HORSEMEN: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

NATHAN DAVID GEHOSKI

(Under the Direction of Magdalena Zurawski)

ABSTRACT

Fantasy is one of the top-selling, most widely disseminated genres on the planet today. From billion-dollar franchises like *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*, to the relatively new explosion in streaming service updates of older works including Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* and forthcoming adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion,* Fantasy invites millions of viewers to escape their own realities and enjoy possible worlds at once familiar and strange to them.

Today, contemporary Fantasy authors often try to redress the historical underrepresentation of people of color and members of the LGTBQ+ community through more inclusive narratives and diverse character selection. However, such efforts can quickly devolve into a type of "Disney Diversity"—an exercise in virtue signaling to improve audience reception and retention—that risks covering up the exact habits of mind that define the problematic white supremacist roots of the genre. Particularly, white normalization & solipsism—a type of ideological & narratological white washing allowing for white people to experience the illusion of diversity without challenge—remain endemic in the mainstream. The popular Fantasy subgenre of Sword & Sorcery[1], or Low Fantasy, fathered by Robert E. Howard is particularly

[1] The alliterative title for Howard's work, first coined by Fritz Lieber in 1961.

fraught as it often reimagines the white, imperialist heroes of 19th century adventure fiction as outsiders fighting against a corrupting influence rather than agents of oppression and colonial expropriation.

Horsemen, as a reimagining of Howard's creation, is a cross-genre, multi-modal Fantasy novel meant to enflame, rather than elide, the history of white supremacy in Sword & Sorcery. Set in a fictional universe that darkly mirrors our own 19th century, it imagines a world in which the super science and occult of weird tales is put in service to a totalitarian white supremacist power to create a set of Fantasy tropes familiar to fans of Sword & Sorcery. A familiarity, I then challenge at the level of the hero's characterization, journey, and fate to resist the normalization of a new genre that refits the same old problem with a less mono-chromatic façade.

INDEX WORDS: Fantasy, Whiteness, Robert E. Howard, Sword & Sorcery

HORSEMEN: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

NATHAN DAVID GEHOSKI

B.S., The University of Michigan, 2004

M.A., Eastern Michigan University, 2015

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2022

© 2022

Nathan David Gehoski

All Rights Reserved

HORSEMEN: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

NATHAN DAVID GEHOSKI

Major Professor:	Magdalena Zurawski
Committee:	Reginald McKnight
	Andrew Zawacki

Electronic Version Approved:
Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction—Defining Fantasy

In the 1973, Lin Carter wrote the first full-length study of the Fantasy genre, *Imaginary Worlds,* followed a few years later by L. Sprague de Camp's *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy* in 1976. As editors of the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series (BAFS) and authors of criticism and creative works alike, both men focused on establishing a working definition of Fantasy and proposed lineage meant to legitimize what many, to this day, deride as escapist trash.

These populist works of criticism were followed in short order by the more literary minded *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (W.R. Irwin 1976) and Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature* (1981), both featuring the more well-established oeuvre of authors like C.S. Lewis, Ursula Le Guin, and J.R.R Tolkien to the exclusion of the dozens, if not hundreds, of "popular" authors on the market. A case of Ivory Tower myopia that often translates into a misunderstanding of the genre itself and led Tom Shippey to observe in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Fantasy Stories* (1994) "… current academic definitions … leave one wondering whether those who produce them ever stray into an ordinary bookshop at all (Shippey xi)." A problem stemming from the fact that, as Edward James and Farah Mendelsohn argue in their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature,* literary scholars tend to "generate definitions of fantasy which include the texts that they value and exclude most of what general readers think of as fantasy (Mendelsohn 1)."

The relative newness of Fantasy and debate surrounding its origins are major features of the genre. It is the product of convergent evolution, with different literary traditions, audiences, publishing venues, critics, and contributors informing a grand experiment in bricolage that did not become codified as a single genre until the 2nd half of the 20th century. Operating contemporaneously in the first part of the 20th century, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings (LotR*) and Robert E. Howard's swashbuckling Sword & Sorcery tales, generally considered to be the source material for what would grow into modern Fantasy, offer nothing to suggest that either man was aware of the pedigree they were building. Nor is there any indication of a holistic, shared literary tradition between the two men. In fact, as Jamie Williamson argues in *The Evolution of Modern Fantasy,* it was not until Carter & de Camp that anyone even attempted to group the "fantastic literature" of Howard and Tolkien under the same heading, with the result that:

> … the fantasy canon is not, from the standpoint of the contexts of the writers themselves, anything like a unified tradition that descends in linear fashion from the romances of William Morris to the 1960s and beyond … it would perhaps be better to say that they too [High and Low Fantasy] moved out of distinct literary territories, developed vocabularies of content similar in notable respects, and converged in the 1960s. (Williamson 15)

With all of this in mind, if we start with Williamson's adaption of Carter and de Camp's definition of the genre, at its most basic Fantasy is a group of "… narratives set in worlds in which the supernatural or magical are part of the fabric of reality and that center on themes of

quest, war, and adventure (Williamson 12).” Fantasy is defined by a fantastic mise en scène that, in many cases, is more complex and developed than the narrative itself. It is a genre of world building and spectacle that can, as Jack Zipes puts it, “… transform plain junk into gold that glitters” and at its worst “drain our [the readers & authors alike] imaginations by glorifying social relations of power that are made spectacular and involve the magic of fetishism (Zipes 77)[2].”

Digging deeper into the narrative structuring of the genre, Brian Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy,* makes the point that “’the problem initially posed,” in a Fantasy narrative, is usually solved by the end of the story, “the task successfully completed (Attebery 15).” And not just completed, but satisfyingly resolved in such a way as to remain consistent with the logic of, as Farah Mendelsohn picks up in *Rhetorics of Fantasy,* an invented world *“*built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world (Mendelsohn 59).” Again, the world itself is paramount. This diptych of a satisfying quest set in an immersive, internally consistent world creates a sense of what Rita Felski terms enchantment in the reader (and perhaps more dangerously in the author as well) “… characterized by a state of intense involvement, a sense of being so entirely caught up in an aesthetic object that nothing else seems to matter (Felski 54),” which Ria Cheyne states is a defining feature of both Fantasy and Fantasy audiences who “actively seek out the aesthetic and affective experience of enchantment (Cheyne 111).” This dangerous liaison with the fantastic has led some to assert, as China Mieville does, that to “claim that fantasy is in some systematic way resistant to ideology of rebellious against authority is, and anyone who

[2] The plot of a “bad” Fantasy story is almost immaterial as the “narrative” is merely an excuse to visit exotic locales to gratify the voyeurism of the audience.

know the genre can attest, laugh-out-loud funny (Mieville 242).” And there is obvious merit to this criticism when considering the near somnambulance of the traditional Fantasy “adventure-narrative pattern of task-struggle-success” that allows the reader “to immerse themselves in the emotions and experiences of the characters, feeling with and for them (Cheyne 112)” with little or no critical engagement.

From the perspective of race, this identification is particularly fraught as it may reproduce or encourage those racist assumptions of mind endemic in the Fantasy genre itself. As Helen Young remarks in her book *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness,* “popular Fantasy inherits its habits from the twentieth century society in which it was founded” and “…habitually constructs the Self through Whiteness and Otherness through an array of racist stereotypes, particularly but not exclusively those associated with Blackness (Young 11)[3].” Habits of racialized representation rooted not just in history, but in the way literature and whiteness correlate and commodify otherness through normative & normalizing language as well. Gayatri Spivak, discussing the problem of teaching English Literature (both High & Low brow), elaborates on the perils of reading as a type of training mechanism:

> The implied reader [of a text] is imagined, even in the most simple reading, according to rudimentary or sophisticated hypotheses about persons, places, and times. You cannot make sense of anything written or spoken without at least implicitly assuming that it was destined for you, that you are its implied reader. (Spivak 37)

[3] The term “popular Fantasy” is important to note here as Young and others, drawing off Brian Attebery’s distinction between “fantasy-as-mode” vs. “fantasy-as-formula” (Attebery 2), make a distinction between the sort of pulp fiction Howard and Lovecraft were known for—fast-paced, popular, easily consumed and enjoyed works set in worlds inviting an easy identification with the (predominantly white male) audience—and the more literary minded, scholarly works of Tolkien of C.S. Lewis.

Or, as she frames the problem later in the same essay, "… to learn to read well is to say 'yes, yes' to the text, if only in order to say 'no,' in other words to perform it, if only against the grain (Spivak 47)." Reading is therefore an act of ideological consumption that, coupled with the disciplinary mechanisms of capital (the classroom "taught to the test" or author/audience conditioned to the market capitalization of the publishing industry), trains people to think, even in the negative, a certain way. The problem with this training, in the case of Fantasy, is exactly in that inconspicuous, "affective engagement," Cheyne and others highlight as a natural feature of the genre. The immersive, invented worlds of Fantasy, with their easy identifications and satisfying conclusions (in the sense of a task completed), enable a problematic slippage as "[t]he racial logics which structure genre worlds mean that shifted representations do not necessarily change Fantasy's habits of Whiteness, but can rather re-inscribe them in new forms (Young 12)[4]." Fantasy, and its most relevant subgenres of High and Low Fantasy, thus creates a mythology of white supremacy made fair, or at least defensible, in the logic of the world-story itself—the (usually) white heroes often fighting as underdogs against a great, evil otherness.

This ideological absolution, a type narratological indulgence purchased for white audience members in advance by the institutionalization of white privilege, is the standard functioning of whiteness itself. As Richard Dyer puts it in his book *White*, "… white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed, and others bound to fail (Dyer 9-10)." Whiteness is thus a privileged positioning of a

[4] Consider the nature of Tolkien's Orcs, by way of example. Dark-skinned, stoop shouldered monsters, any and every act of violence is allowed for when dealing with orcs; the dehumanization of one's enemy accomplished by the simple expedient of making them not only not human, but irredeemably evil.

subject in relation to the archival field whereby they are confirmed in their biases and opinions through the representational density of ready-to-hand signs—signs that, in the context of America (and elsewhere), affirm and promote whiteness and white supremacy as "natural" or present-at-hand as opposed to institutional constructs. As Dyer says, "there is a specificity to white representation, but it does not reside in a set of stereotypes so much as in narrative structural positions, rhetorical tropes and habits of perception (Dyer 12)." One important consequence of this normalization of whiteness is what Cynthia Levine-Rasky refers to as "white solipsism," a type of protective myopia which "Consistent with and operating alongside racist discourse … conserves white innocence and shields whites from the harsh awareness of tacit support for racist ideas (Levine-Rasky 51)." Whites are taught such "common sense" racist assumptions, Levine-Rasky suggests, to not only protect their own position of privilege, but to also provide whites with a racialized strawman onto which they may exteriorize their own personal anxieties and perceived failings. The demonized, non-white other in this way not only becomes an a priori justification for racist thoughts but also the fetishized object of a complex projected identification. And Fantasy, unfortunately, enables this unknowing by providing white actors with masked and disguised racists scripts they can learn to say 'yes, yes' without the psychological baggage of admitting one's prejudices. Stated plainly: Fantasy, in its inconspicuous, popular mode of consumption and production, can make racism acceptable through the enchantment of an immersive world-story in which white supremacy goes unremarked and/or is resolved by simply insisting it does not exist. It is, to borrow Young's term, a "habit of whiteness" that can "simultaneously influence who can be present and what is seen, thought, and done, by creating patterns of bodies and spaces alike (Young 11)," while also

alleviating racial anxieties by presenting a world in which there are larger, unifying concerns (e.g., a great threat to the world all free peoples must unite to fight against).

There is, however, in critical academic thought, and some contemporary Fantasy offerings, the acknowledgement of the *potential* of Fantasy to be transgressive in terms of thematic content and world building. Donald Morse's assertion that "fantasy can help humanity rediscover values important for a healthy society" (Morse 229) dovetails with Maria Nikolajeva's belief that "[f]antasy allows much freedom and experimentation with gender transgression" (Nikolajeva 140) and Daniel Baker's optimism in the progressive potential of Fantasy to "direct the subject [reader] towards a new, radical, [perhaps] emancipated subjectivity" (Baker 437) exactly because of the invented nature of these fantasy worlds. Such progressive examples are still outweighed in terms of representation, dissemination, and popularity by problematic mega franchises like George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones, J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World, and Tolkien's Middle Earth. Suggesting that, despite the negative press and attention these works receive (e.g., Rowling's transphobia, Tolkien's racism etc.), the larger culture remains enamored with these invented worlds.

Fundamentally, Fantasy shares the same potential as its more reputable cousin, Science-Fiction. As Kathryn Hume's oft quoted argument that realism "no longer imparts an adequate sense of meaning to our experience with reality" (Hume 39) suggests, reality itself may have become something to work past or through in the speculative mode. Fantasy, like Science Fiction, is literally a genre of possible worlds with "… a possible state of affairs expressed by a set of relevant propositions" and "possible course of events … imagined, believed, wished, etcetera (Eco 29)." A wish or willing that can, in the conservative mode, act as a repressive

force, reifying or affirming a mythic "once upon a time." But also, as Zipes proposes, in the subversive mode of an active resistance to the status quo, show "us what is missing in our lives and refuse to compensate for the lack by proposing solutions and providing categories through which we can define people and situations (Zipes 82)." Fantasy, at its best, picks at the scab of a historical rupture without rationalizing or explaining it through the normalizing logic of society and literature; the realities of oppression, expropriation, discrimination and genocide are not presented as more narrative scenery for the characters to chew through in the mode of the "task-struggle-success" formula, but rather as lived and livid conditions that resist enchantment and recall our attention to that which is missing in our own world. Progressive Fantasy can, with its ability to "re-write and re-cover history" (Baker 440), elaborate on the double bind of a systemic injustice in the "real" world without resolving or disfiguring its source material. And this is the final addendum I would add to Williamson's functional definition of the fantasy genre:

> Fantasy narratives exist in possible worlds made up of propositions reimagining the social relations of the real world within the framework of a task-struggle-success narrative centered on a quest, war, or adventure in a magical world featuring a prominent central protagonist.

And this final clause, the journey and role of the central protagonist, is the point at which the progressive and conservative modes of Fantasy split. The hero of the hero's journey exists within the space of that inconspicuous identification between audience and text. And this "good guy," as the vector of "affective engagement," is of central concern when (re)evaluating Fantasy as a genre.

Chapter 1—High vs. Low Fantasy

J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard are the fathers of modern Fantasy. Tolkien's Middle Earth and Howard's Hyborian Age, peopled with exotic monsters, (ig)noble heroes and dark sorcery, influenced a generation of imitators and innovators whose own work would go on to help establish the outlines of a best-selling blue-print millions, if not billions, of people enjoy to this day. They also represent two different styles of writing, grounded in the real-world preoccupations and struggles of both men[5], that define the predominant subgenres of Fantasy literature: High & Low Fantasy.

The split between High and Low Fantasy, using Williamson's definition again as a starting point ("… narratives set in worlds in which the supernatural or magical are part of the fabric of reality and that center on themes of quest, war, and adventure [Williamson 12"]) arises from the nature of said quest and motivations of the heroes involved. As Lou Anders and Jonathan Strahan explain in the introduction to *Swords & Dark Magic: The New Swords and Sorcery*:

> If high fantasy is about vast armies divided along lines of obvious good versus ultimate evil, epic struggles to vanquish dark lords bent on world domination, then sword and

[5] Polarities born out of differences in culture, class, and circumstance; Tolkien's purposeful affectations, Christian morality, and literary (academic) pedigree contrasted with the "muscular" action-packed paganism of Conan the Barbarian, a creation inspired by the hard-drinking men of West Texas where Howard was born and raised. Tolkien, the family man and professor, spending decades working out his legendarium. Howard, a single man, cranking out short stories to support himself and his consumptive mother. One, a respected and beloved figure who lived to be eighty-one and saw his works celebrated around the globe. The other, a tired and broken man who, despite a strong cult following, died a relative unknown at the age of thirty when he shot himself in his car following his mother's slip into a lethal coma from tuberculosis.

> sorcery is its anthesis. Smaller-scale character pieces, often starring morally compromised protagonists, whose heroism involves little more than trying to save their own skins form a trap they themselves blundered into in search of spoils. (Anders xi)

Elaborating on Anders and Strahan, strict High Fantasy generally relies on a 3rd person narrator to frame the story of an ensemble cast's quest to defeat a great evil across a trilogy (or greater) of books. This "party system" usually apes Tolkien's Fellowship of the Ring with a central protagonist, elderly guide, bodyguards, traitor or tragic hero, and, in more modern times, a member of the opposite (or same) sex to provide diversity and love interest. The protagonist usually has a hidden reserve of strength or magical ability. And the heroes always overcome their enemies in the end to return to the "good ole days" of a pre-narrative epoch. High Fantasy world building tends to be more wholistic, extensive, and three dimensional than Low Fantasy; with in-depth histories, backstories, and novel vocabularies that can require a glossary or even footnotes to explain. This is because the emphasis of High Fantasy is on a big picture plot growing out of its history and as such requires more effort in that department. For *The Lord of The Rings* to make sense, for example, we need to know about the history of Sauron and the One Ring. And for that history to remain consistent and compelling across a 600+ page novel, Tolkien had to write out the entire history of his world with its significant events and personas.

Low Fantasy, on the other hand, tends to follow the journey of one central character. This protagonist, who can be the narrator, almost always has a special skillset, haunted past, and iconoclastic tendencies vis-à-vis their relationship to an established social order. They generally are an outsider. Have a problem with authority. And their "quest" centers on a clash with a corrupt or corrupting civilization that can be as detailed as the white order of Fairhaven

in Modesitt's *Recluse Saga*—a bureaucratic regime of chaos wizards complete with a sewer management department—or as vague as the "dark sorcerers" or "thieves guild" of the Conan clones (not-so-affectionately dubbed clonans) of the 60's. Low Fantasy also handles more adult content (sexual and otherwise) and iconography and can feature elements of horror.

Of the two, Low Fantasy tends to be more historical than High Fantasy insofar as Low Fantasy world-stories are more often recognizable reflections of real-world time periods and geographical locales. Perhaps owing something to the short story and pulp magazine origins of S&S, this synchronization with real world history provides knowledgeable readers with a type of shorthand; filling in the historical gaps without relying on extensive glossaries or expository footnotes to ground the audience. The authors of Low Fantasy, in this way, jump start their narratives for the practical purpose of making publication easier. In the case of Howard:

> "… he could not find a steady market for historical fiction, nor could he afford to take the time to perform the research that the genre and its often pedantic readers demanded. So he struck a brilliant compromise. He took a creative leap … that moved his stories out of the historical and into the realms of fantasy, while still maintaining a foothold in the real world. (Murphy 60)."

In essence, the invented worlds of S&S streamline the expository necessity of High Fantasy to save time and money[6].

[6] This is not to say that Low Fantasy is fundamentally more susceptible to racism than High Fantasy. Indeed, unlike High Fantasy narratives that often go out of their way to imagine less racially insensitive or offense worlds (worlds that, nonetheless, as Young suggests, still adhere to the habits of whiteness), Low Fantasy can, I would argue, invite a more nuanced reading of the given state with the proper framing—the Low Fantasy world-story, with its attendant real-world weight, making for a clearer critique of the status quo than the world-stories of High Fantasy.

Obviously, these formulas do not hold good for every example of Fantasy and the line has blurred over the years[7]. That being said, the Low Fantasy heroic type almost always operates as an outsider on a quest for personal glory or gratification, reflecting Howard's fascination with the late Victorian imperial romance tradition and it is to that tradition we now turn.

[7] Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant,* usually lumped in with Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara* as a late 70s example of "high" fantasy, is the story of an American leper drawn into a fantasy realm known as The Land where one of his first acts, upon being magically healed of his leprosy, is to rape and impregnate a young woman whose daughter, in a later book, becomes Covenant's lover.

Chapter 2—The Imperial Romance: (White) Men Behaving Badly

Fast-paced, fast-selling, and easily marketed to a predominately white male audience, the adventure novels of Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, Rudyard Kipling, Edgar Rice Burroughs (famous for his John Carter stories and *Tarzan in the Land of the Apes*) and pulp magazine offerings from men like Talbot Mundy, Harold Lamb, and H. Rider Haggard provided Low Fantasy authors with a winning formula for publication and fed into the bank of historical and quasi-historical material they sampled in the composition of their works (Murphy 39).

The imperialist romance itself is a genre that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th century and "… is essentially an adventure story involving the exploration by Europeans of previously uncharted regions" featuring heroes whose "goals are usually ambivalent: the intention to convert the heathen or establish a benevolent order … frequently associated with an equally strong desire for wealth and power (Patteson 3)." Regions uncharted, perhaps, but certainly not uninhabited as almost every example of the genre includes indigenous peoples, usually black or brown, whose cultural naivety is exploited by the protagonists to escape the ever-present threat of murder, disease, or cannibalism. The end result of this trickery being, in a twist of dramatic irony, the infantilization of the whites themselves as they often become the victim of or slave to the exact superstitions they exploit.

Consider the seemingly comical scene in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines,* when the character of Captain John Good, a dandy of sorts, is caught off guard, pantless, with half of

his face shaved, by a group of ancient Zulu's. Situated narratively at the point of first contact with a "lost" tribe, the early part of the scene shows us the numerically disadvantaged white men apparently exploiting the perceived gullibility of the natives—Good using his false teeth to terrify the Zulus causing them to give "prolonged howl of terror" (Haggard 86)—culminating with the main character, Allan Quatermain, declaring "… ye shall know the truth. We come from another world, though we are men such as ye; we come,' I went on, 'from the biggest star that shines at night.' (Haggard 86)." Having just professed themselves to literally be moon men, Quatermain goes on to demonstrate the efficacy of his Winchester repeating rifle, killing a nearby animal, before again threatening the Zulus with a dire curse:

> The light from the transparent eye of him with bare legs and half-haired face (Good) shall destroy you, and go through you land: his vanishing teeth shall fix themselves fast in you and eat you up, you and your wives and children; the magic tubes shall talk with you loudly, and make you as sieves. Beware! (Haggard 89)

The joke of course being that Good must now continue to go about pantless and half-shaved as "Your 'beautiful white legs' and your eye-glass are now *the* feature of our party … you must live up to them (Haggard 90)." As a comic foil, Good's embarrassment and foppishness narratively function to amuse while elevating Quatermain and the more noble and reserved leader of the party, Sir Henry, as exemplars of proper, ruggedly masculine behavior. The dramatic irony, however, comes in Quatermain's performance of an anachronistic, stylized witchcraft (e.g., Good's teeth fixing themselves in the natives, etc.) that seems to privilege the perception of sorcery as much, if not more so than, the realities of having a high powered, fast action, killing machine.

The tribesmen certainly appear scared of Good's teeth as much as anything else, but it is the "magic tube" that ultimately decides the Zulu leader on cooperating with the party, "my old eyes have seen enough. These are wizards, indeed. Let us bring them to the kind. Yet if any should wish a further proof, let *him* stand upon the rock, that the magic tube may speak with him (Haggard 88)." It is the threat of an entirely unknown, and horrifically effective, sort of death that cows the Zulus; a realistic and fatalistic appreciation of an intrinsic asymmetry, not born out of superstition, but out of a practical and pragmatic evaluation of the actual given state of affairs (the shooting of the animal) the imperial romance transfigures into a trickster-esque game of wits the white protagonist, invariably, wins. In this way, rather than being seen as a murderous bully, intimidating people with the threat of grave violence and death, the white imperialist hero becomes the underdog of the story. And the "savage," ignorant only of how many rounds a repeating rifle held (usually fifteen), becomes just another exhibit in a long line of racist representations justifying the solipsistic belief in white supremacy.

Later iterations of these romances, often referred to as "Lost World" fictions on account of their reliance on the trope of re-discovered ancient civilizations, would see an evolution in the handling of, and identification with, the figure of the barbaric savage typified by the emphasis on "new masculine qualities—raw strength, courage, instinctive violence, bodily size, and homosocial commitment to other men—that could become a bridge uniting the ancient and modern in ways that trump other cultural differences and even … cross boundaries of race (Deane 206)." Lost world narratives, put another way, through their construction of a shared masculine ethos, attempted to readdress unresolved bourgeoisie and imperial anxieties. Creating the perception of a shared space of co-habitation, co-operation, and co-dependence

abrogating the white male audience of any guilt regarding the inherent violence and asymmetry of the imperialist project, while also providing cathartic relief and escape to "hen-pecked" and repressed middle-class men.

Deane goes on to argue that this reification of barbarism, seen prominently in Rudyard Kipling's novella "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888), was used as justification for the militarization of imperialist policy, concluding that:

> The history of lost world fiction teaches us that modern barbarism is not some irresistible impulse to which we inevitably return when reason fades; it is an ideology with its own history, actively encouraged and sustained by a set of carefully elaborated fantasies presented to men as the psychic solution to their own sense of loss. (Deane 220)

The reification of barbarism, Deane's argument goes, is a violent response to the apparent loss of white working-and-middle-class agency in a changing world—white male breadwinners, feeling emasculated and insecure in their social position, imagining worlds where they are as free from obligations and civilized morality as the violent savages of the colonial imagination.

If we return to the language of the Fantasy genre itself, these stories, via the proxy of the white male protagonist, made the audience the beneficiary of "a quest resolved successfully." And through the readerly enchantment of the "task-struggle-success" narrative, the imperial romance reduced the complexity of the imperialist (and capitalistic) project into the simple story of simple men going out into the world to make their fortune in the prototypic mode of our Low Fantasy heroic type—the noble savage, rapacious cannibal, untapped wealth, and "darkness" of a fetishized (invented) world, acting as a frame for an overmatched hero who

must utilize his wits and bravery to overcome his trials and tribulations; a tale of strength, perseverance and ingenuity the audience find themselves enchanted by with the strong desire to say "yes, yes."

This is not to say, much like Fantasy, that the work of these authors was free of subversive intent or potentiality. Rudyard Kipling's short stories, especially, carry a great deal of not-so veiled criticism of imperialism and masculinity alike.

Following a day in life of a member of the English parliament on a fact-finding mission in India, "The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.," attempts an exhaustive review of the problems of colonization. From the "lawlessness" of unassimilated Indian tribes to the rapaciousness of white businessmen and treatment of Indian women, the work does an able job pointing out the dangerous absurdity of a "liberalizing" colonialism. More importantly, there is no resolution to be had in "Enlightenments," as the story obdurately refuses to "answer" any of the problems it elaborates on[8]. The only commentary on colonialism itself, perhaps, coming in the end when the Commissioner takes his guest into his garden to reveal a grisly secret:

> 'Come here, Pagett,' he said, and cut at the sun-baked soil. After three strokes there rolled from under the blade of the hoe the half of a clanking skeleton that settled at Pagett's feet in an unseemly jumble of bones. The M.P. drew back.
>
> 'Our houses are built on cemeteries,"' said Orde. 'There are scores of thousands of graves within ten miles.' (Kipling 317-8)

Literally built on the graves of colonized peoples, the imperialist project, considering the protagonist's inability to explain or address any of the problems confronting him, appears

[8] As Zipes suggested all "good" Fantasy must do.

ineffectual and necrophilic; a murderous machine trying to bandage its victims even as it kills and maims them.

A killing machine that eats whites just as readily, if less obviously, in Kipling's story of a soldier going on a murderous rampage "In the Matter of a Private," or confuses and infantilizes them in "Haunted Subalterns" and "A Wayside Comedy." In "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," the main character finds himself transformed into a figurative living dead man, all his power and influence as an imperialist reduced to being able to bully an old man out of a dead crow to eat and, even after escaping his "living death," Morrowbie asserts that his tale is only meant to help identify the corpse of a dead white man he discovered while escaping. There is no victory here. The protagonists, all agents of British imperialism, suffer and survive and learn nothing in the process. And as Kipling notes in "Private," comparing the breakdown of the unhinged solider to tittering school girls "… not a soul thought of comparing the 'bloody-minded Simmons' to the squawking, gaping school girl with which this story opens (Kipling 298)," the not-so veiled criticism of British imperialism here being in the active "unknowing" by society of the costs of the white, masculine hysteria for violent acquisition that is responsible for the sorrows of the main characters and their colonial victims alike.

The mode and method of resistance in Kipling's stories, I would argue, is in this lived and livid characterization of these imperialist agents. Their experiences, as operatives of white terror and colonization, suspended in narratives lacking the satisfying resolution of a "task completed," create a textual echo of the subliminal realities of whiteness itself. Not only are they living within the confines of an unfair system, built on the murder and exploitation of racialized Others, they each lose their own pound of flesh in service to that system. Revealing

whiteness itself to be akin to a pyramid scheme functioning on the premise that, rather than finding common ground with those lower on the racialized hierarchy of global capital, white people will instead become immobilized by the trifecta of fear, resentment and shame that constitutes white emotionality, and allow themselves to be exploited by other whites further up the pyramid.

These romance stories, with their emphasis on fast-paced narratives in exotic locales featuring white male protagonists on a quest of personal (selfish) gratification, are expressions of a collective unconscious trying to defend the fiction of a white innocence that "… cannot explain the structured and long-standing manifestations of racism" (Levine-Rasky 154), as well as escape the day-to-day realities of working- and lower-class whites. And even in the case of less world-weary American narratives like Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* and *John Carter* or the burgeoning superhero genre[9]*,* there is the same action/re-action of white protagonists reconceptualizing the world through the lens of white normalization and solipsism to escape the increasingly calcified social hierarchies of 20th century.

Unlike Kipling's short stories, with their emphasis on the role and lives of white characters contributing to the perpetuation of white supremacy, Low Fantasy doubles down on the solipsistic turn of whiteness by inventing possible worlds where whites can be, and are, merely individuals. And by fleeing the industrialized, imperialist realities of its source material, the subgenre literalizes Quatermain's curse—the practical, murderous, truth of white supremacy getting lost in a world of sorcery and mysticism.

[9] Superman was born in and around the same time Low Fantasy was percolating in pulp magazines like *Weird Tales.*

Chapter 3—H.P. Lovecraft

Lovecraft's influence on S&S is well-established through personal notes and interviews of S&S authors who either read or had direct correspondence with him (Murphy). Creatively, Lovecraft's emphasis on occult magic and the uncanny and strange; the contact between the civilized and horrifically alien in short form narrative tableaus, became proprietary in the sense that Low (and to a lesser extent High) Fantasy adapted it to the quest format integral to the genre. Lovecraftian "heroes," if they can even be called such, are most usually observers or victims of the inexplicable—the scholars, doctors, occultists, and adventurers caught up in the machinations or movements of "old gods" and cosmic forces outside the experience and knowledge of mortal men. Low Fantasy, by contrast, usually positions these alien forces as hurdles for the hero to overcome through wit and force of arms, or to barter with over the course of their conflict with another, lesser power. Agency, a solution to the threat, is thus introduced and allowed for in Fantasy—the Other becoming an X that can be solved for if not canceled out entirely. A figure that, in the logic of the Fantasy genre, is always situated within the confines of the quest narrative; hyphenated into the "task-struggle-success" paradigm; and explained away in a manner consistent with the principle of fantastic enchantment.

"The Doom that Came to Sarnath," one of Lovecraft's earlier and more well-regarded short stories, encapsulates both the connection to Fantasy and underlying thematic problem of a colonial, white supremacist ethos/anxiety I argue exists at the root of the genre. The emphasis on age, otherness, and danger of racialized degeneracy in "Doom" typifies the

Lovecraftian aesthetic—white characters, white society, and white civilization threatened from within and without by an alien other invading and inveigling itself under the skin, so to speak, of whiteness itself. In "Doom," Lovecraft uses a distant third person perspective to narrate the history of the great city of Sarnath over the course of a thousand years. He introduces an invented world, full of strange lands and people, in the mode of Low Fantasy, as well as an uncanny other, the lizard people of Ib, a race said to have descended to earth from the moon in ancient times[10]. At first there is peace between the people of Sarnath and "the beings of Ib" until, like any good colonizer, the men of Sarnath's "…hate grew, and it was not less because they found the beings weak, and soft as jelly to the touch of stones and spears and arrows. So, one day the young warriors … marched against Ib and slew all the inhabitants thereof, pushing the queer bodies into the lake …" (Lovecraft 76). Sarnath then grows in power over the course of the next thousand years, becoming the greatest city of men. With the appropriate hubristic fall set, on the eve of the thousand-year anniversary of the slaying of the beings of Ib, during a great banquet to celebrate the settler's victory, shadows "… descended from the gibbous moon into the lake, and the damnable green mists that arose from the lake to meet the moon and to shroud in a sinister haze the towers and the and domes of fated Sarnath" (Lovecraft 79), and madness and doom come to Sarnath. The people flee, the aristocracy and their slaves are transformed into "a horde of indescribable green voiceless things with bulging eyes, pouting, flabby lips, and curious ears" (Lovecraft 80), the city disappears into a mysterious marsh, and all that remains is a "… curious green idol of stone; an exceedingly ancient idol coated with seaweed and chiselled [sic] in the likeness of Bokrug, the great water-lizard (Lovecraft 80)."

[10] Note the inversion of Quatermain's invocation of the moon in *Mines.*

Many Lovecraft scholars rightfully associate aspects of Lovecraftian otherness with the dehumanizing weight of the industrialized world and a "fascination with and skepticism toward scientific dogma and technological advances (Sperling 76)." The incalculable shadow of a technological revolution, capitalist estrangement, and deanthropocentrism of subjectivity in the post-humanist world of object-oriented ontology, to some, is literalized in the devolution of Lovecraft's characters as "the horror implicit in the weird is … the body's complete enmeshment with the environment; the site of the breakdown between what was once thought of as the 'natural' and what can no longer be staved off as the 'supernatural.' (Sperling 98)." But as a professed eugenicist, writing at the height of the racist, pseudo-scientific mania that would see the Nazis and others forcibly sterilize and extirpate genetic undesirables, Lovecraft's stories also "pursue the ever-elusive gene, the invisible monster haunting the human form (Frye 240)." And in this pursuit, cover the old colonizer's fear of dissolution and dissipation in a jungle wilderness of dark, foreign lands; the will and flesh of white men turned sickly and syphilitic in the face of somet*hing* that cannot be explained.

There are powers, Lovecraft's stories suppose, vast and unintelligible, predating the spread of European Enlightenment. Forces that can corrupt, mutate, and finally avenge themselves on the unwary. There is no explicit solution in Lovecraft for this cosmic miscegenation, only an elaboration on its pervasive spread through the psyche (and flesh) of his characters. Lovecraft's work, like Kipling's short stories, "emphasizes the unbridgeable space between experiences in the world and one's ability to ever fully describe them (Sperling 77)" with the important distinction that, unlike Kipling, the fantastic elements of Lovecraft's stories

often hide or transfigure the explicitly racial and racist ideologies found in his private correspondences[11].

We are never asked to imagine the Beings of Ib's perspective, those creatures "soft as jelly," confronting the irrational hate of a genocidal race of pasty-faced marauders, because, within the confines of the Lovecraftian narrative, trying to understand or communicate with the "othered" is a pointless, even dangerous endeavor. Indeed, any extinction level event or threat in Lovecraft is always externalized, ultimately, in a perverse inversion of the Native/Settler binary, as the action of the Other. The "threat" is never the white people in their everyday, historical, and institutionally privileged mode of being. The source of danger always comes from without. The others are "bad" and the white characters "good" within the algebraic scripting of these narratives. And when you read them, you read them from the privileged/privileging side of the White/Non-white binary. The people oppressed, tortured, terrorized, and killed by whites alchemically transfigured into "hellish creatures" and "unmentionable things"; victimizer becoming victim in the radial sway of the white man's own schizophrenic solipsism.

[11] A solipsistic turn perfectly reflected in Lovecraft's non-ironic declaration to Howard that:
"… the foreign overrunning of America … is certainly the most tragic event in the continent's history. The very essence of a real civilization is the continuous dwelling of generations on the same soil in the same manner, so that race becomes fitted to landscape, and a body of stable genuine traditions and folkways grows up to give each new generation a sense of comfortable placement and interest and significance (*Means 76).*" Lovecraft is of course referring to New Englanders, not Native Americans, and the foreigners overrunning the country are not European colonizers, but the usual, early 20th century American suspects of Mexicans, ethnic Slavs, and Irish.

Chapter 4—Robert E. Howard: Gritty Outsiders & Bad History

Lone wolf adventurers struggling against the decadence of civilization in action-packed stories propelled by direct and unambiguous prose, are a defining feature of Low Fantasy. The humanity of these heroes, complete with hubristic flaws and earthly desires, opens a world of gritty, down-to-earth, narrative possibilities missing from the "epics" of High Fantasy. Likewise, Howard's fast-and-loose appropriation of history, grounded in the necessities of his own write-or-starve existence, helped Low Fantasy authors bootstrap their own worlds into existence without the decades long investment of High Fantasists like Tolkien. This "shortcutting," along with the growth of the paperback industry and pulp origins of S&S, informed a culture of production, as David Earle puts it in his book *Re-Covering Modernisms,* "about quick and exciting living, quickly written in language meant to be quickly read (Earle 129)." In the case of science fiction and Fantasy, Earle goes on to argue, where the conflict between modern and "primitive" is a common plot device, these stories in turn "offer allegories of modern life and man—modern heroes prove themselves as violent and brutal as the cavemen they are suddenly surrounded by, and the men of the utopian future prove themselves as corrupt, brutal, or foolish as those of the present day (Earle 128)." Like the imperial romance and 'lost world' tradition, the tension here between civilization and primitivism, I would argue, is rooted in the alienation and disenfranchisement of working- and lower-class whites in the racialized context of the United States and England. A sense of alienation the Low Fantasy heroic type channels

(and absolves) for the audience through the "task-struggle-success" formula. Or as Brian Murphy says:

> Howard's brand of barbarism is ahistorical and romantic. His sword-and-sorcery incorporated real elements of the United States frontier era of the 1800s and blended it with history and pseudo history to create a barbaric ideal … a figure of muscle and steel, fierce and free, unencumbered by the mechanistic punch-clock of the 9-5 job and artifice required of urban living. It was Howard's attempt to restore manhood to men who lost their way. (Murphy 77)

Again, the normalization of Whiteness—the belief that one's subject position, complete with attendant benefits and access to opportunities and services, is universally shared—coupled with the solipsistic belief that, as a result of playing on an even field, it is individual effort, rather than systematized racism, that is responsible for one's success (or failure), manifests as an incomplete and overdetermined identification with the figure of the outsider and his "rugged individualism" that enchants and cathartically relieves white male anxieties regarding their tenuous subject position.

Consider the case of Conan, a Cimmerian barbarian, "… whose barbaric nature had never been submerged in his adopted culture" (Howard 104), Howard's most popular and enduring creation. He is a self-made man, at various points in his career acting as a thief ("Tower of the Elephant" 1933), pirate ("Queen of the Black Coast" 1934), bandit leader ("People of the Black Circle" 1934), frontiersmen ("Beyond the Black River" 1935), and finally conqueror/King of the settled lands of Aquilonia ("The Scarlet Citadel" 1933, *Hour of the Dragon* 1936). Young and others have ably identified the racist and racialized imagery within

Howard's Conan stories, exhaustively detailing how "[w]hites are always leaders among mixed racial company, and racial difference fundamentally structures the world (Young 27)[12]." In the character of his fierce independence, and almost invariant success in all his endeavors ("Beyond the Black River" being one of the few cases where he fails to accomplish his task), they also argue Conan fits the ideality of the American entrepreneur. He is a "… White American hero: self-sufficient and independent, strong, honest, and moral., abiding by his own code of honor (Young 26)." With an eclectic resume, reflecting Howard's own ad-hoc approach to building the character from "… the dominant characteristics of various prize-fighters, gunmen, bootleggers, oil field bullies, gamblers, and honest workmen I had come in contact with" (Howard 58), Conan is the fantastic, thoroughly American, update of those imperialist adventurers who went to find their fortunes abroad. Unlike Haggard, Kipling, and others, however, Conan is always on his own and never represented as a member of an in-group or cultural dominant.

The Cimmerians, barbaric northerners, roughly coinciding with the Celtic peoples of Ireland and England, never make an appearance in Howard's stories. Leading some scholars to make the connection to Howard's own sense of Irish American identity, arguing that "Like many Irish Americans of Howard's era, Conan is a wanderer who has left behind a beloved homeland and can never return. He is an exile, a displaced person, driven from his country and forced to live in new lands among people who see him as part of an inferior, savage race (Dowd 29)." This

[12] To this I would add the presence of a shared history with the imperial romance tradition of racist, Eurocentric representation. Animality, "The slave's wooly skull split in an animal-like grin, showing white tusks (Howard 107)," superstition, "Hypnotism was not even a myth in Cimmeria. The heritage that prepared a native of the East for submission to the mesmerist was not his (Howard 336)," servility, and technological primitivism, "Invulnerable in his armor … he [Conan] heaped mangled corpses at his feet until his enemies [black slaves] gave back panting in rage and fear (Howard 270)," all defining blackness against the backdrop of white supremacy in Howard's work the same as in Haggard and Kipling.

analysis is well-taken and fits with Howard's many, passionate declarations of ethnicity and pride (*A Means to Freedom).* And situates Howard's racism and fear of miscegenation—a trope in Howard's short stories, similar to Lovecraft, that "consistently brings about the downfall" (Young 28) of civilizations— with the long, troubled history of Irish Americans in the racialized hierarchy of America.

Reading these stories through the lens of Howard's Irish American identity, one could give Howard and his creation the benefit of the doubt and make the case for the Cimmerian as an actual trickster figure; an oppressed other, subverting the dominant power structure of an established, corrupt, and "magical" society—effectively stealing the colonizers technology (magical items instead of a Winchester rifles) to bring about their downfall. And this might be a fair interpretation if those magical antagonists were all white agents of an overtly Anglican imperialist agenda that Conan, with the support of other oppressed Cimmerians, was actively fighting against. But this is simply not the case. Conan is a lone adventurer who "… like other literary wild Irishmen, would prefer a life beyond the reaches of civilization (Dowd 29)." He is at best an outsider, disavowing any responsibility for the intrinsic injustices of society. And at worst, as a thief, pirate, marauder, and conquer, an anti-social opportunist, aggrandized and elevated through the action of a white, masculine ethos that equates "might" with right.

We can see the tragic effect of this "script" on Howard's own psyche in the extensive correspondence he and Lovecraft shared from 1930-1936[13]. In one of the more actively fatalistic letters declaring:

[13] Their letters to one another, collected in the two-volume set *A Means to Freedom,* reveals an ideological struggle between Lovecraft's hazy, often contradictory, blending of democratic socialism and eugenic driven fascism—espousing a general belief in the perfectibility of civilization and humanity given the right, totalitarian,

> Life reminds me of a fight I had, when a kid, with a heavyweight prize fighter. Round after round I rushed savagely and futiley [sic], mad to come to grips and smash his ribs in, but hitting only the naked air. It was like fighting a shadow that wielded clubs; at the end of the fight I was swaying on the ropes groggy and dizzy, with my nose broken and my face cut and bruised, sick with a feeling of utterly helpless futility. … That's Life—fighting shadows; taking lickings that you cant [sic] return. *(A Means to Freedom: Volume 1* 113)

It feels like Howard is right there, on the cusp of something but, blinded by the muck of his own murky subject position, is unable to make the breakthrough identification. Remaining trapped in his own prison, an atomized brawler, fighting forces unseen, unheard, and unrecognized. The author seems romantically invested in an economy of asymmetrical power relations defined by individual effort (and failure), rather than collective action. Conan is successful in his quest because of his own merits and efforts. He is not the beneficiary (or victim) of any institutional privilege. And even when his success is enabled by a magical hand out, or convenient plot device, events are couched in such a way as to make clear this aid itself is always fairly given or gained. There is no "free lunch" in the Hyborian age, so to speak, only the contrivance of a narrative formula of "task-struggle-success" that always provides what is necessary for the completion of the "problem initially posed" in a manner gratifying for the audience.

The real enchantment of Sword & Sorcery/Low Fantasy one could say, is in getting to knock out those "shadows wielding clubs." In being able to escape the factual realities of

---

push—and Howard's belief in the evils of society and preference for the iconoclastic "barbarism" of a decentralized, libertarianism.

whiteness and white supremacy—a world-story defined by the myth of white innocence and individuality, haunted by the thought of ending up, as Howard did, penniless and disenfranchised by those "lickings that you can't return." It is a genre, to historize it, born out of the great depression; the American dream, "on the ropes groggy and dizzy," fighting back to reject the system responsible for its troubles, those corrupt big city financial institutions, while still asserting the privileged (white) exceptionalism of the white, masculine persona that purportedly built the nation[14].

And it is here, at the site of enchantment (the immersive identification with the Low Fantasy heroic type) that the crux of the problem becomes apparent. White people, in their solipsistic, normalized view of the world; caught in the trap of white emotionality (defined by resentment, fear, and shame); (sub)consciously aware of the unfairness of the system and their own fragile subject position; escape into the world-story of a hero that absolves them of guilt (the collective expropriation of non-white others), affirms their sense of persecution (the fear that their privileged access to rights and opportunities is under attack), and finally lets them experience the cathartic relief of "a task successfully completed" all without acknowledging the systemic terror of their own institutionalized privilege or historicity of whiteness itself.

In summation, Fantasy is a task-orientated genre that asks its audience to relate to the journey of a central character on a quest that will, by the end of the story, be "successfully completed." High & Low Fantasy world-stories— "task-struggle-success" narratives set in immersive and fantastic mise en scènes—are meant to make readers feel good. They redress

[14] Neglecting entirely the history of the transatlantic slave trade in building America. A "fantastic" omission even more dangerous in Howard's case given his tendency to romanticize the south and his own antebellum genealogy.

wrongs, resolve conflicts, and reimagine the harsh realities of our real-world as manageable problems, if not outright opportunities, for our heroic proxies.

The progressive potential of Fantasy, when addressing the problems of white normalization and solipsism, however, does not lie in inventing a world free from racism and inequity, effectively erasing the historical and present-day realities of our own world. Rather, it is matter of situating whiteness within a world-story that forces a confrontation between white heroes and the irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of whiteness itself. Most importantly, the cognitive dissonance of asserting that we live in a world founded on fairness and individual merit/hard work (seen most readily in the Low Fantasy Heroic type) while living within the demonstrable shadow of white supremacy—the institutional, systemic, privileging of whiteness founded on the collective action of whites in-support of one another while actively repressing and exploiting nonwhite others.

If one can reimagine the genre as a site of contact between whiteness and its other, rather than heroic conquest, at the moment of a historical rupture, it becomes possible to resist the narrative impulse of a misguided enchantment, and begin investigating the complex arrangement of fear, resentment, and shame underpinning white emotionality and the larger world today. An investigation that, in turn, can help audiences understand whiteness, white supremacy, and the intolerable costs of each.

Chapter 5—Horsemen: A Horrific Imperial Fantasy?

Originally drafted in 2007, *Horsemen* was an attempt at a Low Fantasy novel set in a fictional universe that mirrored our own 19th century. Following the story of an assassin, Jack, sent on a mission to the island nation of Pip'an (a landscape roughly equivalent to 19th century Japan) to exterminate a collection of fantastic, magical monsters (The Four Horsemen + Ultimate Evil behind them), these early drafts reproduced the language, style, and thematic concerns of the Fantasy novels I had read growing up. When I returned to the text in 2018, I found the work to be simplistic and overwritten, and undertook a general redrafting of the whole six hundred page+ project. There were, however, at the outset, several strengths to the piece when re-considering it as a site of possible resistance.

Unlike Howard and other Low Fantasy authors, the time period of my possible world coincided with the height of settler-colonialism and featured a hero operating as a white agent of imperialism. This situated the work much closer to Kipling's short stories than Howard's Hyborian age, the problem of whiteness and imperialism present in the given state of the piece. Jack's arc, however, in the original text, still saw him complete his mission and redeem his character when he saved the life of a small girl, Pala.

A "good guy" who had done "bad" things, Jack was saved through the action of Low Fantasy enchantment. His redemptive arc, coupled with his success, made him likable insofar as he appeared capable, intelligent, and humanistic. *Horsemen's* own formula, the episodic slaying of the four horsemen, contributed to the problem of identification as, even at his weakest,

Jack's vulnerability rang false in the same manner as most Fantasy heroes caught in the "task-struggle-success" formula—the audience never believing the hero to be in real danger as their death or failure would constitute a breach of enchantment; the ending of the world-story; ensuring not only that they must survive but also accomplish their goal *some*how.

To address this, I have since killed Jack off at about three-quarters of the way through the novel. Like *Pagett M.P.*, Jack's story no longer answers any questions. His arc terminates in a manner that is more akin to a Lovecraftian dissolution, not through the miscegenation of an exteriorized other in this case, but rather the internalized rupture of his own white emotionality—the resentment, fear, and guilt of his existence literalized in a prolonged playlet of suffering and torture culminating in his being shot by one of his own men. His death, in this manner, makes clear not only his failure to achieve his mission, but the pathetic nature of his own objectification and lack of agency within the imperialist system. Moreover, he is not treated as a sympathetic victim of said system, but as the by-product of imperialism taken to its natural extreme—an agent being destroyed in a manner consistent with the dehumanizing machinations of imperialism[15].

Another problem with the original text was the naïve reproduction of white normalization and solipsism in the form of Low Fantasy's fast-and-loose appropriation of history. The story being told was from the "universalized" racial position of Jack himself—a presumably straight white male. A subject position that admitted as given the easy appropriation of others' culture and history to enhance the fantastic mise-en-scene of the Low Fantasy archetype.

[15] He is not human. He is just an Other IT being put down.

Pip'an was 19th century Japan. The 'skins were Native Americans. These markers did not require elaboration beyond the initial signifying gesture. After that, in the original draft, I relied on genre conventions and broad, Westernized understanding of these cultures to jumpstart the narrative. Revising the project, it was important to make whiteness explicitly visible as a raced and racializing subject position in the text while explicating the violence of imperialism to clarify the realities of these tropes.

The first point, making whiteness visible, is just that; calling attention to the fact that white characters and institutions are white. This entails rejecting whiteness as the standard of existence and enflaming the site of white normalization/universalization with the simple, irritating act of calling it out[16]. Point two is harder and more distasteful as it requires the honest, graphic depiction of what settler-colonialism/white imperialism does to people of color. Murder, rape, torture, and genocide, all make an appearance over the course of the complete novel and are described in excruciating detail to try and prevent the white audience from escaping back into its comfortably benumbed subject position.

The issue of cultural appropriation (the Pip'anese and 'skins) remains a tricky issue for the project as whole, however. My use of archival photos, for example, often depicting Native Americans in ceremonial dress, a very real and meaningful point of contention, required my purposeful modification of the images to hide and protect the sanctity of these ceremonies. Thematically, I justify these alterations as representative of the geopolitical reality of the invented world of *Horsemen* itself; the 'skins, living within a generation or two of the complete

[16] Just using the adjective white, over and over again, has been shown to upset white people and create tension (Levine-Rasky).

extermination of their culture, standing as proxies for all the victims of a white imperialism; the images are hazy, in other words, because the identity of the People is caught in the limbo of genocidal madness.

This sort of consideration is in direct contrast to the appropriation found in most Fantasy narratives as the enchantment of the world-story usually contextualizes these racial tensions within the closed circuit of the "task-struggle-success" formula. They are problems, in other words, that will either be solved for by the end of the story or made into functional props for the actual quest. In either case, social injustice becomes commonplace in the worst possible sense of being made acceptable to its audience as far as it is just part of the scenery.

Overall, the task I have set for myself in *Horsemen* is to make the psychical costs of whiteness come to light throughout the hero's journey. To have a character like Jack, in his life and death, embody the end result of universalized white solipsism—the dissolution of self in a world-story that does not end at the margins of page but instead extends beyond the narrative to reaffirm the initial discriminating gesture of whiteness itself. The universalized white subject is taught every day to say "yes, yes" to violence, injustice, and inequality. They are enchanted. Caught in a double bind, believing in both the inevitability and impossibility of change, wanting more than anything to live in a world in which the individual can exist, but fearing what such a world would look like for people who look like them.

The solution to this double-bind, if one is to be found, is in making whiteness abnormal, strange, and uncomfortable enough that the fear of losing white privilege is outweighed by the fear of staying the same. Our heroes must betray us. Our expectations must lay fallow. And the

enchantment of our fantastic imaginations must be breached over, and over, and over again, until all we can do is say: “Enough.”

Works Cited

Attebery, Brian. "The Politics (If Any) of Fantasy." *JFA,* Vol. 4, 1991, 7-28.

Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy.* Indiana UP, 1992.

Baker, Daniel. "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy." *Journal of the Fantastic Arts,* Vol. 23, 2012, 437-459.

Cheyne, Ria. *Disability, Literature, Genre.* Liverpool UP, 2019.

Deane, Bradley. "Imperial barbarians: Primitive Masculinity in Lost World Fiction." *Victorian Literature and Culture,* Vol. 36, 2008, 205-225.

De Camp, L. Sprague, Catherine Crook De Camp, Jane Whittington Griffin. *Dark Valley Destiny: The Life of Robert E. Howard.* Bluejay Books. 1983.

Dowd, Christopher. "The Irish-American Identities of Robert E. Howard and Conan the Barbarian." *New Hibernia Review,* Vol. 20, 2016, 15-34.

Dyer, Richard. *White.* 20th anniversary ed., Routledge, 2017.

Eco, Umberto. "Possible Worlds and Text Pragmatics: 'Un drame bien parisen.'" *Versus,* Vol. 19-20, 1978, 29.

Earle, David. *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulps, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form.* Ashgate, 2009.

Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique.* Chicago UP, 2015

Frye, Mitch. "The Refinement of 'Crude Allegory' Eugenic Themes and Genotypic Horror in the Weird Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft." *Journal of the Fantastic arts,* Vol. 17, 2006, 237-254.

Haggard, H. Rider. *King Solomon's Mines.* Penguin Classics, 2007.

Howard, Robert E.. John, Finn J.D., editor. *Conan the Cimmerian Barbarian: The Complete Weird Tales Omnibus.* Pulp-Lit Productions, 2017.

Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis.* Methuen, 1984.

James, Edward, and Farah Mendelsohn, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature.* Cambridge UP, 2012.

Joshi, S.T., David E. Schultz, and Rusty Burke, editors. *A Means to Freedom: The Letters of H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard: 1930-1932.* Hippocampus Press, 2017.

Kipling, Rudyard. *The Works of Rudyard Kipling.* Benediction Classics, 2011.

Levine-Rasky, Cynthia. *Whiteness Fractured.* Ashgate, 2013.

Lovecraft, H.P.. *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft.* Chartwell Books, 2014.

Mendelsohn, Farrah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy.* Wesleyan UP, 2008.

Mieville, China. Bould, Mark, China Mieville, editors. *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction.* Wesleyan UP, 2009, 231-248.

Morse, Donald. Donald Palumbo, editor. "Commit a Public Service and Teach Fantasy." *Spectrum of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Sixth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts.* Greenwood Press, 1988.

Murphy, Brian. *Flame and Crimson: A History of Sword-And-Sorcery.* Pulp Hero Press, 2019.

Nikolajeva, Maria. "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archai to Postmodern." *Marvels & Tales,* Vol. 17, 2003, 138-156.

Patteson, Richard. "Manhood and Misogyny in the Imperialist Romance." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature,* Vol. 35, 1981, 3-12.

Shippey, Tom. *The Oxford Book of Fantasy Stories.* Oxford UP, 1994.

Sperling, Alison. "H.P. Lovecraft's Weird Body." *Lovecraft Annual,* No. 10, 2016, 75-100.

Spivak, Gayatri. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization.* Harvard UP, 2012.

Strahan, Jonathan, and Lou Anders. *Swords & Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery.* Harper Voyager, 2010.

Williamson, Jamie. *The Evolution of Modern Fantasy.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Young, Helen. *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness.* Routledge, 2016.

Zipes, Jack. "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education,* Vol. 43, 2009, 77-91.