

“To make you see”: Narrating identity, gender, and empire in *The Good Soldier* and *Heart of Darkness*

Uncertainty about the “real” is a characteristic undercurrent in any Impressionist novel as the traditional omniscient narrator is cast away and the subjectivity of the character becomes the hazy center of meaning. From this quality of ambivalence and open-endedness emerges the enchanting moral complexity of *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *The Good Soldier* by Ford Madox Ford. Yet despite the novelists’ refusal to explicitly make a singular moral or political judgment about their narrators, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Good Soldier* are anything but apolitical. Critics who have accused the Impressionists of focusing so intently on the mystery and contradiction of their characters’ minds that they evade moral and political judgments and, as Patrick Brantlinger argues, “threaten to submerge or ‘derealize’ the critique of empire within their own more strictly aesthetic project,” have profoundly misunderstood the political intentions inherent in Ford and Conrad’s artistic conventions (388). Even Ian Watt’s claim that “the classic status of *Heart of Darkness* probably depends less on the prophetic nature of Conrad’s ideas than on its new formal elements” assumes an artificial separation between technique and content that ignores the authors’ reasons for using these Impressionist elements (349-350). After all, as Conrad famously declares in the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see!* That—and no more: and it is everything! If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand; and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask (281).

Rather than dodging moral judgment, Ford and Conrad use Impressionism to reveal the processes by which political thought can be created and reinforced at an individual level.

Friends and literary collaborators for nearly a decade, the mutual influence of Ford and Conrad stands out in the Impressionist technique they developed together and in their focused attention to narrative. As Ford explains rather simply, “we agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind” (*Remembrance* 192).

Impressionism thus functions for the two authors as a form of psychic realism: “We saw that life

did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render impressions" (*Remembrance* 194-195). As artists, Ford and Conrad were deeply committed to portraying the processes of the human mind, in all its contradiction, revisions, vagueness, self-deception, and inconclusiveness, in order to create "a sense of the complexity, the tantalization, the shimmering, the haze, that life is" (*Remembrance* 204). Their Impressionist technique examines the mental conditions through which events are understood, filtering reality through "a field of vision which is not merely limited to the individual observer, but is also controlled by whatever conditions—internal and external—prevail at the moment of observation" (Watt 357). The novelists' careful examination of the means through which their narrators make sense of their surroundings includes an illuminating look at Marlow and Dowell's relationships to their cultural environment.

In any Impressionist work, the flawed, idiosyncratic, and highly subjective consciousness of each narrator is the reader's only basis of reality within the narrative frame, but to equate narrative subjectivity with a kind of moral nihilism requires a leap that neither Ford nor Conrad intended.¹ Such an oversimplification of the two authors' stated artistic endeavor overlooks the political focus of each novel. In the Impressionist technique that the Conrad and Ford employ in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Good Soldier*, the most important objective of their scrutiny of individual consciousness is their narrators' navigation of their cultural surroundings. Both narrators inhabit a cultural climate saturated with the values of imperialism, which were inextricably bound to a socially constructed paradigm of masculinity. Through the adventure tales and romance stories the public devoured, the lofty rhetoric trumpeted by the press, and the unspoken rules of conduct controlling English speech, imperialist constructs are both formed and spread through language, a mechanism that both Ford and Conrad understood.

In fact, some of the most convincing evidence of the political motives that inform the two authors' narrative technique appears in their keen awareness of the power of words to shape political sentiment. In his nonfiction work *Spirit of the People*, for example, Ford characterizes the English as an unreflective people who, in an obsessive adherence to proper conduct and speech, refuse to articulate or recognize horror.² He argues that this tendency lends them "the faculty of ignoring the most terrible of facts" and renders them capable of immense cruelty both at the individual and political level (*Spirit* 298). Ford expresses frustration and alarm that polite society strictly forbids any discussion of serious matters, including "religious topics; questions of the relations of the sexes; the conditions of poverty-stricken districts" and any other subject that could potentially arouse the emotions (*Spirit* 336). He implies that this control of language is an epistemic effort to control one's environment: "[The Englishman] hides from himself the fact that there are in the world greed, poverty, hunger, lust or evil passions... He prefers, therefore, to say—and to hypnotise himself into believing—that the world is a very good—an all-good—place" (*Spirit* 335). Thus, Ford contends, the Englishman chooses to ignore the horrific realities of the imperial mission: "he would prefer to believe that such people as the officials of the Congo Free State do not really exist in the modern world. People, he will say, do not do such things" (*Spirit* 335). Ford's scathing criticism of this willful blindness implicates each individual as a blameworthy participant in imperial violence; he unambiguously pronounces "every voter in this country... directly responsible" for the British government's passive acceptance of the atrocities committed by Leopold II in the Belgian Congo (*Spirit* 333).

Conrad voices similar concerns about the power of words to mold political thought; his own misgivings appear most obviously in his criticism of the press. Scott A. Cohen explains that regardless of Conrad's decidedly complex views towards imperialism, it is evident from much of his early fiction that "when it came to jingoistic rhetoric and its popular dissemination, there can be no uncertainty about his distaste" (50). Indeed, Conrad scorns the "cold, silent, colourless

print of books and newspapers," a thriving industry to which he admittedly contributes, for propagating the sensationalism and inadequate truths that Marlow derisively calls the "rot let loose in print and talk at that time" ("Autocracy" 85, *Heart* 12). Observing a multitude of uncritical readers, Conrad, like Ford, underscores a blind acceptance of a national narrative. Noting the frequency with which misinformation has "appeared gravely in print," Conrad remarks that

if [this misinformation has] been gravely considered by only one reader out of each hundred, there must be something subtly noxious to the human brain in the composition of newspaper ink; or else it is that the large page, the columns of words, the leaded headings, exalt the mind into a state of feverish credulity. The printed page of the Press makes a sort of still uproar, taking from men both the power to reflect and the faculty of genuine feeling; leaving them only the artificially created need of having something exciting to talk about ("Autocracy" 90).

Conrad's assertion that the "feverish" adoption of this fabricated narrative destroys "both the power to reflect and the faculty of genuine feeling" reiterates Ford's argument that the English public's verbal propriety inhibits critical thinking and compassion: "he is not analytical—and no person can be sympathetic who is wanting in the faculty of analysis. He may be kind, he may be genial, he may be the pleasantest of company generally, but he will not have the gift of sympathy" (*Spirit* 350).

Similarly, the impact of popular literature on public sentiment eluded neither Ford nor Conrad. Ford classifies the traditional Victorian "novel of commerce," which he mockingly dubs "The English Nuvvle," as "combined—and no doubt unconscious—socio-political propaganda" that championed English gentility as "a world ideal" (*English Novel* 124, 105). Granted, Conrad's view of adventure fiction is more sympathetic than Ford's; however, even when Conrad assumes a somewhat laudatory stance toward Frederick Marryat's popular sea tales, his appraisal of "the beginning and embodiment of an inspiring tradition" that "has affected the destinies of nations" nevertheless proves his acute awareness of the genre's propagandistic potential ("Tales" 56). Furthermore, Conrad quickly clarifies that Marryat's fiction, however influential as myth, is not

art: "To the artist his work is interesting as a completely successful expression of an unartistic nature" (56). He respects its authority as "national story or... an historical document" (56), but also notes its estrangement from the realm of art in form and content.³ Ford recalls Conrad's lifelong resistance to being lumped into the same literary genre as Marryat and his constant indignation at his own reputation as a writer of the sea (*Portraits* 57). Conrad calls Marryat "the enslaver of youth," recognizing the seductive appeal of the adventure tale's imperial mythology: "To his young heroes the beginning of life is a splendid and warlike lark, ending at last in inheritance and marriage" ("Tales" 56). Like Conrad, Ford criticizes the narrative pattern in which "a central character with an attendant female should be followed through a certain space of time until the book comes to a happy end on a note of matrimony or to an unhappy end—represented by a death" as "the normal practice of the earlier novelist and still the normal expedient of the novel of commerce or of escape" rather than a valid artistic endeavor (*English Novel* 126, 124).

Impressionism interrogates various facets of Victorian imperial ideology inherent in the traditional narrative forms described above. Challenging established literary conventions destabilizes the dominant cultural paradigms they uphold. Specifically, dividing the world into pairs of polarized opposites such as "good versus evil, civilization versus savagery, West versus East, light versus darkness, white versus black" is vital to the "racism and authoritarianism that inform imperialist ideology" (Brantlinger 388). The Impressionist technique Ford and Conrad developed allowed them to reject these strict ideological categories, abandoning the rigid moralizing of an omniscient narrator and embracing narrative uncertainty in order to provoke deeper questioning from a reading public that they considered dangerously intolerant of unanswered questions. Conrad affirms this aim in a letter to *The New York Times* "Saturday Review"⁴:

The business of a work striving to be art is not to teach or to prophesy (as we have been charged, on this side, with attempting,) nor yet to pronounce a definite conclusion.... in the sphere of an art dealing with a subject matter whose

origin and end are alike unknown there is no possible conclusion. The only indisputable truth of life is our ignorance" (296-297).

Conrad's aversion to inventing a "definite conclusion" and his denial of any "indisputable truth" beyond the reality of human ignorance betray a serious suspicion of established cultural constructs as adequate representations of human experience. Ford's account of their shared technique explicitly identifies these "definite conclusions" as the stuff of propaganda and further champions written art as a means to question mainstream thinking:

We agreed that the novel is absolutely the only vehicle for the thought of our day. With the novel you can do anything; you can inquire into every department of life, you can explore every department of the world of thought. The one thing that you can not do is to propagandise, as author, for any cause. You must not, as author, utter any views; above all, you must not fake any events (*Remembrance* 222).

Withholding their own "views" to render rather than tell often requires the novelists to imitate conventional rhetoric in order to expose its hypocrisy and its uncomfortably seductive power. Their devoted rendering of their narrators' subjective consciousness brings to life the narrative performance through which an individual navigates his or her sense of identity in relation to Victorian imperial ideology.

One such performance that Ford and Conrad document through the subjective voices of their narrators is the process of gendering. Gender was highly political in the age of imperialism; inseparably intertwined in the dominant ideological construct of empire, particularly in popular literature, is the Victorian notion of masculinity. Given that our current understanding of the performative aspect of gender did not exist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Ford and Conrad exhibit a surprising grasp of gender's role in the politics of their day.⁵ Their fiction also displays an awareness of the function of narrative in an individual's conception of masculinity:

Joseph Conrad does acknowledge the crucial role of adventure literature in the formation of masculine codes. In Conrad this masculine formation process is a crucial focus of his texts. However, Conrad indicates that the interrogation of masculine codes is as important as the processes of imprinting (Kestner 1).

Since the concept of gender represents an intersection of the personal and the political, the performance of gender is a particularly visible case of the narrative process through which an individual makes sense of his or her environment and configures his or her identity. The Impressionist technique that Ford and Conrad employ illustrates the mental processes through which their narrators negotiate a sense of self in relation to the cultural construct of imperialist masculinity.

To view the Impressionism in these two works as a purely aesthetic technique is to disregard the authors' committed investigation into the role of narrative in the creation of identity and empire, for *Heart of Darkness* and *The Good Soldier* are as much about storytelling as they are about the stories themselves. Given the authors' collaboration, their outspoken disapproval of the colonial mission, and the similarity of their technique, the scarcity of criticism comparing the two works' attention to the political impact of narrative is surprising. Indeed, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Good Soldier* explore narrative, identity, and empire in fairly similar ways. For Marlow and Dowell, narrative is a quest for identity, a grappling for security in a setting at once foreign, threatening, and alluring. Their unfamiliar environments throw their comfortable worldviews into question, plunging them into a state of epistemological uncertainty and masculine crisis. Marlow and Dowell respond to this confusion by imitating traditional Victorian narrative conventions, each casting himself as the traditional androcentric narrator who possesses complete control over his story. Conventional Victorian stories, particularly the adventure tales that Conrad's work so closely echoes, heavily rely on intimate male friendships and center on heroic missions of conquest; female voices, on the other hand, are conspicuously absent. In *The Good Soldier* and *Heart of Darkness*, each narrator tries to assert his narrative authority by identifying with a dominant, conventionally masculine character that he idolizes as the pinnacle of civilized European society; simultaneously, he tries to suppress the voices of gendered "others" onto whom he projects his own guilt and sense of powerlessness. In both novels, the most powerful characters exhibit their dominance primarily through their command

of language, and the narrators' struggles to conquer their own narratives represent their attempts to maintain control over their destinies, which are, in fact, largely at the mercy of those whose voices they wish to silence. In other words, language itself is often a weapon of conquest in these two works. The narrators' loyalty to eloquent, conventional characters proves their conformity and thus their complicity in the cruelty and horror that their idols' rhetoric masks. By extension, the degree to which the reader is seduced by Marlow and Dowell's narrative techniques implies a similar culpability. Through the narrators' flawed, illogical, yet often oddly persuasive assessments, Ford and Conrad not only provide insight into the processes of delusion, rationalization, and distortion through which all individuals make sense of their surroundings; they also critique the narrative conventions and Victorian imperial ideology of which Marlow and Dowell are products. In *Heart of Darkness* and *The Good Soldier*, the narrators' subjective voices provide insight into the often-irrational processes by which the identity of an individual and of a civilization are constructed through the stories they tell about themselves.

NARRATIVE AS A PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY

For Marlow and Dowell, narrative is performative; the two narrators treat their storytelling as a personal act of identity formation and assertion. Karen Hoffman considers Dowell's narrative "a performance of his identity in the present" (32). As Sarah Henstra elaborates, Dowell's characteristically English performance is not simply a façade that conceals the true self; rather, one's role becomes so entwined with one's identity that the two become inseparable:

Rather than urging the English to recognize that public masks conceal true identities, Ford's wider project in stripping the wool from Dowell's eyes is to demonstrate the circularity of the performance/soul equation: public behavior associated with Englishness continually reasserts and reinscribes a core English identity that it simultaneously posits as the source or origin of English behavior (181).

In other words, through Dowell, Ford reveals that the identity of the English is determined by the performance of what is or is not articulated; to Dowell and other characters in *The Good*

Soldier, putting something into words is what makes it real. Although *Heart of Darkness* focuses less fixedly on the difference between seeming and being with which Dowell so fiercely wrestles, Marlow, too, tries to define both his identity and his reality through verbal performance.

Marlow's storytelling is literally a performative act: he recites his story orally to a sympathetic audience in an attempt to create meaning from an experience that, he says, "seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts" (*Heart* 7).

Even though Marlow speaks to a real audience, however, he does so for the same deeply personal reasons that move Dowell to tell his story to an imaginary "sympathetic soul" by the fire (*Soldier* 15). The frame narrator notes that Marlow reveals "the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their listeners would best like to hear" (*Heart* 7) and as Marlow demands of his indifferent audience, most of whom are probably not even awake: "Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of an given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone..." (*Heart* 27). Dowell repeatedly expresses a similar sense of doubt as to whether or not one person can ever know another: "I know nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone—horribly alone" (*Soldier* 12). The narrators claim that personal insight is the purpose of their performances; for example, in an attempt to defend his portrayal of Kurtz to his audience, Marlow explains: "Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain—I am trying to account to *myself* for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz" (*Heart* 49, emphasis mine). Storytelling is thus a dramatic act for both Dowell and Marlow, an attempt to form their masculine identities by acting them out through language.

THE THREAT OF FEMALE INFLUENCE

Despite their apparent reflectiveness, however, the fact that Marlow and Dowell use storytelling for the creation and assertion of self does not confirm that either Marlow or Dowell is particularly interested in true self-knowledge. Tellingly, Dowell insists that "I don't know that

analysis of my own psychology matters at all to the story" (*Soldier* 73). Moreover, Marlow's reaction to the doctor he meets prior to his departure for Africa suggests that he is not only uninterested in such introspection; he actively opposes the examination of his psyche as an unwelcome intrusion. When the doctor advises that "the changes take place inside, you know" and expresses curiosity about Marlow's mental state (*Heart* 11-12), Marlow defensively snaps, "Are you an alienist?" (12) and assures his audience that "I thought him a harmless fool" (11). Creating oneself through narrative, then, is a different matter entirely from finding oneself through narrative. As Dowell reflects on his former identity as his wife's sole caretaker and protector, he admits that "surely, surely, these delusions are necessary to keep us going" (*Soldier* 39).

That "these delusions" refer to Dowell's husbandly role is significant. A likely reason that Marlow and Dowell so aggressively evade introspection is the fear of acknowledging the insecurities and weaknesses that plague each man's sense of self, the most blatant of which is a crippling sense of masculine inadequacy. Specifically, the narrators of *The Good Soldier* and *Heart of Darkness* are threatened and emasculated as they navigate literal and figurative unfamiliar territory and find themselves largely at the mercy of feminine control. For example, both Marlow and Dowell find themselves in foreign lands due to the influence of women. Dowell is tricked into living on a foreign continent because Florence deceives him about her imaginary heart condition: "the immediate reasons for our imprisonment in that continent were doctors' orders. They said that even the short Channel crossing might well kill the poor thing" (*Soldier* 10). Likewise, Marlow is forced to ask his aunt for assistance in getting to Africa after failing to attain the support of other men: "The men said, 'my dear fellow,' and did nothing. Then—would you believe it—I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job! Heavens! ... I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul... She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy" (*Heart* 8). Furthermore,

after Marlow's aunt secures his job with the Company, two knitting women in the Company's head offices mark one of Marlow's most vivid and lasting memories of his sendoff:

Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as if for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes (*Heart* 11).

As Marlow uneasily watches these guardians at the door to the unknown, his discomfort stems not only from his sense that his destiny is in these women's hands, but also that they seem to know much more than he does about his fate. As Marlow stands on the threshold of the unknown, his ignorance is accentuated in contrast to the apparent "unconcerned wisdom" of someone who "seemed to know all about" naïve explorers like himself. Given both narrators' reluctance to look inward and examine the things that "take place inside," as the alienist doctor suggests, a woman who can do so with a "quick glance" is understandably unnerving. Indeed, Dowell is equally troubled by Leonora's ability to size him up with a single look:

She gave me, suddenly yet deliberately, one long stare.... And it was a most remarkable, a most moving glance, as if for a moment a lighthouse had looked at me.... And suddenly, into those cold, slightly defiant, almost defensive china blue orbs, there came a warmth, a tenderness, a friendly recognition... oh, it was very charming and very touching—and quite mortifying.... By God, she looked at me as if I were an invalid—as any kind woman may look at a poor chap in a bath chair. And, yes, from that day forward she always treated me and not Florence as if I were the invalid" (*Soldier* 29).

Like the knitting women who casually appraise Marlow's mortality, Leonora's sympathetic and "mortifying" recognition of Dowell's "invalid" condition is similarly humbling. Her perception of him exposes his weakness and leaves him feeling emasculated. Even the notably strange "lighthouse" metaphor suggests Dowell's acute awareness of Leonora's crucial role in navigating unfamiliar territory.

Women themselves are often compared to territory in the two novels, and Marlow and Dowell consider the territory they inhabit to be frightening and dangerous. For example, Dowell begins an eloquent passage explaining why men and women fall in love with the

declaration that “with each new woman that a man is attracted to there appears to come a broadening of the outlook, or, if you like, an acquiring of new territory” (*Soldier* 79). These sound like the words of an acquisitive explorer with a history of exerting his dominance over women, but in fact, Dowell worries incessantly about his lack of attraction to women: “Am I no better than a eunuch or is the proper man—the man with the right to existence—a raging stallion forever neighing after his neighbor’s womenkind? I don’t know... It is all a darkness” (*Soldier* 15). Dowell is equally troubled by his outsider status in the land he inhabits and distressed by the inscrutability of English behavior as he decides that what he once admiringly considered a perfectly orchestrated “minuet” is in fact a “prison of screaming hysterics” (*Soldier* 12). Henstra concludes that his uncertainty is indicative of “a narrative voice adrift, cut off from the legitimacy and affirmation that would buttress its status and authority at home” (182), and it is largely the fact that a woman is responsible for his “imprisonment” that plunges Dowell into his state of epistemological panic. For both Marlow and Dowell, womanhood is as foreign and strange as the land itself, understood only as a threatening and terrifying unknown: “Ah, she was a riddle; but then, all other women are riddles” (*Soldier* 23).

Marlow more explicitly depicts womanhood as indistinguishable from his mysterious environment; as he recounts his journey through the impenetrable wilderness, for example, he often describes the earth with feminine language: “Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank clinging to the skirts of the unknown” (*Heart* 35). Recalling his encounter with the woman at the Inner Station, Marlow perceives that “the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul” (*Heart* 60). Even after he has left the wilderness and makes a visit to Kurtz’s Intended, he describes the bereaved woman’s voice as possessing

the accompaniment of all the other sounds full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow I have ever heard—the ripple of the river, the souging of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of the crowds, the faint ring of

incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness (*Heart* 75).

As Gabrielle McIntire summarizes, “women’s knowledge is very much like Africa itself for Marlow” (274). Marlow imagines that women like the Intended speak with the voice of the wilderness, a voice he describes as potentially damaging to a man’s sense of self:

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.... But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance... 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... (*Heart* 57-58)

Thus, Marlow fears the voices of women, whom he suspects may know “things about himself that he [does] not know.” Despite his efforts to form his identity through narrative, this passage betrays Marlow’s creeping suspicion that his narrative might not entirely define reality; under the “magnificent eloquence” of a man like Kurtz, or even more distressingly, Marlow himself, may yet lurk some sort of “deficiency.” If these voices can destroy something that is “hollow at the core,” then Marlow’s narrative, and thus his identity, is in danger, for as the frame narrator states before Marlow tells his tale, the hollowness of Marlow’s stories are the very reason they differ from the average seaman’s yarn:

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... 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, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine (*Heart* 5).

Both Marlow and Dowell display overwhelming anxieties about women controlling not only their destinies, but also their storytelling, and, by extension, their identities. In fact, control over one’s destiny and control over one’s narrative are often inseparable; McIntire astutely observes, for example, that because she arranges Marlow’s trip to Africa for him, “his aunt is, quite significantly, partially responsible for originating his story” (265).

THE LITERATURE OF IMPERIALISM

Why do Marlow and Dowell display such anxiety about the influence of women on their narratives? It is crucial to recognize that, despite the individual and idiosyncratic consciousness of each narrator, Ford and Conrad also created these characters as representative of the culture to which they belong. As Nidesh Lawtoo explains, “Marlow’s characterization of femininity is, of course, not original. He clearly reproduces sexist representations of women that were common in late nineteenth-century culture” (48). The narratives of Marlow and Dowell often echo a long-established tradition of Victorian fiction whose immense popularity helped to build an imperialist civilization. In Sarah Cole’s insightful examination of the influence of this literary tradition on Conrad’s work, she points out that “the creation of empire is inevitably connected with narrative” and “narratives about empire... reinforced entrenched myths that both naturalized and solidified hierarchy, including foundational hierarchies of class and gender” (253). Cole argues that it was largely through the travel narrative and the adventure narrative that messages about empire and conquest were instilled in the public, and “an essential part of this tradition involved the conjoining of heroic exploration with the creation of male community, both within the stories and in their narrative frames” (254). In these tales, it is through intimate friendship with a fellow conqueror that a man discovers his identity. Thus, the notion of exploration and conquest became a central part of the English understanding of what it means to be a man.

No less instrumental in the propagation of these cultural myths are other forms of popular literature, including love stories, for example. Ford deliberately highlights the impact of these energizing myths and the values of imperial masculinity they inspired in the public through Dowell’s depiction of Edward the “sentimentalist,” a man Dowell alternately resents as his wife’s lover and worships as his model of English “good form.” Dowell indicates that Edward is a voracious reader of popular fiction:

I must add that poor dear Edward was a great reader—he would pass hours lost in novels of a sentimental type—novels in which typewriter girls married

Marquises and governesses, Earls. And in his books, as a rule, the course of true love ran as smooth as buttered honey. And he was fond of poetry, of a certain type—and he could even read a perfectly sad love story. I have seen his eyes fill with tears at reading of a hopeless parting. And he loved, with a sentimental yearning, all children, puppies, and the feeble generally... (*Soldier* 25).

Dowell's mention of Edward's "sentimental yearning" after describing these "novels of a sentimental type" hints that Edward's somewhat mawkish desire to possess the weak is a product of the literature he reads. Edward's exposure to these myths even causes him to unconsciously imitate them in his own speech. On numerous occasions Dowell observes how closely Edward's language resembles that of the books he reads: "I was quite astonished to observe how literary and how just his expressions were. He talked like quite a good book" (*Soldier* 26); "But the fellow talked like a cheap novelist. Or a very good novelist for the matter of that, if it's the business of a novelist to make you see things clearly" (*Soldier* 76). Edward's speech pattern is not the only consequence of his exposure to this propaganda, however; the values espoused by the books he reads are also engrained into the values by which he lives. Dowell repeatedly points to this "sentimentalism" to sum up Edward's embodiment of a traditional masculine "type": "For all good soldiers are sentimentalists—all good soldiers of that type. Their profession, for one thing, is full of the big words, courage, loyalty, honor, constancy" (*Soldier* 25). Furthermore, Dowell's defense of Edward's marital transgressions by defining him as a "sentimentalist" rather than a "libertine" reveals his not entirely disapproving awareness that these "big words" make up the values that inform Edward's behavior and teach him his duties as a patriarchal, imperial conqueror:

Along with Edward's passions and his shame for them went the violent conviction of the duties of his station—a conviction that was quite unreasonably expensive. I trust I have not, in talking of his liabilities, given the impression that poor Edward was a promiscuous libertine. He was not; he was a sentimentalist. The servant girl in the Kilsyte case had been pretty, but mournful of appearance. I think that, when he had kissed her, he had desired rather to comfort her (*Soldier* 45).

This strange conflation of sexual conquest with the fatherly duty to protect and comfort women mimics the rhetoric that rationalized imperialism by claiming that the conquering of other

territories supposedly civilized and protected the very people they were exploiting. A man's relationship to women, therefore, forms a fundamental part of the values of masculinity and conquest that informed imperialism. As Hoffman observes, *The Good Soldier*

presents the operative definition of patriarchal masculinity in late Victorian/Edwardian England as inextricably linked to the assumptions and practices of imperialism, likening the expectation that men transgress boundaries in order to possess ever more women to the scramble for colonies among colonial powers (30).

Obviously, Marlow's feminized depiction of the inanimate wilderness also unmistakably replicates the language of imperialist literature.

Marlow, of course, holds a sturdy position in the male-dominated culture of adventure and storytelling. Cole describes the literary tradition that Conrad inherits as a "textual community, created and perpetuated by boys and men who read the stories of their heroic predecessors, passing along their own tales to imagined protégés" (257), and as a seaman, Marlow belongs to a literal community of adventurers characterized by their "propensity to spin yarns" (*Heart* 5). In this "textual community," Cole explains, "only true men are entitled to a voice, and their masculinity is developed through the harrowing trials of adventure" (257). Accordingly, at the opening of *Heart of Darkness*, the frame narrator makes it clear that Marlow has earned his right to tell a story through the communion of masculine adventure: "Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns—and even convictions" (*Heart* 3). Like good soldiers, therefore, seamen also make up a masculine "type." Even if, as the frame narrator claims, Marlow "did not represent his class" and "was not typical" (*Heart* 5), Marlow is nevertheless heavily steeped in this community of storytellers and is at least "tolerant" of the values and "convictions" set forth in the typical seaman's tale. Moreover, the frame narrator's assessment of Marlow as an unconventional wanderer who "resembled an idol" may not be wholly credible, for the frame narrator, too, belongs to the community of men united by the "bond of the sea." Rather, as Lawtoo points out,

from the very beginning of his tale, Marlow “reassures his audience that he is a rational subject who is usually in control of his thoughts and actions. Marlow’s habitual self falls neatly within normative representations of masculinity” (47). Indeed, a masculine narrator with complete control over the story is a hallmark of imperialist literature, and it is this property above all that Marlow and Dowell most wish to emulate.

According to this set of ideals, in other words, a real man not only acquires considerable power over women and territory, but most importantly, he possesses an exceptional control over language. Although traditional notions of masculinity usually portray women as passive and men as action-oriented, the narrators of *The Good Soldier* and *Heart of Darkness* cast narrative itself as an act of dominance. Marlow, for instance, declares that Kurtz’s eloquence is the real source of his power:

I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing.... The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn’t I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together. That was not the point. 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 (*Heart* 47).

Marlow describes Kurtz here as the ideal European imperialist; Kurtz is supremely cultured, a “gifted creature” and a lofty idealist, but also a man who has asserted his dominance over the land. Admittedly, Marlow’s claim that Kurtz “presented himself as a voice” in his imagination at a point in the story before Marlow has met Kurtz or read his writing is indeed “strange,” even for a story told retrospectively; one senses a hint of defensiveness as Marlow insists that Kurtz’s dishonest dealings as an ivory trader are “not the point.” Indeed, shortly after Marlow makes this speech, a member of his audience remarks that it is “absurd,” prompting a furious outburst from Marlow that temporarily muddles his storytelling process (*Heart* 47). Perhaps Marlow, who often tries to paint himself as an opponent of the atrocities committed in the Congo, does not want to admit that he admires Kurtz for his proficiency as a conqueror. Significantly,

however, Marlow's probably false recollection of Kurtz primarily as a voice nevertheless reveals the inseparability of "doing" and "discoursing" in Marlow's mind. He sees Kurtz's power over words as the ability that "carried with it a sense of real presence" and enables him to assert his identity even in a foreign land. This eloquence is above all an instrument of power for Kurtz, a weapon with which, under the guise of noble intentions, he glorifies the position of the conqueror and justifies his own megalomania.⁶

Dowell, too, sees language as a weapon used to assert one's authority over the weak. According to Dowell, Edward opens up to him because he only speaks to those he considers weaker than himself: "You see, I suppose he regarded me not so much as a man. I had to be regarded as a woman or a solicitor" (*Soldier* 26). Speech and action are nearly inseparable to Dowell; this is why he believes that Edward's "pouring forth of passion" to Nancy "was the most monstrously wicked thing that Edward Ashburnham ever did in his life" (*Soldier* 78). Indeed, it is at least partly due to Edward's confession that the girl reverts to a helpless, infantile madness in which her command over language dwindles to the nonsensical utterance of "Shuttlecocks!" Moreover, Henstra notes that when "Leonora finally gives in to the temptation to talk, her words take on a force akin to physical violence" (189). Although Henstra interprets Leonora's outbursts as the cause of her undoing, however, I see her forceful use of language as the weapon she uses to throw off Edward's oppressive influence. The vividly brutal language Dowell uses to describe Leonora's speech conveys his sense of horror at the feminine takeover of a weapon typically wielded by men:

She gave him unimaginable hell. Those two women pursued that poor devil and flayed the skin off him as if they had done it with whips. I tell you his mind bled almost visibly. I seem to see him stand, naked to the waist, his forearms shielding his eyes, and flesh hanging from him in rags. I tell you that is no exaggeration of what I feel (*Soldier* 152).

Notably, Dowell does not compare language to just any weapon; he specifically refers to Leonora's use of language as a whipping. He describes Leonora as "lashing, like a cold fiend, into

the unfortunate Edward" (*Soldier* 136) and compares Leonora's words to Nancy as a blow to the face with her "riding whip":

She imagined the pleasure she would feel when the lash fell across those queer features; the pleasure she would feel at drawing the handle at the same moment toward her so as to cut deep into the flesh and leave a lasting weal. Well, she left a lasting weal, and her words cut deeply into the girl's mind.... (*Soldier* 135, original ellipses).

A whip, of course, is the classic tool of dominance. From the yoking of livestock to the brutality inflicted upon the people in the Congo, flogging is only imposed upon the subjugated by the dominant. Through her power over words, Leonora forces the weaker Edward to submit to her will. Edward wreaks a great deal of dishonor, madness, and even death upon the women he takes possession of, including Dowell's own wife; yet Dowell's gruesome impression of the effects of Leonora's speech is the only instance in which the brutality of conquest is described. Like Marlow's description of Kurtz, whose noble rhetoric is recounted in detail but whose acts of brutality are only obliquely mentioned, one might accuse Dowell of trying to convince his readers that Edward's cruelty is also "not the point." Clearly, Marlow and Dowell have a vested interest in defending the myth of imperial masculinity, for the performance of their own identities depend on its survival.

IMITATION OF IMPERIAL LITERATURE

Marlow and Dowell imitate these literary imperial constructs in order to reassert their authority over their narratives and reassure themselves of their virility. There are three main strategies that the two narrators employ simultaneously in order to accomplish this goal. First, to affirm their masculinity, they attach themselves to male figures that they idolize as ideal European imperialists based on the values explored above. Second, they avert attention from their own shortcomings and further undermine the authorial credibility of women by projecting their own insecurities onto others, particularly women, who threaten them. Finally, in an effort to gain exclusive control over their narrative and confirm their place in the tradition of masculine storytellers, they attempt to eliminate women's voices entirely.

Aside from the possession of women and land, a less overt yet highly relevant characteristic of imperial masculinity to Marlow and Dowell in the popular literature of their time is an internal form of conquest; a man's identity is shaped through his ability to overpower the wildness of emotion and passions typically characterized as feminine or primitive. As Cole puts it, "a Western man is expected to feel deeply, to have an emotional interior, but ultimately to master that side of himself, much as the conqueror masters the feminine landscape of primeval Africa" (255). Recalling one of his first impressions of "Captain Ashburnham," Dowell states that Edward's outer expression conveys the look of a gentleman who has accomplished this mastery:

His face hitherto had, in the wonderful English fashion, expressed nothing whatsoever. Nothing. There was in it neither joy nor despair; neither hope nor fear; neither boredom nor satisfaction. He seemed to perceive no soul in that crowded room; he might have been walking in a jungle. I never came across such a perfect expression before and I never shall again (*Soldier* 24).

Dowell's fantasy that Edward "might have been walking in a jungle" evokes the exotic adventure experience even in their domestic dinner setting. Dowell again describes Edward's expression two pages later as "that of pride, of satisfaction, of the possessor," adding that this impression was later reinforced with speech: "I saw him once afterward gaze at the sunny fields of Bramshaw and say 'All this is my land!'" (*Soldier* 26). Dowell sees Edward not only as a "possessor" of various forms of territory, but, most importantly, as a man who is remarkably *self*-possessed. Of course, Edward's performance is no more representative of his mastery of self than his proclamation that "All this is my land!" is representative of Edward's control over his estate, which is, of course, managed by Leonora. In fact, Dowell even interprets clear evidence to the contrary, such as the despair evinced by Edward's repeated suicide attempts, as "deeds of heroism" required by his "soldiering" (*Soldier* 113).

Marlow, too, imagines that Kurtz ultimately masters his emotional interior just like he has gained dominance over the land. Marlow states that for a man who faces the imminence of his own death, "the most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself" (*Heart* 69).

Because Marlow fears what he himself will find when he looks inward, he admires Kurtz for, he believes, gazing into his own soul and enduring “every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge” (*Heart* 69). Marlow recounts an occasion in which he, like Kurtz, faced his own impending demise, and confesses that at the final moment “I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say” (*Heart* 70). The emphasis on having something to “say” further highlights the importance of narration in the assertion of male identity for Marlow; again, the command of self depends upon the command of language. Marlow believes that Kurtz is a “remarkable man” because he thinks Kurtz does precisely what Marlow cannot bring himself to do; according to Marlow, Kurtz peers into his own soul, recognizes the truth about himself, and articulates his own judgment about his soul:

He had summed up—he had judged. ‘The horror!’ He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth—the strange commingling of desire and hate (70).

Curiously, Marlow describes Kurtz’s sickly voice in the same mesmerized tones of wonder at Kurtz’s remarkable eloquence as he does when he describes Kurtz’s seventeen-page handwritten pamphlet of exalted idealist rhetoric:

It was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, ‘must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,’ and so on, and so on. ‘By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,’ etc. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you luminous and terrifying like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: ‘Exterminate all the brutes!’” (*Heart* 49-50).

What Marlow refuses to fully recognize is that Kurtz’s note “scrawled evidently much later” represents a significant change in his control over language. The “unsteady hand” reflects the

instability of Kurtz's mental state; by the time he scribbles his final addendum to the seventeen pages of writing, Kurtz is corrupted by his own greed and megalomania. He believes his original rhetoric so strongly that he literally considers himself a godlike being who deserves his conquered people to worship him with midnight rituals and "unspeakable rites" (*Heart* 50).

Despite the extraordinary depth of meaning Marlow bestows upon Kurtz's final words, there is little evidence to suggest that Kurtz himself had any insight whatsoever into the horrors of his soul. Rather, Kurtz appears to be slowly consumed by his own moral corruption both mentally and physically until his death, steadily losing his grasp on coherent speech. Days before his death, Kurtz cries out nonsensically, "Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!" without provoking any reflection on its meaning from Marlow (*Heart* 68). Marlow himself admits to creating exquisite meaning out of the words he exchanges with Kurtz, even if there is nothing innately magical or eloquent in his speech: "They were common everyday words—the familiar vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares" (*Heart* 68). By the time Kurtz utters his final words, there is so little power in them that the words "The horror!" escape in "a cry that was no more than a breath" (*Heart* 69). The immense moral struggle that Marlow gives Kurtz credit for seems implausible. Kurtz is no longer a self-possessed master of language; the man who wrote the eloquent seventeen-page report may have once held the ability to "sum up" and to "judge," but this Kurtz, the "animated image of death carved out of old ivory" with a "weirdly voracious aspect" is unlikely to be capable of such insight (*Heart* 70, 59)

Despite the unlikelihood of their heroes' mastery of self, Marlow and Dowell idolize Kurtz and Edward as archetypes of what a real man should be. They see Kurtz and Edward as so exceptional that their loyalty to the two men is "impossible" to resist. Marlow begins to tell Kurtz's Intended, "He was a remarkable man... it was *impossible* not to—" before she finishes his

sentence with the phrase “love him” (*Heart* 74, emphasis mine). Dowell uses similar language as he expresses his allegiance to Edward:

It is impossible for me to think of Edward Ashburnham as anything but straight, upright, and honorable. That, I mean, is in spite of everything my permanent view of him. I try at times by dwelling on some of the things that he did to push that image of him away, as you might try to push aside a large pendulum. But it always comes back—the memory of his innumerable acts of kindness, of his efficiency, of his unspiteful tongue. He was such a fine fellow (Soldier 78-79, emphases mine).

Dowell’s delusions are particularly evident in this estimation of Edward; he ignores Edward’s cruelties in favor of his “innumerable acts of kindness,” which are, in fact, so detrimental to his “efficiency” that he is forced to relinquish his estate to his wife. Nevertheless, Dowell, like Marlow, professes such intense devotion to the man he idolizes that he experiences a collapse of his own identity in his desire to emulate him.

Marlow believes that showing his loyalty to Kurtz is somehow rooted in “destiny. My destiny!” (*Heart* 69). The moment of self-knowledge that Marlow invents for Kurtz at the moment that Kurtz confronts his own mortality becomes more important to Marlow than his own near-death encounter:

And it is not my own extremity I remember best—a vision of greyness without form filled with physical pain and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things—even of this pain itself. No. It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through (Heart 70).

Dowell’s declaration of love for Edward represents an even more preposterous identification with his idolized male figure, progressing beyond the level of vicarious insight Marlow creates through Kurtz to a baffling revision of his entire identity:

But I guess that I myself, in my fainter way, come into the category of the passionate, of the headstrong, and the too-truthful. For I can’t conceal from myself the fact that I loved Edward Ashburnham—and that I love him because he was just myself. If I had had the courage and the virility and possibly also the physique of Edward Ashburnham, I should, I fancy, have done much what he did. He seems to me like a large elder brother who took me out on several excursions and did many dashing things whilst I just watched him robbing the orchards, from a distance. And, you see, I am just as much of a sentimentalist as he was...” (Soldier 161-162)

Dowell's characterization of himself as "too-truthful" might be the most stunning fallacy of this entire passage; very little of his self-assessment has any grounds in truth. Aside from Dowell's utter lack of passion and his unwillingness to act on even his own wife's flirtations (*Soldier* 22, 63), Dowell also acknowledges elsewhere that Edward only shares these "many dashing things" with him because he regards Dowell as a "woman or a solicitor" (*Soldier* 26); there exists no brotherly relationship between the two men. Predictably, Dowell balks at his single opportunity to confirm his identity as a "sentimentalist" character and forge a bond with Edward; when he realizes that Edward is about to commit suicide, Dowell reports, "I wanted to say: 'God bless you,' for I am also a sentimentalist. But I thought that perhaps that would not be quite English good form, so I trotted off with the telegram to Leonora" (*Soldier* 162). In his final interaction with Edward, Dowell once again proves his passivity and thus his extreme contrast to the "good soldier" ideal he admires; though he ardently claims complete loyalty to Edward in his narrative, in action he upholds his duty to Leonora.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow tries to depict the concept of devotion as a specifically feminine tendency; Jeremy Hawthorn argues that Marlow seeks to prove that "the Intended's capacity is for devotion, not for living" (409). Obviously, in their zealous loyalty to Kurtz and Edward, Marlow and Dowell both experience a much more extreme version of the devoted passivity that is stereotypically blamed on women. The propensity for devotion is not the only instance in which women are criticized for Marlow and Dowell's shortcomings, however. To avert attention from their own insecurities while undermining the narrative authority of competing voices, Marlow and Dowell regularly project their own weaknesses onto women.

Dowell's narrative is peppered with expressions of pity. Despite his avowed admiration for Edward, Dowell cannot dismiss the fact that Edward has had an affair with his wife, which places him in the natural position of a rival. In response to the threat to his masculinity that Edward poses, Dowell launches veiled attacks at Edward's sentimentalism and passively-aggressively assumes the pretense of affection to try to flaunt Edward's weakness, in just one

instance calling him “poor fellow,” “poor dear,” and even “poor wretch” and “poor devil” all within the span of a few pages (*Soldier* 40-41). In fact, Dowell uses the word “poor” to describe almost every character in the novel, including the objects of Edward’s sexual exploits, Florence, and even Leonora. Yet Florence is the character to whom Dowell most consistently attaches this condescending prefix, likely as an attempt to confirm his identity as her protector and caretaker, a role which necessitates her powerlessness and dependence upon him. However, this rhetorical device is as unconvincing to the well-rehearsed actors of English good form as it is to the reader; Dowell hints repeatedly that he appears as the individual most worthy of pity in the eyes of the other characters. Despite his efforts to figure his wife as the helpless patient who requires his assiduous nursing, Dowell is the one most often perceived as the “invalid”: “It is true that, at times I used to notice about [Leonora’s] face an air of inattention as if she were listening, a mother, to the child at her knee, or as if, precisely, I were myself the patient” (*Soldier* 29, 40).

Meanwhile, one of the more flagrant examples of Marlow’s hypocritical condemnations of women appears when Marlow meets with his aunt, the woman responsible for setting his story in motion. During this conversation, Marlow recalls,

it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary and goodness knows to how many more people besides as an exceptional and gifted creature.... Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been such a lot of rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman living right in the rush of all that humbug got carried off her feet. She talked about ‘weaning all those ignorant millions from their horrid ways’ till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit (*Heart* 12).

As McIntire points out, Marlow treats the aunt’s susceptibility to the imperialist ideology “let loose in print and talk just about that time” as “a specifically feminine ignorance... distinguished by its non-relation to truth and its excessive concern with aesthetics over practicality,” thus establishing the world of men, by contrast, as one that possesses “a sufficiently accurate version of the ‘facts’ about the daily business of colonization to make their a world that does not ‘fall apart’”(262). Yet Marlow’s worshipful description of Kurtz renders him much guiltier of bowing

down to this ideological rhetoric than women are; as much as he ridicules his aunt's appraisal of him, Marlow's devotion to Kurtz is so fervent that he can justifiably be considered "a lower form of apostle." For example, while his aunt "got carried off her feet" by such language, Kurtz's speech "soared and took me with him" (*Heart* 50). His language, Marlow explains, "made me tingle with enthusiasm," a quality which, Lawtoo notes, Marlow uses against his "aunt, a dear, enthusiastic soul" in order to portray her as zealously uncritical (*Heart* 8, Lawtoo 49).

Furthermore, Marlow's "excessive concern with aesthetics over practicality," as McIntire calls it, is much more severe than the silliness of which he accuses women. Marlow is enchanted by the same kind of "rot" set forth in Kurtz's document as the "humbug" his aunt echoes; after all, regardless of how "remarkable" Marlow believes Kurtz to be, Kurtz himself is one of the writers who produces the ideology in the press that his aunt parrots: "Was he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a fragment of a phrase from a newspaper article. He had been writing for the papers and meant to do so again, 'for the furthering of my ideas. It's a duty'" (*Heart* 68). In addition, Marlow openly acknowledges that it is the aesthetic quality of Kurtz's "eloquence" that so entralls him:

This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method (*Heart* 50).

The one "practical" note included in Kurtz's extensive document of lofty rhetoric is the brutal line scribbled at the end. In this instance, Marlow, unlike his aunt, beholds the horrifying truth, unmasked by Kurtz's bewitching eloquence. Nevertheless, Marlow is seduced by the dazzling beauty of Kurtz's language, not only excusing Kurtz for this "luminous and terrifying" truth, but actively suppressing it when he hands over the report to the Company "with the postscriptum torn off" (*Heart* 71). Thus, if the women are indeed "out of it," it is because of Marlow's blatant censorship of the truth. Marlow's own ignorance, on the other hand, is willful; he sees the truth yet wipes it out because it does not fit with the aesthetics of the imperialist rhetoric that seizes him.

McIntire states that in *Heart of Darkness*, “the silence of women stands out ever more starkly because of its extreme opposition to Marlow and Kurtz’s command over language” (268). Perhaps more accurately, Marlow and Kurtz’s command over language appears more prominent in contrast to the women’s conspicuous silence. By stifling threatening voices, in other words, Marlow hopes to augment his own narrative authority. Marlow makes no secret of his desire to leave women “out of” his narrative “completely,” deliberately imposing silence upon them by excluding them from knowledge of the truth:

‘I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,’ he began suddenly. ‘Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. 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. Oh, she had to be out of it’ (*Heart* 48).

Obviously, the “beautiful world of their own” to which Marlow refers is an epistemological one; Marlow wishes to confine women to a separate realm of knowledge from the male textual community he occupies “lest ours gets worse.” Marlow had already articulated this dichotomy between male and female forms of knowledge very early in his narrative:

It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are! They live in a world of their own and there had never been anything like it and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over (*Heart* 13)

According to Marlow’s gendered spheres of knowledge, in other words, men exist “contentedly” in a world of rational, straightforward “fact,” whereas women remain wholly “out of touch with truth.” Women “live in a world of their own,” a fanciful realm of knowing that is “too beautiful altogether” and will “go to pieces” if it is ever allowed to come into contact with the world of “truth” and “fact” in which men so “contentedly” dwell. Yet Marlow’s belief that women must “stay in that beautiful world of their own lest ours gets worse” hints that his true motive for setting up this distinction between male and female knowledge is not female security, but his own security. Despite his firm avowal that “I hate, detest, and can’t bear a lie” (*Heart* 27), Marlow displays no qualms about deceiving women in order to keep them “out of” his narrative.

Marlow and Dowell exclude women from this male realm of knowledge in order to defend their narratives against the women who hold power over them, in addition to bolstering their sense of community with other men. For example, after Marlow's aunt secures the job in Africa for Marlow that makes his entire narrative possible, Marlow scoffs at her flattery to his male listeners, adding wryly, "I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit" (*Heart* 12). As McIntire perceptively notices, Marlow

stops short of a full explanation of his views, which he narrates to his male auditors, and he only weakly expresses his discomfort through the always-ambiguous gesture of a hint. Marlow thus not only allows his aunt to misread his own ambivalence about the Company's capitalist ventures, but he seems to wish this misreading upon her (267).

By keeping his aunt ignorant to the facts of the colonial mission masked by the imperialist rhetoric that the press disseminates, Marlow isolates her from the male-dominated sphere of facts, "profit," and myth-making. Marlow's deception of his aunt, however, is mild compared to the outright lie he tells Kurtz's Intended. Again, Marlow implies that he deceives the woman for her own protection, so as not to extinguish "that great and saving illusion that shown with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her" (*Heart* 75). His condescending judgment that the Intended must be shielded from the truth resembles Dowell's patronizing protection of Florence, and it is equally self-serving.

Marlow's "infinite pity" for the mourning woman arises from a "dull anger," just as Dowell's pity for "poor Florence" belies his resentment toward her (*Heart* 76). His jealousy of her intimacy with Kurtz is as obvious as his fear of her influence over his own impressions, which could potentially dismantle his construct of Kurtz as his ideal masculine companion:

She carried her sorrowful head... as though she would say I—I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves.... For her he had died only yesterday. And by Jove, the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute (*Heart* 74).

The Intended speaks with greater authority over Kurtz's memory than Marlow wishes for her to possess. Thus, when she presses, "You knew him well," his response deliberately emphasizes his exclusive form of knowledge that he refuses to share with her: "Intimacy grows quickly out

there,' I said. 'I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another'" (*Heart* 74). With this reply, Marlow asserts his superior knowledge of Kurtz, stressing her separation from the physical domain of wilderness "out there" and the type of "intimacy" achieved in such a setting, as well as her exclusion from the two explorers' shared access to the realm of masculine knowledge. Even so, the next time Marlow speaks she once again manages to take control of his narrative, enthusiastically finishing his sentence and "silencing [him] into an appalled dumbness" (*Heart* 74). Interestingly enough, Marlow does not back down so easily when his speech is interrupted by his seafaring companions. Kurtz's Intended ironically overturns Marlow's aggressive declaration of authorial dominance to any man on his boat who dares to interject: "An appeal to me in this fiendish row—is there? Very well. I hear, I admit, but for good or for evil mine is the voice that cannot be silenced" (*Heart* 36). Faced with the Intended's powerful voice, it is *Marlow's* world of neatly gendered categories of wildness and domesticity, not the insulated world of femininity, that "[goes] to pieces" (*Heart* 13). Unlike his aunt's drawing room, which "most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing room to look" (*Heart* 12), the Intended's drawing room is an ominous, funereal atmosphere adorned with ivory and tainted with darkness. When she pressures him into confessing Kurtz's final words, Marlow lies to her that "the last word he pronounced was—your name" (*Heart* 77).

Women's silence is even more important both to Dowell's authorial command and his sense of identity than it is to Marlow. Until he meets Florence, Dowell admits that he has no answer to the question of "what did I do": "I did nothing. I suppose I ought to have done something but I didn't see any call to do it. Why does one do things? I just drifted in and wanted Florence" (*Soldier* 17). Dowell's only career is his status as a husband, and the sole duty that he appoints himself is the "profession... of keeping heart patients alive" (*Soldier* 39). His role as "the sedulous, strained nurse" consists mostly of controlling Florence's speech and preventing her from discussing any topic that could be considered controversial or subversive, ostensibly because it will overexcite her heart: "For twelve years I had to watch every word that any

person uttered in any conversation, and I had to head off what the English call ‘things’—off love, poverty, religion, and the rest of it” (*Soldier* 13, 18). Conveniently, the dangerous thoughts that supposedly endanger Florence’s fragile heart are the same “things” that threaten Dowell’s comfortable worldview.⁷ Dowell embodies the imperial notion of masculinity “not as doing... but as discoursing” (*Heart* 47) to an absurd degree. Dowell is not a man of action, unless that action is female censorship.

The first sentence of the story announces that Dowell’s story is not his own; instead, Dowell admits, “This is the saddest story I have ever heard” (*Soldier* 9). As his narrative progresses, it becomes clear that this “saddest story” is not really Dowell’s to tell at all; although he is connected to the events in the narrative peripherally, due to his friendship with the Ashburnhams and his wife’s infidelities with Edward, the plot focuses not on the disintegration of his own marriage, but rather the failed marriage of Leonora and Edward. Moreover, this “saddest story” is “heard” from Leonora, and Dowell clearly wishes he had never heard it: “I do blame Leonora for giving way to what was in the end a desire for communicativeness” (*Soldier* 125). Indeed, Dowell’s entire narrative can be read as an effort to silence Leonora by presenting the past illusions he had held as equally legitimate to the reality she makes known to him after the events have taken place. As Hoffman explains it, Dowell tells his story both from the past perspective he held as it the events unfolded and from the distance in time at which he is writing simultaneously, “not only representing himself and others according to his past understanding but also bursting into his own narrative with abrupt revisions of events and identities” (31). What many critics interpret as an epistemological crisis caused by the differences between public performance and private reality or the innate unknowability of other human beings is in fact a result of Dowell’s willful ignorance to the facts that Leonora outlines for him. Dowell’s incessant chorus of “I don’t know, I don’t know” could perhaps be phrased more honestly as “I don’t want to know.” For instance, Hoffman argues, “Most obviously, Dowell’s shifts between his previously and presently-held views can be read as vacillations between denial and

acknowledgement that Florence and Edward have both had extramarital affairs... But these shifts also allow Ford to draw attention to the ideological contradictions that destabilize Dowell's sense of his own identity" (31-32). Namely, these "ideological contradictions" consist of the disconnect between the reality that Leonora reports in her "saddest story" and the literary constructs found in imperialist literature, including women's role as the voiceless objects of conquest, the construct of the "good people," the ideal imperialist male hero, and, most of all, the absolute authority of the male narrator.

Leonora's verbal revelations are devastating to Dowell's traditional imperialist assumptions; he himself attests that "the last day of my absolute ignorance" was also the last day, "I assure you, of my perfect happiness" (*Soldier* 71). For one thing, Leonora shatters Dowell's conception of himself as Florence's protector, caretaker, and possessor when she informs him that Florence has deceived him about her heart condition, committed adultery with Edward, and taken her own life like Edward; it is Florence, not Dowell, who explores new lands and lovers.

Leonora's disclosures to Dowell also weaken his model of Edward as a man who can be idolized as the ideal imperialist male figure. The discovery that Edward and Florence have had an affair throws into question Dowell's description of the honorable Edward as "the cleanest sort of chap—an excellent magistrate, a first rate soldier, one of the best landlords... just exactly the sort of chap that you could have trusted your wife with" (*Soldier* 14). She further smashes Dowell's delusions of Edward "the possessor" and uncovers the emptiness of his declaration that "All this is my land!" when she divulges that she is in fact in control of his estate. The "duties of his station" that Edward absorbs through his eager consumption of sentimental fiction (*Soldier* 45) have rendered him a very clumsy imperialist in practice:

His really trying liabilities were mostly of the nature of generousities proper to his station. He was, according to Leonora, always remitting his tenants' rent and giving the tenants to understand that the reductions would be permanent; he was always redeeming drunkards who came before his magisterial bench; he was always trying to put prostitutes into respectable places—and he was a perfect maniac about children.... All these things, and the continuance of them

seemed to be his duty—along with impossible subscriptions to hospitals and boy scouts and to provide prizes at the cattle shows and anti-vivisection societies... (*Soldier* 46).

Edward's every attempt to embody the values of the powerful, conquering, honorable feudal gentleman causes him to squander his money and relinquish power to his wife. The costs of Edward's infidelities and his outrageous acts of generosity have left them nearly bankrupt, so Leonora seizes control of his finances "while he was still in the arms of his Circe" (*Soldier* 44). Edward's utter failure in upholding these responsibilities and the havoc they wreak upon his psyche invites interrogation of the construct of the "good soldier" and his noble station of the "good people" are worthy of emulation at all. Henstra articulates this uncertainty well: "Do Edward's private desires torture him because they violate the duties of his station and so cannot be fulfilled? Or are such desires the logical outcome of his station, torturous because they impose their own structural confinements?" (191).

Despite all these causes for doubt and questioning, perhaps the discovery most troubling to Dowell's narrative is that his entire conception of his identity and status can be overturned by a woman. His belief in the narrative dominance of men is directly challenged by such an affront. He responds by redefining Leonora in his narrative through typically masculine qualities. He portrays her as cold, conventional, action-oriented, apparently emotionless, and possessing remarkable abilities of seemingly effortless self-control. Despite frequent evidence of the fierce agony of passion with which Leonora simultaneously loved and hated Edward (*Soldier* 25, 91, 119) or the maternal warmth with which she regards him when she sees his weakness (*Soldier* 29), Dowell is determined to present Leonora as "a woman of strong, cold conscience" (*Soldier* 46). Even the physical descriptions of Leonora in his earliest impressions connote cold, composed, unfeminine moral qualities; he says in her evening dress she resembles "a white marble bust" because it is "too clearly cut" and "there was no ruffling," much like the temperament he assigns to her (*Soldier* 28). Dowell says Leonora's appearance draws the male gaze not to the typically feminine features such as the lips or breasts, but to the gold circlet on

her wrist, where, he infers, “perhaps it was that in which she locked up her heart and feelings” (*Soldier* 28). Dowell’s reinvention of Leonora as a masculine character not only enables him to justify his asexuality and the fact that “I never had the beginnings of what is called the sex instinct toward her... [and] she never had it towards me,” but it also softens the trauma of discovering that a woman can topple his entire worldview (*Soldier* 28). In addition, he attempts to claim ownership of Leonora’s story through his choice of title: “I call this the Saddest Story, rather than ‘The Ashburnham Tragedy’ just because it was so sad... there is about it none of the elevation that accompanies tragedy” (*Soldier* 109). His feeble justification for this decision hardly masks his true motive: he chooses to call his narrative the Saddest Story because naming it “The Ashburnham Tragedy” would force him to admit that the story is not his to tell.

Ironically, every attempt that Marlow and Dowell make to exclude women’s voices from their storytelling only corrodes their own narrative authority. For example, McIntire notes that Marlow’s

insistent repetition... that women are “out of it” marks one of the few places in the text when Marlow interrupts his narrative with an aside to his auditors. Indeed, he stutters and falters in his narrative most explicitly at the moments when he is unable to make women a part of his story. Here he “suddenly” stops the flow of his articulate yarn to revise his own terms and preoccupations by asserting that women are not simply of a different world, but ought to be “out of” the story “completely.” His tangent is so filled with hesitations and dramatic caesuras that his very language betrays how unsettling women are to Marlow’s order of things (264-265).

Marlow’s most dramatic unraveling of narrative, however, occurs when he visits Kurtz’s Intended and experiences a literal loss of voice. While his lie does hinder the Intended by leaving her “out of it” (*Heart* 48) and denying her access to the knowledge of Kurtz’s last words, in doing so he loses a great deal of narrative authority. When she speaks, Marlow reports that “I felt like a chill grip on my chest” and his voice becomes “muffled” (*Heart* 76). Marlow speaks “shakily” before stopping “in fright” (*Heart* 76). Despite Marlow’s deceit, moreover, the Intended steers the conversation; in fact, his words seem to echo her own: “‘You knew him well’... ‘I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another’”; “‘I knew him best.’”

'You knew him best'; "'You know!' 'Yes, I know'"; "'His example....' 'True,' I said, 'his example too. Yes, his example'"; "'I knew it—I was sure!' ... She knew. She was sure" (*Heart* 74-77). The Intended, on the other hand, appears to speak "with the accompaniment of all the other sounds full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow I have ever heard," echoed, even, by the sounds of the wilderness (*Heart* 75). Even Marlow's lie to the Intended is an obedient response to her command that he give her Kurtz's final words. She responds to his muffled reply with "the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain" (*Heart* 77). Even though Marlow deceives her, the woman's last words of the novel respond with a declaration of certainty and knowledge: "I knew it—I was sure!" (*Heart* 77). Marlow's narrative, on the other hand, is as "inconclusive" as the frame narrator predicts at the beginning of the tale (*Heart* 7). His story ends in the collapse of language as a carrier of meaning; he cannot even complete the final sentence of his yarn. Not even the "bond of the sea" amends this disconnect; Marlow and his companions sit "apart, indistinct and silent," in motionless isolation as they confront "the heart of an immense darkness" (*Heart* 77).

Dowell also surrenders the lucidity of his narrative in his defiance of Leonora's authorial influence. Despite the factual view of life that Leonora has imparted to Dowell, he stubbornly refuses to shed his former perception of his identity and station. In his attempt to legitimize his prior conception of himself and the "minuet" that he, Florence, and the Ashburnhams stepped, Dowell vacillates between the truth that Leonora has told him and the lies he has told himself, refusing to wholly discard his illusions (*Soldier* 10). The result is a chronologically disordered narrative jumble that often wavers on the edge of a complete breakdown in communication between storyteller and reader. For example, at one point Dowell disrupts his own narrative and admits, "Well, those are my impressions.... What actually happened was this. I pieced it together afterwards" (*Soldier* 76, original ellipses). Despite the fact that Dowell's entire act of writing takes place "afterwards," he regards his delusions as no less valid than "what actually

happened.” Consequently, Dowell’s constant shifts between his past and present forms of knowing often damage his credibility as a narrator:

When one discusses an affair... one goes back, one goes forward... I console myself with thinking that this is a real story and that, after all, real stories are probably told best in the way a person telling a story would tell them. They will then seem the most real (*Soldier* 120).

Henstra appropriately inquires, “Why would it be necessary to take pains to make a real story... seem most real?” (184). With this passage Dowell exposes his narrative as instrument of self-deception even as it serves as a platform for self-creation.

Despite the numerous violations of the reader’s trust that Dowell and Marlow commit, however, the two narrators are startlingly persuasive. Even if the reader can recognize Dowell’s insistence upon his “too truthful” nature as humorously inaccurate, it is nevertheless difficult not to assume the role of the “sympathetic soul” he imagines (*Soldier* 161, 15). Dowell paints himself a victim of Florence’s abuse, for example, and though his behavior indicates that he is a rather oppressive and worthless husband, Florence nevertheless remains a profoundly unlikeable character. Ford criticizes the English for this precise quality of sympathetic readership, arguing that it overrides one’s capacity for critical thought: “And that is how it seems to me, the typical Englishman behaves at all plays—or on this spectacle that is life. He thinks so much about how he would have himself behave—or his sister, or the woman he loves—that he loses, once and forever, the critic in the sympathizer” (*Spirit* 343). That Dowell’s often-ridiculous performance of identity manages to inspire one’s sympathy is a testament to the power of narrative in shaping reality.

What is more, Cole argues that in his failure to achieve intimacy with other men, Marlow emerges from his tale as “a resplendent—if battle-scarred—masculine individual who speaks with a new kind of literary authority” (253). By the end of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow hardly seems authoritative; his yarn ends with a grave act of dishonesty and a faltering breakdown of speech. Nevertheless, despite this collapse and countless other blows to Marlow’s credibility, including his abhorrent racism, it is difficult not to trust the frame narrator’s description of

Marlow as “not typical,” an exceptional, unconventional storyteller who “resembled an idol” (*Heart* 5, 3). Even in the face of clear evidence of Marlow’s conventionality and deceit, many readers take his word at face value; many critics, for instance, fail to question the likely fabricated meaning with which Marlow imbues Kurtz’s final words.

Thus, the weight of the two authors’ indictment of the irresistible power of words to shape political sentiment only gains strength as readers become further removed in history from a culture permeated with imperialist rhetoric. An argument for cultural relativity can be made to explain the racism and sexism of nineteenth century men like Marlow and Dowell; the modern reader, however, is expected to know better than to fully trust a man who cannot recognize Africans as human or one who characterizes romantic relationships as the acquisition of territory. Still, just like Marlow, who similarly believes himself immune to the allure of the lofty imperialist language that seduces his aunt, it is nearly impossible for even the modern reader not to succumb, at least to some extent, to the enchanting magnetism of the narrators’ eloquence and the temptation to sympathize with their verbal performances. The degree to which we are seduced by their narratives reveals to us our own guilt; we become equally responsible for the uncritical acceptance of seductive language that allowed the atrocities in the Congo to occur. Somewhat paradoxically, in the idiosyncratic and highly subjective conscience of an individual character, we catch sight of our own delusions, insecurities, and blindness. Ford and Conrad’s officially stated artistic goal⁸ has been achieved: by “the power of the written word,” Ford and Conrad tear down our illusions of superiority to those who tolerated the abuses of the colonial mission, laying bare the reader’s culpability as “that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask” (281).

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¹ In fact, Conrad refutes this interpretation of his technique in his own words. After stating that a novelist should be free from the dogma of literary formulas, Conrad elaborates:

It must not be supposed that I claim for the artist in fiction the freedom of moral Nihilism. I would require from him many acts of faith of which the first would be the cherishing of an undying hope; and hope, it will not be contested, implies all the piety of effort and renunciation.... To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so ("Books" 14-15)

Although he does not claim that his art will change the world, in this essay Conrad hints that the best art rests upon the belief that the world could be better. Such a philosophy, of course, requires the artist to possess some conviction of what "good" means. In other words, even if an artist breaks with traditional narrative conventions completely, the artist must still maintain some moral sensibility. Similarly, Ford playfully expresses his hope that his honest rendering of the details of life will enable readers to discover authentic truths about the human condition:

You have to render with such exactitude that more specialised beings than you, learning from you what are the secret needs of humanity, may judge how many white-tiled bathrooms are, or to what extent parliamentary representation is, necessary for the happiness of men and women (*Remembrance* 223).

² "Upon the whole you could not have said that she was not English to look at her—only in her enunciation of the word that meant 'horrible' there was a sincerity that was entirely un-English. Because, of course, no typical Englishwoman of her class would be allowed, or would allow herself, to come into contact with anything that is really 'horrible.' An Englishwoman, after all, must not be moved; if she suffers it she is not English" (*Spirit* 295)

³ Conrad explains that "[Marryat's] novels are not the outcome of his art, but of his

character, like the deeds that make up his record of naval service" ("Tales of the Sea" 56). In Marryat's work Conrad identifies key attributes of popular fiction: "His morality is honorable and conventional.... His adventures are enthralling; the rapidity of his action fascinates, his method is crude, his sentimentality... is often factitious" ("Tales of the Sea" 57-58).

⁴ Conrad wrote his letter to *The New York Times "Saturday Review"* in response to their review of *The Inheritors*, an allegorical novel he and Ford wrote collaboratively that satirizes the exploits of King Leopold II in the Congo Free State. Thus, although it would be easy to interpret this artistic statement as a declaration of total moral relativity, Conrad made this statement in defense of a notably anti-imperialist work.

⁵ In his nonfiction work, Ford presents the "relations between the sexes" as the individual manifestation of English national behavior. Whereas the English people's implicit consent to Leopold II's transgressions in the Congo epitomizes the public display of callousness that their verbal restraint engenders, relations between men and women model this cruelty at an individual level. Recounting an incident nearly identical to Nancy and Edward's relationship, Ford recalls the parting between a married man of his acquaintance and the man's young lover after discreet arrangements are made to send her overseas to avoid scandal (*Spirit* 338-339). He describes the couple's final interaction, shortly followed by the girl's death, as tragically devoid of connection:

What was most impressive in the otherwise commonplace affair, was the silence of the parting... it seems to me that at the moment of separation a word or two might have saved the girl's life and the man's misery without infringing upon eternal verities.... But a silence so utter: a so demonstrative lack of tenderness, seems to me to be a manifestation of a national characteristic that is almost appalling" (*Spirit* 339).

Ford also hints at the political nature of gender in Conrad's work, noting that the more his stories included women, the more political they became:

But, even as he left the hated sea further and further behind him, women and non-seafarers came more and more into his books—and political intrigues and the careers of republics entered more and more largely.... And, as he went onward, women became of more and more importance in his political romances—and it was more and more the political romance that occupied his mind (*Portraits* 64-65).

⁶ Marlow's outright condemnations of Kurtz's abuse of this instrument of power are not entirely credible given Marlow's participation in Kurtz's self-mythologizing; as Cole summarizes, "Despite Marlow's tendency to maintain an ironic distance from Kurtz's behavior in Africa, that distance is repeatedly eclipsed by Marlow's insistence on the power and permanence of their bond" (259). Aside from his lie to the Intended, in which Marlow conceals from her what he believes to be Kurtz's final judgment upon his soul, Marlow also buries the sinister intentions masked by Kurtz's rhetoric when he meets with a representative of the Company and "offered him the report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs' with the postscriptum torn off" (*Heart* 71). Indeed, Marlow's criticisms of the imperialism he witnesses in the Congo often center on the inefficiency and waste of their methods rather than the idea of imperialism itself, for, as Marlow argues, unlike the conquerors of the past, "What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency" (*Heart* 6).

⁷ Although Dowell justifies his need to control Florence's thoughts and emotions under the guise of protecting Florence's heart, in *Spirit of the People* Ford describes this same behavior as characteristically English conduct. Excluding any emotionally-stirring topics from conversation is part of the English "good form" to which Dowell conforms:

Nowadays I know very well what "things" are; they include, in fact, religious topics, questions of the relations of the sexes; the conditions of poverty-stricken districts—every subject from which one can digress into anything moving. That, in fact, is the crux, the Rubicon that one must never cross. And that is what makes the English conversation so profoundly, so portentously, troublesome to maintain. It is a question of a very fine game, the rules of which you must observe.... The ramifications of this characteristic are so infinite that it would be hopeless to attempt to exhaust them. And the looking out for them leads one into situations of the most bizarre (*Spirit* 336).

On the previous page, Ford explains that the reason to avoid "anything moving" in conversation is that to experience a depth of feeling would threaten the illusion of pleasantness:

It might be argued, superficially, that because he has done little to remedy the state of things on the Congo, that he is lacking in feeling. But, as a matter of fact, it is really because he is aware—subconsciously if you will—of the depth of his capacity to feel, that the Englishman takes refuge in his particular official optimism. He hides from himself the fact that there are in the world greed, hunger, lust or evil passions, simply because he knows that if he comes to think of them at all they will move him beyond bearing. He prefers, therefore, to say—and to hypnotise himself into believing—that the world is a very good—an all-good—place. He would prefer to believe that such people as the officials of the Congo Free State do not really exist in the modern world. People, he will say, do not do such things (*Spirit* 335).

In other words, English performance of proper conduct depends on a willful blindness. Dowell's belief in Florence's heart condition allows him to believe that "the world is a very good—an all-good place"; it is the saving illusion that justifies their sexless marriage, allows Dowell to deny any possibility that Florence is unfaithful, and perpetuates Dowell's view of her as wholly dependent upon him. Once again, Dowell assumes the role of the patient; it is not Florence's heart he is afraid to agitate, but his own.

⁸ See p. 281 of Conrad's preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* generally accepted as Conrad's most reliable statement about his artistic beliefs. Ford agreed: "it was because that same belief was previously and so profoundly held by the writer that we could work for so long together" (*Remembrance* 178-179).