

The Hero in Heart of Darkness

by Gary Hardaway

Remember *Heart of Darkness*?
The British Company functionary
who meets and briefs Marlow
at the ported mouth of river
on the coast of Africa
just before he travels the river inland
to fetch the fabled (“he dead”) Kurtz?
Remember the equatorial heat, the flies,
the lurking hum and scream of jungle,
the squalor? Remember the functionary.
Remember his coat and tie,
remember his collar, starched and white
despite humidity and river stench.
That functionary, that clerk,
that pathetically misplaced man,
that dumb incongruous fuck,
writing reports, counting tusks,
doing all that minor functionaries do,
with his tie and coat and stiff white collar—
for me, he's the hero of the tale.
He's the irreducible One
surrounded every day
by slithering, undulant Zero.

