

PMMLA

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of America*

May 1980

Toward the Making of Thoreau's Modern Reputation

Selected Correspondence of S. A. Jones, A. W. Hosmer, H. S. Salt,
H. G. O. Blake, and D. Ricketson

edited by Fritz Oehlschlaeger and George Hendrick



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Abstract. As thematic actions, dying and lying divide up Conrad's narrative in *Heart of Darkness* between main story and controversial coda. Steeped in the formulas of literary fatality, including the symmetries of ironic reprisal and the summarizing retrospect of last words, Kurtz's death is modeled on fictional expectations so as to secure its dark transmissible import, only for that import to be betrayed by the supposedly beneficent mendacity of Marlow's lie in the final interview with Kurtz's Intended. Marlow as reader or interpreter of tragic meaning degenerates to Marlow as false author of a euphemizing fiction. The essay traces the complex preparation for Kurtz's death, including the suicide and murder of earlier surrogates for Marlow, as these scenes establish an interpretive framework by which to assess a coda that becomes, for a narrator repulsed by the "flavour of mortality in lies," yet another indirect but self-indicting death scene. (GS)

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