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**The Ludic and the Strategic: Games, War, and the Conduct of Character in the  
Literature of British Imperialism**

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**by**

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## **Dedication**

To Mom and Dad, with all my love

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**The Ludic and the Strategic: Games, War, and the Conduct of Character in the  
Literature of British Imperialism**

Chris S. Ortiz y Prentice, PhD

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This dissertation examines the language of games in the literature of British imperialism, paying special attention to turn-of-the-century and Edwardian works of Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad. Where critics have called attention to the centrality of terms and concepts derived from games in this literature, it has been to show a conformance with the ideological intrusion of *ludic play* into rationales for British imperialism. By likening the British Empire to a “Great Game,” popular adventure literature aimed at male British readers not only made imperialism seem a form a play, it also helped to install a shame-inducing *agonal mindset*, which was itself in conformance with the aggressive expansionist policies of Disraeli and the New Imperialists.

As this dissertation shows, Kipling, Wells, and Conrad drew their interests in games both from British Edwardian political discourse and the bearing of strategy on war, geopolitics, and human sociality. Studying such texts as *Stalky & Co.* (1899-1927) and *Kim* (1901), *The War of the Worlds* (1897) and *Little*

*Wars* (1913), and *Nostromo* (1904) and *Chance* (1913) reveals that attentiveness to strategic dynamics tends to undercut the racist and classist logics subtending British imperialist discourse. Preachers of the “games ethos” argued that Britain’s imperial supremacy testified to the quality of English character. For Kipling, Wells, and Conrad, by contrast, individual persons are moral agents that are also caught up in overlapping contests occurring on scales as large as international finance and as local as particular mental processes. These texts associate moral authority with strategic insightfulness. While Kipling restricts his interest in strategy to the criticism of British political discourse, Wells and Conrad explore the strategic bases of laws and morality. Supplying the significance of game-strategy to these and other works by Kipling, Wells, and Conrad, adds to their legibility and contributes to critical conversance with the meaning of games in the literature of British imperialism.



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## Introduction

Critics have called attention to the centrality of terms and concepts deriving from games in late-Victorian through early-twentieth-century British literature.<sup>1</sup> *Treasure Island* (1888), *Peter Pan* (1904) and many lesser adventure, pirate, mummy, and Lost World stories, for instance, depicted British Imperialism as a “Great Game” through which the British man could realize his inner child, which meant releasing the “savage” within by escaping the stifling restrictions of life in European society. Popular adventure literature aimed at male British readers thus made imperialism seem a form of play. It also helped install a shame-inducing *agonal mindset* that prized competition and prestige above other rationales for conduct, such as moral rightness, sumptuousness, or rebellion. This agonal mindset was in conformance with the aggressive expansionist policies of Disraeli and the New Imperialists. In these and other ways, British literature depicting “The Great Game” had a role in subsuming realms of business, government, war, and imperial policy to game-playing rationales.<sup>2</sup>

Critical attention has been attuned to language in which war and imperialism is likened to game-playing. But the explicit role of game-strategy in the literature of late British imperialism has not been remarked upon. This

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Deane, Dudley, Eagleton, Howarth, Kucich, Mangan, Marcus, McDevitt, Said, Shaffer, Simons, Smith, and Tozer. I discuss these critics in this introduction and the following the chapters.

<sup>2</sup> This account relies primarily on Bradley Deane’s 2014 book, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870–1914*, which I discuss in further detail below.

dissertation examines game-strategy and game-language in the works of three prominent authors of the period: Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), H.G. Wells (1866-1946), and Joseph Conrad (1857-1924). Reading closely such texts as, among others, Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (1899-1927) and *Kim* (1901), Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1897) and *Little Wars* (1913), and Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) and *Chance* (1913), this dissertation discovers that all three authors relied upon strategic thought in their modeling of imperial conflict. They also used game-language to explore the strategic bases of imperialism, war, and human violence.

As I hope to show, the meanings of games in works by Kipling, Wells, and Conrad point towards, especially, two contexts. One is turn-of-the-century imperialist ideology, specifically the "games ethos" of the British public schools and the British concept of "The Great Game." The other context is an interest in the formal properties of strategic interaction. This second context for the signification of games, I argue, led these authors away from Edwardian imperialist ideology towards a philosophical investigation into the bearing of strategy on geopolitics and, in the cases of Wells and Conrad, on the evolutionary bases of human sociality.

We may begin our investigation of game-language and game-strategy in these authors' works by considering three passages. The first is from Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*. Kim has finished his schooling, first as a street boy, then as a disciple to a holy man, then as a student at a military preparatory school, and finally as a spy for the British. In the passage Kim reflects on his progress, and his thoughts underscore his conflict with the lama, who has previously advised

him, “this is a great and a terrible world” and that one should “abstain from action” (196, 214):

“Well is the Game called great! I was four days a scullion at Quetta, waiting on the wife of the man whose book I stole. And that was part of the Great Game! From the South—God knows how far—came up the Mahratta, playing the Great Game in fear of his life. Now I shall go far and far into the North playing the Great Game. Truly, it runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind. And my share and my joy”—he smiled to the darkness—“I owe to the lama here. Also to Mahbub Ali—also to Creighton Sahib, but chiefly to the Holy One. He is right—a great and a wonderful world—and I am Kim—Kim—Kim—alone—one person—in the middle of it all.” (226)

The second passage comes near the end of *Little Wars*, a book by H.G. Wells that describes a complex strategic wargame of the author’s invention. Wells says he played this game with his male friends, among others, Jerome K. Jerome, Hillaire Belloc, a Colonel Sykes, and Arthur Balfour (Smith 542n1; *Little Wars* 71). In the passage Wells proposes a pacifist use for wargames:

This world is for ample living; we want security and freedom; all of us in every country, except a few dull-witted, energetic bores, want to see the manhood of the world at something better than apeing the little lead toys our children buy in boxes. We want fine things made for mankind—splendid cities, open ways, more knowledge and power, and more and

more and more—and so I offer my game, for a particular as well as a general end; and let us put this prancing monarch and that silly scare-monger, and these excitable “patriots,” and those adventurers, and all the practitioners of Welt Politik, into one vast Temple of War, with cork carpets everywhere, and plenty of little trees and little houses to knock down, and cities and fortresses, and unlimited soldiers—tons, cellars-full—and let them lead their own lives there away from us. (68)

The third passage is from Joseph Conrad’s novel *Nostromo*. It depicts a conversation between the Chief Engineer of the railroad, who is English, and Dr. Monygham, a British ex-patriot and one time surgeon for the British Army. Their interview occurs in a lull in the action of the novel. The Montero brothers have led a defection from the Ribiera government, and Pedro Montero is leading a force towards Sulaco hoping to capture the San Tomé silver mine, the greatest source of wealth in the fictional South American republic of Costaguana. Charles Gould, the English owner of the mine, has put Nostromo and Martin Decoud in charge of a lighter containing the latest haul of silver. Their mission is to see the treasure safely deposited in a Western bank so that continued return will reassure European and American investors and give the San Francisco-based investor Holroyd reason to finance the armed secession of Sulaco from Costaguana.

An immediate context for the exchange between Dr. Monygham and the Chief Engineer is the earlier scene, in which Martin Decoud, “the imaginative

materialist" (310), tells Mrs. Gould that her husband Charles is a "Sentimentalist, after the amazing manner of your people." Decoud says that Gould, who is English, "could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale," whereas, "Life is not for me a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale. No, Mrs. Gould; I am practical. I am not afraid of my motives" (199-202). This difference between realist practicality and romantic illusion is drawn again when Dr. Monygham responds unenthusiastically to the Chief Engineer's news that Nostromo and Decoud have embarked on their mission with the silver.

"You have a poor opinion of that move, doctor? But why? Charles Gould has got to play his game out, though he is not the man to formulate his conduct even to himself, perhaps, let alone to others. It may be that the game has been partly suggested to him by Holroyd; but it accords with his character, too; and that is why it has been so successful. . . . Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity—"

"Bah!" interrupted the doctor, without stopping for an instant the idle swinging movement of his legs. "Self-flattery. Food for that vanity which makes the world go round. . . . I put no spiritual value into my desires, or my opinions, or my actions. They have not enough vastness to give me room for self-flattery. . . . Have you met the impossible face to



face—or have you, the Napoleon of railways, no such word in your dictionary?” (274-5)

All three passages come from the same period of British literature; each uses the term “game” in a conspicuous way, in the first and last instances to describe imperialism, in the second to describe war; and all three passages concern a game-like investment in these life-and-death matters of, respectively, British rule of India, the “Great War” in Europe, and economic and cultural imperialism in South America. There is, furthermore, an implicit admonishment in the attitude of the passages: that these matters are *not* games and should not be treated as games. Yet, as we shall see, the bearing of games on geopolitics and war in texts by these three authors is not so much vitiated as reconceived. Kipling, Wells, and Conrad did understand imperialism and war as “games”—high-stakes games of strategy, not low-stakes games of ludic play.

Attentiveness to game-strategy made all three authors depict a world driven by games to war, and all three authors diagnosed and indicted British ludic imperialism and its valorization of boyish irresponsibility. While providing them a standard against which to judge the ethicality of conduct, game-strategy also held certain, different, redemptive possibilities for these authors, which are discussed in the following chapters. A shared interest in the formal dynamics of strategic interaction serves to differentiate these authors’ works from adventure literature more enthralled with the romance of the “Great Game.” By supplying the significance of game-strategy and game-language to Kipling, Wells, and

Conrad, this dissertation adds to the legibility of their works and contributes to critical conversance with the meaning of games in the literature of British imperialism.

My central concern in this dissertation, to reiterate, is to examine the language of games in the works of these three authors, particularly as that language attaches to depictions of war and imperialism. In this introduction, I describe and define “British ludic imperialism” and “strategic interaction” as two contexts in which we should interpret the game language in these authors’ texts. Because the difference between these two aspects of games has gone under-examined in the existing scholarship, I also consider here how my terms contribute to critical understanding of the language of games in the literature of British imperialism. I then return to the passages above to read them in light of the contexts supplied. Finally, I provide a synopsis of the chapters to follow and anticipate this dissertation’s conclusions.

## 1. British ludic imperialism

Kim, the “adventurers” to whom Wells refers, Charles Gould: all are “players” of the “Great Game.” To understand what this entailed we should consider the cultural crucible in which the ludic approach to imperialism was made and disseminated in Britain: the public schools.

There are several good descriptions of the cultural and intellectual inspirations of British ludic imperialism. The account I offer here draws from,

especially, J.A. Mangan's trilogy of monographs on *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (1998), *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (2000), and "Manufactured" Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism (2013); Martin J. Wiener's *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (1981); Paul R. Deslandes's *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (2005); and Bradley Deane's *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (2014).

Victorian and Edwardian pro-imperialists in Britain shared a rhetoric of games that they learnt at the public schools. Why and how games were made relevant to imperialism in the public school curriculum can be explained with reference to the ideological function of the schools in their Victorian renaissance. The revolutionary epoch had resulted with Britain in an ideologically stable marriage between the rapidly empowering middle-class and an increasingly impoverished aristocracy.<sup>3</sup> The middle class would pay money for culture,

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<sup>3</sup> This claim and the following one, like all such "grand narrative" claims, lose in detailed accuracy what they gain in explanatory power. I include such claims here not because I wish to defend them as sufficient explanations of British history but because they suggest a necessary (if not sufficient) cause for the culture at the public schools. One may find these claims argued on the grounds of their own historical validity in a great many works of scholarship, not least of which is Wiener's study of Victorian gentrification. Other important works of history that have tried to establish the nineteenth-century reconciliation of the professional with aristocratic classes in Britain include Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (1958), Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (1962) and *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (1975), Patrick Joyce's *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (1991), David Cannadine's *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (1994), Susan Kingsley Kent's *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (1999), Paul R. Deslandes's *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience*,

buying entry to the ruling order, which would let them and avoid conflict; and it was at the public schools that the two British factions, moneyed and landed, would intermingle and become one (Wiener 11-24, Deslandes 35-37). This role for the public schools of forming Britain's elite class brought with it a change in the curriculum. The public schools before their Victorian renaissance are portrayed as "savage" places—and indeed they appear to have been in reality at least highly rough-and-tumble places (Mangan, *Athleticism* 18-20). In their newly formed role, the public schools became bastions of Anglicanism, finding common ground for Britain's rising elite by disciplining aristocratic rakishness through Anglican principles while tempering materialistic acquisitiveness through "culture" (Wiener 11-24).

The new curriculum was instituted by such clergymen headmasters as Edward Thring at Uppingham (1853-1887), G. E. L. Cotton at Marlborough (1852-1858), Nathaniel Woodard who in 1857 founded Lancing, H. H. Almond at Loretto (1862-1903), Christopher Wordsworth and his successors C. J. Vaughan and James Welldon at Harrow (1836-1898), and, of course, their model and progenitor, the legendary Thomas Arnold, who served at Rugby from 1828 to 1842 (Mangan, *Athleticism* xx; 30-55). "It has been observed," writes Edward

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1850-1920 (2005), and William Lubenow's *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815-1914* (2010). Mangan's account of the historical causes for the renovation of the public schools articulates what I have said in a different way: "These developments, a new prosperity, the rise of the industrial aristocracy, the growth of the professional middle class and the growing preoccupation with 'Britain overseas' against a backcloth of industrial, commercial and imperial expansion, led directly to the rebirth of that unique phenomenon of British society: the public school. They supplied the clientele, the finance and a training rationale" (*Athleticism* 14).

Thring's biographer, "that his ideal of manliness, while chivalric in the manner of his favourite authors, Scott and Tennyson, moral in the manner of Farrar and Arnold, Christian in the manner of the children's writers, Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing, 'owe most to Kingsley's ideal of healthy manliness'" (*Ibid.*, 45). In these "muscular Christian" views, Thring was a model headmaster (*Ibid.*, 43-48).<sup>4</sup> It was a requirement of the position that headmasters at public schools should feel convictions about their importance to the success of the British Empire and about the good done by British Imperialism to civilize the world and spread Christianity. In *Early Days at Uppingham School under Edward Thring. By an Old Boy* (1904), W. F. Rawnsley remembers that his headmaster "considered the creation of a great empire a marvelous ambition, maintaining that the British flag should fly over 'every unoccupied land essential to our colonies'" (163).

The Clarendon Public Schools Commission, which was appointed in 1861 to review the most prestigious endowed schools and helped to establish the ideal of the time period, states:

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<sup>4</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "muscular Christianity" as the "ideal of robust religious character and Christian life supposedly expressed in the writings of Charles Kingsley, though the term is not his." As Hall explains, "The tag 'muscular Christianity' originated in a review of Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) written by T.C. Sandars for the *Saturday Review*. . . . Sandars highlights a central, even defining, characteristic of muscular Christianity: an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself" (7). The passage in which Sandars coins the term is this one: "We all know by this time what is the task that Mr. Kingsley has made specially his own—it is that of spreading the knowledge and fostering the love of a muscular Christianity. His ideal is a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours—who, in the language which Mr. Kingsley has made popular, breathes God's free air on God's rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker around his fingers" (176).

These schools have been the chief nurseries of our statesmen; in them, and in schools modeled after them, men of all the various classes that make up English society, destined for every profession and career, have been brought up on a footing of social equality, and have contracted the most enduring friendships, and some of the ruling habits of their lives; and they have had perhaps the largest share in moulding the character of an English Gentleman. (*Report* 56)

As this text suggests, the British public schools were envisioned as a crucible creating “statesmen.” Also notable is the emphasis on the reconciliation of “all the various classes” by way of a single ideal, that of the “English gentleman.” As historian Martin Wiener has pointed out, the public-school gentlemen became “lawyers, doctors, public officials, journalists, professors, and men of letters” and were thus “characterized by their comparative aloofness from the struggle for income” (4-15).

The revered virtue of the English gentleman was “moral thoughtfulness,” and this would be instilled in boys, it was believed, through an educational program consisting in equal parts appreciation of the classics and mettle-testing on the field of battle, which would be simulated through the games of cricket, rugby, and football, but particularly cricket. According to the model, the school games aided in the boys’ moral development. Games made the boys more selfless, bound them in brotherhood, instilled patriotism in them, and developed feeling for “fair play” (Mangan, *Athleticism* 43-98). Introducer of rugby to Loretto, Hely Hutchinson Almond wrote in an 1882 issue of the *Lorettonian*,

Games in which success depends on the united efforts of many, and which also foster courage and endurance, are the very life blood of the public school system. And all the more self-indulgent games or pursuits contain within themselves an element of danger to school patriotism and might, if they permanently injured the patriotic games, cause public schools to fail in their main object, which we take to be the production of a grand breed of men for the service of the British nation. (57)

Organized games were believed to give the boys esprit-de-corps and patriotism. As we can also see in this passage, selfishness was singled out as an ungentlemanly, and by extension un-English, trait.

In fact, it was believed that the English gentleman's specially developed disinterestedness marked him out to rule the world with a benevolent hand. As a latter-day agent of the Foreign Service in India could put it: "Never since the heroic days of Greece has the world had such a sweet, just, boyish master [as the British]" (Mason 391); and, as Harrow headmaster James Welldon wrote in 1915, making reference to Kipling's eponymous poem of 1899, "If there is in the British race, as I think there is, a special aptitude for 'taking up the white man's burden,' and for leading the less advanced races of mankind in the ways of peace and progress, it may be ascribed, above all other causes, to the spirit of organized games" (*Recollections* 146).

Rawnsley remembers that Thring's history texts were Mommsen's *Rome* (1854-56), Moltey's *United Netherlands* (1860-67) and Kaye's *Lives of Indian Officers* (1867). As historian Malcolm Yapp has shown, *Indian Officers* was one of the

crucial Victorian texts to disseminate the notion of “The Great Game.” Kaye’s source for the phrase was an 1840 letter from Captain Arthur Connolly to Major Henry Rawlinson, political agent at Qandahar: “You’ve got a great game, a noble game before you,” writes Connolly, adding: “if the British Government would only play the grand game, help Russia cordially to all that she has a right to expect—shake hands with Persia, etc.—we shall play the noble part that the first Christian nation in the world ought to fill” (Kaye 104). As Yapp observes,

Kaye had altered in two ways the sense of the phrase “the great game” from the form in which Connolly had bequeathed it to him. First, he had given it a geographical association with Central Asia and, second, he had substituted for the noble, humanitarian associations it had enjoyed in Connolly’s usage an uneasy adventurerist quality similar to that which

“imperialism” was to possess in liberal formulations of the 1870s. (182)

Like muscular Christianity itself, then—which was one part athleticism, one part Anglicanism, and one part adventurism—the British idea of “The Great Game” was an unstable mixture. To the boys, “The Great Game” could signify a complex, even contradictory, package of promises and beliefs: adventure, heroism, escape; English superiority, “fair play,” and duty.

Yet, as Bradley Deane has shown, the trend in British ludic imperialism, from its origin in mid-Victorian culture to its demise after World War I, was from Liberal to New Imperialist instantiations. Where “fair play” and “moral thoughtfulness” had defined the Victorian instantiation of ludic imperialism, Edwardian ludic imperialism placed the “emphasis,” writes Deane, “on the



competitive dimensions of manliness—as derived, for instance, from discourses of honor, gamesmanship, or military codes” (15). By the Edwardian period, one “played the game” to prove one’s manliness and to win prestige, not to spread the light of Anglican “fair play” (Deane 8-16). We can see evidence of this shift in attitudes in a 1929 address delivered by one Dr. John Robert Paterson Sclater on “The Imperial Significance of Games,” who summed up his remarks:

In the first place, we would rather lose a game than win it unfairly. In the second place, we would rather have respect to the spirit of the law than to its letter, in playing the game. In the third place, we would exact from ourselves and all associated with us a spirit of absolute obedience to the authorities set over us for the moment, never for a moment questioning the umpire. In the fourth place we would, so to speak, play the ball where it lies—an entirely admirable attitude to have in respect to all life’s difficulties. In the fifth place, we would desire to be among that company who, having started either in a race or a game, go on if we can till we drop dead. In the sixth place we would hope that that spirit would be developed amongst us which is not so very greatly concerned for itself, so long as the side on which we are is successful. (138)

The first five points respond clearly to the Victorian Anglican model of “grand and noble game.” The important virtues are “fair play,” team spirit, and self-sacrifice. Yet Sclater’s final proviso, while stressing the importance of the team over the individual, also shows a desire to win that betrays the cracks that had appeared in the public school ideology.

As muscular Christianity had become less Christian and more muscular, the neo-chivalric ethos of the Victorian gentleman had become eroded by a part of its composition in distinctly middle-class and industrialist virtues of competition and profit. And public-school team-sports culture became increasingly more invested in personal prestige than moral training. By the turn of the century, the public schools were “too frequently, a polarised world of encouraged ‘hearties’ and discouraged ‘aesthetes’, elevated ‘bloods’ and diminished ‘remnants’, supported athletes and neglected others” (Mangan, *Athleticism* xxviii). The quality of ludic imperialism had changed in step with this evolution of public school culture. “If asked what our muscular Christianity has done,” writes the author of *Our Public Schools: their influence on English history* (1901), “we point to the British Empire. Our Empire would never have been built up by a nation of idealists and logicians. Physical vigour is as necessary for the maintenance of our Empire as mental vigour” (113).

Deane offers an account of Edwardian “New Imperialist” attitudes that reveals the ways in which British imperialist ideology was *ludic* at the turn of the twentieth century. These attitudes included,

first of all, a frankly competitive spirit, demonstrated by an aggressive assertion of national prestige against threats from rivals and a militant readiness to defend or expand its influence (from the late 1870s, the more feverish demotic eruptions of this spirit would be called jingoism).

Moreover, in its fixation on prestige, the New Imperialist ethos was attentive to appearances, attracted to the performative and even theatrical

dimensions of power, enamored by spectacle, ceremonial pomp, and the bold symbolic stroke. Where the gesture failed, it was prepared to turn to naked force, and it intensely appreciated the military virtues. It was deeply concerned with honor, but less patient with the prohibitions of law, religion, and morality; to its proponents, this emphasis could be read as a pragmatic and realistic defense of British interests within the complex game of imperial powers, but to its enemies it seemed opportunistic, unprincipled, and Machiavellian. (9)

This pro-imperialist attitude was *ludic*, then, in two ways: it drew from the competitive mindset of the *agon*—or arena of competition—as well as the theatrical or performative mindset of role-playing.<sup>5</sup> The paradigm for this kind of British ludic imperialism at the turn-of-the-century was offered by Cecil Rhodes, who, as Deane shows, would dress “native” to gain cultural prestige and who wrote of imperialism as a competition between empires for land and power.<sup>6</sup>

Disraeli had maintained that British Imperialism was not, as Gladstone had represented, a parent-child or teacher-student relationship but was, instead, a proving ground.<sup>7</sup> Thus, when speaking of the “maintenance of the Empire,” Disraeli places the stress on the “character of the people” (531, 607). “[I]t is not merely our fleets and armies, our powerful artillery, our accumulated capital,

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<sup>5</sup> For an exploration of both these rhetorics of play—the agonal and the performative—see Sutton-Smith 74-90 (“Rhetorics of Power”) and 91-110 (“Rhetorics of Identity”).

<sup>6</sup> See Deane 51-84 for an explication of the New Imperialist significance of Rhodes’s “cultural cross-dressing.”

<sup>7</sup> The differences between Gladstone’s and Disraeli’s reasons for imperialism are discussed by Deane 8-13.

and our unlimited credit upon which I so much depend,” says Disraeli in an 1872 speech, “as upon that unbroken spirit of her people, which I believe was never prouder of the Imperial country to which they belong” (522).<sup>8</sup> As Disraeli’s New Imperialism became hegemonic in Britain, “The Great Game” was portrayed in turn-of-the-century popular British literature not as a sporting match between gentlemen but as a merciless tournament where shame was to be avoided as much as valor was to be won (Deane 23-31). The colonial “Other,” meanwhile, was increasingly admitted as an equal, even potentially superior, opponent on the no-holds-barred field of battle (*Ibid.*, 32-51). The message at the schools and in the adventure literature was to “never grow up” but lay hold of a fundamental and boyish “savagery” and channel one’s inner pirate (*Ibid.*, 85-115). Only in this way could Britain hope to compete on the geopolitical stage.

Where it was not coopted and travestied, the Victorian version of British ludic imperialism was parodied. *Punch* cartoons dating from the late 1870s registered rising resentment with the philistinism and anti-intellectualism of the public schools (Mangan, *Athleticism* 89-93), and by the end of the century *Punch*’s

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<sup>8</sup> The *OED* quotes Andrew Carnegie expressing a Disraeli-like belief in an 1899 article for the *North American Review*: “Imperialism implies naval and military force behind; moral force, education, civilization are not the backbone of Imperialism.” Contrast this position with what Gladstone writes in “England’s Mission,” an 1878 article for *The Nineteenth Century*: “The doctrines of national self-restraint, of the equal obligations of States to public law, and of their equal rights to fair construction as to words and deeds, have been left to unofficial persons. The Government, not uniformly nor consistently, but in the main and on the whole, have opened up and relied upon an illegitimate source of power, which never wholly fails; they have appealed, under the prostituted name of patriotism, to exaggerated fears, to imaginary interests, and to the acquisitiveness of a race which has surpassed every other known to history in the faculty of appropriating to itself vast spaces of the earth, and establishing its supremacy over men of every race and language” (569).

sarcasm had taken hold. Even one-time literary boosters of the neo-chivalric traditions of the public schools, authors P. G. Wodehouse and E. W. Hornung, for example, would come to take more circumspect views. Hornung, brother-in-law of Arthur Conan Doyle and inventor of the popular Raffles series, provides a particularly intriguing case. Hornung could make an ornate analogy between cricket and the “game of life” in a 1914 sermon, delivered to the assembled boys at Uppingham; and in *Fathers of Men* (1912), Hornung sought to immortalize his Uppingham experiences under the tutelage of Thring. But Hornung’s satiric spin-off of Sherlock Holmes in the character of Raffles, a gentleman-thief and a professional cricket player, suggests to what an extent the “fair play” take on “the grand and noble game” might be professed with tongue in cheek.

As is evidenced by Arnold Lunn’s *The Harrovian* (1913) and Alec Waugh’s *The Loom of Youth* (1917), sarcasm about the neo-chivalric public schools and their Victorian “gentleman” had elevated by the second decade of the twentieth century into an outright disavowal, and indeed it is generally acknowledged that the romance of the public schools was fatally sapped by the experiences of the Great War (Bishop and Bostridge 5). Wodehouse, whose Edwardian school novels had celebrated the British public school traditions, converted to a more jocular view, as in *Enter Psmith* (1935). After World War II, a greater sense of global competition in Great Britain had led to the introduction of higher academic standards in the public schools and ancient universities, as well as the introduction of democratic measures such as state-funded schools and scholarships (Mangan, *Athleticism* 211-215). “Constant and fierce anti-athleticism

within and outside the schools,” writes Mangan, “competitions from the state-educated, the demands of a national examination system, the growth of professional occupations in association with reduced opportunities for imperial careers especially in the armed services, reactions and arguments of medical practitioners, physical educationalists and radical schoolmasters, the new ethos of individualism, a nonconformist spirit of disenchantment—these certainly appear to be among the main reasons for the eventual decline of athleticism” (*Ibid.*, 217). The Victorian public schools and the “gentleman” they created were propped up for derision as instances of hypocrisy, as in, e.g., Stephen Potter’s *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship: Or, The Art of Winning Games Without Actually Cheating* (1948), Evelyn Waugh’s *Little Learning* (1964) and T. C. Worsley’s *Flannelled Fool* (1967).

For over half a century, then, from the 1860s through World War I, the British notion of the “Great Game” could hold contradictory messages depending on whether the emphasis was placed on teamwork and self-sacrifice or on individualism and gain. For some, “The Great Game” meant moral thoughtfulness, gentlemanly “fair play,” and the inherent superiority of the English over the colonized. For others, “The Great Game” meant competition, prestige or shame, and the equality of the Other. Although first one then the other position became hegemonic, these versions of British ludic imperialism describe not so much a chronological continuum as dialectically connected possibilities—as is shown by the example of Kaye’s “adventurist” meaning for “The Great Game” in his *Indian Officers* (1867). Regardless of the emphasis,

imperialism was made to seem something more than its definition in the *OED*: “the extension or maintenance of a country’s power or influence through trade, diplomacy, military or cultural dominance.” *Ludic* imperialism was a form of play, first and foremost. This play may be believed to instill “moral thoughtfulness” in its players (and, as we shall see in the next chapter, colonial subjects were thought amenable to the moral education of games); or else it may be believed to bring out the inherent and uncivilized manliness of its “players.” Yet, crucially, imperialism becomes *ludic* when the play it affords is felt to matter more than, or as much as, its ostensible purpose in military, trade, political, or cultural dominance. The ludic imperialist annexes land, makes war, or opens trade zones, in other words, fully as much because he likes dressing up and playing general—and because he wants the approval of his fellow players—as because he desires wealth or power. Like Kim, he “plays” because the “Game” is “Great.” Like Gould, he endows his conquest with a “spiritual value,” finds his motives in a “moral romance,” and so gratifies his vanity. And like Wells’s “adventurers,” the ludic Imperialist plays at real war with the same ludic pleasure as is more appropriate to wargames. This is why Wells proposes locking up such men in one “vast Temple of War,” where they may play wargames with toys and leave the world’s people in peace.

The reason Kipling is not his Kim, Wells is not his adventurers, and Conrad is not his Gould—however—is because, as I shall be arguing, these authors understood geopolitics and war as “games” in a *strategic* sense of the word.

## 2. From “gamification” to strategic interaction

I want to assess and argue with some critical assumptions that have made it difficult to interpret game terms in English literature in connection with any other context than “gamification.” “Gamification” is a twenty-first-century neologism invented by cultural theorists to describe “a condition of seepage through which game mechanics and objectives come to constitute the work, leisure, thought patterns, affects, and social relations of the overdeveloped world” (Jagoda 116). We could use the word “gamification” to denominate the social processes leading to the kind of ludic investment in imperialism described in the previous section. What we saw also allows us to parse certain passages where a less nuanced appreciation of gamification would miss much of importance. Take, for example, the following selection from Ruskin’s essay “Work” (1865):

The first of all the English games is making money. That is an all-absorbing game; and we knock each other down oftener in playing at that than at foot-ball, or any other roughest sport; and it is absolutely without purpose; no one who engages heartily in that game ever knows why. Ask a great money-maker what he wants to do with his money—he never knows. He doesn’t make it to do anything with it. He gets it only that he *may* get it. ‘What will you make of what you have got?’ you ask. ‘Well, I’ll get more,’ he says. Just as, at cricket, you get more runs. There’s no use



in the runs, but to get more of them than other people is the game. And there's no use in the money, but to have more of it than other people is the game. So all that great foul city of London there,—rattling, growling, smoking, stinking,—a ghastly heap of fermenting brick-work, pouring out poison at every pore,—you fancy it is a city of work? Not a street of it! It is a great city of play; very nasty play, and very hard play, but still play. It is only Lord's cricket ground without the turf,—a huge billiard table without the cloth, and with pockets as deep as the bottomless pit; but mainly a billiard table, after all. (23)

The twentieth-century cultural critic of gamification might see in this passage an anticipation of the sort of ludic investment in business—the “playbor”—that has driven Western capitalism.<sup>9</sup> My account of British ludic imperialism in the last section allows us to see, much more specifically, that Ruskin is taking aim at the pedagogical rationale of mid-Victorian public schools. In the passage, “foot-ball” and “cricket”—public school games meant to teach Thomas Arnold's patriotic virtues of team-spirit, moral thoughtfulness, and “fair play”—are debased through the comparison to billiards, which is there to suggest what is “mean,” un-Christian, even un-English. By choosing to describe “a great money-maker” in reference to these games—and by refusing to acknowledge a distinction

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<sup>9</sup> Like “gamification,” “playbor” is a term with currency in the burgeoning field of Game Studies. It denotes a problematic conflation of work and leisure. See, for instance, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 23-27. In *Homo Ludens* (1944), the founding text of Game Studies, Dutch medievalist Johann Huizinga follows Ruskin in diagnosing an “innate will to be first [that] will still drive power-groups into collision and may lead them to incredible extremes of infatuation and frenzied megalomania . . . though we know well enough that this form of ‘winning’ can bring no gain” (101).

between them—Ruskin reveals a gentry affiliation that is distinctly old-fashioned.

Gamification *is* a relevant and useful term for this dissertation, but games also become significant in the texts I read below in a connection that is *not*, or not *only*, gamification. If it has been difficult to see this before, it may be on account of a critical tendency to attribute the appearance of game terms, game tropes, and game structures in nineteenth-century literature to gamification.

Two studies that are representative of the tendency I mean are Nancy Morrow's *Dreadful Games: The Play of Desire in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (1988), which is still the most comprehensive study of games in nineteenth-century fiction; and Jonathan Freedman's essay "What Maggie Knew: Game Theory, *The Golden Bowl*, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Knowledge" (2008), which tellingly comes to the same conclusions as Morrow's *Dreadful Games*, despite Freedman's avowedly fresh interest in Game Theory.

Morrow focuses on works by Stendhal, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Hardy, and Henry James and claims that these nineteenth-century novelists used game structures and especially game tropes to criticize concomitant developments in the rise of the Protestant work ethic and the demise of the Romantic imagination:

The metaphor of the game in nineteenth-century novels tends to indicate an increasingly problematic ambivalence toward the rationalistic social and philosophical tendencies of the age. For all that nineteenth-century literary Realism proposed, as a general movement, to incorporate the methods of science into the practice of fiction, and for all that the fictional

world relies heavily on empirical “evidence” taken directly from the material world, the texts themselves seem to question time and again the validity of “logic” and “reason.” It is, for example, the “logic” of Mephistopheles and “the language of Hell” that marks the course of Julien Sorel’s downfall. A “utilitarian” ethic leads Victorin Hulot to exact a dreadful form of revenge from his enemies in Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette*. Logic also helps Crevel to rationalize his manipulative schemes. In both Balzac and Laclos, the rational “games” that structure the characters’ experiences cloud the distinction between good and evil, since even one who “plays fair” is capable of committing evil. This ambivalence toward reason continues into the world James describes, where characters must learn to avoid judging their relationships according to a utilitarian logic. The emphasis, in the Realist novel, on human reason can be tied to the absence or suppression of the play spirit in so many fictional worlds: excessive rationalization undermines the spontaneity and freedom inherent in the playful exchange of human desire. (170)

Morrow proposes that the moral mission of Realism was to denounce an agonal, or competitivist, mindset that was utilitarian, selfish, rationalizing, aggressive, amoral, and trivializing. If the “language of games in the nineteenth-century novel suggests a world where strife is inevitable, and hypocrisy easily justified,” then realist novels emphasize “the deceit and self-deception, even the potential violence, of action motivated by personal ambition . . . [a]nd the way in which these metaphorical games subvert the spirit of play” (39, 41).

This claim that “the language of games” tells of the rationalizing, utilitarian subversion of the (Romantic) “spirit of play” may say more about the moment of Morrow’s writing, however, than about the Victorian novelists’ use of game terms. Let us consider first the moment of Morrow’s writing before re-evaluating the importance of games to novelists.

In 1985, Robert Rawdon Wilson, who would go on to write *In Palamedes’ Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory* (1990), edited a special issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* on “Game and the Theories of Game.” In his introductory article, Wilson distinguishes eight separate “lines of analysis” by which play and game concepts were being applied in literary critical discourse. These include the Schillerian philosophy that treats play as fundamental to self-realization; the view of literature as being a game-like creation of possible worlds with their own rules; the psychoanalytic approach that represents the Unconscious as a schemer and cunning agent; an interest in role-playing in connection with the creative imagination; the Wittgensteinian approach that “subject[s] all human activity, including language, to an atomistic analysis in which the discrete parts may be called games” (188); Game Theory; and Derrida’s play-concepts. About this last source for critical interest in play-concepts, Wilson writes: “Considering the evidence of this collection of essays alone, it seems correct enough to claim that Derrida, and the bulking presence of *jeu libre*, now dominate most discussions of play and game pushing other perspectives towards marginalia and gloss” (194).

Morrow's presuppositions, I suspect, stem from a more or less conscious affinity for felt-utopic possibilities in the concept of *jeu libre*. And I think it likely that "pro-play" and "anti-game" sentiments like Morrow's are still widespread.<sup>10</sup> It may be useful, then, to guess at and overstate certain connotative significances, which may have become attached to the terms "game" and "play" on account of critical aversion to "gamification," on the one hand, and critical attachment to felt-utopic possibilities in the concept of *jeu libre*, on the other. To that end, I have developed a table (see below), showing on the left-hand side ideas associated with "bad" games, and on the right-hand side binary opposites associated with "good" play.

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<sup>10</sup> As evidence that they are, one can point to the recurring need to defend Game Theory against its detractors in the humanities. Thus, for example, political scientist Michael Chwe offers an able apology for Game Theory in the introduction to his *Jane Austen: Game Theorist* (2014) (see, especially, Chwe 26-30). Or see Amanda Driscoll and Mona Lena, "Feminism and rational choice theory," *European Political Science Review* 4.2 (2012): 195-216.

Game	Play
Competition	Make-Believe
Individualism	Communalism
Selfishness	Altruism
Rules	"Free" Play
Strategy, Deception, Artificiality	Playful Performativity
Aggression	Considerateness
Rationality and Paranoia	Emotionality and Reparation
Behavior, Pattern, Affordance	Psychology, Unpredictability, Agency
Restricting	Liberating
Plot(ting), Structure	Slippage, Indeterminacy
Realism	Romanticism or Fantasy
Industrial	Agrarian
Economic	Literary
Capitalist	Anti-Capitalist
Defeatist	Revolutionary
Conservative	Progressive
Tragic	Redemptive

Table 1: Speculation on literary-critical associations attaching to the terms "Game" and "Play"

Such *a priori* associations may explain why Freedman's otherwise excellent 2008 essay about Game Theory in *The Golden Bowl* concludes:

Anticipating the brave new world of Game Theory that was to prove so important to contemporary economic thought, and anticipating even more the extension of economic analysis into understandings of the transactions of everyday life that has followed it, the novel thus presciently critiques these developments, putting in their place a more tragic view of life in which precisely the means that assure victory ensure defeat, the means that allow the accomplishment of gain negate it. As such, it vividly

displays the kinds of knowledge that fiction, and more generally literary culture, has to offer: a negative knowledge to be sure, but one which provides a corrective to the hegemony of economic thought that marks our current moment, as it so powerfully did James's own. (113)

Freedman opposes "economic thought" and "aesthetic knowledge," offering to uphold literature—with its purview of feelings, psychology, behavior, culture, and thick description—against the supposedly deadening influence of numerical analysis. Interestingly, Morrow is more sanguine than Freedman about the value of strategy in *The Golden Bowl*. She recognizes that Maggie's brilliant move to conceal her knowledge allows her to guide the characters into "a more universally satisfying, harmonious 'equilibrium'" (175). Yet informing both Freedman's and Morrow's studies is the intuitional supposition that interest in game-strategy must be either pro- or anti-rationalizing, and by extension, pro- or anti-capitalist.

The Victorian novelists had a more profound interest in game-strategy than these binary oppositions can allow. As more recent scholarship has begun to reveal, the nineteenth-century novelists were deeply engaged with ideas that have since been gathered under the heading of Game Theory. *That* interest both could and should accrue to game-theory-like ideas in nineteenth-century novels, when Game Theory was only given its name in the 1940s, will be more readily granted after I explain what Game Theory is the study of. In Blackwell's *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (1994), we read under "Game Theory" that,

A game is being played by a group of individuals whenever the fate of an individual in the group depends not only on his own actions, but also on the actions of the rest of the individuals in the group. Chess is the archetypical example. Whether White wins, loses or draws depends not only on the moves made by White, but also on the moves made by Black. Bridge and Poker are further examples which have the added interest that lack of relevant information complicates the player's decision problems.

The word "game" is natural for the examples given above. But, for really interesting games, it would not be usual to use the word "game" in ordinary English. Consider, for example, war, international treaty negotiations, competition for survival among animals or for status among humans, elections, wage bargaining or the operation of market economies.

All these activities fall within our definition of a "game." (242)

If game-strategy is important for understanding war, evolution, markets, and "competition for status among humans," then we are likely to see a great deal of interest in game-strategy in nineteenth-century novels. And of course this is what we do see. Thus, to take a weighty example, Jane Austen's novels chart strategic interaction with game-theory-like precision, as has recently been shown in Michael Chwe's *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* (2013). To take another telling instance, George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) makes a game-theory-like thought-experiment when, after likening politics to a game of chess in which pieces move according to their own inscrutable wills and preferences, the narrator concludes:



Yet this imaginary chess is easy compared with the game a man has to play against his fellow-men with other fellow-men for his instruments. He thinks himself sagacious, perhaps, because he trusts no bond except that of self-interest: but the only self-interest he can safely rely on is what seems to be such to the mind he would use or govern. Can he ever be sure of knowing this? (247)

In this passage, the narrator delineates a fundamental concern of game theorists: how players' knowledge or beliefs about other players' knowledge or beliefs influence the outcome of a strategic interaction.<sup>11</sup>

Not only can we discover game-theory-like ideas and concerns in nineteenth-century literature, there are historical points of contact between nineteenth-century English literature and *mathematical* Game Theory. In *Principles of Parliamentary Representation* (1884), Charles Dodgson—who as Lewis Carroll had modeled *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) on a chess problem—applies a mathematical game theorem to advance a fairer voting scheme than was being argued for by the Society for Proportional Representation (Black, Dimand and Dimand). And Conan Doyle's "Final Problem" (1893) was used by Oskar Morgenstern—co-author with mathematician John von Neumann of the book that gave Game Theory its name, *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944)—to illustrate mixed-strategy, two-person zero-sum games (Wainwright).

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<sup>11</sup> For a classic work on this subject, see Bicchieri, *Rationality and Coordination* (Cambridge 1993).

The authors of the Blackwell Dictionary entry on Game Theory are perceptively alert to the possible confusion caused by the connotative significances of the word “game.” “The usage of the word ‘game’ [when game is defined as strategic interaction] is not meant to imply that wars are fun or that economics is entertaining” but that, as they go on to explain, certain aspects of war and economics may be analyzed in terms of game-strategy. I want to expand on this point because I think it is one source of Game Theory’s bad reputation as capitalist ideology. In English, we may say “game” to mean what is of no importance. A game is what is set off from serious activities and concerns. It may be played seriously, it often is; but it is separated from the world. We may “quit it” and go on living, as may not be said about life itself. Whatever we may think about life itself, we know that a game has rules, even though (as Wittgenstein observed) they may be very basic. A game has a point (as Wittgenstein also emphasized)<sup>12</sup>: it is artificial and contrived. We can sometimes feel an unwanted incursion of games into our lives. For example, if we feel prevented from carrying out our intentions by an obstacle or set of obstacles that we feel to be somehow arbitrary, we will say that we are being made “to play a game,” or else, as spirits worsen, that it is “just” a game, or “all” a game. Similarly, when we suspect a charade, we will employ the word “game” to incriminate or, as the case may be, exonerate. “Game” is used, thusly, in a dismissive sense: games have their place; they are feints; they are not “reality.” To apply “game” to war, then, may seem inappropriate.

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<sup>12</sup> These remarks about Wittgenstein’s writing on games rely upon Lamarque’s explication, especially, 369-70.

Twentieth-century Game Theorists have used game-strategy to model and understand the maintenance, breakdown, and evolution of animal sociality, including human sociality, across several interacting scales of duration.<sup>13</sup> According to some advanced thinkers, game-strategy is more fundamentally *there* than ourselves, just as Darwinian dynamics underlay the species.<sup>14</sup> Game-theory-like interest in the formal dynamics of competitive gaming has been traced through Darwin, Hobbes, Shakespeare, and Plato (Ross). “[N]ot only may we speculate that Marx would have been quick to explore [Game Theory’s] techniques,” writes Lebowitz, “but we can go further and suggest that Marx’s analysis was inherently a ‘game-theoretic’ perspective” (197). Games have a serious, analytical, and not necessarily ideological, application to all phenomena of strategic interaction, including war.

Of course, in the hands of nineteenth-century novelists, the *ludic* and *strategic* meanings for “game” can be finely, even treacherously, interwoven. Much of what follows is an attempt to disarticulate the meanings of game in over-determined usages by Kipling, Wells, and Conrad. But I want to stress here,

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Dugatkin and Reeve, eds., *Game Theory and Animal Behavior* (Oxford, 1998); Krebs and Davies, eds., *Behavioral Ecology: An Evolutionary Approach* (1984); Skyrms, *Evolution of the Social Contract* (Cambridge 1996); Young, *Individual Strategy and Social Structure* (Princeton 1998); Ross, “Evolutionary Game Theory and the Normative Theory of Institutional Design: Binmore and Behavioral Economics,” *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 5 (2006): 51-79.

<sup>14</sup> See Maynard Smith, *Evolution and the Theory Games* (Cambridge, 1982); Hofbauer and Sigmund, *Evolutionary Games and Population Dynamics* (Cambridge, 1995); Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (Simon and Schuster, 1995); Glimcher, *Decisions, Uncertainty, and the Brain* (MIT Press, 2003); Sterelny, *Thought in a Hostile World* (Oxford, 2003); Ross, *Economic Theory and Cognitive Science: Microexplanation* (Cambridge, 2005).

what has not been said before, that much of the importance about the “language of games” in English literature emerges from game-theory-like concerns. So when, for example, the narrator says in *The House of Mirth* (1905)—“It was part of the game to make him feel that her appeal had been an uncalculated impulse, provoked by the liking he inspired” (85)—the term “game” should not be read as Edith Wharton’s Romantic warning against a spirit of rationalization overtaking Western society. It should be read in the technical sense promoted by Game Theory: *strategic interaction*. This does not mean that Lily Bart could take no ludic pleasure in misdirecting Gus Trenor, or that she could not approach her bid for a place in society as if it were her version of “The Great Game.” Moreover, the phrasing, “It was part of the game,” conveys a tired regret that Miss Bart should find herself needing to elicit Mr. Trenor’s romantic attentions. “Game” signifies as *more than* the strategic in this instance, but we may be apt to give too little attention to the literal significance of the word “game” in Wharton’s usage. Lily Bart is making a move on Gus Trenor, and he will make, in turn, counter-moves—the result of which literal *gaming* will be, in the long run, that Lily loses social standing. If we feel that it is patently *unfair*, part of that feeling will have been put there by Wharton’s attentiveness to strategic interaction. This attentiveness is signaled in the quotation by the appearance of the word “game,” and we should not mistake it as only Wharton’s complaint about gamification. As a matter of fact, while there may be a critique of gamification in *The House of Mirth*, it does not extend to Lily’s gaming, about which, indeed, the narrator is sympathetic.

My purpose in this section has been to show that gamification is, on its own, an insufficient explanation for the appearance in English literature of the word “game” and such words that derive from games as, especially, move, tactic, strategy, turn, and others. These terms, *this language of games*, derives from strategy, which is its own area of thought with applications in the analysis of war, economics, and geopolitics. As we shall now see, strategy is an important referent for the language of games in texts by Kipling, Wells, and Conrad. The question I shall be trying to answer in the remainder of this dissertation is, What is the relation between the *strategic* and the *ludic* in first Kipling’s, then Wells’s, and lastly Conrad’s recourse to game terms? To this question we may now turn.

### 3. Ludic play and strategy in Kipling, Wells, and Conrad

An answer to my question can be found by bringing the passages with which we began into communication with the language of games of each author. In the following chapters, I attempt a reconstruction of each author’s language of games. The comparative nature of my approach provides opportunity to comment upon divergences and commonalities. In texts by all three authors, I find that the *strategic* is emphasized at the expense of the *ludic* in the application of game terms to depictions of imperialism and war. These texts criticize *British ludic imperialism*, and the reason why, as I hope to show, is that the authors understood war and imperialism to be high-stakes *games of strategy*. Each author also developed interest in the strategic quality of games for different reasons and

to different ends. To consider more fully the many issues that converge at the juncture of the *ludic* and *strategic* in the literature of British imperialism, I investigate each author's language of games in turn.

### "The Great Game": Rudyard Kipling Against Ludic Imperialism

In chapter 1, I track Kipling's use of the "Great Game" trope through his correspondence, *The Verses on Games* (1898), *Stalky & Co.* (started in 1899), "The Islanders" (1901), and *Kim*. I find that Kipling was finely attuned to the political fantasies implicit in the "Great Game" trope, both Liberal and New Imperialist versions. Kipling denounces his middle-class readers' pretensions to country sports and was an astringent critic of the "games ethos," which he believed had lulled a powerful professional class into treacherous feelings of moral and racial superiority. Moreover, pace critics, Kipling also eschewed New Imperialist valorization of boyish irresponsibility. The New Imperialist "Great Game" trope fails to appeal to Kipling's ideals of moral maturity because it assumes that the child is wiser than the elder.

Indeed, *Kim* is not, as some readers have mistakenly believed, the eponymous novel's center of moral authority and wisdom. Those roles are represented in the characters of the lama and Babu Hurree Chunder Mookerjee. And, as I argue, *Kim* puts moral maturity (represented by the lama) on the side of a perspicacious understanding of the strategic aspect of imperial conflict (represented by Hurree Babu). Moral maturity via insight into the strategic

dynamics of imperial conflict is contrasted in the novel against the immaturity and naiveté of the “Great Game” view of British rule in India (represented by Kim). For his part, Kim is as insensitive to the one source of authority as the other. In the passage we saw, Kim contradicts the lama’s wisdom. Kim of “The Great Game” thinks the world “good” and life meant for action. The lama of “The Way” thinks the world “great” and “terrible” and that life is meant for enlightenment. “A Cause was put out into the world,” he tells Kim at one point in their divergence, “and, old or young, sick or sound, knowing or unknowing, who can rein in the effect of that Cause? Does the Wheel hang still if a child spins it—or a drunkard? Chela, this is a great and a terrible world” (196). Hurree Babu combines Kim’s love for “The Game” with the lama’s awe of causation and provides the novel’s interest in strategic interaction. Kim does not understand what happens in Himalayas, whereas Hurree Babu, who is an excellent spy with complicated allegiances, has—as we shall see—an impressively nuanced understanding of Britain’s strategic foothold in India.

Its emphasis on *strategy* is what, I argue, saves Kipling’s language of games from full complicity with Britain’s political ideology.

### Games, War, and Diplomacy: The Strategic Thought of H.G. Wells

H.G. Wells’s language of games displays the same rejection of the *ludic* and adoption of the *strategic* that we saw in Kipling’s use of game terms. Thus, for instance, Wells criticizes the British Army, as did Kipling, for being overly

beholden to the showy traditions of the public schools. Where Kipling wanted to replace his British readers' ludic investment in imperialism with strategic appreciation of geopolitics, though, Wells sought to utilize the principles of competitive gaming to overcome humanity's bellicose nature and lay the foundation for a more equitable and peace-loving world society.

In chapter 2, I track Wells's language of games through his short essay "Concerning Chess" (1897), his classic science fiction tale *The War of the Worlds* (1897), his rarely cited dialogue novel *Boon* (1905-1915), his rule-manual for a strategic wargame *Little Wars* (1914), his nuclear apocalypse story *The World Set Free* (1914), and his memoirs *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934). I find that Wells's interest in strategy encompasses several areas of his thought: military strategy and the theory of war; the role of violence in the evolution of morals, laws, and reputation; social reform. Wells held that human behavior tends towards violence and selfishness. While he hoped that ingrained belligerency could be sidestepped and that world government could be made to emerge from world war, Wells also doubted whether any reasoned discourse could overcome the mutual mistrust and selfishness that fuels militarization and threatens worse and worse world wars. If strategic thought made Wells unapologetic about his anti-pacifism—and indeed Wells contributed to British military policy during World War I—it also made Wells want to better the art of war so that, as he says in *Little Wars*, there will be less war and less destructive war. In *The World Set Free*, Wells sidesteps the strategic stalemate of European imperialism by imagining the destruction by atom bomb of the world's urban centers. This



calamity causes the establishing of an anti-nationalist, egalitarian, democratic, and cosmopolitan world-system. Wells was more patient in his reforms for post-war Europe, which are founded on and advanced through strategic considerations. If H.G. Wells played “The Great Game” of Empire, it was not as a public school boy might do, but as the world’s foremost advocate for socialist reform.

### Strategy and Morality: Joseph Conrad’s “Game Theory”

Marlow says in *Lord Jim* (1900) that, “The onlookers see most of the game” (172), and the narrator of *Chance* (1913) returns to the phrase to explain Marlow’s rapport with another sailor: “A turn of mind composed of innocence and skepticism is common to them all, with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game” (28). Until now, these and other appearances of the word “game” in Conrad’s fiction have been interpreted figuratively. Critics have argued that Conrad’s “ludic imagination” was a part of his aristocratic nostalgia, adducing to it Conrad’s seeming approval of the duel, his interest in “agonal ethics,” his ambivalence about the relative merits of naïveté and maturity, his ideals of manliness. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I interpret Conrad’s use of the word “game” more literally to mean *strategic interaction*. Applying the context of strategy to the interpretation of Conrad’s language of games, one finds that it combines Kipling-level attentiveness to British political discourse with Wells-level interest in the

evolutionary bases of human sociality. Like Kipling's, Conrad's attentiveness to game-strategy faults obtuseness and naïveté about imperialism (as exemplified, for instance, by Marlow's "aunt" in *Heart of Darkness* and Captain Mitchell in *Nostromo*), while it applauds the perspicacity and moral maturity of such "onlookers of the game" as Marlow, Martin Decoud, and Mrs. Gould. Like Wells's, Conrad's interest in games responds to evolutionary theory and a pessimistic conception about the violence at the root of human nature. Only Conrad's language of games, however, reaches for an optimistic reconciliation of the strategic with the moral.

I focus in on these issues in *Nostromo* because this novel uses the language of games with explicit reference both to British ludic imperialism and strategy. In *Nostromo*, Charles Gould's typical English bravado and thus "Great Game" obliviousness is contrasted against the strategic insightfulness, and therefore tragic pathos, of Martin Decoud. In the same novel in which Decoud gives explicit definitions of the fundamental concepts of Game Theory, such as "motive," "action," and "decision"—the ruthless Pedro Montero's success as a military dictator is explained in terms of a game-theory-like thought experiment. As I argue, this thought experiment shows a surprising similarity with recent applications of Game Theory to the social sciences and evolutionary theory. I also focus on the game-theory-like quality of what Cedric Watts has called the novel's "wisdom." In a novel about the tragic destinies of characters "short sighted in good and evil" and caught between overlapping scales and temporalities of agency—from the interpersonal to the geopolitical and from the quotidian to the

evolutionary—game-strategy is made to hold the high moral ground. More than his contemporaries, and most of all in *Nostromo*, Conrad suggests that moral and strategic considerations are inseparable.

### Conclusions and Anticipations

What I have said so far, and what I hope to show in the following chapters, leads to three conclusions, which I want to articulate here.

(1) Whereas in recent literary critical discourse “games” have been associated with rationalization and amorality while “play” has been associated with reform and reciprocity, the reverse associations may be found in texts by Kipling, Wells, and Conrad, wherein *games* represent the utopic and reforming possibilities while *play* represents imperialist partiality and bellicosity.

(2) Texts by Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad attest that the language of games in the literature of British Imperialism could run at cross-purposes to the politicized discourse of “game” tropes within Edwardian Britain. In Edwardian Britain, the “Great Game” trope and attendant “games ethos” were implicit guides to moral conduct and rationalizations for imperialism in ideas like personal heroism, vigor, manifest destiny, and white/male supremacy.

Kipling, Wells, and Conrad use game-strategy to point out, criticize, ironize, and undercut this British ludic imperialism. All three authors associate ludic conduct with irresponsibility; and all three authors associate game-strategy with wisdom.

(3) The application of game terms to imperialism in the literature of British Imperialism was not only ideological; it could also be analytical.

This dissertation hopes to make two different interventions in scholarship. One, it reassesses the meaning of games in Kipling, Wells, and Conrad. Two, it develops readerly concerns—about ludic play and strategic interaction and how these map onto ethicality—which, I argue, should be brought to the interpretation of the language of games in the literature of late British imperialism.

## Chapter 1

### **“The Great Game”: Rudyard Kipling Against Ludic Imperialism**

“Each word tastes of the context and contexts  
in which it has lived its socially charged life. . .  
. Language is not a neutral medium that passes  
freely and easily into the private property of  
the speaker's intentions; It is populated—  
overpopulated—with the intentions of others.”

Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” (293, 294)

One who has read Kipling’s correspondence knows to what an extent the author adopted the “game” lingo of his times and social milieu. In forty-seven usages of “game” in his letters between 1911 and 1919, to take a sampling, only seven refer to a literal game (e.g. “*What a stinking game is soccer!*” [293]). By contrast, nine refer to war, as when Kipling dissuades Theodore Roosevelt from rushing off to the Western front: “The present game of war is no show for a middle-aged man” (467). In several instances, game means larks, of which Kipling was a connoisseur as well as practitioner, as when soldiers returned from combat for officer training at Oxford “have their names taken by the porters at the various gates if they are late o’ nights! Never was such a game . . . . They simply say after a while: — ‘Oh! I’m Christ’s – or Corpus or Clare’ – as the case may be: and, in a wonderful

fashion, they are" (413). Sports, war, and larks are frequent referents for "game" in Kipling's correspondence, but more often than not, the game in question is politics:

To MP Max Aitken (the future Lord Beaverbrook): "I never have, and I never intend to back any man as a man — all that has ever concerned me is a man's value in the game, and when I say I have known this man fifteen years I have known his work in and for the game" (69).

To C.R.L. Fletcher, historian and fellow of Magdalen College: "I distinctly approve of the end of your letter to Cathcartic {sic} Wilson.<sup>15</sup> The front part [by contrast] strikes me as superfluous politesse. The game, I think, is to rasp their nerves. Then they have less energy to devote to more important matters" (80).

To Sir Charles P. Crewe: "Now you can see how this will fit into *your* game down South? The dynamite vials in the U.S. should clear the air there [referring to the 1910 bombing of the *LA Times* building, convicted for which crime were 38 union leaders in the metal trades]; the horrors of the coal strike *plus* the silently maturing revolt from within against Trade Union Tyranny should clear the air in England and given a Cons. victory here 'tis just possible that the Union party in S. A. might without

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<sup>15</sup> Cathcart Wilson had recently asked the President of the Board of Education whether he had considered proscribing *The History of England* as a textbook on account of its "very distinct libel on the Irish race" (qtd. in *The Letters of Kipling*, Vol. 4, 80).

imputation of unworthy motives be able to approach the sane Labour on the Rand" (90).

Politics *qua* "the game" (sometimes capitalized) makes many appearances in Kipling's letters to men of distinguished position in the military, the government, the press, or academia: "I have been watching the development of the Winston Churchill game with a little amusement and a good deal of disgust" (218); "The man at the back of this game is [Viscount Richard] *Haldane* and for goodness sake go into it and work it up" (360); "I have given [Sir Francis] Younghusband a card to you as *the* best man I could think of to help him towards meeting the men who will help him in his game which is the Imperial game" (221).<sup>16</sup> As these examples show, the speaker of Kipling's language of games is distant and tactical, worldly and nonplussed, cynical bordering on reactionary. It was the posture Kipling adopted when writing to influence powerful men.

The same speaker may be found throughout Kipling's oeuvre. He is the wry observer of *Departmental Ditties* and *Plain Tales from the Hills*, the cynic who narrates "The Man Who Would Be King" and (in a somewhat shaken form) "The Village Who Voted the Earth is Flat." He is the "Man, my son" of "If." He is not every voice in Kipling's writings. Among Kipling's best works—"On Greenhow Hill" and "Mrs. Bathurst," "'Dayspring Mishandled'" and "The Wish House," "Hymn of the Breaking Strain"—are those stories and poems that explore, undercut, even deride manly posturing. "The game" was not everything for Rudyard Kipling, and it would be a mistake to assume that Kipling was either a

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<sup>16</sup> To Sir Max Aitken, H.A. Gwynne, and Cameron Forbes, respectively.

native or unaware speaker of the language of games. In fact he was neither. Unlike the elite men whom he influenced, Kipling had not gone to a public school and was not an Oxbridge Man. He had not rowed, and he detested cricket and football, as was well known. His school tales *Stalky & Co.* are a send-up of the popular public school novel that got its start in Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857). As one of Kipling's preferred schoolboy types observes about the novels of Frederic Farrar, a latter-day Hughes, "They spent all their spare time stealing at St. Winifred's, when they weren't praying or getting drunk at pubs" (*Stalky & Co.* 62). In place of the sporting Tom, hero of fair play, Kipling offered as the model schoolboy the cunning Stalky. In place of Tom's Rugby, Kipling offered as the model school his idealized vision of the United Services College.

The difference is telling. An apocryphal but widely alluded to story has the Duke of Wellington saying that it was on the playing field of Eton that the battle of Waterloo was won. The idea struck a chord, indeed informed the resurgence of the public school system in the mid-Victorian period. "The production of a grand breed of men for the service of the British nation" was how one headmaster explained the purpose of the public schools (*Lorettonian*, June 1882: 57). As Mangan shows in *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (2000), starting around the 1860s house games—cricket, rugby, and football—became headmasters' primary measure for accomplishing such a production. The degree to which they were successful in linking the house games with the superiority—racial and moral—of the English gentleman is amply



testified to by any copy of *The Boy's Own Paper*, published through at least the First World War. Indeed, the "games ethos" is legion in the archives of British writing. In Henry Newbolt's poem "Vitaï Lampada" (1892)—the refrain of which runs "Play up! play up! and play the game!"—the game is war, the game is empire, and the players are products of the grand English public school system. The Englishman's capacity to "play the game" became testament not only to his valor but especially to his gentlemanly nature. The values house games taught, it was believed, were fair play and *esprit de corps*, self-sacrifice, discipline, and (the hallowed Arnoldian virtue) "moral thoughtfulness." It was for being a better gentleman than his continental peers that the Englishman deserved to rule the world, and the public schools and their games ethos were to thank. As headmaster of Harrow, later Bishop of Calcutta, J. E. C. Welldon explained in 1915, making reference to Kipling's eponymous poem of 1899: "If there is in the British race, as I think there is, a special aptitude for 'taking up the white man's burden' . . . it may be ascribed, above all other causes, to the spirit of organized games" (*Recollections* 146). From as early as the 1850s, then, "the game" was shorthand for the public schools' Victorian code of masculinity, one largely informed by the tenets of muscular Christianity. It is ironic that Welldon should have ascribed the English gentleman's capacity to carry "the white man's burden" to organized games, though, since, as we shall see, Kipling thought this was nonsense. Part of what I want to show here is that Kipling's language of games contradicted the Old Boy's way of talking.

Critics have described the connection between games and Kipling's writings in terms of the author's anti-athleticism and conservative politics. As Mahatma Gandhi (of all readers) could attest, Kipling "described sportsmen as enemies of the mind" (467). Although Kipling was criticizing British complacency in his most notorious swipe at games—that in "The Islanders" (1901) at "the flannelled fools at the wicket" and "the muddied oafs at the goals"—his anti-athleticism, as Gandhi's explanation suggests, has been seen to conform to a conventional wisdom that separates brains from brawn. It is true that Kipling did not play the field-sports as a student at the United Services College (1878-1882), a school like so many others modeled after the public schools. Kipling was furthermore regarded at school as "an aesthete, a romantic, a follower of the Pre-Raphaelites" (Keating 15). These aesthetic allegiances all but confirmed his anti-athleticism (or perhaps it was the other way around), for the British schools "[b]y the late Victorian period . . . [were], too frequently, a polarised world of encouraged 'hearties' and discouraged 'aesthetes', elevated 'bloods' and diminished 'remnants', supported athletes and neglected others" (Mangan, *Athleticism* xxviii). Kipling's intellectual abilities combined with his poor eyesight—his school nickname "Gigger" derived from his wearing eye-glasses or "gig-lamps"—to pigeon-hole him in the latter camp; although, in an exception that proves the rule, Kipling's aesthetic interests promoted him in the eyes of the USC headmaster, Cormell Price, himself a Pre-Raphaelite. As Kipling's first official biographer observed: "There seems never to have been any doubt that 'Gigger' would become a literary man. His defect of sight prevented

him from playing ball-games with the other boys, and gave Price the opportunity to nourish his talents, by special treatment, apart from them" (Carrington 68).

Kipling's aversion to sports has been traced to this start in British life and culture. The implication is that *because* he read (and wrote) he did not play games. Kipling's anti-athleticism was not simply a product of his intellectualism, however, nor was it only the complacency and provincialism of British sports to which Kipling objected but also, and especially, the political fantasies of the games ethos. This fact confuses what has seemed until now the settled case of Kipling's anti-athleticism, for where politics and not art were concerned, Kipling should have been a fan of sports. To G.C. Beresford, Kipling's school friend and the model for the rakish M'Turk in *Stalky & Co.*, Kipling's anti-athleticism was of a piece with his youthful ideals, ones he gave over as he aged. About this change in Kipling from young and liberal to old and reactionary Beresford wondered (as have many critics since),

How are we to account for the transformation of the Epicurean Giglamps, the art and literature crank, the anti-sport, anti-athletic highbrow, the disillusioned Fleet-street too cute to be taken in by the shallow emotions that sway the mob, the versifier with his head in the clouds, laughing at the common ideals of all kinds because they were common, into the Gigger who endorsed, or even boosted, patriotism, militarism, royalism, athleticism, even Jehovahism? (250)

Beresford's incredulity shows how attitudes towards national sports served as one component in a matrix of turn-of-the-century conservative values. By

arguing for a transformation in Kipling's attitudes towards games that reflected the author's turn towards populist conservatism, Beresford covers over the contradiction of a Kipling who might be at once pro-empire and anti-sports. In fact, Kipling never wrote of sports without critiquing their supposed significance to the imperial project.

Bradley Deane points out that the New Imperialist "play ethic" as compared with the public schools' games ethos "placed no particular importance on physicality, and while it could include sport, it also encompassed other ludic forms, such as games of chance or imaginative role-play. Rather than the playing field [furthermore] the locus of the play ethic was the playground, where boys could spontaneously invent any number of games" (89). This shift of emphasis in the British language of games from the playing field—with its universal rights and codified laws—to the playground—with its ad hoc justice and amorphous allegiances—reveals, as Deane explains, the changing politics of British imperialism as mid-Victorian Liberal justifications were superseded by Edwardian New Imperialist justifications. Deane explains that the New Imperialist "play ethic," unlike the Liberal games ethos, was "non-developmental":

[I]t assumed that boys or boyish men were equipped naturally for struggle on the frontier, and that a boyish spirit was so well-suited for the great game of empire that any deviation from it could be crippling. Second, it was situational: each imperial encounter was a new game to be played by locally generated rules rather than by deference to universal

moral strictures. Third, it was self-consciously performative: play required great attention to one's appearance to other players—friend and foe alike—emphasizing role-playing and conduct over interiority, and the forms of competition over its transcendent meaning. Lastly, and correlatively, play was regulated primarily by shame: in its emphasis on external opinions, the play ethic depended less on the inward sanctions of guilt than on the dishonor that followed from failure in the eyes of others. (692-3)

As I argued in the Introduction, these characteristics of British ludic imperialism evolved out of the games ethos of the public schools. As the nineteenth-century came to a conclusion, British ludic imperialism became less about the gentleman's "moral thoughtfulness" and more about performance and competition. As ludic imperialism became less regulated by rules and ideals, it became more regulated by appearances and by the threat of shame.

Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* would seem to confirm these characteristics. Deane has read these stories as proof that "Kipling recommends an imperialism that does not conform to conventional civilized virtues or to traditional liberal justifications, but in place of these he proposes an apparently coherent honor code through which competitive manliness can make the entire enterprise virtuous, meaningful, and satisfying" (48). I find Deane's analysis of the conservative politics of Kipling's language of games insightful. While adopting the public-schools' "game" lingo to appeal to powerful men, Kipling co-opted and altered the language of games in New Imperialist ways. He widened the

“game” lingo’s class appeal, for example, a project that required criticizing middle-class gentrification; and he replaced the Liberal emphasis on playing by the rules with a New Imperialist emphasis on cleverness. After Kipling, playing the game did not mean playing fair but making the system work. Kipling’s hero is not the aristocratic knight but the middle-class bureaucrat.<sup>17</sup> As with Lytton Strachey, who was a member of the “intellectual aristocracy” whose method of practicing authority Strachey employed while criticizing in *Eminent Victorians* (Lubenow), so the part Kipling played in reinventing the masculinist language of games was eminently suited to him. Kipling knew from personal experience both the games ethos and the empire, and his writings helped to create the British man who, in the twentieth century, would use Kipling’s language of games and not Newbolt’s as the language of authority.

However, Kipling’s language of games could also differ significantly from the “game” lingo of such of his contemporaries on the Right as Henry Newbolt, W. E. Hornung, Robert Baden-Powell, Arthur Conan Doyle, P.G. Wodehouse, and Maud Diver. As we may see by tracking Kipling’s use of game-tropes from the sarcasm of “The Verses on Games” to—what has not been sufficiently understood—his exposure of the political irrelevance of “The Great Game” in *Kim* (1901), game-thinking could drive Kipling to criticize both the destructive naïveté of the Liberal “game ethos” and the destructive arrogance of the New

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<sup>17</sup> Kipling’s valorization of the middle-class hero may parallel a contemporaneous change in ideals of masculinity. For how codes of masculinity shifted at the outset of the twentieth century, see Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*; McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win: Sport, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935*; Dudley, 23-25 for a point of comparison in the U.S.A.; and Connell, 186-203, for a wider-angle history.

Imperialist “play ethic.” What the trope of “The Great Game” came to signify for Kipling—perhaps especially after the Second Boer War (1899-1902)<sup>18</sup>—was not justification for imperialism in either Liberal or New Imperialist ideals of manliness but, on the contrary, the falsehood that war is a proving ground where brotherhoods are formed.

### 1. Kipling’s Critique of Gentrification in “The Verses on Games”

Kipling began his reformation of his readers’ attitudes towards the games ethos in such highly publicized works as “The Islanders” and *Stalky & Co.*, yet more revealing of Kipling’s attitudes towards the games ethos than either of these is his little-known “Verses on Games.” These Kipling wrote, fittingly, for fun. *The New Review* had sent William Nicholson to Rottingdean, where the Kiplings then resided, to make a woodcut portrait of the author, the famous one that shows a middle-aged Kipling in profile. Nicholson was meantime at work on an *Almanac of Twelve Sports*, a calendar for 1898. Apparently inspired by the artwork and concept, Kipling offered to write verses for each month, the title and concluding pages (Lycett 308-9; Ricketts 238-9). The twelve sports, one for each month, are Hunting, Coursing, Racing, Boating, Fishing, Cricket, Archery, Coaching, Shooting, Golf, Boxing, and Skating.

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<sup>18</sup> For Kipling’s observations about the Second Boer War, see Ricketts 260-267. Evidence that the Second Boer War influenced Kipling’s thinking about modern warfare appears in his poetry on the war (for a list of these works, see the Kipling Society website), in some asides in *The New Army in Training* (1914), as well as in a revealing passage about trenches in *Souvenirs from France* (1933).

“The Verses on Games” reveal that Kipling knew what games could mean to a certain class of British person about race and nationality, religion and social status. In the verses, Kipling attacks three aspects of the games ethos: its squierarchical pretensions, its muscular Christianity, and its racialism. That the speaker of the verse-accompaniments will flaunt his readers’ expectations—as the illustrations will not—is announced in the title piece:

Here is a horse to tame—

Here is a gun to handle—

God knows you can enter the game

If you'll only pay for the same

And the price of the game is a candle—

One single flickering candle.

The attitude of the speaker is that of the outsider addressing a confidante, a not unfamiliar pose in Kipling’s writings. The reader is invited to confess that he would rather read about the country sports in the comfort of his library than undertake the physical exertion they require. “The game,” in this case, is the pleasure of vicarious experience; its playing requires neither risk nor skill but only the light to read by. And, as the speaker admits in the first month “Hunting,” he himself knows about the gentry’s sports only through reading about them in, for instance, Robert Smith Surtees’s hunting novels *Jorrocks’ Jaunts and Jollities* (1838), *Handley Cross* (1843), *Mr. Sponge’s Sporting Tour* (1853), and *Mr. Romford’s Hounds* (1865):

Certes it is a noble sport



And men have quitted selle and swum for't.

But I am of a weaker sort

And I prefer Surtees in comfort.

Reach down my "Handley Cross" again,

My run, where never danger lurks, is

With Jorrocks and his deathless train—

Pigg, Benjamin and Artaxerxes!

In the first two poems of "The Verses on Games," Kipling signals his distance from "the 'huntin', shootin', fishin' gentry of late Georgian and early Victorian England" (Mangan, *Imperialism* 100). Indeed, his conspiratorial attitude in the poems suggests that he does not believe himself to be addressing this gentry. Rather the poems seek a double confession from the reader: first, that the reader is not a hunter by tradition but by aspiration; and second, that, in truth, the reader, like the speaker, feels there is something off-putting, even absurd, about the gentry's sports.

Kipling's sarcasm at the expense of the gentry's sports is for the enjoyment of a middle-class reader, the same kind who grew up with boys' adventures tales in the weeklies and who was the primary object of the public schools' games ethos. To understand the object of sarcasm in "The Verses on Games," it is helpful to recall the composition of the British middle class the verses address. As I argued in the Introduction, the British elite in the early part of the nineteenth century was divided between two powerful factions, an

ascendant money-making class and a residual land-owning class. In conformance with Antonio Gramsci's law of hegemony, the middle class aspired to appear as one with the country aristocracy they were slowly overtaking.<sup>19</sup> Money-making families sought to distance themselves culturally from the business ventures which had given them access to cultural prestige in the first place. The public schools and their many imitators (of which the USC was one, albeit an idiosyncratic one) were the means by which the landed and the moneyed formed an alliance. It was at the public schools that the two British factions, moneyed and landed, met and intermingled, going on together at Oxbridge; and it was the purpose of the public schools to produce the "gentleman," a happy medium between pure leisure and "money-grubbing."<sup>20</sup>

Kipling was ambivalent about this complex orientation of Britain's elite, but when in England and talking to the English, he tended more to criticize than endorse the gentrification of the middle classes. Such is the case in those "Verses on Games" which cover gentry sports, such as "Hunting," "Coursing," "Shooting," and "Archery". The illustration for "Archery" (July), for instance, shows a young woman archer, rosy cheeked, in a white bonnet and a hoop-frame dress. The verse is as follows:

The Child of the Nineties considers with laughter  
The maid whom his Sire in the Sixties ran after,  
While careering himself in pursuit of a girl, whom

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<sup>19</sup> See Mangan, *Athleticism* 129.

<sup>20</sup> See Wiener 3-26.

The Twenties will dub a "last century heirloom".

The poem strikes a progressive note, showing up the folly of the reader's atavism by comparing it to a widely accepted law of courtship. Adopting a middle-class circumspection about fashion, the speaker implies that what is desirable today, such as archery itself, will soon be markedly outdated. In addition to the silliness of gentry fashions, folly to adopt since they are already outdated, Kipling questions, too, the consistency of the gentry's posturing. Certainly there is very little *noblesse* about slaughtering birds after Christmas day, as "Shooting" (September) suggests. The same middle-class circumspection makes a more serious charge in "Coaching" (August). The illustration shows a red coach atop which sit four gentlemen in top hats. Abreast the driver sits a lady dressed in black with trailing ribbons in her bonnet. The atmosphere is jubilant. Writes Kipling:

The Pious Horse to church may trot,  
A maid may work a man's salvation,  
Four horses and a girl are not  
However, aids to reformation.

It is significantly a middle-class skepticism as much as moralism that indicts these gentry. Kipling originally proposed a more pointed version of this attack, although the lines were rejected by Heinemann, the publisher:

Youth on the box and Liquor in the boot,  
My Lord drives out with My Lord's prostitute.

Where *The Almanac* depicts the gentry's sports, Kipling undermines whatever might appear heroic, noble, or dignified about them.

It was the first task of one who would criticize the middle-class's faith in sports to separate out and denounce their squierarchical pretensions to the sporting life. The second was to interrogate their properly middle-class muscular Christianity. And indeed, having so far dispensed with those sports not proper to the suburban elite, Kipling turns in such poems as "Boating" and "Cricket" to savage muscular Christianity. In "Boating"—athletic rowing on the Thames, not the leisure activity as it is depicted, for instance, in Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889)—the speaker appears to conform to the familiar gestures of the laudatory verse in the school magazines devoted to athletics yet subtly undercuts the religious reasoning on which such verse was often founded. The illustration shows the rowers' coach on horseback, calling to them from the bank, as was the nineteenth-century practice. The verse is as follows:

The Pope of Rome he could not win  
From pleasant meat and pleasant sin  
These who, in honour's hope, endure  
Lean days and lives enforced pure.  
These who, replying not, submit  
Unto the curses of the Pit  
Which he that rides (O greater shame!)  
Flings forth by number not by name ... [sic]  
Could Triple Crown or Jesuit's oath

Do what yon shuffle-stock doth!

John Radcliffe, who has annotated the "Verses on Games," offers in explanation, "Kipling's point is that in enforcing abstinence the dictates of religion are as nothing compared with the discipline of training." The references to Catholicism, however, are too conspicuous if that were the versifier's only meaning. That Catholicism should be bested by the proselytism of Anglican muscular Christianity seems, indeed, an irrelevant message until one considers the historical intricacies by which the games ethos became installed in the public schools.

Although Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* played an important role in inspiring the public's faith in the games ethos, organized games were not established at Rugby under Thomas Arnold. Rather the games ethos was installed programmatically by subsequent headmasters, such as C. J. Vaughan, Head of Harrow (1845-1859); G. E. L. Cotton, Head at Marlborough (1852-1858); Edward Thring, Head of Uppingham (1853-87); H. H. Almond, Head of Loretto (1862-1903); and Nathaniel Woodard who established Lancing College in 1857 (Mangan xx). All were clergy in the Anglican Church, as befitted the headmasters of public schools, and all save Woodard were muscular Christians, although they drew their philosophies from disparate sources.<sup>21</sup> Woodard had

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Kingsley was a personal friend of Vaughan's and "regularly preached and dined at Harrow" (Mangan, *Athleticism* 30); Thring admired the gymnasiums of German education and was a reader of Scott, Tennyson, and Kingsley, but, in contrast to Almond, was not a votary to Spencer or Darwin; while Almond drew his Muscular Christianity from passages in which Ruskin makes Wordsworthian praise of the outdoors, as well as Spencer and Archibald MacLaren, the Scottish educationalist and author of *A System of Physical Education, Theoretical and*

ties to the Oxford Movement but made athleticist hires in William Sterne Raymond, E. C. Lowe and his successor as headmaster in Henry Walford. About his rationale, Mangan writes:

The truth of the matter was that Woodard badly needed a headmaster of demonstrably rugged Christianity. . . . because the Woodard system had suffered during the early 1850s from accusations of 'Popish practices,' . . . which had given the schools an undesirable image as places of womanish piety and effeminate Puseyism. (Mangan, *Athleticism* 40)

Woodard's case reveals the anti-Puseyism of the games ethos, which is also on display in Kipling's "Boating." It is significant in this regard that Stonyhurst, a Jesuit public school, was one of the very last schools to adopt organized games and was among the least influenced by the games ethos (*Ibid.*, 94).

"Boating" might seem to conform to Anglican chauvinism but for the fact that the speaker's references to Catholicism are too bald to be taken literally. (Indeed, the satirical bent of all "The Verses on Games" makes it impossible for the attentive reader to take any one at face value.) "Boating" winks at its reader, presenting the Oxford Movement's indiscipline and effeminacy as ready-made and thus cliché. Granting the relevance of Catholicism to boating only calls in the games ethos for ridicule. Even while suggesting that the Pope's is a heavenly separation while the coach's a hellish one, the speaker nevertheless underscores that Boating, like Catholicism, is hierarchical. "Boating" implies that the games

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*Practical* (1869) who opened the gymnasium at Oxford in 1858 and devised the Army's new physical training program in 1861 (Mangan, *Athleticism* 50). For more on MacLaren, see McIntosh, Peter C. "MacLaren, Archibald (1819?–1884)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: OUP, 2004.

ethos is more Popish than its Anglican proponents would like to admit at the same time it calls into question one of the games ethos's cardinal virtues in *esprit de corps*.

The most provocatively heterodox of Kipling's "Verses on Games" is undoubtedly "Cricket." Cricket was (and by some estimations remains) the British sport *par excellence* and was the one game more than any other that signified in imperialist and racist ways. To understand how Kipling's "Cricket," to which we shall presently turn, undercuts the logic of cricket as the British largely understood it, it is important to recognize that the morality of cricket was perceived as at once testament to and reason for the British person's right to rule the world. A comprehensive example of the moral significance of cricket as it was commonly evoked in games ethos verse, sermons, and stories is provided by E. W. Hornung, a popular novelist, fervent imperialist and games ethos preacher (Tozer 11-26). Less than a month before the outbreak of the First World War, Hornung was delivering a sermon on "The Game of Life" in his annual appearance before the assembled boys at Uppingham. The sermon amounts to an extended analogy between Anglican life and cricket. As Hornung draws the moral:

For here now "we see through a glass darkly" so darkly that try as we will, we cannot see the score; so darkly that we can hardly see to play the game; but not so darkly that we are going to appeal against the light—nor so darkly that we cannot be sportsmen and glory in the difficulties we have to overcome. Who wants an easy victory? Who wants a life of full-

pitches to leg? Do you think the Great Scorer is going to give you four runs every time for those? I believe with all my heart and soul that in this splendidly difficult Game of Life it is just the cheap and easy triumph which will be written in water on the score-sheet. And the way we played for our side, in the bad light, on the difficult pitch: the way we backed up and ran the other man's runs; . . . surely, surely it is these things above all that will count, when the innings is over, in the Pavilion of Heaven. (37)

Hornung's analogy might appear over-extended, but in fact he was drawing from a well-established tradition. Henry Drumond's *Baxter's Second Innings* (1892), for example, premises a novel on the same analogy, making a devil of the Bowler, temptation of the different pitches, and a Pilgrim's Progress of Baxter's improvement as a batter (Mangan, *Athleticism* 204-205). Indeed, "It's just not cricket" is a British slang term for unfairness or bad conduct.

This "moral thoughtfulness"—as Thomas Hughes described Thomas Arnold's pedagogical goal at Rugby—of the English gentleman was believed to give him a right to rule over the native (Mangan, *Imperialism* 51). It would not be going too far to aver that the "sporting" British gentleman was built upon a rhetoric of contrast from the native "Other."<sup>22</sup> Such a view was of a piece with what scholars have shown to be a ubiquitous "child-race" theory among literate Britons, wherein the colonized were seen to exhibit childish understandings and

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<sup>22</sup> I am indebted to Mangan's work here as earlier in this chapter for his recovery of the full significance of the games ethos—its imperialism, racism, and militarism—in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.



morality.<sup>23</sup> The child-race theory not only installed the gentleman as the native's moral superior but also teacher and parent. As Sir Francis Younghusband, Commander of the British Expedition to Tibet in 1904, explains in *The Heart of a Continent* (1896),

It is not because we are any cleverer than the natives of India, because we have more brains or bigger heads than they have, that we rule India; but because we are stronger morally than they are. Our superiority over them is not due to mere sharpness of intellect, but to the higher moral nature to which we have attained in the development of the human race. (396-397)

Younghusband's pronouncement was no more novel than Hornung's analogy. His claim is that the British gentleman has a more advanced moral nature, or civility, than the colonial subjects. The implication is that India is better off under British rule because the British are more ethical and charitable than would-be Indian leaders. These ideas are present also in, for example, the following argument by Sir Frederick Lugard (1858-1945), Governor of Hong Kong from 1907-1912 and Governor-General of Nigeria from 1914-1919:

The English public schoolboy has from infancy been habituated to the standards which 2,000 years of Christian ethics have created in the society in which he lives. In his home-life, in the books he reads, among the people with whom he mixes, he has learnt to discriminate between what is honourable and what is dishonourable. He is well aware when he transgresses the unwritten code. Among primitive people this ethical code

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<sup>23</sup> See Mangan, *Imperialism* 109-115; Huttenback 15; and Heussler 182.

has to a large extent to be created by the force of example, and hence the necessity, at least in the early stages, of a strong British staff of the right type, who in the daily social intercourse and in the play-fields will impress on the boys what the school expects of its members: self-respect devoid of vanity, truthfulness, courage, good manners, self-control and honesty—because these qualities are the necessary essentials which make a gentleman. (9)

Lugard here combines the religious education of cricket with the child-race theory to produce the full imperialist logic of the games ethos. The British boy (of the right type) becomes a gentleman on the cricket field, where his sportsmanship proves what makes him a gentleman. The next logical step, as Lugard's insistence on the importance of the example of British staff "in daily social intercourse and in the play-fields" indicates, is that a gentleman may civilize the lawless native on the very playing field where he learned his moral code.

So sincerely did the British hold to their belief in the efficacy of cricket to instill Christian morality that British colonial administrators introduced schools for native elite modeled on the British public schools.<sup>24</sup> Wherever colonized people took up cricket, it was hailed as a sign of the success of the civilizing

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<sup>24</sup> In India, for instance, public schools for the higher castes were established in the wake of the Indian Mutiny as one among a number of measures in the new British policy of "indirect rule." Chester Macnaghten (1843-96), headmaster from 1870 at Rajkumar College in Kathiawar, a "Chiefs College," was a fervent proponent of the games ethos and, as one of his students recalled, would "read his Indian princes the passage from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in which the Captain of the Eleven (Tom Brown himself) kept his team steady and faced his work bravely in a match crisis" (Mangan, *Imperialism* 133).

mission. So opined Theodore Leighton Pennell (1867-1912), a medical missionary to Afghanistan who opened schools there, in *Among the Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier* (1909):

The old order changes and gives place to the new. The simpler native games are gradually giving place to the superior attractions of cricket and football, and the tournaments between schools of the provinces are doing much . . . to develop among these frontier people a fascination for these sports which have done so much to make England what she is. (157)

A similar subscription to the games ethos inspired the work of Cecil Earle Tyndale-Biscoe (1863-1949), headmaster of Church Missionary School in Srinagar, Kashmir from 1890-1947. “The *preux chevalier* of imperial Christian knights,” in Mangan’s estimation, he made games the cornerstone of his moral reform programs (Mangan, *Imperialism* 177-90). He could consider his work done in 1922 after observing “an inter-class match, most keenly contested, the referee being not a teacher but a schoolboy. His decision was not once disputed, nor was there any altercation between any of the players; it was a truly sporting game” (280). Within the imperialist reasoning of the games ethos, cricket (and occasionally football) was seen as a moral instrument, fully as capable of civilizing the native as making a Christian gentleman of the Briton.

Kipling’s “Cricket” takes as its subject, then, not only the public school game par excellence but also the source of the games ethos’s most high-flown rhetoric. Many believed that Britain owed her national sovereignty, her morality, her racial superiority, and thus her imperial supremacy to cricket. Kipling’s

“Cricket” undermines the racial as well as religious understandings on which the imperialist games ethos placed the British sportsman over the native:

Thank God who made the British Isles  
And taught me how to play,  
I do not worship crocodiles  
Or bow the knee to clay.

Give me a willow wand, and I,  
With hide and cork and twine,  
From century to century  
Will gambol round my Shrine.

The grounds on which the speaker claims his ethnic superiority betray his similarity to the native superstition he deprecates. Here the cricketer’s bat is transformed into the warlock’s wand; the wicket becomes a fetishistic shrine; and the communion of play, which the clergy proponents of the games ethos had elevated to a divine worship, is debased into an animalistic, sacrilegious dance or “gambol.” The poem implies that the British veneration of a game is every bit as superstitious as the native’s idolatry; and yet worse, for at least the native’s god is modeled on an animal of great ferocity or a symbol of creation, whereas the British have made a god of a game.

Like “Boating,” “Cricket” draws its significance from its participation in the prevalent rhetoric of the games ethos; but where “Boating” establishes the received contrast between Catholicism and muscular Christianity only to subvert

the games ethos's religious chauvinism, "Cricket" utilizes the construction of the "British gentleman" by his contrast to the "native" to subvert the games ethos's racial logic. No doubt *The Almanac of Twelve Sports*, a mere sporting calendar for 1898, was conceived with a view to sales and entertainment. But we should not underestimate the provocation of "Cricket" or the other "Verses on Games."

Kipling's circumspect attitude draws his reader into an identification with the speaker. The elevated heights from which the speaker casts derision on the gentry sports is a ploy to gain his ascent as a middle-class man. After lulling the reader into a feeling of superiority, the speaker turns round, in "Boating" and "Cricket," and lays bear to the reader a hypocrisy which strikes nearer to home. The reader's precious beliefs in the games ethos are shown to be corrupted with contradiction and ignorance. Kipling's endpiece reveals an awareness that he has thus upset the reader's expectations:

Now we must come away.

What are you out of pocket?

Sorry to spoil your play

But somebody says we must pay,

And the candle's down to the socket—

Its horrible tallowy socket.

The introduction of ugly materialist concerns ("somebody must pay"; "Its horrible tallowy socket") is an indictment of the reader's effete pretensions to leisure ("sorry to spoil your play").

The same spoil-sport made a less humorous appeal to middle-class readers of clubland in “The Islanders” (1901). In “The Islanders,” as in *The Verses on Games*, Kipling addresses country sports only to denounce his readers’ pretensions to leisure; but Kipling was an even more stringent critic of the public school games, for it was these he believed had lulled a powerful professional class into easy feelings of moral and racial superiority in addition to military and imperial ability. On the very same grounds the ethic claimed superiority Kipling shows inferiority: the games ethos is hierarchical, despite its insistence on Anglican *esprit de corps*; it is superstitious, despite its insistence that it instills true religion; and it trivializes war, despite its insistence that it prepares men for battle.

## 2. *Stalky & Co.* and a new “games ethos”

Few readers have failed to notice the contrast between Thomas Hughes’s reverent *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* and Kipling’s markedly irreverent *Stalky & Co.*<sup>25</sup> The significance of the difference has been insufficiently remarked upon. In fact, Kipling was quite consciously re-writing the schoolboy genre established by Hughes in order to rescue a new games ethos from the parochialism of the old. He does this by inverting the major components in Hughes’s story—offering a crass prep school in place of an honored public school, an aesthetical (and non-clergy) headmaster in place of the deeply religious Thomas Arnold, and scrappy,

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<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Marcus 67-68 and Quigly xiv.

conniving schoolboys in place of the “moral thoughtfulness” of the Tom Brown-type hero. The games ethos Kipling offers in place of Hughes’s is encapsulated by the idea of stalkiness, an honorific the boys come up with to describe Stalky’s capacity to play tricks and get away with them, often framing the victim of the prank for the perpetrator. One way to sum up what we have so far seen to be Kipling’s criticism of his readers’ faith in games as educative measures, and as indications of moral, racial, and national superiority, would be to see it as an indictment of his readers’ credulity. *Stalky & Co.*—a sort of anti-*Tom Brown’s Schooldays*—is concerned to show the value of skepticism, in school as well as in service to the Empire.

Much of Kipling’s derision for the games ethos finds its way into *Stalky & Co.*, yet these stories are interested not only to criticize but also to reform the public’s faith in games. Kipling’s understanding of the suburban elite’s religious, military, and racial beliefs in games, the depth of which I have argued for by setting his *Verses on Games* into the rhetorical contexts in which their anti-athleticism becomes fully significant, is above all demonstrated by his strategy of reform. *Stalky & Co.* is just the right kind of fantasy to correct the old and reinstall a new games ethos. Mangan’s work has left no doubt that the games ethos was instilled through the efforts of the public schools; what must be understood, equally, is that this effort could not have been successful without the ideological support of the Bildungsroman. Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* did much to inform the public’s subscription to a school model wherein moral training took precedence over scholarship. Moreover, the games ethos is in itself

a Bildungsroman: its militarist, racial, and religious arguments each depend upon the virtues games were thought to instill in “children,” whether understood as British youths or Indian or African adults. By offering a coming of age story that draws an explicit link between school and imperial service, all while explicitly denouncing public school games along with the entire public school model, *Stalky & Co.* addresses the games ethos at its very source.

That Kipling once again knew what he was up to is suggested by an 1899 letter to his former USC headmaster Cornell Price, a close and lifelong friend. “I’m going to dedicate the book to you,” wrote Kipling, “and it will cover (incidentally) the whole question of modern education. Ordained headmasters and people of the Welldon and Farrar types will weep and howl at it: but we of the genuine congregation will approve” (*Letters* 2.359). As for Farrar, Stalky and his friends cast endless fun on his stories. “An Unsavoury Interlude,” a story in which the boys kill a cat to stink out a rival house, begins with the boys reading Farrar’s *St. Winifred’s, or the World of School* (1862), about which M’Turk quips (as I quoted earlier): “They spent all their spare time stealing at St. Winifred’s, when they weren’t praying or getting drunk at pubs” (62). In another story M’Turk quotes *Eric, or, Little by Little* (1858): “‘Corporal punishment produced on Eric the worst effects. He burned not with remorse or regret’—make a note o’ that, Beetle—’but with shame and violent indignation. He glared’—oh, naughty Eric! Let’s get to where he goes in for drink” (72). Stalky puts a point on his disbelief in Farrar’s fantasies of public school life: “‘The Sixth,’ he says, ‘is the palladium of all public schools.’ But this lot—” Stalky rapped the gilded book—“can’t prevent



fellows drinkin' and stealin', an' lettin' fags out of window at night, an'—an' doin' what they please. Golly, what we've missed—not goin' to St. Winifred's!" (62). Farrar's phrases become a running joke among the boys, who call one another "pure minded boy" when they are hatching a plan or have broken the rules.

The narrator of the Stalky stories approves of the protagonists' disdain for organized games. Stalky, Beetle, and M'Turk, in turn, often measure the inferiority of the other boys by their love of cricket. As they put it in an early story, "They play cricket and say: 'Yes, sir,' and 'O, sir,' and 'No, sir'" (50). The housemasters, all typical in being subscribers to the games ethos, frequently admonish Stalky & Co. for failing to attend house matches, which they miss because they are engaged in one of their schemes or romping around the countryside. Kipling's point in making his model schoolboys' lovers of outdoor romps and haters of the house matches is astonishingly apropos. By studying boys' diaries, Mangan has discovered that amusements before the era of athleticism included bird-shooting, nesting, duck-hunting, and "'toozling' or chasing and killing birds in the hedgerows" (*Athleticism* 19)—all favorites of Stalky, M'Turk, and Beetle. "The important point," Mangan stresses, "is that one of the origins of athleticism lay in the utilisation of games as a form of *social control*" (*Athleticism* 28). In *Stalky & Co.*, Kipling very purposefully brings out the repressive function of the compulsory games. In one instance in which Beetle has been pretending to lend money, "Prout [a housemaster] expounded to Beetle the enormity of money-lending, which, like everything except compulsory cricket,

corrupted houses and destroyed good feeling among boys, made youth cold and calculating, and opened the door to all evil" (105). In another exchange with Mr. Prout, the narrator lauds his boys for resisting just such measures of control.

Prout asks,

"Why can't you three take any interest in the honor of your house?"

They had heard that phrase till they were wearied. The "honor of the house" was Prout's weak point, and they knew well how to flick him on the raw.

"If you order us to go down, sir, of course we'll go," said Stalky, with maddening politeness. But Prout knew better than that. He had tried the experiment once at a big match, when the three, self-isolated, stood to attention for half an hour in full view of all the visitors, to whom fags, subsidized for that end, pointed them out as victims of Prout's tyranny. And Prout was a sensitive man.

In the infinitely petty confederacies of the Common-room, King and Macrea, fellow house-masters, had borne it in upon him that by games, and games alone, was salvation wrought. Boys neglected were boys lost. They must be disciplined. Left to himself, Prout would have made a sympathetic house-master; but he was never so left, and with the devilish insight of youth, the boys knew to whom they were indebted for his zeal.

"Must we go down, sir?" said M'Turk.

"I don't want to order you to do what a right-thinking boy should do gladly. I'm sorry." And he lurched out with some hazy impression that he had sown good seed on poor ground. (73)

Prout's belief in games, whether honestly held or professed on account of peer pressure, accords well with Mangan's account of athleticism in the public schools. Housemasters with athletic skills were seen to exemplify the period's ideals in boyishness and were increasingly sought after and valorized.<sup>26</sup> Games were thought to provide an occasion for the boys to admire their housemasters, thus dispelling, as Edward Thring theorizes, any "spirit of antagonism" between the boys and the masters (126). Yet in *Stalky & Co.*, as exemplified by the above passage, games oftener serve as a source of antagonism between the boys and the housemasters. The boys' exchange with Mr. Prout also reveals what was insidious about compulsory games. About C. J. Vaughan, an early installer of compulsory games, Mangan notes his "sophisticated approach . . . to the introduction of organized games, namely permitting the initiative to be seen to come from the boys through their apparent creation of the Philathletic Club" (*Athleticism* 34). That the boys love the games was an important conceit of the games ethos, for it argued that the moral superiority of the British born was in fact natural and only needed occasion to show itself. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, importantly, the football match that serves to so elevate Tom in his peers' estimation is voluntarily struck up. Mangan has shown, however, that compulsory games were installed, quite programmatically, from the top down.

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<sup>26</sup> See Mangan, *Athleticism* 115-16.

The boys get out of going to the match, it is important to note, by putting pressure on this inconsistency behind the logic of compulsory games.

In *Stalky & Co.*, Kipling valorizes the boys' lawlessness and larking. The stories are exuberant tales of survival and comeuppance that find humor in a harsh school life of frequent canings, boys' brouhahas, and inadequate heating and food. This life of survival is punctuated by rare pleasures such as nude bathing in the summertime sea, afternoon "brews" of "coffee, cocoa, buns, new bread hot and steaming, sardine, sausage, ham-and-tongue paste . . . and Devonshire cream," as well as opportunities for heroics and justice. In one story, the boys build a secret hideout in the countryside, to which they repair to smoke, a practice the narrator applauds: "In summer all right-minded boys built huts in the furze-hill behind the College—little lairs whittled out of the heart of the prickly bushes, full of stumps, odd root-ends, and spikes, but, since they were strictly forbidden, palaces of delight" (29). Kipling's success in resuscitating the pre-Arnoldian boarding school in *Stalky & Co.* is indicated by Robert Buchanan's scathing review of the stories: "It is simply impossible to show by mere quotation the horrible vileness of the book describing these three small fiends in human likeness; only a perusal of the whole work would convey to the reader its truly repulsive character . . . The vulgarity, the brutality, the savagery . . . reeks on every page" (*Kipling Critical Heritage* 244-245).

The positive side of Kipling's criticism of the old games ethos is a new games ethos centered on the concept of stalkiness, which is shown to have use both at school and in service to the British Empire. In "The Impressionists," the

boys regain the privacy of their study, which they have been recently denied, by working upon the housemasters' fears of money-lending and homosexual behavior among the boys. Lending the impression that these are running rampant in Prout's house proves all too easy. M'Turk analogizes the boys' tactics to Jiu-jitsu: "These wrestler-chaps have got some sort of trick that lets the other chap do all the work. Then they give a little wriggle, and he upsets himself" (115). One need not work very hard to lend an impression where impressions are expected. Another "Stalky" story explicitly links the usefulness of such stalky tactics as seeming innocence and lending impressions to imperial service. The story finds the USC comrades grown-up, recalling their recent experiences in the 1895 defense of Chitral, a fort in the far northwest of British India. The narrator, speaking for the first time in first person, retains the boys' nicknames for the adult soldiers. Dick Four and Tertius (occasional compatriots of the boys at the USC) come across Stalky holed up in a fort, outnumbered, under-provisioned, and over-exposed. He puts to the purposes of war his well-worn USC tactic of setting would-be enemies against one another to escape an otherwise inevitable destruction. The Malôts and the Khye-Kheens—made-up names for two indigenous groups—have put away past antagonisms to oust the British. In the middle of the night, Stalky sneaks across enemy lines and begins firing from the Malôts's line on the Khye-Kheens. Dick Four and Tertius, back at the fort, realize Stalky's "game" (290) when he plays on the bugle a well-loved song from their schoolday larks. The men at the fort sneak over the Khye-Kheens lines and begin firing on the Malôts. What he learned as a boy is shown to be of use to Stalky as a

soldier in the British Empire: lending an impression in which one's adversary is predisposed to believe—in this case that one's traditional enemy has betrayed one—can allow a weaker force to overcome a stronger one.

By offering an alternative understanding of “games” to the public school field sports, Kipling was upsetting the conventional wisdom. Kipling's explanation of the defense of Chitral is in such pointed contradiction to Welldon's account of the same that one suspects Kipling knew of the latter's. Welldon had written,

I do not think I am wrong in saying that the sport, the pluck, the resolution, and the strength which have within the last few weeks animated the little garrison at Chitral and the gallant force that has accomplished their deliverance are effectively acquired in the cricket-fields and football fields of the great public schools, and in the games of which they are the habitual scenes. (Welldon, “The Imperial Purpose of Education” 829)

Kipling's account of the events could not offer a more contradictory reasoning. By offering an anti-athletic understanding of games, and by showing this to be responsible for effective military action, Kipling was installing his idea of the “game” and British duty in place of the conventional one. And, as we have seen, Kipling's idea of the “game” meant *stalkiness*, not fair play.

### 3. “The Great Game” and *Kim*

So far we have seen how Kipling criticized the whole of the ideological edifice of British games, sparing neither the traditional gentry sports nor the field sports of middlebrow Britain. *Stalky & Co.* shows how Kipling wished to replace stalkiness for fair-play in his readers' understanding of the relation between "the game" and British duty. How, finally, does what I have shown to be Kipling's intervention in the imperialist conception of games inform our appreciation of *Kim*, a novel in which The Great Game vies with other all-informing metaphors such as The Wheel of Life, The Search, and The Way?

No one who has read Edward Said's magisterial rendering of the colonialist logics embedded at every level of Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* can doubt its ethnocentrism. As is well known, Kipling's jingoism and racism are more or less blatantly on display throughout his verse, speechifying, and fiction. Nevertheless, as Harish Trivedi has recently argued, "because he knew the Raj so well on the basis of wide-ranging exploration as a journalist and sensitive observation as an artist, Kipling also had a more critical and ironical awareness of its defects and deficiencies, its pretensions and limitations, than most of his smug official contemporaries, who indeed were the Raj" (xliii-iv). For reasons I want to explain in this chapter, a contemporary reader who was conservative and attentive could not have been very satisfied with Kipling's handling of "The Great Game" concept in *Kim*. Yet this critical dimension of the novel has been lost owing to a widespread but ill-informed understanding of the historical Great Game, on the one hand, and an only partial understanding of the novel's development of the Great Game thematic, on the other.

Said for his part discovered a key way in which the ideology of “The Great Game” informs the structure of *Kim*. As we saw in the introduction, the “games ethos” of the British public schools asked boys to think of foreign service, as Said explains, “as similar less to a story—linear, continuous, temporal—than to a playing field—many dimensional, discontinuous, and spatial” (298). Writing about the new imperialist politics of the late nineteenth-century and the connected rise of a “romance of endless boyhood”—in which *Kim* may certainly seem to take part—Bradley Deane has observed similarly that “each imperial encounter was a new game to be played by locally generated rules rather than by deference to universal moral strictures” (693).

This insight into the ideological function of “The Great Game” trope informs Said’s brilliant comparison of *Kim* to such of its contemporaries as Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, James’s *Portrait of a Lady*, Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*, and Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*. Whereas in these late-nineteenth century European novels, “the protagonist . . . is someone who realizes that his or her life’s project—the wish to be great, rich, or distinguished—is mere fancy, illusion, dream,” *Kim* concludes with its protagonist “at the beginning of a new and satisfying life, having helped the lama to achieve his dream of redemption, the British to foil a serious plot, the Indians to continue enjoying prosperity under Britain” (323). The logic informing this difference conforms to the imperialist fantasy of the games ethos. For while Europe is presented as a narrative-bound “driven world of hastening disaster,” India is presented as a vast playing field



where “time is on your side” (328). It is a crucial insight into the psychological appeal, and thus the ideological functionality, of the games ethos.

That India is a playground for the picaresque was, as Said shows, a common conceit, and one much believed in when Kipling wrote *Kim*. For Said, *Kim* never strays from the conceit, and indeed what enables this ideological transformation of India in *Kim* into a *great game* is—and this is the whole thrust of Said’s argument about the novel—the authority of British rule. Thus, The Great Game provides Kipling with “the device . . . by which British control over India . . . coincides in detail with Kim’s disguise fantasy to be at one with India;” or, as Said neatly formulates the relationship: “The political hold of the one [affords for] the aesthetic and psychological pleasure of the other” (330). Kim may *play*, in other words, because Creighton, the English anthropologist and master strategist, is calling the shots from above; and Creighton calls the right plays because his men on the ground, especially Kim and Hurree Babu, see and hear all. It is a perfect system, one that removes potential threat making the whole operation more akin to a *game* than to the historical predicament it was. If, as Edmund Wilson claimed, there is no real conflict in *Kim*, this is (argues Said) revealing of the extent to which Kipling himself had bought into, ultimately contributed to, the rosy (and of course rationalizing) Great-Game-view of India.

Yet, Said’s reading provides only, as it were, one-half of the way *Kim* employs the signifying potential of the Great Game. To understand the other half, it is necessary to review the final one hundred pages of the novel, for these reveal, pace Said, that there *is* a conflict in the novel, that it is between Kim, who

represents “The Great Game,” and the lama who represents “The Way.” The novel does not ultimately side with Kim. Furthermore, what drives the novel’s criticism of *ludic* imperialism is a *strategic* appreciation of British rule in India. In fact, and as Kipling makes apparent through what he has Hurree Babu say, Kim has not “helped the British to foil a serious plot” because the plot, *that plot*, is not serious. The serious plot in *Kim* is not the strategic stalemate between Russia and Great Britain that could cause certain European powers to try to cause another Indian uprising; it is that Kim, who unlike Kipling knows nothing of this, is offered no good alternative to the lama’s renunciation or subscription to British rule. The “Game” in *Kim* does not signal freedom from European constraint but an attentiveness to strategy that reveals what motivates and delimits the conduct of its characters.

The purpose of the final third of *Kim* is to develop and bring to crisis the novel’s central conflict between Kim, who is becoming more and more enamored of British authority and the Great Game of empire, and the lama, who views earthly subscriptions such as Kim’s as illusory and tending towards harm. Kim cannot play the Game and follow the Way. That Kim knows as much as early as his reunion with the lama in Chapter 11 is indicated by the fact that he feels he must lie to the lama about the profession for which his Anglophone education has been preparing him. This lie—Kim says he will work as a “scribe” for the Government—is symptomatic of the fundamental split between Kim and the lama that will lead to their implied parting in the final chapter of the novel. Indeed, the reunion scene anticipates the final interaction, when in response to

the lama's beatified account of his discovery of the River of the Arrow, Kim blandly offers, "Wast thou very wet?" (289). Compare this with Kim's response to the first lesson the lama offers Kim upon their reunion in Chapter 11. The lama in his impatience to return to the Search has ignored the plight of a farmer and his sick son, a mistake he regrets and attributes to the impatience of his old age. Kim would exonerate the lama's actions on the same grounds, but the lama knows a rationalization when he sees one:

"The thing was done. A Cause was put out into the world, and, old or young, sick or sound, knowing or unknowing, who can rein in the effect of that Cause? Does the Wheel hang still if a child spin it—or a drunkard? Chela, this is a great and a terrible world."

"I think it good," Kim yawned. "What is there to eat? I have not eaten since yesterday even." (196)

The exchange is revealing: Kim is a player of the Game, not a follower of the Way. As Trivedi remarks about the final scene, here too Kim is "distinctly laconic and unspiritual in his responses" (xxix).

That Kim has chosen the Game means that he views worldly existence as real and "good" and meant for action. As he reflects in the last chapter, "Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less. He shook himself like a dog with a flea in his ear, and rambled out of the gate" (283). The lama believes in just the opposite of all this.

Kim's and the lama's contradicting views provide for frequent arguments between them in the last third of the novel. When, for instance, Kim disguises a British agent as a Saddhu to allow him to escape detection, meanwhile mystifying and frightening the farmer with whom he and the lama are travelling in the train, the lama chastises Kim:

“Ah, chela, see how thou art overtaken! Thou didst cure the Kamboh's child solely to acquire merit. But thou didst put a spell on the Mahratta with prideful workings—I watched thee—and with sidelong glances to bewilder an old old man and a foolish farmer: whence calamity and suspicion.”

Kim controlled himself with an effort beyond his years. Not more than any other youngster did he like to eat dirt or to be misjudged, but he saw himself in a cleft stick. The train rolled out of Delhi into the night.

“It is true,” he murmured. “Where I have offended thee I have done wrong.”

“It is more, chela. Thou hast loosed an Act upon the world, and as a stone thrown into a pool so spread the consequences thou canst not tell how far.” (211)

In this scene, Kim's delight in espionage—with its disguises, feints, lies, and performances—runs against the lama's dedication to doing no harm. In the following passage, the narrator goes on to suggest just how wide the ripples of Kim's “Act” had spread: “the last ripple of the stone Kim had helped to heave was lapping against the steps of a mosque in far-away Roum—where it

disturbed a pious man at prayers" (211). There is a mystique in this last comment that is clearly meant to appeal to the Kim in the reader; but here as elsewhere the narrator does not dwell on the Game but rather on the developing rift between Kim and the lama. Very soon after this episode, Kim is shown studying the lama's hand-drawn illuminated manuscript of the Wheel of Life. His thoughts reveal that he continues to see worldly existence as "good" and not "terrible": "Obediently, then, with bowed head and brown finger alert to follow the pointer, did the chela study; but when they came to the Human World, busy and profitless, that is just above the Hells, his mind was distracted; for by the roadside trundled the very Wheel itself, eating, drinking, trading, marrying, and quarrelling—all warmly alive" (213).

Kim, who loves the lama, takes courage at this pass and addresses the root of his dissatisfaction with the lama's Way as well as the precise point of difference between the Way and the Game:

'Then all Doing is evil?' Kim replied, lying out under a big tree at the fork of the Doon road, watching the little ants run over his hand.'

'To abstain from action is well—except to acquire merit.'

'At the Gates of Learning we were taught that to abstain from action was unbefitting a Sahib. And I am a Sahib.'

'Friend of all the World,'—the lama looked directly at Kim—'I am an old man—pleased with shows as are children. To those who follow the Way there is neither black nor white, Hind nor Bhotiyal. We be all souls seeking escape. No matter what thy wisdom learned among Sahibs, when

we come to my River thou wilt be freed from all illusion—at my side.'

(214)

What is radical about the lama's response should not be underestimated. Here and in the following scene too, the lama denies Kim's belief-system and in the process underscores as ideological or illusory that which ties the British Game of imperialism to the status of the Sahib in India. In buying into the fun of the Game—which derives from its mystique—Kim has also internalized its racist logic. In their next exchange, Kim asks the lama whether he revealed to the medicine man that he, Kim, is a Sahib, to which the lama replies exasperated: "What need? I have told thee many times we be but two souls seeking escape" (230). As the narration demonstrates repeatedly, the lama's words are too radical for Kim's understanding. In the very next scene, in fact, Kim mistakenly aligns his "share" and "joy" in the Great Game with the lama's part in his life:

'Well is the Game called great! I was four days a scullion at Quetta, waiting on the wife of the man whose book I stole. And that was part of the Great Game! From the South—God knows how far—came up the Mahratta, playing the Great Game in fear of his life. Now I shall go far and far into the North playing the Great Game. Truly, it runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind. And my share and my joy'—he smiled to the darkness—'I owe to the lama here. Also to Mahbub Ali—also to Creighton Sahib, but chiefly to the Holy One. He is right—a great and a wonderful world—and I am Kim—Kim—Kim—alone—one person—in the middle of it all. (226)

That Kim can transform the lama's admonition that "this is a great and terrible world" into praise of earthly existence—and this after their several arguments—indicates to what an extent Kim is unable to appreciate the lama's perspective.

The conflict between Kim and the lama reaches its apotheosis in the Himalayas. What happens in the novel's climactic scenes is complex and merits the closest scrutiny. On the one hand, this section of the novel narrates a geopolitical interaction that bears a close resemblance to the historical Great Game; on the other hand, the narration relates the lama's final attempt to convert Kim. So far as the first of these climaxes is concerned, the treatment is clearly farcical:

If the British run anything in the novel [writes Trivedi] it is the Great Game. The very name has a ring of a boys' adventure to it, which accounts for its irresistible appeal to the teenage Kim, what with its code-names for agents, passwords for identifying each other and the occasional cryptic message to be delivered secretly and urgently. Until near the end of the novel, it is not really clear precisely what the threat or the enemy is, and then it is revealed to be two boorishly incompetent and ineffectual wanderers in the hills, one Russian and the other French, who are dispossessed of their papers, whatever they might contain, and led off to Shimla. If Kim were himself not so enamoured of the little tricks and pranks which comprise most of this not-so-Great-Game, with its distinctly anti-climactic conclusion, he might well, with his penchant for Hindi

proverbs, have described it as digging up a whole mountain to find a mere mouse at the bottom. (xxxvii)

As Trivedi's account suggests, in the mountain scenes the narration is at pains to render meaningful the lama's, and not the players', view of the Game. Kipling does this, I want to add, by representing the events in the Himalayas as literally forming a game. It is as if, in taking the Great Game at its word, Kipling aligns the novel's political perspective with what the lama has been striving to show all along from his spiritual elevation: that The Great Game is indeed a *game*, in the sense of a child's play, a vanity, ultimately a harmful unreality.

Kipling manages this coalescence between the novel's political and spiritual perspectives through the device of The Great Game; this is what Said did not see. In the set-up to the climactic scenes of the novel, Kipling draws a symbolical line around the events in the mountains which functions to separate them off in the same way a game is delimited from everyday reality. As the ludologist Johan Huizinga wrote about this process of delimitation,

All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtains. All are temporary worlds



within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.

(10)

Huizinga theorizes that play occurs within the “magic circle” of the game. Within this circle are the rules of the game and the game’s reality; without the circle the rules of the game have no importance and the reality of the game has no standing. Significantly, the Himalayas provide Kipling with the temporary world in which the events of the Great Game will occur. Chapter 13 begins with a description of the lama’s and Kim’s ascent. Reading this chapter, profuse in visual imagery to point of redundancy and scanty in the dialogue and evocation of persons that characterize the rest of the novel, is akin to traversing the mountainous terrain it laboriously describes. The threshold reached, Kim and the lama enter the playing field:

At last they entered a world within a world—a valley of leagues where the high hills were fashioned of a mere rubble and refuse from off the knees of the mountains. Here one day’s march carried them no farther, it seemed, than a dreamer’s clogged pace bears him in a nightmare. They skirted a shoulder painfully for hours and, behold, it was but an outlying boss in an outlying buttress of the main pile! A rounded meadow revealed itself, when they had reached it, for a vast tableland running far into the valley.

Three days later, it was a dim fold in the earth to southward. (235)

About this “world within a world” where the events of the Game will be played out, Kim, a Plains-dweller and the novel’s representative of *joie de vivre*, is unsurprisingly dismayed. He ventures that “the Gods live here” and that it is

“no place for men.” The lama, on the contrary, is given new vigor during the ascent. As he tells Kim, “This is *my* country” (231). Quite specifically then, Kipling causes the climactic actions of the Great Game to be played on the lama’s home-court, where the sense of humanity’s inconsequence is reinforced by the vastness of the physical surroundings.

By so framing the novel’s climax, Kipling ensures that the consequences of what happens within the playing field will not extend outside of the boundary lines. What happens in the mountains has no geopolitical consequence. This might seem to confirm the rosy “Great Game” view of India and work to contain readers’ anxieties about the security of British colonial possessions were it not for the lama’s disturbing presence. At this point in the narrative the political plot and what we might call the spiritual or educative plot split paths. As Kim goes with the lama to help him recover from his blow, Hurree Babu leads the Russian and French agent on a wild goose chase calculated to discredit them among the mountain-dwelling people of those regions. The comic relief of the Hurree Babu plot balances against the spiritual seriousness with which the lama will address Kim. That the novel’s Great Game is for Kim’s allegiances—whether they will be earthly or otherwise—not the geopolitical one is indicated by the framing of the Himalayan scenes, the fact that they take place on the lama’s field of advantage and that Hurree Babu’s presence is comical. In fact, the two plots mirror each other insofar as the skepticism of the lama and Hurree Babu—which are of different kinds—are emphasized in contradistinction to Kim’s childish acceptance, which he is shown to never outgrow.

As for the political plot, Kipling is surprisingly revealing in *Kim* about the historical Great Game, which was not simply shorthand for Britain's possession of India, but more specifically the name for a reputed "Tournament of Shadows" carried on between Russian and British agents in Central Asia. As historian Malcom Yapp has shown, "The Great Game," for all its appeal to twentieth-century commentators, was a non-event.<sup>27</sup> India did not provide Britain a stage for expansion northward into Central Asia, as the Eastern Crisis of 1877-8 had shown; but neither—as several contemporaneous studies of the problem had established—was there a Russian threat to British India. Concludes Yapp: "In retrospect one can see that the twenty-five years of debate about the defence of India from Russia had little substance behind it and the debate took place largely because the institutions to promote it had come into existence at that time and because it suited the interests of many individuals and groups to carry it on" (196). While "The Great Game" was largely the invention of imperialists and conservative commentators—especially of J.W. Kaye, who synthesized previous uses of the term and added to it its geographical specificity and adventurist quality in his *History of the War in Afghanistan* (1857) and *Lives of Indian Officers* (1867)—the real geopolitical "problem" between Russian and Britain "was not one of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia but of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Europe" (Yapp 190). If there was a real "Great Game," it was a Russian gambit to deplete British ranks in Europe in case of an outbreak of war: "The scenario

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<sup>27</sup> For a representative, twentieth-century popular history of the Great Game, see Karl Meyer and Shareen Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Basic Books, 2006).

envisaged was one of diplomatic crisis in Europe, probably over the fate of Constantinople, threatening to bring about a war between Britain and Russia; of a Russian army mustered on the Afghan border; and of an uprising in India calling for an increase in the British garrison" (Yapp 190). This means that throughout the period of British control of India—as even an inveterate imperialist such as Lord Kitchener was forced to conclude—the “primary task of the Army in India remained what it had always been: to support or replace the civil power in case of internal disturbances” (Yapp 196).

This account is in keeping with the kind of threat Hurree Babu has been sent by British Indian authorities to ward off. The threat to British authority posed from the North is described in the first chapter of the novel in a passing reference to intelligence Mahbub Ali has gained “that most scandalously betrayed the five confederated Kings, the sympathetic Northern Power, a Hindu banker in Peshawur, a firm of gun-makers in Belgium, and an important, semi-independent Mohammedan ruler to the south” (23). The threat here is of an internal uprising encouraged and aided by European interests, not of an invasion. Significantly, it is the very same threat Hurree Babu is sent into the Himalayas to head-off four years later, a delay about which Hurree Babu makes a pointed criticism, although Kim does not understand him:

The Government knows, but does nothing. . . . When all the evil is done, look you—when these two strangers with the levels and the compasses make the Five Kings to believe that a great army will sweep the Passes tomorrow or the next day—Hill-people are all fools—comes the order to

me, Hurree Babu, "Go North and see what those strangers do." I say to Creighton Sahib, "This is not a lawsuit, that we go about to collect evidence." Hurree returned to his English with a jerk: "'By Jove,' I said, 'why the dooce do you not issue demi-offeercial orders to some brave man to poison them, for an example? It is, if you permit the observation, most reprehensible laxity on your part.'" And Colonel Creighton, he laughed at me! It is all your beastly English pride. You think no one dare conspire! That is all tommy-rott. (224)

This passage is among the more radical of Hurree Babu's always radical interventions in the novel's imperialist ideology. Hurree Babu disputes the mystique of The Great Game, with its emphasis on intelligence. Notwithstanding Hurree Babu's compliments, Kim's role in the events in the mountains is a minor one. What matters more than the information Kim obtains—which anyway only confirms what Mahbub Ali's intelligence had confirmed four years previously—is, as Hurree Babu suggests, the impressionability of potential rebels to British rule. This explains why Hurree Babu takes such pains to remain with the agent provocateurs after their belongings have been stolen. Babu Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, not Kim, is the novel's expression of Stalky, as his impression-lending and frequent gloating indicate. One might well read the political plot of *Kim* to say that spying is not a clandestine gathering of tactically valuable information but a mere policing of subordinate populations. This is a very different view of "The Great Game" than Kipling's conservative readers would have been willing to endorse. It is also worth recalling at this point that the last

time Kipling had sent Westerners to the north of India, in “The Man Who Would Be King” (1888), one was beheaded and thrown off a bridge and the other escaped presumably so that the story could be told. While this outcome has no place in a picaresque like *Kim* it indicates Kipling’s estimation of Western chances for colonizing the Middle East.

Hurree Babu’s skepticism—he realizes his is a policing mission, not an act of international espionage—is matched by another kind in the lama. Just as in *Stalky & Co.* moments of sobriety reveal why stalkiness is not a lark but a survival tactic, so too does *Kim* provide a perspective that emphasizes what is farcical about what happens in the mountains. While Hurree Babu has been ingratiating himself with the spies, the lama has been meditating on what is anathema to Kim but clearly not to Hurree Babu: The Cause of Things. The lama admits he erred in seeking the sensual pleasures the mountains gave him, since his spiritual journey is to find the River of the Arrow, which is reputedly in the plains. The lama interprets the blow he has received as a spiritual reproof. Kim doubts this transcendental interpretation, as an existentialist should. It is the turning point of the novel, yet although Kim will only humor the lama from this point on, the narration gives the lama a clever reply to Kim’s skepticism.

'But the Sahibs did not know thee, Holy One?'

'We were well matched. Ignorance and Lust met Ignorance and Lust upon the road, and they begat Anger. The blow was a sign to me, who am no better than a strayed yak, that my place is not here. Who can read the Cause of an act is halfway to Freedom! (262)

Of course, what Kim doubts is precisely the lama's spiritualist approach to interpretation, but that last line carries all the force of a Kiplingesque maxim. In explanation for his version of events, the lama shows Kim the rent in his illustration of the Wheel of Life, which it received when the Russian agent sought to wrench it from the lama's hands.

Kim stared at the brutally disfigured chart. From left to right diagonally the rent ran—from the Eleventh House where Desire gives birth to the Child (as it is drawn by Tibetans)—across the human and animal worlds, to the Fifth House—the empty House of the Senses. The logic was unanswerable. (262)

The exchange constitutes the true climax of the novel and is presented in all sincerity. Kim's "I see" and recognition that "the logic was unanswerable" remain patronizing, yet the lama, like Hurree Babu although in a different way, is skeptical as Kim is not; indeed, in this scene, that is precisely the point. Kim trusts all too much in the empty House of the Senses, follows too closely the whim of his Desires, cares too little about the consequences of his Acts, which he makes in service to he knows not whom.

Only by denying the love-story element of *Kim* can one manage to read the last hundred pages including the final one as being free from conflict, or, for that matter, as resolved. Yet it is at least as great an obfuscation to deny the fact that *Kim* is a love story as it is to read the novel as a story abstracted from its historical context. Said, in wishing to avoid the latter extreme, goes somewhat too far the other way in claiming that "for Kipling there was no conflict and, one

should add immediately, one of the purposes of the novel was, in fact, to show the absence of conflict once Kim is cured of his doubts and the lama of his longing for the River, and India of a couple of upstarts and foreign agents" (308). As I mentioned, Said bases this claim on Edmund Wilson's that "the alternating attractions felt by Kim [to the "East, with its mysticism and sensuality, its extremes of saintliness and roguery," and the English "with their superior organisation, their confidence in the modern method, their instinct to brush away like cobwebs the native myths and beliefs"] never give rise to a genuine struggle" (30). Wilson is right about Kim, perhaps, but this is no reason to take his point as applying to the novel as a whole; for in fact, and as I have been arguing, there is a genuine struggle between Kim and the lama. This conflict, furthermore, is not a conflict of identity (as Said might have wished) but of perspective. Indeed, all of Kim's multivalent and historically situated and complex allegiances—to the Easternized Westerner Lurgan Sahib, to the Westernized Easterner Hurree Babu, to the wholly Eastern lama, to the wholly Western Creighton—are reduced to two perspectives, the perspective of the Game, what Kinkead-Weekes has described as "the affectionate fascination with the kaleidoscope of external reality for its own sake" (233); and countervailing this, the perspective of the Way, what Kinkead-Weekes called the lama's "triumphant achievement of an anti-self so powerful that it became a touchstone for everything else" (233). While Kinkead-Weekes found the lama's perspective "almost at the furthest point of view from Kipling himself," he also thought it "explored so lovingly that it could not but act as a catalyst towards some deeper



synthesis" (233). As we have seen, the lama's view of the Great Game as not only illusory but harmful, since acts made in the name of the Game are doubly liable to cause evil consequences, infuses the narration of the political Great Game. If, by the end of the novel, Kim remains firmly on the side of the game players, by this time, the whole idea of the Game has lost its specific political connotation and begins to stand in for, simply, an existentialist view of life. Each player in his turn laughs at the lama in the novel's closing pages, but for that reason, I would argue, the reader does not. Indeed, the narration, as I have been showing, is on the lama's side all the while, developing the "game" thematic in a sense that complements yet complicates the Great-Game-as-rosy-view ideology Said so brilliantly exposes. The narration introduces a difference between "game" meaning "safe fun" and game meaning "unreality." Hurree Babu knows for what purposes he is sent into the mountains, as many a commentator on the historical Great Game has not. For the lama, the game-view of life is a childish one; and indeed, Kim's own childishness—evinced, e.g., in his consistent rejections of women's advances—contrasts sharply with the lama's exceeding age.

Employing the very language of games, *Kim* contradicts the credulity of the novel's readership and at the same time upsets readers' dependence on the "romance of endless boyhood." In explanation for the popularity of these romances, instances of which include *Peter Pan*, *Treasure Island*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Lost World*, even *Lord Jim*, Bradley Deane has argued that, "As conservative strains of imperialism displaced older liberal narratives of progress,

civilization, and enlightenment in favor of militarism, expansionism, and a vision of permanent dominion and endless competition, imperialists found in enduring boyishness a natural and suitably anti-developmental model of identity" (690). Kim's enduring boyishness would seem, on the contrary, a fault rather than a justification. If he sees espionage and governance in India as a "Great Game" it is because he does not know better, as Hurree Babu and the lama do. Even and especially in *Kim*, then, was Kipling reforming his audience's expectations, causing them to align the old chivalrous games-language with outdated naïveté and to adopt in its place a new skepticism.

#### 4. Conclusions

When writing about games Kipling took on the faith of his readers. It was a faith instilled by schoolmasters and parents; by books and popular magazines; by clergy and (as it may have seemed) common sense. Yet although Kipling's writings about games were an island surrounded by a sea of difference, they were also cleverly adapted to attack and to alter the orthodoxy. Kipling became one of Britain's pre-eminent preacher of the games ethos; as such, he was part and parcel of a reformation in the attitudes of his readers, that class of British people who were drawn equally from a residual aristocracy and an ascendant yet gentrified middle class, the same class that most supplied British administrations, schools, and military at the outset of the twentieth century. As John Kucich has recently contended, the creation of an inclusive middle class

served as a major motivation of Kipling's work and may be counted as among its highest achievements. Drawing from a wide range of Kipling's fiction, Kucich argues that Kipling's "broadened middle-class appeal" derived from two strategies: a utilization of a sadomasochistic logic to produce a dynamic of insiders and outsiders; and a blending of "upper- and lower-middle-class ideological languages" of evangelism and professionalism (Kucich 57-9). We have seen that Kipling did not only draw up the money-making classes into his language of authority but also drew down, as it were, the Oxbridge society who were heretofore in exclusive possession of the "game" lingo.

The counter-cultural function of Kipling's writings about games in the context of the highly politicized discourse of game tropes in Edwardian Britain may be measured by contrasting *Stalky & Co.* against "The Epitaphs of War" (1919). Steven Marcus identifies the "virtues [that] exist as active and credible possibilities in the world of *Stalky & Co.*" to be "honor, truthfulness, loyalty, manliness, pride, straightforwardness, courage, self-sacrifice, and heroism" (63-64). Indeed, *Stalky & Co.* works to salvage these "masculine virtues"—as Marcus calls them—imbuing them with importance through preserving them against the adult world, which represents hypocrisy, ineffectuality, and the unacceptable bartering of moral uprightness for social standing. Yet, if *Stalky & Co.* parodies the *packaging* of the older masculine virtues in complacent English society only in order to preserve their *content*, the "Epitaphs of War" criticize the masculine virtues in themselves. Take for example: "If any question why we died, / Tell them, because our fathers lied." What the epitaph conveys is that, roughly

speaking, we moderns lack the wishful thinking of those for whom British imperialism was a “Great Game.” The masculine virtues offer “us” no guarantee, no source of support, chastened as we are by our vantage on world war. For “us,” the relevance of games to geopolitics and war is not *esprit de corps*, “toughness,” and fidelity—it is not heroic action, patriotism, or ruthlessness—but strategy, pure and simple.

Kipling’s criticism of the old Victorian games ethos presents Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* in a new light, indeed suggests another way to understand Strachey’s point. From the perspective of both these Edwardians, Strachey and Kipling, the point is not that the Victorians were hypocrites but that the Edwardians were too credulous. It is this credulity that Kipling most regrets in a revealing usage of his language of games in his correspondence: “My boy turned up here last Sunday in uniform,” wrote Kipling to Andrew Macphail in October 1914, 11 months before John, Kipling’s son, would go missing in action. John appears to his father, Kipling writes,

“a grave and serious person much attracted by his Irish soldiery with whom he had been playing football as well as accompanying on night marches. As he says ‘a second-lieutenant is less valuable than a private.’ When one is my age and has toiled *very* hard to make life pleasant for one’s children, one resents bitterly that their youth should be blasted by this shadow: But *they* don’t and that’s what it is so hard to realize. They have the world to carry on; with the spring and passion of their own

youth and, not having played the game of life, do not in the least care what sort of game it may be. This is very curious to meditate upon" (260). In this passage Kipling's own skepticism is part lama, part Hurree Babu, part world-wizened Stalky. Kipling contrasts his own appreciation of the high stakes "game of life" with his son's mistaken assumption that, being a game, life in the Army should be approached as low-stakes child's play. Of course, this youthful appreciation of the Game did not survive World War I.

H.G. Wells shared Kipling's view of the Game of British imperialism, and like Kipling, he sought to convince his readers of its terribly high stakes. Wells did not seek lama-like escape from the Game. Rather, and as we shall now see, he sought to utilize the principles of strategy to bring an end to imperialism and world war.

## Chapter 2

### Games, War, and Diplomacy: The Strategic Thought of H.G. Wells

In the Introduction, I argued that there are two sources for the language of games in works by Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad. One source is *British ludic imperialism*, and the other is *strategy*. We have defined British ludic imperialism as a cultural phenomenon, a mindset, and a rationale. We have located this cultural phenomenon in the British public schools, in Oxbridge, in the Army and Foreign Service, in the home and colonial governments; and we have seen that it was a phenomenon of elite male British society. *Strategy* we have defined as its own field of thought—the game-theory-like analysis of strategic interaction—with applications to the analysis of, among other things, war, economics, and geopolitics. I want to separate and distinguish between strategy and British ludic imperialism in the language of games in the literature of late British Imperialism. I have asserted that ludic investment in imperialism is different from strategic analysis of geopolitics and war.

The difference was illustrated in the previous chapter's analysis of Rudyard Kipling's language of games. I argued that Kipling spoke to elite male British society in the language of games, but that he was an outsider and his language of games was not like theirs. *Theirs* emphasized the analogy between conduct in the nationalist field sports—cricket, rugby, and football—and patriotic service to the British Empire; whereas Kipling's language of games

emphasized strategic interaction as a property of geopolitics. We saw that the *strategic* is, as it were, “set at odds” with the *ludic* in Kipling’s language of games. Kipling thought that the British middle-class was naive about geopolitics and that their “games ethos” was to blame. *Strategy*, not *ludic play*, serves as the legitimized connection between games and imperialism in the works of Kipling.

Kipling was, then, a conscious and, indeed, conscientious speaker of the language of games. In the case of his language of games, the *strategic* is less developed for its own sake as it is utilized to critique British complacency and naïveté. As we shall see in this chapter, H.G. Wells was also interested in critiquing British complacency, and the *strategic* and the *ludic* are set at odds in Wells’s language of games. But Wells was less interested in dispelling ludic imperialism than in utilizing strategy for three different, and successive, purposes: making war “more humane,” preventing war in the future, and bringing about the “World State.” To interpret H.G. Wells’s language of games it is necessary to more fully explore the *analytical* applications of game-strategy to geopolitics and war; therefore, if the previous chapter contributed to our appreciation of British ludic imperialism as a source for the language of games in the literature of late British imperialism, this chapter should contribute to our appreciation of the other source for that language: *strategy*.

H.G. Wells’s strategic thought has three significances in the context of this dissertation: first and foremost, it sheds light on the significance of game language in English literature bearing on imperialism and war. Second, it prepares us to read Conrad’s language of games, which, as we shall see,

represents a more sophisticated combination of the *ludic* and the *strategic* than either Kipling's or Wells's. Studying Wells's work on game-strategy also clarifies his theory of society and praxis for its reform. His outspoken anti-pacifism and the recurrence of violence in his fiction has led some critics to suspect that Wells did not really want the more peace-loving society he advocated. Bradley Deane has argued, for instance, that despite his socialist leanings, Wells was deeply influenced by the masculinist, warhawkish, and rationalizing ideologies of New Imperialism.<sup>28</sup> Yet, while Wells did think of male aggressiveness as natural—the “inherited factor,” as opposed to the “acquired factor” in man's evolution—he also hoped to overcome belligerency by establishing of an equitable, democratic, and peace-enforcing world government.<sup>29</sup> As I hope to show, his strategic thought reconciles Wells's pacifist hopes to his pessimistic views about the evolutionary bases of violence and selfishness in animal behavior. Indeed, *game-strategy* assumed an increasingly important role in Wells's praxis for social reform the more he became convinced that human behavior is more often motivated by individualism, fear, and resentment than fellow-feeling, trust, and

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<sup>28</sup> Deane says that Wells's prewar writings are “fundamentally consistent with a range of New Imperialist fictions that had come to regard manliness and imperial struggle as mutually validating. Wells's chief departure from them in his early novels was his turn to evolutionary biology in support of his case, his willingness to find some manly encouragement in Darwin's humbling observation that ‘Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.’ But Wells's trust in scientific objectivity obscured the degree to which his conclusions were determined by popular assumptions of his day, such as the belief that emotion is rooted in the gendered body but not in the brain, or that the love of battle follows from an inherently male proclivity that is suppressed rather than fostered by contemporary British civilization” (229).

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, W. Wagar's *H.G. Wells and the World State*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1961.



forgiveness. Wells held that enlightened persons must work strenuously to educate people away from their individualist motives. But as he grew more doubtful about the power of reasoned discourse to stop the chain-reaction of wars, Wells sought to utilize the principles of competitive gaming to *anticipate* antagonism and remove its causes.

Wells did play a “Great Game,” then, and not without ludic enthrallment. But it was not the “Great Game” of his British imperialist contemporaries. This is evidenced by his Kipling-like criticism of the “games ethos,” to which we now turn.

### 1. Wells with Kipling against ludic imperialism

A 1902 letter from Rudyard Kipling to H.G. Wells shows that there was a subject on which these two reformers, one reactionary, the other progressive, could agree: it was the ill preparedness of Britain’s Army for modern warfare. What is more, Kipling and Wells evidently agreed on the cause of this ill preparedness: the *ludic* and romantic idea of warfare fostered in the British middle-class by the hegemony of the Victorian public schools. Thus, three weeks after “The Islanders” was published in British and US newspapers, Kipling wrote to Wells to compliment this passage from *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* (1901):

I seem to see, almost as if he were symbolic, the grey old general—the general who learnt his art of war away in the vanished nineteenth century,

the altogether too elderly general with his epaulettes and decorations, his uniform that has still its historical value, his spurs and his sword—riding along on his obsolete horse, by the side of his doomed column. Above all things he is a gentleman. And the column looks at him lovingly with its countless boys' faces, and the boys' eyes are infinitely trustful, for he has won battles in the old time. They will believe in him to the end. They have been brought up in their schools to believe in him and his class, their mothers have mingled respect for the gentlefolk with the simple doctrines of their faith, their first lesson on entering the army was the salute. (*Anticipations* 205-206)

Kipling remarks that this “description of the General (old school)” is “ghastly true,” adding: “[B]ut not all the truth in the world saves a man who interferes with the noble English pastime of watching games. ‘Which has made us what we are!’” (CL 3.85). There can be no doubt that Wells perceived the finest nuances of Kipling’s meaning. What we learned in the previous chapter about the gentrification of the British middle class in the nineteenth century, about the role of the public schools in making “gentlemen,” about the role of the organized games in the public school curriculum, and about the imperialist significance of these games in public school culture, enables us to decipher Kipling’s missive.

The line about “the noble English pastime of watching games” is a jab at the British middle-class’s gentry pretensions and complacency—the emphasis on the word “noble” is sarcastic. The fact that Kipling says *watching* games rather than *playing* games conveys that the British middle class has not even directly

experienced the public school culture it romanticizes; that it is lazy, moreover, content to watch war from afar and undisposed to have its romantic ideas about war challenged. Kipling is agreeing, then, with Wells that the British middle class is complacent and naïve about war and geopolitics and that the cause of this naïveté is their ludic, rather than realistic and *strategic* appreciation of war. He is also saying that the greatest obstacle to the reform of the British Army is the powerful middle class's attachment to its romanticized view of war. As for the General, Kipling clearly recognized in him an Oxbridge Man, the sort who would have attended proudly to his military uniform, which would have given him the same feelings of prestige as, when on the cricket eleven, he had worn a white blazer with blue trim. This General would have thought of *war* as being, like cricket, a proving ground and would have believed that cricket, rugby, and football proved and helped form the gentleman's Anglo superiority. He would have read Henry Newbolt's "*Vitai Lampada*" (1892) with enthusiasm.<sup>30</sup>

The Second Boer War had given Kipling a recent and disturbing reminder of how markedly ungentlemanly is modern warfare, and in "The Islanders" Kipling warns against a naïve and untrained army. Wells was similarly

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<sup>30</sup> The foregoing depiction is obviously a caricature, although caricature is perhaps the best mode in which to capture the performativity, which, with the spectators it enraptured, is the target of Kipling's derision. The sources for this caricature are discussed in the previous chapter. Both Mangan and Deslandes offer excellent descriptions of the Oxbridge men who became officers of the Army in the Edwardian period. As Mangan has documented, a significant portion of Britain's Army officers went to a public school and were Oxbridge Men (*Games Ethos and Imperialism* 80-84). Mangan describes the symbolism of the cricket uniforms (145-147, 163-165). For the New Imperialist take on this General—that is to say, for the "New School," but still Oxbridge, officer of the Edwardian period—see Deane 51-84.

disillusioned about modern warfare and fearful for the British Army, as this passage from *Anticipations* shows:

I cannot foresee what such a force will even attempt to do, against modern weapons. Nothing can happen but the needless and most wasteful and pitiful killing of these poor lads, who make up the infantry battalions, the main mass of all the European armies of to-day, whenever they come against a sanely-organized army. There is nowhere they can come in, there is nothing they can do. The scattered invisible marksmen with their supporting guns will shatter their masses, pick them off individually, cover their line of retreat and force them into wholesale surrenders. It will be more like herding sheep than actual fighting. Yet the bitterest and cruelest things will have to happen, thousands and thousands of poor boys will be smashed in all sorts of dreadful ways and given over to every conceivable form of avoidable hardship and painful disease, before the obvious fact that war is no longer a business for half-trained lads in uniform, led by parson-bred sixth-form boys and men of pleasure and old men, but an exhaustive demand upon very carefully-educated adults for the most strenuous best that is in them, will get its practical recognition. (208).

Wells paints a gruesome picture of the inadequacy of an army trained through Victorian institutions and holding chivalric expectations. Modern warfare has no place for romance but is utilitarian, rational, and, thus, shockingly brutal. Wells

and Kipling agreed, then, that war is not a game of low-stakes *ludic play*, and they agreed that *strategy* was the characteristic war and games share.

Of course, Wells and Kipling were not exactly allies in their campaign to reform the British military. Their differences become apparent in the passage from Wells's autobiography in which he describes meeting British officers during World War I:

Here were these fine, handsome, well-groomed neighing gentlemen, the outcome of some century or so of army tradition, conscientiously good to look at but in no way showy or flashy, and they had clear definite ideas of what war was, what was permissible in war, what was undesirable about war, what was seemly, what was honourable, how far you might go and where you had to leave off, the complete etiquette of it. We and our like with our bits of stick and iron-pipe and wire, our test tubes and our tanks and our incalculable possibilities, came to these fine but entirely inconclusive warriors humbly demanding permission to give them victory—but victory at the price of all that they were used to, of all they held dear. It must have been obvious to them for instance, that we hated saluting; we were the sort that might talk shop at mess; we had no essential rigidities, no style; our loyalties were incomprehensible; our effect on “the men” if men had to be instructed, might be deplorable.

(*Experiment* 586-587)

The point of Wells's differentiation between “we and our like” and the “entirely inconclusive warriors” is that the former, not the latter, know how to win the

war but that the British Army would rather lose than win on Wells's terms. Unlike Kipling's, Wells's loyalties were "incomprehensible" to the Army: Wells was pledged to his idea of the "World State." He wanted to defeat Germany, not in order to reinstall the British Empire but to form a world government along liberal and socialist lines. Yet, although not a political ally of Kipling, Wells also rejected the pacifist stance towards World War I taken up by many of his Fabian contemporaries (*Experiment* 570, 579-580).

In the passage, Wells compares the "gentlemen" to horses: they are "fine," "well-groomed," and "neighing." They engage in war as if they were playing polo. War has rules of etiquette for them: they are concerned with "what was permissible in war, what was undesirable about war, what was seemly, what was honourable, how far you might go and where you had to leave off." Where the Army officers hold to tradition and etiquette, the emphasis among "we and our like" is on "bits of stick and iron-pipe and wire"—or inventiveness—and "our incalculable possibilities"—or *strategy*. Wells was, of course, both a tinkerer and a military strategist. Thus, he made, for instance, a "telpherage" system, which was an ingenious collapsible lift for the transportation of supplies from the rear to the front. (The British Army eventually adopted the system, but that information was classified throughout Wells's life and he died lamenting the tragic obstinacy of the high command [Tilly]).

Undoubtedly Wells made his most influential contribution to the war effort in his writing on military strategy. "Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Wells as a student of war," writes military historian T.H.E. Travers, "is that in the

decade or so before Fuller's first publications, and the outbreak of World War I, Wells ignored the conventional method of preparing for war—the study of past campaigns and tactics—and instead provided an original approach to future war based upon an understanding of the inter-relationship between science, war and society" (82). J. F. C. Fuller was a fascist modernizer of the Army (see Gat 13-42). Unlike Fuller (with whom he shared some ideas for reform), Wells rejected social-Darwinism, racism, "flights into the mystical," authoritarianism and anti-cosmopolitanism (Gat 12). According to military historian Azar Gat, Wells paved the way in British military reform for Liddell Hart, a liberal reformer of the Army and—as Gat has shown in "Liddell Hart, Modern, and 'Post-Modern' strategy"<sup>31</sup>—an influential twentieth-century source of U.S. and British war policy.

As Travers shows, Wells had devoted himself to military reform through the first decades of the twentieth century. In "The Land Ironclads" (1903), Wells envisioned the role of tanks on the battlefield.<sup>32</sup> In *The War in the Air* (1908), Wells explores the changes to the nature of war brought on by the invention of airplanes. Travers explains that in this story Wells was "conducting a form of escalating war game" (Travers 78). In his autobiography Wells says that the possibility of being bombed would change "the ordinary man's attitude to

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<sup>31</sup> This is part two (125-310) of Gat's *Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Douhet, and Other Modernists* (1998).

<sup>32</sup> See Ellis for an account of the story's inspirations and influence on the Army. According to Travers, Liddell Hart thought the story helped to spur on the development of the tank (73). Travers also notes that Churchill, who set up the Landship Committee that spearheaded the introduction of tanks into the Army, held Wells in esteem, and that, since the turn of the century, Wells had met regularly with General Haldane in the Co-Efficients (78).

warfare. He can no longer regard it as we did the Boer War for example as a vivid spectacle in which his participation is that of a paying spectator at a cricket or base-ball match" (569).

In these stories and in numerous works of nonfiction—including *Anticipations*—Wells advanced his ideas of an elite army while criticizing traditional methods of calculating military strength on the basis of numbers of units (*Anticipations* 176). Wells saw education and invention as key: the new army should be a corps of engineers, which select few would rely not upon manpower but airpower, tanks, and submarines (*Anticipations* 185, 212). New armies, new weapons, and new tactics would bring, as Wells argued, a change in the parameters of war (*Anticipations* 183-185). Wells foresees the blurring of the line between soldiers and civilians: as both would suffer the casualties, so both should take part in the fighting, and Wells held that modern warfare requires the concentrated effort of the whole nation (*Anticipations* 185-189; see also Travers 80-87 and Gat 8-12).

Wells was, then, a serious student of war and serious student of strategy; he put strategy to a three-fold function in his praxis for social reform. The first was to develop the strategic faculty in order to make war less needlessly destructive, an idea that Wells debates and tests in *Little Wars* and *The World Set Free*. The second was to use strategy for "getting whatever was to be got for constructive world revolution out of the confusion of war" (*Experiment* 580), a gambit we can see Wells's employing during the last stages of World War I. The third was to anticipate and neutralize individualism through an indirect means



of preaching peace, an idea Wells developed in *Boon*. I shall consider each idea in turn in the remainder of this chapter.

## 2. Wells on the art of war

The first idea, that a development of the strategic faculty could help lessen the destructive impact of war, was one that Wells seems ambivalent about. He introduces the idea in *Little Wars* but puts it to the test in *The World Set Free*, both of which books were published in 1914 at the outset of World War I. In *Little Wars*, Wells describes how he, his sons, and such illustrious friends as Jerome K. Jerome and the truculent Hillaire Belloc would begin their games by constructing detailed battlefields (6-12). Photographs of their creations included in the book show miniature trees and hills, waterways, railways, and bridges, miniature houses, cathedrals, barns, outhouses, painted doors and windows (3-4, 11, 23-24, 38, 43-44, 49-50, 57-58, 63-64, 69-70). The physical features of the landscape were not only aesthetic aids to the imagination but were incorporated through rules into the gameplay. With the help of his opponents (whom, he remarks, he beat more often than not), Wells adjusted the rules of the game in a hundred ways to better stimulate the thrill of contest. They added time limits for turn-taking and modified how the breach-loading spring guns may be moved, fired, incapacitated, and captured (12-16). They devised a rule ensuring that isolated forces would be less disposed to rush the enemy in “inhuman heroisms” than to surrender (17-19). They created a points system in order to incentivize a player to

retreat and came up with three different scenarios—"Fight-To-The-Finish," "Blow at the Rear," and "The Defensive Game"—to provide variation and added challenge (34-36). All of this was done in the name of fun. As we saw in the Introduction, though, Wells also offered his game as a "homeopathic remedy" for would-be warhawks (65) and seemed to think that his game might serve a practical purpose in aiding the training of officers. He writes in a post-script: "If Great War is to be played at all, the better it is played the more humanely it will be done. I see no inconsistency in deploring the practice while perfecting the method" (72), and accordingly, Wells invented rules for the simulation of modern warfare, complete with corps of engineers, sea and land transportation, railways, entrenchment, medical corps, land mines, supplies, cavalry charges, and artillery (71-82).

In *The World Set Free*, we see Wells criticizing the traditional British officers in a way that explicitly links their naiveté with their ludic approach to war, but we also see Wells doubting whether the field of war strategy can ever be utilized for the purposes of peace. The first chapters recount the discovery of atomic energy, its profound destabilization of the world economy and its use as a weapon by outdated heads-of-state foolishly persisting in the tactics of Weltpolitik. The Allied Headquarters of the first war using atomic bombs are described in terms strikingly reminiscent of Wells's own terrains in *Little Wars*:

There over a wilderness of tables lay the huge maps, done on so large a scale that one might fancy them small countries; the messengers and attendants went and came perpetually, altering, moving the little pieces

that signified hundreds and thousands of men, and the great commander and his two consultants stood amidst all these things and near where the fighting was nearest, scheming, directing. They had but to breathe a word, and presently away there, in the world of reality, the punctual myriads moved. Men rose up and went forward and died. The fate of nations lay behind the eyes of these three men. Indeed, they were like gods. (96)

In this image, *kriegspiel* is directly connected to the field of battle. It is a vision of cybernetic warfare, where the important factors in the outcome are determined far away from the scene of battle, in the calm and rational setting of the war room. We might expect the book to launch from here further into this vision of cybernetic warfare: having perfected the command-control-communications technologies, the military commander can rely fully upon the brilliance of his strategies. In fact the scene is used to underscore the fatal underdevelopment of British intelligence. For indeed, this “game” is not being played by a Wells, but by “old Dubois,” a military general of the “old school” who conducts himself according to a few “simple rules” learned through officer training and experience: “Not to talk, to remain impassive and as far as possible in profile; these were the lessons that old Dubois had mastered years ago. To seem to know all, to betray no surprise, to refuse to hurry—itself a confession of miscalculation” (98). Dubois has built up a reputation as a great commander by the start of the war, for,

Deep in his soul Dubois had hidden his one profound discovery about the modern art of warfare, the key to his career. And this discovery was that

*nobody knew*, that to act, therefore, was to blunder, that to talk was to confess; and that the man who acted slowly and steadfastly and above all silently had the best chance of winning through. (98)

Yet Dubois does not have imagination enough to predict his impending destruction by air attack. The “modern art of warfare” makes possible new strategies of brutal swiftness and decisiveness, making a dangerous liability of Dubois’s Victorian expectations.

Wells takes almost sadistic pleasure in showing Dubois’s confidence to be misplaced when he envisions the destruction of the Allied Headquarters by atomic bomb. After miraculously surviving the destruction, a witness sees Dubois, “lying against a huge slab of the war map. To it there stuck and from it there dangled little wooden objects, symbols of infantry and cavalry and guns as they were disposed upon the frontier.” The destruction of the war table is laden with meaning: the now useless pieces dangle from the wrecked table of *Kriegspiel*. The symbolic quality of the destruction is expanded upon in the depiction of Dubois’s corpse:

He did not seem to be aware of this [destruction of the headquarters] at his back, he had an effect of inattention, not indifferent attention, but as if he were thinking. . . . She [the witness] could not see the eyes beneath his shaggy brows, but it was evident he frowned. He frowned slightly, he had an air of not wanting to be disturbed. His face still bore that expression of assured confidence, that conviction that if things were left to him France might obey in security . . . (104-5).

The irony here is sufficiently heavy-handed to relay Wells's contempt for the inept military commander. Dubois's worth as a military commander is, by implication, equal to a dead man's, since there is no difference between Dubois's bluff of knowingness and his dead face. The passages about Dubois convey the criticism that he has vested too much importance in the performative aspects of being a military officer. He "plays at" being a general, and he sees war in terms of toy-troops on a toy-map. But he is not sufficiently qualified to lead an actual army into war defined by complex geopolitical situations and state-of-the-art means of destruction.

While Wells thought his wargame might help hone the strategic minds of officers, he also recognized a great difference between "Great War" and "Little War." Little Wars give, Wells writes,

[...] the premeditation, the thrill, the strain of accumulating victory or disaster—and no smashed nor sanguinary bodies, no shattered fine buildings nor devastated country sides, no petty cruelties, none of that awful universal boredom and embitterment, that tiresome delay or stoppage or embarrassment of every gracious, bold, sweet, and charming thing, that we who are old enough to remember a real modern war know to be the reality of belligerence. (65-66)

Among the gracious, bold, sweet, and charming things of war for Wells were its achievements in strategic maneuver. A chapter of *Little Wars* is devoted to a detailed description of Wells's more brilliant moves in that game, but Wells had his doubts as to whether modern war could be rationally conducted. As he

writes, the stratagems of real warfare often fail or succeed for reasons entirely unconnected with wit. Accidents, “petty cruelties,” and, above all, the destruction serve as causes as well as intercede between causes and effects. This makes Great War not only irrational but also inconceivable to military minds.

Wells writes that,

I have never yet met in little battle any military gentleman, any captain, major, colonel, general, or eminent commander, who did not presently get into difficulties and confusions among even the elementary rules of the Battle. You have only to play at Little Wars three or four times to realise just what a blundering thing Great War must be. (66)

It seems obvious now that World War I should have provided the test that confirmed Wells in his doubts about strategic reasoning’s applicability to war and statecraft. If Great War could not be rationally conducted, it was for the three reasons Wells learned, in part, from playing Little Wars. First, Great War cannot be seen and commanded as Little Wars can: its information channels are material and thus partial as well as destructible and error-prone. Second, Great War’s events are not discrete as in Little Wars but dispersive, bearing unpredictable consequences. Lastly, Great War is carried on by many real men, not by one “mere selfish-intelligence.”

These conditions explain why contemporaneous military textbooks differed from Wells’s technocratic way in warfare. As military historian Michael Howard has explained:

The emphasis on simplicity and directness rather than on ingenious maneuver, on resolution rather than on subtlety, on bold initiative rather than on elaborate calculation was to be found in every German textbook between 1870 and 1914; all the more so since the conditions of twentieth-century warfare clearly made these qualities even more vital to military success than they had been in the Napoleonic era. In the enormous armies of 1900, their communications dependent at best on fragile field-telephones, their size and complexity rendering elaborate maneuver out of the question, commanders-in-chief could give only the broadest of directives to their subordinates and rely on their intelligence and initiative to carry them out in detail. (34-35)

This reality of warfare led Wells into some contradictions. On the one hand, he could criticize Dubois and military officers for being unthinking, tradition-bound, and habitual. And he could write of World War I in 1916 as this “planless war” (Introduction, *Keeling Letters* xiv). But he also granted that the reality of warfare made military intelligence practically useless. Thus, Dubois was doing about as well as any General could, although Wells could not concede this. Yet Wells did perceive that his wargames did not model modern warfare.

The further Wells delved into the art of war, the less faith he had in its perfectibility towards humane ends, and the more he believed that a “better” warfare meant, simply, more devastating destructiveness. If war could not be made less destructive through strategy, however, strategy might be used to

produce the conditions for a lasting peace: this is the second task to which Wells put strategy. Yet this hope was also dashed by his perception of realities.

Wells's thinking about war drove him from the field of war-strategy to the field of diplomacy. In his autobiography, he reflects on his understanding of the geopolitical situation in 1917:

The chief point of permanent value in book, [*War and the Future* (1917)] was my insistence on the fact that the progressive mechanization of war was making war impossible for any countries that did not possess a highly developed industrial organization and adequate natural resources. Five or six countries at most had it in their power to make modern war, and it needed only an intelligent agreement among these powers to end war, if they so wished it, for ever. (*Experiment* 592)

Wells's idea here is that the epoch of imperialism could be transitioned into an epoch of world government. World powers had organized communication, trade, and travel into center-periphery networks. Agreement between these powers to end war could make the sharing of resources much more efficient. Wells thus put down his war games and took up a new "Great Game" wherein victory would be defined by the "intelligent agreement" of world government. If the question of World War I had been, for Wells, how to defeat Germany most efficaciously and with the least destruction possible, the question of the post-war would be how to conduce the world's military powers to end war.

Wells's work on diplomatic-strategy shows the same pattern of hope and disillusionment that had characterized his work on war-strategy. The pattern



emerges in David Smith's extensively researched account of Wells's wartime writings (217-244). As Smith shows, Wells began by hoping that the war would provide an opportunity for redrawing the national boundaries in Europe. He wrote in the *Daily Chronicle* on the fifteenth of August, 1914: "we have to redraw the map so that there shall be, for just as far as we can see ahead, as little cause for warfare among us Western nations as possible" (qtd. in Smith 236). Wells thought a "Frictionless Europe" might be had by drawing the national boundaries along "lines laid over language and race," as he wrote in the *Daily Chronicle* on August 28th (qtd. in Smith 237). During the war, Wells served in the Cabinet propaganda office before resigning from this post to contribute to the effort to install the League of Nations (see Smith 237-238). Near the end of the war, Wells outlined his design for world peace. He published his ideas in a series of three articles—published September 30th, October 3rd, and October 9th 1918—written to the readers of the *Morning Post*, a Tory publication Wells chose because he wanted to reach the people who would be attending the peace conference (see Smith 239-240). In these articles, Wells argued for "a pooling of Empires," holding that a centralized body was needed to control world networks of goods and to monitor strategic situations (qtd. in Smith 239). And Wells called for an end to secrecy and the "Great Power" view of the world order, writing:

We are up against an idea which saturates our histories, saturates the minds of statesmen, saturates the press, saturates European thought and the thought of many spirited states outside Europe; and that is what I call

the Great Power idea in human affairs. This Great Power idea and the organ and methods that embody it is the real enemy. (qtd. in Smith 240)

Wells wanted to see a world government, and he wrote *The Idea of the League of Nations* and *The Way to the League of Nations* and served on a League of Free Nations Society executive committee (see Smith 240-242). Yet Wells's hopes gave way to his doubts as the Peace Conference drew near. "It is up to the people," he wrote in the *Daily News* in September 1918, "to see that mankind does not, in a mood of weariness and reaction and resentment, slip into the old grooves of thought and action, and lose the harvests of peace" (qtd. in Smith 240). What was keeping the world powers from intelligently agreeing to end war was, in Wells's view, that "a 'sovereign state' is essentially and incurably a war-making state" (*Experiment* 570). This "insight," as Wells calls it, would eventually drive Wells from the field of diplomacy.

At least part of what made the sovereign state so incurably bellicose was cultural. Wells says that, during the war, he began to feel that the fundamental enemy was less Germany than militarism and nationalism in Great Britain: "It was fundamentally more important for those finished products of our militant sovereign state system to beat us than to beat the Germans" (*Experiment* 587). Wells worries that the British do not really want the end of war but enjoy the feelings of prestige, power, and risk that emerge from the competition of the nations:

It took me some months of reluctant realization to bring my mind to face the unpalatable truth that this "war for civilization," this "war to end war"

of mine was in fact no better than a consoling fantasy, and that the flaming actuality was simply this, that France, Great Britain and their allied Powers were, in pursuance of their established policies, interests, treaties and secret understandings, after the accepted manner of history and under the direction of their duly constituted military authorities, engaged in war with the allied central powers, and that under contemporary conditions no other war was possible. The World-State of my imaginations and desires was presented hardly more by one side in the conflict than by the other. (572)

After the war, Wells abandoned diplomacy for what he called, in a 1935 book, "Open Conspiracy." Since one cannot work existing institutions into forms inimical to them, runs the book's argument, "intelligent people" should band together in "open conspiracy" against "traditional governments, traditional ideas of economic life, and traditional forms of behaviour" (*Open Conspiracy* 10, see also Wagar 174-205).

If Wells saw the traditions of the Army and romanticizing notions about war as one side of the incurably bellicose nation-state, the other important factor by Wells's estimation was human proclivity for violence. Wells says that the war enlarged for him "the vast possibilities of human violence, feebleness and docility that I had neglected and ignored so long in my eagerness to push forward to the modern State" (572). As we shall now see, the more Wells accredited an instinctual fondness for violence in the explanation of human

behavior, the more heavily did he rely upon game-strategy and the less did he emphasize moral teaching in his praxis for social reform.

### 3. Individualism in human nature

The human disposition to individualism, competition, and war has its roots, for Wells, in the evolution of the species. In “Human Evolution, an Artificial Process” (1896), Wells writes:

[T]he average man of our society is now intrinsically what he was in Paleolithic times. Regard his psychology, and particularly his disposition to rages and controversy, his love of hunting and violent exercise, and his powerful sexual desires. (*Early Writings* 215)

Paleolithic man in modern times is a frequently alluded to theme in Wells’s theoretical writings as well as his fiction. In “Bio-Optimism” (1895), for instance, Wells argues that the human society is every bit as competitive and violent as the animal world:

Because some species have abandoned fighting in open order, each family for itself, as some of the larger carnivora do, for a fight in masses after the fashion of the ants, because the fungus fighting its brother fungus has armed itself with an auxiliary alga, because man instead of killing his cattle at sight preserves them against his convenience, and fights with advertisements and legal process instead of with flint instruments, is life therefore any less a battle-field? (*Early Writings* 208)

Here Wells works to break down the walls of perception that make a distinction between humanity and other animals. The competitive quality of Darwinian dynamics ensures, for Wells, that humans are selfish, fearful, and violent.

Morality, as Wells understood it, is the result of education, so that, as he explains, “in civilized man we have (1) an inherited factor, the natural man, who is the product of natural selection, the culminating ape, and a type of animal more obstinately unchangeable than any other living creature [because of the relative “slowness with which the human animal breeds”]; and (2) an acquired factor, the artificial man, the highly plastic creature of tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought” (*Early Writings* 217). Throughout his career, Wells placed his hopes for humankind in this “acquired factor” of human evolution. In “Human Evolution, an Artificial Process,” he says that,

In the artificial man we have all that makes the comforts and securities of civilization a possibility. That factor and civilization have developed, and will develop together. And in this view, what we call Morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilized state. (*Early Writings* 217)

Wells does not say that preservation of the individual is the only driver of emotion in the uncivilized man (see, for instance, “Review of Motives” in *First and Last Things* [1908]), but he continued to insist that morality, and consequently civilization, depends on the “artificial” dissemination of peace-loving ideas that run contrary to man’s evolutionary predisposition for war.

Wells frequently depicts civilization to be fighting a losing battle against innate human violence. In “A Story of Days to Come” (1897), for instance, Wells imagines civilization to be ephemeral and precarious:

Violence, that ocean in which the brutes live for ever, and from which a thousand dykes and contrivances have won our hazardous civilized life, had flowed in again upon the sinking underways and submerged them. The fist ruled. Denton had come right down at last to the elemental—fist and trick and the stubborn heart and fellowship—even as it was in the beginning. (*Tales of Space and Time* 276)

The language in this passage is oriented to an evolutionary past. What is “elemental” is “violence,” imagined as a flood or tide giving sustenance to “the brutes,” and inevitably washing away the “dykes and contrivances” of morality, conceived of as law and the love of peace. The ruling forces of human society are, according to this passage, power, cunning, and narrow patriotism.

How these beliefs intersect with Wells’s interest in game-strategy may be seen in his little-read essay “Concerning Chess,” collected in *Certain Personal Matters* (1897). Wells begins by averring that the “passion for playing chess” is “unaccountable” and “slaps the theory of natural selection in the face” (140). This is because the passion for playing chess seems to serve no purpose other than making people—and especially power-hungry men—unhappy. Yet despite this opening claim, the essay itself develops a contrary argument, that chess responds to the conquest and cunning particularly males love by nature.

You have, let us say, a promising politician, a rising artist, that you wish to destroy. Dagger or bomb are archaic, clumsy, and unreliable—but teach him, inoculate him with chess! It is well, perhaps, that the right way of teaching chess is so little known, that consequently in most cases the plot fails in the performance, the dagger turns aside. Else we should all be chess-players—there would be none left to do the business of the world. Our statesmen would sit with pocket boards while the country went to the devil, our army would bury itself in chequered contemplation, our bread-winners would forget their wives in seeking after impossible mates. The whole world would be disorganised. (140)

Men, in other words, are only too ready chess players, since the game taps into their desires to experience victory and superiority. Wells imagines that chess could usurp the motivational energies of all business and government.

The “proper” way to awaken the passion for chess, according to Wells, is by beginning with endgames and working backwards to opening scenarios. Having been made to “understand why one Gambit differeth from another in glory and virtue,” chess becomes “flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone; you are sold, and the bargain is sealed, and the evil spirit hath entered in” (142). Although “There is no happiness in chess,” then, its unhappiness is, significantly, not the misery of battle but of regret: “No chess player sleeps well,” because he is filled with remorse: “You see with more than daylight clearness that it was the Rook you should have moved, and not the Knight” (141). The chess-initiate joins “a class of men—shadowy, unhappy, unreal-looking men—who gather in coffee-

houses, and play with a desire that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched” (141). Wells calls chess a “too intellectual game” and a “curse upon a man” (143, 141), but he also says, revealingly, “I have played many games” (144).

In *The War of the Worlds*, written a year after “Concerning Chess,” Wells imagined the invading Martians in terms that recall his anatomy of the chess player. Near the end of the tale, the narrator relays a learned speculation about the evolution of the Martians. The theory under debate is that the Martians’ heads and hands have evolved at the expense of the rest of their bodies. The narrator suspects that human beings might follow a similar path of evolution:

[...] here in the Martians we have beyond dispute the actual accomplishment of such a suppression of the animal side of the organism by the intelligence. To me it is quite credible that the Martians may be descended from beings not unlike ourselves, by a gradual development of brain and hands (the latter giving rise to the two bunches of delicate tentacles at last) at the expense of the rest of the body. Without the body the brain would, of course, become a mere selfish intelligence, without any of the emotional substratum of the human being. (192)

Chess, as Wells depicts it, is similarly all head and hands. At the end of “Concerning Chess,” Wells cites headaches from prolonged concentration as an affliction common among chess players. Yet if the “shadowy class of unreal looking men” who play chess in coffee-shops are wasting away into mere selfish intelligences, what holds them back from perfection, where chess is concerned, is precisely the “animal side of the organism.” Thus Wells describes “the only game



of chess that I recall with undiluted pleasure” as being one in which both players became inebriated. The game ends when, “It was presently discovered that both kings had been taken.” The players also discover that mantel ornaments have been put in place of the chess pieces, meaning, of course, that the game has not been played properly, which is what the narrator likes about it: “I have no doubt chess exquisites will sneer at this position, but in my opinion it is one of the cheerfulest I have ever seen” (144). What interferes with chess in this match is camaraderie and carelessness. It is not all heads and hands but livers and spleens too. This match was played by animals who substitute liquor for coffee, whose concentration wanes, and who at last prefer sleep to conquest. They are reassuringly human, just as the Martians—epitomes of the evolutionary struggle—are not.

Wells saw the “too intellectual game” of chess as stoking and responding to Paleolithic man’s love of “fist and trick,” conquest, war and his Martian-like absence of morality. The last line of “Concerning Chess”—“Yet I have played many games”—is, therefore, a telling one. The passion for chess implies that even peace-loving men can and may become merciless and calculating Martians. And men are most Martian-like when playing chess. It is chilling when, in a late scene in *The War of the Worlds*, the narrator reports that he beat the artilleryman at “three tough chess games” and then abandons him. *The War of the Worlds* as a whole is a kind of endgame scenario, parts of which are seen from the purely strategic perspective of the chess player. One harrowing passage, for example, imagines a “stampede” of “six million people” “driving headlong” from the

birds-eye perspective of a balloonist: “Directly below him the balloonist would have seen the network of streets far and wide, houses, churches, squares, crescents, gardens—already derelict—spread out like a huge map, and in the southward *blotted*” (167). The balloonist’s distance from this human disaster is not only physical but emotional as well. *Chess-like*, he does not sympathize but observes, occupying the same birds-eye perspective as do the Martians, who are “mere selfish intelligences.” The reader is asked to imagine Wells perched over his parchment, flinging ink upon the page, not so much picturing as *modeling* the rout of civilization he describes.

Wells was ultimately unsure whether history attests more to the belligerence and individualism of human nature or to its amenability to moral reform. In *The Outline of History* (1920), for instance, Wells argues that world religions, history, and science all converge on a single truth, “that there is no reasoned peace of heart, no balance and no safety in the soul, until a man in losing his life has found it, and has schooled and disciplined his interests and will beyond greeds, rivalries, fears, instincts, and narrow affections” (584). Wells suggests that the teleology of history points towards greater and greater reconciliation and peace. He claims scientific and historical evidence for this trend, and suggests that religious feeling is good for people on an individual as well as communal basis.

Yet, we may set what Wells avers in *The Outline of History* against a section of *Boon*, which was written during World War I:

We people who sit in studies and put in whole hours of our days thinking and joining things together do get a kind of coherence into our ideas about the world. Just because there is leisure and time for us to think. But are you sure that is the [Human] Race at all? That is my point. Aren't we intellectually just a by-product? If you went back to the time of Plato, you would say that the idea of his "Republic" was what was going on in the Mind of the Race then. But I object that that was only the futile fancy of a gentleman of leisure. What was really going on was the gathering up of the Macedonian power to smash through Greece, and then make Greece conquer Asia. Your literature and philosophy are really just the private entertainment of old gentlemen out of the hurly-burly and ambitious young men too delicate to hunt or shoot. Thought is nothing in the world until it begins to operate in will and act, and the history of mankind doesn't show now, and it never has shown, any consecutive relation to human thinking. (196-197)

By "human thinking," Wells means the "acquired factor" in human evolution: morality, the "disciplining" of the will "beyond" selfish motivations and towards devotion to the community. Wells could say that "thinking" is both central and irrelevant to human development: history shows an increasing feeling for community in humankind, and history is a record of the chain reactions of war.

Wells is most pessimistic about the power of persuasion and reasoned discourse in his wartime writings. In *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), for instance, Mr. Britling despairs in terms recalling those just quoted: "Man has

come, floundering and wounding and suffering, out of the breeding darkneses of Time, that will presently crush and consume him again. Why not . . . banish all these priggish dreams of 'The Better Government of the World,'" (418). Britling (like Wells) recommits himself to the fight for socialism, while Boon dies from depression, wondering, "Is there no power of thought among free men strong enough to swing them into armies that can take this monster by the neck?" (274). It was while he was at the height of his war-induced pessimism about the predominance of individualism and love of violence in human nature that Wells gave most due, in his plans for social reform, to strategic thought.

#### 4. Strategy to outwit individualism

The contribution made by strategic thought to Wells's program for social reform is a certain indirect method of moral reform—a method of anticipating individualism, resentment, and obstinacy—the need for which Wells develops at length in his dialogue novel *Boon*. I want to give a detailed description of this book here because its bearing on Wells's strategic thought only becomes clear when we see how its discussion renders the convolutions of its form. Started in 1905 and written up until its publication in 1915, *Boon* is a deeply meditated and wide-ranging criticism of literary life and thought in Edwardian times. "In many respects," Wells remarked, "it is the most frank and intimate book that [the author] is ever likely to write. And yet—esoteric" (*Collected Works* ix-x). *Boon*'s esoteric quality derives from two factors. First, the work is, as Wells says, of

“blended origin” (*Collected Works* ix); not only was *Boon* written over ten years but for different purposes at different times. The beginning of the book starts slowly by establishing Boon “this man, so representative of Edwardian literature” (226). The middle sections of the book are weighed down with insiders’ jabs at publishers, journalists, critics, and writers. The later parts of the book leave such score settling behind for the kind of “dialogue novel” Wells would experiment with later in his career. Another factor contributing to the work’s complexity is that it is, again in Wells’s phrase, “a posed discussion, a devil’s advocate statement, or why should it be thus detached and pseudonymized?” (*Daily News and Leader*, 1 Mar 1916; qtd. in Smith 172). The author of the title page is one “Reginald Bliss,” and in a foreword, Wells (under his own name) disavows authoring the book. He says that “it seems to me an indiscreet, ill-advised book.” “Bliss is Bliss and Wells is Wells,” he insists, “And Bliss can write all sorts of things that Wells could not do.” Whatever Wells says, however, this was a lame attempt to avoid social consequences, and, of course, nobody believed in the existence of Bliss. Yet the work is a “devil’s advocate statement” for good reasons as well as lame ones. Wells’s own positions are taken up by various characters in the book, and the more charged passages are those in which Wells gives voice to his doubts about the power of persuasion and the chances for collectivism.

George Boon, the reader learns, is a recently deceased author who wrote light literature. He was comfortably provided for but dissatisfied with his popularity. The orthodoxy (and hence commercial success) of his books was

enforced by Miss Bathwick, his prudish amanuensis. Boon's real value as a thinker is nowhere testified to in print, but Reginald Bliss, Boon's literary executor, plays Boswell to Boon's Johnson and tries to reconstruct some of their conversations. Above all, Bliss is concerned to relate Boon's idea that humankind is becoming more self-aware, that selfishness is being replaced by a communal feeling, that history attests to the agency of a "Mind of the [Human] Race." The idea is clearly a representation of Wells's own prewar thinking, but *Boon* is less interested in developing this idea than in discovering the obstacles that limit its dissemination.

Primary among these obstacles is the unreceptiveness of learned people. Bliss calls Boon a mystic, but he is clearly meant to embody the Edwardian man-of-letters for, above all else, being a scoffer. "Even while we talked most earnestly and brewed our most intoxicating draughts of project and conviction," Bliss recalls, "there was always this scarce perceptible blossom and flavour of ridicule floating like a drowning sprig of blue borage in the cup" (15). Boon recognizes that people are wary of his "true religion"—that the existence of society, morality, science, and religion attests to an inevitable progress of humankind from a "savage," war-making state to a "civilized," peace-loving state—because *he* is its prophet. The meaning of a statement, is vitiated by the fact of its having been stated by someone; or as Bliss explains Boon's idea: "the aggression of the universal is pointed and embittered by an all too justifiable suspicion that the individual who maintains it is still more aggressive, has but armed himself with the universal in order to achieve our discomfiture" (177).

That truth should be viewed as another weapon says something about the viewers. The middle portion of *Boon* implies that Edwardian men of literature are blasé because the literary milieu is so aggressively individualistic. Boon, ever the strategist, comes up with a gambit to best this obstacle. He will use fiction to overcome distrust among writers. It is not Boon who preaches the “Mind of the Race” but, now, in a work Boon daydreams of writing, “Hallery.” Hallery, then, not Boon, will prepare the way for salvation through the enlarging of the “Mind of the Race.” In the planned fiction, Boon starts off Hallery modestly enough as the organizer of a writers’ conference to be held, initially, on the estate of W.H. Mallock. The idea is that the invitees will do for the present what, in *The New Republic* (1877), Mallock did for the recent past: offer a criticism of leading ideas. But the satirical spirit in which that work was undertaken infects the sardonic Boon as well. Henry James and George Moore immediately go off on a long walk in which both pontificate and neither listens. A.R. Orage (of *The New Age*) gets locked outside and climbs a tree to throw (what else?) oranges at those who have been admitted. Other illustrious guests, including Edmund Gosse, fall to intractable debate about the purpose and best location for the conference. Eventually, though, the details are settled and a conference of England’s leading writers on the best means to bring about world peace is scheduled. In attendance are G.B. Shaw, Hugh Walpole, Arnold Bennett, James Joyce, Ford Heuffer, Conrad, Yeats, J.M. Barrie, Marie Corelli, Stephen Crane, Thomas Hardy, Cunninghame Graham, Roger Fry, Hillaire Belloc, Maurice Baring, W.H. Hudson, Compton Mackenzie, Upton Sinclair, Clement K. Shorter, A. C. Benson,

Maurice Hewlett, and the journalist E. B. Osborn (who comes in for the most scathing criticism other than James and Shaw). Some of these figures are depicted, others are commented upon, while some are merely mentioned, as when Boon “talked about D. H. Lawrence, St. John Ervine, Reginald Wright Kauffman, Leonard Merrick, Viola Meynell, Rose Macaulay, Katherine Mansfield, Mary Austin, Clutton Brock, Robert Lynd, James Stephens, Philip Guedalla, H. M. Tomlinson, Denis Garstin, Dixon Scott, Rupert Brooke, Geoffrey Young, F. S. Flint, Marmaduke Pickthall, Randolph S. Bourne, James Milne” (134-135). Wells sometimes takes the trouble to change names. Thus the insistently atheistic Dodd is the scientific journalist Edward Clodd, and Boon’s arch-nemesis Dr. Tomlinson Keyhole is Robertson Nicoll. In addition to these references, the book includes “picshuas,” Wells’s name for his crudely drawn caricature sketches. There are picshuas of G.B. Shaw, Henry James, George Moore, Rebecca West, “Dodd,” “Tomlinson Keyhole,” and E. B. Osborn, as well as of all the main fictional characters. In an original version, there are also picshuas of “Harold Bigbee, St. Loe Strachey (of the Spectator), J. L. Garvin, Richard Le Gallienne, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the editor of the Westminster Gazette (J. A. Spender)” (Smith 534n42). All these, and still more, are gathered at Hallery’s conference.

Hallery starts his keynote address, but as Boon had feared, his earnestness is distasteful to his audience, and the invitees slip out of the room one by one. A primary conceit of *Boon* is that Edwardian letters is a vacuous field of personal injuries and ambitions. Boon, in his depression, despairs, “Bliss and I have tried



to write of all the world of letters, and we have found nothing to write about but posturing and competition and sham reputations, and of dullness and impudence hiding and sheltering in the very sheath of the sword of thought” (273). At last, in a gesture of exhaustion, and just before his death from depression, Boon laments,

Was there anything that amounted to an intellectual life at all in all our beastly welter of writing, of nice-young-man poetry, of stylish fiction and fiction without style, of lazy history, popular philosophy, slobbering criticism, Academic civilities? Is there anything here to hold a people together? Is there anything to make a new world? A literature ought to dominate the mind of its people. Yet here comes the gale, and all we have to show for our racial thought, all the fastness we have made for our souls, is a flying scud of paper scraps, poems, such poems! casual articles, whirling headlong in the air, a few novels drowning in the floods....” (275-276)

Boon’s images for the world of Edwardian letters are, significantly, martial ones: “sword of thought,” “flying scud of paper scraps.” Thus even writing, which should be an implement of the “artificial” education of humankind, is, in the final analysis, a field for battle. Poems are missiles. In this last image, the world of Edwardian letters has been literally blown up (“whirling headlong in the air”) by the onset of World War I, an eventuality Boon thinks has only stoked, not chastened, the militarism of Edwardian journalism (278-279).

Wells was himself a Hallery who would continue to preach his secular religion of “The Mind of the Race” throughout his life. As Wells’s explicators Robert Philmus and David Hughes write, “Wells speaks of molding man by means of ‘an apparatus of moral suggestion,’ which he conceived of as made up of individual human beings—‘prepotent persons, preachers, writers, innovators’—who bring the benefit of their unique energies into the human interplay” (*Early Writings* 186). The innovation Wells landed on in *Boon* on account of the development of his increased estimation of human violence is expressed in this line: “If I were to found a religion, I think I should insist upon masked priests....” (*Boon* 178). Wells is not Bliss; Boon is not Hallery; *Boon* is just a thought experiment and is not in earnest if you do not want to take it that way, Wells’s autobiography recounts, as it says on the title page “Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866).” The need for these ruses is that “the aggression of the universal is pointed and embittered by an all too justifiable suspicion that the individual who maintains it is still more aggressive, has but armed himself with the universal in order to achieve our discomfiture” (*Boon* 177). By representing the rejection of his ideas, Wells was trying to disarm the “greeds, rivalries, fears, instincts, and narrow affections,” that would prevent world government and world peace.

## 5. Conclusions

The first role for strategy in Wells's social theory was making war "more humane." The next was for bringing world powers into "intelligent agreement" to prevent war. The last was for anticipating and neutralizing the individualism that prevents trust and peace. Having seen this, it is interesting to note Wells's own scrupulousness about his *ludic* involvement in his stratagems. There is, for example, a part in *Little Wars* when Wells imagines his transformation from a writer to a military general:

And suddenly your author changes. He changes into what perhaps he might have been—under different circumstances. His inky fingers become large, manly hands, his drooping scholastic back stiffens, his elbows go out, his etiolated complexion corrugates and darkens, his moustaches increase and grow and spread, and curl up horribly; a large, red scar, a sabre cut, grows lurid over one eye. He expands—all over he expands. He clears his throat startingly, lugs at the still growing ends of his moustache, and says, with just a faint and fading doubt in his voice as to whether he can do it, "Yas, Sir!"

Now for a while you listen to General H. G. W., of the Blue Army.  
(39)

The treatment here is at once ingenious, every bit the workmanship of the author of the scientific romances, and facetious. They are qualities that hold throughout Wells's career as a strategic thinker. The effect is of a man with two minds. Perhaps his sense of the ridiculous is getting the better of him. He is only temporarily a General, and even then, on the verge of transforming back into the

drooping scholar with inky fingers. But Wells's career as a strategist attests that "the fading doubt in his voice as to whether he can do it" is a doubt about ethicality, not tactical acumen.

Wells's work on strategy shows him trusting the selfish motives of individualism. Human, particularly male, nature is that of a chess-player, a would-be Martian, a mere selfish intelligence. A premise of Wells's work on strategy is that the "best self" of Liberal doctrine cannot be relied upon and that socialism will have to be won despite selfish interests.<sup>33</sup> Much of the tone of his autobiography betrays a sense of disillusionment. Wells says that his period of "mighty-statesman strategist" evinced a "puerile political outlook" that he shared with men "whose imaginations were manifestly built upon a similar framework" to his own, "men in responsible positions, L. S. Amery for example, Winston Churchill, George Trevelyan, C. F. G. Masterman" (*Experiment* 75-76). The more Wells trusted to his appreciation of strategic interaction, the less ludic became his own involvement in war and diplomacy.

In Wells, strategic thought is connected to a high estimation of the importance of violence and selfishness in human behavior. One might say that strategic thought, along with the wars he witnessed, led Wells from hope to pessimism. The reverse was true for Conrad, who, as we shall now see, had a better mind for games of strategy than Wells.

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<sup>33</sup> Wells's brand of Liberalism was a rearguard action, as Toye has previously suggested. As Wells wrote in 1910, "Socialism without Liberalism is organization without liberty . . . Liberalism without Socialism is generosity in a vacuum and freedom in a waterless desert" (*Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1910, qtd. in Toye 173).

## Chapter 3

### Strategy and Morality: Joseph Conrad's "Game Theory"

To this point, we have disarticulated *ludic play* and *strategy* as two separate sources for the language of games in the literature of late British Imperialism. We have found that, in making the connection between games, imperialism, and war, both Kipling and Wells associate *ludic play* with speciousness, naiveté, and (ultimately) immorality, while, at the same time, they associate *strategic interaction* with insight, responsibility, and ethicality. This pattern, as we shall see in this chapter, is present also in the works of Joseph Conrad.

But, as I also want to show, Conrad had a greater conversancy in the language of games than either Kipling or Wells. More so than Kipling's or Wells's, Conrad's language of games shows self-consciousness about its referents in British ludic imperialism and strategy; moreover, the texts I read here—*Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Nostromo* (1904), *Chance* (1913), and *Victory* (1914)—work towards a rapprochement of the ludic and the strategic, the potentiality of which was not even available, perhaps, to the perceptions of Kipling and Wells. If Conrad is more sympathetic to *ludic* involvement than his contemporaries, it is *because*, as I argue, he is more rigorously attuned to the *strategic* than they are. This chapter contributes, then, to our growing understanding of the bearing of the *strategic* on the *ludic* in the language of games in the literature of late British Imperialism.

This chapter also adds to what has been seen about Conrad's conspicuous use of game terms. Critics have tended to read game terms in Conrad's works in connection with gender and performativity, focusing on valorizations of game-like relations between men in Conrad's stories about duels, in *Lord Jim* (1900), and in "The Secret Sharer" (1909). In these and other texts, male characters are depicted using observation and shame to discipline male behavior and prescribe masculine identity.<sup>34</sup> I would add that, in the logic of these *ludic* relations between men, women are excluded from the valorized agonal circle and made to signify as prizes or as representations of a romantic ideal.<sup>35</sup> These aspects of Conrad's "ludic imagination" have not been related, however, to Conrad's interest in *game-strategy*.<sup>36</sup> Without wanting to clear Conrad of the charge of misogyny, I do want to suggest that the strategic exists beneath and in some ways contrariwise to Conrad's depiction of gender.

I begin this investigation of Conrad's language of games by close-reading a conspicuous definition of the word "game" in *Chance*. In a passage in which chess and the obtuse Mr. Fyne are referents, Marlow says that "feminine" "acuity" is needed more than "masculine" ponderousness to perceive the

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<sup>34</sup> See Deane on "Lord Jim: The Problem of Shame," 702-709. See also Simons 15-27, 93-106.

<sup>35</sup> This may be seen in, for instance, *The Arrow of Gold* (1919).

<sup>36</sup> Critics who have been interested in the metaphor of games in Conrad's writings have never investigated Conrad's strategic thought. The focus has been on wordplay in *Under Western Eyes* (Simmons); on "agonal ethics" and "ludic high seriousness" in the major works, especially "Youth" and "The Secret Sharer" (Simons); on New Imperialist "play ethic" in *Lord Jim* (Deane); on "'game' [a]s a central metaphor of *The Secret Agent*" (Eagleton 140). As we shall see, Conrad's strategic thought intersects with the concerns raised by these critics in intriguing ways, while retaining its own coherence.

reasons for human behavior. The context for this claim, which betrays Marlow's essentialism, is a passage earlier in the novel that describes Marlow as "a looker-on at a game." I read this commentary on games in *Chance* as indicating a desire to bring a game-theory-like perspective to the analysis of human behavior.

Taking Marlow's hint, I track Conrad's strategic thought to *Heart of Darkness* and find there intriguing parallels with the strategic thought of H.G. Wells. Like Wells in his strategic thought, Marlow thinks that the Paleolithic person exists in a civilized state. But where Wells saw the existence of morality as testifying to an "artificial" and "acquired" factor in the development of society, Marlow sees morality as the consequence of *strategic necessity*—a "commitment device," as it is known in contemporary Game Theory, which is held in place by both mutual threat and the benefits of cooperation.

Conrad's interests in the strategic bases of law and morality receive their fullest explication in *Nostromo*. This novel, which depicts the founding of a South American republic as an intricate interplay of forces on scales ranging from the global and geopolitical to the personal and idiosyncratic, holds a number of interests for our investigation: it performs a game-theory-like thought experiment to account for the motivations and successes of Pedro Montero; it gives its narrator's perspective on game-strategy the high moral ground; and through Mrs. Gould's thoughts, it tries to reconcile strategic reasoning with humanitarian wishes. The novel's strategic perspective also makes it tellingly ambivalent about *ludic* naïveté. As I argue, *Nostromo* posits an ideal of moral conduct in which ludic enthrallment is built on top of strategic insightfulness.

Taking a broad assessment of his major works, I conclude that Conrad synthesizes the strategic and the ludic into a complex figure for games, which represents the tragic and heroic pathos of fighting against insurmountable odds as well as the hope, born from strategic thought, that good “policy” and moral conduct need not be mutually exclusive.

### 1. Games and gender in *Heart of Darkness* and *Chance*

“The secret scorn of women for the capacity to consider judiciously and to express profoundly a meditated conclusion is unbounded,” says Marlow in *Chance*:

They have no use for these lofty exercises which they look upon as a sort of purely masculine game—game meaning a respectable occupation devised to kill time in this man-arranged life which must be got through somehow. What women’s acuteness really respects are the inept “ideas” and the sheeplike impulses by which our actions and opinions are determined in matters of real importance. For if women are not rational they are indeed acute. Even Mrs. Fyne was acute. The good woman was making up to her husband’s chess-player simply because she had scented in him that small portion of “femininity,” that drop of superior essence of which I am myself aware. (111)

The gender issues at stake here may make it easy to overlook the rare and intriguing definition of the term “game.” The context for this passage is as



follows: Marlow has paused in his report of his conversation with the Fynes to tell why he thinks Mrs. Fyne has admitted him into her confidence. Mrs. Fyne is a writer of feminist tracts who holds stolidly Victorian views about the proper deportment of unmarried women and who takes in young female protégés and rescues. One recent rescue is Flora de Burrell, the daughter of a notorious financial swindler. A letter has arrived from Miss de Burrell announcing her elopement with Captain Anthony, Mrs. Fyne's brother, who had been staying with the Fynes on a shore-leave visit. The match is, of course, disagreeable to Mrs. Fyne, who has given it the ungenerous and, as it turns out, unjust interpretation that the calculating and shameless Flora has swooped in on the respectable and defenseless Captain Anthony as her fastest means to social rehabilitation. Resenting this interpretation, and recognizing Mrs. Fyne's galling position, Marlow seizes his opportunity to goad her in conversation, offering this commentary about masculinity's calculating and dense qualities in contrast to femininity's impulsive and acute qualities in an aside.

Focusing in on his definition of "game," we see that Marlow concedes that judicious consideration and the expression of profoundly meditated conclusions are "purely masculine" pass-times. The phrase "purely masculine" conspicuously attaches to Mr. Fyne, who is depicted as chivalrous, physically active, shy and conflict-averse. The narrator remarks that Fyne regularly defeats Marlow at chess, implying that he possesses the ponderous nature the more "feminine" Marlow lacks. At the same time, the sarcasm of the definition—"game meaning a respectable occupation devised to kill time in this man-

arranged life which must be got through somehow”—makes it seem as if Marlow could want to derive “game” in some other connection than the battle of the sexes. It also implies that he could want a definition of “game” that would accommodate “the inept ‘ideas’ and the sheeplike impulses by which our actions and opinions are determined in matters of real importance.”

In *Chance*, then, the use of the word “game” to describe masculine ponderousness is made to seem unsatisfactory. There is another conspicuous appearance of the word “game” in *Chance*, however, that is presented in the earnestness of *le mot juste*. It occurs when the narrator tries to explain the rapport between the splenetic and contemplative Marlow and the hale and businesslike Mr. Powell:

I have observed that profane men living in ships like the holy men gathered together in monasteries develop traits of profound resemblance. This must be because the service of the sea and the service of a temple are both detached from the vanities and errors of a world which follows no severe rule. The men of the sea understand each other very well in their view of earthly things, for simplicity is a good counselor and isolation not a bad educator. A turn of mind composed of innocence and skepticism is common to them all, with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game. (28)

The last phrase recalls one Marlow uses in *Lord Jim*: “The onlookers see most of the game” (172). As has been noted, “*The Oxford English Dictionary* gives the first recorded occurrence [for the phrase] in *The Comedy of Acolastus* (1529) by John

Palsgrave (d.1554): 'It fareth between thee and me as it doth between a player at the chess and a looker on, for he that looketh on seeth many draughts that the player considereth nothing at all'" (*Lord Jim* 338n10). I would suggest that Conrad's referent for this phrase is not only this literary source but also a technical conception of games of strategy.

Still, the context for these appearances of the word "game" in *Chance*—Marlow's declaration "I am not a feminist" and a description of Marlow as one of "the men of the sea"—may make us want to adduce them to Conrad's ideas of manliness and femininity. The difference between these ideas and Conrad's game-theory-like concerns—which is more my interest here—can be illustrated by referring to Kenneth Simon's *The Ludic Imagination: a reading of Joseph Conrad* (1985), which is the founding study of game concepts in Conrad's writings.

The concepts Simons derives from his readings of canonical works—*Lord Jim* (1900), "Youth" (1902) and "The Secret Sharer" (1910)—and Conrad's war stories—"The Duel" (1908), "The Warrior's Soul" (1917) and "The Tale" (1917)—are "ludic high seriousness" and "agonal ethics." "Ludic high seriousness" is important to *Lord Jim* and "Youth." In the latter story, Marlow approaches his ship duties in the spirit of playing a game. For Marlow, that is, the rules and rewards of sailing are, like a game, arbitrary and intrinsic. Because his ludic approach avoids such utilitarian distractions as making money, Marlow is—according to his narration—a better worker, sailor, and officer than the other men. The adult Marlow looks back on the "ludic high seriousness" of his youth with mixed feelings of nostalgia and disapproval. The latter feeling emerges

especially as Marlow relates how he had his men outpace the other lifeboats in an effort to prove his superiority to the master of the ship. Yet, if the ludic approach to work wrongly increased the suffering of the men under his command, it also preserved him from discouragement and, arguably, ensured their survival. As Simons shows, a theme in Conrad's major works—it is explicit in *Lord Jim*—is that efforts will appear dishearteningly futile if their consequentiality is judged on any other than idiosyncratic grounds. "Very often," writes Simons, "Conrad couches naiveté in terms of play and proceeds to lock it in a struggle with enervating disillusionment or ethical nihilism" (ix).

"Agonal ethics" is important to the war stories and "The Secret Sharer." It describes the ethical engagement of the duel, one that Simons sees Conrad mapping onto larger social patterns. Simons tries to explicate the idea of "agonal ethics" by making lateral reference to Freud and Nietzsche. Both Freud and Conrad, he argues, "see that civilization is made of transformed instincts, and that therefore the appearance of civilized behavior is extremely deceptive" (88). The virtue of an "agonistic culture," one in which duels could occur, was that it utilized innate aggressiveness towards civilizing ends. As Simons explains via Nietzsche's essay "Homer's Contest" (1872): "In the agonistic culture, the children of the Night are not banished, but given free expression within the sacred circle. . . . In combining expression with regulation [of aggression], the agon duplicates the essential endeavor of culture. Thus the contest civilizes" (105). Simons shows that Conrad frequently contrasts the utilitarian methods of contemporary warfare against the chivalric codes that held back aggressiveness

in the Napoleonic era of warfare. The ethical engagement of the duel, “very much like the work at the pumps in ‘Youth,’ issues in a positive sense of self-unity, spiritual exultation associated with a communal expenditure of energy in a shared purpose; [unlike modern warfare] it does not issue in futility, bodily mutilation, spiritual degradation” (27).

These ideas of “ludic high seriousness” and “agonal ethics” emerge, I would argue, from a Conradian ethos of manliness. They are, significantly, *prescriptions* for behavior. By contrast, strategic thinking about laws and morality in *Heart of Darkness* is *analytical*. For Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, that is, strategy underwrites the laws of society in a way that is not dependent on optional subscription to either ludic enthrallment or agonal “culture.” We see this in the famous passage in which Marlow tries to “account to myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz” (61). Marlow says that Kurtz “had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land—I mean literally,” and continues:

You can't understand. How could you?—with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence, utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things

make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. (59-60)

Marlow would appear to hold a Hobbesian view, that willingness to murder would make even the most basic sociality impossible were it not for the effective presence of guarantors--what political philosophers today call "commitment devices"—such as those provided by the rule of law, social reputation, or the "moral emotions" of altruism and a sense of fairness.<sup>37</sup> Marlow's "account" of Kurtz combines his appreciation of the strategic basis and necessity of social norms with a Puritan-like conviction of total depravity. For Marlow, that is, what Kurtz does outside of the disapproving eyes of "society" in a strategic situation in which there is a radical inequality in the power of each party is to seek a total gratification of his heart of darkness.

Marlow's strategic appreciation of the function of reputation and laws intersects complexly with his ideas about gendered social roles. Take, for example, the passage in which Marlow explains why he does not tell of his experiences with Kurtz to "the Beloved":

"I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie," he began suddenly. "Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. They—the women, I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had

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<sup>37</sup> For an account of the game-theoretic quality of Hobbes's theory of the social contract, see Ross. The relevant sections of Hobbes are *Leviathan* (1651), Chapters 13 and 14: "Of the Naturall Condition of Mankind as concerning their Felicity and Misery" and "Of the first and second Naturall Lawes, and of Contracts." See, too, Martinich 54-80 and 107-111.

to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, 'My Intended.' You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it." (59)

In effect, Marlow wishes to preserve religious sentiment at home with women in order to help shore up the social, since, if everyone knew what Marlow knows, or saw what Kurtz saw, then, presumably, the murderous logic described in Hobbes's thought experiment would escape the bonds of civilized relations.

The whole complex of essentialisms in *Heart of Darkness* and *Chance*—"masculine knowingness" and "feminine naiveté," on the one hand, "masculine obtuseness" and "feminine acuity" on the other—binds up Marlow's strategic thought with his misogyny. But I think the strategic thought and the misogyny remain independent—it does not need misogyny to analyze human behavior from a game-theory-like perspective or to perform game-theory-like thought experiments about the strategic bases and functions of social reputation. *Whereas*, Conrad's "ludic high seriousness" and "agonal ethics" *depend* on his approval of, as he puts it in *A Personal Record* (1912): "The honest violence of a plain man playing a fair game fairly" (173). We might conclude this section by saying, then, that Conrad's interest in games is of a different quality depending on whether the emphasis is on strategic interaction or ludic play. In the first case, the interest is in the strategic bases of laws and morality. In the second case, the interest is in gendered social roles. What I want to emphasize is that Conrad's ideas about gender are not the only driver of his interest in games. Like Wells, Conrad was a serious student of strategy.

## 2. The strategic perspective of *Nostromo*

To demonstrate Conrad's interest in strategy, and to consider this in reference to his depiction of imperialism, we may turn to *Nostromo*. "Keith Carabine, in one of the most enduringly useful pieces written on the novel, [argues] that far from authorizing or coercing the reader into a single perspective, *Nostromo* rather creates an unusually dynamic, dialogically-acknowledged, and critically participatory reader who is 'obliged to criticize' all perspectives" (Mallios 222). I hope to show here, on the contrary, that *Nostromo's* strategic perspective is why the reader feels in a position to criticize the views of the characters. As we have seen, Marlow says in *Lord Jim* that, "The onlookers see most of the game" (172), and *Chance* posits that "profane men living in ships like the holy men gathered together in monasteries" share "[a] turn of mind composed of innocence and skepticism . . . with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game" (28). I want to suggest in this section that the narrative perspective of *Nostromo* seeks to put the reader into the position of a disinterested looker-on at a game.

It is not necessary to rely on the word "game" to announce the presence of a strategic perspective in *Nostromo*. Although not surprising that Conrad should have found the game-as-society metaphor felicitous,<sup>38</sup> yet the metaphor is

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<sup>38</sup> Terry Eagleton has observed that "'game' is a central metaphor of *The Secret Agent*," arguing that the novel must "mime the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* in its consecration of that vast stalemated 'game' which is society"



ephemeral as the strategic sensibility is foundational. Therefore, what is worth tracking is not the word “game” in *Nostromo* but what the Game Theorist reading this novel would be likely to mark for emphasis. For this novel is, as I want to show, deeply invested in strategic analysis. I can establish this with a few examples.

We may begin our investigation with the commitment device Charles Gould puts in place to protect himself and his wife Emily from Pedro Montero’s murderous intentions. “In some games,” writes Ross, explaining commitment devices, “a player can improve her outcome by taking an action that makes it impossible for her to take what would be her best action in the corresponding simultaneous-move game. Such actions are referred to as *commitments*, and they can serve as alternatives to external enforcement in games which would otherwise settle on Pareto-inefficient equilibria.” The scenario between Gould and Pedro Montero is one such game. Gould’s stratagem requires that he designate a trigger-puller, and accordingly Don Pepe is put in charge of effecting the destruction. This is done so that Montero will not wager on Gould’s relenting. By committing himself through Don Pepe, who is removed from the scene and cannot be easily communicated with, Gould forecloses his own defection as a possibility. Blocked in this manner from gaining anything by

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(*Criticism and Ideology* 140). “Stalelated games are in one way unachieved, in another way complete,” Eagleton goes on to explain: “the world goes on, and this is at once the question, and the answer, of the text” (*Criticism and Ideology* 140). Whereas Eagleton attends to the analogical relation between games and society in Conrad’s works, I want here to focus on the game-theory-like aspect of Conrad’s depiction of human motivation.

threatening the Goulds' lives, Montero responds (characteristically for an economic agent) by trying to bribe Don Pepe to hand the mine over to Monterist forces. Dr. Monygham thinks it a wise counter-stratagem to have Don Pepe lead-on Montero's hopes for success, thereby buying some time for the Blancos to come up with a plan. Gould reasons quite correctly, however, that this would be bad "policy": "Directly Don Pepe let it be supposed that he could be bought over, the Administrador's personal safety and the safety of his friends would become endangered. For there would be then no reason for moderation. The incorruptibility of Don Pepe was the essential and restraining fact. The doctor hung his head and admitted that in a way it was so" (345).

The reader becomes on-looker at a game again when Dr. Monygham plays traitor to the Blancos, leading-on Sotillo—whose name ironically evokes the Spanish word for "subtle"—that the silver may be recoverable. Nostromo is involved in the doctor's gambit when he learns that Monygham is thinking of setting Sotillo onto the Great Isabel as the location of the treasure. Nostromo, thinking quickly, suggests that Monygham tell Sotillo that the silver is submerged in the shallow part of the harbor. Not only does this put Sotillo off the treasure, it also preserves Monygham's ignorance about the location of the treasure while also bettering Monygham's purposes: dredging being an especially tantalizing form of searching, Sotillo never joins his forces to Pedro's in the town. Probably the most involved strategic interaction of the novel, other than the overarching one that is the founding of the Occidental Republic, is what occurs between Nostromo and Monygham in the Customs House. In fact,

Nostromo never really doubts the doctor's loyalty to the Blancos, although Monygham, who is particularly sensitive on the point of honor, is blind to this fact. What there was no way for Monygham to guess is that, after the disastrous episode in the lighter, Nostromo's "imagination had seized upon the clear and simple notion of betrayal to account for the dazed feeling of enlightenment as to being done for, of having inadvertently gone out of his existence on an issue in which his personality had not been taken into account" (353). Therefore, when Monygham points out the strategic consideration that guarantees Nostromo's safety from the Blancos—"Listen, Capataz," he said, stretching out his arm almost affectionately towards Nostromo's shoulder. 'I am going to tell you a very simple thing. You are safe because you are needed. I would not give you away for any conceivable reason, because I want you'" (379-380)—Monygham inadvertently guarantees Nostromo's defection: "In the dark Nostromo bit his lip. He had heard enough of that. He knew what that meant. No more of that for him. But he had to look after himself now, he thought" (380). The doctor has lost his match against Nostromo but it will seem to him that he has won it, because, having declared himself enemy to the Monteros, Nostromo is forced to either preserve Blanco hegemony or leave the country: "The choice was between accepting the mission to Barrios, with all its dangers and difficulties, and leaving Sulaco by stealth, ingloriously, in poverty" (381).

Thus, a strategic perspective tracks and explains the moves of *Nostromo's* characters. The way in which the novel is plotted also evinces the centrality of its strategic perspective. "Action is consolatory," opines the narrator of *Nostromo*,

sounding very much like *Kim's* lama: "It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates" (86). If we are made to accede to this belief, it is because of the way in which the novel promotes thought over action, strategic insight over the illusory belief that conduct can produce one-to-one consequence in anything like direct correspondence. Thus, the basic pattern of the novel, until one catches up with the story at the start of the second part, is Event and Explanation. The novel opens formulaically enough with the moral of the greedy adventurers and a wide-angle approach to the setting of our story. Chapter 2 is Captain Mitchell's account of Ribiera's escape from the various forces arrayed against him. The moment of this telling is presumably the same as chapter 10 of part 3, *after* the Occidental Republic has been founded, during the happy days in which visitors to Sulaco are made "more or less willing victim" to Captain Mitchell's obtuse recounting of the political action of the novel (396). Not until late in part 2 will anything occur *after* Ribiera's escape, and when it does, it is reported for the most part as it happens. Yet to show the meaning of the events of the novel's opening takes up more than half the novel's pages, something even a first-time reader can become aware of as early as chapter 6 of part 1.

The general plan of the novel, then, is really no more complex than this: here is a land of interest, here is a curious event, what has caused it, and what will come of it? Chapter 5 of part 1 shows the Blanco party of Sulaco aboard Captain Mitchell's boat toasting the election of Ribiera. In very short order from this moment, the Monteros will defect, defeating Ribiera's army and sending

Ribiera fleeing over the mountains; Sotillo will make his grab for the silver while Pedro Montero chases Ribiera towards Sulaco; Monterist forces will rebel in Sulaco and be routed by Nostromo's workers just in time to allow Ribiera's escape (the part of the story Mitchell is telling in Chapter 2); after which the novel relates in order the events leading up to Nostromo's death. But before the full story of Ribiera's rise and fall can be told, the sighting of Emily in Chapter 5 sends the story well into the past to explain her appearance. This backstory takes several chapters to relate, in which we learn how the mine came into the possession of Gould Senior, what were the grounds of Charles's and Emily's courtship and why the couple decided to restart the mine. Once this is told, the narration can return to the boat party (this is in the last chapter of part 1) and then proceed to relate the rise and fall of Ribiera (starting in the first chapter of part 2).

From this point there is only minor discrepancy between the narration's order and the order of on-going events. The reader is not as bewildered, then, as might be expected when, for example, Decoud only recalls drawing up the "Separationist Proclamation" on official San Tomé paper *after* he and Nostromo are already in the lighter, even though this memory helps explain why Charles allows the lighter to go in the first place. It is true that Doctor Monygham's and the rebel Hernandez's stories take some backtracking to tell; and there is a pleasing simultaneous action and tying of loose ends in part 3 of the novel. But the reader is well enough established in the current state of events by the end of

the first part of the novel to feel perfectly prepared to entertain new characters and simultaneity of event.

My claim here, to reiterate, is that the reader's perspective in *Nostromo* is that of a looker-on at a game, where game is defined in the technical sense of strategic interaction. The novel's strategic perspective is applied at the large-scale level of plot as well as at the mid-scale level of incident. As we saw in the Introduction, there are also passages in which strategy itself becomes the subject of interest. "What is a conviction?" asks Decoud, and answers like a Game Theorist: "A particular view of our personal advantage either practical or emotional" (179). The novel calls Decoud an "imaginative materialist," and Decoud calls Charles Gould, by contrast, "such an idealist," who "cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement." To Mrs. Gould, Decoud says that Charles "could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale," whereas,

I am not deceiving myself about my motives. [Antonia] won't leave Sulaco for my sake, therefore Sulaco must leave the rest of the Republic to its fate. Nothing could be clearer than that. I like a clearly defined situation. I cannot part with Antonia, therefore the one and indivisible Republic of Costaguana must be made to part with its western province. Fortunately it happens to be also a sound policy. (200)

The distinction made between Decoud's and Gould's perspectives is made again when Doctor Monygham contemptuously dismisses what the Chief Engineer (another Englishman) says: "Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth

nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity—" The novel itself sides, however, with Monygham (and Decoud), who says: "Self-flattery. Food for that vanity which makes the world go round" (275).

A strategic perspective is central, then, to *Nostromo's* plot and narration. In the previous paragraph, we have also begun to see that *Nostromo* associates strategic awareness with moral conduct. I want to consider more fully now the novel's moral discourse in relation to its strategic perspective.

### 3. Game-strategy and morality in *Nostromo*

In this section, I argue that strategic thought lies at the root of *Nostromo's* depiction of good and evil. I draw evidence for this claim from two passages, one concerning the duplicitous Pedro Montero, whom I take as the novel's emblem of immorality, the other regarding the charitable Mrs. Gould, whom I take as the novel's emblem for virtuousness. We discover from these passages that *Nostromo* imagines a reconciliation of evolutionary theory with progressivism that could have relieved one of the great conceptual crises of the nineteenth century: the crisis represented by the threat "social Darwinism" posed to Anglicanism.

As with Marlow's remarks about Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo's* account of Pedro Montero rests upon a theory of the strategic bases of immoral behavior:

The influence which that man, brought up in coast towns, acquired in a short time over the plainsmen of the Republic can be ascribed only to a genius for treachery of so effective a kind that it must have appeared to those violent men but little removed from a state of utter savagery, as the perfection of sagacity and virtue. The popular lore of all nations testifies that duplicity and cunning, together with bodily strength, were looked upon, even more than courage, as heroic virtues by primitive mankind. To overcome your adversary was the great affair of life. Courage was taken for granted. But the use of intelligence awakened wonder and respect. Stratagems, providing they did not fail, were honourable; the easy massacre of an unsuspecting enemy evoked no feelings but those of gladness, pride, and admiration. Not perhaps that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of to-day, but that they went straighter to their aim, and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality.

We have changed since. The use of intelligence awakens little wonder and less respect. But the ignorant and barbarous plainsmen engaging in civil strife followed willingly a leader who often managed to deliver their enemies bound, as it were, into their hands. Pedro Montero had a talent for lulling his adversaries into a sense of security. And as men learn wisdom with extreme slowness, and are always ready to believe promises that flatter their secret hopes, Pedro Montero was successful time after time. (327-328)



The novel is imagining here, Hobbes-like, the genesis of the social contract. The passage proposes that the key to Montero's success is that he is an atavistic occurrence of a betrayer in a community that has evolved to expect at least the semblance of honesty. The passage goes on to suggest that modern people do not only expect the semblance of honesty but hope for honesty in their interactions with others. The passage points out that it is easier to fool such people than people who have no such expectations and desires. The attitude of the passage walks a thin line between pity and endorsement. It does not say that modern people would be better off if they acted more like their ancestors. But it does remark upon the greater simplicity of "primitive" interactions, when "success [was] the only standard of morality."

I want to consider more closely the articulation of morality and strategy in this complex commentary. The issues raised above—how expectations of fairness or unfairness influence moral decision-making and the evolution of the hope for fairness given Darwinian dynamics—have been explored further by political philosophers and evolutionary theorists using Game Theory to account for altruism.<sup>39</sup> I want to consider this work here because it will help us better understand the role of strategy in *Nostromo's* vision of good and evil.

We can distill this discussion by considering a thought-experiment introduced by Brian Skyrms's in his *Evolution of the Social Contract* (1996).<sup>40</sup> The experiment involves a specialized version of the game, Prisoners' Dilemma. In

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<sup>39</sup> See Skyrms; Binmore, *Natural Justice* (Oxford 2005); and Ross, "Evolutionary Game Theory and the Normative Theory of Institutional Design: Binmore and Behavioral Economics." *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 5.51 (2006): 51-79.

<sup>40</sup> I draw the following discussion from Skyrms 45-79.

Prisoners' Dilemma, two prisoners are offered the following plea bargain: If one will confess to the major charge against him, implicating his accomplice, he will go free and the accomplice will get 10 years hard time, *except* if the accomplice also confesses. In this case both prisoners will receive 5 years punishment. However, if neither prisoner confesses, both will receive only 2 years punishment. In a single, non-repeating game of Prisoners' dilemma, practiced players will implicate their accomplices. This is because the decision to say nothing risks the worst possible outcome. Betrayal is the only safe bet, and thus mutual betrayal is this game's equilibrium.<sup>41</sup> Prisoners' dilemma illustrates a game with an inefficient equilibrium, since the best outcome for both players remains inaccessible due to the game's distribution of risks and rewards.

Skyrms's version of Prisoners' Dilemma is different. Skyrms stipulates that many games are played, and he "programs" the players, so that some will choose defection and will betray their accomplices while others will choose trust and will keep their mouths shut. Skyrms's game is also interested in the growth of populations. The players who receive better outcomes make copies of themselves, and these copies play their parent's strategy in the next iteration of the game. Players who receive worse outcomes fail to reproduce and thus are removed from the population. Skyrms's question is whether, under any circumstances, the cooperators could survive, or whether, given enough iterations of the game, the defectors always drive the cooperator population to extinction.

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<sup>41</sup> Ross in his entry on "Game Theory" for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* gives an excellent explication of Prisoner's Dilemma.

Skyrms calculates that defectors win the race for survival when in a given community of defectors and cooperators each strategy has a random chance of meeting any other strategy. This outcome resembles *Nostromo's* account of "primitive mankind," when defection is expected and even respected. Yet Skyrms introduced a consideration that shows a way in which cooperators can drive defectors to extinction. The consideration involves adjusting the probability with which each strategy—a defecting player or a cooperating player—will meet up with another strategy. The discovery is that, when defectors are given high odds of meeting other defectors and cooperators are given high odds of meeting other cooperators, then cooperators do better than defectors in the population. This is because cooperators experience a better outcome than defectors in the Prisoners' Dilemma. Giving players more ability to seek out their matching strategy also increases the relative population of cooperators. Skyrms also experiments with spatial distributions of players and discovers that there is a beginning concentration at and beyond which cooperators will drive defectors to extinction. *Almost*. In fact, defectors in this experiment tend to hang around on the edges of cooperator communities. These defectors do quite well, since they are meeting cooperators who will give them their best possible outcomes. Still, the defectors never do so well that they drive the cooperators to extinction.

There are numerous ways in which this thought experiment has been related to biological evolution, involving genetics, familial and cultural proximity, the influence of societal norms and expectations. The upshot of this discussion is that a feeling for fairness, a desire for justice and just institutions,

and even altruism can arise within Darwinian dynamics. Cooperating populations tend to do much better than defecting populations so long as certain circumstances favorable to cooperators are present.

What I want to suggest is that the passage in *Nostromo* that explains Pedro Montero's success imagines a state that is like Skyrms's community of cooperators. Cooperators have tended to predominate and have instituted cultural, familial, and institutional expectations for and valorizations of fairness. *Therefore*, a Pedro Montero, as a defector living within this community, is likely to do especially well. And so he does.

I said above that the attitude of the passage about Pedro Montero does not allow us to think that the narrator is arguing for a return to "primitive mankind" and their approval of duplicity. The implication of the narrator is that it is good, if also regrettable, that "men learn wisdom with extreme slowness, and are always ready to believe promises that flatter their secret hopes." This makes special sense from the evolutionary perspective I have been developing. It is important to Skyrms's experiment that no individual player can re-evaluate her situation and change her strategy. Defectors must defect, and cooperators must cooperate. If cooperators could defect, then they would do so, since defection is the dominant strategy in Prisoners' Dilemma. Thus, it is good for the community of cooperators that players are slow to learn to distrust one another.

Besides norms, another mechanism economists introduce to arrive at models in which cooperating communities predominate is "overlapping generations." In this kind of distribution game, prior generations of players are

given ways to save resources and increase the odds of survival for subsequent generations. In the second passage I want to consider in this section, Mrs. Gould briefly captures this strange area in which morality, rationality, and evolutionary behavior are one and the same:

Had anybody asked her of what she was thinking, alone in the garden of the Casa, with her husband at the mine and the house closed to the street like an empty dwelling, her frankness would have had to evade the question. It had come into her mind that for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present. Our daily work must be done to the glory of the dead, and for the good of those who come after. She thought that, and sighed without opening her eyes—without moving at all (430).

Mrs. Gould's intergenerational definition of "good" is, to use her husband's and Decoud's language, good "policy" too: *because* it is moral, *because* it is full of wishful thinking and universal love. Although she cannot know it, Mrs. Gould's thinking here is the most advanced in the novel: it builds upon rather than controverts Decoud's definition of conviction, and it is certainly leagues ahead of her husband's misplaced faith in "material interest." Mrs. Gould's silent idea names, I would argue, the very spirit and method of the novel's writing: we might call it strategic humanitarianism. By this term, I mean to convey a synthesis, one I think *Nostromo's* moral vision strives to attain, in which strategy is put in the service of humane rather than bellicose feelings. Strategic humanitarianism means that cooperation, fairness, and love are good policies.

This idea is developed through the contrast in *Nostromo* between Pedro Montero and Mrs. Gould.

#### 4. The “Game” and Conrad’s wisdom

The description Cedric Watts has given of *Nostromo*’s “wisdom” strikes me as consistent with the work done by its strategic perspective:

The wisdom that Conrad had commended in the novel, by implication and through irony, had entailed ample indignation on behalf of the humble, the exploited and the cannon-fodder of history. The wisdom had entailed ample scepticism, about political jargon and rhetoric, about the possibility that a just society could ever be found under conditions of economic imperialism. Yet that wisdom had entailed a hope that can be glimpsed in the challenges afforded by the novel’s shifts in time and space, with their therapy for short-sightedness (85).

We may take as an example of the role of strategic insight in the novel’s idea of wisdom the passage recounting the history of the mine. The passage relates the story of the mine from its foundation, when “[w]hole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation,” through its periods of abandonment, its rediscovery by “[a]n English company,” and its “confiscation” by “the Government as national property” (76). This long-sightedness allows the narrator to show that the confiscation proves a means of enriching the current government. Thus, the strategic perspective of the narrator is put to use in

showing up the selfish motives behind socialist-sounding propaganda. The same pattern is repeated in the passage recounting Gould Senior's forced-acquisition of the mind and when the "National Guard" leaders use socialist-sounding sentiments to put the townspeople on the side of the Monteros. In all of these instances, the novel's strategic perspective is used to locate the operative stakes, parties, motivations, and gambits. And this strategic perspective, this wisdom, is committed to sorting the charitable from the avaricious.

This reading, that *Nostromo's* strategic perspective is made to carry its ideal of wisdom, puts me at odds with Gooch, who argues that the novel is anti-objectivist:

[W]here [marginal utility theorist Alfred] Marshall uses these economic faculties [of perception, reason, and imagination] to search for rational and objective causality, Conrad uses the different subjective conceptions of the imagination held by the novel's characters to trace their irrational actions, and in the process subverts realist or objective perception in the text. In *Nostromo*, imagination is not a faculty that allows one to discover the world's hidden causes from on high but rather the chief faculty of an embedded immaterial labor that adapts the world to subjective use by creating abstract ideals. (275)

Gooch seems to think that economic analysis and interest in objective causality is necessarily pro-capitalist or pro-bourgeois ideology. And he wants to say that the characters' actions are irrational and therefore unaccountable. Yet, as Decoud's definition of conviction avers and as the novel shows—for instance in the

“game” played between Nostromo and Doctor Monygham discussed above—subjective whim is every bit as effective a motivator as something like rational want, and in any case, a strategic perspective treats both the same. *Nostromo* is interested in tracking the strategic causes for human behavior even when motivations are drawn from idiosyncratic fantasy; it does not want to “subvert realist or objective perception” but *provide* it. What works to subvert objective, strategic perspective in *Nostromo* is the characters’ fantastical rationales for their own actions. Decoud’s function in the novel is to represent and aid the desire for calling ideology out and accounting for it in the definition of the operative situations. As he tells Mrs. Gould: “I am practical. I am not afraid of my motives” (202).

Decoud’s literal-mindedness, his clear-headedness, and his insightfulness into strategic scenarios also serve to separate him from and oppose him to the finance capitalism without which there would be no mine and no story. When Decoud commits suicide, he acts radically to change the novel’s strategic situation by treating the silver as so much weight. This action effectively metamorphoses the silver by forcing Nostromo to use it not for what it once was—a guarantee and the lifeblood of this particular stage of imperialist capitalism—but for what *it is always under threat of becoming*: a hoard. Nostromo, the idealist-capitalist, is not, perhaps, imaginative materialist enough to perceive that silver’s use value at a certain pass is the weight that makes it good for sinking a dead body. Nostromo thinks like the Blancos, who will say that Nostromo has stolen two of the bars for his personal enrichment. Nostromo is



forced, then, by Decoud's literalist action to sever himself from the credit-based, prestige-based society of the capitalists, a defection that Nostromo will come to view as self-betrayal.

My claim is that *Nostromo* endorses a strategic perspective both for its explanatory power and for its ethicality. Yet the fact that Decoud commits suicide also calls into question his and the novel's version of wisdom. The narration claims that Decoud's manner of death is "the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity" (416): if my reading up to this point is correct, then Decoud's is presumably the same intellectual audacity which would attempt writing (or reading) *Nostromo*; and this audacity consists in a game-theory-like assessment of human behavior and historical event. Granting that Decoud is a representative of the perspective the novel makes the reader's own, the question arises: does his suicide amount to Conrad's endorsement of *ludic naïveté*?

In fact, the novel's attitude towards solipsism is ambivalent. The narrator says of Nostromo, "With admirable and human consistency he referred everything to himself" (352). Here, Nostromo is being applauded, and we find a similar attitude about Nostromo on the same page: "In the downfall of all the realities that made his force" (352). The implication is that, personal force being inversely proportionate to one's appreciation of "all of the realities," one should *not* seek out an appreciation of all of the realities. When explaining Charles Gould's decision to disobey his father and take up custodianship of the Gould Concession, the narrator proclaims: "Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action

can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates" (86). The first two sentences would seem to advise against action; yet the last sentence shows a more positive attitude towards solipsism. "Can we find," indicates a desire for discovery and possibility. Finally, with reference to Decoud's death, the narrator says: "In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part" (413). As the word "sustaining" indicates, the novel *approves* of illusion. *Nostromo* shows, then, an ambivalent and approving attitude towards *ludic* enthrallment—and to this extent it is different than *Kim*.

After *Nostromo*, Conrad's figure for the "Game" stresses both strategic wisdom *and* ludic enthrallment. For example, in *Victory* (1914), Axel Heyst says, "Truth, work, ambition, love itself, may be only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life, but when one takes a hand one must play the game" (218). That "but" gets at the kernel of Conrad's synthesis of the strategic and the ludic in a single figure for "the game." Despite Conrad's novel's lack of faith in the efficacy of intentioned action, they do not discredit the neo-chivalry of their male heroes. Such would-be "agents" as Nostromo and Decoud and Axel Heyst (to place them in increasing order of cynicism) are pointedly frustrated. It is as if "the game" they have been set to play is rigged—or else the world is too vitiated by chance to make decision-making meaningful to them. Nostromo, an indomitable man of action, is mistakenly shot; Decoud gets stranded on an island and dies from isolation; Axel Heyst cannot save his love, Lena. One moral lurking in Conrad's major novels would seem to be that modern chivalry

consists in going through with actions *known* to be doomed either to inconsequentiality or failure.

*Because* Conrad's worlds are so unremittingly chance-dominated and naturalistic, the provincialism of the games ethos is seen as an asset rather than a short-coming. *Nostromo*, for instance, is a tragi-comedy of errors, showing idiosyncrasies of motive and interpretation interacting to produce events that then confirm characters in their illusions about others, themselves, and their reality in the world. Everybody in the novel is playing a "personal game," as Conrad says in the "Author's Note" (32). Men who can see the larger picture of interacting events, like Decoud and Heyst, are paralyzed by speculation. The "trick," writes Conrad in his "Author's Note" to *Victory*, is to act like it makes a difference, a trick Heyst has lost the knack of:

Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by civilized man. (48)

Something like knowing naïveté or ludic maturity describes Conrad's moral vision after *Nostromo*. It is achieved by shifting honor from winning to losing. To achieve this reformation in his readers' attitudes, Conrad's Edwardian novels

rely upon a contradiction in the old games ethos's dual insistence on Darwinian and Christian values. As Mangan observes, the games ethos "embraced antithetical values—success, aggression and ruthlessness, yet victory within the rules, courtesy in triumph, compassion for the defeated. The concept contained the substance not only of Spencerian functionalism but also the chivalric romanticism of an English Bayard: egotism coexisted uneasily with altruism" (135). Conrad resolves this contradiction by stripping the games ethos of its redemptive Christianity. According to the games ethos, that is, ultimate and assured victory make "compassion for the defeated" an instance of good sportsmanship. Conrad replaces this redemptive Christianity with a strictly postlapsarian theology wherein protracted loss and degradation make the highest virtues of perseverance and humility.

## 5. Conclusions

If "the onlookers see most of the game," then perhaps Joseph Conrad saw more of it than Wells did. Conrad played spoilsport to Kipling's and Wells's faith in cunning, and he found a new way of meaning "play up, play up, and play the game!" The major novels make "victory" a misnomer and misleading analogy. In a telling letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad writes, "You remember always that I am a Slav but you seem to forget that I am a Pole. You forget that we have been used to go to battle without illusions. It's you Britishers that 'go in to win' only. We have been 'going in' these last hundred years repeatedly, to be knocked on

the head only—as was visible to any calm intellect” (*Collected Letters* 3 492-493). The major novels also recommend action over “profound reflection.” In his essay on Henry James, Conrad says that “mankind is delightful in its pride, its assurance, and its indomitable tenacity. It will sleep on the battlefield among its own dead, in the manner of an army having won a barren victory. It will not know when it is beaten. And perhaps it is right in that quality. The victories are not, perhaps, so barren as it may appear from a purely strategical, utilitarian point of view” (*Notes on Life and Letters* 14). Conrad could find a place for ludic enthrallment in his moral judgments, but only once it has been tempered by strategic insightfulness.

If Conrad’s language of games represents a circuit from Edwardian disillusionment back to Victorian sureness, it also represents how far the language of games could be taken from one of its sources in British political discourse. The way, as we have seen, is from the romance of the public schools, the neo-chivalry of Britain’s gentlemen officers, and the team spirit of the British Empire; through Kipling, who made the lama challenge Kim’s immaturity and who made Hurree Babu so perceptive about geopolitics; through Wells, who strenuously applied strategy to end war and bring about world government; to Conrad, who saw the dead-ends, showed sympathy for the benighted, and redefined the parameters of victory. Thus could the meaning of games develop in the literature of late British imperialism.

## Conclusion

### Game-strategy and Ethicality

“Peace is declared, an’ I return  
To ‘Ackneystadt, but not the same;  
Things ‘ave transpired which made me learn  
The size and meanin’ of the game.  
I did no more than others did,  
I don’t know where the change began;  
I started as a average kid,  
I finished as a thinkin’ man.”

From Rudyard Kipling, “The Return” (1903)

This dissertation has examined the language of games in works by Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad. Like many of their contemporaries, these authors used a language of games to describe and depict a world divided by empires. Also like their contemporaries, these authors relied upon a language of games to account for human conduct. Unlike many writers of adventure tales of the sort popularized in *The Boys Own Paper*, however, these authors’ assessments of the stakes of the Great Game could not allow them to recommend romantic investment in it. These authors saw tragic and threatening strategic

dilemmas where some others saw an opportunity for heroism or the display of manliness.

The similarities between Kipling's, Wells's, and Conrad's uses of game terms stand out when they are contrasted against the backdrop of British ludic imperialism. Yet these three authors also came by their interests in games in distinct ways. Kipling was a middle-class reactionary whose interest in game-strategy led him to view the British elite as provincial. Wells was a middle-class progressive who found in competitive gaming a suitably antagonistic model for human behavior. Where Kipling wanted to reform the expectations and beliefs of the British elite, Wells turned to game design in his praxis for wholesale and global social reform. Conrad shared Wells's interest in the articulation of game-strategy to human behavior and society. But Conrad was a triply residual aristocrat (old-world, colonized, exiled) who put formal game terminology to more purely analytic and artistic purposes than Wells. Conrad wanted to depict and explain the world, and he needed to think in terms of game-strategy to do that. But for Conrad, game-strategy was not so much what agents utilize to make the world conform to their desires as what, for better or worse, defines and restricts the possible in human affairs.

We saw that Kipling criticized the whole of the British ideology of games and that he drew his readers up from the middle class and down from the upper class into his idea of the Game, one that valued brains over gentility in the service of national-imperial duty. I argued that critics have misunderstood the full significance of "The Great Game" in *Kim*, and I tried to restore this by

contextualizing the novel with Kipling's other uses of game terms in "Verses on Games" and *Stalky & Co.* We found that, pace the critics, Kipling did not endorse but parodied and criticized the rhetoric of the "games ethos" of the public schools, which in both its liberal and conservative versions likened British imperialism to a game-like proving ground where brotherhoods are forged. For Kipling, the game-like aspect of geopolitics was strategic interaction. This understanding gave Kipling a perspective on British imperialism that was less jingoistic and more impartial than has been commonly assumed.

Wells has been well known as a socialist, a New Liberal, a military reformer, a writer of science fiction, and an evolutionary scientist. As we saw, Wells was also a gamer and his writings about games combine his polymath interests. We learned that Wells was interested in games primarily on account of their strategic aspect and that his interest in games responds to his evolutionary theory and pessimistic views about human nature. Human fondness for game-strategy inspired Wells's doubts about progressive civilization—doubts as to its achievability, not (as some critics have believed) its desirability. Through inventing games and applying game-strategy to politics, Wells tried to reconcile his pessimism with his commitments to liberal and socialist values.

Critics have collected under the heading of Conrad's "ludic imagination" his nostalgia for heroics and chivalry, his valorization of youthful romance, and his seeming approval of the duel and "agonal ethics." I have approached Conrad's ludic imagination from a different angle, focusing on the role of game-strategy in *Heart Darkness*, *Nostromo*, and *Chance*. We found that, like Wells's,



Conrad's interest in games responds to evolutionary theory and a pessimistic conception about the violence at the root of human nature. Conrad's thinking about game-strategy reaches for an optimistic reconciliation of the utilitarian with the moral. The standard of morality underwritten by Conrad's attentiveness to game-strategy faults obtuseness and naïveté in both women (Marlow's "aunt" in *Heart of Darkness*) and men (Captain Mitchell in *Nostromo*), while it applauds the perspicacity and moral maturity of "onlookers of the game" whether they are men—Marlow and Martin Decoud—or women—Mrs. Gould. In *Chance*, Marlow attributes his own strategic acumen to his benefitting from both "feminine" "acuity" and "masculine" ponderousness. I paid special attention to the application of formal game terminology in *Nostromo*, which depicts the founding of a South American republic as an intricate interplay of forces both global—geopolitics and imperialist economics—and personal—the idiosyncratic fantasies shown to inspire the actions and reactions of characters.

Because I have wanted to investigate the role of strategic thought on the language of games in these authors' works, I have emphasized connections between games, war, and imperialism. I have said little about games that are played for fun, such as card games, parlor games, and make-believe. This subject is not without interest from the perspective we have developed. As a child, Kipling played word games with his sister, and his attachment to these seems to have been the creation and sharing of secret languages (Ricketts 62-63; 119). Wells, by contrast, could take to athletics with less calculation than could Kipling, who had more contact as an adolescent with the military institutions of

Britain. As a young man Wells played vigorously and exuberantly. He went on long walks with his father, who was a better than average cricket player. Wells became a cyclist after receiving a bad injury as a young man (Smith, "Little Wars" 126-127), and there was no more appropriate exercise for a young progressive in those days; indeed, cycling serves as a socially inflected plot device in some of the fiction Wells wrote in the 1890s (Choi; Smith, "Little Wars" 128). Wells played tennis, famously with Arnold Bennett, well into his sixties (Smith, "Little Wars" 127). (Biographers of Conrad have not paid similar levels of attention to his game-playing, and perhaps this is because he was not very playful, or perhaps it is because the subject has seemed irrelevant.) Kipling and Wells kept playing games when adults. Guests to the Wells' home were expected to participate in—among other scheduled activities such as theatricals, charades, croquet, tennis, and games of demon patience—a ball game of his invention (Smith, "Little Wars" 133). Likewise, the Kiplings played games at home, where they excelled at putting on plays for guests and visitors (Ricketts 358). Wells's ball game was akin to volleyball, only more anarchic. It was "filled with much loud noise, appeals, jostling for position, and was extremely competitive" (Smith, "Little Wars" 133). Apparently Wells did not like to lose and selected the sides accordingly. At the same time, he took care that everyone participated in the ball game, regardless of age, gender, or respectability. If there was one thing Wells detested, in games as in politics, it was spectatorship (Smith, "Little Wars" 130-132). And in this too, Wells and Kipling did not disagree.

Whereas Kipling was concerned to utilize the social connotations of games—to speak and through speaking to manipulate what I have called “the language of games”—Wells was more concerned to learn and to use the logic of competitive gaming in his efforts to influence social formation and behavior. As is fitting for a totalizing theorist, Wells believed that playing games had its place in life as it had a role to play in making the future society, whether for good or for ill. Athletics could be a useful “organ,” he writes in *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* (1931), “for excreting the more violent and adventurous ingredient in the surplus energy of mankind” (701). Athletics, then, should be subordinate to the life of the mind. The activities at the Wells household were meant to refresh and enliven the guests, many of whom were writers. And we get the sense that Wells was composing novels on his long cycling trips. What neither athletic nor mental games should do, however, is stoke the competitive spirit. Wells accordingly sent his sons to Oundle School, headed by F. W. Sanderson, who had replaced the public school model of organized games with activities he felt led to more collective feeling among the boys. At home, Wells played with his sons at world-building, an activity he describes in *Floor Games* (1911). Significantly, the rules Wells came up with for building islands, cities, and far-away lands out of blocks and toy figurines are meant to forestall feelings of unfairness. The rights and responsibilities of constructing and administering the toy worlds are carefully divvied out and regularly swapped. As Wells’s biographer David Smith has observed, Wells preferred games “in which the

participant would develop not only dexterity and quickness of mind, but also positive behaviour patterns" ("Little Wars" 129).

I may have given the impression that Kipling, Wells, and Conrad saw any form of play or playfulness to be immoral when the "game" is imperialism. They did not. These authors' standards of morality attach, rather, to the level of strategic awareness informing conduct. The objectionable position for these authors was the belief that imperialism is a *low-stakes* game, that it is fun, or else it builds character and proves inherent superiority. The authors do not seem to have objected to a character playing the game when that character is shown to perceive the high stakes of the game for everyone involved. Hence, for instance, the antics of Stalky & Co. are presented as moves in the high-stakes game of survival, as the boys well know. Wells, we saw, formed scruples about playing wargames because he understood the horribly high stakes of war, yet Wells did not eschew the Game for this reason. He played to achieve an outcome in which war could no longer be possible. And as for Conrad: Decoud makes his difference with Gould, not on the grounds that Gould is a player of the Great Game and he is not, but on the grounds that Gould does not know what sort of a game the Great Game is, whereas Decoud does. Moreover, Decoud is humble about his motivations because he can bring under a single perspective his selfish ends with the fates of suffering poor. The novel gives the reader an encompassing and accurate idea of the reasons behind the state of affairs in Costaguana. And it offers a humanitarian awareness about what the

consequences of the game will be for the impoverished people who live in the country.

Kipling's poem "The Return" (*Collected Verse* 365-367), which offers the perspective of a soldier returning from the Second Boer War, suggests how class could influence the quality of one's participation in the game. For gentlemen, British imperialism may have been a Great Game, *i.e.* a matter of low-stakes play; but, as Kipling's poetry written from the perspective of soldiers so powerfully attests, war could not be viewed as low-stakes play by the infantryman. In "The Return," a soldier's close and unprotected encounter with war is what makes him superior to the officer-gentlemen. The soldier is compelled to become "a thinking man" because he has undergone a life-threatening, and certainly soul-threatening, experience.

The line of inquiry opened by this dissertation could be carried farther. One idea I introduce here and which deserves further exploration is "strategic humanitarianism." By this term, I have tried to convey how a game-theory-like perspective on interacting players can underpin an ethical commitment to fairness or "fair play." The idea is that humanitarianism is not only ethical but also good policy. I think the Conradian novel is an especially well-suited vehicle for this idea, because it combines game-theory-like attentiveness to strategic interaction with the novelistic ethos of non-judgment. To more fully substantiate these claims, one could adduce the novels of Henry James. Strategy has been seen in James's novel to prevent reconciliation and understanding; strategy, it has been argued, is the worldly impulse James seems at once to concede and

regret. Yet it could be shown that James uses strategic thought to imagine resolutions and equilibriums for his characters. James's work is one of the more important sites of strategic humanitarianism in his period of English literature. What would be interesting to discover in connection with this dissertation's perspective is how James's strategic humanitarianism squares with his views and depictions of imperialism.

In the texts I have read in this dissertation, a strategic perspective is made to detect the knavish and safeguard the foolish. "Who can read the Cause of an act is halfway to Freedom!" says Kipling's Lama. "If you went back to the time of Plato, you would say that the idea of his 'Republic' was what was going on in the Mind of the Race then. But I object that that was only the futile fancy of a gentleman of leisure. What was really going on was the gathering up of the Macedonian power to smash through Greece, and then make Greece conquer Asia," is what Wells has Wilkins say to counter Boon's idea of Progress. "A turn of mind composed of innocence and skepticism is common to them all, with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives, as of disinterested lookers-on at a game," is how Conrad describes "profane men living in ships like the holy men gathered together in monasteries." This ethos of detection, perhaps dialectical twin of the desire for domination, feels especially valuable in light of the twentieth century's sobering witness to the inextricability of power from the imagination of strategy. Another avenue of development that this dissertation opens is how detective fiction makes use of game-strategy to unveil the

underbelly of imperialist and post-imperialist machinery.<sup>42</sup> Truth-finding is given a very precise definition in detective fiction on account of the categories of strategic interaction, and it would be interesting to track the ethos of detection through such Edwardian and twentieth-century British authors as Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, P.D. James, and John le Carré.

It will be important to add the perspective of women on the Game. How did women of different classes experience conscription into British ludic imperialism? And how did women's perspective on strategic interaction conform to and resist this conscription? Virginia Woolf's novels could be read for answers to these questions and for clues to sites of further answers. Finally, there was a great deal of complicated fallout over the Victorian British public school system among the modernist writers, and it would be interesting to add the voices of Auden and Isherwood to this dissertation's assessment of the stakes of the Game. After World War I, as Martin Green's *Children of the Sun* (1976) attests, British culture underwent a rebellion against the "fathers" and their moral maturity. Playfulness and performativity were reinvested with significance in the reaction against Victorian responsibility. How did the Game signify to this postwar generation? The role of strategic awareness in the novels of Evelyn Waugh could provide interesting answers to this question.

For twentieth-century theorists, games were of especial interest. Wittgenstein wrote about "language games" and John Von Neumann and Oskar

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<sup>42</sup> Yumna Siddiqi has blazed a trail in this line of inquiry in *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue* (Columbia 2007), yet Siddiqi does not make game-strategy one of the indices of her study.

Morgenstern founded formal game theory in *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944). Erving Goffman wrote a book on *Strategic Interaction* (1969) to move sociology away from its overemphasis on linguistic communication. Derrida sighted play as an emancipative characteristic of structures. And in their essay “1227: Treatise on Nomadology--The War Machine,” Deleuze and Guattari used game-thinking to illustrate the “third-person” kind of agency behind “the war machine and the State apparatus” (352).

In 1968, a fateful year, *Yale French Studies* devoted an issue on “Game, Play, Literature.” Mikhail Bakhtin, A.J. Greimas, and W.K. Wimsatt, who wrote on the analogy between chess problems and poetic significance, were among the contributors. The post-1968 discussion among literary critics turned from an interest in “games” to an equally pressing one in “play,” a move made all but inevitable by the ways post-structuralism was being articulated in contradistinction to structuralism. For a long while, “Play” and not “Game” was the urgent interest. Indeed, when, in 2009, *New Literary History* returned to the subject *Yale French Studies* had denominated as “Game, Play, Literature,” the editors sought a synthesis in the single concept of “Play.” But, interestingly, the word “Game” or “Games” was in most of the contributors’ titles.

Game Theory has found applications in economics, diplomacy, evolutionary science, ethics, and neuroscience. Recently, scholars of literature have been discovering literary bearings for these areas of research. In *Compeupance* (2007) and “Hyperbolic Discounting and Intertemporal Bargaining,” for instance, William Flesch has written about the game-theoretic



origins of readers' desires for narrative closure. And in *The Vehement Passions* (2002), Philip Fisher has used Game Theory to explore the role of fear in shaping cultural modernity.

On account of Game Theory and Game Studies, games are becoming of increasing interest to scholars in the humanities. This dissertation has begun to uncover some of the concerns that emerge at the intersection of British literature and game-strategy. In the texts I have studied, games become meaningful for their bearing on the role of violence in determining human behavior and national policy. And strategic thought holds out a promise that lessening the suffering of the world's players is the right move in the Game. This is an area of research well worth developing, notwithstanding the inadequacy of Edwardian standards of ethicality to policy-making in the twenty-first century. I hope this dissertation will be of use to the scholars who will further develop these areas in which games become relevant to the study of English literature.

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