart of darkness of central Europe—the *terra incognita* of Harker's incomplete British maps—to London, the centre of the very same civilised Europe that has created Kurtz. This exchange somehow restores the balance to a system of primitive savagery that has been disturbed by the modernity bred by European colonisation: Europe sends Kurtz on a dark civilising mission. Dracula is on his own mission.

Dracula vampirises Harker's persona and leaves him behind trapped in his castle, assuming his respectable male identity so as to travel in disguise to Britain and pretend that he is a respectable Englishman. Dracula wants to fuse with the people of England though he is apparently in two minds as to the status he seeks there:

But a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not—and to know not is to care not for. I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he sees me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words, to say, 'Ha, ha! a stranger!' I have been so long master that I would be master still—or at least that none other should be master of me... (20)

Looking down on the natives from a position of superiority (unlike Dracula, who looks up to the English) Kurtz succeeds where the Count fails because he mixes his professional mastery of colonialist ways with his indulgence in barbaric ways—though these result in his self-destruction. Kurtz may easily become 'African', which Marlow both abhors and understands. But what terrifies Stoker's Englishmen is that the barbaric Count may become 'English' at all. *Dracula* appeared in 1897, the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's coronation, her Jubilee Diamond Year. Leaving aside Stoker's unclear politics—as an Irishman who had worked for the British government in Dublin, he must have had a direct experience of the imperial machine—it seems safe to say that *Dracula* celebrates the integrity of Britain in the face of the foreign threat of invasion. This corresponds only partly to what Stephen D. Arata (1990) calls the anxiety of reverse colonisation. As Clive Leatherdale observes, Dracula's "objective, then, is to establish a contemporary empire in Britain, the fulfilment of which would be unwittingly assisted by British laws and customs" (1985: 109). Dracula does not want to impose a foreign culture on England, but rather to use English culture to dominate Britain and turn the English into his slaves. *Dracula* supports thus the xenophobic view that those who surrender to the charms of British/English culture may want to appropriate it for themselves, corrupting it, and then claim power as the new masters of England/Britain. Yet, Stoker's story about how the invulnerability of Victorian England is only saved by the perspicacity of a foreigner, the Dutch Van Helsing, may have well been written tongue in cheek. Stoker himself was, as has been noted, not English but Irish and had entered English culture from the margins.

to counteract the pull of his vampiric foreignness and so he must be destroyed. Victorian English civilisation appears to be an exclusive club rather than a model of integration or a model to be exported. Pericles Lewis reads *Heart of Darkness* from this point of view, arguing that in it Conrad "who would like to believe that he, a stateless Pole, has successfully become an Englishman, [...] expresses a profound scepticism about whether Africans—or even Belgians or Frenchmen— can do the same" (1998: 244). Or Transylvanians and Irishmen, for that matter. Stoker and Conrad were both migrant writers who chose England as their new home and who through their texts tried to out-English the English. Count Dracula may even be seen as Conrad's dark double. Conrad's native Poland had itself risen to its historic role defending Europe from the infidels coming from the East, just as Vlad Tepes' Wallachia had done. Like Dracula, Conrad came from eastern Europe and was fascinated by England's allure; he struggled to become not only a British subject (just what Dracula wishes) but also an English writer, even though English was the second foreign language he learnt.

Conrad was, so to speak, an exceptionally gifted, vampiric writer, drawing literary nourishment from a language that was not even his own, a point which is often stressed by unkind literary critics. Even staunch defenders of Conrad like Ian Watt have insisted that "Conrad's speech immediately identified him as a foreigner. Nor did Conrad's written English ever wholly free itself from Polish and French influences in vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical style" (Watt 1980: 21). A carnivalesque image of Conrad in Dracula's garb may spring from this characterisation: this Conrad who never lost his thick Polish accent recalls Count Dracula, who never quite loses his Romanian accent. Watt observes that Conrad would rather keep quiet than explain to the uninitiated the historical and national roots of his identity as a human being, for he felt he was always misunderstood. Even admirers such as H.G. Wells and Edward Garnett "would tend to call his politeness Oriental, and his soul Slav, and thus in either case mortify Conrad by outraging the Western allegiance which is at the heart of the Polish sense of national identity" (Watt: 9). Both Conrad and Dracula understand that they cannot expect the English to respect them for what they are and so they try to master Englishness as the key to becoming 'one of us'. Through Marlow, his English alter ego, Conrad rejects Kurtz's unsound 'European' methods in the name of English 'efficiency'. Stoker, the Irishman, sides with the English in the defeat of the European Other, helping re-inforce the idea that the English and the civilisation of the British Empire will not succumb to the degeneracy that threatens to invade them.

Heart of Darkness is, clearly, much more problematic than *Dracula* as to its political positioning. As a Pole, Conrad knew much about the horrors of imperialism, having witnessed the subjection of his native land to Russia. However, the politics of *Heart of Darkness* are unclear. Marlow says at the beginning of his tale that "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (50) but he does not really look into it too much, immersed as he is in narrating Kurtz's personal fall. In Conrad's case this hesitation between the artistic, moral discourse and the political denunciation can be explained by his own ambivalence as a British citizen of Polish origins, which resulted in his inability to openly criticise the imperialism of the land that received him (Spittles 1992: 88). Stoker could speak about the fears of reverse colonisation to Queen Victoria's triumphant England without questioning at all England's (Britain's) position as a world power. It seems right for the Crew of Light not only to expel Dracula from England but also to chase him back to Transylvania and kill him in his own land, as if British justice could and should be meted out anywhere in the world. Conrad, however, could not voice the ugly truths of English colonialism except in a circuitous way. This is why the Gothic framework is so useful for him. He could still present the conflict between good and evil and question the ways in which Kurtz was a villain or a hero, the embodiment of civilisation or barbarism, but he needn't define his politics—it was enough to suggest, as most Gothic fiction did at the time, that the difference between good and evil was becoming more and more blurred and had more to do with the moral mistakes of particular men than with politics. Stoker simply appealed to a more basic jingoistic stance.

When contrasting their texts, the irony that emerges is that while imperialist, Western, Victorian Britain proclaims her triumph over the Oriental, monstrous Dracula, Europe manages to neutralise Kurtz, a much more dangerous monster than the Count, only through the accident of his illness and death. Dracula's power to threaten Britain is a sign of the contradiction inherent in late Victorian modernity between the rationalism of modernity and the irrationality of its uses: the function of his destruction is to reinforce the self-esteem of the civilised men who vanquish him and who represent the forces of civilisation. They succeed but at a high cost that entails the peace of mind of some, the lives of others—significantly, a woman, Lucy, and the American Quincy Morris, a good representative of the rough American masculinity that Stoker seemingly feared as a threat to the superiority of English masculinity. The threat posed by Kurtz is much more insidious: he is not an outsider but one of the European men carrying

civilisation to the heart of barbaric Africa. His failure and his lapse into barbarism are a mirror held up to Europe's colonialism rather than to Africa's alleged barbarism.¹⁵ His seeing the horror, which Marlow regards as a moral triumph but also as a warning Englishmen must heed, undoes the victory achieved by the civilised men who kill Dracula and who naively believe that by killing the Count the horror and the monstrous men they themselves may become are under control.

II

The crippling encounter with darkness in the forest of Transylvania and the jungles of Congo leaves Harker and Marlow unable to fully articulate their tale for a long time, out of fear of what it might say about them as civilised Englishmen. Marlow finally tells his tale to his audience of business colleagues in the safety of civilised London,¹⁶ where he lives after his Congo adventure. This is, however, the same London Dracula is planning to invade practically while Marlow speaks. The invasion is the horror Harker faces in his own English home, as the Count stalks and preys on Harker's wife Mina. It is to her that Harker entrusts his testimony of what he saw in Dracula's castle, convinced that only this respectable English woman can help him regain his mental balance. Marlow, apparently a single man, prefers the attentive audience of his male peers—who, he says, are linked by the bond of the sea—to cure the wounds the jungle left in his soul. No woman can help him, for, in Marlow's view, only a few chosen men can make sense of his experience.

Johanna Smith maintains that twin colonising ideologies of Empire and gender operate in Conrad's text (1996: 169). Smith argues that Marlow's tale seeks to silence—colonise and pacify—both woman and the darkness of Kurtz's Africa. In *Dracula*, there is also a link between the ideologies of gender and Empire. In this narrative of subtle invasion, the women (Lucy, Mina) symbolise a feminised Britain vulnerable to unconventional penetration by the invading Count. The men who protect them—literally winning their right to penetrate their women in a conventional way—must fight the Count's ability to turn the women into monstrous doubles of the respectable women they control. However, there is not a single unified misogynist front here, but a fragmented structure, too deeply

the prevalence of masculine values, but it is not the main focus of *Dracula*. Likewise, *Heart of Darkness* addresses only secondarily the issue of the position of women, focusing primarily on a deep conflict in man's view of himself.

Marlow has no particular reason to reorder his experiences for his listeners at that moment in his life, except perhaps his need to understand how they have contributed to making him the man he is. Harker, rendered metaphorically if not literally impotent by his experience of the horror, pours his feelings into his journal which he eventually hands over to his wife Mina. Kurtz's death reconciles Marlow with his own barbaric self, though his newly-found masculine self-confidence—built in opposition to the wishes of the Company's men to control the legacy Kurtz has left him—falters before the Intended's feminine notions of what a triumphant man is. In contrast, the nightmare so vividly recorded in Harker's diary—except, significantly, for the month he spends alone with the three vampire brides—opens a gap in Harker's sense of his own masculinity that only his wife, Mina, as his proper audience, can heal. Two main points separate Harker from Marlow here: first, Harker is forced to have sexual contact with the savage women of Dracula's castle whereas Marlow never interacts with the natives nor participates in Kurtz's dark rites—or so he claims; second, Harker is loyal to his fiancée and later wife Mina, while Marlow remains ambiguously loyal to Kurtz's memory. Dracula is pure evil and so cannot expect to elicit any kind of loyalty, except from madmen like Renfield. The moral victory that Kurtz wins in Marlow's eyes when he sees the horror in his own soul, earns him Marlow's respect, if not downright admiration.

Both Stoker and Conrad narrate an ambiguous quadrangular confrontation involving the young traveller, the wild man, and two kinds of woman: one a barbarian clearly associated with a wild type of sexuality, the other a respectable woman associated with conventional sexuality and marriage. In *Heart of Darkness*, the wild scream uttered by Kurtz's black mistress before Marlow's astonished eyes signals the transfer of her claims from Kurtz's body and soul to Marlow's. He has to account, though, for Kurtz's soul (his last words) and body (how he died) to the Intended, the respectable woman Kurtz never married. The struggle to possess Kurtz, the man, is won by none of these three people, but it seems obvious that the Kurtz loved by the anonymous African woman is closer to the real man—to the man Kurtz knows he has become when he cries out 'the horror'—than to the idealised man loved by the also nameless European woman waiting for his return to

gets Mina to retrieve him from the Transylvanian heart of darkness to marry him immediately. Mina's discreet femininity is expected to erase from Harker's mind the memory of the female "devils of the Pit" (53) that held him in thrall.

Harker saves English civilisation and his sanity by trusting his patient bride Mina with the narrative of his ordeal as he recorded it in his self-censored diary. The ultimate threshold he cannot cross if he is still to regard himself as a proper, civilised man is to narrate his ordeal to her by word of mouth. In his view of marriage, trust is essential, but when he hands his journal over to Mina he selfishly places a heavy burden on her shoulders:

The secret is here, and I do not want to know it. I want to take up my life here, with our marriage... Are you willing, Wilhelmina, to share my ignorance? Here is the book. Take it and keep it, read it if you will, but never let me know; unless, indeed, some solemn duty should come upon me to go back to the bitter hours, asleep or awake, sane or mad, recorded here. (104)

Mina is given the diary when Harker recognises the Count in the streets of London and feels unable to go on keeping his secrets to himself. When Van Helsing attests to the truth of what Harker wrote and Mina reads, they are ready to face the Count's threat together. Harker's hysteria is balanced thus by Mina's determination to stand by him: "*my belief in him*", she writes, "helps him to have a belief in himself" (157, italics in the text). In this scheme of things, though, there is no opportunity for Mina to unburden her own misery and fear onto her husband. She stands surrounded and aided by the men while Dracula's attacks persist, but she is fundamentally alone. Her voice is heard through her journals but, almost magically, she never wavers, she never hesitates, she never cringes before the reality of evil, she never ceases to comfort the men.

Homosocial bonding as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes it (1985), is present in *Dracula*, but in this novel the men's bonding through woman's body is split into two phases. The men bond first through their pouring of blood into Lucy's veins and, later, through their joint dismembering of Lucy's undead body, a scene tinged with all the possible sexist horrors. But they realise that they can only truly bond positively through Mina if they are to defeat evil. When a hysterical Arthur collapses after participating in the grisly ceremony performed on his bride's body, Mina comforts him. "I suppose", she writes in her journal "there is something in woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory for his manhood"

(229). She identifies this 'something' with mothering instincts: it is easy for her to see adult men as children. Initially, Mina is involved in the struggle against Dracula because of her friendship with Lucy and the engagement to Harker and her efficiency as a secretary. But, in fact, the men need above all her ability to bring out the feelings of men. Yet, their false sense of chivalry endangers her. Wanting to protect her, they deny her participation in their meetings to decide how to stop Dracula; it is in this isolation that the Count finds and attacks her. This has often been read as a literal attack against women's freedom but it would be more accurate to say that woman is trapped in the confrontation between different types of masculinity struggling to stay in control.

Mina is forced to participate in the confrontation between the split sides of man, the barbaric and the civilised, leaving aside her own interests as a woman, but she is, at least, very far from the false idealism of Kurtz's Intended. When she reads her husband's diary all she can think of is how she can help Jonathan overcome his "nervousness" and "ask him questions and find out things, and see how I may comfort him" (179) —for that will also revert in her own safety and happiness. Unlike Kurtz's Intended, who —we sense— would be totally incapable of understanding Marlow's discourse were he to tell the truth, Mina is in a privileged position, for men are less afraid to show her their fears and their darkest side, relying on her sensibility to discriminate between the wrong and the right sides of masculinity. She can understand and help Harker because she knows the truth in all its details, even down to what Harker cannot bring himself to say, whereas Marlow finds neither consolation nor sympathy in the Intended. Stoker is more modern than Conrad in this, as he involves woman in man's struggle, though he cannot imagine, either, how women can cope with the intrusion of the horror caused by men into that 'beautiful world' they are supposed to inhabit.

Marlow will not trust Kurtz's bride with the secret of her fiancé's terrible behaviour in Africa, telling his listeners that "to this day I don't know why I was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience" (144). Marlow's sense of decorum turns out to be much more overwhelming than Harker's sense of shame but it is also bounded by this strange possessiveness about Kurtz. After having had time to meditate on and edit out his experience of the Congo, Marlow still lies to Kurtz's Intended, allowing the perpetuation of a monstrous fiction, namely, that Kurtz never strayed from the path of civilisation. This lie springs not so much from his failure to invoke any faith in the name of which to challenge the Intended's false ideals (Watt: 249) but rather from his doubts about himself. Marlow claims at the beginning of his narrative that there is nothing he hates more


than a lie. He lies apparently to preserve the Intended's ideal world, but he also lies to preserve his own memories of Kurtz and, above all, of himself.

Despite his dislike of the Intended's false view of Kurtz, he genuinely seems to believe that women should provide a haven for men: "They —the women I mean— are out of it —should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, *lest ours gets worse*" (115, my italics). This position is not without its contradictions, for the need to protect women for selfish reasons also makes men hate them, precisely because women needn't face the horrors men face. When lying to the Intended, Marlow acts out of both motivations, protectiveness and hatred. He 'must' protect her from the truth, but hates her for it. This leads him to rob her of the authority to narrate the tale of Kurtz's death, which he passes on to his male peers, circumventing her —the woman who, he feels, cannot even imagine what he understands about Kurtz. But the exclusion of woman also hints at something in Marlow himself that cannot be disclosed: telling the truth about Kurtz is also telling the truth about himself, and he needs the Intended's false world more for his own sake than for Kurtz's. Explaining to his male audience why he had to go through the ordeal of looking into Kurtz's mad soul Marlow concludes that it must have been "for my sins, I suppose" (144); sins left untold at the end of the tale. It is not so hard to see, though, that Marlow's never being really horrified by Kurtz as Harker is by Dracula must be taken as a sign not so much of the strength of his civilised values as of his being in touch with the darkness in his own soul. Harker can tell Mina the truth because he reacts to evil in the 'appropriate' way. Marlow's ambiguity concerning Kurtz's strange death would certainly tell the Intended too much about himself. When he speaks about the savage noises made by the wild men in the jungle he acknowledges that "if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of response to the terrible frankness of that noise" (115). And this is what, ultimately, *Heart of Darkness* is about: Marlow's responding to the wild noise in Kurtz's soul. And this is what, finally, woman is not told.

As Van Helsing's closing remarks note, the real recipient of *Dracula's* fragmented narrative is Mina and Harker's son. This boy, born on the anniversary of the Count's defeat, bears the names of all the men in the league against Dracula but is known by them as Quincey in memory of the American man killed in the final fight. "This boy", Van Helsing says "will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on, he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (378). Perhaps not so much for her sake as for their sake, and at the cost of killing off her wilder

sister Lucy. Yet, there is at least the promise of a New Man in this boy who is to be brought up by a man and a woman sharing the same memories of darkness and, above all, a fundamental trust in each other. Conrad's novella, unclear in its intention even for Marlow himself, offers no solution as to how the radical separation between men and women may be bridged, despite the fact that it clearly presents the role played by the lies between men and women in the monstrous perpetuation of the model of heroic masculinity the Intended worships in Kurtz. Marlow may convince other men to abandon their beliefs in the lies of men's dangerous dreams, but no New Man is likely to be born out of their bonding.

The comparison of texts as apparently diverse as *Dracula* and *Heart of Darkness* reveals the extent to which the sub-genre of the imperial Gothic cuts across the canons of the literary and the popular. It also reveals that these masterpieces articulate common concerns springing from a similar cultural background, crystallising around the date of Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. Conrad's and Stoker's texts respond, essentially, to anxieties about the privileged position of British masculinity beset then by fears of personal (i.e., sexual), racial and imperial degeneration. They reflect man's attempt to ease his anxieties by symbolically rejecting his shadow, the unwanted Other. The civilised barbarian at the centre of Conrad's and Stoker's narratives —Kurtz, Dracula— is an ambiguous patriarchal monster used as scapegoat in narratives that regenerate the discourse on the masculinity proper to the Englishman. This regeneration, however, is not without its tensions. The superiority of the Englishman over the foreign civilised barbarian is endorsed by writers who are not themselves English: Stoker's Irishness and Conrad's cultural and political allegiances as an immigrant Pole, naturalised British, problematise their defence of English masculinity. Seemingly seeking to reinforce their own position within English culture, Conrad has Marlow dismiss Kurtz's corrupt colonising project, while Stoker sides with the English in the defeat of count Dracula in his own Transylvanian domain. Both Conrad and Stoker write from a position that, without being necessarily misogynist, clearly ignores women's concerns. Where they most diverge, though, is in the different solutions they give to the problem of women's positioning in the face of the rejection of man's dark double. Stoker chooses to include women in the confrontation with the evil Dracula, focusing on Mina as the proper model of sympathetic woman who can selflessly aid man in his search for a new stability. Her own needs are left aside, but she fully participates in the defeat of the monster and in the construction of a future for herself, her husband and their son —the New Man to be born. For his part, Conrad excludes the women from Marlow's audience, arguing that woman

should be protected from the presence of moral horror. In fact, this exclusion forces man to lie—the sin Marlow most abhors—perpetuating the false world women live in, but also man's false, dubious position regarding the civilised barbarian. The bonding of men—Stoker's Crew of Light, Conrad's circle of friends—may momentarily suffice to overcome the horror of meeting the civilised barbarian, but it may not be enough, as Stoker suggests through Mina's motherhood, to ensure the birth of the New Man and the renewal of masculinity for the 20th century. This is a process that the texts by Stoker and Conrad dramatise in its early stages but for which they can find no definitive closure. 

NOTES

¹ There is no mention of either *Dracula* or Stoker in Conrad's own meticulous reading notes (see Knowles 1989).

² See Sherry (1973) for a complete collection of these reviews.

³ He first used the phrase for Chapter 8, "Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult in the British Adventure Novel 1880-1914" of his book *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914* (1988).

⁴ Between June and December 1890 Conrad was employed by the Société Anonyme Belge pour le commerce du Haut Congo. His traumatic experiences in Africa formed the autobiographical basis of *Heart of Darkness*.

⁵ See White (1995). Despite the fact that we now regard Stoker as a popular writer and Conrad as a literary writer, in fact, "Conrad's main concern—obsession would hardly be an exaggeration—was to attract a large enough share of the reading public to enable him to become financially secure" (Watt 1980: 42), something he achieved with *Chance* (1913). *Dracula* gave Stoker no money and no reputation and he was fortunate that his job as manager of Henry Irving's Lyceum in London could support him.

⁶ There is no need for Gothic to use supernatural elements, even though most Gothic fiction is also fantasy of one type or another. Gothic is, more generically, any type of fiction that explores the dark side of humankind with a special emphasis on the appeal of evil from a perspective for which realism is not essential.

⁷ Shades of Darwin have been found in both texts, though. See Knowles (1994) for a discussion of the parallels between Conrad and Schopenhauer and Shaffer (1993) for those between Conrad and Herbert Spencer.

⁸ Young argues that "Carl Jung's African journey [in 1925 to Mombassa] led him to formulate his theories of the collective unconscious" (1982/83: 586); Pick, however, argues that the transition from the late Victorian intuition of the depths of human psychology as expressed in the literary use of pseudo-myth to the science of psychology was over by 1905, when Freud published *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.

⁹ *Dracula* might be regarded rather as a pre-patriarchal primordial sadistic father. But it is important to notice that in the novel he has a place within the feudal, patriarchal system of his country. Despite being immortal he belongs at the same time to history.

¹⁰ I am quoting from the 1984 edition of *Heart of Darkness* in *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether* by Oxford University Press.

¹¹ Medical theories supported the idea that man lost vital fluids he had in limited supply every time he engaged in sexual intercourse. Since semen was supposed to be the same type of matter that made up the brain, it is easy to see this must have caused anxiety to countless men, who responded by demonising sexuality and woman with it. The female vampire and the later screen vamp emerge from this context. See Dijkstra (1996).

¹² In *Facts and Comments* (1902), quoted in Shaffer (1993: 50).

¹³ I am quoting from the 1983 edition of *Dracula* by Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Stoker never visited Transylvania, which he reconstructed from travelogue descriptions (Gelder 1994: 3).

¹⁵ See Achebe (1978), and Zhuwarata (1994) for an African evaluation of Conrad's alleged racist colonialism.

¹⁶ The anonymous Director of Companies, Lawyer, and Accountant, together with the frame narrator listen to Marlow's tale. In *Dracula* Harker is accompanied in his adventure by Dr. Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, Lord Godalming and Quincey Morris—forming another group of five men. They finally see, though, that Mina cannot be left aside.

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