Question 3
Cultural Collisions

Sample UUU (Score 8): This persuasive essay succeeds largely because of its skillful description of Marlow’s experiences and its ability to infer from them the novel’s issues of cultural collision. What emerges at once is a “domineering, imperialistic” European culture in violent conflict with Africa and Africans, and in some conflict with itself — notions of “civilization” and “the greater good” in conflict with “hypocritical, self-serving” Europeans who degrade and exploit the natives. Using long, complex sentences with interesting subordinations and amplifications, the essay parallels Marlow and Kurtz, showing the idealistic visions that each of them had and lost. Limiting the analysis is a conception of Africa that falls into unfortunate cliché. It is characterized as a realm of exoticism, unfamiliarity, and danger. “The wildness and lawlessness of the African Congo has driven Kurtz mad,” the writer argues, failing to recognize what Marlow knows, that African culture only seems lawless to ignorant European eyes. But the writer swerves back again to say (rightly) that the “horror” is really in Kurtz himself, “falling prey to the hypocrisy and darkness within himself.” Despite this confusion and a tendency to summarize the story instead of asserting its own design, the essay still offers innumerable persuasive and well-developed insights.

Sample MMM (Score 6): Benefiting from its appropriate choice of *A Room with a View*, this essay offers a sufficient response to the question almost by means of plot summary alone. The first paragraph promisingly suggests too that Lucy’s encounters with foreign cultures — Italian and American — not only change her identity but dramatize the essential issues of the novel, Victorian “delicacy” and “suppression” vs. Italian “passion” and partly American “freedom.” Unfortunately what follows remains generalized and repetitious. Two encounters are mentioned repeatedly, one in the churchyard and one in the square, but detailed analysis of either is missing (what happens in “the incident in the square”? what role does “the small Italian child” play? do any of the Italian characters have names?). The essay displays some skill in defining issues, but in the end the writer seems more interested in generalizations about Lucy’s “empowering herself” and “self-actualization” than in paying closer attention to the novel.

Sample KKK (Score 4): This essay ignores the question’s emphasis on a character caught between conflicting cultures and addresses instead Huck Finn’s response to “southern traditional values” as found in “Miss Watson’s God” and “the rigidity of civilization.” It attempts to argue that Huck is “free of doctrines” and without “moral obligations to his parents,” but then argues that he is caught between not wanting “to hurt Jim or Miss Watson.” Confusingly, the writer then claims “Huck is not pressured by the values of the southern culture he grows up in.” Subsequent examples convey the idea that Huck’s identity remains essentially independent: “Through his journey, Huck is often faced with colliding views [whose?] of the ‘appropriate’ choice.” Failure to grasp the question and failure to recognize any of the cultural collisions that exist in the novel, quite apart from Huck Finn’s response to them, dooms this essay to a low score.