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Alexandre goes south: A novel – and – An essay, 'The modern adventure novel'

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ALEXANDRE GOES SOUTH: A Novel

- and –

An Essay, 'The Modern Adventure Novel'

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THE MODERN ADVENTURE NOVEL

An Essay

INTRODUCTION

When asked what sort of novel I was writing, I always said 'a modern adventure novel'. And then I began to question myself about the meaning of these three words together, the substance and the definition of a modern adventure novel. Does such a thing exist?

In my novel 'Alexandre Goes South', Alexandre is a thirty-year-old Parisian from a family that enjoy wealth and privilege, facts that provide a setting but play only incidental roles in the events that unfold. Alexandre goes through a series of crises, which propel the journey that launches him onto the road to manhood.

The novel begins at the exact moment of suffering, after a break-up, when Alexandre thinks he will do anything to win back Malena, even sleep on her doormat. A self-described poet and admirer of Rimbaud, he escapes it all by embarking on a spontaneous trip to Africa in search of adventure, in the spirit of sixteen-year-old Rimbaud's 1870 departure from France in search for adventurous relief from his tattered young life. Alexandre wants to adventure into the world as a poet, but rather he exists in the world in the manner of a poet and the adventure unfolds. As Kathleen Sands (1974) writes, 'The role of the initiate is a passive one: he endures rather than controls.'

We could say that adventure was born with the birth of human consciousness, that it is recorded as ancient 'novels' on clay tablets from the Babylonian era in the epic of Gilgamesh, and in the myths and legends recorded 5,000 years ago in Egypt . . . or in the stories of Scheherazade, a multicultural Oriental collection of stories rooted in Arabian, Persian, Mesopotamian, Indian, Jewish, and Egyptian folklore.

The adventure novel was born in the nineteenth century, separating itself from the novel. The genre appeared during a century of exploration that followed the great conquests and the expansion of knowledge. The adventure novel served both. The earliest adventure fiction was published in serial episodes through the vehicle of a new type of publication: the periodical. Serial writing created suspense, authors influenced each other, and readers anticipated the plot. Through intertextuality, the genre defined itself, and the adventure novel distinguished itself from the travel journal and exoticism.

The journey aspect, carried forward from the travel journal, became a frame for this new fiction that was all about action – one main adventure and other misadventures articulated. The adventure novel was usually optimistic, with a triumphant ending, in the service of an ideology.

I chose to undertake a comparative study of three contrasting nineteenth-century adventure novels: the educational *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* of Jules Verne, the horrific *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* by Edgar Allan Poe, and Joseph Conrad's partly autobiographical *Heart of Darkness*. These first two novels have in common the exploration of the centre of the earth – one through a volcano and the other through the South Pole – and both explore the Hollow Earth theory that was first proposed in the late seventeenth century and was enjoying a renewed interest among some scientists in the mid nineteenth century. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, based on historical fact, explores the centre of a continent, Africa.

Each novel is an initiatory novel, in its own way. While Verne and Poe approach the initiation theme through the progress to manhood of their young protagonists, Conrad's middle-aged hero enters the sacred and unfathomable at a more mature level, culminating in a 'supreme initiation' – a spiritual, but disturbing, insight. Two of the three works contrast with the laws of the genre: only *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* is optimistic. Poe's novel is oniric, if not nightmarish, and at the frontier of the fantastic. Conrad's novel, the most literary, is unique in its ideology, denouncing certain aspects of colonialism without denouncing colonialism itself, an aspect that classifies it as a true frontier novel.

The controversy around *Heart of Darkness* takes us to the twentieth century's decolonisation and post-colonial novels, when authors of the new countries that were once European colonies begin to raise their voices in protest and long-hidden resentment against their colonisers. Frontiers are redrawn, the colonised write in the language of the coloniser, and new discursive spaces are created. The adventurer, the explorer make room for *the other*. The concept of genre itself is shaken, and at this point, I believe, the modern adventure novel is born. It keeps the characteristics of the genre, but the quest is more individual, less ideological, masculine or feminine – liberated and refusing any sort of codification.

The adventure experience for the reader emerges from the author's own adventurous undertaking as he contemplates his creation before even setting pen to

paper. It is this moment in the creative process that is reflected in this passage from a letter written by Conrad in May 1905 to his friend, Ford Madox Ford:

> I am sunk in a vaguely uneasy dream of visions—of innumerable tales that float in an atmosphere of volupt[u]ously aching bones. Comprenez Vous ça? And nothing nothing can do away with that sort of gently active numbness. (Karl & Davies [Eds.], *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol 3, p. 241)

I.

THE ADVENTURE NOVEL

The *adventure novel* was born from the novel and has distinguished itself from it, as the *modern novel* has distinguished itself from the *ancient novel*. Like Marthe Robert (1972), we must go further back, to the origins of the novel. The first novels, today classified as the *ancient novel*, were written in the Roman tongue and characterized by a 'true or fictitious narrative' (Robert, 1972, p. 19).

From Ancient to Modern

The ancient novel is first of all an oral, re-transcribed narrative. This is the reason why several versions of a particular narrative can be found. In the same way as storytellers change the content according to its narration, mood and audience, so, too, do those who transcribe the oral tale grant themselves certain liberties. The ancient novel does not wonder whether it is true or fictitious, for it places both elements on the same level. Like the storyteller's discourse, it is actualized and alive. It is as the poet Verlaine sees the woman in his poem, '*Mon rêve familier*', 'My Familiar Dream'.

> *Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant*
> *D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime et qui m'aime*
> *Et qui n'est chaque fois ni tout à fait la même*
> *Ni tout à fait une autre, et m'aime et me comprend.*
>
> I often make that strange and penetrating dream
> Of an unknown woman, whom I love and by whom I am loved
> And who is in turn neither another
> Nor quite the same, and loves and understands me.

This is my understanding of the ancient novel, a form still so close to the oral expression that it is not quite a fixed form, as it is much less set rigidly in writing. The storyteller's voice can still be heard, the copyist's hand can be felt, and the reader is the recipient. The ancient novel is comparable to a palimpsest not yet dry; it is speech delivered by writing. The narrative and its reception override the accuracy or the concept of authorship.

The ancient novel endures with some modern authors, such as Paolo Coelho, who draw from the breeding ground of human stories and give us narratives which strangely appeal to us. The ancient novel is like the *I Ching*, a Chinese manuscript dating from around 1000 BCE. The *I Ching* is a work both mathematical and cosmogonist, esoteric and pragmatic, moral and poetic. It suggests the permanence of questions and the infinity of interpretations.

The ancient novel tells a story, a cycle, and it accompanies its reader until the end of the tale. Like the *I Ching*, the story is permanent, timeless and inscribed in duration. One of the most widely known of these ancient tales is Tristan and Isolde, an old Celtic legend kept alive in the oral tradition until it was eventually published as 'Tristan et Yseult' in the mid twelfth century by two French poets, Béroul and Thomas of Britain. Only fragments of each remain. The fragments of Béroul's more barbaric version are missing both the beginning and the end, while fragments of Thomas's version—more in line with the Anglo-Franc medieval courtly rules—were missing much of the central action of the story. About 1170, Eilhart von Oberge wrote a German version. Based primarily on Béroul, he filled in missing bits with elements of Thomas and his own vision.

Through the centuries, other European variations have appeared, but all begin and end the same: Tristan falls in love with his uncle's wife Isolde, their affair is discovered, they are separated, and they both die (Demaules, 1995). The tale is revived in Wagner's 1865 opera *Tristan und Isolde* (Shirley, 2015), and again in the 2006 epic film by the same name (Diamant et al., 2006). Tristan and Isolde are truly from yesterday and today; they live in cyclical time. The ancient novel belongs to this sacred cyclical dimension of medieval time.

According to Robert (1972), the modern novel was born in England and reflected the concerns of the local bourgeoisie after the Industrial Revolution: 'Regarding this, we can say that the novel is a middle-class genre, which before becoming national and universal, started by being specifically English' (p. 11). Therefore, born in England in a particular historical context, the modern novel is about particular concerns. It does not belong to cyclical time but is anchored in a linear one. It is no longer timeless and permanent. It fixes and freezes. It leaves orality to become a text, and the one who writes it claims their paternity. The modern novel belongs to its author.

While the ancient novel is a narrative that is not concerned with whether or not it is fictitious, the modern novel *is* fictitious. It is the very postulate of what is fictitious, and it prides itself in creating a novelistic reality: 'the novelistic reality is fictitious', states Robert (1972, p. 21). The transposition is not from orality to writing, but from reality to text and from text to reality. The dynamic is reciprocal, for even though it claims its fictitious nature, the modern novel is attached to its relationship with reality, as well as its ambivalence and its duality.

Don Quixote is the first modern novel, asserts Robert (1972), 'if we understand by modernity the movement of a literature which is always in search of itself, wonders, and makes its doubts and faith regarding its own message the very topic of its narratives' (p. 11). *Don Quixote* is a parody of medieval usages. *El genioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, the ingenious Don Quixote de la Mancha, his real name being Alonso Quichano, is a gentleman obsessed by the descriptions of valour he finds in his large collection of books on chivalry. He is so inspired that he sets off on his old horse Rossinante to become a wandering knight, naming himself Don Quixote, advocate of everything good and worthy.

Alonso Quichano, alias Don Quixote, goes to war against evil. He leaves his library, the world of books, for reality. His quest is chimerical, his visions are authentic. So where is the boundary between reality and imagination when chimerical deeds act on reality? Thus, Don Quixote stages his apparent contradictions while thwarting them. The modern novel leaves orality, while loosening its ties to reality ... therefore constructing its intrinsic reality. Don Quixote is the poet's figure, the one who perceives another dimension of reality, who recreates a connection between things.

Mathilde in 'Alexandre Goes South' leaves her certainties, not the comfort of a library but the aesthetic of a life she built patiently. She reckons 'What's the use of a perfect life when it's smashed into bits?' (p. 196). Even what was dear to her heart feels different, 'even my roses are no comfort' (p. 197). Her pain is as authentic as her quest is desperate. She relates more to the unknown, searching to resonate with an environment that was familiar to Alexandre. She, too, tries to create this connection between things, maintaining this way the hope that she will find her son. It proves to be difficult emotionally and rationally: 'I piece together a reality that has the consistency of a shadow (p. 222).

The modern novel does not come within the frame of the sanctity of cyclical time; it becomes cyclical itself, being its beginning and its end, a finished object and therefore perfect. Robert (1972) speaks about the degree of reality: 'here again reality is the part of illusion the storyteller likes to play with' (p. 21). Reality and illusion oppose each other in a confrontation which produces literature. As Michel Foucault (1966) writes, 'The language breaks its old relationship with things to enter this lonely sovereignty from where it won't reappear in its rough nature which has become literature' (p. 62).

Don Quixote, the poet's figure, perceives another dimension of reality and recreates some connection. The different perceptions of duration are juxtaposing themselves and coexist for the reader. There is the one of Don Quixote and then the one of Sancho Pancha, the sensible man rooted in reality, worried about the demands of his stomach – as his name suggests. The distance between reality and perceived reality, as well as the transposition of medieval values in a reality which does not seem to fit, enables this questioning. Don Quixote wants to face reality while denying it. Thus, he fights opposing forces in his dream, but his dream has no purpose other than to envision the world to which he wishes to belong.

The modern novel resembles Don Quixote the knight, as he stands in front of the windmill ready for battle: the setup provokes questions and critical distance. This example illustrates the strength of the novel. It is somehow free to believe and to make believe; it distances itself from reality immediately. This distance is born from disillusion which seeks to reintegrate reality while denying it at the same time. As the reflection in the mirror is not the reflected object and always refers to it, Robert (1972) speaks about 'truth of fake and illusion of reality' (p. 67).

We can also question how the writer is impacting the world. Don Quixote fights, but what is the gain? As Anne Roche (2010) writes: '*Ce constat de l'irrémédiable appelle deux réponses, l'une symbolique, l'autre qui voudrait bien ne pas être que symbolique*' – The acknowledgement of the irremediable calls for two responses, one symbolic and the other that would like to be more than symbolic.

How can a battle in a fictional world be won in reality? Can a fictional discourse impact the course of real-world events? With Don Quixote, his power is to encompass the symbolic and what it wants to signify, since the parable carries its message.

Thus the novel claims its totalitarian freedom, its anarchy, its thirst for the absolute, its lying truth – but questions and wonders, while seeking its place in the world as the 'seeing' visionary and quirky poet – and by extension the artist seeks a personal place amidst humans. In so doing, the novel is entirely free. It chooses to be credhible and untrue, only acknowledging its own truth. It is free and creates this space of freedom where all contradictions can be staged.

Birth of the Adventure Novel

By 1800, we may say that the world has been conquered . . . in a sense. The great discoveries belong to the past, primarily the innovations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The planet has been unified and round since Galileo's trial and his *urbi et orbi* in 1633. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are associated with the discovery of other cultures, leading to great literary movements, such as orientalism, exotism and romanticism. This is the era when great expeditions are launched; artifacts are collected, listed and classified; the far corners of the globe are mapped. Great quantities of information about distant places are amassed.

In some select circles, prominent writers of the time, mix with scientists and explorers. In London, it is the Savile Club in London, where, among others, Stevenson, Kipling and Haggard are in attendance. In Paris, it is the Geographic Society, founded in 1821 by Jean Nicolas Buache, Louis XVI's geographer, where Verne mixes with Cuvier and Chateaubriand . . . or even Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. These societies and their members contribute to sharing and spreading knowledge. With the Industrial Revolution comes the idea that knowledge must be spread, and technical conditions are united in the early nineteenth century.

The intellectual abundance of the time and the spreading of knowledge promote the development of the adventure novel. Indeed, the scientific and medical discoveries are soon known by the public, thanks to journals. The journal becomes the favourite communication tool. The British scientific journal, *Philosophical Transactions*, first issued in 1665, is advertised as the world's first science journal, or '*La Science Illustrée*' in France. Many journal titles appear, differing from each other to reflect the schools of thought they represent. Jules Verne publishes a short story, 'A Drama in the Air', in *Science Illustrée*, and the serial novel is born when H. G. Wells publishes *The War of the Worlds* in the same journal. Thereafter, Verne's novels, under the title *Voyages*

extraordinaires dans les mondes connus et inconnus – Extraordinary Voyages in Known and Unknown Words – are published in the journal *Le magasin d'éducation et de recreation*. It is the beginning of a new sort of periodical, now named a *magazine*, that adds the element of entertainment to its mission to educate. Literacy is rapidly growing, and France, England, and many of the states in the United States pass compulsory education laws. For the first time in history, there exists a large audience of readers outside the rich and privileged.

Through this vehicle of the periodical, a novel comes out in a few months and may be published and translated very quickly. The success of *The Count of Monte Cristo* was such that many readers write in, in an attempt to find out what will happen next before the publication of the next instalment. Serial writing begins to govern writing, literary reception and the reading of books. Thus, some features in writing are exaggerated and overinvested, and suspense becomes an indispensable quality.

For the authors, publication exercises an influence, one author upon another, and a dialogue develops as they answer each other, enriching each other's writing. The authors know each other, share and correspond with one another. Thus Verne pays homage to Poe in 'An Antarctic Mystery'. Matthieu Letourneux (2010) writes, 'Due to mutual influence and every writer being inspired by the others, the adventure novel has become a genre and has evolved, altering through successive contributions' (p. 18).

Readers, too, play an important part. They anticipate the plot, whereas the author plays with and foils their expectations, uses suspense by delaying the moment of giving answers. The narrative is marked by a series of moments of suspense, followed by moments of rest. Very soon, the genre goes beyond the first intention, which was educational and entertaining, as testified by the title *Le magasin d'éducation et de recreation*.

Hence, through intertextuality and serial writing, the codes of the genre define themselves and are put in place, both in writing and reading. There is a reading pact between author and reader. The adventure opens the door to the extraordinary, and the structure of the adventure novel is codified. Jacques Goimard (2004), in his *Critique des genres*, proposes – as a decisive criterion – the change of scene, a designation that distinguishes the adventure novel from the travel story and exotism.

The mechanism as constituted is simple. First, there is an initial situation which stages the hero in everyday life, as an ordinary person who is not particularly

distinguished from his or her congeners. Then, an event appears which breaks the course of daily life. The main character enters the adventure and becomes the hero when he or she triggers its mechanisms. The main adventure is the plot of the novel, and the misadventures all serve as episodes. As Goimard (2004) says, 'the novel doesn't only correspond to the narrative (adventure) but also its every step (misadventures) is circumscribed and precisely located in the mechanic of adventure' (p. 37). Therefore, the hero becomes the person of the circumstance, and the achievements realized measure up to the difficulties encountered.

The designation *adventure* comes from the Latin *adventura* – it is what happens, either good or evil. The adventure novel is first of all a novel of action. Adventure is above all the unknown, the coincidence and the hazard. Many adventure stories take place at sea (e.g., Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*, Ernest Gann's *Twilight for the Gods*, to name a few). For everything that happens to be an adventure, one has to cast off, break with terra firma and daily life.

Vladimir Jankelevitch (1963) declares, 'An adventure, whatever it is, even a little one for a laugh, is only adventurous when it contains a part of possible death' (p. 19). Adventure is hazard and supreme hazard is death. The adventurer, being in the unknown, puts life at risk. Adventure becomes the permanent confrontation with external forces and positions the main character as a hero, fighting to restore order.

Philippe Hamon (1984) distinguishes three functions of the hero. The hero is the main actor, the figure around which the story is organized, as well as the bearer of the values of the text. The hero's subjective view generally represents the dominant ideology to which the reader will identify. Hamon (1972) talks about the 'socio-stylistic' approach of the character, being for him a 'domain strongly tributary of ideological constraints and cultural filters' (p. 87).

The adventure novel, then, begins as a popular genre that aims at a young audience with an educational purpose. The hero is young and often male, ready to endure every danger, even at the risk of death. He lives a great adventure through the vehicle of secondary adventure (misadventures). The narrative goes from moments of action and suspense to quiet ones, from action to educational breaks. Adventure breaks with daily life, a bracket in the character's life. When the adventure ends, he can go on with his life again or go on a new adventure.

The historical context which has allowed the adventure novel to appear has been described here, as well as its technique, which has propelled it beyond its original simplistic desire for the popularisation of knowledge. The adventure novel is primarily spread through serialization in periodicals and eventually becomes a codified genre with strong structural features. When comparing the novel with the adventure novel, it appears that the novel is free, whereas the adventure novel is much codified, and a basic component of its code is the travelling theme.

The adventure novel was born from the travel story. Whether it is extraordinary or not – by sea, by air, in time – the *journey* plays a central role. It is interesting to compare the adventure novel's theme of the journey with another important literary movement of the nineteenth century: romanticism. Travellers' journals have had significant influence on art and literature in movements such as orientalism and exotism, but the romantic movement had the greatest impact in the nineteenth century. Romanticists, being great travellers, are often influential people. Chateaubriand, for example, born of nobility, was Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as a famous writer.

The romantic movement was born in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century with Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. The connections between nature and humanity, between the inner landscape (of the soul) and the outer landscape (of natural surroundings) are expressed in it. The romantic movement in each European country has a specific tone generated by the particular political and social conditions in the country in which it develops. All European romantic traditions, however, have in common their opposition to rationalism. European romanticism's sympathies coincide with the values of Gothic medieval times versus classicism, and it is attracted to orientalism, with its vision of a poeticised east. Most of all, it places the individual at the centre of its conception of the universe, and this individual is linked to a creator and united to him through nature.

Romanticism is a libertarian movement at odds with the establishment. Its representatives in France are clever young people, labelled 'The Lions' in the early 1930s and 'The Dandies' in the latter part of the decade. Victor Hugo's *Hernani* constitutes a turning point. In this five-act drama, Hugo questions the principles of tragedy and the fundamental rules of classicism's three unities: (1) unity of action, whereby a play has but one action with few, if any, subplots; (2) unity of time, whereby the action is resolved in a 24-hour period; and (3) unity of place, whereby there is no

change in scene, but all action takes place in one physical location. Even more bold and direct, Hugo's preface to his drama, *Cromwell*, is a defence and an illustration of the romantic drama, a manifesto of romantic literature that declares itself free from the confines of classicism.

Romanticism is a total phenomenon, an act of reaction. Romanticism draws a new relation to time by a greater distance from the present and a strong taste for history. Nineteenth-century romanticism is a movement of protest. In literature, it opposes classicism, but it goes further – a total phenomenon, a protest against the establishment. The romantic questions everything. Driven by an ideal, it perceives more easily the failing of the century.

Unlike romanticism, the adventure novel is completely in tune with its century. The change of scene offers a setting to adventure, associating a space and a time to it. Letourneux (2010) compares this setting with a 'picture frame' (p. 75). For him, this frame will determine for the reader his vraisemblance . . . or not . . . which is possible via the use of referential codes linked to reality and other texts (p. 77). Both its background and its material limits the body of the work, which allows one to decipher it. Says Letourneux, 'No doubt it is the setting . . . that defines the connection between adventure and reality and the conditions of likelihood, essential when we get interested in a novel which is firstly involved in the narration of extraordinary events' (p. 77).

The romanticists also try to describe nature . . . or rather to transcribe *pittoresco*, a painting term which literally means 'in a painter's way'. It persists in perceiving everything the eye can see; it is *picturesque*. Architectural historian Christopher Hussey (1927) describes the characteristics of the picturesque as 'a roughness and sudden variation joined to irregularity of form, colour, lighting and even sound' (p. 16). It is this same concern of ultra mimesis which moves Eugène Fromentin (1857) to say, in *Un été dans le Sahara*, 'The difficulty of painting with a painting brush [made him] try the quill' (p. 88).

Romanticism wants to transmit what it felt on contact with nature. This notion is different from classical beauty, which corresponds to order and symmetry – or to the presence of man in nature – and to the sublime which is the imposing or frightening feature corresponding to the predominance of nature over man. The question is somewhat beyond the balance of power between man and nature, to decide who the

winner is. It is rather about man into the wild, witness of what is happening within himself on contact with nature.

Gilpin (1792) asks, 'Shall we suppose it a greater pleasure to the sportsman to pursue a trivial animal, than it is to the man of taste to pursue the beauties of nature?' The response to this question is also what differentiates the place of the journey for the romanticists and in the adventure novel. The latter prioritises action and, in this sense, hunting an animal or triumphing over a monster or even reaching a mythical place gives more pleasure to adventurers than beauty of the places in which they find themselves. Nature serves nothing but a setting to the adventure novel. It is necessary but the setting is a backdrop or décor. It allows the creation of what Thomas Pavel (1975) calls 'fictional worlds' (p. 165). Pavel defends his 'integrationist view' – that there is no true ontological difference between fictional and non-fictional descriptions of the universe – in opposition to the 'segregationist' view of some philosophers who assert that nonexistent (fictional people, places, events) are outside logic because claims can be made only about things that actually exist. Umberto Eco (1975) talks about 'possible worlds' and refers to the necessary reading pact between author and reader which gives a backdrop for the extraordinary to happen. And the extraordinary does happen. It is the adventure which is created by the author and the reader in this acceptance of the *extraordinary* world becoming a *possible* world.

The setting of the adventure may not necessarily be exotic, but it becomes exotic in the sense that it breaks with daily life, a 'gap compared with what is known' (Letourneux, 2010, p. 28). The gap merges with the extraordinary; we leave the everyday setting to create another, also defined, also likely, but where the extraordinary may happen. The breaking is not between one location and another, but rather between one setting and another. According to Letourneux (2010), exotism is a movement towards something – in other words, a desire for elsewhere – whereas the change of scene that he calls *dépaysement*, the movement which takes away from something, becomes disruptive. In 'Alexandre Goes South', the disruption occurs before the desire to leave; it is the desire to separate from what is familiar in search of solitude, the desire to look inward. Paris becomes 'a mirror' (p. 59), and he returns 'underground' and takes 'refuge in a cinema. In the dark room images are passing' (p. 59).

Romanticism uses every process of enlargement or drama, of projection to another location, exotic, disillusionment opposed to reality, an *elsewhere* opposed to a

here. The adventure novel sets another likely setting: romantics are cast in an elsewhere to find nothing but themselves. *Here* and *there* join together, are in wonder or disappointment, but it is always oneself that is carried.

We can sum up the romanticists' way with these two Latin expressions, *mutatis mutandis* and *celeris paribus – what had to be changed having been changed* and *everything is equal*. The romanticists are in quest of themselves and are cast to find nothing but themselves. There and here are stated in a painful here, a dreamed there, a disappointing there, an elsewhere where one gets bored. Patrick Née (2009) speaks of 'the euphoric tension of comparison' (p. 32). The here and there are always joined in the self. Whether the feeling is wonder or disappointment, it is a confrontation of oneself in both locations.

As a decisive criterion, Goimard (2004) suggests the change-of-scene designation which distinguishes the adventure novel from the journey and exotism. The adventure novel is a breaking with the everyday setting, without necessarily a spatial displacement. It is everything but our 'daily mental tone' (Segalen, 1995, p. 748), everything that is 'exo'. Victor Segalen speaks about a sensation felt only by the true traveller and names it 'exote' (p. 750). Out of this, one will be, by essence, exotic. It is this breaking with daily life which will constitute the change of scene.

The change of scene is entirely built in the way in which the scenes of a play would be. For example, if the change of scene is historical, the story is reduced to a few events. History becomes a scene, more a location than a landmark in time. The criterion of *likelihood* prevails on exactness. The concern is not historical, for it is not a real interest *in* the era, but rather the spirit *of* the era serving the nature of the adventure, which allows movement away from daily life.

I choose to adopt Letourneux's (2010) classification concerning the different types of scene change. The change of scene can be social; the world will be urban and contemporary, and the distanciation will be made on the social ladder, either towards the top or the bottom. In 'Alexandre Goes South', Alexandre discovers other aspects of Paris like the Biffins market, also called the market of misery (p. 75). Therefore, the seemingly well-known world reveals a hidden side. In the fantastic change of scene, the gap stands between natural and supernatural – 'tension between the realistic and marvellous worlds', as Tzvetan Todorov (1970, p. 192) says. He also mentions the change of scene for the eyes, which consists in a change in the point of view, as, for

example, through the eyes of animals, as in Jack London's novels, or when the characters take on another identity, as in Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Thus, once the scene is set and the mechanism put in place, the adventure novel writes itself in its era. The ideologies of the time can be found in it – the great travellers' writings, the scientific breakthroughs, as well as fantasies and stereotypes. Hence, Africa is the incarnation of savagery, and the Manichean logic perfectly serves the mechanism of the adventure novel, so well depicted in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.*

The current affairs of the era nourish the novel, which in turn, colour reality. With the colonial ideology, for example, the relation between humankind and the world is based upon conquest and possession, and the adventure novel of that era serves the colonial ideology (e.g., H. Rider Haggard's popular novels, *King Solomon's Mines*, published in 1885, and *She*, published in 1889). The frontier between reality and the adventure novel seems very pronounced, but actually it is not so far from the ideology of the time and the audience's evoked fantasies related to the places. The adventure novel serves the colonial ideal of its time without it being its confessed goal. It is a novel of action which is set in its time. Readers identify with the heroes and follow them in their adventures and misadventures. The very structure of the novel, going from moments of tension to moments of rest, slowly leads the reader to the end.

In general, adventure novels of the nineteenth century follow the rules of the genre. The adventure novel is therefore, so to speak, well put together or even locked. The hero is the main figure, the point of view is unique, and the objective world defined by the hero's subjective view; good and evil are absolute principles, always with adventure as a vector. In this 'well-oiled machine' (p. 58), as Letourneux (2010) calls the nineteenth-century adventure novel, we can insert a grain of sand – a troublemaker disrupting its every pillar. We put aside the tragic hero or the romantic traveller and get rid of the poet. Yet, a novel like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, though showing the dark side of a continent, reveals the human being's darkness, the human part of savagery. It is a novel apart from the adventure story, as we have just codified it, but it is a dialogue with the genre, a transgression of the rules of the genre and a literary work which plays with the rules it has itself established.

As the adventure novel was born in the gap and the breaking with daily life, it also lives within the gap of codes it has given to itself. At what point does it cease to be an adventure novel?

II.

ADVENTURE NOVELS IN DISPARATE SHAPES

Letourneux (2010) speaks about an extreme rigour in the building of an adventure novel and calls it 'architextuality' (p. 11). Even though extremely codified, the adventure novel can take various and disparate shapes, depending on the mixing of elements which compose it. Aside from the criteria mentioned above, we can add impact, effect, controversy and other important criteria, not the least of which is literary value, which makes the work stand the test of time.

Part I discussed how the adventure novel, despite being inspired by the travel story, uses travelling mainly as a setting. The adventure can be set at sea, on land or in the air – or even in space or time. These categories can be combined; for instance, an adventure can be set both at sea and on land, as in Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island.* Therefore, we have a type of adventure, a type of adventurer, and an aim which is located within the themes of the novel.

My approach is comparative. Following closely to the texts and examining the comments and insights of critics, I was able to identify new lines of thought. After defining, in the first part, the codes constituting the adventure novel, I have chosen to examine three novels from the nineteenth century: Jules Verne's (1867/1992) *Journey to the Center of the Earth* is a scientific educational novel targeting young readers; Joseph Conrad's (1899/1995) *Heart of Darkness* is a novel about Africa (classified by some critics as colonialist and by others as anti-colonialist); and finally, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Edgar Allen Poe's (1838/1975) somewhat nightmarish novel. Protagonists in all three novels travel to fantastically foreign landscapes: two to an imagined land at the centre of the earth and the third to the mysterious core of a continent.

Three Nineteenth-Century Novels

As I studied, first, the origins of the novel, and second, the nineteenth-century origins of the adventure novel, I was interested to see how the modern adventure novel – and my

own effort – has evolved from the earlier forms of the genre. My speculations led to my interest in comparing three pieces of work from that era. Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1867/1992) and Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838/1975) both explore Hollow Earth theory, and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899/1995) has, at its centre, a trip to Africa, which nineteenth-century explorer and journalist Henry Stanley dubbed 'the Dark Continent'. Each of these three works takes the protagonists – with readers in tow – on journeys into unknown territory in an effort to solve a mystery, and the travel is by land, by sea and by river. The destination is mysterious and the return uncertain.

The educational aspects of early adventure novels are almost perfectly illustrated in the work of Verne, whose novels were intended to popularise science for a family audience. Russian literary critic Cyrille Andreev (1955) labelled Verne's introducing 'every scientist's concerns' in a fiction format as a 'bold innovation' (p. 22). Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, published in 1864, was the first in his adventure series that would, in later years, come to be known as *science fiction.*

Journey's main character is Professor Otto Lidenbrock, a German scientist, who discovers an encoded runic message in a sixteenth-century manuscript. The message promises that the reader could reach the centre of the earth through Snaeffels, an extinct volcano in Iceland. Thus he undertakes the journey with his nephew Axel and guide Hans, whom he engages in Iceland to help them make their way to Snaeffels.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, Edgar Allan Poe's only complete novel, was published in 1838 both in New York and in London. This maritime adventure takes the hero to the South Pole, where he, too, seeks entrance to a subterranean world.

The third text is *Heart of Darkness*, a novella by Joseph Conrad, first published in Britain as a serial in *Blackwood's Magazine* in their January, February and March, 1899, issues. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses his personal experiences in Africa to create his character Charles Marlow, the novella's main character and first-person narrator. Marlow is hired to captain a steamboat located at a remote station on an unnamed African river. As he travels towards the station where his steamboat is berthed, he hears stories of Kurtz, an ivory hunter employed by his company as a trading-post manager. When Marlow eventually meets the legendary Kurtz, the man is now very ill and near death.

Among the three adventure tales, only *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* triggers the mechanism of adventure from the very first line. Axel, the young hero-narrator, tells the reader that his uncle comes home earlier than usual one day, with a sixteenth-century runic manuscript tucked under his arm: 'May the 24th 1863, my uncle, Professor Lidenbrock . . .' (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 32). Axel, well educated and phlegmatic by nature, welcomes his uncle's discovery with his usual phlegm. As they leaf through the ancient chronology of the Norwegian kings who once ruled over Iceland, a note, written in runic script, falls out from the pages. Professor Lidenrock is excited, but Axel sees nothing but a 'filthy parchment', a 'knick knack' (p. 37), as he dreams romantic dreams of Graüben, the professor's goddaughter. While the two easily decipher the letters in the note, they realize the jumble of letters are some sort of code, whose key eludes them. Axel stumbles on the key, quite by chance, but decides to withhold his knowledge and plans to destroy the note, fearful that his uncle will do something foolish, and set them to depart immediately. Meanwhile, Professor Lindenbrock persists in his promise that no one shall have anything to eat until the note is deciphered. The Professor's persistence outlasts Axel's ability to go hungry, and the note is finally decoded. It contains instructions from a sixteenth-century Icelandic alchemist for finding a passage that leads to Earth's hollow core. Thus, against his will, Axel is the one who launches the adventure. This beginning marks the opposition between two characters, the professor, entirely devoted to science and to science only, and Axel, a young man content in his present situation and quite distracted by a young lady. The frame is an educational novel and the main theme is science.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket is presented differently. The novel starts with a preface, in which Pym explains why he agrees to tell his adventures under the cover of fiction:

> He [Mr. Poe] afterward proposed (finding that I would not stir in the matter) that I should allow him to draw up, in his own words, a narrative of the earlier portion of my adventures, from facts afforded by myself, publishing it in The Southern Messenger *under the garb of fiction*. To this, perceiving no objection, I consented, stipulating only that my real name should be retained. (Poe, 1938/1975, p. 44.)

Pym signs his preface and dates it 'New York, July 1838' (p. 44). Chapter I commences with Pym's first-person narrative: 'My name is Arthur Gordon Pym. My father was a respectable trader in sea-stores at Nantucket, where I was born' (p. 47). It is the filiation which comes first. Thus substantiated by the preface, the narrative becomes rooted in reality itself when published under the cover of fiction. Following the filiation, which authenticates the narrative, comes the violent desire for adventure: 'I felt the greatest desire to go to sea' (p. 47).

Heart of Darkness is narrated by an anonymous narrator, who breaks in from time to time to comment, over the voice of the main character and narrator, Charles Marlow. The central narrative is embedded in a contemplative world – as Marlow addresses a group of men aboard a boat anchored in the Thames Estuary in London. The embedded narrative begins with Marlow's voice, without being announced or described: '"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth"' (1899/1995, p. 83).

Thus the three beginnings show their authentic narrative origins, although their roots in reality are very different.

Adventure Novel as Initiation Novel

Initiation rites, as classified by Arnold van Gennep (1909/1981), fit well into the formal codifications of the adventure novel. Van Gennep identifies three types of rites of passage: preliminary, liminal, and post-liminal. Just like the change of scenery, the preliminary rite separates the individual from his social and cultural context. The liminal period corresponds to the time of adventure when the individual is introduced into an environment containing no attribute of his past or future condition. Finally, in the post-liminal period, the subject assumes a steady condition and returns to stability.

Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*

For Simone Vierne (1973), novels of initiation either reproduce the initiatory scenario or are an attempt to 'answer subconsciously to the questions mankind asks when facing its destiny' (1973, p. 22). We see this in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, when Axel, even though phlegmatic and passive, decodes the runic message where his uncle fails: he becomes a myth. In terms of preparation, his uncle will teach him 'lessons in precipices' (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 62) at the top of Copenhagen's Vor-Frelsers-Kirk church, and within a few days, he makes 'noticeable progress in the art of

"contemplation from high places"' (p. 62). We will incidentally appreciate Verne's humorous distance to be found in his flight of fancy, above all when Axel addresses Hamlet: 'Sublime dreamer,' I said. 'You'd probably have given us your blessing. You might even have wanted to come with us to the centre of the globe to seek a solution to your eternal doubt!' (p. 63).

The second step of Axel's initiation is the underground journey, followed by the third step of an impending new birth, as Axel faints twice in symbolic deaths. His first fainting spell occurs when he gets lost in the labyrinth without light or water. (Here I am using my own translation from Verne's original 1864 text, to restore a nuance overlooked in Butcher's translation of the opening sentence to this passage):

> Then my mind got lost. . . . I saw myself running away, speeding up randomly in this inextricable labyrinth, going further down, running through the crust of the Earth, as an inhabitant of subterranean rifts, calling out, wandering, screaming, soon bruised by the sharp rocks, falling and getting up covered in blood, trying to drink the blood flooding my face and always anticipating some rock wall to offer my head an obstacle on which to be smashed. (Verne, 1864/1977, p. 167)

This is one of the rare passages of Verne's novel where Axel is desperate, which is accentuated by the syntax of the first sentence: '*Alors ma tête se perdit*'– 'Then my mind got lost' – rather than 'I lost my mind', as if the mind were the last shield, the guarantor of reason, the one which commands the whole body and that loses at that moment its guidance and function. This image slowly shrinks, until, at the end of the paragraph: 'always anticipating some rock wall to offer my head an obstacle on which to be smashed' (p. 167). Axel then faints: 'I felt like an inert mass along the wall and lost all awareness of existence' (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 120).

In the following chapter, Axel comes back to life and is finally rescued, hearing some strange sounds, then the word *förlorad* in his uncle's voice. Axel recognizes it as a Danish word, though both he and the reader do not know that its meaning is *gone* or *lost*. Calculating the distance from the sound, Axel begins 'following the path of the sound' (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 124), when he takes a tumble: 'I felt myself rolling and hitting the projections of a vertical gallery, a veritable shaft. My head struck a sharp rock, and I lost consciousness' (p. 124). It is a completely different Axel who comes back

to life. This new Axel must set aside his old way of being, for the next part of the journey will challenge all reason.

Axel recovers and the trio undertakes a crossing of a subterranean sea on a raft built by Hans. The professor is fascinated by the varieties of fish he fetches from the waters: 'It now seems very probable that this sea contains only fossil species – in which both fish and reptiles alike are more perfect the longer ago they were created' (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 137). In fascination, Axel lapses into a reverie of possibilities:

> . . . my imagination carries me away into the fantastic hypotheses of palaeontology. I am in a waking dream. I fancy I can see on the surface of the water those enormous Chersites, tortoises from before the flood, as big as floating islands. . . . The giant mastodon, twisting and turning its trunk . . . Higher up, the Protopithecus, the first monkey to appear on the face of the globe . . .. I am carried off into planetary space! My body is being subtilised, subliming in turn and commingling like an imponderable atom . . . What a dream! Where is it taking me? . . . A hallucination has taken hold of my head. (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 137)

Lost in his vision of what may have been, Axel is saved from falling overboard by Hans's quick action. 'Had it not been for him, under the sway of my dream, I would have thrown myself into the waves' (p. 137), reflects Axel.

Axel faints a second time during the final volcanic eruption, when they are propelled outside. This time, it's a trial by fire. The initiation is here alchemical – after the transition to dark, the purification through fire. Once again, he loses his mind, and it is his overexcited imagination which takes its turn:

> In my overstimulated imagination I wandered over the snowy plains of the Arctic icecap, and longed for the moment when I could roll on the frozen carpet of the Pole! But gradually my head, confused by the repeated shocks, gave up working altogether. (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 179)

In this escalation of the event, survival is at stake, but the hero reaches a boundary, both physical and emotional, where giving up is sometimes tempting. The body weakens, then gives up. It is a symbolic death, followed by a rebirth.

At the culmination of the adventure, Axel retrieves his mind and reason, sets aside Professor Lidenbrock's glorious adventure, and questions the theory of central fire:

> As for myself, I personally cannot accept the theory of the cooling of the Earth. Despite what I have seen, I believe, and always will, in heat at the centre. But I admit that circumstances which are still not properly

explained can sometimes modify this law under the effect of certain natural phenomena. (Verne, 1867/1992, p. 184)

Is he the Axel of the beginning reappearing, or the author's wink that deems us to be the judge? The ambiguity is integral to Verne's subtlety. Every enigma of the adventure has been solved (e.g., the compass incorrectly indicating south), and science has triumphed. Yet Axel chooses to doubt his own experience: 'Despite what I have seen, I believe, and always will, in heat at the centre.' (p. 184). In fact, they did not reach the centre. Short of their goal, they were propelled outside by a volcanic eruption. This position indirectly asserts the scientific approach: as long as it is not scientifically proven, the mystery remains. Thus, Verne satisfies all, even the sceptics.

Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

In Poe's novel, the initiation is accomplished through fits and starts. Poe uses the technique of an abyssal setting, and like the movement of the waves, the events intensify. In the preface to a 1977 French edition,[*] Jacques Cabau mentions a 'first transgression' (p. 12): '[a] classical initiation novel which starts with a disobedience, then a lie (the false letter of invitation), finally a runaway' (p. 12). In Cabau's opinion, *Arthur Gordon Pym* is a novel of survival – 'The adventure is surviving' (p. 13), he writes. He speaks about 'graduated suspense, each episode being the preparation of the next which will be even more horrible . . . the burial in the hold announces collapse then submergence' (p. 13). Cabau sees in it an initiation into the very nature of existence: 'Poe, through the irony of this jerky structure, wants to show the fragmentary, random, even catastrophic nature of the human condition' (p. 13). Even what first appears comforting becomes threatening and dangerous; the situations reverse and lead to catastrophe – the friend in his exhilaration leads to a wreck, the found-again pet, which nearly makes him 'die from joy' (1977, p.14), ends up a rabid beast he must cruelly abandon for his survival. There again, every joy announces the misery to come – the dog's name is 'Tiger'.

Initiation also works though symbolic death. Pym, after surviving the horrors of several wrecks, sickness, murder and cannibalism, is lost on the island. When he climbs the cliff, he looks deep into the abyss; he is attracted by it:

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[*] Translations from French to English of Cabau's preface are mine.

My whole soul was pervaded with a longing to fall; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable . . . now there came a spinning of the brain. A shrill-sounding and phantom screamed within my ears; a dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure stood immediately beneath me; and sighing, I sunk down with a bursting heart, and plunged within its arms. (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 229)

When does physical strength – or will itself – break down? Pym's lets him down: 'I had swooned and Peters had caught me as I fell' (p.229). He awakes a new man: 'On recovery, my trepidation had entirely vanished; I felt a new being . . .' (p. 230).

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, there is no symbolic death of the hero, who does not even inhabit the role of hero. Marlow does not faint, does not come back to life; he observes. There is no escalation in horror, no determination on behalf of science. Marlow is contemplative. From the beginning, he watches: 'Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you – smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering "Come and find out" ' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 14). The adventure is life itself, its meaning.

As the steamer travels up the river, Marlow travels to the 'centre of a continent' in an environment perceived as hostile, in the 'mud of the first ages' on a 'prehistoric earth' on the edge of a 'forest that screams' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 30). The steamer seems to travel up the River of Time towards time immemorial. It seems we have to be speechless for the enigma to reveal itself. Here, the codes are not the same anymore, the Africans' language is incomprehensible, like the sound of drums which is only a worrying sound – Marlow wonders 'whether it meant war, peace, or prayer' (p. 41). We arrive in a place where nothing is comprehensible:

Droll thing life is – that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself – that comes too late – a crop of inextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. ' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 82)

He describes his experience but what astonishes him is that at this very moment he discovers that he has nothing to say:

I was within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say.

This is the reason why I affirm Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 82)

The enigma is life itself and the key is the words which are spoken on the threshold of death. Conrad invests in the sanctity of the verb. If the verb is sacred, the pronouncement often speaks of a divine word at the creation. Yet, the summit of writing is to retrieve this sanctity of the verb, of the word.

Conrad (1899/1995) goes further:

True, he had made the last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I have been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps the wisdom and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. (p. 83)

Thus, the key to the enigma is right at the moment when the threshold is crossed. In this lies the whole unrevealed mystery . . . perhaps. In the last lines of the novel, the anonymous narrator describes Marlow: 'Marlow ceased and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha' (p. 91). This is reminiscent of Vierne's (1972) third stage, where 'for rare chosen ones, the contact becomes permanent in this life . . . the others access the same contact when dying physically, the supreme initiation' (p. 38). Has he found the key to the enigma? How can we not think of Racine's 'sweet tragedy' (1670/2011), and more to the point, his words: 'To praise life and day, wait for the end of one and at night, wait for the other' (Jean Racine, lettre à M. Vilard, le 17 janvier 1652).

Hear Kurtz's last words, 'The Horror! The horror!' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 82) and the last word in Racine's (1670/2011) tragedy, *Bérénice*, spoken by King Antiochus, 'Alas' (p. 164). As the Oriental queen departs, she is saying her farewells to Emperor Titus: 'Everything is set. I am expected. Do not follow my steps. . . . For the last time, farewell, My Lord' (p. 164). She is a determined queen in these two last verses, with but three short sentences in the last verse. She remains sovereign in her relationship to beings and things: 'Everything is set. I am expected', and her final injunction, 'Do not follow me.' She is nonetheless in love and lingers, 'For the last time', and her last words, 'Farewell, My Lord'. In the spaces between the words, we hear her difficulty to articulate these last words, and yet, in this verse without verb or subject, she is utterly overwhelmed by her last farewell and leaves.

The tragedy ends on Antiochus's last word, 'Alas' (p. 164) – alas for these three protagonists, each of them measuring their own suffering. *Bérénice* is Racine's 'sweet' tragedy, where no drop of blood is shed. At the end of the day, Queen Bérénice leaves the palace without making a scene. It is a tragedy of the *word*.

Listen to the exchange between Marlow and Kurtz's fiancée:

> 'To the very end' I said shakily. 'I heard his very last words . . .' I stopped in a fright.
> 'Repeat them,' she murmured in a heart-broken tone.

At that moment Marlow makes the decision to hide the truth.

> 'His last word – to live with' she insisted. 'Don't you understand I loved him – I loved him – loved him!'
> I pulled myself together and spoke slowly. 'The last word he pronounced was – your name.'
> 'I knew it – I was sure!' (p. 91)

This is the last exchange of words in *Heart of Darkness* before Marlow resumes his narrative and, as narrator, ends his story. *Heart of Darkness* is a novel of the word – the ones of the anonymous narrator's, Marlow's, Kurtz's – each word adding to the mystery, and the last sentence crowns it all:

> The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (p. 91)

Marlow reaches his 'supreme initiation' this side of death.

In 'Alexandre Goes South', the novel ends with Mathilde in a conversation that is an acceptance of uncertainty. Knowledge and acceptance of uncertainty participate in the same mystery – different from the conversation between Marlow and Kurtz's fiancée, which is a polite fiction to hide the truth.

The Mystery, the Sacred, the Unfathomable

In *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, the parchment is a runic-written coded message; in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Poe, 1838/1975), the 'native' shouts 'Tekelili', the birds shout 'Tekelili' (p. 235); and the figures found in the abysses of Tsalal Island represent the Ethiopian root word meaning 'being dark', the Arabic root word

meaning 'being white', and the Egyptian word meaning 'south region' (p. 241). It is indeed about codes, but decoding does not necessarily reveal the mystery.

When Axel finds the old iron blade with the letters *A.S.*, they have the proof that Arne Saknussemm reached the same place they reached, but how far did he go? Did he reach the centre of the earth? Likewise, Pym's narrative is interrupted. We stop at the doors of the unfathomable. Pym tells only one part of his adventures. Is it, as Marlow says, 'When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality – the reality, I tell you – fades. The inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 39). The metaphor here is very powerful, as he is busy all day looking for pieces of dead wood that they would 'cut up in the night for the next day's steaming' (p. 39). He is looking all day for something necessary, but seemingly useless (dead wood), that will be essential to the navigation the next day and that will keep them busy at night. This is what Marlow calls *the mere incidents of the surface*. The surface here is the daily chores, but could also be the river as metaphor of life itself. Thus, life itself distracts us from 'reality', and here we start to wonder, what is reality?

Later, when he returns to civilisation, to firm ground, to the 'sepulchral city' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 3), as he names it, he hates being among others: 'resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams' (p. 83). Marlow has entered Vierne's (1972) third stage, 'the supreme initiation' (p. 38). He goes further: 'They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure, because I felt so sure they could not know the things I knew' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 83). He confirms by stating that he had accessed some secret that the profane doesn't know. This unfathomable secret seems to be somewhere between life and death, between darkness and light, as unfathomable as the contrasting features of Kurtz's personality: 'It seemed to throw a kind of light on everything about me – and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough' (p. 83).

In *Heart of Darkness*, the secret is between shadow and light, between Marlow and Kurtz, the only characters to have names. The others are the lawyer, the accountant, the director, the doctor, the chief of the interior station, the central station brick maker and so on. They have no names. A young Russian, whose clothes had been patched many, many times, 'bright patches, blue, red, and yellow' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 73),

reminds Marlow of a harlequin and represents for Marlow the spirit of adventure. He has spent the past few years serving Kurtz, when allowed, just for the privilege of occasionally hearing his philosophical meanderings on justice and morality. Also aware of the darker side of Kurtz, Marlow is taken into his confidence as a fellow sailor: 'He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been "of the same profession", he would have kept the matter to himself without regard to consequences' (p. 74). Marlow knows the harlequin is in danger, some among the Europeans believing him to be some sort of partner in Kurtz's atrocities, and advises him, 'Perhaps you had better go if you have any friends among the savages nearby' (p. 74). The harlequin responds that he counts 'plenty' of friends among the natives, yet voices concern about 'these whites', meaning the other Europeans who work and live at the station. He stands between the groups – the Europeans and the indigenous Africans – and understands neither one nor the other.

Kurtz is himself a singular character. The entire narrative is built on the anticipation of the meeting between Marlow and Kurtz, and when it finally happens, Kurtz dies soon after. When Marlow sees Kurtz for the first time, he describes their conversation and the tenor of the meeting:

> They were common everyday words – the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of my life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody ever struggled with a soul, I am the man. And I wasn't arguing with a lunatic either. . . . his intelligence was perfectly clear – concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity. . . . But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. (p. 77).

Marlow is facing 'the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself' (p. 77). He has met a man, once powerful in his sway over the minds of others, now weakened physically, with only a voice remaining . . . and a soul that seems to have strengthened, though it is now mad. Marlow grapples with Kurtz's demented soul, winning the single combat, victorious but not unharmed – begging the question: do we have to die to access the sacred?

Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* too addresses death and Poe is even darker. It is not just death, it is death in its creativity, in its escalating hunger, a

calculation of the dead. Death is everywhere, and it is often brutal. There is a mutiny and a massacre, and the hope to be saved by a ship turns into a vision of horror when they pass the ghost ship with carrion and carrion-eaters. It scares us to death, as when the first mate believes he has seen Peters back from the dead. They make a choice to become cannibals in order to survive. It is Parker's idea to draw straws to see who will become nourishment for the others, and it is Parker who draws the short straw. The sense of desperation grows and grows, finally reaching a climax during the ambush and looting of the *Jane Guy*: 'Our men were borne down at once, overwhelmed, trodden under foot, and absolutely torn to pieces' (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 215).

The Seekers

What were these adventurers seeking? Have they found it? It seems the answer is not so clear, so simple. In Verne's novel, Professor Lidenbrock finds glory and answers, and Axel returns to his love as a mature man. As Northrop Frye (1957) describes it, 'adventure is not for a declining hero or a tragic one, it is optimistic' (p. 47); he links it to the myth of spring.

Pym was seeking adventure through a desire to reach the limits of human experience, in the tension between life and death through a pattern of macabre experience associated with sexual tension. He went to the end of his quest *but* the tale remains incomplete; a note at the end of the novel tells us that Pym died and could not finish it, though hinting that Peters, still alive, might be able to give an account of the end of the trip. Is Poe simply reserving the possibility of continuing his story in a later instalment?

Marlow, at the end of *Heart of Darkness*, is 'indistinct and silent, in a pose of a meditating Buddha' (Conrad, 1899/1995. p. 91). There is a knowledge that seems to be locked in words like 'reality', in the line earlier quoted: 'When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality – the reality, I tell you – fades. The inner truth is hidden – luckily' (p. 39). What is this truth? What can be found at the centre of the earth and at the pole? Well, we don't know.

In 'Alexandre Goes South', Alexandre, like Axel, is going through an initiatory experience to manhood. Initiatory experience seems to be always a result of the search where the benchmarks in discovery of Truth are initiations into that eventual experience, not accessible to all. Alexandre, too, has the desire to leave, to follow the

path of Rimbaud, the great poet and adventurer. He wonders what he leaves – 'What am I leaving, exactly'? (p. 85) – and rapidly, even before departing, finds himself at the threshold of adventure: 'The car slides on the quays with the window closed. Paris looks like a scene in a movie: the lights, the quays, the soundtrack – perfect. And then the station: another soundtrack, a liminal place. I am anonymous' (p. 85). The desire to leave changes the setting, creates the dépaysement. The change of scenery and the station represent the threshold, the liminal space at the threshold of perceptions.

Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*

Professor Otto Lidenbrock is a mineralogy teacher, a geologist, a distinguished scientist and the author of an 1853 treatise on transcendent crystallography. On Sunday, the 24th of May, 1863, at the shop of Hevelius the Jew, he purchases a very rare book, and from its pages falls a scrap of parchment with runic writing – easily deciphered, but yielding only nonsense words that appear to be some sort of code. Once Axel decodes the short text, which alludes to a mysterious passage into the hollow Earth, Lidenbrock has only one goal – to reach the centre of the earth. To Lidenbrock, anything else is a waste of time. On board the Danish schooner, *Walkyrie*, on their way to Iceland, he so raves about his exciting find that 'The dignified captain took advantage of his enthusiasm to charge [them] double the crossing on his ship' (Verne, 1864/1977, p. 73).

Driven by this enthusiasm, everything seems easy. But Axel is not so enthusiastic, thinking to himself it is 'the *Facilis descensus Averni* of Virgil' (p. 129), where Aeneas enters the underworld:

> *Facilis descensus Averni;*
> *Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;*
> *Sed revocare gradum superasque evadare ad auras,*
> *Hoc opus, hic labor est.*
>
> Easy is the descent to Avernus,
> for the door to the underworld lies open both day and night.
> But to retrace your steps and return to the breezes above –
> that's the task, that's the toil. (Jenkins, n. d., para. 2)

But nothing worries the Professor; he trusts science. When the water stocks are running low, he is certain of finding a water supply, and when he learns that all the supplies have been lost, he reasons and makes a decision: '"Come now," he says, "we have to take a stand."' Axel is incredulous:

'What? Do you still believe in some chance at salvation?'

'Yes, of course I do! And as long as their heart beats, as long as their flesh is pulsating, I will not admit that a willing being lets himself be desperate.' (Verne, 1864/1977, p. 109)

Besides enthusiasm and will, Lidenbrock's powerful rationality fears no argument; not only does he have a ready response, but he does not leave any room to doubt: 'Enough. When science has spoken, there is nothing to do but remain silent' (p. 109).

The Professor's determined attitude settles the matter. Now only observation and calculation matter. Thus, they calculate their position and Axel is rescued when he gets lost. Even in the chaos of the final eruption, it is science, once again, which reassures:

'That crazy needle, every sign of an earthquake.'
'An earthquake?' he says.
'Yes!'
'My boy, I think you are mistaken.'
'What! Don't you recognize the symptoms?'
'Of an earthquake? I expect better than this.'
'What do you mean?'
'An eruption!'
'We are in the chimney of an active volcano!' I say.
'I think so,' the Professor says, smiling, 'and this is the best thing that can happen to us!'
The best thing! Had my uncle gone mad? What could he mean by those awful words? Why this calm and shrewd smile? (Verne, 1864/1977, p. 251)

Dialogues of this nature are frequent in the novel, displaying the absolute triumph of reason and positivism. Indeed, positivism renounces religious and metaphysical explanations, holding itself true to scientifically ascertainable phenomena.

Scientific theories of the time are scattered throughout the novel, notably on the formation of the earth's crust – the Neptunian theory that rocks were shaped from the action of water and the oceans opposed by the Plutonian theory that Earth's geology was created by fire. The Professor also introduces into conversation the debate between Cuvier's immutability theory – claiming that species appear and disappear during natural catastrophes – and Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution.

Upon their return home, 'a fact still remained unexplained, the one of the compass; to a scientist, such an unexplained phenomenon becomes a torture for intelligence' (Verne, 1864/1977, p. 263). Axel, who saw that the compass needle showed south instead of north, as would be expected, manages to account for the phenomenon: 'During the storm, on Lidenbrock Sea, the fireball which was magnetizing the iron of the raft had simply disorientated our compass' (p. 263). In the end, science solves all the mysteries, even the puzzle of an errant compass. The novel ends with this triumph of the scientific spirit.

> From that day, my uncle has been the happiest scientist on earth, and I have been the happiest man, for my pretty Virlandaise, abdicating her position as a ward, shall rank in Kônigstrasse house, becoming both a niece and a spouse. (p. 264)

As an initiate who leaves an inexperienced young man and comes back a mature adult, Axel seems to be the hero of this tale; but in truth, Axel thinks only of Graüben. When they try to decode the runic manuscript following the Professor's guidance, he is distracted with thoughts of 'my little Graüben' (p. 45). When he is deep in the bowels of the earth, with no hope of returning, and believes he is about to die, his thoughts are only of Graüben; and when he returns, his happiness is not about his adventures, but about living to fulfil his dream of being reunited with his love.

Is the hero of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, then, Lidenbrock? In this case, the hero may be said to be science – or the team of Axel, Hans and Lidenbrock in the service of science. As Axel says, after finding the water supply, 'How would a committed man like my uncle not succeed, thanks to an industrious guide as Hans and a *determined* nephew as myself' (p. 153)? As Andreev (1955) wrote, 'Jules Verne had the feeling that the face of the future could be perceived through the enchanted prism of science' (p. 24).

Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym integrates mysteries that fascinated the scientific societies of the time, such as navigation to the South Pole and the very nature of that pole. In 1692, Edmond Halley published his theory that the earth is hollow, with two concentric layers around a central core. He believed his hypothesis could explain compass anomalies, as well as the Auroral Borealis. In 1826, John Cleves Symmes

resurrected the hollow earth notion with his own theory of Concentric Spheres. He described the earth as hollow, with an opening at the pole of 4,000 metres in diameter, a kind of gaping hole circled by ice but hot in the inside from a central fire. This might have explained the climate change experienced by Pym as he nears the earth's centre. American author, explorer and newspaper editor Jeremiah N. Reynolds used his influence to raise money for scientific expeditions. Though he later rejected the notion of a hollow earth, In 1836 Reynolds delivered his famous *An Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and the South Seas.* Poe was so taken with Reynolds theories that he used nearly half the speech in *Arthur Gordon Pym* (Tynan, 1971).

If *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* is clearly a Bildungsroman with a scientific aim, *Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Heart of Darkness* are even more complex works. Would we call Poe's novel maritime or initiatory? The readings of *Arthur Gordon Pym* differ totally, according to structural, historical and, bibliographical, or even psychoanalytical critics, even if they complete each other at the same time, as Cabau (1977) beautifully underlines in his French preface (p. 11).

Finally, the whole episode devoted to the South Pole, even though it is the scientific basis for their journey, is completely outside the novel. As well, the first episode about the *Ariel*, which is the first chapter as well as the last, has a different tone from the rest of the novel. The narrative is published as an authentic travel story, but the last part is unlikely; the last paragraph was actually suppressed from the British publication.

According to Cabau (1977):

> The successive wrecks and burials announce the final passage between the horizontal and the vertical voyage. Each episode foreshadows the falling in the hole which is the final goal of the abyssal quest. This flirtation at the edge of the abyss implies an orgasmic tension which is the suspense of the book. (p. 18)

In Cabau's opinion, Poe's narrative is linked to the incest taboo and to 'a perpetual escalation in transgression' (p. 18).

With Poe, a multitude of interpretations are possible, and I will add another. In this passage, quoted earlier, Pym is clinging to the cliff on the island:

For one moment my fingers clutched convulsively upon their hold, while, with the movement, the faintest possible idea of ultimate escape wandered, like a shadow, through my mind – in the next my whole soul was pervaded with *a longing to fall*: a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable. (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 229)

He describes a 'dusky, fiendish and filmy figure' (p. 229) which lies in wait for him. *Arthur Gordon Pym* is a novel of desire, of the tension between the life impulse and the death impulse. While it is true that psychoanalysis links the death impulse to the 'little death' of sexual intercourse, I find this approach rather simplistic in this case.

At the beginning, there is a violent desire, the one of going to sea, the one of adventure, the one of transgression:

I can hardly tell what possessed me, but the words were no sooner out of his mouth than I felt a thrill of the greatest excitement and pleasure, and thought his mad idea one of the most delightful and most reasonable things in the world (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 48).

And despite the first shipwreck of the *Ariel*, Pym wants more: 'I never experienced a more ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of a navigator than within a week after our miraculous deliverance' (p. 57). This violent desire always pushes him further and goes hand in hand with a powerful survival instinct.

Pym's post-adventure narrative is infused with metalanguage, as he comments on his own thoughts and emotions:

For the bright side of the painting I had a limited sympathy. My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some grey and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires – for they amounted to desires – are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men – at the time of which I speak I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfil. (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 57)

His desire is for the adventure of disaster, and when Auguste hides him in the *Grampus*'s hold, he is besieged by terrible nightmares:

I fell in spite of every exertion to the contrary, into a state of profound sleep, or rather stupor: My dreams were of the most terrific description.

> Every species of calamity and horror befell me. Among other miseries, I was smothered to death between huge pillows, by demons of the most ghastly and ferocious aspect. Immense serpents held me in their embrace, and looked earnestly n my face with their fearfully shining eyes. Then deserts, limitless, and one of the most forlorn and awe-inspiring character, spread themselves out before me. (p. 65)

The nightmares go on, following one after another, until he loses all sense of time. Indeed, the clock stops several times, and the time estimations are wrong. It is dark in the hold; time can only be a guess, and it is the sense of time itself which disappears or stretches; what Pym considers as a day – his alternating between waking and sleeping, with no knowledge of light or darkness – is actually even longer. His estimates are wrong, but it is only later, when Auguste can meet with him, that he will be able to piece together the track of time.

The hole can be compared to Plato's allegory in which men cannot see anything except their shadows projected on the wall of a cave; with no other perspective, their shadows are accepted as a reflection of reality. Pym and the reader are in the double field of illusion and the unconscious – the dream reality, the world of fantasy. Poe is very modern for his time in exploring his unconscious – or Pym's. Again here in Plato's allegory we find three stages, the first one, the men being in the dark, the second when their chains are taken off and the third when they see the Truth in daylight.

After interpreting the inscriptions found on the island, Poe writes, 'It should be observed that these interpretations confirm the opinion of Peters in regard to the "most northwardly" of the figures. The arm is outstretched towards the south' (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 242). And in the next paragraph: 'Conclusions such as these open a wild field for speculation and exciting conjecture' (p. 242). In the French text translated by Baudelaire (Poe, 1838/1977), Baudelaire translates 'speculation' as 'reverie', which gives an entirely different dimension to this sentence. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is, to me, the novel of experienced fantasy and broadened consciousness.

Just before throwing himself into the abyss, Pym mentions a crisis of imagination:

> The more earnestly I struggled *not to think* the more intensely vivid became my conceptions, and the more horribly distinct. At length arrived that crisis of fancy, so fearful in all similar cases, the crisis in which we

begin to anticipate the feelings with which *we shall fall . . .* (Poe, 1838/1975, p. 229)

While recopying this passage, I paused to consider the passages written in italics by the author: *'not to think', 'we shall fall'.* Is it about Icarus's fall, the ontological one, or perhaps Cabau's (1977) fall into the incestuous darkness, the one to be next in the passage? But the fall is wanted, anticipated and updated. Is Poe bidding us not to think and let ourselves be taken by the flood of imagination? It would be interesting to consider the theme of the fall in his short stories, but the possibilities are too broad to dwell on in this short essay.

In 'Alexandre Goes South', when Alexandre talks to the policeman, he has no evidence that what the man says is the truth, but when he is unable to find Aissa, the possibility that she might be dead is transformed in his mind from an absurdity to a reality, and he 'starts running, as if he were in a dream' (p. 158). He runs away, takes a new identity, is kidnapped and disappears. From one moment to another we have an escalation of events.

Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* is a novel of desire and of its companion, fear. Pym nearly dies in many ways, but always survives. It is not a novel about surpassing oneself but about taming oneself, the whole of oneself, including the darkest parts. Poe's only novel caused a considerable stir at its publication, meeting with mixed reviews, and the least that can be said is that, if the reader manages to read it until the end, they will not come out of it unscathed.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Even before telling the story of his journey to Africa, Conrad's narrator-protagonist Marlow evokes a distant time at the peak of the Roman Empire. He makes a parallel between the past and the present:

> They were conquerors . . . The conquest of the earth, which mostly means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 7)

Marlow contrasts conquerors with colonists, and about colonists he says, 'what saves us is efficiency – the devotion to efficiency'. He does not say much about the present, as if one can better judge events of the past; he steps back, but in doing so implies that what applies to the past applies logically to the present. Conrad's text is thickly laced with periphrases; he is creating parallel realities, using more symbols, more inner perceptions.

After summoning the shadows of the past, Marlow begins his story. 'I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 7), he begins. He once dreamt of a formerly empty space on the map, he says, and thanks to his aunt's intervention, his fantasy of exploring that mysterious, empty space became a reality. He was hired to fill the vacancy created when a riverboat captain died on duty in Africa. As he prepares to journey to the station where his new assignment is docked, he sees in the company's offices

> a large shining map, marked with all the colours of the rainbow; there was a vast amount of red – good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going to any of these; I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there – fascinating – deadly like a snake. Ough! (p. 11)

The simple sketching of the river on the map is enough to horrify him. Many critics have evoked the satanic snake that provoked the fall. Apart from the use of colours to qualify the colonists' activities, Conrad is materialising an arbitrary appropriation of space. The map becomes the territory. Naming, categorising and defining on a map is the way of conquest, and the dread seems mixed with the fascination.

Soon Marlow adopts the attitude of a detached and contemplative observer. He succeeds in keeping some sort of distance between what he sees and the way it is presented to him. He stays impassive while passing a French warship:

> In the empty immensity of earth, sky and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech – and nothing happened; nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not

dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives – he called them enemies! Hidden out of sight somewhere. (Conrad, 1899/1975, p. 15)

Yet the act is described as 'incomprehensible', tiny compared with Africa – 'immensity of earth, sky and water', 'firing into a continent' – and then the sound of the gun going 'pop' and not 'boom'; the adjectives, 'tiny', 'feeble', 'lugubrious', 'drollery' . . . failing to mention the result: 'nothing happened; nothing could happen'. When Marlow contemplates Africa, he is deeply moved, even if he finds it frightening: 'The silence of the land went home to one's very heart – its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life' (p. 30). To him, men's activities are gruesome; he speaks of 'the merry dance of death and trade' (p. 16).

Most of the time, Marlow is both passive and impassive, as during the fire when he goes on smoking his pipe 'quietly' looking at the men 'cutting capers in the light, with their arms lifted high' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 26). It is when he meets the company accountant that Marlow begins his revelations of the ironies in each of the characters Conrad has created to people the business of 'the company'. The station accountant prides himself on keeping perfect books and arrives at work each morning, in the oppressive heat, perfectly dressed in 'high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots' (p. 20). Then there's the brickmaker, who had been there more than a year and had yet to make a brick. He lacked something, 'straw maybe' (p. 27), says Marlow: 'Anyway, it could not be found there and it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for. An act of special creation perhaps' (p. 27). The brickmaker is not the only one with a title but no work; there is also the man who is in charge of road upkeep. 'Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep' (p. 28), muses Marlow.

After a two hundred mile journey, he finally arrives at the Central Station, where he will meet the manager. As he debarks, he is met by a stout man with black moustaches who tells him his steamboat has sunk, but that 'Everybody had behaved splendidly! splendidly!' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 26). When he meets the manager of the station, Marlow describes him as a cold and ordinary man, who 'could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an axe. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention' (p. 24). These contradictions in character, these mixed feelings are everywhere, contaminating everything. With each of Conrad's

characters, the process is always the same: the character presents aspects of his personality that seem contradictory or absurd, then all these elements combine to create a reality where all contrasts coexist: 'the sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in great peace.' (p. 21). A rhetorical figure becomes more of a system that contributes to the dream-like atmosphere of the novella.

Contrast is in fact inherent to the strangeness of a reality that the traveller cannot totally grasp. As Alexandre observes in 'Alexandre Goes South', 'having a mobile phone but no electricity is not a contradiction in the modern world' (p. 124).

I think about Beckett's play where two tramps are waiting, in a place in the public space that is not-a-place, waiting for a certain Godot, who might come. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, first performed in 1953 in Paris as *En attendant Godot*, the main characters have no social reality. Externally, they appear to be tramps; they do nothing, expect nothing – except the arrival of Godot – and have no quest. They are too dull to be aware of their situation. Everything is where it belongs, in the flies' peace, in the absurdity of existence. As the accountant in *Heart of Darkness* says, 'When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages – hate them to death' (p. 21). Conrad uses a rhetoric of the absurd; there is no logical link between the segments of the sentences.

Grammatically, Conrad's style is classic, definitely modern while dealing with the genre, committed and at the same time absolutely caught in the grip of his time – as when Marlow states, 'I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 35). Everyone seems to be trying to maintain a certain level of sanity – the accountant making entries, the brickmaker waiting, the writer writing and Marlow returning to work every morning waiting for rivets. After all, what seems real is the land: 'And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck of earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion' (p. 26).

III.

POST-COLONIAL LITERATURE AND THE CONCEPT OF OTHERNESS

In Parts I and II, I have discussed and compared three nineteenth-century adventure novels, staying close to the texts. Moving into the twentieth century, it is inconceivable to talk about *Heart of Darkness* without studying Chinua Achebe's 1975 lecture delivered at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (USA). Thus, in Part III, I will follow my exploration of the historical and biographical background of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with an examination of Achebe, post-colonial writing and the expression of otherness in fiction.

Historical and Biographical Background of *Heart of Darkness*

David Livingstone (1813-1873) – physician, missionary, scientist – was the first European explorer to reach as far as the headwaters of the Lualaba River in what later became the Belgian Congo. He was followed by journalist Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904), who went to Africa in search of Livingstone (as Marlow went to search for Kurtz). Upon finally meeting him, Stanley reportedly greeted Livingstone with the now famous British understatement: 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' No doubt Conrad was well acquainted with Stanley's Africa writings, which included numerous newspaper articles and a dozen or so books that included 1878's *The Dark Continent* and 1890's *In Darkest Africa.*

From 1884 to 1908, the Congo Free State was a personal venture for personal gain, founded, named and governed by King Leopold II of Belgium (1835-1909). Leopold hid behind a philanthropic image, which he began cultivating with his 1876 conference in Brussels, to which he invited philanthropists, explorers and others with similar interests, in order to gain support for what he described as a *humanitarian* endeavour in central Africa. Once having gained endorsements within the international community, Leopold proceeded to plunder the Congo's natural resources and, in effect, enslave its people as workers for his gain. When his atrocities – which included disciplinary mutilations, amputations, and mass murder – became known, he was

eventually forced to turn his interests in the Congo over to the Belgian government, and the area was renamed the Belgian Congo. Conrad's descriptions of chained Africans, savage beatings of black workers and the display of severed heads around Kurtz's compound makes clear his awareness of the terrible consequences of Leopold's sovereignty over the Congo. Perhaps he hoped his *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899, would stir outrage and spur action in much the same way as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852/2005) stirred sentiment against slavery in the United States a half century earlier.

The American Civil War exploded over the issue of slavery in 1861 – nine years after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Leopold II's sovereignty over the Congo, which began in 1885, was ended in 1908 – nine years after the publication of *Heart of Darkness.* While Stowe's novel was meticulously researched and based on documentary evidence (Stowe, 1854/1968), Conrad's novella was largely based on his personal experiences as a riverboat captain on the Congo River in 1889 and 1890; the narrative, up to and including Marlow's discovery that his steamboat has been sunk, follows documentary evidence so closely as to be considered an autobiographical account (Conover, 2003). Stowe was inspired by the testimony of others, Conrad by his first-person observations.

The binary structure of the novella, and Conrad's constant use of adjectives like 'impenetrable' and 'unspeakable' are aesthetic choices that create a dreamy quality. Conrad considered himself a foreigner, and that certainly determined his way of seeing himself in the world. His biographer, Zdzislaw Najder (2007), considered the dark-tunnel feeling as a symptom of 'shrinkage of psychological space; seeing the world in grey and dark colors and feeling that it is unreal and chaotic' (p. 168). Najder thought Conrad was 'prone to melancholia' and the 'tendency sometimes took morbid forms' (p. 167). This may explain some recurrent themes, but whatever the psychological interpretations might be, the writing is always the result of conscious, aesthetic choices.

The idiotic and mythological aspects of the novella have been discussed here previously, and savvy readers will likely recognize the knitters in the company office in Brussels as the three mythical Fates. Conrad uses strong symbols and his writing has many layers. The reader may not see them all, but the density of the words and their powerful evocations can hardly escape notice.

Achebe and Post-Colonial Writings

Achebe is a celebrated Nigerian novelist and professor of African literature, and his 1975 lecture and the debate it aroused has become known as the 'Achebe controversy'. In his lecture, Achebe asserted that good writing cannot be a justification to sacrifice other people's individual lives and, in so doing, deny their language, culture and identity. He claims that, in writing *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad used Africa to serve his genius. Achebe does not accept Conrad's mere revelation of the suffering of others; he insists that Conrad should have demanded equality for them. For Achebe, one of the main problems is that 'white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked' (1977, p. 257).

In his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said explains how Conrad's representations of Africa are fabricated from the ideas of his time and the fact that he saw Africa through that era's scheme of representations. Referring to Said's definition of *Orientalism*, Christopher Miller (1985) introduces the term *Africanism* to describe the contrast between *representations* of African reality (as seen through the Western cultural lens) and the reality experienced by Africans themselves. Thus, in this view, *Heart of Darkness* becomes a demonstration of *Africanism discourse*, where Westerners have projected their own images of Africa and then reacted to it as an alien or savage world.

I agree with Achebe that *Heart of Darkness* is a monument to literary art, but I take exception to his condemnation of Conrad as insufficiently active in resolving a shocking social situation. Achebe is putting on trial a man instead of a time. By the time Conrad's novella appeared at the close of the nineteenth century, the newly described law of entropy had led to the startling conclusion, in the popular mind, that the sun would soon die, and the earth would become cold and dead; the Victorian world and its values were collapsing, and with it the Carlylean values of 'work, duty and renunciation' (Watt, p. 151). Existentialism had disposed of God, and Technology had become the new master of His laws. With *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin introduced evolution in place of creation, and in *The Descent of Man* (1871), he seemingly legitimated the extermination of populations. At the time Achebe published his first novel in the mid twentieth century, his native Nigeria was engaged in its fight for decolonisation, most African colonies were demanding self-government, and the transatlantic African

diaspora was involved in their struggle for civil rights. Examining the eras in which they wrote, it is clear that Conrad and Achebe were each a product of his time.

Achebe was born in 1930 in the Igbo region in southeastern Nigeria, the son of Evangelical Christian converts. He graduated from the British-run school and university system of colonial Nigeria, where he studied English and history. It is because he was educated in the colonial system that Achebe is able to 'see' as if he is an outsider; it is because he is African that he can write from the inside. He writes in the language of the coloniser – a paradox of this era in literature. One – being one side or the other – apparently has two choices: entering the other's territory or staying at the frontier. But perhaps there is a third choice, which is remaining in the middle ground, where one is neither one nor the other. History has shown this to be the most difficult position to maintain. In the same way that immobilisation leads to sclerosis and destruction in the human body, so does remaining inert challenge human society to push ahead. Staying at the frontier is an uncomfortable place, but French writer Marguerite Yourcenar recognised it as the writer's place (Berthelot, 2006). Berthelot suggests Yourcenar went further, considering 'exile like the only place where writing can be authorised because it divests oneself of the self to make the other's voice heard' (p. 63). Entering into the other's territory, as Kurtz does in *Heart of Darkness*, is the most dangerous, as one takes the risk of loss of self.

Literature is always linked to the history of the world, even as it is completely detached from it, like all forms of art. After colonialism, decolonisation appeared – and everything that happened in between. There was also a literature of assimilation, the desire of being like the colonised. Indian author Arundhati Roy (2009) speaks of 'Anglophilia' (p. 41) and the tendency for characters to evaluate themselves through white eyes: 'she walked down the runway with the smell of London in her hair' (p. 106).

After colonisation and assimilation, came what Salman Rushdie (1982) labelled the *colonial periphery*. This is conceptualised by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*, in which they discuss the works of writers who 'write back' from former British colonies on five continents. Ashcroft et al. say that the centre is now perceived as discursively constructed and not universal. The *colonial* self is proclaimed central and self-determining and the *periphery* – the postcolonial – responds. Ashcroft et al. present an ethnological counter representation, their own, which is phenomenally rich as it covers

the five continents. As Conrad did, the authors represented use 'delayed decoding' (Watt, p. 175), a technique whereby the characters receive information with their senses and only later understand the meaning. The information received can be perceived as neutral – but of course it is not – and consequently interpretations can differ.

The Journey to Europe or a Search for Identity

The journey of postcolonial migrants to Britain or France creates an in-between perspective, such as portrayed by the character Samba Diallo in *L'aventure ambigüe* (*The Ambiguous Adventure*), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's 1961 novel which was awarded the 1962 Grand Prix de L'Afrique Noire. It is the story of Samba Diallo, a young man from the Diallobe country in Senegal. Samba is educated in Senegal by a Koranic traditional school, followed by the local 'foreign school', then on to higher studies in Paris. How does one combine African identity with French Cartesian mind? Kane shows all the complexity of the journey with a subtle writing of pain inside exile. Through the other's language, the road can be taken, and through his tribe's language – through his people – Samba recalls the motherland. The hero is both fascinated and tortured: 'This sentence he did not understand, for which he was suffering to death, he liked it for its mystery and beauty' (Kane, 1961, p. 86) and in a question that could seem naïve, 'can we learn this without forgetting that, and what we learn is it worth what we forget? (p. 41).

The attitude towards the West is also ambiguous. In V. S. Naipaul's and David Dabydeen's novels, characters are multiply-displaced persons searching for a place to settle and a position in society. Salim is simultaneously at home and in exile, neither white nor black, seemingly abused eventually; he sort of takes his revenge in intimacy with Yvette. For those who are hybrids, by descent or culture, it is more a search for identity. Being hybrid can be a claim, a discovery or a resolution – or some combination of the three, as seems the case of Anuradha Marwah (2007) who proclaims: 'I write as a woman and an Indian; also as an androgynous exile.' Kane's Samba Diallo, though, initially perceives himself as monocultural, not recognising his hybridity.

In my own novel, *Alexander Goes South,* Aissa is hybrid; born in Mali of black African parents, her family emigrates to France when she is a child. She returns to Mali as a young adult. When Alexandre and Aissa have a confrontational dispute, she feels

insulted when he tells her that inside she is white. In David Malouf's 1993 novel, *Remembering Babylon*, it is even more complex. Gemmy is British but raised by an Aborigine family who found him as a child, wandering alone on a remote beach; he is a 'black white man' (Malouf, 1993, p. 10). One day Gemmy emerges from the bush and approaches the doorstep of a family of isolated European settlers. To them, he is 'a parody of a white man . . . he was imitation gone wrong, and the mere sight of it put you wrong too' (p. 39).

The Concept of Otherness

The concept of *other* was introduced by German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and re-examined by twentieth-century philosophers, including Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) and, particularly, Emmanuel Levinas (2000), whose collection of essays written from 1967 to 1989, were published in English translation as *Alterity and Transcendence*. Levinas's focus was a further development of *alterity*, a philosophical and anthropological term meaning *otherness*. Rimbaud, as poet, famously wrote: '*Je est un autre*' ('I is another') (1871/1912). No less famous is Sartre's '*l'enfer c'est les autres*' ('Hell is other people'), a line from his play, *No Exit*, first performed in France in 1944, its first English performance being in the United States in 1946.

In my previous novel, 'Small Trees Bend on Long Shadows', the main character, Firoza – a light-skinned Indian born into a family of mostly darker skin kin – experiences a 'divided consciousness' (Radden, 1996). She believes her failure to live what she considers a normal life lies at the base of this identified weakness. Later, though, when she attempts to discover the roots of her weakness, she finds it to be a weakness of will expressing itself in the colour of her skin: 'For me, my light-coloured skin is my outward weakness' (Hansrod, 2008, p. 38). Firoza leaves behind the comfort of family in an effort to discover her unity. Is this a universal quest, this desire for unity? Radden (1996) responds: 'Now it seems obvious that these ways in which our lives and selves are marked by a want of oneness, wholeness, and homogeneity are the very stuff of normal human experience' (p. 17). At home, Firoza was in contact with other cultures, but now she experiences another culture from within.

Kane and other African authors have employed the term 'hybrid' to explain the phenomenon that transforms people like Firoza, who – like Kane's Samba Diallo –

discover another culture and expand their knowledge, as well as their views of the world. In the process of reappropriation and reintegration, Firoza goes from the 'I' to the 'you' and becomes completely rooted in the present. As initial memories fade, she learns to know herself. She finds her integrity, but is she the same person? The answer is no. At the end, she finds within herself the resources and the way to healing.

French philosopher Michel Serres (1992) writes about *du tiers-instruit*, the third educated. The first would be the individual, the second the other one, and the third, the individual transformed and therefore educated. There's a paradox here: exploring the past leads to its disappearance – or at least to its transformation, as Harlequin (Serres's model for the educated individual) is multi-coloured.

The Frontier Novel and Boundaries of the Genre

I have analysed the nineteenth-century adventure novel as a much codified genre. Yet, the more I explore *Heart of Darkness* and its controversy, the more Conrad's novel appears to be *a dialogue with the genre*. Considered a *frontier novel* (Farn, 2005, p. 263), it reaches the boundaries. Guyanese writer Wilson Harris (cited in Farn, 2005) accuses Conrad of 'an exhaustion of spirit that froze [his] genius and made it impossible for him to cross the frontier upon which his intuitive imagination had arrived' (p. 266).

Has Conrad suffered from an 'exhaustion of genius'? I think not, but it seems plausible that he has reached a boundary he could not go beyond. In a dreamlike setting, with strong suggestive density and layers of significance, he manages to unfold an image he describes as *unreal*, because it is *unacceptable*. He seems to have reached the limit his mind can accept though reality is right before him. Nadjer considers Heart of Darkness as a 'moral protest' and a condemnation of colonialism and a rejection of "land-dwelling" community' (p. 165). This is at the centre of the debate: did he condemn or just passively witness? What would be the difference?

In 1898, in the newspaper L'Aurore, Emile Zola wrote an article title 'J'Accuse' related to what is called l'affaire Dreyfus. In this eloquent article, he accuses vehemently a number of times and at the end he says 'Je n'ai qu'une passion, celle de la lumière', one passion being the light, the truth, and he speaks in the name of 'humanity', the whole mankind! Nadjer describes Conrad as 'a recluse in the social sense' (p. 165); maybe that makes the difference, our social implication? I would say, there are many ways to denounce and Literature is one of them.

In Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, Lidenbrock wants to reach the centre of the earth to test the Hollow Earth theory; Poe and his *Arthur Gordon Pym* are fascinated by the South Pole. Fictional adventure is able to drive literature beyond the boundaries of reality. Through imagination and fantasy, Verne and Poe go beyond what is known, and Conrad's Marlow hints at having solved a mystery, though Conrad does not share the secret with his readers.

In the nineteenth century, the great explorations are in the past, but the origin of mankind, the centre of the earth and the poles are still mysteries. At the close of the twentieth century, the problematic is completely different; much has been explored, and we are in an era of almost instantaneous communication.

In literature, the twentieth century witnessed the mixing of the genres. In 2001, Marc Dambre and Monique Gosselin-Noat write a literary history titled L'*éclatement des genres au 20e siècle* (*The Bursting of Genres in the 20th Century*). On the back cover, the authors write: 'We hesitated between the bursting and the obliteration of the genres. The first term conveniently highlights the positive explosion, the emergence, the bloom of original combinations that promote creativity beyond generic boundaries.' The texts gathered in the work are the result of a homonymous conference organised by the Society for the Study of 20th Century French Literature. We cannot enter the debate of the mixing of the genres, their bursting – even their erasure – in this essay; the debate is too broad. I will only quote Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce in his *Aesthetic : As Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (1922/1965):

> While making a verbal pretence of agreeing or yielding a feigned obedience, artists have however, really always disregarded these *laws of the [genres]*. Every true work of art has violated some established [genre] and upset the ideas of the critics, who have thus been obliged to broaden the [genres], until finally even the broadened [genre] has proved too narrow, owing to the appearance of new works of art, naturally followed by new scandals, new upsettings and – new broadenings. (pp. 36-37)
> *Note*: Ainslie's translation of Croce uses *kind*, which I have replaced with *genre*.

In the nineteenth century, the adventure novel experienced a codification as well as a separation with the detective novel (which promoted investigation), the science fiction novel (fantasy) or even the spy novel (political). In the twenty-first century, it seems impossible to respect the classification of genres and still answer the question:

what is adventure nowadays? Indeed, a novel such as *L'aventure ambigüe* (*The Ambiguous Adventure*) cannot, according to this codification, be considered an adventure novel. In the nineteenth century, the world, if not computerised, was clearly binary. We are now in what we may call discursive spaces. We are in the era where space is not only geographical; space becomes the container of all spaces, all discourses, all realities created and imagined in three-dimensional space, the imaginary and dreamlike space, the fictitious space, the discursive space or the virtual one.

We live in a time of a dialogic approach, and this dialogue is between cultures, between genres and also between the past and the present. Regelind Farn (2005), mentioning this intercultural approach, says that 'such intense dialogue can result in what feels like a glass wall, a situation in which each participant begins to see the other's position or cultural tradition, but cannot quite come to terms with it' (p. 45). He adds that 'writers unanimously present it as a necessary post-colonial stage. This mutual and precise consciousness of limited understanding is hardly comparable with the earlier vague impression of generally "mysterious" or "enigmatic" "natives" that whites projected as their essence' (p. 45).

Farn (2005) mentions that this 'important aspect of the discourse-analytical approach is the project of *un*learning Western discourses. . . . The unlearning of discourse begins with an awareness that one's own knowledge, representation or discourse are limited. . . . Some travellers learn from not understanding. This represents a departure from older Western enlightenment epistemology, which postulates that everything is knowable' (p. 56).

Broadening the genre to a discursive space of adventure, we get back to the notion of the novel of the limit. I use the term *limit* as the extreme degree reachable, the threshold; when the limit is reached, there is no knowledge of what is beyond, if only there is something beyond. Charbonneau (1992) examines Austrian writer Marlen Haushofer's novel, *The Wall*, in which the main character is a woman who plans a vacation at a hunting lodge in the Austrian mountains. The morning after her arrival, she finds herself behind a glass wall with a dog, a cow and a cat. She struggles to survive. Charbonneau compares Haushofer's novel to Robinson Crusoe – or more specifically to 'a Robinson without Friday' (p. 335). Haushofer's character sees what is behind the wall but she cannot reach it. The delimitation is within, and is of confinement with a visibility of what is outside. She has to organise her world day by day: 'As I had decided

to stand firm, I was standing firm, but I couldn't remember why it was so important to do so and I was contenting myself by living day to day' (Haushofer, (1963/1990, p. 65). But it is slowly taking a toll on her, and she has fear of losing ground, losing her humanity: 'It's not that I dread to become an animal, it would not be that terrible, what is terrible is that a human being can never become an animal, he fails on animality to fall into the abyss' (p. 65). In *Robinson Crusoe* the limit is the physical geographical limitation of the island. In both they have to follow strict routines to contain an invading feeling of nonsense. As Aristotle said, 'The human being is a social animal.'

In Michel Tournier's (1932/1967) *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (*Friday, or the Other Island*), the island becomes a field of exploration of the subconscious mind where everything is manifesting. The subconscious is the territory that is limitless or too deep to be measured, like the abyss. At one point, Robinson is climbing a tree on the island. At first, he feels he is like the tree, expanding its branches, but suddenly a reminiscent fear catches him and he is afraid of falling. He remembers when he climbed to the top of a church tower:

> He closed his eyes and leaned his cheek against the trunk, the unique stable support he had. In this living mast, the wood, surcharged with members and carding the wind, was heard like a muted vibration interrupted sometime by a long groan. He listened to appeasing rumour for a long time; the anguish was loosening its grip. He was dreaming. The tree was a big ship anchored in humus and he was fighting, crammed on all sail, to fly up. A warm caress was enveloping his face. (Tournier, 1932/1967, p. 234)

Nature here is the therapy and the cure and fulfils all functions; the island is even fertilised by Robinson and gives birth to mandrakes.

The Thanotonautes by Bernard Werber (1994) takes us on a voyage to the last unexplored continent, death. The word *Thanotonautes* is a construction from Thanatos, the Greek god of death, and the Latin *nautis* (navigators); thus its meaning of navigators or explorers of death. The thanatonatonautes voluntarily risk their lives to discover the mysteries of death. We find here an ultimate adventure where one's life is put at risk to highlight the existence of life itself. Is adventure about eternally pushing the boundaries of the known, the earth, the exploration of oceans and space, the psyche and the very existence? When individuals are locked within boundaries, they reorganize their existence to accommodate the boundaries.

To conclude this discussion of frontier novels, there is the essential novel, Albert Sánchez Piñol's (2004) *La peau froide* (*Cold Skin*). Sánchez Piñol's protagonists are two men who despise one another and are locked in a lighthouse on a small island at the South Pole, where they nightly push away belligerent, cold-skinned sea creatures. It is a narrative of survival and meeting with an *Other* who is not human. They manage to capture one of these creatures, which turns out to be a female with whom a relationship, sexual and sentimental, becomes possible. Sánchez Piñol seems to be inspired by nineteenth-century adventure novelists – e. g., Stevenson, Conrad, Kipling, Verne. He shows us an adversarial relationship, a staple of the adventure novel; and Manicheism, on top of everything else, is very present. The fear of the Other materializes as enmity. Does the adventurer need adversity to become human?

Rimbaud: The Starting Point[*]

What about Rimbaud? All this started with Rimbaud – Rimbaud, the great poet, the great traveller, a clairvoyant: '*J'ai cru acquérir des pouvoirs surnaturels. . . . Moi qui me suis cru mage ou ange* – I believed I had gained supernatural powers. . . . I thought of myself as a wizard or an angel' (Rimbaud, 1873/1960, Adieu, *Une saison en enfer*, p. 240).

Rimbaud also answers to the call of the sea:

Les lampes et les tapis font le bruit des vagues, la nuit le long de la coque et autour du steerage. . . . Et rêver que la mer guérit tout (Veillees III, *Illuminations*, p. 282).	The lamps and the curtains sound like waves, at night along the hull and around the steerage. . . . And dreaming that the sea heals it all.
Rouler aux blessures, par l'air lassant et la mer, aux supplices, par le silence des eaux et de l'air meurtriers; aux tortures qui rient dans leur silence atrocement houleux. (Angoisse, *Illuminations*, p. 289).	Rolling at the wounds through the the tiresome air and the sea, at the agonies through the silence of waters and the murderous air; at the agonies That laugh in their dreadfully choppy silence.

Rimbaud introduces free verse. He upsets the establishment at every turn, through his sulphurous love affairs, his sudden departures, his returns to his mother. To him, the sea is the meeting between sky and earth, as in this verse from *The Drunken Boat*:

jeté par l'ouragan dans l'ether sans oiseau.
(Le bateau ivre, strophe 18, vers 70, p. 130)

Thrown by the hurricane in the ether empty with birds.

This union is found again in his famous definition of eternity:

Elle est retrouvée
Quoi – L'Éternité.
C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil.
(L'Éternité, *Vers nouveaux*, p. 255)

It is found again
What – Eternity.
It is the sea gone
With the sun.

In Rimbaud's work, all the contradictions of adventure can be found – this heartbreak between Here and There:

Je quitte l'europe. L'air marin brûlera mes poumons; les climats perdus me tanneront et puis le brutal retour, On ne part pas – reprenons les chemins d'ici . . .
(Mauvais sang, *Une saison en enfer*, p. 215)

I am leaving Europe. Sea air will burn my lungs; lost climates will tan my skin and then the abrupt return, We do not leave – let's walk the paths from here again.

If not clairvoyant, is it about the desire of being aware like Marlow? And evoking the Buddha?

[s]'il avait été toujours bien éveillé, je voguerais en pleine sagesse! (L'impossible, *Une saison en enfer*, p. 237)

[If] he had always been well aware, I would have sailed fully wise.

We also find anxiety appropriate to the romantics in 'Soir Historique', where he accuses the 'Naive tourist':

un ballet de mers et de nuits connues, une chimie sans valeur, et des mélodies impossibles. (Soir historique, *Illuminations*, p. 239)

A ballet of known seas and nights, a worthless chemistry and impossible methods.

As well as:

la meme bourgeoisie à tous les points ou la malle nous déposera. (Soir historique, *Illuminations*, p. 301)

The same bourgeoisie in all the spots the colonial mail dumped us.

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* As the reading and interpretation of poetry is such a personal matter, all translations into English from Rimbaud's original French are mine.

And his contempt for colonialism:

Aux pays poivrés et detrempés! – au service des – plus monstrueuses exploitations industrielles ou militaires. . . . Au revoir ici, n'importe où. Conscrits du bon vouloir, nous aurons la philosophie féroce; ignorants pour la science, roués pour le confort; la crevaison pour le monde qui va. C'est la vraie marche. En avant, route! (Démocratie, *Illuminations*, p. 307)

To peppery and sodden countries! – at the service of the most industrial or military exploitations. . . . Farewell here, anywhere. Conscripts of goodwill, we will have the ferocious philosophy; ignorant of science, wheels for comfort; puncture for the world that goes round. It is the true walk. Let's hit the road!

Like the title, 'Démocratie' speaks to us, to us, who have seen wars in the name of democracy. Undoubtedly he was clairvoyant. In the Harar's sun, Rimbaud will be a trader . . . and will cease writing.

We have seen different figures of the adventurer, some easier to identify than others, but what is certain is that the adventurer and the poet are two different ways of being to the world; only the romantic can be both, 'maybe', as Marlow would say . . .

IV.

CONCLUSION

The dawning of human consciousness was the birth of human adventure. Just as with Scheherazade in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the stake is life itself. Death is hypothetical every night, and life is made possible every morning.

The adventure novel codifies itself in the nineteenth century; it is ideological, changing with the characteristics of each era. As Marlow said, 'They were no colonists. . . . They were conquerors' (Conrad, 1899/1995, p. 3). The adventure novel is humankind looking at itself, always too closely, at the heart of action; and that once-glorious world – the conqueror's world – becomes industrious, the colonisers' world.

In the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the adventure novel becomes individualistic and feminine. Thus, in her Carnets de Notes de *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, Marguerite Yourcenar (1977) said that it was impossible to choose as a central figure a female character, for "women's life is too limited or too secret, and the first reproach we could address to her is failing to be a woman' (p. 256). Ironically, she chose to write the grandeur of Hadrien – a Roman emperor. In Dirie Waris's (2011) *Desert Flower*, the heroine faces the lion, which does not eat her but bows to her; and Marlen Haushofer's (1963/1990) heroine kills a man that she thinks may be the last human being on earth – it goes beyond survival.

It was necessary to distantiate a little from the model (the ideology) to respect an essential distance, in order to be able to see the Other (Turco, 2003), to see them in their difference . . . and yet not so different after all. The Other is a mirror. Whether it is Bardamu's Robinson (Céline, 1932), Robinson's Friday (Tournier, 1932/1977), or Marlow's Kurtz (Conrad, 1899/1995), the Other is always a reflection. Duality is the element of surprise. As ideology seems Manichean at first, ending up being only a reference, another frame, duality is neither binary nor an oxymoron; it is another, it is

the Other. If ideology is still present in the modern adventure novel, it is distantiated. The adventure novel wins its freedom back, and this is accomplished through its main character, who is also free from distinguishing himself, entering a period of crisis or getting involved.

As stated in the Introduction, the adventurer, the explorer, made room for the Other. There was another category which was the literary adventurer, the poet, *l'homme du monde*, a man well born and belonging to high society. In a sense, Proust was a traveller of time and psyche, who was immobilised. The explorer replaced the poet, bringing with him other values, mainly merchant ones.

Alexandre, wealthy and well read, is not this man of the past; well born and having access to the dominant ideology of the wealthiest, he is the educated wealthy man, having access to knowledge and considering himself a citizen of the world. He is neither a poet nor an adventurer, but rather a traveller being in the world in the manner of a poet. 'Alexander Goes South' is a coming-of-age novel.

Heart of Darkness stands at the frontier, denouncing but not actively questioning colonialism. Marlow observes, and ends up growing apart. He perceives this same indifference in nature. Conrad creates a poetic and meditative distance between Marlow and the world where Alexandre creates a contemplative and ironic distanciation. Both are ways to break free from contemporary ideologies. In my opinion, the modern adventure novel has done away with boundaries. It pushes away the limits and goes beyond them. In *The Thanatonauts*, we go beyond the boundaries of life and explore death. In Haushofer's novel, the real wall is inside but the heroine is determined to survive, and she makes choices which define another order, and in so doing recreates a world. She is entering the demiurgic dimension of humankind.

Yet the reference system which is the first notion of reality is necessary, for it allows one to determine a frame. When we reach the frontier then, we eventually infringe and go beyond the limits to create another reality. The adventure novel which had to separate itself at his birth from the novel and used to serve an ideology, now enjoys a new-found freedom and reclaims the attribute of being firstly a novel. The adventure novel trifles with its frame, pushes away the limits of its reality and recreates it.

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