

**Dominance and Deference: The Inability to Coexist**  
*As Expressed by Conrad and Orwell*

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Honors Thesis, Spring 2019

Department of English  
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Defense Date  
April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 4pm

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## Introduction

Modernism is more than just a literary time period; it is a cultural movement responding to the social, political, and economic climate of the times. The actual dates for when modernism spans from is an ongoing debate, however it is conventionally understood as lasting between 1890-1940. For the purposes of this essay, I will be understanding modernism as lasting between those years. *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad was first published in 1907, and *Burmese Days* by George Orwell was first published in 1934, placing them in the categories of Early Modernism and Late Modernism respectively. More specifically, *The Secret Agent* is based in Britain's Edwardian era while *Burmese Days* is taking place during Britain's end of empire. Both of these novels are written by British authors, so I will be situating my thesis around how political, social, and economic transformations affect British society.

My research topic involves the relationship between two types of masculinity: stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity. Stereotypical masculinity is a societal norm – it is what people generally think of when they hear the word “masculine”. It is influenced by “normative patterns of morality and behavior, that is to say, typical and acceptable ways of behaving and acting within the social setting of the past centuries” (Mosse, 4). It is “a theory of human nature” (Mosse, 3), and the “manly ideal changed very little” (Mosse, 3) since its inception “sometime between the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth” (Mosse, 5). The virtues associated with stereotypical masculinity have existed and have been expected of men for hundreds of years; it is the stereotype that did not exist until modern history (Mosse, 5). To embody stereotypical masculinity means to project virtues such as will power, honor, courage (Mosse, 4), hold a commitment to freedom (Mosse, 7), “upholding the clear division between men and women” (Mosse, 9), chivalry (Mosse, 18), having physically

fit bodies (Mosse, 76), being “[a] conduit of power” (Mosse, 15) while “restraining reckless impulses” (Mosse, 15), and more. Generally speaking, “the masculine ideal itself in its strength and beauty became a symbol of society and nation” (Mosse, 23). So, the stereotypically masculine man should stand as a pillar of excellence in society.

The new, modern masculinity, however, is not as rigid in its descriptors. It is a masculine identity that is free to evolve with society. It fluctuates in accordance with the man’s surroundings. Being adaptable is a crucial virtue for the new, modern masculine man. It is distinct from stereotypical masculinity because of its freedom to shift. Nevertheless, it is still a valid form of masculinity because its virtue comes by way of listening to what the present environment is demanding.

George Mosse’s *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* is the foundation of my thesis. It is my guidepost for what I use to conceptualize the different types of masculinity. Mosse’s definitions and commentary primarily direct my understanding of masculinity, thus affecting my analyses of *The Secret Agent* and *Burmese Days*.

Stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity are terms that I have created for the purposes of my thesis. A difficulty that arose from using *The Image of Man* was that Mosse frequently refers to masculinity as “modern masculinity” (Mosse, 5). Modern masculinity in his analysis relates to the traditional understanding of masculinity, being honor, chivalry, power, and more. Due to that historical understanding and masculinity being a norm, he states, “[m]odern masculinity [is] a stereotype” (Mosse, 5). To further complicate matters, I am writing about modernist authors, so the word “modern” can easily get confused over the course of my thesis. To avoid confusion, I created the terms “stereotypical masculinity” to relate to Mosse’s understanding of modern masculinity (in the traditional sense), and “the new, modern

masculinity” to show the adaptable yet equally valid form of masculinity that arose in modernist literature.

My analysis of masculinity is concerned solely with the expression of masculinity in British society. British society encompasses Englishmen in the metropolis of London and Englishmen living in Kyauktada, Burma – a colony on the Indian Subcontinent under the British Raj. Due to the scope of my research, I cannot make conclusions about how masculinity is expressed across all communities under the control of the British empire. The factors that I use to gauge changes in British society are endemic to London and the Indian subcontinent. The factors may vary in other cities and other colonies.

My thesis contributes to the discourse surrounding masculinity in the modernist period. It is unique for its juxtaposition of the two authors and their novels. I narrowed the scope of the evolution of masculinity in the modernist period down to how two authors – one in modernism’s early stages and one in its waning days – portray it, because attempting to document masculinities’ complete shift over the course of the entire time period is too broad of a task for the purposes of this essay.

As Conrad and Orwell address, there is a new type of man that develops in British society: the new, modern masculine man. Both authors engage that new, modern masculinity against stereotypical masculinity. My research examines if the two types of masculinity can coexist in British society – allowing them both to distinctly have a presence in British society, enabling them to grow without disturbing the other’s progress - or if they cannot coexist, resulting in clashes and one type ultimately suppressing the other.

The new, modern masculinity is a masculine identity that arises in modernist literature as a product of an evolving British society; it is distinct from stereotypical masculinity, yet stereotypical masculinity does not allow for the two to coexist. My analysis explains that stereotypical masculinity does not allow the new, modern masculinity to coexist with it because the presence of the new, modern masculinity permits men to adopt bodies and mannerisms that lead to the exasperation of societal factors that weaken stereotypical masculinity. The “masculine stereotype [is] strengthened . . . by the existence of a negative stereotype of men who not only failed to measure up to the ideal but who in body and soul were its foil, projecting the exact opposite of true masculinity” (Mosse, 6). While the new, modern masculinity is a valid form of masculinity in and of itself – so it does not project the exact opposite of stereotypical masculinity – it is an opposing force to stereotypical masculinity that stereotypical masculinity can strengthen itself off of. Since the new, modern masculinity allows men to adopt virtues like accepting the empowerment of women, that acceptance is fundamentally at odds with stereotypical masculinities’ need to maintain strict gender roles and thus weakens stereotypical masculinity. The new, modern masculinity is perceived as a threat to stereotypical masculinity and therefore cannot coexist with it.

#### Joseph Conrad and *The Secret Agent*

Joseph Conrad was born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in the year 1857 in what is now known to be the Ukraine. He became a British subject in 1886, having been a seaman in the French Merchant Service and the British Merchant Service previously (Prescott, 1 and Encyclopedia Britannica). Conrad continued sailing after becoming a British citizen, garnering an impressive career of 19 years as a seafarer (Kennerley, 12). After his life at sea, he dedicated

himself to writing and produced numerous novels and short stories. He died in the year 1924 (Encyclopedia Britannica).

His time at sea undoubtedly influenced his writings. Robert D. Foulke describes long voyages out at sea as being “marked by isolation, boredom, and miserable living conditions [that tax] the endurance of men who were already hard pressed by the grueling nature of shipboard work” (Stockdale, 3). Conrad uses symbolism to present naturally complex entities and allow the reader to deduce meaning for themselves<sup>1</sup>, yet his “first-hand experience of sea life” (Stockdale, 2) integrates itself in his writing as an “empirical reality” (Stockdale, 2). The sea is, in and of itself, mysterious. Gerald Morgan “observes that Conrad shows the sea, . . . to be man’s mirror” (Stockdale, 1). The sea as a mirror absolutely reflects Conrad’s personal hardships, and those internal struggles surface themselves in many of Conrad’s works.

*The Secret Agent* in particular portrays Conrad’s struggles. He endured an “unhappy solitude” (Meyer, 92) in childhood and, throughout his life, “craved surcease from his loneliness and his despair” (Meyer, 92). It has been said that, “[i]f his own existence seemed empty, devoid of purpose and direction, lacking in human companionship and fulfilled passion, through invented characters . . . the shy and lonely Conrad could enjoy vicariously a vibrant participation” (Meyer, 92). So, the characters in *The Secret Agent* embody Conrad’s personal expressions of alienation and isolation. But a rebuttal against this claim could be that *The Secret Agent* is about a real, historical event, so Conrad dramatized the story behind it and the all-encompassing loneliness is a product of the story itself.

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<sup>1</sup> “For Conrad, the symbolic works of the creative artist, who ‘lays claim to nothing that his matchless vision has not made his own,’ constitute an act of fidelity or justice to the reality of the visible universe” (Stockdale, 2).

As a reminder, *The Secret Agent* is about anarchists in London who attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory. Verloc is an anarchist who is married to Winnie and helps provide for Winnie's brother, Stevie. Verloc's plan of bombing the Greenwich Observatory goes awry when he tricks Stevie into planting the bomb but Stevie trips and falls on the way to the target, killing only himself. When Winnie learns about the tragedy, she kills Verloc in a rage and then goes on to kill herself later.

The parallels between *The Secret Agent* and the historical event are difficult to discount. Notably, “[b]ehind Conrad’s novel *The Secret Agent* there is, as Dr. Norman Sherry has shown in his recent article, the true story of Martial Bourdin, the original of the pathetic Stevie” (Nash, 322). Historically, Martial Bourdin was a French anarchist who attempted to bomb the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park in London. “On 15 February 1894 a young French anarchist, Martial Bourdin, attempted the criminal act of blowing up the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London. However, Bourdin tripped and fell in Greenwich Park, and managed to only blow himself up fatally” (Lyon, xi). This exact situation happened to Stevie with the only exception being Stevie not directly acting as an anarchist, but rather, by being tricked into the situation by his anarchist brother-in-law, Mr. Verloc.

However, although the parallels are highly visible and present, Conrad denies receiving any influence from the historical happening. Sherry states, “[t]hat the Greenwich Bomb Outrage of 1894 was the source for *The Secret Agent* has never been denied except by Conrad himself” (Sherry, 1). In Conrad’s words, “... [t]he subject of ‘The Secret Agent’ – I mean the tale – came to me in the shape of a few words uttered by a friend in a casual conversation about anarchists or anarchist activities . . .” (Sherry, 1). By distancing the historical event from the text, it allows Conrad to maintain ownership over his novel.



So, Conrad's bias cannot be completely discounted from the text. His internal struggles with loneliness and his opinions on what it means to be masculine are liable to surface in the novel's portrayal of certain characters and situations. In short, Conrad's authorship cannot be removed from the analysis of the story.

Conrad's personal understanding of masculinity is a crucial caveat, since he has a history of addressing masculinity in his novels and short stories. He used to be understood "[a]s a straightforwardly masculine author suggested by his nautical adventure themes and predominantly male casts" (Taylor, 192). When looking at one of his most famous works, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), adventure and facing danger - "imperatives of imperial manhood" (Taylor, 191) - are central to the stories' plot. But recent scholarship suggests that Conrad also "wrestles with and re-formulates the models of masculinity of earlier adventure narratives" (Taylor, 193). This presents Conrad's masculinity as being "'fractured, insecure and repeatedly failing in [his] attempts to master the world, in particular the world of modernity' (Ross 3)" (Taylor, 192-193). Since Conrad has a fractured sense of his own masculinity, it sets the precedent for *The Secret Agent* to be a text that glorifies the type of masculinity that he wishes he had.

Conrad's imperial narrator is engrained into many of his texts, creating a lens that the masculinities of his characters are viewed through. The imperial narrator is described as, "[t]ypically the bearer of a univocal story justifying British imperialism, this figure reiterates dominant cultural narratives" (Wellman, 5). They are "[a]n iconic figure within turn-of-the-century British cultural consciousness . . . [and] would certainly have been familiar to Victorian readers of literature of empire" (Wellman, 5). The imperial narrator describes stories of adventure and conquest from the perspective of a British nationalist and colonialist, and is present in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* among many others.

The absence of a defined imperial narrator in *The Secret Agent* presents an engaging question: who is the narrator then? This absence invokes the presumption that Conrad is the narrator, and his bias creates the lens through which the new, modern masculine man is seen. It must be noted though that in Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) he uses the imperial narrator to "critique European, and particularly British, imperialism" (Wellman, 5), but a full overview of Conrad's imperial narrator is outside the scope of this paper.

Ultimately, *The Secret Agent* expresses Conrad's desire to repress the new, modern masculinity in favor of maintaining the norm of stereotypical masculinity. His own background as a masculine sailor going on dangerous adventures at sea biases his opinion of masculinity, and he uses this bias to formulate duels between stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity so that stereotypical masculinity can win the duels and thus become recognized as the superior identity. The two types of masculinity cannot coexist, because Conrad views the new, modern masculinity as a danger to British society.

### The Edwardian Era

Technological advancements, factories, and urban environments have devastating effects on the psyches of citizens. Capitalism entraps people into believing that wealth and material gain are synonymous with success, so people slave away their happiness for money. These new developments strip away people's individuality and make workers seem like mere cogs in a system. Conrad responds to this by highlighting individual's experiences within the system, detailing how isolating and emotionally void urban society can become.

Edwardian Britain has largely been cited as the pre-war era, marking the accession of King Edward VII shortly after Queen Victoria's death between the years 1901-1910 (Banfield,

1). Edwardian Britain is riddled with, “industrial unrest that affected a range of important industries” (Gazeley and Newell, 52). The “onward march of Victorian prosperity” (Gazeley and Newell, 52) in the early twentieth century is violently interrupted because, “at least 23 percent of people in urban working households and 18 percent of working households had income insufficient to meet minimum needs. . . . among labourers’ households, the poverty rates are close to 50 percent” (Gazeley and Newell, 52). Psychologists note the “[delegation of] a natural human function to purpose-built machines” (Attridge, 299) as a reason for the declining societal state.

Following Edwardian Britain is the Great Labour Unrest of 1910-1914 (Villis, 88). This time period produced, “an unprecedented amount of labour disputes” (Villis, 88) with around 480 strikes per year between the years 1907-1910, 873 strikes in 1911, 834 in 1912, 1459 in 1913, and 972 in 1914 (Villis, 88). British subjects are facing poverty, anger, confusion, and an unknowingness of how to respond to the new labor market.

These labor and wage shortages are inescapable, since the industrialized economy is forcing people to migrate towards cities. Notably, “the spread of industrialization had been changing lives and living. A large proportion of whole nations had been relocated from a rural to an urban environment, and had become subject to the routines of factory and office and the directives of state bureaucracy” (Wilson and Prior, 128). The Great War is unique for the times in that, “[t]he development of new weapons, and the speed and volume with which they could be produced and replaced and enhanced, appeared to have produced a type of war with no precedent” (Wilson and Prior, 129). Technological advancements are at the core of this new, terrifying war machine, and the people of Britain had to accept this way of life because of what is at stake. The idea that, “the survival – as ongoing entities – of established nation states and

multi-national empires, of powerful ideals concerning right systems of government and right relations between rulers and ruled, of fundamental notions concerning the proper conduct of one state towards another” (Wilson and Prior, 130) is on the line. This belief clearly resurfaces with the decline of the British empire as discussed by Orwell in *Burmese Days*.

### The Great War

World War I, also known as the Great War, has had lasting effects on the cultural legacy of Britain (Heathorn, 1103). The Great War, “pitted the Central Powers – mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey – against the Allies – mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and, from 1917, the United States” (Royde-Smith and Showalter, 1) from 1914 to 1918. For the first time ever, “the entire globe was enveloped in conflict” (Winkiel, 95). It is said that, “the war was virtually unprecedented in the slaughter, carnage, and destruction it caused” (Royde-Smith and Showalter, 1). The prevailing mindset is that the Great War, “signaled nothing less than the end of humanity” (Winkiel, 95). The devastation of World War I cannot be downplayed. The Great War shocked the participating countries in ways that they had never experienced before and spawned discourse that permanently linked Britain with the rise of literary modernism.

There will always be debates about if European culture actually rapidly changed because of the Great War, and if modernism truthfully gained attention because of that change, but the parallels cannot be discredited. Rightly, “the fact that the Great War’s artillery shells burst amidst the artistic and intellectual questioning of the shibboleths of the nineteenth century’s social and intellectual norms has generally not been viewed as a coincidence” (Heathorn, 1105). The shibboleth in question is that of the conservative, traditional, Victorian “bourgeois culture” (Heathorn, 1105). So, “while the Great War did not alone generate the intellectual and artistic

challenges grouped, however uncomfortably, under the label ‘modernism’, the central conception of the war as a significant cultural rupture became articulated by modernists themselves during and after the conflict” (Heathorn, 1105). British modernists wrote about the Great War extensively, inextricably linking the cultural identity of Britain from the war to modernism.

Modernist authors documented this societal change in their literature, making those feelings of loneliness and alienation become hallmarks of the time period. An image of modernism gets developed that, “involves alienated, suffering males” (Cole, 471) and uses key thematic figures like, “the alienated wanderer; problems such as the impermeability of the individual psyche; images of fragmentation and loss (at both personal and cultural levels); an apparent rejection of tradition; formal features such as narrative discontinuity” (Cole, 471). Modernists demonstrate the effects of war in their novels by highlighting the individual’s experience within British society.

The Great War is the landmark moment that separates *The Secret Agent* and *Burmese Days*. The portrayal of stereotypical masculinity in modernist literature, however, remains relatively unchanged. Stereotypical masculinity – especially being associated with nationalism and imperialism – remains as the ideal expression of masculinity that other forms of masculinity are compared against. The new, modern masculinity is equally as valid as stereotypical masculinity; it is simply different from it, being a product of the ongoing cultural shifts. While *The Secret Agent* details competing masculinities in “the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets” (Conrad, 157), thus creating expressions that are a result of industrialization and urbanization, *Burmese Days* details competing masculinities in the periphery of British society,

where the colonialist and imperialist mindsets heavily influence the masculinities of the colonizers.

### George Orwell and *Burmese Days*

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1903 in Motihari, Bengal, India. After living in India throughout his early childhood, he returned to England in 1911 and attended boarding school. Afterwards, he went on to study and graduate from Eton from the years 1917-1921. After university, Blair returned to India and was part of the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. He later resigned from the police force and pursued writing and journalism full-time (Encyclopedia Britannica). He did not don the pen-name George Orwell until 1932 (Kerr, 311). He died on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1950 in London, England (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Orwell's time as a policeman in the Indian Imperial Police greatly affects his perception of the British empire. That bias clearly surfaces in his texts. So much so, that “[*Burmese Days*] and two short stories he wrote about Burma [*A Hanging* (1931) and *Shooting an Elephant* (1936)] are transparent testament to what Eric Arthur Blair experienced in that country” (Melia, 12). He was a policeman in Burma between the years 1922-1927 (Kerr, 311) and while serving, “upheld British imperial law in a regime of conquest, under the sign of a rule of law that the British were unanimous in feeling was the chief benefit, and justification, of their government of other peoples” (Kerr, 311). This personal experience “had important repercussions for the development of his political views and for his future writing about power and violence, authority and privilege” (Kerr, 311). Orwell's bias is inextricably linked with *Burmese Days*.

Orwell's time enforcing British imperial law makes him an anti-imperialist. He once wrote that he was “‘against imperialism because I know something about it from the inside’”

(Melia, 12). But Orwell is also “[a] bundle of contradictions” (Queen’s Quarterly, 487) and *Burmese Days* reflects the struggles that he internally grapples with. While “. . . a lingering embitterment towards his experiences as a policeman in Burma is evident in his writings, . . . a close and honest reading of the texts reveals a side to Orwell that many critics have shown a distinct reluctance to acknowledge” (Melia, 11). Specifically, “[i]n each of his Burmese stories, although the British are depicted as morally lacking, the indigenous people, . . . are resolutely inferior beings: timid, puerile and comical, with a couple of villainous exceptions” (Melia, 11). Being raised and living as a Sahib<sup>2</sup> in the Indian subcontinent, Orwell has to deal with benefitting from and enforcing colonial rule while simultaneously recognizing that he is an intruder on their land. In *Burmese Days*, Orwell voices his concerns and discontent with the British Empire and the stereotypical masculinity that it reinforces. However, he also depicts the native Burmese as being weak, corrupt, and subjugated, which does nothing to elevate their societal status.

As a reminder, *Burmese Days* is a tale about power structures in Kyauktada, Burma. Flory is a British timber merchant living and working in Kyauktada, and he is friends with an Indian named Dr. Veraswami. Flory hopelessly falls in love with Elizabeth Lackersteen, an orphaned Englishwoman who is indefinitely staying with relatives in Kyauktada. Lieutenant the Honourable Verrall, accompanied by other members of the Military Police, get stationed in Kyauktada and quickly disrupt daily life in the city. U Po Kyin is a corrupt Burmese magistrate who does anything to advance his own agenda and gain the respect of the Englishmen. He defames Veraswami and sparks and disbands a Burmese rebellion, both with the intention of

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<sup>2</sup> “‘Sahib’ is neither a rank nor an official title, but a form by which ‘all over India, European gentlemen, and it may be said Europeans generally, are addressed, and spoken of, when no disrespect is intended by natives.’ In other words, it is an ethnic designation . . . that over-rules all other hierarchies when he is among non-Europeans” (Kerr, 312).

gaining entry into the Club. In the end, Flory, Veraswami, Verrall, and U Po Kyin all either die or are sent away from Kyauktada.

The masculinities of all four of those central characters are integral to their life's trajectory over the course of the novel. Flory embodies the new, modern masculinity since he is not physically fit, his face is tainted with a birthmark, and he is resolutely anti-imperialist. Essentially, he lacks most of the qualities associated with stereotypical masculinity. His masculinity is that of the outsider's. To make Flory's opinions end in disgrace, Orwell makes Flory commit suicide. Veraswami is a pathetic character, lacking honor and dignity among other virtues. His allegiance to the Europeans is emasculating, resulting in him being completely dominated by them. Race relations between the natives and the British are accentuated through Veraswami, since the British admire his loyalty yet quickly reject him when he is accused of being untrustworthy. To fully portray this, Orwell has Veraswami get demoted and transferred out of Kyauktada all because of a rumor. Verrall should be a champion of stereotypical masculinity, but he quickly proves otherwise. He literally holds the prefix of "the Honourable", is physically fit, and champions the stereotypically masculine virtue of dominance through his superiority complex over the natives. However, his virtues are quickly overshadowed by his negative traits. He is antisocial, unchivalrous, and also holds a superiority complex over his fellow Englishmen which is deeply offensive to them. Orwell satirizes Verrall by making him a failing version of the stereotypical masculine ideal, and thus has him leave Kyauktada hastily. Verrall is hated in the city and his departure is latent with disgrace. Finally, U Po Kyin is a countertype to stereotypical masculinity. By being fat, corrupt, and villainous, yet still being politically powerful and receiving an award from the governor of Kyauktada, his character shows the futility of stereotypical masculinity. Men are deemed virtuous by expressing all the



characteristics that U Po Kyin purposefully lacks. But allowing U Po Kyin to succeed while all the other men addressed fail insinuates that being the countertype to stereotypical masculinity is superior to actually being the ideal stereotypically masculine man. To avoid this, Orwell makes U Po Kyin die abruptly before he can bask in his achievements.

Orwell's decision to portray the Burmese in a negative light and disgrace all the significant men in the novel did little to fully elucidate his anti-imperialist beliefs. Reading *Burmese Days* today helps show its satire. But at its time of publication, that satire could have easily been confused for an accurate depiction of Burmese natives, further expressing the superiority of the British. Orwell has a history of expressing contradictory opinions, and Andrew Rubin goes so far as to accuse Orwell of being “[involved] in wartime and imperial propaganda, emphasizing the ways in which literature and its ambassadors were part of state-administered infrastructures that exerted the soft power of culture to sustain forms of political attachment between metropole and colony” (King, 61). An important reminder is that Burma, and *Burmese Days* as a text, is located at the periphery of British society. Burma is a colonial entity detached from the mainland of Britain and its heart, London. The literature about the periphery shapes the way the British in the mainland understand their influence over the colonies. *Burmese Days* read at face value could depict the disgrace of an anti-imperialist dissenter, the notion of corrupt Burmese officials not being able to run their own country, and that many Burmese natives actually enjoy being controlled by the British.

The notion of Britain being in its waning days of colonial rule, facing the end of their empire, is a crucial lens that greatly affects the way *Burmese Days* is analyzed. So, that notion must be addressed. The years following the Great War mark the beginning of the decline of Britain's imperial empire. Notably,

[t]hough the British empire was at its largest and most expansive in the 1920s and '30s, that same period was also the beginning of the end of imperial authority. Following the devastation of the Great War, these decades saw the gaining momentum of the Indian independence movement, the founding of the Irish Free State, and mass labor strikes across Africa. The works of George Orwell, . . . among others, chart the steady deterioration of imperial confidence both at home and in the empire. (Gopinath, 202)

Britain's end of empire is a long and arduous process, and it is a global ordeal. The political climate of India, however, is particularly relevant to the novel.

A brief history of Britain's presence in India is necessary for understanding the Burma that Orwell lived in. The British began exploiting India when "[t]he British East India Company was founded in 1600 to help British merchants compete with the Portuguese and Dutch in what was at that time an extremely lucrative trade in products, particularly spices, from the Far East" (Pickersgill, 379). The Great Indian Revolt of 1857 goes by many names, including the Indian Mutiny, the Sepoy<sup>3</sup> Rebellion, and the First War of Independence. Regardless of its name, it was "the most serious military challenge to the might of British colonialism over the nineteenth century" (Pati, 1). Indians were revolting against the British East India Company.

As a result of the rebellion, "the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1858, whereby British power over India was transferred from the East India Company to the Crown" (Belmekki, 115). Decades later, Gandhi launched a "non-cooperation programme in India in 1920" (Kumar, 5) against the British. Finally, "[i]n December 1929, the [Indian National Congress] declared complete independence [from Britain] as its goal and followed this up with the launching of the mass Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930" (Chandra, *India After Independence: 1947-2000*). In Burma specifically, "in the years that followed the Great War there was chronic unrest in Burma, encouraged by the campaigns of

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<sup>3</sup> "native regiments in the service of the East India Company" (Belmekki, 112).

Gandhi and the Congress Party in India but also by the suspicion that the concessions won by the nationalists from the British in India would not be equally applied to Burma” (Kerr, 311).

Indians and the Burmese were increasingly growing less tolerable of Britain’s presence on their land.

Burma’s political climate surfaces itself in the portrayal of Orwell’s characters in his texts. Orwell “[makes] sure that the important characters . . . [are all] anti-heroes and –heroines” (Quintana, 32). Since “[i]t has often been asserted that the early novels are only thinly disguised autobiographies” (Quintana, 32), Orwell himself is those pathetic heroes (Quintana, 32). Their pathetic portrayals are an important note, since for all of the characters, their non-stereotypically masculine characteristics results in their demise. If Flory is read as Orwell, it shows that Orwell does not downplay that opposition that anti-imperialists face. Orwell does not pretend to have his own views succeed in the end; he articulates Britain’s ability to suppress the dissenters.

The political history and social climate of India and Burma, mixed with Orwell’s personal experiences there, display themselves outright in *Burmese Days*. It is a story about life in the periphery of British society during a period marked by the end of empire. Masculinity plays a crucial role in the behaviors of the characters and their eventual ends. Orwell internally grappled with his allegiance to British rule in Burma, and the characters express his opinions, highlighting all of his contradictory thoughts and actions.

Orwell depicts stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity as being unable to coexist because the two identities fundamentally disagree with each other over the issue of imperialism. Stereotypical masculinity values dominance, and maintaining imperial control over colonies in the British Raj perpetuates that dominance. The new, modern masculinity recognizes that the British are not wanted in the Indian subcontinent, and the

presence of the British instigates colonial unrest. As a result, the new, modern masculine men want to either decolonize, or at the very least, individually leave. Stereotypically masculine men view the new, modern men as directly contributing to the decline of Britain's imperial power, and stereotypically masculine men refuse to relinquish control. So, stereotypically masculine men have to suppress the new, modern masculine men to maintain the power of the British empire.

## Chapter 1

In this chapter, I will be focusing on Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Conrad is vehemently opposed to the introduction of the new, modern masculinity in British society. He believes it is the culmination of the worst aspects of urbanization, and those who identify with it are detrimental to the stability of British society. He showcases men who identify with the new, modern masculinity as trying to destroy stereotypical masculinity – an identity that Conrad has a history of possessing. Conrad does not accept the notion that stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity can coexist. He documents a power struggle between the two with an expectation that one must dominate the other. To progress his narrative of stereotypical masculinity being the ideal masculine identity for men in British society, he disgraces characters that represent the new, modern masculinity to show that they are corrupted individuals and will never be superior to stereotypically masculine men.

The metropolis is rising in popularity, bringing forth unprecedented challenges to British society. Advertisements and the industrial money-economy create a fast-paced urban environment, resulting in anxiety and isolation. Greed on top of rampant capitalism results in physically weak men who express their power through status instead of brawn. Conrad is repulsed by how these stimuli are fracturing individuals, so he creates characters that are on the extreme end of mental degeneration to represent what the metropolis is capable of doing to people.

Conrad even turns his gaze to the domestic sphere and shows how that is being corrupted by new, modern men. He depicts loveless marriages and men who lose control of their households. The rising feminist movement in Edwardian Britain<sup>4</sup> began empowering women,

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<sup>4</sup> "The term 'feminism' first gained wide currency in Britain during the Edwardian period" (Delap, 101).

changing the dynamic of domestic life. New, modern men lacked the virtue of chivalry necessary for keeping their wives happy and content, so women began fighting the structure of the gender relation to exercise their power and frustration.

### Conrad and His Relation to Masculinity: Revisited

To link together a few terms, stereotypical masculinity and the masculine ideal are products of normative masculinity. Normative masculinity is a strategy used for defining what it means to be masculine and is understood as, “masculinity is what men ought to be” (Morris, 6). So, men ought to embody the masculine ideal, which stereotypical masculinity describes as being dominate, honorable, chivalrous, physically fit, self-reserved, and more. Conrad favors stereotypical masculinity so he thinks that masculine men embody the masculine ideal. The new, modern masculinity that is developing in British society allows for men to be masculine without having to possess the traits that stereotypical masculinity prescribes. Conrad believes that the presence of the new, modern masculinity in British society is damaging to it, so *The Secret Agent* details new, modern masculine men harming society and looking generally inferior to stereotypically masculine men.

George Mosse in *The Image of Man* describes how stereotypical masculinity was formed. He states, “[m]odern masculinity helped to determine, and was in turn influenced, by what were considered normative patterns of morality and behavior, that is to say, typical and acceptable ways of behaving and acting within the social setting of the past centuries” (Mosse, 4). Thus, “[m]odern masculinity was a stereotype, presenting a standardized mental picture, . . . Such a picture must be coherent in order to be effective, and, in turn, the internalized visual image, the mental picture, relies upon the perception of outward appearance in order to judge a person’s

worth” (Mosse, 5). The modern masculinity that Mosse is referring to in those previous passages is what I am referring to as stereotypical masculinity.

Conrad’s caricatures of Verloc and the Professor unravels a dialogue about the trajectory of London and the British Empire. It speaks to an unmotivated Britain; one that wants to rest on its laurels and gain power through connivery rather than being overzealous in its pursuits. Conrad is working in a system where “true manliness was so powerful precisely because unlike abstract ideas or ideals it could be seen, touched, or even talked to, a living reminder of human beauty, of the proper morals, and of a longed-for utopia” (Mosse, 6). The stereotypically masculine man “define[d] itself through an ideal of manly beauty that symbolized virtue” (Mosse, 5) and to “standards of classical beauty” (Mosse, 5). It comes as no surprise then that the idealized empire that influences British society is the Roman Empire, and Conrad mapped Britain’s downfall in parallel with Rome’s demise<sup>5</sup>.

Rome offers Conrad the means to “articulate the opportunities and anxieties inherent in modern urban existence” (Eastlake, 473) by way of the “social, moral and physical condition of London and the metropolitan male who inhabited it” (Eastlake, 473). This parallel is fitting since “the Roman legacy was at once one of imperial splendour and of empire built on militaristic, expansionist models; but so too was it linked with Gibbonian narratives of decline and fall, especially of decline and fall catalysed by decadent (and therefore failed or diseased) masculine vigour” (Eastlake, 473-474). Mosse would agree with this comparison, since he cites Greek scholarship concerning the chiseled male body with heightened intellect and moral virtue<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> “When the intelligentsia of the day sought the necessary perspective from which they could assess their own age in historical analogy or tried to think about how society and history in its generalities worked, it was to Rome that they turned” (Butler, 9).

<sup>6</sup> See the “Getting There” (pp. 40-55) chapter in “The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity”

Conrad uses *The Secret Agent* to showcase British societies' decline due to the influences of urbanization and industrialization.

Urbanization seeped its way into the culture of Britain, greatly heightening the apparent crisis of masculinity. Technology began to strip people of their jobs, an abundance of stimulation started numbing people to their surroundings, the intellect had to override emotions, the money-economy pushed its way into everyday interactions, and blending into a crowd had become easier than standing out<sup>7</sup>. The slow, rural life was overtaken by the demands of the fast-paced, urban environment, permanently altering individual's standings in society. Through the need for the intellect to be more powerful than physical attributes and more leisure time due in part to increases in wealth and not being bound to nurturing a crop, the makings of a successful man were straying away from pure physical fitness and having an upstanding character.

The metropolis deteriorates more than just the body; it eliminates a sense of self. Within the metropolis, "the development of modern culture is characterized by the preponderance of what one may call the 'objective spirit' over the 'subjective spirit' (Simmel, 58). So, individuality gets quenched to satisfy the "hypertrophy of objective culture" (Simmel, 59) needed to maintain the metropolis's standards. Latent within this model is the willingness and capacity to "other" those who do not conform. Deeming somebody or a group of people an "other" makes them outsiders to British society. Conrad makes the men that identify with new, modern masculinity anarchists because they both threaten and are outcasts from British society.

Remember that Conrad is fearful of British society declining to a state where the new, modern masculinity is the prevailing form of masculinity, pushing stereotypical masculinity to

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<sup>7</sup> See "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (pp. 47-60) by Georg Simmel



the wayside. Anarchists are the perfect vehicle for Conrad to express this concern since the goal of anarchists is to disrupt social and political systems. Stereotypical masculinity has convention on its side, being a form of “normalcy that set the standard for an acceptable way of life” (Mosse, 56). But that “unambiguous symbol [of stereotypical masculinity] . . . needed an image against which it could define itself” (Mosse, 6). Men who embody the new, modern masculinity, with their large bodies and radical beliefs, are distinctly different from the virtues latent within stereotypical masculinity. To stereotypical masculinity, the new, modern masculinity appears to be its countertype. Mosse asserts that countertypes to stereotypical masculinity are “perceived as asocial because they failed to conform to the social norms” (Mosse, 56). The anarchists in *The Secret Agent* are either isolated socially or made to feel lonely in their relationships. They like British society in its declining state and are opposite to stereotypical norms of masculinity. But the anarchists nevertheless exist in British society, living on its fringes. Conrad recognizes their presence and channels his fears through them, since anarchists have the capacity to attack the norms of British society and potentially win, instilling their virtues over conventional virtues.

### Verloc

A central character in *The Secret Agent* is Mr. Verloc. Verloc is an anarchist and the owner of a pornography shop - “a seller of shady wares” (Conrad, 4). Ironically, his wife’s mother considers him to be “a very nice gentleman” (Conrad, 6) even though his demeanor is far from it. His body is “burly in a fat-pig style” (Conrad, 10) and he is incredibly lazy, with an “idleness [that] was not hygienic” (Conrad, 10). He has “an indescribable air . . . [that is] common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses” (Conrad, 10). He is intelligent, but his skepticism and laziness haunts his ability to apply it. He is “the victim of a

philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort. Such a form of indolence requires, implies, a certain amount of intelligence” (Conrad, 10). Verloc is representative of the new, modern masculinity for his nihilistic attitude, languorous behaviors, and ugly body.

Verloc’s home-life is equally as not stereotypically masculine. He is not disciplined and expects his wife to cater to him without showing kindness to her. He leaves the house late at night and gets home “as early as three or four in the morning” (Conrad, 5). Upon “waking up at ten” (Conrad, 5), he then addresses Winnie to bring in the breakfast tray (Conrad, 5), which she does with a “jocular, exhausted civility” (Conrad, 5). He dines “till noon every day” (Conrad, 5), and leaves his bed unmade (Conrad, 4). As Winnie’s expression accompanying her daily chore of bringing the breakfast tray would suggest, she feels emotionally neglected by Verloc. Verloc “never offered to take Winnie to theatres, as such a nice gentleman ought to have done” (Conrad, 4) and distances Winnie from his professional life – not showing any trust. He once vaguely told her that “[h]is work [is] in a way political” (Conrad, 6) and “warned her, to be very nice to his political friends” (Conrad, 6). In a subjugated manner “with her straight, unfathomable glance she answered that she would be so, of course” (Conrad, 6). Winnie is a trophy for a Verloc. She enables his lackadaisical lifestyle and maintains his status as a married man in British society.

Through Verloc’s laziness, he still manages to provide for his family, which is enough to keep him a gentleman in the eyes of his mother-in-law. He has the means to provide “a complete relief from material cares” (Conrad, 6) for his family, assuring Winnie’s future and Stevie – Winnie's brother’s - safety (Conrad, 6). Verloc’s occupations are ignoble and somewhat mysterious, but he is nevertheless successful in the industrial money-economy, so the dignity of his work is less important than his wealth.

Unlike the hard, laborious work that Conrad endured for a paycheck, Verloc earns his money through passively distributing goods – and he wants to protect the ability to get wealthy without working hard at all costs. When walking through a wealthy neighborhood, he

surveyed through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. . . . the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city . . . the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour. (Conrad, 9)

Having been “[b]orn of industrious parents for a life of toil, he had embraced indolence from an impulse” (Conrad, 10). Verloc is a champion of the industrial money-economy because he expresses the “[r]espectable behavior” (Mosse, 126) of “. . . industry, sobriety, order, and self-cultivation” (Mosse, 126) while maintaining “an orderly and decent family life” (Mosse, 126), all without needing the “manly strength that, though it was obviously related to manual labor, had some ties to the aesthetics of modern masculinity” (Mosse, 123). Verloc as a new, modern masculine man shows that it is possible to become wealthy and successful through intelligence and efficiency instead of having to work long and hard. Verloc can be respected by the “prewar British working class” (Mosse, 126) without having to exert energy like they do. Conrad finds this type of lazy success appalling and is fearful that the industrial money-economy in British society will lose the stereotypically masculine virtue of hard work.

Conrad's vision of Verloc being a degenerate male is why he makes Verloc feel so strongly about protecting the wealthy's “hygienic idleness” (Conrad, 9). Instead of allowing Verloc and his fellow fat, wealthy men to happily live alongside the working class, he has to make Verloc willing to rigorously defend his lifestyle. To do so, Verloc must conjure up a threat to society.

Conrad declares that British society is becoming vulnerable because of the weakening of its men. Through State Councillor Wurmt, he asserts,

'[e]very country has its police,' . . . [w]hat is desired,' . . . 'is the occurrence of something definite which should stimulate their vigilance. . . . [t]he vigilance of the police – and the severity of the magistrates. The general leniency of the judicial procedure here, and the utter absence of all repressive measures, are a scandal to Europe. What is wished for just now is the accentuation of the unrest -' (Conrad, 13).

In an ironic twist, Verloc must attack society to protect it. By endangering the social order, the police and magistrates will be forced to rally, thus invoking a stronger protective force. Conrad's commentary on masculinity in this instance is complex. He is saying that there is a preponderance of new, modern masculine men in society which are causing its deterioration in the first place. The remaining stereotypically masculine men are losing their honor because of their inability to stop this deterioration. So, something jarring must happen to British society by the new, modern masculine men to allow the stereotypically masculine men to regain their honor and reinstate order. That jarring event is going to be the attempted bombing of the Greenwich Observatory.

Although convoluted, going outside the law to reinforce the law is an intelligent performance of masculinity. The new, modern masculinity attacking stereotypical masculinity can be likened to a duel, especially since honor is at the forefront. Remember that Europe being weak is "scandalous" (Conrad, 13), which is a disgraceful state of affairs to be in. The duel is an important factor in stereotypical masculinity and represents the "defense of manly honor" (Mosse, 20). It is said that, "the duel makes man strong and independent, it takes up the cause of justice the minute the law abandons it, and penalizes scorn and insult that the laws are unable to punish. In this way the sensibilities of the law-abiding citizen were eased" (Mosse, 21). Conrad, voicing his opinion through Wurmt and Verloc, is under the impression that British society is

growing weak and the law (or governing code) is doing nothing to stop the decline. The citizens of British society deserve to feel at peace, and knowing that there is a strong system in place to protect them is a way of bringing about that peace. A duel needs to occur so the stereotypically masculine vigor latent within the protecting force can be re-energized.

The duel between the new, modern masculinity and stereotypical masculinity is a chance for stereotypical masculinity to reassert order over British society. The duel “[is] embedded [with] ideals of justice and manly virtue and also exemplified principles of good order” (Mosse, 21). Verloc can’t be honorable by instigating the duel since “[m]ale honor had to be informed by a moral purpose” (Mosse, 21) and his purpose – although it has the intention of bringing about more protection – is to cause chaos first and foremost. It’s what makes him an anarchist. Conrad’s purpose, on the side of the police, is to reinstate justice and order into British society.

#### A Duel of Masculinities

Before the bombing of the Greenwich Observatory takes place, there is a more private dueling of the new, modern masculinity against stereotypical masculinity. The scene is wrought with bravado. Verloc is locked into an argument with his superior, Mr Vladimir, when Mr. Vladimir takes a jab at Verloc’s identity. Mr Vladimir states, “[w]hat do you mean by getting out of condition like this? You haven’t got even the physique of your profession. You – a member of a starving proletariat – never! You – a desperate socialist or anarchist – which is it?” (Conrad, 16) To which Verloc responds “in a deadened tone” (Conrad, 16) with “Anarchist,” (Conrad, 16). The deadened tone is the crucial factor in Verloc’s answer because it depicts a fuming man, ready to burst out of hurt and the need to defend his identity. Verloc experienced a “true identity threat” (Holmes et al, 207) since his boss is the person who belittled him, and “true identity threats take place when individuals with legitimate authority (e.g. managers) are the

initiators of threats” (Holmes et al, 207). The interaction that follows is a characteristic response to an identity threat.

A speaker’s diction and voice play an important role in masculinity and have the power to assert dominance over other parties. For Verloc, “[h]is voice, famous for years at open-air meetings and at workman’s assemblies in large halls, . . . was, therefore, a part of his usefulness” (Conrad, 17-18). It accentuates his large frame. So, when Vladimir addresses Verloc with language like “[t]ut, tut!” . . . with a frowning grimace” (Conrad, 17) and “I see that you understand me perfectly. I dare say you are intelligent enough for your work. What we want now is activity – activity” (Conrad, 17), Verloc mentally and physiologically responds to the aggressive emasculation. For Verloc, “[e]very trace of huskiness disappeared from [his] voice. The nape of his gross neck became crimson above the velvet collar of his overcoat. His lips quivered before they came widely open” (Conrad, 17). He is humiliated and ready to defend himself.

The result is a flagrant display of bravado. Verloc takes pride in the fact that, “[t]here was no uproar above which he could not make himself heard” (Conrad, 18), and for good reason. It has been noted that, “[p]erceptual studies in humans have tended to corroborate these hypotheses in finding that speakers of either sex whose voices have either low  $F_0$  [pitch] or low  $F_n$  [resonance] are rated as being larger and more masculine” (Pisanski and Rendall, 2202). So, to demonstrate, “he crossed the room to one of the French windows. As if giving in to an uncontrollable impulse, he opened it a little” (Conrad, 18) and says, “[c]onstable!” . . . with no more effort than if he were whispering” (Conrad, 18), making “the policeman spin around as if prodded by a sharp instrument” (Conrad, 18). This policeman stood, “across the courtyard of the

Embassy, well beyond the open gate” (Conrad, 18). To put it plainly, Verloc’s voice is so bellowing that it can garner the attention of people who are far away with little effort.

Peacocking in this manner is an acceptable response for someone who was just shamed. Notably, “[i]n response to such a threat [to identity], individuals are motivated to engage in compensatory efforts to reassure themselves in order to regain an identity claim” (Auger et al, 224). From the attack on his identity and being emasculated in the process, Verloc felt more strongly about regaining his dignity than wanting to directly battle with Vladimir. Especially with the hierarchical structure at hand, demonstrating his dignity is a more intelligent move than verbally slighting Vladimir. Unfortunately, the demonstration didn’t entirely work.

Verloc regains some of his integrity since Vladimir recognizes that Verloc has a burly voice, but Vladimir is quick to put Verloc back in his place as the subordinate. After more deliberation, Vladimir states, “[a]ha! You dare be impudent,” (Conrad, 19) with a projection that has an “amazingly guttural intonation not only utterly un-English, but absolutely un-European” (Conrad, 19). With the context of voice being related to masculinity, their argument became a true clash of masculinities. The men needed to establish dominance over each other instead of conversing through the actual reason that called for their meeting in the first place. The content of the meeting is addressed, but when mixed with the deep vocal patterns, the wordplay is used to bolster the tone of the speaker.

As mentioned previously, Conrad does not want stereotypical masculinity to coexist with the new, modern masculinity. Stereotypical masculinity must reign supreme over the new, modern masculinity. In this instance, Verloc and Vladimir are not able to simultaneously be masculine figures; one must subjugate the other. Consequently, Vladimir bellows “. . . Voice won’t do. We have no use for your voice. We don’t want a voice. We want facts – startling facts

– damn you,” (Conrad, 19) with a ferocious discretion, right into Mr Verloc’s face” (Conrad, 19). To this, Verloc lets out a weak rebuttal. Vladimir, now “smiling mockingly above the bristling bow of his necktie” (Conrad, 19), has won. Conrad uses Verloc and Vladimir’s verbal argument to pit the two types of masculinity against each other. He purposefully makes stereotypical masculinity dominate the new, modern masculinity to show that the new, modern masculinity will never be as respected as the masculine ideal.

### The Professor

Although Verloc presents an engaging entryway into the discussion surrounding anarchists and masculinity in *The Secret Agent*, he is not the only notable anarchist in the novel. The Professor is the paradigmatic anarchist in both Conrad’s vision and through the general understanding of anarchists. He is a “little man” (Conrad, 47) with a “sallow face” (Conrad, 48), “fragile head” (Conrad, 49), piercing self-confidence (Conrad, 49) and lives far away from London in “a small house” (Conrad, 47) tucked away from society “down a shabby street” (Conrad, 47). He’s a loner; a societal outcast with radical ideas. To amplify his isolation, he keeps explosives on himself at all times (Conrad, 49) that could “blow [himself] and everything within sixty yards of [him] to pieces” (Conrad, 49) if he ever feels threatened. The Professor is rational and calculating with an immense disdain for society and authority.

Conrad designs the Professor to highlight the pitfalls of the excessive intellectuality emerging in British society. The Professor is intelligent, yet his character appears to be an insane conspiracy theorist burdened by logic. He sees the bigger picture that British society falls victim to, yet he knows that the spectrum is inescapable. He “had genius, but lacked the great social virtue of resignation” (Conrad, 56). His alienation is self-induced out of animosity for structure in general. In a self-assured monologue he asseverates,



[y]ou revolutionists, . . . are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stands up in the defense of that convention. . . . It governs your thought, of course, and your action too, . . . you are not a bit better than the forces arrayed against you . . . [t]he terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality – counter moves in the same game (Conrad, 52).

With this monologue, Conrad is showing that stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity are two sides of the same coin. Those who identify with the new, modern masculinity are different – or outsiders – but they still exist within the narrative surrounding masculinity. By being in a binary structure, one must dominate while the other is subordinate, and both sides gain influence by possessing virtues that the other lacks. Conrad, in this mindset, does not allow for both types of masculinity to coexist – he depicts them as being constantly competing.

The Professor is Conrad's ultimate fear in a new, modern masculine man. He is an extremist who calls for the erasure of convention. Stereotypical masculinity has its roots in normalcy and convention. The Professor wants "the disintegration of the old morality" (Conrad, 55) and "a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life" (Conrad, 55). A change to British society of this caliber means disregarding stereotypical masculinity entirely and making the virtues associated with the new, modern masculinity the new standard.

Conrad depicts the Professor as being deranged to push the narrative that those who identify with the new, modern masculinity are outcasts from British society for good reason. He is displaying the Professor as having internalized all the worst attributes associated with urbanization – a grotesque figure, nervousness from mental overstimulation, and asocial tendencies. The Professor is chaotic and crazy, but he could be crazy enough to actually make an attempt at unravelling British society. Conrad is saying that the current British society is

developing individuals like the Professor and if left unchecked, the entire society could devolve to the Professor's level of madness.

Nervousness as a result of overstimulation is a burgeoning threat in the metropolis. A constant for people living in the metropolis is “the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli” (Simmel, 48). These stimuli take the form of “changing images . . . sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions” (Simmel, 48) with the “[c]rossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life” (Simmel, 48). This overstimulation demands “a heightened awareness and a predominance of intelligence in metropolitan man” (Simmel, 48). The Professor, with his explosives on him at all times, is undoubtedly nervous.

The Professor personifies the extreme example of someone suffering from a nervous condition. The emasculating qualities of being nervous are tremendous, since it makes men cowardly, physically and mentally unfit (therefore their bodies are not in harmony with their minds), and asocial. Conrad's fears about nervousness stemming from the metropolis is fitting for the time, since “[t]he fascination with nervous disorder throughout the nineteenth century was encouraged by the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, as well as by Romanticism, but basically it was a response to the rapid pace of social, political, and economic change” (Mosse, 60-61). *The Secret Agent* being published in the Edwardian era – the years directly after the nineteenth century – deals with that fascination by continuing to grapple with it in the next century. Conrad employs the notion that “[s]ick and diseased men had ruined their nerves, which not only threatened to make them effeminate . . . but, through the state of their bodies and mind, documented their lack of manliness” (Mosse, 60). The idea is that nervous men are weak and

volatile, so they can't possess masculine virtues like intelligibility, strength, and decisiveness. Men who identify with the new, modern masculinity fall victim to nervousness while men who identify with stereotypical masculinity can overcome it and remain as successful participants in British society.

The Professor is mentally unstable and villainously bitter. It is said that, "[t]he word *disorder* characterized a state that could end in chaos" (Mosse, 60), and the Professor perfectly fits that description. In the final pages of the novel, he makes a toast to Ossipon, saying "'[t]o the destruction of what is'" (Conrad, 224) and a description of the Professor marks the novel's final words. The Professor is left walking "frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable – and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. . . . He passed on unsuspecting and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men" (Conrad, 227). Conrad's final depiction of the Professor strips him of any semblance of masculinity. The Professor is such an outsider – so uniquely corrupted - that he loses his personhood in comparison to the other members of British society.

Conrad's sinister depiction of the Professor is a flagrant attack against the new, modern masculinity. The Professor is a projection of Conrad's fears for British society. If more men disavow stereotypical masculinity and adopt the new, modern masculinity, British society will crumble at the hands of nervous, ignoble, physically unfit, mentally unstable, isolated men. Conrad uses the Professor as a warning sign of what is to come if the men in British society don't suppress the new, modern masculine man and continue to strive for the masculine ideal inherent in stereotypical masculinity. Men still walk among the "pest" (Conrad, 227) so the societal decline is not inevitable.

### A Loveless Marriage

Turning to the domestic sphere, Winnie – Verloc's wife – is an intriguing character. Her interactions with Verloc are emotionless and calculated; always resulting in the goal that she wants. Their loveless marriage forces Verloc to feel lonely when he's around her, even in intimate spaces. Winnie is a powerful female character; however, Conrad has ulterior motives with his formation of her. Rather than making her a champion of female empowerment, Conrad portrays her as the dangerous result of men losing control over their households.

Femininity is not the direct inverse of masculinity; it is perceived as existing in a separate sphere that works alongside masculinity. But if women overstep their boundaries, they can be perceived as being hostile towards masculinity. Women and femininity

had a status different from the counter-types, those who symbolized the very opposite of normative masculinity and who were said to lack all qualities either men or women as members of established society were thought to possess. Women who left their prescribed roles, however, joined the countertypes as the enemies against whom manliness sharpened its image (Mosse, 12).

Winnie is an enemy towards masculinity because she eventually fights back against her oppressor.

Verloc benefits from the Victorian ideal of rigid gender roles. He “[is] thoroughly domesticated. . . . He found at home the ease of his body and the peace of his conscience, together with Mrs Verloc’s wifely attentions” (Conrad, 4-5). For context, Queen Victoria “was most upset by the issue of women’s emancipation, considering men and women different and insisting that they should each act according to their gender characteristics” (Cordea, 116). Leading Queen Victoria to say, “[l]et women be what God intended, a helpmate for man, but with totally different duties and vocations” (Cordea, 116). Essentially, due to the Victorian ideal of rigid gender roles, Verloc expects unconditional love and support from Winnie.

In a scene that showcases a bout of mild affection, a close reading details how shallow the emotional connection between Winnie and Verloc actually is. After Winnie asks, “[a]re you not tired of me?” (Conrad, 143) to which “Verloc made no sound” (Conrad, 143), Winnie “lean[s] on his shoulder from behind, and presse[s] her lips to his forehead. Thus she linger[s]. Not a whisper reached them from the outside world” (Conrad, 143). Winnie recognizes that “Verloc [is] not in his usual state, physically and even mentally” (Conrad, 143) so she makes a romantic gesture towards him to boost his mood. However, this action is done out of duty instead of love. Winnie is playing the role of a Victorian domestic wife and is obligated to show care towards him.

Verloc’s perception of the event is also emotionally void. Rather than feeling loved, being kissed only boosts his ego. Notably, “[d]uring the contact of that unexpected and lingering kiss Mr. Verloc, gripping with both hands the edges of his chair, preserved a hieratic immobility. When the pressure was removed he let go the chair, rose, and went to stand before the fireplace.” (Conrad, 143) Having Winnie unexpectedly kiss him gave him that “hieratic immobility” which both demonstrates the power that he experiences when having his wife show him care, and simultaneously proves that he does not feel the need to give her any affection back. Verloc referring to her kiss as simply “pressure” and the grip that he has on the chair is also devoid of love. It can be inferred that the kiss is what made Verloc grip the chair so strongly, almost as if he was wincing from her touch. Then, to belittle the gesture and only refer to it as “pressure” shows that Verloc does not recognize the emotional undercurrent present in the physical action.

Verloc’s inability to experience strong emotions from Winnie’s actions is another method that Conrad uses to show that Verloc – and by extension the new, modern masculine man – does not possess the virtue of chivalry. The ideal masculine man - as expressed by stereotypical

masculinity - is supposed to be “compassionate, loyal, and ennobled by the pure love of a woman” (Mosse, 18). Verloc is an intellectual type, and based on his understanding of the domestic sphere, expects Winnie to show him affection. It is said that, “[t]he intellectually sophisticated person is indifferent to all genuine individuality, because relationships and reactions result from it which cannot be exhausted with logical operations” (Simmel, 49). Verloc is apathetic towards the emotions behind Winnie’s actions and surprised when they occur, but he knows that they are a part of marriage.

### Stevie’s Role in Verloc and Winnie’s Marriage

Winnie kissing Verloc out of duty highlights an important secret that she has been keeping from him: she never loves Verloc in the first place. Winnie only marries Verloc for the financial stability that he provides, and uses that stability to give her brother Stevie a better life. Winnie deeply cares for Stevie and reconciles her decision to marry Verloc with the thought that “[she] was provided for by her sensible union” (Conrad, 114). Her marriage to Verloc allows Stevie to “remain destitute and dependent” (Conrad, 114). In marrying Verloc, she “pursued the vision of seven years’ security for Stevie, loyally paid for on her part; of security growing into confidence, into a domestic feeling, stagnant and deep like a placid pool” (Conrad, 179). When looking back on her marriage, she tells Ossipon (a fellow anarchist),

‘He cheated me out of seven years of life’ . . . ‘Love him! I was a good wife to him. I am a respectable woman. You thought I loved him! You did! Look here, Tom . . . I was a young girl. I was done up. I was tired. I had two people depending on what I could do, and it did seem as if I couldn’t do any more.’ (Conrad, 201)

Winnie sacrifices her own happiness for the betterment of Stevie.

Conrad, in pushing the agenda that stereotypical masculinity is superior to the new, modern masculinity, humiliates Verloc by revealing that Winnie never loves him. The new,

modern masculine man is unable to truly love a woman in a romantic relationship, so Conrad is saying that those types of men do not deserve to have a happy marriage. The humiliation goes further by having Verloc's wealth – as obtained through laziness and moral questionability – get exploited by Winnie. She expressly only marries him to give Stevie a comfortable life.

Conrad depicts Winnie using traits associated with the new, modern man against Verloc – a token new, modern man – to show how dangerous and permeable the traits are. Winnie, through exploiting Verloc's wealth, is intelligent and calculating. The “[m]oney economy and the dominance of the intellect are intrinsically connected” (Simmel, 49)<sup>8</sup>, making citizens in British society adopt mannerisms akin to computing instead of processing emotions. Winnie weighs the pros and cons of marrying Verloc, and comes to the conclusion that she should do it because it will grant her financial stability which will help Stevie.

Conrad is showing what the institution of marriage will devolve to if the new, modern masculinity continues to persist. It is a British society devoid of emotion. Men can't love their wives, and their wives - being exposed to the metropolis and their husbands who operate inside it – can absorb the same rationality-based mental processing system and strictly use men for ulterior motives. Conrad is fearful of this. He is showing that chivalry – a virtue in stereotypical masculinity – will protect British society from this marital degeneration because it will make men love their wives and keep their wives happy.

### The Bombing

The bombing at Greenwich Park is one of two climactic events in the novel. It has been Verloc's mission since the beginning of the novel, and upon its actualization, instigates an

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<sup>8</sup> See pages 48-52 of “The Metropolis and Mental Life” by Simmel.

unsuspecting change in course. Two threads concerning the duel between stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity string from the bombing itself and its aftermath.

The bombing itself is a fluke. Verloc's target is the Greenwich Observatory, but a mishap solidifies the incident as "the attempted bomb outrage in Greenwich Park" (Conrad, 139). Verloc tricks Stevie into being the one to plant the bomb, and on Stevie's way to the observatory, he stumbles (Conrad, 169), killing only himself. The bombing is a marvelous failure. Ossipon reads the bombing's description in the newspaper to the Professor, saying

'[b]omb in Greenwich Park. There isn't much so far. Half-past eleven. Foggy morning. Effects of explosion felt as far as Romney Road and Park Place. Enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and broken branches. All around fragments of a man's body blown to pieces. That's all. The rest's mere newspaper gup. No doubt a wicked attempt to blow up the Observatory, they say. H'm. That's hardly credible.'  
(Conrad, 53)

Verloc fails at his mission of disrupting British society to garner a stronger police presence. The attempted bombing simply inconveniences society; it does little to ignite any change.

The attempted bombing does more damage to the anarchists than to the social order. Chief Inspector Heat – a policeman – recognizes that, "[t]he turn this affair [is] taking [means] the disclosure of many things – the laying waste of fields of knowledge, which, cultivated by a capable man, [has] a distinct value for the individual and for the society. It is sorry, sorry meddling" (Conrad, 154). After Verloc tells Heat that he is going to make a full confession, Heat speaks to Verloc as "Private Citizen Heat" (Conrad, 153) and tells Verloc to "[v]anish. Clear out" (Conrad, 155). Heat's treatment of Verloc and the situation begs the question: is Heat an anarchist too?

Conrad making the bombing fail and insinuating that Heat is also an anarchist has twofold repercussions in the discussion of masculinity. First - just like it sounds - the new,



modern masculinity loses to stereotypical masculinity. It is unable to carry out its mission in a humiliating fashion and hurts itself in the process. Conrad is showing that the new, modern masculinity is loose and reckless with the potential to deteriorate itself. But Heat potentially being an anarchist highlights how damaged British society has already become with the presence of the new, modern masculinity being a part of it. A policeman – the type of person responsible for the protection of British society – is corrupted to the point where he understands the shift in masculinity that is occurring. After all, the intention of the bombing is to reinvigorate the scandalously soft British legal system and its servants, giving stereotypical masculinity a spark to regain its dominance. So, Heat potentially being an anarchist is Conrad's way of showing how urgent the need for the eradication of the new, modern masculinity is.

The other thread that stems from the bombing is a fractured domestic sphere. Verloc's "marital affection [receives] the greatest shock from the premature explosion" (Conrad, 170). Verloc continues to view the situation from a rational perspective, being oblivious to Winnie's immense heartbreak from the death of her brother. When the two are speaking, Winnie "[shudders] at the sound of her husband's voice" (Conrad, 170) and says, "I don't want to look at you as long as I live" (Conrad, 172). To which Verloc replies, "[l]ook here! You can't sit like this in the shop, . . . '[s]omebody might come in at any minute' . . . 'Come. This won't bring him back,'" (Conrad, 172) and "[d]o be reasonable, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me" (Conrad, 172). Verloc is so emotionally calloused that he disregards Winnie's pain and expects her to not only snap out of her furious state, but be thankful that he wasn't the one to die.

From Verloc and Winnie's exchanges, a complete shift in the power dynamic of the household occurs. Winnie stabs Verloc to death<sup>9</sup> with "all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns<sup>10</sup>, and the unbalanced nervous fury of the age of bar-rooms" (Conrad, 193). Meaning, she kills him with her seven-year resentment of their marriage, the blind power of a caveman, and the disdain for an age where women are completely subjugated by men. Verloc's murder leaves Winnie "giddy but calm. She had become a free woman" (Conrad, 193). Winnie, motivated by fury, causes the destruction of her oppressor.

Verloc's murder is Conrad's method of showing the total loss of control in the domestic sphere that can come as a result of husbands identifying with the new, modern masculinity. Verloc, in his ignoble, emotionless behavior and unchivalrous treatment of Winnie, deserves to die because he does not respect the institution of marriage. Verloc lacks all the stereotypically masculine virtues that produce tame and structured home environments. So, his death in his own home at the hands of his wife shows how disordered the domestic sphere can become when new, modern masculine men are the heads of their households.

### Conclusion

Conrad uses *The Secret Agent* to show the dangers that the presence of the new, modern masculine man in the Edwardian era brings to British society. He is showing that the new, modern masculine man is inferior to stereotypically masculine men. Verloc and the Professor – two prominent anarchists – are paradigmatic representations of Conrad's vision of the new, modern masculine men. They are grotesque, lazy, nervous, isolated, and willing to bring about

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<sup>9</sup> See pages 192-193 in "The Secret Agent".

<sup>10</sup> "The age of cavemen" (Conrad, 243).

harm to British society. Verloc's character defends the new, modern masculinity. He wants to protect the identity at all costs, allowing the lazy pursuit of wealth and opulence to continue to exist. Instigating the stereotypically masculine police force asserts stereotypically masculine dominance over society, but it still protects those who identify with the new, modern masculinity. A stronger police force allows new, modern masculine men to continue their lackadaisical pursuit of wealth and continue to coexist alongside stereotypically masculine men. The Professor is an extremist in both his views and Conrad's depiction of him. The Professor is an enemy to stereotypical masculinity, wanting the new, modern masculinity to completely overcome stereotypical masculinity. He embodies the worst attributes of metropolitan life that are caused by urbanization and industrialization – loneliness, nervousness, and a grotesque figure. The bombing is a duel between the two types of masculinities, in which its failure demonstrates the new, modern masculine man's loss to stereotypical masculinity. Winnie provides a commentary on the domestic sphere. She shows that new, modern masculine men don't have control over their households, which allows women to gain influence and disrupt the natural order latent within the domestic sphere.

## Chapter 2

In this chapter, I will be focusing on George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. *Burmese Days* is located in Kyauktada, Burma, during Britain's late-empire period. World War 1 – a major historical event in literary modernism – has passed, and Britain's imperial power is beginning to wane. Britain's end of empire is a timeframe spanning from the conclusion of World War 1 to the Suez Crisis of 1956, which some scholars consider to be Britain's official end of empire<sup>11</sup>. Natives of the Indian subcontinent - under the British Raj - are starting to revolt against their colonizers, causing unrest in the colonies. Masculinity at the periphery of British society gets brought into the discussion because of this unrest. Stereotypical masculinity is again at odds with the new, modern masculinity.

The virtues of stereotypical masculinity remain unchanged in British society. British colonizers recognize their gradual loss of power in the colonies, so they grow nostalgic for the time when British imperial power was at its peak. The colonizers yearn for a British society filled with honorable, physically fit, dominant men, since those attributes are associated with power. They believe that if their colonies at the periphery of British society are reinvigorated with stereotypically masculine men, they will regain control and restore order over them.

The new, modern masculinity in Britain's end of empire period does experience some changes from the Edwardian era. As has been previously stated, the new, modern masculinity adapts to the evolving British society. New, modern masculine men recognize that Britain's imperial power is waning and they accept that change. They become anti-imperialist in their beliefs and go so far as to think that Britain should relinquish control of their colonies back to the

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<sup>11</sup> "The Suez Crisis of 1956 occupies a fundamental position in the historiography of twentieth-century Britain. . . . after 1956 Britain became a second-class power" Gorst and Johnman, xi).

natives. The colonizers who idealize stereotypical masculinity feel threatened by the anti-imperialist beliefs of the new, modern masculine men because it directly precipitates British society's loss of power.

Orwell – who is himself an admitted anti-imperialist – takes an ambiguous stance towards which type of masculinity should be allowed to persist in British society. His bias from having served in the Indian Imperial Police surfaces itself through his disgraceful depictions of both types of masculinity. He agrees with Conrad that the two cannot coexist since they are constantly at odds with each other, but unlike Conrad, he does not say that stereotypical masculinity – or conversely, the new, modern masculinity – is superior and must dominate over the other. The stereotypical masculine ideal in the periphery of British society results in men developing racist and violent tendencies from their overwhelming drive to dominate. The new, modern masculinity is vehemently satirized for the weak and ignoble men that it develops. Although Orwell politically wants British society to decolonize, the new, modern masculine men that it creates are undeniably flawed beings.

### A Brief Overview

To begin, it is important to draw the connection between stereotypical masculinity and British imperialism. It is said that, “war and occupation create the conditions for masculinity nostalgia, or a yearning for a set of gender norms and relations linked to fantasies of a secure, traditional and ordered past” (MacKenzie and Foster, 207)<sup>12</sup>. Since “English manliness<sup>13</sup> [is connected with] traits of self-restraint, disinterestedness, chivalry, vigor, aptitude for governance, and ‘dominance and deference’” (Gopinath, 203), Orwell has his British colonizers not abide by

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<sup>12</sup> Stereotypical masculinity represents that secure, traditional, ordered past.

<sup>13</sup> “English manliness” is being understood as stereotypical masculinity.

these traits while still believing that they are superior to the Burmese. Flory and Verrall are key European figures in *Burmese Days* who get satirized for their disgraceful behaviors.

Orwell also satirizes native men, but for a different purpose. The undignified statures and mannerisms of the natives are used to perpetuate the notion that the natives are inherently below the British. U Po Kyin is a corrupt and obese Burmese magistrate, and Dr. Veraswami is an Indian living in Kyauktada that believes the British are naturally superior beings to the natives of the Indian subcontinent. Dr. Veraswami's lack of stereotypical masculinity is paralleled with Flory's, while U Po Kyin acts as a countertype to stereotypical masculinity which inversely strengthens the ideal of stereotypical masculinity in the eyes of British society. Basically, by having a character that is opposite to stereotypical masculinity, that character proves why stereotypical masculinity should be celebrated.

The women in the novel are used to reinforce or degrade men. Chivalry is an important virtue to stereotypical masculinity, so the way in which the men in the novel treat the women impacts their masculine identities. Elizabeth and Ma Hla May are central female characters that shape Flory and Verrall.

### The Dissenter

Flory, a European timber merchant, is a prime example of the new, modern masculine man in the periphery of British society. The first time Flory is mentioned, he is described as a coward<sup>14</sup>. Naturally, being a coward goes against one of the stereotypically masculine virtues, “. . . courage” (Mosse, 4), and “to be called a coward was the worst insult” (Mosse, 18). Further, Flory's appearance is not one of beauty. In a time when “outward appearance became a symbol

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<sup>14</sup> See page 12 of “Burmese Days”.

of inner worth, a sign for all to see and judge” (Mosse, 27), Flory’s appearance is not “conductive to bodily health and clean-cut limbs. . . . [the] virtue that accompanied [stereotypical] masculinity” (Mosse, 26). Rather, Flory looks disheveled and tarnished, which corrupts his ability to have “one harmonious whole” (Mosse, 5) formed by merging “outward appearance and inner virtue” (Mosse, 5). By Flory not being beautiful, Orwell is insinuating that his inner morality is equally as impious as his body, so he can never be a stereotypically masculine man.

A description of Flory’s appearance is necessary. He’s

a man of about thirty-five, of middle height, not ill made . . . his skin, naturally sallow, was discolored by the sun. Not having grown fat or bald he did not look older than his age, but his face was very haggard in spite of the sunburn, with lank cheeks and a sunken, withered look round the eyes. He was dressed in the *usual*<sup>15</sup> white shirt, khaki drill shorts and stockings, but instead of a topi<sup>16</sup> he wore a battered Terai hat, cocked over one eye. (Orwell, 17)

At its onset, this description of Flory paints him as being an average-looking man. He’s only slightly unkempt and not decrepit, but certainly not characterizing the “ideal male stereotype” (Mosse, 26-27) either.

Orwell purposefully constructs Flory’s appearance to comment on Britain’s presence in Burma. The “male body . . . became in the twentieth century one of the most powerful means of national . . . self-representation” (Mosse, 27), so how the Europeans look is intimately tied with their perceived ability to rule. By Flory not wearing a garment of clothing traditionally worn by the British, Orwell is insinuating that Flory is disconnecting himself from British imperialism.

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<sup>15</sup> I italicized “usual” to show that this outfit is standard for Flory throughout the novel and it’s not specific to this single occurrence.

<sup>16</sup> “. . . the tropical pith hat called a ‘topi’ (a Hindustani word) made from the solo plant of India; this ‘topi’ being customarily worn by Westerners for protection from the hot and dangerous tropical sun” (Hobbs, 312).

But the key feature of Flory's appearance rests on his face. It is the "hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down his left cheek, from the eye to the corner of the mouth" (Orwell, 17) that everyone notices first. When "[s]een from the left side his face had a battered, woebegone look, as though the birthmark had been a bruise – for it was a dark blue in colour" (Orwell, 17). This birthmark is blaring and impossible to hide. Flory "[is] quite aware of its hideousness. And at all times, when he [is] not alone, there [is] a sidelongness about his movements, as he [maneuvers] constantly to keep the birthmark out of sight" (Orwell, 17). Flory's birthmark plays an important role in his new, modern masculine identity.

Due to his birthmark, he can never embody the stereotypically masculine ideal of male beauty. The ideal of stereotypically masculine beauty is based off Greek sculptures<sup>17</sup> that depict "young athletes who through the structure of their bodies and their comportment exemplified power and virility, and also harmony, proportion, and self-control" (Mosse, 29). Flory's birthmark destroys any semblance of harmony and proportion. Plus, it forces him to adopt a timid, isolated, erratic, and depraved demeanor. Since Flory does not possess the "masculine beauty"<sup>18</sup> that came to symbolize a healthy and progressive society" (Mosse, 28), it can be deduced that Orwell is equating Flory's embellished appearance with a faulty and deteriorating colonial British society.

Flory drinks excessively<sup>19</sup>, wallows in self-pity, and treats women poorly. He is incredibly lonely in Kyauktada and feels alienated there. When thinking back to his first year in Burma, he recollects that "[h]e was too young to realize what this life was preparing for him. He did not see the years stretching out ahead, lonely, eventless, corrupting" (Orwell, 65-66). At age

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<sup>17</sup> See "The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity" page 28.

<sup>18</sup> Stereotypically masculine beauty.

<sup>19</sup> See pages 18, 61, 65, 73, and there are many other instances of Flory being drunk or hungover.



twenty-seven, "[q]uite suddenly he had begun to look and feel very much older. His youth was finished. Eight years of Eastern life, fever, loneliness and intermittent drinking, had set their mark on him" (Orwell, 68). Now, he realizes,

[s]ince then, each year had been lonelier and more bitter than the last. What was at the centre of all his thoughts now, and what poisoned everything, was the ever bitterer hatred of the atmosphere of imperialism in which he lived. For as his brain developed . . . he had grasped the truth about the English and their Empire. . . . There is a prevalent idea that the men at the 'outposts of Empire' are at least able and hardworking. It is a delusion. . . . The time comes when you burn with hatred of your own countrymen, when you long for a native rising to drown their empire in blood. And in this there is nothing honourable, hardly even any sincerity. For, *au fond*<sup>20</sup>, what do you care if the Indian Empire is a despotism, if Indians are bullied and exploited? (Orwell, 68-69)

Flory's loneliness and hatred of imperialism is a radically different perspective from that of the stereotypically masculine British colonizer who gets energized off the desire to dominate others.

Flory's opinion of the British empire is traitorous, thereby distinguishing him apart from stereotypical masculinity. Nationalism is inherently wedded with stereotypical masculinity, since honor and dominance lie at the foundation of empire. Mosse asserts, "[t]he creation of societies and states was a masculine task" (Mosse, 73). Further, the "macho ethos cultivated by the colonizers, according to which they were 'masculine imperialists conquering the feminine East', was also highly important in the history of the British Empire" (Targosz, 280). In fact, "[l]ike the military, most state institutions have been historically and remain dominated by men. It is therefore no surprise that the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism" (Nagel, 248-249). So, the British link their political power with their stereotypical masculinity, and a denunciation of the British empire means a forfeiture of stereotypically masculine standings.

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<sup>20</sup> "Au fond" is French for "basically".

Flory's critique of Britain's position in Burma is on par with a cardinal sin that is typically reserved for the Burmese. When U Po Kyin - a corrupt Burmese magistrate - is plotting how to defame Veraswami, he states "[c]learly, then, it must be disloyalty – Nationalism, seditious propaganda. We must persuade the Europeans that the doctor holds disloyal, anti-British opinions. That is far worse than bribery; they expect a native official to take bribes. But let them suspect his loyalty even for a moment, and he is ruined" (Orwell, 11). For Flory – a product of British imperialism – to hold anti-imperialist beliefs, Orwell is showing the deterioration of the British empire from the inside-out.

It's even more surprising for Flory to not dislike the Burmese. Since the "majority of the British shared the cold sentiment of superiority in relation to the peoples under the authority of the British Empire" (Targosz, 280), and the British have a permeating belief that "England [was] the most highly enlightened and civilized nation upon earth, enjoying the knowledge of the sublime truths of the Christian revelation in its purest form, freed from the errors and corruptions which human devices introduced [...]" (Targosz, 280), for Flory to not hold those same opinions is counter to the stereotypically masculine ideals of vigor and dominance. Flory thinks of the natives as "no worse than anybody else" (Orwell, 68) and even goes farther to think that "every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism" (Orwell, 69). Orwell is shedding light on an emerging type of man in British society through his formulation of Flory: the new, modern masculine dissenter.

Orwell degrades Flory's standings with stereotypical masculinity further by giving him a vice that makes him run contra to stereotypically masculine virtues: women. There is a "parallel between the usurpation of the Burmese land and the Burmese women" (Kalpakli, 1216), and Orwell highlights this imperialism of women's bodies by having Flory and many other British

men<sup>21</sup> sleep with prostitutes. When Flory is forced to reflect upon his involvement with Burmese women, he envisions

an endless procession of Burmese women, a regiment of ghosts, were marching past him in the moonlight. Heavens, what numbers of them! A thousand – no, but a full hundred at the least. . . . Their heads turned towards him, but they had no faces, only featureless discs. He remembered a blue *longyi* here, a pair of ruby earrings there, but hardly a face or a name. . . . He had dirtied himself beyond redemption. (Orwell, 196)

This immense amount of womanizing clearly goes against the stereotypically masculine virtues of self-restraint and chivalry, especially when “[h]onor, in accordance with the tradition of chivalry, was attached to the individual himself, to his reputation, standing, and dignity” (Mosse, 18). Flory’s womanizing comes back to haunt him in his relationships with Ma Hla May and Elizabeth - a woman who he views as his saving grace in Kyauktada.

Ma Hla May is a prostitute and Flory’s Burmese mistress. She refers to him as “master”<sup>22</sup> and only shows him affection because she enjoys the prestige of being a “’bo-kadow’ - a white man’s wife” (Orwell, 54). To embody the stereotypically masculine virtue of chivalry, Flory would have to be “compassionate, loyal, and ennobled by the pure love of a woman” (Mosse, 18). He is expressly the antithesis of those characteristics in relation to Ma Hla May. Flory sleeps with her, pays her, and immediately demands her to leave<sup>23</sup>. It is “a take-and-give relationship, there is no feeling and emotion in their relationship. Just as they do to Burma, the white man/Flory uses her for the satisfaction of his desires and needs” (Kalpakli, 1216). Flory is abrasive with Ma Hla May and even threatens to “’take a bamboo and beat you till not one of your ribs is whole’” (Orwell, 87). Orwell uses Flory’s interactions with Ma Hla May to show the

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<sup>21</sup> Mr. Lackersteen is known for constantly sleeping with Burmese prostitutes and even tries to rape Elizabeth on multiple occasions.

<sup>22</sup> See pages 55 and 56 of “Burmese Days”. There are other instances.

<sup>23</sup> See pages 54 and 55 of “Burmese Days”.

character of British men in Burma and, more broadly, how the British treat Burma itself. The British abuse their subjects and only them for their benefit.

Flory's downfall lies at the hands of Ma Hla May and Elizabeth. U Po Kyin shames Flory "so that he will never dare show his face in that Club again" (Orwell, 262) by having Ma Hla May publicly disgrace him. In church, in front of the fifteen members of the "Christian community of Kyauktada" (Orwell, 269) (mostly English men and women, except for roughly three Burmese natives<sup>24</sup>), Ma Hla May humiliates him. She "[shrieks] like a maniac" (Orwell, 273), yelling things like "[w]here is the money you promised me" (Orwell, 273) and "[I] look how he has ruined me! Look at these rags I am wearing! . . . He would let me starve at his gate like a pariah dog. . . . Look at this body that you have kissed a thousand times" (Orwell, 273). Ma Hla May devolves further by tearing her clothes off<sup>25</sup>. The spectacle embarrasses Flory beyond comprehension.

As a result of the humiliation, Flory takes his own life<sup>26</sup>. Flory's suicide is a culmination of his loss of all forms of stereotypical masculinity. The unrequited love of Elizabeth mixed with his bitter loneliness and fondness of prostitutes strips him of his respectability and chivalrous expectations. His disdain for imperialism is the clear opposite of "the imperial manliness of empire" (Gopinath, 205). Flory is an "unworkable imperial Englishman" (Gopinath, 220), meaning he can never possess the characteristics ascribed to stereotypical masculinity. By not fitting the imperial agenda, Flory and his new, modern masculinity cannot coexist with stereotypically masculine men in the periphery of British society.

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<sup>24</sup> See page 269 of "Burmese Days".

<sup>25</sup> See page 273 of "Burmese Days".

<sup>26</sup> See page 281 of "Burmese Days".

Orwell has Flory commit suicide in a satirical grand scheme. By Flory being killed off, it shows that stereotypical masculinity has won. New, modern masculine men – with progressive beliefs about the Burmese being able to rule themselves and wanting the British to abandon their imperial conquests – could not be allowed to be a part of British society. Britain is in the midst of their “long slow decline of empire” (Gopinath, 205), but stereotypically masculine men do not want to accept that. Stifling the voice of a new, masculine man is a way of maintaining the stereotypically masculine virtue of dominance without having to acknowledge the impending need for deference.

### The (Almost) Heroic Ideal

Verrall – an English Military Policeman – directly antagonizes Flory’s character. Verrall has most of the traits that Flory lacks, especially characteristics that are celebrated by stereotypically masculine British imperialists. His character is a symbol for stereotypical masculinity in the periphery of British society.

Verrall is commandeering and athletic. He “was a youth of about twenty-five, lank but very straight, and manifestly a cavalry officer. He had one of those rabbit-like faces common among English soldiers, . . . He sat his horse as though he were part of it, and he looked offensively young and fit” (Orwell, 184). He holds the rank of lieutenant and earned the prefix of “The Honourable” (Orwell, 195). Alongside his military stature, he’s an athlete with a great love for polo<sup>27</sup>. In imperialist fashion, he pities the environment of his new station, stating ”this is a filthy hole, isn’t it’ . . . indicating the whole of Kyauktada” (Orwell, 184). Verrall ”represents the Victorian ideal of bodily perfection” (Gopinath, 214) and has the British superiority complex to

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<sup>27</sup> See page 185 of “Burmese Days”.

match. He is the stereotypically masculine paradigm that Englishmen in the periphery of British society wish to be.

However, Verrall doesn't seamlessly transition into Burmese colonial society. In fact, "[he] made no move to join in the local society" (Orwell, 201) at all. He is quite reclusive, and his masculinity is hinged upon that introversion. Even though he is fit, distinguished, and has self-control<sup>28</sup>, his "ungracious" (Orwell, 201) and disrespectful mannerisms deeply offend the citizens of Kyauktada. Englishmen and native Burmese alike "would all have fallen at the feet of a lieutenant the Honourable if he had shown the smallest courtesy" (Orwell, 201) but from ignoring invitations to the Club, neglecting official summons, and overtaking a significant portion of Kyauktada's open space grounds to practice polo, the citizens detest him. Verrall's masculinity is linked with his social presence (or lack thereof) since his body, interests, and title should be enough to make him a representation of the stereotypically masculine ideal. But his apathetic character alone outweighs all his other attributes in the eyes of the people.

Sinisterly, Verrall is no stranger to berating the Burmese. As an officer he should be bound to the duties of promoting honor and respect, but his stereotypically masculine impulse for dominance surfaces itself through acts of violence. A servant at the Club told Ellis - a fellow Englishman in Kyauktada - "[n]ew master been beating me, sir" (Orwell, 207) and Verrall quickly confesses to doing so. Verrall's rationale is that, "[b]eggars gave me his lip. . . . So I kicked his bottom. Serve him right" (Orwell, 208). Ellis, however, does not approve of Verrall's treatment of "Club property" (Orwell, 208). He says, "'Serve him right? I dare say it bloody well did serve him right. [But] . . . Who are *you* to come kicking our servants?'" (Orwell, 208). Since

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<sup>28</sup> "He exercised himself ceaselessly and brutally, rationed his drink and his cigarettes, slept on a camp bed (in silk pyjamas) and bathed in cold water in the bitterest winter" (Orwell, 203).

Verrall is not well-received in Kyauktada, his stereotypically masculine impulse to dominate causes his masculine standing to wane instead of strengthen - even when his fellow Englishmen would have been just as cruel.

Ellis, specifically, is an unlikely challenger towards Verrall. The “Englishmen in Burma are mostly the believers of violence” (Kalpakli, 1219), and Ellis is vehemently racist. On one occasion he blinds a Burmese high school boy out of rage<sup>29</sup>, and on another occasion, has a brutal fantasy of disregarding the law to torture and slaughter the Burmese<sup>30</sup>. Verrall is generally cordial with Ellis and once attended a (defused) rebellion with him, carrying fifty rifles<sup>31</sup>, presumably with the intention of killing any remaining rioters. Even though “the use of violence against the indigenous people is forbidden by the British government, it is practiced by the British officers in Burma” (Kalpakli, 1219) and Verrall and Ellis share the same sentiment of wanting to harm the Burmese in order to establish their superiority over them and maintain order in the colony. They both blatantly value their stereotypically masculine codes over “the legal and moral structures designed to control their behavior” (Neill, Introduction). But in the case of kicking the Club’s servant, Verrall undermines Ellis’s authority, so Ellis hastily condemns Verrall as being dishonorable.

Verrall is as unchivalrous as Flory, but in a starkly different way. Rather than being a womanizer, Verrall doesn’t show any interest in women, which translates into a lack of respect. Flory is plagued with unrequited love from Elizabeth, while Verrall is indifferent towards her even though he spends time with her frequently. His small talk about hunting, racing, polo, and horses “could thrill Elizabeth as all Flory’s talk had ever done” (Orwell, 213). But his resistance

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<sup>29</sup> See pages 242 and 244 of “Burmese Days”.

<sup>30</sup> See page 240 of “Burmese Days”.

<sup>31</sup> See page 224 of “Burmese Days”.

towards eating dinner with her and never wanting to enter her home<sup>32</sup> implies that Verrall is merely entertaining Elizabeth with their evenings together. He does offer her favors and gives her privileges that others do not receive, but he never vocalizes any clear interests regarding a romantic relationship.

The seemingly insignificant detail of Verrall not vocalizing any interest in starting a relationship with Elizabeth highlights a pressing issue in the study of masculinity regarding how men are not being able to express their emotions. Flory quite frequently tells Elizabeth how much he loves her, but his professions are meaningless since they are all self-centered. Flory once tells Elizabeth, “I said just now that I loved you. . . . This afternoon when you were there shooting with me, I thought, my God! here at last is somebody who can share my life with me, but really share it, really *live* it with me” (Orwell, 179). Flory only loves Elizabeth because she offers an escape from his loneliness. Her presence is all about how she benefits him. Verrall, conversely, never finds the language or the desire to verbally express romantic feelings for Elizabeth. He only knows how to express himself through actions. An instance of this is when he dances with Elizabeth all night, leaving her swooning, yet closes out the evening with “a brief good night to the Lackersteens” (Orwell, 211) and abruptly leaves the Club. Dancing with Elizabeth is a kind gesture on Verrall’s part, but his emotions stop there. He seeks to make her happy by participating in events that she enjoys, but he is unable to tell her that their time together is for merriment and not a romantic pursuit. In his swift goodbye, what isn’t said is more related to chivalry and self-restraint than what was.

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<sup>32</sup> See page 214 of “Burmese Days”.



With his overly-inflated sense of stereotypical masculinity as a signifier, Verrall comes to represent imperialist Britain. He colonizes Kyauktada much like the Englishmen there before him did. He bounds in with an air of superiority, treats the native Burmese poorly, changes the landscape to fit his own personal interests<sup>33</sup>, and is met with disdain the entire time. He is simultaneously a powerful Englishman who embodies some stereotypically masculine virtues, and a crude mirror showing the Englishmen in Kyauktada the atrocious things that they are doing to the city.

To capture the essence of Britain's declining power and influence, Orwell satirizes Verrall by having him act exactly like a typical colonizer. The satire is expressed through its realism. Verrall "had no intention of mixing himself up with all the petty *sahiblog*<sup>34</sup> of the district" (Orwell, 202), "despised the entire non-military population of India . . . [and] despised the entire Army as well" (Orwell, 202). Precisely like colonizers, Verrall doesn't have any respect for the location and the people inhabiting it; his time in the Indian subcontinent is entirely about how he can benefit himself. Just like British imperialists, "[u]p and down India, wherever he was stationed, he left behind him a trail of insulted people, neglected duties and unpaid bills. Yet the disgraces that ought to have fallen on him never did" (Orwell, 203). His parallels with imperialism and colonialism are clear. Alongside that, Orwell's depiction of his masculinity is the most shocking. His behavior shows the members of British society that even a man who should represent the stereotypical masculine ideal can abuse their status and lose their standing as a virtuous stereotypically masculine man. Orwell never emasculates Verrall, he depicts a version of stereotypical masculinity that Englishmen living in the periphery of British society are

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<sup>33</sup> This is referencing his annexation of the public grounds so he can practice polo.

<sup>34</sup> Englishmen.

trying to emulate – thus showing how easily the ideal can be misconstrued to promote violence, disorder, and racism.

So, Verrall's departure from Kyauktada is equally as significant as his presence there. He leaves "in a fearful hurry" (Orwell, 265), not even taking the time to say good-bye to Elizabeth, which leaves her in shambles<sup>35</sup>. Like any colonizer, he exploits the territory and leaves "a nice mess" (Orwell, 265) in his wake. Orwell making Verrall leave is related to the departure of stereotypical masculinity from British society in general. Stereotypical masculinity has withdrawn from the scene, insinuating that the new, modern masculinity is going to take its place.

As previously stated, Flory - the champion of the new, modern masculinity - is killed off. But Flory's death is symbolic of the resistance that anti-imperialists face. Verrall is supposed to be the hero of Kyauktada, but his antisocial behavior, dishonorable and unchivalrous actions, and commandeering presence strip him of that title. Verrall's actions and mannerisms give the Englishmen in Kyauktada a bitter taste of what corrupted stereotypical masculinity looks and acts like. Orwell making Verrall leave is worse than having Flory die in disgrace, since it demonstrates that stereotypical masculinity can no longer exist in British society.

### The Perfect Subject

Englishmen are not the only significant characters in *Burmese Days*, and Orwell spares no expense when it comes to satirizing the natives as well. Dr. Veraswami is an Indian living in Kyauktada who holds significant positions there, including "the Civil Surgeon and Superintendent of the jail . . . [making him a] high official" (Orwell, 11). He's close friends with

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<sup>35</sup> See pages 265 and 266 of "Burmese Days".

Flory, and the entire city is aware of their friendship. His physique is unimpressive<sup>36</sup>, but his demeanor is the biggest indicator of his non-stereotypically masculine status. Even though Veraswami is successful on his own merits, his friendship with Flory brings him prestige, and as a result of that dynamic he develops a remarkable inferiority complex in relation to the British. Veraswami is brainwashed by colonial ideology and depicts an ironic representation of what the British think the natives think of them. He is a pure representation of colonial mimicry, and his masculinity gets degraded as a result. He can never truly be honorable in a position of deep subjugation.

Colonial mimicry is an insidious tool used by the British to establish their dominance over the “feminine east” (Targosz, 280). Colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. . . . [mimicry is thus] a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha, 126). Essentially, the British use colonial mimicry to make Veraswami and other natives feel inferior to them through accentuating minor differences in their belief systems and physical attributes. As is consistent with colonial mimicry, “the naïve and loyal Veraswami is a caricature of the Westernized native who has internalized the imperial discourse of his inferiority. He is an instrument of heavy narrative irony, because the apparent embodiments of these ideals – in the shape of the Sahibs . . . are without exception dissolute, debauched, and wholly ignoble” (Gopinath, 201). Veraswami is conditioned to be “an admirer of the British . . . [and] feels gratitude to the British colonizers” (Kalpakli, 1216). Veraswami is

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<sup>36</sup> See pages 36-37 of “Burmese Days”.

everything that the British want in a colonized subject – a man degraded to the belief that everything the British are doing is right and that he deserves to not be their equal.

The brainwashing of Veraswami proves effective. Veraswami “does not see the evil behind the white mask” (Kalpakli, 1216) and asserts things like “consider how noble a type is the English gentleman! . . . Even those of them whose manner is unfortunate . . . have the great, sterling qualities that we Orientals lack. Beneath their rough exterior, their hearts are of gold” (Orwell, 38)<sup>37</sup>. As has already been shown, there aren’t any stereotypically masculine men - or English gentlemen - among the British colonizers, but Veraswami firmly believes otherwise. The Englishmen do not possess or exercise the virtues necessary for elevating them to the status of the stereotypically masculine English gentleman. But moral virtues are not the only component of stereotypical masculinity. Physical stature plays an important role as well, and Veraswami is quick to point out the differences. He says,

’[b]ehold there the degeneracy of the East’ . . . pointing to Mattu . . . ‘Look at the wretchedness of his limbs. The calves of his legs are not so thick as an Englishman’s wrists. Look at his abjectness and servility. Look at his ignorance – such ignorance as is not known in Europe outside a home for mental defectives. . . . How can you pretend, Mr. Flory, that you are not the natural superior of such creatures?’ (Orwell, 44)

Veraswami thinks that the British are superior to the Burmese in every way, so their dominance over Kyauktada is justified. Veraswami holds a pitiful sense of his and his fellow native’s self-worth, which is not compatible with being a stereotypically masculine man. An important view of masculinity linked with Veraswami is that, “[a]s military officers, courtiers, and civil servants, the aristocracy now cultivated a code of honor linked on the one hand to the performance of duties and, on the other, to trying to preserve self-respect and sense of caste” (Mosse, 18). There

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<sup>37</sup> Veraswami hisses his s’s when he speaks. Before having a dialogue with Flory, the narrator states, “[h]is voice was eager and bubbling, with a hissing of the s’s” (Orwell, 37).

is no honor in being willingly subjugated and purposefully lowering your rank within the hierarchy, so Veraswami is both not honorable and not dominant.

A large part of Veraswami's status within the periphery of British society is his position as Superintendent of the jail. This is, of course, a high-ranking position. But it is extremely ironic in the broad view of the novel while being aptly fitting for Veraswami's character. The irony is that, "[t]he modern prison was one of the many innovations . . . that were brought to Burma by the colonizers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century" (Targosz, 284). Further, "[d]uring the Victorian period, the architectural purpose of public buildings constructed in the colonies was to convey the power of the British Empire. Similarly as in the case of present-day architecture, the external form of the building was a way for the colonial authorities to communicate their power to their subjects" (Targosz, 284). Veraswami not only personally promotes British superiority, it is literally his job to do so. His job description perpetuates the notion that stereotypical masculine British superiority still reigns over Burma and the Indian subcontinent, while he personally ignores (or has been conditioned to not recognize) that presently the British empire is beginning to wane in its power and influence.

Veraswami's friendship with Flory is filled with complexities. The two banter as equals, yet race relations are never put to the wayside. Flory treats Veraswami as a true friend – and they are – however Veraswami's status is undeniably elevated by being close with a European, and Veraswami ceaselessly reinforces British superiority in their discussions together. A joke that they share in which Flory genuinely believes but Veraswami takes as fool hearted is that of the present state of the British empire. The joke is, "the British Empire was an aged female patient of the doctor's" (Orwell, 37) who has palsy. In one such dialogue, Veraswami tells Flory "she iss very low, very low! Grave complications setting in. We shall have to call in the specialists, I

fear. Aha!’” (Orwell, 37). The grave complications being the presence of new, modern masculine men that are weakening Britain’s military power. “The specialists” is a foreshadowing, alluding to Verrall’s arrival. Orwell’s narrative purpose in pairing Veraswami and Flory together is the juxtaposition of two non-stereotypically masculine men. They are both weak, dishonorable, and anti-nationalistic respective to their home nations. Their friendship represents the unity of outsiders.

Ultimately - just like Flory - his life ends in disgrace. When Flory dies, “Dr. Veraswami was ruined, even as he had foreseen. The glory of being a white man’s friend . . . had vanished” (Orwell, 283). To strike the nail in the coffin, U Po Kyin then accuses Veraswami of being “an unmitigated scoundrel” (Orwell, 283). Since “when a ‘native’ official comes to be known as *shok de*<sup>38</sup>, there is an end of him” (Orwell, 283), Veraswami is “reverted to the rank of Assistant Surgeon and transferred to Mandalay General Hospital” (Orwell, 284). Even a loyal, devoted British subject such as Veraswami can be humiliated by the system that conditions him, because the unfortunate reality is that the race relations never cease and any native is powerless against the superiority complex latent within members of British society. Veraswami’s character is subjugated to reinforce the notion that the British will always be superior to the natives, and the strongest way for Orwell to push this narrative is to forcibly remove him from British society once he loses his British friend.

### The Bane of the British

The final satirized man who must be addressed is U Po Kyin. While Veraswami represents what the British want in a Burmese subject (obedient, brainwashed, naturally inferior),

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<sup>38</sup> Untrustworthy.

U Po Kyin represents what the British fear. He is powerful, corrupt, and only pretends to respect the British so he can advance his own agenda. Rather than being non-stereotypically masculine, U Po Kyin is a countertype to stereotypical masculinity. By U Po Kyin being stereotypical masculinities' inverse, his presence makes stereotypical masculinity look even more virtuous.

U Po Kyin's weight is one of the first things that people notice about him. He "[is] a man of fifty, so fat that for years he [has] not risen from his chair without help, and yet shapely and even beautiful in his grossness" (Orwell, 5). This form of beauty is in direct contrast with Verrall's physique and the stereotypical masculine ideal of the athletic body. It derives its beauty (and thus virtue) from being the opposite of the British's. This is understood through the notion that "the Burmese do not sag and bulge like white men, but grow fat symmetrically, like fruits swelling" (Orwell, 5). U Po Kyin is appropriating dominance. He excels in a domain that the British deem undignified.

And U Po Kyin is quite dedicated to his gluttony. When he eats, he "[stuffs] the food into himself with swift, greasy fingers, breathing fast. All his meals [are] swift, passionate and enormous; they [are] not meals so much as orgies, debauches of curry and rice" (Orwell, 14). Rather than being ashamed or emasculated, his voraciousness is a symbol of his wealth. U Po Kyin is "proud of his fatness, because he saw the accumulated flesh as the symbol of his greatness. He who had once been obscure and hungry was now fat, rich and feared. He was swollen with the bodies of his enemies" (Orwell, 14). U Po Kyin gains power and prestige through his physique. He absorbs the influence of the British and uses it for his own benefit. It is important to remember that "outsiders were stereotyped as evil kinds of men but nevertheless still recognizable as men even if they reversed traditional values" (Mosse, 63). As a result, U Po Kyin is never ugly or unmanly (which is described as being) "accidental, without harmony,

nothing was in its place” (Mosse, 59). U Po Kyin’s body is perfectly symmetrical and attained with a sense of purpose. He is a threat to the British because he becomes more powerful the more he subverts expectations.

U Po Kyin’s power is not only expressed by his figure. He is a wealthy aristocrat; his influence is established by his political acumen. He is the acting Subdivisional Magistrate of Kyauktada<sup>39</sup> and ”would probably be promoted still further and made an acting Deputy Commissioner, with Englishmen as his equals and even his subordinates” (Orwell, 6). These high positions in government run in line with his life’s ambition, which is to ”become a parasite upon [the British]” (Orwell, 6). He wants to become so influential that he can destroy the colonialists from the inside-out. Although his political power is undeniable, the way he attains it is questionable, and that is precisely why he subverts the stereotypical masculine ideal of dominance.

U Po Kyin is a corrupt politician with insidious intentions. The first breakthrough in his career in politics comes from “a lucky stroke of blackmail [that] put him in possession of four hundred rupees” (Orwell, 6) which led him to Rangoon<sup>40</sup> where he “bought his way into a government clerkship” (Orwell, 6). He then “denounced all his confederates” (Orwell, 6) which sent them to prison (even though U Po Kyin was committing the same crimes as them<sup>41</sup>), all so he could be promoted to “Assistant Township Officer as [a] reward for his honesty” (Orwell, 6). In his current position as Subdivisional Magistrate, when ruling on a case he “[takes] bribes from both sides and then [decides] the case on strictly legal grounds” (Orwell, 6). He also enacts a

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<sup>39</sup> See page 5 of “Burmese Days”.

<sup>40</sup> Yangon - known as Rangoon at the time of publication - “is the largest city in Myanmar [then Burma] and the industrial and commercial centre of the country” (Encyclopædia Britannica).

<sup>41</sup> See page 6 of “Burmese Days”.



“private taxation scheme” (Orwell, 7) on “all the villages under his jurisdiction” (Orwell, 7) and has “gangs of dacoits<sup>42</sup>” attack the villages that don’t pay. His actions go completely against any notion of honor and virtue.

But are the colonizers any better? They took over Kyauktada, instilled their own value systems, berate the native Burmese, and hate the very land that they now control. Orwell uses U Po Kyin to show the hypocrisy of British colonial rule. U Po Kyin is a rebel trying to reclaim the land that rightfully belongs to him and his people. Any accusation that he is a coward or an inferior is simply false; he is incredibly wealthy and a significant actor in the political landscape of Kyauktada. He is “practically invulnerable, because he was too fine a judge of men ever to choose a wrong instrument, and also because he was too absorbed in intrigue ever to fail through carelessness or ignorance” (Orwell, 7). His prestige counters any claim of natural British superiority. His power is the countertype to stereotypically masculine British power because it is achieved through shady measures, but it is nevertheless still power. He cannot be emasculated or deemed non-masculine for his actions and influence, he is simply the inverse of the ideal stereotypically masculine British ruler.

As with Veraswami to Flory, U Po Kyin is tantamount to Verrall. His fat physique is directly opposite of Verrall’s athletic build, yet they both are revered for their bodies. Verrall is a lieutenant the Honourable, while U Po Kyin is “a Government servant of thirty years’ standing” (Orwell, 139). Both designations should immediately be received by the public with respect, but the actions of the men negate their ability to be praised. U Po Kyin is aware of his infamy and snarkily self-depreciates himself in a public anonymous letter aimed at defaming

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<sup>42</sup> “One of a class of criminals in India and Burma who rob and murder in roving gangs” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Veraswami by accusing Veraswami of “being in league with the notorious scoundrel and bribe-taker U Po Kyin” (Orwell, 137)<sup>43</sup>. While Verrall hates the Burmese, U Po Kyin hates the British and wants to cause harm upon them as well. He instigates a rebellion in which “there will be terrible fighting and shooting, and . . . poor men . . . will be killed” (Orwell, 139) all with the intention of quelling it when it begins so he can become “be the hero of the district” (Orwell, 140) for stopping it. Just like Verrall, his acts of dominance are met with resentment instead of praise<sup>44</sup>. Verrall does everything for his own benefit, and same with U Po Kyin. In a manner not related to U Po Kyin’s influence but still relevant to his masculinity and paralleling Verrall’s, U Po Kyin is unchivalrous towards his wife. He constantly belittles her, saying things like “[n]onsense, woman, nonsense! Attend to your cooking and sewing and leave official matters to those who would understand them” (Orwell, 16). That is merely one instance, but the belittlement can be seen throughout the novel<sup>45</sup>. Finally, and exactly like Verrall, U Po Kyin’s reign comes to an abrupt end.

Even as a countertype, Orwell could not allow U Po Kyin’s masculine identity to continue. If his influence lived on, the political scene in Kyauktada could unravel into flagrant acts of corruption, tainting the city permanently. Thus, U Po Kyin gets elected to the Club<sup>46</sup>, receives a certificate “of honour” (Orwell, 286) from the Governor for his “long and loyal service and especially for his timely aid in crushing a most dangerous rebellion in Kyauktada District” (Orwell, 286), and then, three days later, promptly gets “stricken with apoplexy and [dies] without speaking again” (Orwell, 286). In true countertype fashion, U Po Kyin’s fate

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<sup>43</sup> U Po Kyin’s public persona, of course, does not show any proof of those true accusations. He is simply leveraging the Englishmen’s pre-conceived notions about himself to spark outrage.

<sup>44</sup> Ma Kin’s (U Po Kyin’s wife) response to U Po Kyin’s plan is “[s]urely you have not gone mad?” (Orwell, 139) and Ellis’s response to Verrall beating the servant is also negative.

<sup>45</sup> “How slow are you! . . . Latin, you would not understand” (Orwell, 139) is another instance.

<sup>46</sup> See page 285 of “Burmese Days”.

satirizes both Verrall and the Burmese as a whole. While Verrall leaves hastily in disgrace, U Po Kyin dies with honor.

U Po Kyin's death is significant for Orwell's commentary on the masculinities of the men living in the periphery of British society. Even though U Po Kyin dies with honor to his name, he never actually deserves to be honored. He is politically and morally corrupt. U Po Kyin receiving public honors while being corrupt is proof that adhering to the virtues within stereotypical masculinity is not the only way of being successful in British society. Orwell shows through U Po Kyin that it is possible to gain prestige through dishonesty, which is blasphemous to the stereotypically masculine ideal. But Orwell having U Po Kyin die also shows that being powerful and corrupt is not sustainable or beneficial for any given society.

### Conclusion

As has been eloquently stated by Gopinath, "George Orwell's *Burmese Days* represents the fate of disarticulated manly virtues in the wake of a crumbling imperial-national grid that produced and sustained the ideals of manliness" (Gopinath, 211). Veraswami is the reflection of Flory while U Po Kyin is the reflection of Verrall, and more intimately, Verrall antagonizes Flory while U Po Kyin antagonizes Veraswami. The publicly-perceived stereotypically masculine man always bests their weaker reflection, but since stereotypical masculinity can easily be misemployed to cause unnecessary harm and because the new, modern masculinity develops weak and ignoble men, Orwell disgraces and removes both identities by the end of the novel.

Orwell's presentation of different types of masculinity in *Burmese Days* contributes to the understanding of why Britain is in their end of empire stage after World War 1. With rampant

unrest in the colonies under the British Raj, the British are losing their ability to maintain order and control abroad. Two masculine identities are present in the periphery of British society – the stereotypically masculine man (and those who strive to emulate it) and the new, modern man. Orwell shows that the two types cannot coexist. The new, modern man adapts to their surroundings – they recognize that the natives want the British out of their land - so they question and ultimately denounce British imperialism. Stereotypically masculine men, however, still value dominance and honor heavily, so they still want to believe that Britain is not waning in power and thus they commit acts of violence and blatant racism to try to re-establish their control over the turbulent colonies. Since new, modern men are against British imperialism, they weaken the empire by not wanting to maintain it, and thus stereotypically masculine men fundamentally disagree with them and want the new, modern masculinity to stop spreading.

Orwell famously holds contradictory beliefs, and thus does not promote one type of masculinity over the other. *Burmese Days* disgraces both types, showing the pitfalls of each. Having all men in the periphery of British society adopt stereotypically masculine mannerisms will only instigate the unrest in the colonies further. Similarly, a British society of only new, modern masculine men will subscribe to deference instead of dominance and will thus relinquish control of the colonies under the British Raj, speeding up the process of Britain's end of empire. Both options end in defeat, so Orwell is saying that Britain is undeniably in its end of empire period.

## Conclusion

My thesis has provided an analysis of the ways in which Joseph Conrad in *The Secret Agent* and George Orwell in *Burmese Days* portray masculinity in their novels. My mission has been to prove the following statement: The new, modern masculinity is a masculine identity that arises in modernist literature as a product of an evolving British society; it is distinct from stereotypical masculinity, yet stereotypical masculinity does not allow for the two to coexist. My analysis explains that stereotypical masculinity does not allow the new, modern masculinity to coexist with it because the presence of the new, modern masculinity permits men to adopt bodies and mannerisms that lead to the exasperation of societal factors that weaken stereotypical masculinity.

Joseph Conrad and *The Secret Agent* is analyzed alongside George Orwell and *Burmese Days* due to the backgrounds of the authors, the year that each text is published, and the locations that each text is based in. Conrad was a seaman and has a history of addressing masculinity in his works. Orwell admitted to being an anti-imperialist yet enforced British colonial rule in Burma. *The Secret Agent* was published in 1907, a time period considered to be early modernism within the Edwardian Era. *Burmese Days* was published in 1934 which is considered to be late modernism and during Britain's end of empire period. *The Secret Agent* is located in London which is the heart of Britain's empire, while *Burmese Days* is under the British Raj, being located in Burma. Both authors base their understanding of masculinity around stereotypical masculinity and depict characters representing the new, modern masculinity against that paradigm. Both authors agree that stereotypical masculinity cannot coexist alongside the new, modern masculinity.

The new, modern masculinity emerges in literary modernism as a result of societal factors such as industrialization, urbanization, and the stressors associated with the end of empire. It is distinct from stereotypical masculinity, yet it is equally as valid as a form of masculinity. The new, modern masculinity allows for men to evolve alongside society instead of being forced to remain firm in holding outdated beliefs. This new, modern masculinity recognizes that order – be it in the home or in a society – does not have to stem from a dominant male presence. In the case of Winnie, Verloc, and the domestic sphere, order could have been obtained through treating Winnie with more respect. In the case of order in society, order in Kyauktada could have been obtained through treating the Burmese as equals instead of inferior beings.

Also, the new, modern masculinity does not have to be directly at odds with stereotypical masculinity. Conrad's new, modern masculine men could easily stay unperturbed at the fringes of British society and live happily in their isolation. Orwell's new, masculine men also do not have to be directly associated with imperialism. If they work outside of a military or police position and live in London, they can hold their anti-imperialist beliefs without disturbing those who are required to enforce it. Conrad actively pushes the narrative that stereotypical masculinity is superior to the new, modern masculinity, so he conjures up multiple instances of duels to force a conflict. Orwell's duel stems from stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity fundamentally disagreeing over the topic of imperialization. That duel is not forced like in Conrad's novel, but is made organically and is ever-present in British society under the British Raj. Since a duel between the two types of masculinity must occur, there must also be a winner and a loser. Coexisting is not an option.

Conrad does not like how men in Edwardian London are adapting to industrialization, so he satirizes Verloc alongside the Professor to show the dangers that the new, modern masculinity brings. They live on the fringes of British society, are socially isolated, promote indolence and acquiring wealth without working hard, and have undesirable bodies. Verloc is willing to harm society to protect those attributes, while the Professor is willing to attack society to erase stereotypical masculinity as an ideal. Conrad argues that allowing the new, modern masculinity to persist only exasperates the societal spread of unfit, lonely, and lazy men, so he describes a need to defeat those who identify with the new, modern masculinity so stereotypical masculinity can regain control and reinstate order.

Orwell neither rejects nor reinforces the new, modern masculinity. He satirizes both the new, modern masculinity and stereotypical masculinity by having the characters who embrace each type meet disgraceful ends in *Burmese Days*. Orwell does this to show that both types of masculinity are damaging to British society. The weak, morally corrupt, anti-imperialists perpetuate the deterioration of Britain's power. Stereotypical masculinity, however, has virtues that can easily be misapplied, resulting in men being dishonorable and violent. Misapplied stereotypical masculinity increases the amount of disorder in British society. The two types of masculinity cannot coexist because deferent anti-imperialists fundamentally disagree with dominant imperialists, and stereotypically masculine imperialists refuse to be the cause of Britain losing its power.

Although *The Secret Agent* and *Burmese Days* were written by different authors at different times, their parallels are striking. Flory can be compared with Verloc because they are both indolent, ignoble, have imperfect bodies, lose control in the domestic sphere, die because of women, and want the new, modern masculinity to coexist with stereotypical masculinity. Verloc

doesn't hate those who work hard; he just wants the freedom for Englishmen to continue living lives of luxury. Flory, although opposed to imperialism, desperately wants to leave Kyauktada and return to England. If Flory is no longer living under the British Raj, he will be separated from the organic dispute between the two types of masculinity. U Po Kyin can be compared with the Professor because they are both ignoble, have imperfect bodies, and directly want to harm British society. U Po Kyin wants to be a parasite to the British and destroy their stronghold from the inside-out. The Professor wants a clean sweep of British society's value systems. So, the masculinities of the characters in both novels can be compared across time and location.

My analysis of stereotypical masculinity being unable to coexist with the new, modern masculinity is not exhaustive, but it does add to the discourse surrounding masculinity in the modernist period. Key aspects of my analysis are the dates and locations that *The Secret Agent* and *Burmese Days* are based in. Other scholars could examine if stereotypical masculinity and the new, modern masculinity are able to coexist by researching novels that are written by different authors but are similar in their locations and time periods. For example, comparing texts that are both based in the British Raj, but are written during the Edwardian era and the end of empire period. Or, comparing texts that are based in London but are both written during the Edwardian era. Further, I recognize that British literary modernism is not the only type of literary modernism, so other scholars could examine masculinity in, for example, Irish modernism.

The new, modern masculinity is (unwillingly) an instigator to stereotypical masculinity during the modernist period. Men who embrace this masculine identity are vehemently challenged and are depicted as being outsiders. Stereotypical masculinity views the new, modern masculinity as a threat to its value systems, and therefore tries to eradicate it from British society. Stereotypical masculinity does not allow the new, modern masculinity to coexist alongside it



because the new, modern masculinity recognizes that deference is an important factor in forming what it means to be masculine, and stereotypical masculinity is fundamentally at odds with causing its own loss of control.

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