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Tobias Döring · Winfried Fluck
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The Pleasures of Peril

Rereading Anglophone Adventure Fiction

Edited by
Tobias Döring and Martina Kübler

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TOBIAS DÖRING AND MARTINA KÜBLER

The Pleasures of Peril: Rereading Anglophone Adventure Fiction

Adventure fiction often seems embarrassing. George Orwell once called Rudyard Kipling's work "almost a shameful pleasure, like the taste for cheap sweets that some people secretly carry into middle life" (141). In just this way, sophisticated readers often dismiss adventure writing as a juvenile indulgence, full of clichés, bogus action, silly heroes, and cheap thrills, i.e. formulaic genre fiction which any self-respecting literary culture leaves behind and which, in academic discourse, mainly serves to set off serious and critically worthy literature. Even though "[t]he adventure plot formed and forms part of the basic expectation with which all readers come not only to fiction, but also to the ways in which they articulate life narratives" (Bruzelius 23) and, as such, adventure forms a basic building block of storytelling (von Koppenfels and Mühlbacher 1), the genre is rarely assigned much value outside of children's and young adult literature or in literary fiction past the Victorian age. Accordingly, the history of modern literature can be told as a programmatic resistance to adventure, discarding and denouncing both the genre and the cultural experience which it used to catch or prompt: the crossing of a threshold and departure into some uncharted, unknown space, wild and open, full of hope and promise, and beyond the strict confines of everyday routines. Sometimes in modern writing such memories resurface, but otherwise the modern world seems to have "ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over" (Conrad 8). With this wistful phrase, Marlow, Joseph Conrad's notorious narrator in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), articulates a sense of cultural nostalgia which, by the later nineteenth century, was about to make adventure with all its pleasure and allure a tale of the past: archaic, conservative, colonial, conventional.

And yet, our volume argues and would like to demonstrate, adventure has never really left the scene.[1] As implied by Orwell's quip, the pleasures may be perilous but carry on – and are being carried, not just into adult life but also into modern and contemporary literature where they serve, sometimes in

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[1] Our project is part of the activities of the Munich research group "Philology of Adventure", whose previous publications (especially von Koppenfels and Mühlbacher as well as Grill and Obermayr) throughout inform the present volume and its introduction; see also https://www.en.abenteuer.fak13.uni-muenchen.de/index.html

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secret but often rather openly, as forceful drives and forms to work with. Even a twentieth-century avantgardist like Virginia Woolf acknowledged how the seafaring tradition, manifest in Richard Hakluyt's early modern compilation of English maritime travelogues, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, captured and enraptured her: "I used to read it & dream of those obscure adventures" (Woolf 271). Many of her novels, like *Orlando* or even *Mrs Dalloway*, testify to her preoccupation with adventure writing by taking up, taking on, and creatively transforming the typical adventure rhetorics of risk and fortune. What is more, performances of masculinity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – and narrative or critical engagements with them – continue to draw on old adventure plots and their gender repertoire, though not necessarily just to continue classic models but often in the process of rethinking or redressing contemporary sexual politics. While today the discourse of adventure seems particularly powerful and pertinent in filmic formats and new media, where the old story patterns are frequently played through on screen and in the virtual reality of games, our present volume takes a decidedly literary interest, focussed on the residues, rewritings and / or reappropriations of adventure tales in anglophone literature since their eighteenth-century heydays, through Victorian and modernist times up to present-day realisations in postmodern and postcolonial writing. With regard to writers as diverse as Tomi Adeyemi, Carl Ashmore, Eleanor Catton, Joseph Conrad, James Fenimore Cooper, Daniel Defoe, Damien Dibben, Arthur Conan Doyle, T.S. Eliot, George MacDonald Fraser, Zora Neale Hurston, Mat Johnson, James Joyce, Mary Kingsley, Matthew G. Lewis, Nnedi Okorafor, M. NourbeSe Philip, Arthur Ransome, Salman Rushdie, Alex Scarrow, Mary Seacole, Tobias Smollett, and Rose Tremain, our contributions set out to reread adventure fiction – *reread* both in the sense of 'read again' and 'read against the grain' – in an effort to establish what functions it might (still) fulfil, what pleasures (if any) it may offer, and for whom.

The most recent novel discussed in this volume, in fact, harks back to one of the oldest and foundational texts for all post-medieval engagements with adventure. Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte* (2019) openly recalls *Don Quixote of la Mancha* (1605 / 15), in which Miguel de Cervantes four centuries ago both parodied and perpetuated the medieval romance tradition by letting one of its most avid readers loose into a modern world clearly unaccommodating for knights-errant. So, the passionate as well as desperate reenactment of knightly adventures that Cervantes's hero performs for the pleasure of his readers sets up a pattern oft repeated in the modern novel: resisting old adventure plots by exhibiting their standard features, incongruous in a social world without giants or dragons, and so exposing them to our ridicule and laughter even while continuing their fascination and paying tribute to their power. The famous windmills the hidalgo fights still remind us of the losses we incur through disenchantment and which we partly compensate by taking pleasure in the limited perceptions of a misguided protagonist whose delusions we feel we have outgrown but whose visionary power still attracts us. Avid readers ourselves, we may well share this reader's wistful visions and can hardly help marvelling at his passion – perhaps secretly and guiltily but pleasurably just the same – in taking seriously what he reads. For this reason, resisting adventure in the name of enlightened modernity and rational behaviour principally also involves our work of mourning for a fantastic world of romance and probation, of perils and pleasures long gone. That is why modern novels often go in search of what adventures used to offer, like Don Quixote, even as they measure out the growing distance that separates us from the wondrous world they would like to regain by means of transformation.

"If ever the story of any private man's adventures in the world were worth making publick […], the editor of this account thinks this will be so" (Defoe 25). With the Preface to *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*, published a century after *Don Quixote* in 1719, the adventure tradition gains admission into the world of Protestant middle-class merchants, where adventure now appears transformed in the "great variety" of one particular man's life, a variety also "of our circumstances" (ibid.), which Providence might keep in stock for us, as Defoe writes in his Preface. But this is also the world of Protestant middle-class readers, whose serious business leaves them little time for purely pleasurable reading. Whenever they might happen to encounter fiction, therefore, they read it at their own peril and with a bad conscience. Unlike Cervantes's hero, who reads chivalric romances with passion, Defoe's protagonist only ever reads one book, the Bible – a pious model we might strive to follow, were it not for the extra pleasures we suspect in other books. In his Preface, Defoe therefore adopts the role of a stern editor and opens his adventure novel by stressing that he is presenting us "a just history of fact", a story "told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events" (ibid.). On this condition, all serious-minded resenters of fiction as fantastic stuff may risk and read whatever strange surprising adventures are recorded here. And yet, the "editor" must also stress the "wonders of this man's life" (ibid.) and so concede that parts of what he offers will exceed the rational account: his book may involve some wondrous and fantastic bits, after all. This undecidedness is surely part of its attraction and characteristic of adventure fiction especially in the modern age: it always involves and provokes both pleasure and peril, desire and shame.

In thinking, reading, and writing about adventure, *Robinson Crusoe* offers a good starting point. From its genesis in early eighteenth-century London as a place and time of political and societal upheaval to the present, similarly turbulent moment in which many of us desperately wish for a desert island to escape a global pandemic, the story of a man on an island, and centuries of readers' fascination with it, also provides a good insight into the pleasures and perils of reading, into how we read, and why, and into how adventure literature travels across space, time, and contexts. In the first contribution of our volume, VID STEVANOVIĆ indeed takes his starting point in Defoe's novel in order to explore how Crusoe's inclination to wander, which situates the text in the generic tradition of picaresque works such as Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), is indicative of a structural impasse of the drive. The mobility and permutability of the protagonists of these novels, Stevanović demonstrates, are then radicalised in the *It-Narratives* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in which objects, often coins or bank notes, embark on the adventure of circulation, thus inevitably detaching the drive toward adventure from human agency.

Trying to pinpoint exactly what we talk about when we talk about adventure often leads to an impasse: adventure is so commonplace not only in fiction writing but also in how we conceive of our own lives, how we structure experience, and how we narrate personal stories on a daily basis that trying to define it seems superfluous. A shorthand formula for widespread experience just as for widespread narration, adventure perhaps functions somewhat in the same way that US Supreme Court Justice Potter Steward, in 1964, discerned pornography: we know it when we see it. Upon closer inspection, however, the paradoxes multiply. As von Koppenfels and Mühlbacher have noted in their recent volume, to theorise adventure is not an easy task in spite of its ostensible simplicity, as the term seems trivial but its abstract and constructive quality, its status as a narrative building block, renders it notoriously impalpable (1). With its roots in medieval courtly verse narratives – originating from the terms 'aventure' or 'avanture' in Old French (2), which signified "a thing about to happen to anyone" (Pierce n. p.) –, the adventure novel in anglophone literature proliferated especially via the imperial and male quest romances of the nineteenth century, and the literary progeny of these early adventure stories in turn continues to allure authors and readers to the present day. In their efforts to determine the structural level of adventure within a given narrative, von Koppenfels and Mühlbacher note further that the use of adventure as a *genre* of fiction writing did not come about until the rise of the popular adventure novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. A hinge form of sorts, these works connected earlier traditions of adventure writing with subsequent popcultural phenomena of the twentieth century (von Koppenfels and Mühlbacher 3). Structurally, adventure has always been ambiguous: while it seems to characterise more than a mere *event* or *function* in a narrative, it is at the same time less comprehensive than an entire *hero's journey* and more specific than a *theme* (6). Von Koppenfels and Mühlbacher conclude that adventure is situated between the micro and the macro level of a text, and is therefore less a structural and much more a phenomenological entity (ibid.).

In the context of literatures in English, adventure was from the beginning inextricably tied to romance and thus to popular fiction rather than to the novel. It can be said that the adventure tale in itself is "anti-novelistic" (Pierce n. p.) in that it favours escapism, risk, and the extraordinary experience rather than the quotidian trials and tribulations of bourgeois society – such as the finding and securing of partners and wealth – with which the nineteenth-century realist novel principally concerned itself. Rather, adventure stories were a "masculinized variety of romance" (Baldick n. p.), as "the erotic and religious dimensions common to other types are subordinated to or completely replaced by an emphasis on vigorous outdoor activity and the practical arts of survival amid unexpected dangers, along with a cultivation of such virtues as courage and loyalty" (ibid). With a focus on masculine heroism, early adventure fiction frequently turned to past events and "treats the development of nation states, revives episodes of their heroic pasts, or furnishes myths of national values and virtues" (Pierce n. p.), themes that can be observed most distinctly in canonical works such as Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Importantly, these historical novels "often are set in borderlands, such as that between England and Scotland" (ibid.), with adventure thus frequently featuring a subplot of national belonging and territorial disputes. It is no wonder, then, that war was and continues to be a prime subject of adventure fiction, as it combines adventure's main desires for heroism, masculinity, and devotion to the nation state as well as personal sacrifice and growth. In line with adventure's propensity for liminal spaces, ENNO RUGE's contribution in this volume examines a stock character of adventure fiction in an exceptionally interstitial locale: Gothic Venice, a setting equally charged with political intrigue as with mythical deception. In his discussion of Matthew "Monk" Lewis's *The Bravo of Venice: A Romance* (1804) and Cooper's *The Bravo* (1831), Ruge traces the origins of the Venetian bravo as a literary character back to Heinrich Zschokke's *Abaellino der große Bandit* (1794) and the German *Räuberroman* and subsequently diagnoses the demise of the bravo's appeal as a protagonist in adventure writing after Cooper.

The importance of borders, boundaries, and the crossing thereof to adventure stories is further highlighted by adventure's currency in the imperial romance. Martin Green holds that adventure is "the energizing myth of English imperialism" (3) in that adventure stories not only traditionally depicted military and mercantile imperial endeavors but the myth of adventures in the name of the Empire conversely also became a vehicle of imperialism in its own right. By portraying daring heroes in their search for foreign lands and climes unknown, by having them move from the imperial European centres to exotic and colonised territories, adventure fiction educated generations of European males in compliance with an ideology of imperialism, white supremacy, and white saviourism as it instilled in young readers – mostly boys and young men – a sense of ownership of the world and of the humans that people it. INGO BERENSMEYER's contribution picks up one of the classics of British children's literature in order to explore adventure's imperial entanglements. In his rereading of Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), Berensmeyer demonstrates how aventure writing for young readers resonates with ideas of both Britishness and the Empire during the interwar period. Strikingly, these ideas are transported via the innocent pastime of the young protagonists' play: in intricate role-plays and incidents of make-believe, and in plot elements lifted from Defoe and R. L. Stevenson, the novel both reveals and transports dominant English and imperialist ideologies to its audience. The novel furthermore creates a microcosm of British sea power in the Lake District, referring to ships and shipwrecks just as abundantly as to the infusion of English literary history with the canon of adventure writing, making Ransome's a "meta-imperialist meta-adventure novel". SUSANNE REICHL similarly locates a residual of British hegemony in twenty-first-century young adult fiction when she traces some of the imperialist attitudes of the nineteenth century in contemporary time travel adventures for young adults. In her comparative analysis of three British time travel adventure series – Alex Scarrow's nine-volume series *TimeRiders* (2010–2014), Carl Ashmore's *The Time Hunters* (six volumes to date, 2012-), and Damien Dibben's *The History Keepers* (three volumes to date, 2011-) – she inquires whether and how the genre's early ideology of British imperial hegemony remains valid in a twenty-first-century ethics of adventure. While adventure's proclivity to favour boys and stereotypically masculine behaviour can be observed even in these contemporary young adult novels, Reichl notes how time travel is a logical continuation of the imperialist desire for outward expansion: instead of charting territory and purportedly bringing wealth and civilisation to the Empire, these young explorers travel back in time in search of adventures, often with a desire to know the temporal Other and with an entitlement to 'fix it' – history, in this case.

One of the bedrocks of adventure writing, Margaret Bruzelius has argued, is that it is characterised by a sense of the "elsewhere" (14). Crucially, the classics of adventure all take us across thresholds, into unknown, liminal or interstitial space, to the margins of a world, and always beyond boundaries. As the world became increasingly charted – already deplored, as cited earlier, in *Heart of Darkness* – and subjected to Western imperialist powers, however, adventure stories turned to ever more exotic and remote locations or indeed to remote periods in time. As Bruzelius adds, "[o]ther common elsewheres of romance are the past, as in historical fiction, and the future and space, as in science fiction. But even the back of a closet" – or indeed of a wardrobe, as in C.S. Lewis's fantasy classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) – "can be enough of an elsewhere for the romance" (14). While the protagonists of Henry Rider Haggard's late-Victorian novels ventured out into the most difficult to reach regions of the African continent, other writers turned to such locales as the heart of Australia (Ernest Favenc), the moon (Jules Verne), and the future (H.G. Wells). Since the demise of the colonial casualness and power structure that used to prompt and sustain such fictions, later twentieth-century and especially present-day writers must tackle the question of where to experience adventure in an increasingly globalised world that knows no traditional 'outside'. Yet, as several of our contributions show, even the late-modern and fully mapped contemporary world holds plenty of possibilities for adventure, with the complexities of an intensely stratified or striated space reverting into a semiotic jungle that once more attracts explorers to enter at their peril. It is the trope of transgression that allies the adventure quest not just to fantasies of conquest, dominance, and power but potentially also to more subversive ventures that renegotiate the bonds and bounds that make up our daily world. Indeed, in spite of their imperial impulse, adventure stories are seldom unequivocal: rather, their protagonists often harbour "anguish and self-doubt" (Pierce n.p.) about their own position in the world. This renegotiation of power structures is especially pronounced in adventure's manifestation as imperial romance, as these stories can be said to paradoxically also voice the ambivalence at the heart of the imperial enterprise (ibid.).

With the rise of postcolonial writing in the later twentieth century, and the new perspectives it provides, this lesson has been powerfully learned. Looking back at his own schooldays in the late-colonial Nigeria of the 1940s, Chinua Achebe remembered reading H. Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, and John Buchan and their 'African' books in the classroom. And he remembered taking "sides with the white men against the savages", imagining himself to be part of the imperial explorers' team in their "hair-raising adventures"

(Achebe 7). But he eventually realised that these writers, as he put it, "had pulled a fast one on me" (ibid.) because, as an African, his designated position was not on the team nor on the boat but somewhere in the mass of nameless bodies on the river bank: "That was when I said no, and realised that stories are not innocent; that they can be used to put you in the wrong crowd, in the party of the man who has come to dispossess you" (ibid.). The reading experience he recounts has fundamental relevance: his point that stories are "not innocent" acknowledges the very real impact fiction may have on the world and so corresponds to Edward Said's notion of the "worldly text", i. e. the claim that texts are "*events*, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (4, italics in original). As such, adventure texts are all the more important to study for the worldly moves they make. Precisely because adventure stories seem escapist and take us to an otherworld, it is urgent we consider what their effects are on the world as we know it and ask, in Achebe's words, whom they might have dispossessed. All adventure heroes must cross thresholds and find themselves in unknown territories – yet these are rarely empty space but rather contact zones in which colonial encounters take place. Can the ones therein encountered begin to tell their own views of adventure? What happens if and when they do?

It is for the reason of adventure's imperial entanglements that postcolonial writers have frequently engaged with versions of adventure writing – consciously, critically, creatively – so as to reconsider and re-vision imperial legacies and texts from early modern to Victorian times as part of their own agenda. Authors from the erstwhile "elsewhere" of traditional adventure fiction – most notably Australia, Asia, Africa, or the Americas – have thus made and continue to make assaults on and revisions of a genre that, though notoriously outdated and continously transformed and rewritten, paradoxically still survives and flourishes in a postcolonial world. FABIENNE IMLINGER turns to Marlene NourbeSe Philip's poetry collection *Zong!* (2008) in order to fundamentally question the relationship between reading, pleasure, and adventure literature. By simultaneously provoking *and* defying a close reading, by foregrounding its own unreadability while also supplying clues for its own decipherment, Imlinger argues, Philip's text performs what public opinion of the sentimentality of aventure writing has long implicitly criticised: that to engage in the solitary and pleasurable experience of reading an exciting story is somehow petty, almost shameful. ANNIKA MCPHERSON's contribution engages with works of young-adult fiction by two Nigerian-American authors. Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch* (2011) and *Akata Warrior* (2017) and Tomi Adeyemi's fantasy novels *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) and *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019) illustrate how the perilous heroine's journeys of their young female protagonists on different quests to save Nigerian-inspired magical realms can be read as writing back to Eurocentric male-centred adventure and fantasy genres imbued with the legacies of colonialism. Stefanie Fricke focusses on two contemporary Neo-Victorian novels that rewrite or resist traditional narratives of the New Zealand gold rush, Rose Tremain's *The Colour* (2003) and Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013). Even though a gold rush seems like a stereotypical setting for adventure stories about ambitious men in search of fortune and a better life, Fricke demonstrates that these novels eschew such an obvious route. Rather, she argues, both novels deconstruct key elements of (gold rush) adventure stories, inverting the stereotypical gender order or even denying to narrate the gold rush adventure entirely.

In addition to boundary crossings, desire is one of the fixtures at the heart of every adventure. Adventure is something that the heroes – and sometimes heroines – of these stories actively seek and desperately desire, to the point that the significance of the object that must typically be won, found, or conquered fades in comparison with the daring and the excitement of the journey or the search itself. Indeed, "the adventuring impulse may run contrary to, and even impede, the desire for gain" (Pierce n. p.), and even though, as Joseph Campbell has pointed out, the "ultimate boon" (159) must be won and returned home safely for many adventurers to complete their journeys, the drive that keeps the story going is adventure itself, not the golden fleece, ring, grail, or captured princess that must be returned. Rather than merely hunting for a treasure, adventure goes in search of pleasure. When we follow the heroes of adventure stories on their perilous journeys, their trials and tests of courage, the suspense and dangers inherent in such a boundary crossing turn into an adventure all in itself: the adventure of reading and the vicarious pleasure of experiencing something extraordinary along with the story's hero or heroine.

Perhaps it is because of adventure's appeal to the readers' affects that adventure stories and romances are commonly regarded as 'bad literature'. As Grill and Obermayr expound, in the delineation between high and low culture set off in the modern era, texts featuring a high incidence of adventure motifs are overwhelmingly assigned to the realm of popular literature (6). In spite of adventure's being written off as light entertainment, this value judgment nevertheless did little to hinder its success, as its numerous variations betray: the nineteenth century saw a considerable upsurge in all tales adventurous, and the mass publication of dime novels and penny dreadfuls, serial novels, chivalric novels, travel and colonial novels as well as detective novels flourished (ibid.). This proliferation of adventure stories in turn did not help to reconcile its bad reputation (ibid.). In the light of adventure's assignment to low culture and light entertainment, it is nevertheless striking that many of the most canonical authors in anglophone literatury history have indeed written adventure stories, often in what would become their best-known works. While the English novel originates in adventure with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the list of high-profile adventure writers does not end there: Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and Rudyard Kipling have all prominently turned to adventure, and other modern, postmodern, and contemporary writers, this volume shows, have done so as well, albeit perhaps less obviously and more creatively, subliminally, or subversively. As Grill and Obermayr indicate, adventure remains with us throughout modern literature, and it can be regarded as a phenomenon that is interlinked with the historical circumstances and aesthetic and poetological programmes of modernity, even beyond the classic adventure novels of the nineteenth century (8). In particular, they hypothesise, adventure undergoes a transformation at the beginning of the twentieth century and throughout high modernism that is characteristic for the period's break with established artistic principles: in accordance with the modernist programme, adventure likewise transmorphs, becomes knotted, twisted, complicated (ibid.).

In view of such crucial and creative transformations, several of our contributions focus on adventure in modernist literature. Jens Elze addresses one of Conrad's most explicitly imperial adventure stories. *Lord Jim* (1900), he argues, notoriously marks Conrad's entrance into modernist aesthetics while simultaneously being in conversation with a multitude of adventure topoi and intertexts. Rather than claiming an absence of adventure in modernity, Elze demonstrates, the novel suggests a modernist vision of adventure as evoked by the modern uncontrollability of life and its many contingencies. Roger Lüdeke turns to one of the prime representatives of high modernism. In his contribution focussed on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Lüdeke finds traces of adventure in one of the hallmarks of James Joyce's poetics: both Joyce's and his fictional alter ego's epiphanies, he argues, is where adventure finds its way into a modernist aesthetic and life with otherwise adverse circumstances for nineteenth-century remnants of adventure. Tobias Döring undertakes a reading of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), a signature text of modernist poetics, in dialogue with Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890), one of the early tales of Sherlock Holmes and, as such, characteristic of late-Victorian adventure thrills. The close conjunction of these two rather different texts, commonly categorised as representative of high versus popular culture, draws attention to quite a few commonalities – their anthropology of modern London life, their engagement with fragmentation and disconnection, their conjuring of India and Eastern riches – and so suggests the mode by which adventure survives in modernity: as a ghostly and yet crucial presence.

In the list of canonical modern writers who have prominently turned to adventure, one detail stands out: all of these authors are white men writing adventure stories about white male adventurers, presumably for predominantly white male readers. Any thinking about and rethinking of adventure in modern fiction must thus necessarily also concern itself with questions of racial and gender performances. As for gender, Paul Zweig has accordingly noted "the unrelenting masculinity of adventure literature" (61) in that it is almost exclusively male heroes who set out for their adventures. Yet, Zweig also notes that the heroes' departure is often occasioned by women: frequently, the safety or honour of a woman must be secured by the hero's valiant actions, or the hero must escape from the domestic sphere or the confines of the female space associated with it (63). Sometimes, women in adventure stories signify "the power to bind" (68), as they represent everything that is "immobile" and "predictable" (69), and the movement and continuity of adventure become the male antidote to this power. At the same time, as adventure is usually a process of initiation, the individual trials that make up a male hero's journey are the ideal theatres to perform and prove his masculinity, often in turn to impress or woo an initially unconvinced prospective love interest and always in order to find a place in patriarchal society. This is not to say that women cannot set out in search of adventures. Yet, in traditional adventure stories, as Bruzelius argues, "those who do are maimed and scarred by their authors and rarely survive their tales" (15). A number of contributions in the present volume question this claim, however, and show that modern literature has found ways to write adventure stories with heroines. Far from remaining "plot free and marriagable" or "resisting-but-doomed-to-fail" (26), the heroines discussed in various chapters of our volume are both valiant and successful, both actively engaged in their plots and in charge of telling and writing their adventure stories. To begin with, STEFANIE LETHBRIDGE's contribution dismantles the myth of the self-assured, valiant male hero of adventure writing. In her discussion of the Scottish author George MacDonald Fraser's series *The Flashman Papers* (1969–2005), Lethbridge demonstrates how notions of the typical adventure hero's masculinity as noble, courageous, and chaste become complicated in Fraser's cowardly hero. When readers are, rather disturbingly, encouraged to root for a blatantly immoral character and his constant bragging and womanising, these novels work to simultaneously unroot and reroute the mechanics of readerly identification with the hero familiar from traditional male quest romances. Silvia Mieszkowski's contribution features the accounts of two famous female Victorian adventurers whose autobiographical narratives are both to a similar extent characterised by the frequent use of anecdotes. Via a thorough engagement with the poetics of the anecdote, Mieszkowski demonstrates how Mary Seacole's and Mary Kingsley's accounts of their travels to the African continent – titled *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) and *Travels in West Africa* (1897), respectively – likewise reproduce and offer critical reflections on imperial ideology and colonialist practice. Martina Kübler also engages with a text that chronicles a female author's real-life adventures. In her discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, Kübler traces structures of archetypal mythological adventure texts in Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) and asks if and under which circumstances it is possible to narrate a Black woman's life in the Jim Crow-era US as a heroine's journey.

Next to adventure's rather obvious traditional connection to maleness and masculinity, the fact that most adventure stories focus on white adventurers has gone largely unremarked in previous discussions. Of course, with adventure's origins in European courtly verse narratives, the adventurer's whiteness seems natural but does not explain its endurance past the middle ages. In the context of the British Empire and the United States' westward expansion, narratives of border crossings and individual and ethnic mobility also proliferated amongst Black and Indigenous writers as well as writers of colour, and yet their stories only rarely used the adventure formula centered on an individual hero to tell their narratives of migration and displacement, of bondage and flight. Gero Guttzeit discusses a recent engagement with one of the most canonical works of anglophone adventure writing. Guttzeit argues that Mat Johnson's *Pym* (2011), a satirical rewriting of Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), not only revises the allegorical meanings of the genre of adventure writing but, by drawing on the picture-book tradition of African American writing, importantly brings to the fore the absurdity of the racialisation of the visual. Ursula Kluwick demonstrates that Salman Rushdie's novel *Quichotte* (2019) draws not just on Cervantes but on a distinctly US-American version of the adventure genre, namely the road trip narrative, to engage with questions of ethnicity and race which have always been central to Rushdie's writing. By having a hero of Indian origin go on a road trip as a key trope of US-American identity, Kluwick argues, Rushdie explores Americanness and its discontents as an example of the resurgence of uninhibited nationalism and racism.

As this introductory survey shows, much is clearly missing in our present volume. What we provide is neither a systematic nor a comprehensive treatment of anglophone adventure writing. Instead, we offer a series of connected case studies focussing on texts selected for their power in challeging readers to reflect upon what we are doing when we read about adventures. When George Orwell described reading Kipling's work as "an almost shameful pleasure" (cited at the outset), he also identified at least one instance where a Kipling reader failed to confess his act: in a footnote, Orwell cites a Kipling stanza which John Middleton Murry quotes prominently in one of his essays but misattributes to Thackeray. As Orwell says, this "is probably what is known as a 'Freudian error'. A civilised person would prefer not to quote Kipling – i. e. would prefer not to feel that it was Kipling who had expressed his thought for him" (Orwell 140n1). The point is perhaps symptomatic of adventure fiction, too. As civilised readers, we might well prefer not to feel that it is adventure writing which has expressed and done so much that we treasure. And yet, as Freudian analysis indeed suggests, every civilised reader still entertains uncivilised desires, like reading about forays beyond civilisation and into unmentionable perils. Rereading anglophone adventure fiction, then, our volume hopes to find new ways by which such pleasures can be reached.

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Adventure fiction often seems embarrassing. Sophisticated readers may dismiss it as a juvenile indulgence, full of clichés, silly heroes, and cheap thrills, i.e., formulaic genre fiction which literary culture and academic discourse leave behind. And yet, this volume demonstrates, adventure has never really left the scene. The pleasures of adventure tales may be perilous but carry on – and are being carried, not just into adult life, but also into modern and contemporary literature where they serve, sometimes in secret but often rather openly, as forceful drives and forms to work with. This volume takes a decidedly literary interest, focussing on the residues, rewritings and/or reappropriations of adventure tales in anglophone literature since their eighteenth-century heydays, through Victorian and modernist times up to present-day realisations in postmodern and postcolonial writing.

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