

Imperial Treasure and Extractive Masculinity in Late Victorian Adventure Fiction

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Abstract

This article explores how imperial adventure fiction constructs imperial masculinity as what could be called "extractive masculinity," a form of masculinity that is created through mining, owning, risking, even killing, and colonial conversion of land and people into wealth. By engaging in close reading of each of the texts, it compares H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Allan Quatermain (1887) with Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) and reveals that the buried hoard, the diamond mine, and the silver ingot are never neutral objects but symbols of organisation that tie together empire, race, capital, and manhood. A displayed text sample is provided with each analytical claim that is directly quoted from the novels. In Haggard's romances, extraction is justified as a criterion for courageous conquest and white male authority, colonizing Africa's mineral resources as a proving ground for bravery and a right of the gentleman-adventurer, and feminising, mapping and emptying of the colonial terrain. Conrad's *Nostromo*, on the other hand, is about the decaying masculinity of silver, revealing the moral rot and self-destructive thinking of imperial capitalism and its foreign finance. The article follows a trajectory from 'heroic fantasy of extraction' to 'psychological and political crisis of extraction', informed by postcolonial theory, masculinity studies and postcolonial ecocriticism.

Keywords: *imperial romance; extractive masculinity; postcolonial ecocriticism; Joseph Conrad; H. Rider Haggard; mining and empire; material interests*

الكنز الإمبراطوري والرجولة الاستخراجية في أدب المغامرات الفيكتوري المتأخر

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ملخص

تستكشف هذه المقالة كيف يُصوّر أدب المغامرات الإمبراطوري الرجولة الإمبراطورية بوصفها ما يُمكن تسميته "الرجولة الاستخراجية"، وهي شكل من أشكال الرجولة التي تُخلق من خلال التعدين، والتملك، والمخاطرة، بل وحتى القتل، والتحويل الاستعماري للأراضي والشعوب إلى ثروة. ومن خلال قراءة متأنية لكل نص، تُقارن المقالة بين روايتي "مناجم الملك سليمان" (1885) و"ألان كواترماين" (1887) لهنري رايدر هاجارد، ورواية "نوسترومو" (1904) لجوزيف كونراد، وتبين أن الكنز المدفون، ومنجم الماس، وسبائك الفضة ليست أشياء محايدة، بل رموز تنظيمية تربط بين الإمبراطورية، والعرق، ورأس المال، والرجولة. يُرفق بكل ادعاء تحليلي مقتبس مباشرة من الروايات نموذج نصي. في روايات هاغارد الرومانسية، يُبرر الاستخراج كمعيار للغزو الشجاع وسلطة الرجل الأبيض، واستعمار الموارد المعدنية في أفريقيا كساحة

اختبار للشجاعة وحق للمغامر النبيل، وتأنيث الأراضي الاستعمارية ورسم خرائطها وتقريغها. أما رواية نوسترومو لكونراد، فتتناول انحلال رجولة الفضة، كاشفةً عن الفساد الأخلاقي والتفكير التدميري الذاتي للرأسمالية الإمبريالية وتمويلها الأجنبي. تتبع المقالة مسارًا من "الخيال البطولي للاستخراج" إلى "الأزمة النفسية والسياسية للاستخراج"، مستندةً إلى نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، ودراسات الرجولة، والنقد البيئي ما بعد الاستعماري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرواية الإمبريالية؛ الرجولة الاستخراجية؛ النقد البيئي ما بعد الاستعماري؛ جوزيف كونراد؛ هـ. رايدر هاغارد؛ التعدين والإمبراطورية؛ المصالح المادية

1. Introduction

The typical features of late Victorian adventure fiction are its emphasis on empire as movement whether across deserts, into uncharted interiors, in battle or as a changed individual upon his return. But often it's not only about grand glory that drives this movement. It's, with trenchant frequency, something that has to be excavated from the soil. These are the things hidden under the table in an African mountain, the silver scattered from the side of a South American sierra, the stones that seal the keys of the hoard for centuries: the items that are the foundation of the genre's plots, its geographies, its understanding of manhood. The treasure and the mine are not just prizes that the protagonist receives at the end of the journey, but also they are devices that organize relationships of power between empire, land, race and masculinity. The mineral wealth of the adventure novel is read as the romance and political economy of the novel fuse in their reading. In the reading of the adventure novel, the mineral wealth reads as a fusing of romance and political economy (Brantlinger, 1988; Miller, 2021).

The present article deals with this convergence. Brantlinger and Katz both regularly claim Haggard as the preeminent practitioner of a popular fantasy of conquest, that of imperial romance, in which the author's African adventures express the fantasy and help mould it (1988, 1987, respectively). In contrast, Conrad is the great critic of imperialism from within; the writer who uncovered the contradictions of colonial capitalism from the inside (McClure, 1994; Watt, 1979). The two are often juxtaposed (romance/ scepticism; propaganda/irony), but they are less often considered together, under the same material lens, the lens of extraction (Miller, 2021).

There is in that sense, a gap. Many scholars have considered Haggard as an imperialist fantasist and Conrad an anti-imperialist ironist; and there has been a recent trend of postcolonial ecocriticism which has turned to reading the works of the nineteenth century in the context of resources, exhaustion and environmental imperialism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; Miller, 2021; Nixon, 2011). What has yet to be developed is something that can be sustained as a comparative account,

something that can reach back from the various novels to a kind of connection with the extractive economy that they depict; a connection that asks: How do the taking of wealth from colonised ground become in each writer, a way of making or unmaking a man. To refer to that nexus, I want to propose to you, that is, in this article, the term extractive masculinity (cf. McClintock, 1995; Miller, 2021).

There are three questions for the analysis. How do mineral wealth and hidden treasure affect the identities of men in King Solomon's Mines, Allan Quatermain and Nostromo? Second, how do these novels relate to the extraction and colonialism and to the racial hierarchy—how, that is, does the right to dig become interwoven with the right to rule? Thirdly, what does Conrad's use of silver tell us about the imperial romance at the fin de siècle, compared to Haggard's use of mines, diamonds and treasure (cf. Miller, 2021)?

Here the argument is that the excitement and fear of "extraction" are defining characteristics of the imperial manhood of late Victorian adventure fiction. Mining and treasure in Haggard's romances legitimize heroic conquest: The contents of the found treasure validate the white adventurer's courage, endurance and entitlement; the African landscape is a body to be read, entered, and emptied. The silver, as in Conrad's Nostromo, reveals the moral rot, volatility, and brutality of imperial capitalism, eroding the heroic manhood that Haggard had extolled into vapidty, treachery and self-absorption. When read together, the novels trace the metamorphosis of extraction from the sign of manhood to the solution of it. The article starts with a literature review and then follows the theoretical framework and method for the article, three analytical sections that are all based in the text, a comparison discussion, and finally a conclusion (McClure, 1994).

2. Literature Review

The scholarship in this study could be divided into three overlapping categories – criticism of imperial adventure fiction, the study of Victorian and colonial masculinities, and the recent focus on the literature of resource extraction. By reading each one, one gets at both the roots of the current argument as well as the space that it's attempting to fill (Said, 1978).

2.1 Late Victorian Adventure Fiction and Empire

It would be impossible to think of a modern critical understanding of imperial fiction without the work of Edward Said, who in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) argued that uses of narrative form and imperial power are not separable, but rather co-constitutive. Said's insistence that the novel participates in the structures of domination that it represents here supports a great deal of

subsequent work, including the analysis presented here of how treasure-plots represent colonial authority. The adventure tale was already the energising myth of British expansion, as Martin Green's *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (1979) had explained, and Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness* (1988) is the essential study of the field, an account of “imperial Gothic” that had already identified the fusion of adventure fantasies with racial anxieties and notions of the limits of empire in late-century romance, a structure that Brantlinger (2009) later developed into a more elaborate discussion with postcolonial studies. John McClure (1994) redefines the genre as “late imperial romance” and suggests that romance had to re-enchant or re-locate the zones of mystery which it relied upon as the map filled in and the world was rationalised.

Elleke Boehmer (2005) places these pieces in the wider context of colonial and postcolonial literature, focusing on the metonymy of 'possession' and 'mapping' that is naturalised in colonial literature. Other more specific works on Haggard (Haggard-Wright and Wright 1987; Stiebel 2001; Monsman 2006) have identified his importance to the imperial image, as well as the ambivalences in his novels, and it is on the latter point that Monsman is especially persuasive, suggesting that his novels are in fact more internally divided than his reputation as imperial propaganda may indicate. Laura Chrisman (2000) reads Haggard against SA resistance to show the economic ground surface—land, labour and the mineral revolution that underlies the romance surface. Hay (1963), Fleishman (1967) and Watt (1979) are still fundamental to the political and historical readings of Conrad, the first two of which treat Conrad as an Africanist, the last as an “imagist.” GoGwilt (1995) reads *Nostromo* through the “double-mapping” of Europe and empire, and Fredric Jameson's (1981) account of romance as a “socially symbolic act” provides a method for reading *Nostromo*'s silver as the figure through which a political unconscious is organised (Jameson, 1981).

The era of colonial power

The second field is about the production of masculinity in and through empire. The conceptual vocabulary comes from R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005): masculinity is a configuration of practice rather than something fixed and inherent, and is upheld by race and class hierarchies as well as by males who are dominant over females. Joseph Bristow's *Empire Boys* (1991) and Graham Dawson's *Soldier Heroes* (1994) describe how the adventure format provided British boys and men with a template of imperial manhood pluck, endurance and command and John Tosh (1999, 2005) demonstrates how an imperial frontier exported and testifies to home ideals of manliness, with empire serving as a test of national virility.

The following argument is particularly relevant to Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995). Her reading of King Solomon's mines highlights the feminisation and sexualisation of the colonial landscape, the colonial fantasy of penetration and possession embodied in cartography and mining, and the importance of the appropriation of colonial wealth in the reinvention of patriarchy. Bradley Deane (2014) revises the traditional view, demonstrating that imperial manhood was always being remade, and Showalter (1990), Hyam (1990), Mangan and Walvin (1987), Low (1996), and Richardson (2006) each chart a gendered, sexual, and generic economy of empire and the fin de siècle. Combined, these works demonstrate that adventure fiction's masculinity is relational, performative, racialised, but less often linked to the action of extraction (McClintock, 1995).

This third and latest field is the one that gives the article its unique perspective, although it has long origins: J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) already identified the motive of empire as the export of surplus capital and search for overseas profit which Conrad's "material interests" bring to light. This insight, extended by Postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010) is that the colonial relation is an environmental relation too: land, animals, resources are subjected to a colonial logic of appropriation. Dispersed, attritional harm has been named by Rob Nixon (2011) as 'slow violence'; the colony might be read as a space of death exposure as part of sovereignty, as did Achille Mbembe (2003); the violent extraction of animal bodies has been a theme in Victorian adventure fiction, as in John Miller (2012); and the presence of 'paradise and Eden discourses' has been demonstrated to conceal the exploitation of colonised ground (Deckard, 2009).

The one thing most recently relevant to the subject is the work of Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion* (2021), which reads precisely this corpus, including Haggard's mines and Conrad's *Nostromo*, as registering a new consciousness of finite, nonrenewable resources and of the "sacrifice zones" that extraction produces, the mine being a formal as well as a thematic problem that reshapes the temporality and endings of imperial narrative. Based on this, and on Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) work on the imperial gaze which claims and surveys, this article makes closer links between extractive and masculine than have other scholars. The gap it fills is a lack of single comparative context that could position Haggard's fantasy of the mine next to Conrad's critique of it, and interpret both as phases of a single extractive imagination (Miller, 2021).

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This article uses a tri-fold approach because the object of this article extractive masculinity is at their intersection. The first is the theory of post-colonialism. In the wake of Said (1978, 1993), Brantlinger (1988), and Boehmer (2005), the analysis focuses on the adventure novel as a genre that both constructs and validates colonial power, with particular attention to the naturalisation of race, conquest, and the right to possess in the novel; the surveying imperial gaze of Said (1978, 1993) and the mappable space of colonial possession of McClintock (1995) read the treasure map and the landscape that opens the way to the treasure-hoard (McClintock, 1995).

The second strand is the studies of masculinity. Using both the hegemonic masculinity of Connell (2005) and the other perspectives quoted earlier, the portrayal of manhood as a configuration of practice is understood here as a performance that is consolidated by risk, leadership, violence and racial dominance rather than as a natural gift so that the heroism of Quatermain and Gould and the “incorruptible” reputation of Nostromo can be read as a performance that is tested and, in the case of Conrad, challenged by the extractive plot.

The third strand is the extractive/ecocritical approach. Inspired by Hobson (1902), Huggan and Tiffin (2010), Nixon (2011), Mbembe (2003), and particularly Miller (2021), the framework sees the mines, silver, diamonds and the land as symbols of the Empire and sites where the human and environmental costs of empire are made visible or concealed. The study's originality rests on the way the strand are woven together, in such a way that the mine is simultaneously read as a space of colonial power, a place of manly performance, and an ecological wound (Miller, 2021).

3.2 Methodology

The method is comparative close textual analysis that is structured around evidence presented. Each analytical section identifies the moments when treasure, mining, silver, exploration, racial hierarchy, and masculine authority is most strongly emphasized, presents the appropriate passage as a set-off block quotation, and offers a detailed interpretation of that passage, before proceeding to the next. This makes the text on which each claim is based evident and verifiable, and gives the three novels a shared textual base for the ensuing discussion (Said, 1993).

As the analysis is based on the primary editions placed in electronic form (Project Gutenberg texts of the three novels), it is not cited by page number, but by the author and year of its first publication; the chapter (for Haggard) or part (for Conrad) is indicated, which avoids the assigning of spurious pagination to a re-flowable electronic text, but preserves the location of each quotation and its verifiability. All quotations have been carefully transcribed from the source texts and material omitted in between has been indicated by ellipses.

4. Treasure Maps, Hidden Wealth, and the Romance of Possession in King Solomon's Mines

King Solomon's Mines converts extraction into pure romance. Its mineral wealth is never merely economic; it is the occasion for a fantasy of masculine adventure in which the mine functions as a test of courage, endurance, racial authority, and imperial entitlement. The following analysis moves through four moments the map, the landscape, the adventuring self, and the hoard showing how each binds the act of taking to the making of a man (McClintock, 1995).

4.1 The Blood-Written Map: African Land Made Legible

The plot is set in motion not by a place but by a document the dying Portuguese's map and the nature of that document reveals how the novel imagines colonial space:

I, José da Silvestra, who am now dying of hunger in the little cave where no snow is ... of the two mountains I have named Sheba's Breasts, write this in the year 1590 with a cleft bone upon a remnant of my raiment, my blood being the ink. ... With my own eyes I have seen the countless diamonds stored in Solomon's treasure chamber behind the white Death; but through the treachery of Gagool the witch-finder I might bring nought away, scarcely my life. Let him who comes follow the map ... Let him kill Gagool. (Haggard, 1885, ch. 2)

Two operations are performed at once. First, African land is rendered legible: a vast, unknown interior is reduced to a readable object, a route, a set of coordinates that European men can follow. As Pratt (1992) argues of imperial travel writing, the surveying gaze transforms territory into a possession-in-waiting; Haggard literalises that gaze as a thing one carries in a pocket-book. Second, the wealth is figured as inheritance rather than theft. The diamonds, the narrator later reflects, had been "found for us thousands of years ago by the patient delvers" and merely await the rightful claimant (Haggard, 1885, ch. 17); the romance thereby converts seizure into discovery and dispossession into destiny. That the map is written in blood, and instructs the reader to kill the African witch-finder Gagool, fuses extraction with violence and racial elimination at the very threshold of the plot (Haggard, 1885, ch. 2).

4.2 The Feminised Landscape and the Erotics of Possession

The route to the mine is mapped onto a sexualised female body, a point central to McClintock's (1995) reading. The twin peaks the adventurers must cross are named Sheba's Breasts and described accordingly:

"Straight before us, rose two enormous mountains ... These mountains placed thus, like the pillars of a gigantic gateway, are shaped after the fashion of a woman's breasts, and at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form of a

recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep. ... upon the top of each is a vast hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast. (Haggard, 1885, ch. 6)"

The hero's progress toward the diamonds is thus narrated as a journey across, and into, a feminised landscape; the treasure chamber lies, in the map's own geography, beyond the nipple and within the body of the land. Extraction is here inseparable from a patriarchal fantasy of penetration and possession, and the novel's racial hierarchy white men reading and entering a territory coded as native and female is encoded in its very topography. When the adventurers descend at last into Kukuanaaland, the land is described as "little less than an earthly paradise; in beauty, in natural wealth, and in climate I have never seen its like" (Haggard, 1885, ch. 8): the colonised country is at once Eden and resource, a body whose "natural wealth" is appraised in the same breath that admires it exactly the conflation of paradise and exploitation that recurs throughout colonial discourse (Deckard, 2009).

4.3 The Modest Narrator and the Authority of the Hunter

Allan Quatermain's self-presentation complicates, without dislodging, this masculine authority. He repeatedly disavows the heroic posture:

"am I a gentleman? What is a gentleman? I don't quite know ... At any rate, I was born a gentleman, though I have been nothing but a poor travelling trader and hunter all my life. ... I have killed many men in my time, yet I have never slain wantonly or stained my hand in innocent blood, but only in self-defence. (Haggard, 1885, ch. 1)"

This studied modesty is a narrative strategy rather than a genuine qualification of power. By disavowing bravado and insisting that he kills only in self-defence, Quatermain authorises himself as the reliable witness the seasoned guide, hunter, survivor, and interpreter of Africa whose understatement guarantees the truth of the marvels he reports. His refusal of the heroic posture is, paradoxically, what secures his authority over the narrative and the land it describes. That authority is grounded in a lifetime of killing, and the novel's great hunting set-piece shows how readily the adventurer's violence is naturalised even as the text registers its excess:

"Into this the elephants plunged ... filling the air with their screams, and trumpeting as they pushed one another aside in their selfish panic, just like so many human beings. Now was our opportunity, and firing away as quickly as we could load, we killed five of the poor beasts ... We were too tired to follow them, and perhaps also a little sick of slaughter, eight elephants being a pretty good bag for one day. (Haggard, 1885, ch. 4)"

The hunt is itself a form of extraction bodies converted into ivory, the “big tusks” that the bearers are sent to “chop away” and the simile likening the panicking herd to “human beings” briefly opens, then closes, the question of whether colonial killing has a moral cost. The phrase “a little sick of slaughter” concedes unease, but the accountant’s idiom that follows, “a pretty good bag for one day,” reabsorbs that unease into the satisfactions of the tally. This is hegemonic masculinity in Connell’s (2005) sense identity secured through risk, mastery, and the disciplined application of violence and Dawson (1994) and Bristow (1991) have shown how exactly such ordeals furnished the period’s template of imperial manhood. The desert crossing and the agonising ascent of the snow-line that follow stage the body of the adventurer as an instrument of endurance: suffering is the price of, and the qualification for, the wealth ahead (Haggard, 1885, ch. 4).

4.4 *The Hoard and the Repressed Crime*

The discovery of the diamonds is the novel’s climax of acquisitive desire, and its language betrays a guilt the romance must repress:

"When our eyes grew used to it we saw that the chest was three-parts full of uncut diamonds ... “We are the richest men in the whole world,” I said. “Monte Christo was a fool to us.” ... We stood still with pale faces and stared at each other, the lantern in the middle and the glimmering gems below, as though we were conspirators about to commit a crime, instead of being, as we thought, the most fortunate men on earth. (Haggard, 1885, ch. 17)"

The simile admits that taking the hoard might be a transgression the men look like “conspirators about to commit a crime”—but Haggard allows the anxiety to surface only to neutralise it, dissolving the moral question into euphoric laughter “over the gems that were ours.” That repression is then codified as a gentlemanly ethic of entitlement when Sir Henry Curtis distinguishes honour from greed: “a gentleman does not sell himself for wealth,” he declares, before immediately conceding that “Wealth is good, and if it comes in our way we will take it” (Haggard, 1885, ch. 10). The formulation captures the romance’s ideological work: it disavows greed as a motive while affirming acquisition as a right. The diamonds are to be received, not pursued a distinction that lets the imperial adventurer remain a gentleman while emptying a colonised treasure chamber. Even the vocabulary used to describe the wealth to the Kukuanas—“bright stones, pretty playthings, and yellow iron” (Haggard, 1885, ch. 9) reduces a colonial economy to a children’s game, naturalising European desire as the only serious relation to mineral value (Haggard, 1885, ch. 9).

In *King Solomon’s Mines*, then, Haggard turns extraction into romance. Mining becomes adventure, possession becomes heroism, and imperial desire is disguised

as masculine courage. The mine confirms rather than threatens the white male self, and the brief flicker of conspiratorial guilt is absorbed back into the pleasures of the hoard. It is precisely this confident equation of extraction with manhood that Conrad will later take apart (Brantlinger, 1988).

5. Recycled Heroism and Colonial Masculinity in Allan Quatermain

Allan Quatermain extends the imperial adventure model of its predecessor while inflecting it with nostalgia. Published two years after *King Solomon's Mines*, the sequel returns its now-wealthy hero to the colonial frontier and, in doing so, exposes a structural feature of extractive masculinity: the hero cannot remain at home. Manhood, once secured through danger and acquisition, must be perpetually re-secured. The analysis proceeds through three moments: the disavowal of civilisation, the frontier as the theatre of manhood, and the necropolitical economy of colonial violence (Dawson, 1994).

5.1 "Civilization is Only Savagery Silver-Gilt": The Disavowal of the Metropolis

The novel opens with a sustained meditation that frames the entire journey. Mourning his son, Quatermain turns a critique of metropolitan greed into a justification for returning to the colony:

"the savage, as I have known him, is to a large extent free from the greed of money, which eats like a cancer into the heart of the white man. ... Civilization is only savagery silver-gilt. A vainglory is it, and like a northern light, comes but to fade and leave the sky more dark. (Haggard, 1887, Introduction)"

The image of money as a devouring cancer is striking, and it anticipates Conrad with uncanny precision yet Haggard's narrative does not act on its own insight. Having diagnosed the corrosive greed of his civilisation, Quatermain promptly returns to the frontier to extract value from it once more; the critique becomes a licence. The disavowal is then given a quasi-anthropological form:

"supposing for the sake of argument we divide ourselves into twenty parts, nineteen savage and one civilized, we must look to the nineteen savage portions of our nature, if we would really understand ourselves ... It is on the nineteen rough serviceable savage portions that we fall back in emergencies, not on the polished but unsubstantial twentieth. (Haggard, 1887, Introduction)"

The passage performs the double move characteristic of imperial Gothic as Brantlinger (1988) describes it: it both celebrates a supposedly authentic, virile savagery beneath the civilised surface and racialises that savagery as the property of the colonised, against whom the white adventurer measures himself. The "nineteen savage portions" are what the frontier exists to exercise; civilisation is the thin,

“unsubstantial” guilt that adventure must scrape away to find the man beneath (Haggard, 1887, Introduction).

5.2 *The Frontier as the Theatre of Manhood*

Quatermain’s longing for the wilderness is explicitly a longing for a space in which a masculine self can be renewed:

"The thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate this place no more; I would go and die as I had lived, among the wild game and the savages. ... no man who has for forty years lived the life I have, can with impunity go coop himself in this prim English country ... He begins to long ah, how he longs! for the keen breath of the desert air. (Haggard, 1887, Introduction)"

Domesticity is figured as confinement (“coop”), the metropolis as emasculating (“prim”), and the frontier as the only environment in which manhood can breathe. He frames departure as a severance from a fallen world. My poor boy’s death has broken the last link between me and civilization, and I’m off to my native wilds” (Haggard, 1887, ch. 1) while in fact re-entering the circuits of conquest. Here the novel’s extraction operates beyond minerals: even where literal treasure is less central than in *King Solomon’s Mines*, the narrative continues to extract value from African geography, bodies, myths, and political structures, converting the continent into raw material for the production of European heroism and European story. The land yields adventure as the mine yielded diamonds (Haggard, 1887).

5.3 *Necropolitical Heroism: Violence, Race, and Renewal*

Violence is the most explicit medium of this masculine renewal, and it is tightly bound to racial hierarchy. The set-piece rescue at the Masai kraal stages mass killing as heroic achievement:

"With an universal howl of terror and fury the brawny crowd of savages within the kraal sprang to their feet, many of them to fall again beneath our well-directed hail of lead before they had moved a yard. ... As they went we kept pouring our fire with terrible effect into the thickening mob as fast as we could load. (Haggard, 1887, ch. 7)"

The slaughter is narrated as triumph rather than atrocity. Command, weapons, and endurance define the male hero, while the racial coding of the enemy as a “mob” of “savages” renders their deaths consequenceless within the romance’s moral economy an instance of what Mbembe (2003) theorises as the colony’s necropolitical logic, in which some lives are exposed to death as a matter of course. The colonised may also be recruited to validate the very martial masculinity the empire prizes, as in the admired ferocity of the Zulu warrior Umslopogaas, who wishes that

"when he was dead he should like his spirit to sit upon that snow-clad peak for ever, and to rush down the steep white sides in the breath of the whirlwind, or on the flash of the lightning, and "slay, and slay, and slay". (Haggard, 1887, ch. 4)"

This is presented as noble savagery, a heroic violence the novel can admire because it serves the expedition. In *Allan Quatermain*, then, imperial masculinity becomes nostalgic and repetitive an identity that must return, again and again, to colonial space to be renewed, because the frontier is the only theatre in which it can be performed, and the novel's elegiac tone registers, without quite confronting, the suspicion that such heroism is already belated (Haggard, 1887).

6. Silver, Capital, and the Collapse of Imperial Masculinity in Conrad's *Nostromo*

Conrad's *Nostromo* takes the materials of Haggard's romance the mine, the precious metal, the heroic man of action and turns them inside out; as White (1993) argues, Conrad consistently constructs the imperial adventure subject in order to deconstruct it. In the fictional South American republic of Costaguana, the San Tomé silver mine does not confirm heroic order but generates instability, dependency, and moral decay, dissolving the very masculinity the imperial romance had celebrated. The analysis proceeds through four moments: the mine as a state within the state, Gould's faith in material interests, the alliance with foreign finance, and the corruption of the "incorruptible" hero (Conrad, 1904).

6.1 *The San Tomé Mine as Imperium in Imperio*

Conrad insists from the outset that the mine is the novel's economic and political centre, an "Imperium in Imperio" (Conrad, 1904, Part First) whose silver finances revolutions, buys officials, and draws foreign capital. The labour of extraction is rendered with a sonorous attention that simultaneously aestheticises and exposes it:

"the great wooden shoots slanting over the edge of the tunnel plateau ... the ceaseless, violent rush of water in the open flumes could be heard, murmuring fiercely, with the splash and rumble of revolving turbine-wheels, and the thudding march of the stamps pounding to powder the treasure rock on the plateau below ... the mountain would swallow one-half of the silent crowd. (Conrad, 1904, Part First)"

The mountain that "swallow[s]" its anonymous workforce and the stamps that pound the "treasure rock" register the human and environmental cost that Haggard's romance suppresses; this is the "slow violence" of extraction (Nixon, 2011) given narrative form, the disposable labour of the mine theorised by Mbembe (2003) as the colony's necropolitical ground. Yet the silver is also experienced by its owners

as triumph. The quarterly silver escort is described in the language of imperial conquest:

"Every three months an increasing stream of treasure swept through the streets of Sulaco on its way to the strong room in the O.S.N. Co.'s building by the harbour, there to await shipment for the North. ... For them both, each passing of the escort under the balconies of the Casa Gould was like another victory gained in the conquest of peace for Sulaco. (Conrad, 1904, Part First)"

The phrase "the conquest of peace" captures the novel's central irony: the silver is imagined as the instrument of order even as it is, in fact, the engine of the violence that consumes the province. Where Jameson (1981) reads the central symbol of a political narrative as the figure that organises its whole field of meaning, the silver is precisely that figure in *Nostromo* the point at which economics, politics, and selfhood converge (Jameson, 1981).

6.2 Charles Gould and the Faith in Material Interests

Charles Gould embodies the idealist conviction that extraction can produce order a conviction the novel methodically discredits. His credo is the clearest statement of imperial capitalism's self-justification in the book:

"What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. ... A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope. (Conrad, 1904, Part First)"

The promise that justice will come "afterwards," once profit is secured, is precisely Gould's undoing, and Conrad frames his project from the start as a repetition of the catastrophe it means to redeem. Reopening the mine that ruined his father, Gould is overtaken by the thing he commands:

"For a moment he felt as if the silver mine, which had killed his father, had decoyed him further than he meant to go; and with the roundabout logic of emotions, he felt that the worthiness of his life was bound up with success. There was no going back. (Conrad, 1904, Part First)"

Gould's masculinity his silence, his control, his rectitude hardens over the novel into what Conrad calls a "fixed idea" (Conrad, 1904, Part Third) that hollows out his marriage and his self; the man of material interests is consumed by the material he produces. Where Haggard's gentleman receives wealth without being altered by it, Conrad's idealist is progressively deformed by it. The author's own verdict, delivered in the prefatory note, fixes Gould forever to the object of his faith: he is

“the Idealist-creator of Material Interests whom we must leave to his Mine from which there is no escape in this world” (Conrad, 1904, Author’s Note).

6.3 Holroyd, *Foreign Finance, and the Religion of Profit*

Conrad is careful to show that the mine is not a local enterprise but a node in a transnational circuit of capital, financed by the North American steel-and-silver magnate Holroyd, for whom Costaguana is at once an investment and a mission field. The relationship between financier and administrator is rendered with mordant clarity:

"He was not running a great enterprise there; no mere railway board or industrial corporation. He was running a man! A success would have pleased him very much on refreshingly novel grounds; but, on the other side of the same feeling, it was incumbent upon him to cast it off utterly at the first sign of failure. (Conrad, 1904, Part First)"

Holroyd “runs” Gould as he runs an asset, and Mrs Gould perceives that his much-advertised piety is continuous with his commerce: he “looked upon his own God as a sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches” (Conrad, 1904, Part First). The “purer forms of Christianity” that Holroyd exports alongside his capital expose the ideological dimension of imperial extraction the way the conversion of land into profit is sanctified as the redemption of “benighted” continents. This is the imperial economy that Hobson (1902) had diagnosed in the same decade: the export of surplus capital in search of overseas return, dressed in the rhetoric of civilising mission. Conrad’s silver, unlike Haggard’s diamonds, is visibly embedded in a global financial system, and the masculine authority of those who command it is correspondingly contingent Gould may be “cast off” the moment he ceases to be profitable (Conrad, 1904, Part First).

6.4 *Nostromo: The Incorruptible Made Slave*

Nostromo is Conrad’s most direct rewriting of the adventure hero, and his trajectory is the novel’s sharpest indictment of extractive masculinity. His identity is wholly a matter of reputation—of courage, fidelity, and public honour—and the old Garibaldino Viola names him “the Incorruptible” (Conrad, 1904, Part Second). The sceptical Decoud exposes the fragility of an identity grounded in the regard of others:

"this man was made incorruptible by his enormous vanity, that finest form of egoism which can take on the aspect of every virtue. (Conrad, 1904, Part Second)"

The hero’s incorruptibility, in other words, is not moral substance but performance, sustained by the very vanity the silver will exploit. The novel’s central irony fuses metal and man as Nostromo conceals the treasure on the island:

"this treasure may be left safely here for hundreds of years. ... And silver is an incorruptible metal that can be trusted to keep its value for ever. ... An incorruptible metal," he repeated ... "As some men are said to be," Decoud pronounced, inscrutably. (Conrad, 1904, Part Second)"

The pun is devastating: the only thing in the novel that remains truly incorruptible is the silver, and its incorruptibility is precisely what corrupts the man supposed to share the quality. Entrusted with the hoard and then, as he believes, abandoned by the powers that used him, Nostromo is seized by the conviction that he has been betrayed, and Conrad distils the logic into an aphorism—"A man betrayed is a man destroyed" (Conrad, 1904, Part Third). From this point the silver functions as a moral pathology:

"A transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever. Nostromo had lost his peace; the genuineness of all his qualities was destroyed. ... But he hated the feel of the ingots. (Conrad, 1904, Part Third)"

The cancer-image that Haggard had used rhetorically and then ignored becomes, in Conrad, literal narrative event: Nostromo is repeatedly named "the slave of the San Tomé silver" (Conrad, 1904, Part Third), the heroic man of the people reduced to bondage by the metal he secretly possesses. His dying words complete the reversal of the adventure formula:

"The silver has killed me. It has held me. It holds me yet. Nobody knows where it is." ... "I die betrayed betrayed by ..." But he did not say by whom or by what he was dying betrayed. (Conrad, 1904, Part Third)"

The broken-off sentence is the precise measure of Conrad's critique: the agent of betrayal is unnameable because it is the extractive system itself. Silver in *Nostromo* is thus not merely wealth but an imperial force, a colonial system that reorganises every human relationship it touches loyalty, marriage, politics, selfhood (Miller, 2021). Conrad transforms the adventure-treasure motif into a critique of imperial capitalism: extraction no longer confirms masculinity but exposes its fragility and corruption. The hoard that made Haggard's men "the richest men in the whole world" makes Conrad's hero a slave, and then a corpse (Conrad, 1904, Part Third).

7. Comparative Discussion

Read side by side, the three novels reveal a coherent transformation of a shared imaginative material. Haggard and Conrad both bind masculinity to extraction; they differ radically in what that binding produces. The contrast can be summarised across several dimensions before being interpreted (Miller, 2021).

Element	King Solomon's Mines	Allan Quatermain	Nostromo
Main resource	Diamonds / buried treasure	Colonial space and symbolic wealth	Silver
Type of masculinity	Heroic explorer	Nostalgic imperial adventurer	Corrupted public hero
Colonial logic	Discovery and possession	Return and renewal	Capitalist control
Economic frame	Treasure as inheritance	Frontier as resource	Transnational finance capital
Dominant tone	Romantic and heroic	Nostalgic and elegiac	Ambivalent and critical
Meaning of extraction	Reward and entitlement	Renewal of masculine identity	Moral and political corruption

Table 1. Comparative schema of resource, masculinity, and colonial logic across the three novels.

The first two axes of difference have to do with the meaning and effect of the taken object on manhood. The diamond and the hoard are his prizes, stable and easy to carry, a kind of proof of the hero's value which leaves him pretty much the same, while the code of the gentlest gentleman (Haggard, 1885, ch. 10) guarantees that nothing will ever stain his honour, which is his chief value. At the end of the romance the men are richer, but the same man; the act of taking is the validation of manhood: courage and endurance, racial authority, in one act. Conrad's dream is a silver agent in his dream world: it affects Gould and Nostromo, molding their desires, and ultimately destroying them. People's reputation for incorruptibility is proved to be empty, and the uncorruptible literal metal is the standard of the man's moral downfall. In both texts, a man is placed in charge of treasure, but in one case the exercise of this power is heroic (Haggard, 1893), and in the other case, it is a means to moral corruption (Conrad, 1904).

The third axis is the economic one in which the extraction is envisioned. The issue of a system of accumulation is hardly proposed when Haggard's diamonds are regarded as treasure, ancient, discovered, and an inheritance due to the rightful

owner. By contrast, Conrad's silver is clearly "capital": it comes out of the ground financed by the profits of California, carried aboard northbound steamers and sold on a global market; and the masculine "authority" that accompanies it is dependent on profit, and can be withdrawn at any moment when the business goes out of business (Conrad, 1904, Part First). This is also a transition from a male who owns to a male who is owned (Hobson, 1902).

There is a fourth axis, dealing with colonial authority and race. Both writers naturalise the entitlement of the Europeans to the colonised territory, and it is crucial not to overstate Conrad's dissent: The San Tomé mine's work is largely described in a homogenous mass, and the critique of empire in *Nostromo* follows from within imperial structures, not from the point of view of the colonised (Said, 1993). However, the emphasis comes into play. In Haggard's romances, colonial possession is presented as adventure and destiny; in Conrad, colonial capital is a system of corruption that is self-sustaining and traps coloniser and colonised. Allan Quatermain is positioned between the two, pointing towards criticism that the romance form cannot sustain (Brantlinger, 1988), and meditating on the "cancer" of money (Haggard, 1887, Introduction).

The path between the three texts is thus not just to be seen as an opposition between two authors but as a journey into the imperial imagination at the turn of the century. This is a shift from Haggard's idea of imperial extraction as heroic fantasy to imperial extraction as a psychological and political crisis as it moves from Haggard to Conrad. The surety that digging = manhood comes to be undermined by the sense that the man mastered by the hoard masters the digging, as the genre to which McClure (1994) refers—late imperial romance—declines its dream, of the closing of the map, the spread of capital, the awareness of finite resources that Miller (2021) documents, or the stagnant developmental arcs that Esty (2012) identifies through colonial modernism.

8. Conclusion

This article has contended that extractive masculinity is created through the fantasy and the fear of extraction so that a comparative reading of Haggard and Conrad in late Victorian contexts can be seen to highlight an interesting and significant transformation. Here, the mine is a romance: the blood-written map makes the African country legible and possessable, the feminine nature of the landscape allows it to be penetrated, the hardship of the hunt and the passage of time make for a hero, and the prize, the diamond hoard, is a reward for a manhood that the gentleman's code keeps unstained even during the process of acquisition. That virility, in Allan Quatermain, is compulsive and nostalgic: at no time can the hero stay put, at no time can he, half-acknowledging in the novel the critique of very

greed it embodies, stay at home, or remain at rest in domestic life, but must return to the colony and extract from there the heroism which the domestic cannot provide.

With *Nostromo*, Conrad uses these materials to attack themselves. The San Tomé silver does not signify order and identity, but that politics, loyalty and selfhood are all corrupted, Gould himself a believer of material interest, his enterprise supported and “run” by a foreign financier for whom God is a profit-maker and the “incorruptible” *Nostromo* becomes the servant of the metal that proves to be more incorruptible than he is. The adventure hero, who comes back to him in Haggard with riches and unscavenged, goes away in Conrad and is betrayed by an unsuspecting system. In Conrad, the cancer-image of money raised and killed by Haggard is the literal form of the narrative (Conrad, 1904).

The comparison is important because it refutes the usual dichotomy of these authors as propagandist/critic, demonstrating instead that the authors operate the same seam from different ends. Both render the mine the site of the creation of empire, race, capital and manhood – only in one case, that of the mine, resulting in the creation of a hero and the other of a ruin. The article is placed in the context of postcolonial theory, masculinity studies, and the new discipline of extraction ecocriticism (Miller, 2021), to show that some of the most ideologically packed objects in the empire literature are the buried hoard and the silver ingot, objects by which the idea of cultural manhood of conquest got imagined and then doubted.

More research could be done to chart the ramifications of this model across the larger body of imperial romance—into Kipling, Henty and Stevenson—and into twentieth century colonial petrofictions, where the link between extraction and masculinity is reframed with a new resource frontier of oil. What the present comparison demonstrates is that a question with the form and force of a fin de siècle issue was already present at the end of the nineteenth century; the imperial adventure novel was beginning to find that the wealth it was digging up in the colonized earth could dig something out of the men who were digging it up (cf. Miller, 2021).

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