DEMONIZING THE AFRICAN OTHER, HUMANIZING THE SELF: HOLLYWOOD AND THE POLITICS OF POST-IMPERIAL ADAPTATIONS

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> Dominant definitions connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views-of- the-world: they take 'large views' of issues: they relate events to 'the national interest' or to the level of geo-politics, even if they make these connections in truncated, inverted or mystified ways. The definition of a 'hegemonic' viewpoint is (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe of possible meanings of a whole society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy—it appears coterminous with what is 'natural,' 'inevitable,' 'taken for granted' about social order. (Stuart Hall 57)

> Cinema is thus a privileged locus for the investigation of the coming together of nineteenth-century obsession with the past, and the twentieth-century desire to make visibly comprehensible the difference of cultural 'others.' (Fatimah Tobing Rony 9)

I. Introduction

Since the emergence of critical attention to the gothic genre over half a century ago, a salient character of that literary category that has been somewhat ignored is "its long obsession with race" (Delamotte 17). As far back as the late eighteenth century, when what Delamotte calls "Anglo-Gothic" literature emerged, through to the nineteenth century, a significant feature of this literature has always been the "racial Other." The many supposedly fearful and dangerous racial Others in Euro-American imaginations—Indians, Chinese, Native Americans, Western Europeans—include what Toni Morrison termed the "Africanist persona." These "Symbolic figurations of blackness," as Morrison puts it, refer to "the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany

Eurocentric learnings about these people" (Qtd. in Delamotte 18). In these popular and dominant Anglo-American figurations of the African racial Other, consistent perceptions of the black person, culture, and even landscape (geography) as monstrous are repeatedly reproduced. These perceptions have not changed dramatically since the eighteenth century: they have been inherited by twentieth-century purveyors of culture (novelists, playwrights, poets), and by producers of other media of mass culture such as films, television, Internet, and so forth.

In this essay I examine this continuous reproduction of the monstrous African racial Other in contemporary American Hollywood films. As a specific site of interest, I will interrogate the Hallmark's 2004 adaptation of Rider Haggard's sensational adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines,* originally published in 1885. By conducting a close reading of this film and its original text, I hope to call attention to the unique way in which contemporary Euro-American mainstream visual media (especially film and television) repackage and re-circulate Victorian fantasies and racial stereotypes of African peoples, especially around the idea of monstrosity. I argue that because the hue of imperialism in the twenty-first century has changed from an earlier frontal colonialism to new forms of subtle subjugations, mainstream American media continually seek new ways of catering to the sustained colonial desires of Euro-American media audiences. These audiences suffer from a particular kind of social craving which Renato Rosaldo has appropriately termed "imperialist nostalgia" (1993). I take up Rosaldo's term to refer to the continued desires of modern Euro-American media audiences to consume mythical images of "lost" empires. These peculiar neo-imperial desires continue to put pressure on Hollywood and indeed other mainstream American media to excavate, repackage and re-circulate nineteenth-century fantasies of supposed African monstrosity.

As a point of entry into this discourse, I begin with an examination of the politics of adaptation. In this regard, I interrogate what it means to adapt a work of art. The first reason for this approach is very obvious: Hallmark's film is an adaptation from a famous nineteenth-century imperial romance novel. Second, as an apparatus of cultural dissemination, motion picture technology inherited the social functions of the nineteenth-century novel: Joss Marsh and Kamilla Elliott have characterized this inheritance as a continuance of nineteenth-century "fiction's burden of social commentary, community–building, and the dramatization of values" (459). I consider it fruitful and important then to investigate which twenty-first-century Euro-American values are being "dramatized" in the new filmic prog-

enies of Victorian fiction about Africa. By reviewing the subterranean politics underlying the process of adaptation, I hope to unravel the deeply troubling hinge between twenty-first-century productions of culture in Euro-American mainstream media and continuities of imperialism.

In spite of the lingering debates about the formal disparities between film and literature—images and words—Francesco Casetti has argued that both media can "be considered as sites of production and circulation of discourses; that is, as symbolic constructions that refer to a cluster of meanings that a society considers possible (thinkable) and feasible (legitimate)" (82). Here, film and literature no longer function as mere media of mass entertainment and education but as discursive centers and vectors of mainstream ideologies. Dominant ideologies are continuously generated, re-circulated and re-enforced in these two media in very subtle but strongly effective ways. Modern electronic media and literature therefore function, beyond their traditional roles of entertainment, as conveyor-belts of popular mentalities and dominant mainstream social values. If we ascribe any validity to these views, then adaptations in these media have enormous social ideological implications. According to Casetti, adaptations then become "the reappearance of discourse" (82) and not merely the re-emergence of a variation of the original/previous text. By using the term "discourse," Casetti elaborates, "what we are dealing with is the reappearance, in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, a theme, a character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere" (82). The "reappeared" discourse then is re-inserting itself in a new moment and addressing old issues in the light of new *presents*. Put differently, the "discourse" is made continuously relevant through acknowledgement that the moment has changed—the adaptation emerges to address a "new" time and space in the light of current realities. In this regard, adaptation as a cultural phenomenon functions primarily, Casetti argues, as a "recontextualization of the text" (83). It is significant to note that when discourses "reappear," they do not do so in a static and unchanged mode: they are reinvented anew. But this *reinvention* still embodies the structural frame of the original "discourse," concealed in new social logics.

Casetti's insights about the re-emergence of discourse in adaptations have significant implications for this study. For instance, Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), has illuminated the deeply inextricable relations that exist between nineteenth-century literary productivities (such as novels) and Victorian politics and culture. The argument advanced by Said is not that nineteenth-century literary culture was responsible for imperialism but that "imperialism and the

novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible…to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (84). In light of Casetti's arguments —and by extension my own position—about adaptations as "reappearance of discourse," the crucial question I want to raise is: If nineteenth-century empire novels, as Said suggests, arose out of the specific moments of imperialism—of British adventure, conquests, and imperial expansionism, what are the adaptations of those Victorian literatures doing for the present century? After all, as Roy Armies has argued, "though Edward Said make [*sic*] no mention of film, a connection remarkably similar to that linking the novel and European colonialism can be posited between the Hollywood movie and US twentieth- century imperialism" (2). So is there a "discourse" in nineteenth-century empire novels about Africa that has "reappeared" in the Victorian "second-lives," such as contemporary Hollywood films? Or to rephrase it in the words of Jennifer Green-Lewis: "why, when we want to reinvent and revisit the past, do we choose the nineteenth century as the place to get off the train? What is it about the look of this past that appeals to the late twentieth-century passenger?" (30). In attempting to answer these questions, I re-examine some of the mythical archetypes of Africa[ns] constructed in nineteenth-century novels such as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines,* see how those mythical stereotypes and the "discourses" they encoded in the nineteenth century "reappear" in Hallmark's film adaptation of the novel, and then critique the implications of this "reappearance" for the present century, many decades after European colonialism in Africa. Inevitably, this essay will navigate a comparative negotiation between the 1885 original text and the 2004 Hallmark film.

II. Mythical Archetypes

In revisiting nineteenth-century stereotypes of Africa[ns] in both the novel and film, I will pay specific attention to the idea of the "dark unknowable" land, the "uncanny and weird heroine," and the "monstrous power maniac." These three are not the only stereotypes of Africans in the film or even the novel, but the three categories have been chosen as representative samples of the visual rhetoric of the film. These categories, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, are connected with the construction of monstrosity in Victorian literary rhetoric, and those narrative strategies are reenacted in the film adaptation.

A. The “Dark Unknowable”[1] Land

It is only in the last decade and half or so that a new critical interest—one “concentrating on the relationship between literature and the natural environment—has become one of the fastest growing areas in literary studies” (Carrol 295). But the metaphor of landscape has featured in western literature as far back as even the romantic writings of the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, physical place assumed a prominant role in literary narratology. According to Joseph Carroll, the nineteenth-century British writer lived in a fairly “densely populated” and emerging “industrialized country,” where “world exploration, colonial expansion, and the still fresh scientific revelations about geological time and evolutionary transformations offered a wild field for imaginative exploration into wild places” (305). Carroll notes also that it was a moment when the idea that “the world can simply be divided into *wild* and *cultivated* tracts” was popular. So in most of the writings of this period, place and individual/national/racial identity were frequently conflated.

Africa as a geographical entity had a strong hold on popular Victorian imagination during this period, not only as a potentially rewarding colony belching untapped wealth such as diamonds, gold, and other industrial resources, but also as the gothic landscape—*terra incognita*. Consequently, the mystified topography that is Africa was vividly narrativised in popular novels. But the said topography “is not merely described and then set aside as the novelist gets on with the plot; it is vividly kept before the reader’s eyes,” with all its component dangers, “as an essential aspect in the quality of experience” (Carroll 308) of the narrated imperial adventure. It is important to note that as a narrative strategy the literalization of the “dark unknowable” geography was undergirded prominently (thought not solely) with the logic of Gothicism, which Ruth Bienstock Anolik describes as “marked by an anxious encounter with otherness” (1). In this regard, Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* is based on an adventure played against a sensational gothic background. Indeed it is believed that it was Haggard who first coined the term “Heart of Darkness,” which Joseph Conrad later adopted for his own novel.[2] This became the prototypical colonial metaphor for Africa as “a dark, primordial alterity where the physical and human landscape would express instinctual

[1] This is a term Ruth Bienstock Anolik uses in referring to the general conception of the gothic in western episteme (1).

[2] See Itala Vivan (p.53). On p. 250 of the *Three Adventure Novels* (which is the version I use in this essay) Haggard describes South Africa as “this dark land.”

levels of consciousness that might cause the regression of civilized white man" (Vivan 53) such as Quartermain and his safari team. Hence the racial identity of Africans as Other was embedded in the very land that was narrativised. This vivid Victorian depiction of Africa as "ancient," "static" and "savage" achieved a dual function. According to Itala Vivan, "it created stereotypes of immobility and primitivism that ideologically contributed to justifying the "'civilizing mission,' but at the same time proved fascinating and seductive because they constructed a cultural alterity" (53).

As a typical nineteenth-century novel of adventure into the geographically threatening labyrinth that is Africa, *King Solomon's Mines* is contoured by what Vivan catalogues as "wild human races, sensational landscapes, dangerous wild beasts, hidden dangers, and especially the duel with the classic lion" (54). In the 2004 Hallmark film, this archetypal African geographical labyrinth is inherited from the nineteenth century and vividly transposed onto the screen. The film's action vacillates between two distinct spatial horizons—London and Africa, colonial centre and periphery, self and "Other." Of course the specific locales that the film chooses in narrating Africa conforms to and reinforces the Victorian perception of Africa during the nineteenth century as the "dark unknown"—backward in human civilization. As the film's jacket clearly and sensationally advertises, it is "a journey into the Heart of Darkness." The film's opening sequence is a medley of long takes, high angle shots, and close-ups of an African jungle replete with wild game—elephants, lions, zebras, giraffes and other strange animals regarded as exotic when compared to the domesticated pets of English civilization. Deep valleys, gullies, wild forests, and large expanses of desert land characterize the African landscape in the film. As Mrs. Maitland says in the film, "it is a place that clearly hasn't changed for thousands of years." By contrast we are presented with London, with its clean streets, wonderful architecture, well-furnished homes and trimmed lawns, horses and carts, etc. This disparity between what constitutes the landscape of London on the one hand, and Africa on the other, is itself part of the visual poetics of articulating a sub-human spatial zone or continent. That is, space becomes actively implicated in the construction of the ideology of racial degeneracy integral to Victorian society and its hierarchy. The visual logic in the film is simply that the land is as wild and untamed as those who inhabit it—a conflation of identity and place that, as I suggested earlier, is coterminous with nineteenth-century literature. This depiction of a wild and uninhabited geography itself is a deeply troubling visual rhetoric that reintroduces the age-old perception of vast unclaimed lands—a rhetoric that once legitimized imperialism.

This assumption—that the land, because it is empty and holds such enormous natural resources, should be possessed—is central to imperialist ideologies. Why has this colonial narrative strategy been reenacted? I argue that the continued portrayal of African land as wild is itself a reintroduction of the colonial logic of the monstrous landscape that consumes all who dare to adventure into it. This is reinforced in the film in many ways—one being that a lion in the wild African forest decapitated Quatermain's wife during his first phase of sojourn to the continent. This historical reference conjoins with the wildness of the landscape in the film to reinforce popular western notions of Africa as monstrous geography.

If Africa was (as implied in the novel), and still is (as the film imputes), a "dark unknowable" place, then a renewed rhetoric of recolonization is implied. But this new discourse of imperialism is "purified" and strategically "dissociated" from the core of the film's thematic concern. Citing Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Jeff Bass defines dissociation as "those techniques of separation which have the purpose of dissociating, separating, disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole or at least a unified group within some systemic thought" (262). This narrative strategy is itself inherited from the novel. Bass argues that while the underlying motive for the adventure of Quartermain and his safari team is imperialistic economic exploitation, through the manipulation of his characters Haggard creates a façade of indifference "which relegates his characters' desire for material wealth to a position of minimal importance" (262). Thus "economic exploitation is …presented as the 'appearance' of imperialism while its 'reality' becomes the act of establishing justice and its reward the resulting transformation of identities" (262) in Kaukauna land. This dissociation is also central to the logic of the film too.

The adventure starts out purely as a rescue mission for the dear life of Professor Maitland, Elizabeth's father, held captive by the despotic Twala. But the introduction of Elizabeth Maitland[3] is another rhetoric of concealment that diverts attention and serves as a tapestry over an obvious imperialistic mission. Anne McClintock broaches on the feminization of the "Empty Space" as a key strategy in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines.* This is marked by the use of such gender-

[3] The introduction of Elizabeth Maitland is a direct inheritance from the 1985 film adaptation of the book produced by Cannon Group and directed by J. Lee Thompson. There, Lee Huston (played by Sharon Stone) seeks her father, an archeologist held captive by Germans who want him to give them information about the mythical Solomon's Mines. See Philip Leibfried, p. 140.

oriented descriptive phrases as "Sheba's Breasts," "nipples," and the "blushing" of the sky "like the cheek of a girl" (242).[4] In the film, this feminization is physically realized with the character of Elizabeth. When we meet Elizabeth in the film she is a spinster hob-knobbing with her uncle Captain Good in London. Quartermain is also a widower as he has lost his wife in the "dark" African jungle to a lion during his first sojourn to the continent. He desperately needs his son but his in-laws will not allow him custody of the child because he does not possess responsible family credentials such as a stable home and a wife to raise a child. It is almost at the end of the adventure then that Quartermain proposes marriage to Elizabeth inside the mythical cave redolent with diamonds. Here the western patriarch conquers the African land and its wealth, represented by the cave and the diamonds, but that imperial "conquest" is symbolically enunciated by the intense romance that ensues between him and Elizabeth inside the cave. The very setting for this romantic encounter is significant. The cave, like a woman, is "penetrated" and its feminine interiority ransacked by the new American imperial patriarch, Quartermain. As Quartermain escapes from the cave in the film, he takes no gold or diamonds, yet in the novel he makes time, in spite of the frenzy, to fill his pockets with "a couple of handfuls of big ones out of the third chest" (400). By escaping only with the woman, the film tactically dissociates the imperialistic theme of economic exploitation. But it is the ending that unravels that narrative strategy. The film does not end with Quartermain's returning to meet with Sir Henry Curtis in London. Rather, it ends with Quartermain's son coming to join him and his new wife Elizabeth in South Africa. Quartermain can stay, live off the land, and see that a gleeful African servant, Khiva, attends his family.

Here, the film initiates an interesting post-colonialist hegemonic take. Africa is no longer to be infiltrated temporarily, and dispensed with after it has been ransacked like a treasure trove. Rather, almost invoking the "Bering-Strait theory"[5] in North America, the edenic land that is Africa is vast and free and "whosoever cometh" can stay; hence the new imperialist remains in the colonized space. Africa, like North America, could become another settler-colony. This is a significant political take that the film advances if read in the context of South-

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[4] See p. 281 of *Three Adventure Novels* for such examples of feminized images.

[5] This has been the argument advanced by white settlers insisting that land in North America was wild hence all peoples, including First Nations, made forays into it as adventurers thus dismissing "First Peoples' claims to occupying the land since time immemorial" (Wakeham 6).

ern Africa. For the benefit of the current white minority Boers in say Zimbabwe, Mozambique, or even South Africa, dominant notions of settler-colonies are still being re-inscribed in the public imagination. But this dominant hegemonic imperial ideology is initiated, purveyed and fostered thousands of miles (the USA) from the heartland of Southern Africa. But it is effective because the American, British, and other European audiences whose nationals are still stuck to these colonial spaces are being convinced persistently that this option of a settler-colony still remains the best one possible.

But far from the imperial domination insinuated by the reincarnation of a supposedly "dark" and "savage" geography, another kind of subtle imperialism, racial domination, is going on in the film—a unique kind of "nostalgia"[6] which Renato Rosaldo argues "makes racial domination appear innocent and pure" (68). Rosaldo uses the term "imperialist nostalgia" in referring to "a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed" (67). At the height of imperialism, Europe saw its role in the colonies as a "civilizing mission." Europe's "burden," then, was to civilize and refine the frontier physically as in the environment, the social values, religious mores, etc. But at the time Europe itself was engaged in vigorous industrialization, which necessitated the destruction of its own natural environment. So apart from the allure of the African colony as a site of wealth, a number of young Victorians who mourned the unfolding decimation of nature went to the colonies as a journey back to "uninterrupted nature." However, the reality of contemporary Africa is a testimony of colonialism's "achievements" in its goal of "civilization." Africa has its own big cities with sky-scrapers, automobile-filled streets, train subways, oil and gas industries, and all the general markers of a modern industrial world. Its "pristine" world celebrated in Victorian literature is gone. The new generation of Euro-American families read about the "dark" continent in novels such as Haggard's and Conrad's in high schools, colleges, and universities, but that world has changed and is thus inaccessible on a realistic level. When family television companies, like Hallmark, produce the "second-lives" of Victorian fiction such as *King Solomon's Mines*, a unique kind of post-imperial voyeurism is going on. It is a classical case of "imperialist nostalgia"

[6] According to Rosaldo, the term "nostalgia" was originally coined by a Swiss physician (in the seventh-century) from the Greek words *nostos* (meaning "a return home") and *algos* ("a painful condition") in referring to the psychological "conditions of home sickness among his nation's mercenaries who were fighting far from their homeland" (71).

where, as Rosaldo notes, "someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to intervention" (70). But this feeling is not an innocent one: it contains hope that the past should return and "mourning" because it will not.

No wonder the film's opening sequence begins with Quartermain's dissension with his hunting team over the wanton killing of female elephants in a thick forest in South Africa. This conservationist slant is a radical deviation from the original text. But it is interesting that this narrative innovation opens the "reinvented" visual text. The lesson is apparent: what is left of the "wild" nature of the continent must be preserved for the posterity of Euro-America families to assuage its "imperialist nostalgia." Today, there is still an on-going thriving popular culture of westerners going 'on safari' to Africa, which is now billed often as a kind of 'eco-tourism' and juxtaposed to Africans' own frivolity or lack of care for the landscape and especially the endangered species (due to poaching, etc.). The current thriving reincarnation of Victoriana in film and television thus presents "idealized fantasies"[7] of Africa's past, excavated and re-served to contemporary Euro-America families for their vicarious participation in that mythical colonial past which the modern western audience cannot see anymore. Of course the extinction of nature is traceable to Euro-American's own very project of "civilization." As Rosaldo concludes, "Mourning the passing of traditional society and imperialist nostalgia cannot neatly be separated from one another. Both attempt to use a mask of innocence to cover their involvement with processes of domination" (86). "Imperialist nostalgia" functions as an alibi for the concealment of post-imperial hegemonies. The reintroduction of Victorian texts in modern visual culture is therefore a clear example of how Euro-American society is complicit in a new kind of imperialism that furthers racial domination through modern media technology.

B. The Uncanny and Villainous Heroine

In his famous harangue on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe wrote that Africa for Conrad was "the other world, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (3). This was not the Africa of Conrad alone; it was also Af-

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[7] Rosaldo borrows this term from Marshal Berman in his strong criticisms of "reverential postures towards traditional societies," arguing that these are strategies that gloss over violence and brutality. See Rosaldo p. 72.

rica in the eyes of earlier Victorian writers like Rider Haggard. A good example of that "other-worldliness" that was Africa for the Victorian writer and his readers is found in the character of Gagool in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. She is described thus:

> The wizened, monkey-like figure creeping up from the shadows of the hut. It crept on all fours, but when it reached the place where the king sat it rose upon its feet…revealed a most extraordinary and weird countenance. It was apparently that of a woman of great age, so shrunken that in size it was no larger than a year-old child… Set in the wrinkles was a sunken slit that represented the mouth, beneath which curved outward to a point. There was no nose to speak of, indeed the whole countenance might have been taken for that of a sun-dried corpse had it not been for a pair of large black eyes… As for the skull itself, it was perfectly bare, and yellow in hue, while its wrinkled scalp moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra (320-1).

No other description could have elicited the conviction of Africa as a metaphysical cultural alterity so well as this. It is a fantasy of absolute evil laced with the most primeval icons of horror and bloody ferocity such as "sun-dried corpse" and "cobras." This textual creation immediately encodes a "line between a mundane and day lit moral Anglo-Saxon self and some colossal dark evil oneiric other" (Delamotte 27). This portrayal of racial degeneracy was significant at the time because it fit tidily into popular imaginations of racial Others as seen in other imperial romances set in India, eastern Europe, and South America. Generally, however, due to her femaleness, some critics have read Gagool as a metaphor for the typical Victorian "anxieties about female power and its threat to helpless men."[8] But distinctively, what marks her character as an evil Other is that she serves "as foil for the protagonists of their respective works, heightening the pluck, good humor, courage, and idealism of Quartermain and his companions" (Rogers and Underwood 129). Gagool is made to function as a foil to the imperial agenda of Quartermain and his team because she is infused with an unflinching sense of protection for territorial integrity, fierce ethnic nationalism, a deep consciousness of political power, and an avid propensity for material wealth. These capitalist instincts were not attitudes the British conqueror expected from a society supposedly devoid of any civilization.

So central to the film too are the supernatural propensities of Africans symbolized by Gagool. Ironically, in the Hallmark film Gagool

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[8] Haggard himself is said to have been a victim of domestic abuse by a "maladjusted" nurse while growing up in London. It is believed that part of the inspiration for Aisha (in *She*) and Gagool is Haggard's vicious childhood nurse. See Philip Liebfried, p. 6.

is ripped of all agency. Rather than the exotic "fiend" we see in the book—fiercely oppositional to the imperial ambitions of Quartermain and his safari team, she becomes treacherous to Twala and sides with the imperial forces symbolized by Professor Maitland, Quartermain, and his "rescue" team. When we first encounter Gagool in the film she is a pernicious African witch with strange powers to cause pain and even death to her victim. So whenever Professor Maitland exhibits the arrogance of the English patriarch who fears no primitive African king (Twala), or when he tries to escape, she pierces her hand-held statue and Maitland writhes and winces into unconsciousness with pain. But dramatically, Gagool becomes sympathetic to Maitland and thus transforms from a fierce African "savage witch" to an ally to the new imperial force led by Quartermain and Umbopaa. This radical visual poetics that ensures the reinvention of Gagool from the symbol of the nadir of African savagery to a benign imperial accomplice is indeed a fortuitous "reappearance" of the beliefs of nineteenth-century writers. According to Laura Chrisman, "many imperialist writers, among them Haggard, were not automatically antagonistic to the new spirituality and things occult, but were on the contrary attracted to them and saw their usability for imperialism" (42). The nebulous zone—for and against imperialism —that the Gagool of the Hallmark film occupies is interesting and revealing in many ways. It unravels the very double politics that characterizes the conceptualization of good and evil in the project of imperialism. As Laura Chrisman argues, "it is through Gagool that imperialism's ambivalence about rationality and knowledge, as well as about Africa and the feminine, are best dramatized" (53). Though she is evil and a threat to the imperial course, she possesses supreme knowledge that is invaluable to the imperial project. In the book Gagool leads the empire, though under duress, into the treasure trove that is the ominous cave, but the stone finally crushes her as she attempts to impede the imperial project. But in the film, she leads Quartermain willingly and obsequiously to the entrance of the cave, posing no threat of any kind to the imperial adventure. For this reason the Gagool of the Hallmark film is not crushed but retained for future alliance with the empire.

Gagool fulfills a new social function in the film narrative, apart from the political implications of being retained as an exotic spectacle of the degenerating racial Other. That function, I argue, is that of "ethnographic spectacle" (Rony 17). In the introduction to her book Fatimah Tobing Rony calls attention to what she describes as "fascinating Cannibalism." She defines this as "the obsessive consumption of images of the racialized Other known as primitive" (10). In this social dynamic, there is a curious admixture of "'fascination' and

‘horror’ that the ethnographic occasions” (10). In this context the said “‘cannibalism’ is not that of the people who are labeled savage, but that of the consumers of the images of the bodies—as well as actual bodies on display—of native peoples offered up by popular media and science” (10). Though Rony uses this argument in referring to ethnographic films, its logic has a fitting application to Hallmark’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. As she notes, the people in ethnographic film are always portrayed as “exotic,” “savage,” “primitive,” and without a history, civilization, technology, and generally at the very early stages of the evolution of human history (7). As a genre that purports to record a realistic historical moment, the “ethnographic film” implies “truth” and is thus linked, like its printed/written kin, to what Rony calls “discourses of power, knowledge and pleasure” (10). Images of the likes of Gagool in twenty-first-century cinema, though not explicitly conceived as ethnographic, purport to provide the public with true anthropological “knowledge” of Africa, but that “knowledge” of “savagery” is viewed with “pleasure,” almost like the “voyeuristic gaze” of the male viewer on the female image that Laura Mulvey talks about in cinema (10). A different kind of “power” game, specifically at the psychological level, is going on in this neo-imperialist voyeurism. It is something of a psychological pathology earlier diagnosed by Chinua Achebe which has to do with the west’s “deep anxieties about the precariousness of its own civilization” and the constant need “for reassurance” by comparing itself with Africa (17). The image of Gagool is an encounter with the Other. And as Sherene Razack argues, “without such encounters, the west will not know its own civility” (208). That is, contemporary images of supposed African savagery (of any kind) “offer an imperial personhood [the individual viewer] and statehood [the polity]” a feeling of “ultimate membership in the family of civilized nations” (Razack 208). This is the true aesthetic and cultural function of the obsession with “savagery” in Victorian “second-lives” such as Hallmark’s *King Solomon’s Mines*.

C. The Monstrous Power Maniac

One of the key legitimizing strategies deployed in imperialistic discourse is that “of exaggerating and playing off difference among diverse others” (Chrisman 40), especially supposed racial Others. This is primal in the narrative rhetoric of Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, and is indeed replicated in the 2004 film. In the book, as soon as the motivation for the adventure is established—the rescue of Sir Henry Curtis’ brother—and the onerous task of finding their destination through a “tortuous” and “savage” landscape is achieved, our at-

tention is immediately turned to the differences between two political camps in the book, one being the more civilized imperial team led by Quartermain, and the other, Twala, "an unusually bloodthirsty tyrant who has a soldier put to death for accidentally dropping his shield while standing in review" (Bass 264). Such images of mis-governance and other terrifying wholesale massacres such as the "witch-hunting" episodes clearly constitute Twala as a power monster engaged in the savagely wanton decimation of his subjects. And since imperialism's "burden" was the restoration of "civilized" culture—social, political, religious, etc., in a supposedly barren moral landscape, Twala had to be ousted and replaced with a new and reformed noble savage, Umbopa. This is of course one of the key strategies through which imperialism purifies itself, as Jeff Bass has brilliantly established. But this strategy is effective because the creation of a stereotype of a politically monstrous racial Other efficiently dredges up sympathy for the colonizing authority.

The Twala in Hallmark's film is similar to the one in the book yet different in a number of important ways. First, we do not see those images of jungle justice inscribed in the book. Second, there are no witch-hunting scenes led by Gagool. Third, unlike Haggard's Twala sequestered in the "dark" forests of the Kuakuana land, Hallmark's Twala claims "he grew amongst" the white race. The bestiality of the Twala in the film, then, is solely his threat on the life of an imperial subject, Professor Maitland. That threat of course emerges from his desperation to retrieve the map leading to the proverbial Solomon's mines where the "sacred stone" that grants ultimate and eternal power to its bearer is preserved. The political shake-up that follows in the Kaukauna land of the film thus arises from Twala's love for political power independent of imperial support. Twala then can be likened to any Third World political leader who has been to Europe and North America, learned their ways, and has returned back to the continent to rule but does not defer to imperial authorities in the First World, nor cater to their economic interests. As far as contemporary African political history goes, that leader is always demonized and ultimately ousted and replaced with an imperial stooge such as Umbopa. In the Middle East, a fine example of the Euro-American role as the *Patria* is already playing out. Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, all former protégés of western political interests, have now either been demonized (as in the case of Osama) or demonized and deposed (Saddam) because of their supposed threats to global (in a way implying western) lives and property. But beneath this dominant western logic/rhetoric lurks the true picture, which is these leaders' intrepid attempts at being autonomous, that is, without regard or deference to

western political hegemonies. And like the Twala of Hallmark, these are all "monsters" manufactured by the First World.

In the new world order contoured by American hegemony, a new logic of subtle or enlightened imperialism is being fostered. Hallmark's film, like its forebearer the imperial romance of the nineteenth century, re-incarnates the discourse of what Anne McClintock calls "the power of white *patria potestas*" (248). This was a dominant political logic that underlay nineteenth-century imperialism, which accorded hegemonic imperial regimes "the authority to inaugurate what they believe will be a subservient black monarch, on terms favorable to the colonial state" (McClintock 249). The economic interests of Europe and America in Africa have not ended. A vast amount of the west's industrial raw materials like crude oil, iron ore, tin, and agricultural products such as cocoa, cotton, and coffee, etc. are still being sourced in the continent. Those huge economic interests cannot be left in the hands of [un]trusted African leaders. The continuing political upheavals in African countries such as Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, to mention only a few, countries whose stories of genocides have become the subjects of fascinating documentaries[9] for Euro-American Film companies, are in many ways not unconnected with crises arising from imperial impositions of leadership from North America and Europe. But those impositions are couched in and legitimized by the deceptive rhetoric of clearing away the stereotypical African power monster. The installation of political stooges by Euro-American imperial mercenaries is still a regular occurrence in the Third World[10] and films like Hallmark's *King Solomon's Mines* "re-circulate" those neo-colonial political tropes, thereby "re-legitimizing" and "re-enforcing" dominant neo-imperialist political ideologies amongst their watching audiences.

III. Implications of the "Re-emergence" of Discourse in Hallmark's *King Solomon's Mines*

In attempting to outline some of the typical mythical stereotypes of African monstrosity inflected in nineteenth-century fiction that have then been popularized in contemporary western technologies of cul-

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[9] See Sherene Razack's essay "Those Who Witness the Evil."

[10] Afghanistan and Iraq are clearly not in Africa, but they constitute a vivid example of Euro-American propensities for wanting to control political scenes outside their spheres of sovereignty primarily for economic interests. Saddam was another Twala ousted from power for killing his people with noxious gases and constituting a threat to American subjects.

ture such as the film and television, I have simultaneously problematized the subtlety of encoded cultural, social, and political rhetoric embedded in those reincarnated archetypes. In this section, I will do a rather broad, though brief, critique, from a theoretical standpoint, of the implications of those discourses that have "reappeared" in modern media technology.

I have already made reference to Francesco Casetti's ideas on adaptation, inferring that adaptations do not simply imply a fervent or partial replication of an original text, but rather the inflection of the implicit discourses that are embodied in that work. The discursive "reappearance" takes place within what Casetti terms "the communicative situation" (83), which is the sum total of the large number of interrelated factors that coalesce to give a text its meaning. This involves the complex interplay of the text[s] with a number of social influences that are interactional, institutional, intertextual and existential (84). What is crucial about the "communicative situation" is not just the assessment that takes into cognizance the reinvented text and its environment, "but, more importantly, it means dealing with the relationship between these elements and the way in which they, together, bend the text one way or another" (Casetti 85).

Keeping this in mind, it is important to note the significant social shifts between the nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century on the one hand, and the later twentieth century to the present on the other, to see what role the culture industry still plays in "bending" the meaning of visual texts in a new "communicative situation." For instance, as soon as the narrative potentials of film crystallized in the early twentieth century, the American film industry flourished in the production of imperial films that gave meaning to the whole idea of imperialism through the fabrication of imperial heroes. "Britain was the biggest market for Hollywood films outside America," argues Richards, and both countries "shared a cultural commitment to the values of chivalry, service and *noblesse oblige*..." (129). But by the mid-twentieth century, agitation for political autonomy and consequent independence had begun to take shape in the colonies, especially in Africa. Today, direct invasion, conquest and occupation of foreign lands by Europe and America purely in the name of imperialism have almost completely ended (I say "almost," recognizing the absurd theatre of American imperial misadventure in Iraq). But the grand tropes of imperialistic ideologies have not. In 1997 for instance, as part of the events to mark the centenary of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, the *Daily Telegraph* conducted a poll to assess the popularity of British imperial history. As this poll revealed, a large percentage of the respondees, especially from the younger generation,

knew almost nothing of the history of the British Empire.[11] But there was ironically a striking conviction about the sanctity of the imperial project by this same ignorant generation: "Do you take pride in the fact that Britain had an empire? Seventy per cent said yes. Do you regret that Britain no longer has an empire? Sixty per cent said yes. Did Britain do more good than harm in her colonies? Fifty-eight per cent said yes (as opposed to thirty-one per cent saying more harm than good)" (Richards 143). It is clear from this data what films like *King Solomon's Mine* and other "second-lives" of Victorian fiction do for Euro-American audiences: They help these audiences "retreat into nostalgia for an empire which they barely remember and of which they know almost nothing" (Richards143). Here is a classical example of a new "communicative situation" where, as John Mackenzie notes, "popular culture can have precisely [the] role of projecting illusions when a different form of reality has taken over" (32). Frontal imperialism has ended, but a deep conviction about its sanctity has remained etched in the imagination of western publics. The obsessive "Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture" (2001), as John Mackenzie calls it, is thus lucid evidence of the ways in which the mass media, such as television and film, function in modern societies precisely as "important sites for the production, reproduction and transformation of ideologies" (Hall 19). Ideologies of racial superiority, of the sanctity of the European-American "burden" of cleaning the "axis of evil" all over the world, and its anointed role of playing the father-figure to non-European/American geo-political entities is still very much a dominant discourse in mainstream western media of mass communication such as film and television. These discourses need to be sustained if the First World's unflinching and irreversible projects of imperialism all over the world must be legitimized amongst a growingly inquisitive and suspicious global public. Hallmark's *King Solomon's Mines* is only a small fragment of this socio-cultural trend in modern societies and what it serves, be it "imperialist nostalgia," "fascinating cannibalism," or what I have called "post-imperial voyeurism," is precisely to further the cultural trope in western societies where the racial Other is demonized so that the western-self can be humanized.

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[11] See Jeffrey Richards, p. 128.

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